Introduction

David McPherson

In contemporary secular societies, many people would acknowledge a concern for something called "spirituality," even if they are not "religious" in any conventional sense. There is a recognition that human beings have what might be called "spiritual needs," in addition to their "material needs," and that fulfilling these needs is important for living well as human beings.[1] This is perhaps most dramatically illustrated in the common phenomenon of someone having a "midlife crisis," i.e., the person who may be successful in material terms but nevertheless feels a sense of existential malaise: there is an experience here of a lack of a deeper sense of meaning in life. But this experience and the questions it involves can arise for anyone provided he or she has reached a certain level of reflectiveness and self-awareness.

This collection of essays will examine the nature of spirituality and how it can contribute to "the good life" for human beings.[2] The editor's own general working definition of spirituality is that it is *a practical life-orientation that is shaped by what is taken to be a self-transcending source of meaning, which involves strong normative demands, including demands of the sacred or the reverence-worthy*. To unpack this definition some here (it is filled out more in Chapter 4): spirituality involves *spiritual practices* – e.g., practices of prayer, meditation, self-examination, repentance, mindfulness, study, contemplation, worship, thanksgiving, communal living, charity, fasting, keeping the Sabbath, ritual observance, going on retreats or pilgrimages, imitating saints, habituation in virtue, etc. – that aim to *direct and transform one's life as a whole* toward increasing spiritual fulfillment, i.e., toward a more meaningful life. The meaning that makes for a meaningful life here is "strong evaluative meaning," i.e., meaning or value with which we *ought*

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[1] See J. Cottingham, *The Spiritual Dimension: Religion, Philosophy and Human Value* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 3.

[2] In speaking of how spirituality *can* contribute to the good life, I acknowledge that there may be forms of spirituality that do not so contribute and may even be harmful. I take up this concern in my contribution.

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to be concerned and toward which we ought to orient our lives (which can and often does connect up with a concern for *the* meaning of life; i.e., there is a concern here with how our lives fit into the grand scheme of things and whether there is a cosmic or "ultimate" source of meaning to which we must align our lives). Hence, spirituality is a practical life-orientation that is shaped by what is taken to be a *self-transcending source of meaning*, which involves *strong normative demands*. Especially important among these demands are those of *the sacred* or *the reverence-worthy* (used equivalently), which are "set apart" in that they place the strongest demands on us and play a central guiding role in our practical life-orientations.

This definition of spirituality, I believe, captures well the "spiritual" concerns of the different contributors, even though they might emphasize different aspects or state things in somewhat different terms. The dominant concerns here have to do with discovering a deeper sense of meaning in life, the place of the sacred or the reverence-worthy in human life, the quality and orientation of one's interior life, and the importance of specific spiritual practices and oft-neglected and sometimes contested virtues such as piety, humility, and existential gratitude.

This collection will also explore questions about the relationship between spirituality and religion: Are they distinct, and if so how? Even if they are distinct, does spirituality, at its best, lead to religion? How might specific religious traditions help to foster and enhance the spiritual life? As suggested previously, many people today would describe themselves as "spiritual but not religious," and one might take this to be a feature of our living in a secular age, where religion is often thought to have less significance. However, in *A Secular Age*, Charles Taylor argues that we should not understand secularity simply as the decline of traditional religious belief and practice and their perceived significance or as the removal of religion from public life (though both of these may be true in many cases). Rather, it should be understood primarily as a situation in which a religious life is seen as "one option among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace." Taylor goes on to remark: "An age or society [is] secular or not, in virtue of the conditions of experience of and search for the spiritual."[3] He also describes this as the experience of and search for "fullness": "We all see our lives, and/or the space wherein we live our lives, as having a certain moral/spiritual shape. Somewhere, in some activity, or condition, lies a fullness, a richness; that is, in that place (activity or condition), life is fuller, richer, deeper, more worth while, more admirable,

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[3] C. Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 3.

more what it should be."[4] Living in a secular age thus means that many of us will be "spiritual seekers" and with this comes the possibility that the search might fail and we can experience "exile," in which "we lose a sense of where the place of fullness is, even of what fullness could consist in; we feel we've forgotten what it would look like, or cannot believe in it any more. But the misery of absence, of loss, is still there."[5] This leaves open the possibility that the "experience of and search for the spiritual" may require completion in religious terms.

This contested issue and others explored in this collection will be approached *philosophically*, and hence the subtitle: "philosophical approaches." Although the topic of spirituality has been explored extensively in empirical psychology, it is noteworthy that it has suffered neglect within the academic discipline of philosophy, and most glaringly within specializations such as philosophy of religion and virtue ethics, where one might expect to find an interest in spirituality, whether with respect to its relationship to religion (in the case of philosophy of religion) or to the good life (in the case of virtue ethics).[6] This neglect is somewhat surprising given the prevalence and importance of spirituality in human life throughout recorded history up to the present, and given that spirituality connects up with concerns about meaning in life that are often what draw people to philosophy in the first place.[7] However, the neglect is not entirely surprising. Many philosophers are likely to be suspicious of the idea of "spirituality," which can seem overly

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[4] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 5.

[5] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 6; cf. 302–20; cf. C. Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 17–18.

[6] In regard to empirical psychology and spirituality, see, e.g., L. J. Miller (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Psychology and Spirituality* (Oxford University Press, 2012). By contrast, in W. J. Wainwright (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford University Press, 2005), there is no chapter on spirituality (the closest is one on "Mysticism and Religious Experience") and not even an entry for it in the index. I take up the issue of the neglect of spirituality in contemporary virtue ethics in my contribution. The same neglect is not there in empirical psychology accounts of character and virtues: see C. Peterson and M. E. P. Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification* (Oxford University Press, 2004), where the last "character strength" discussed is "transcendence" (chs. 23–7; ch. 27 is specifically entitled "Spirituality"). The topic of spirituality of course has not been completely neglected by philosophers (as can be seen by consulting the bibliography), but it has been very much a marginal focus in the discipline, including in philosophy of religion and virtue ethics.

[7] There has been some growth in the philosophical literature on meaning in life: see, e.g., J. Cottingham, *On the Meaning of Life* (New York: Routledge, 2003); S. Wolf, *Meaning in Life and Why It Matters* (Princeton University Press, 2010); D. Benatar (ed.), *Life, Death, and Meaning*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010); J. Seachris, *Exploring the Meaning of Life: An Anthology and Guide* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013); and T. Metz, *Meaning in Life* (Oxford University Press, 2013). However, with the exception of the first of these, there has been very little explicit discussion of the connection between spirituality and meaning in life.

vague (though this just calls for philosophical clarification), too focused on inward life (in a way that is not easily amenable to the abstract or "disengaged" modes of discourse that are common in the discipline), "mystical" or "new-agey," and problematically dualistic (or "spooky") in referring to matters of "the spirit." The latter concern also points to the prominence of certain forms of "naturalism" within contemporary academic philosophy that can be resistant to "spiritual matters." Naturalism is typically (though not always) seen as opposed to "the supernatural." It can also have a scientistic aspect that privileges a "disengaged" (or third-personal or observational) standpoint that prescinds from our "engaged" (or first-personal) experiences of the meaning of things for us. "Scientific naturalism" can go so far as to try to circumscribe reality within the bounds of what the natural sciences can validate, and it may also seek to offer reductive explanations of first-personal experiences of meaning or value (e.g., in terms of our brain "wiring," or a stimulus-response mechanism, or something else of the sort).[8] This collection challenges scientistic outlooks (especially with regard to their ability to make sense of our lives) and seeks to get past the aforementioned concerns and to put the topic of spirituality firmly on the contemporary philosophical agenda by showing the extent to which it connects with central questions about the good life for human beings.

This volume can be seen as heeding the call for a more "humane" mode of philosophy (as opposed to scientistic modes), where it is regarded, as Bernard Williams puts it, "as part of a wider humanistic enterprise of making sense of ourselves and of our activities," and where this takes place "in the situation in which we find ourselves."[9] Relatedly, this collection can also be seen as seeking to recover an ancient conception of philosophy

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[8] There are forms of "expansive naturalism" that seek to account for our first-personal experiences of meaning or value and show their validity. On "scientific naturalism" vs. "expansive naturalism," see F. Ellis, *God, Value, and Nature* (Oxford University Press, 2014), which argues for a type of expansive naturalism that is compatible with theism. This distinction has also been described in terms of "strict naturalism" vs. "liberal naturalism" or "broad naturalism"; see S. Goetz and C. Taliaferro, *Naturalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008); M. De Caro and D. Macarthur (eds.), *Naturalism in Question* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); M. De Caro and D. Macarthur (eds.), *Naturalism and Normativity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010). De Caro and Macarthur distinguish between an *ontological scientific naturalist*, who "holds that the entities posited by acceptable scientific explanations are the *only* genuine entities that there are," and a *methodological (or epistemological) scientific naturalist*, who "holds that it is *only* by following the methods of the natural sciences – or, at a minimum, the empirical methods of a posteriori inquiry – that one arrives at genuine knowledge" (*Naturalism in Question*, 7). Of course, these types of scientific naturalism can also be combined.

[9] B. Williams, *Philosophy as a Humanistic Discipline* (Princeton University Press, 2006), 197, 182; see also J. Cottingham, "What Is Humane Philosophy and Why Is It At Risk?," *Royal Institute of*

as itself a "spiritual exercise" and part of a "way of life." Regarding this conception, Pierre Hadot writes:

> The [ancient] philosophical school . . . corresponds, above all, to the choice of a certain way of life and existential option which demands from the individual a total change of lifestyle, a conversion of one's entire being, and ultimately a certain desire to be and to live in a certain way. This existential option, in turn, implies a certain vision of the world, and the task of philosophical discourse will therefore be to reveal and rationally justify this existential option, as well as this representation of the world.[10]

Elsewhere he writes:

> Under normal circumstances, the only state accessible to [human beings] is *philo-sophia*: the love of, and progress toward, wisdom. For this reason, spiritual exercises must be taken up again and again, in an ever-renewed effort. . . . To the same extent that the philosophical life is equivalent to the practice of spiritual exercises, it is also a tearing away from everyday life. It is a conversion, a total transformation of one's vision, life-style, and behavior.[11]

In the first essay, "Philosophy, Religion, and Spirituality," John Cottingham explores this conception of philosophy in more detail. He distinguishes between philosophy as a specialized academic discipline, which is often concerned with a careful examination of our concepts, and philosophy as a way of life, which is concerned with an examination of the overall meaning and purpose of our lives and with the "care of the soul," i.e., cultivating a life of integrity and virtue. Cottingham sees the latter conception of philosophy as clearly connected with "spiritual" concerns, and he explores this connection in the essay, first by seeking to get clear on what is meant by "spiritual" and "spirituality" (thus employing the first kind of examination in service of the second). He also explores how these spiritual concerns connect up with a religious outlook of a traditional theistic sort. Cottingham argues that when we examine common spiritual experiences, they often involve cosmic and moral dimensions that are not easily accounted for by a purely secular (i.e., non-religious) framework, but rather seem to point toward a religious framework, especially a theistic one, as what may be needed for sense-making.

Philosophy Supplement, 65 (2009), 233–55; J. Cottingham, *Philosophy of Religion: Towards a More Humane Approach* (Cambridge University Press, 2014).

10 P. Hadot, *What Is Ancient Philosophy?*, trans. M. Case (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 3.

11 P. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed. A. Davidson, trans. M. Chase (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1995), 103.

In "The Problem of Impiety," Cora Diamond discusses Hume's critique of the absolute prohibition of suicide among religious people of his day, which he regarded as mere superstition. Diamond uses this to highlight what she calls "the problem of impiety": can any way of acting be ruled out as impious without appealing to divine prohibition? In other words, can human reason identify certain domains as being set apart as sacred or reverence-worthy and so as being absolutely inviolable? Diamond discusses different responses to this problem and how it pertains not just to the issue of suicide, but also to our treatment of the dead and to a host of controversial issues in biomedical, sexual, and environmental ethics. Moreover, she contends that it illustrates the difference between the sort of objectivity proper to science and that which is proper to ethics. Drawing on Iris Murdoch's work, Diamond suggests that our moral concepts are deep moral configurations of the world, rather than merely different ways of judging the facts of a common world. She also draws on the work of Elizabeth Anscombe and others to explore how our moral concepts, such as the pious and the impious, can capture important truths about the world.

Whereas Diamond explores the possibility of a non-religious understanding of piety, in "The Virtue of Piety," Robert C. Roberts discusses piety as a religious virtue. Drawing on Plato's *Euthyphro*, Roberts discusses filial piety as a prelude to thinking about piety toward God. Filial piety, he argues, involves a reverence toward one's parents simply *as* one's parents, as the source of one's existence. This is an analogue for piety toward God, who is the *fundamental* source of all existence. But there is a crucial difference: whereas filial piety is directed toward one's parents in the *role* of parents, even if they are not good parents, piety toward God, properly construed, involves an affirmation of God's perfect goodness or "glory." Piety as a virtue is thus "a developed and temporally stable disposition to appreciate the glory of God and his creation and thus to feel inhibited from actions that violate its order, including, importantly, the glory of parenthood and inhibition from actions and thoughts that violate it." Roberts argues that this theistic account of the "glory of creation" (rather than mere divine command) can help make sense of the sort of examples of impiety that Diamond discusses.

In "*Homo Religiosus*: Does Spirituality Have a Place in Neo-Aristotelian Virtue Ethics?," I explore the place of spirituality within a neo-Aristotelian account of the good life. First, I lay out my understanding of spirituality. Second, I discuss why neo-Aristotelians have often ignored or explicitly excluded from consideration the issue of the place of spirituality in the good life. I suggest that a lot turns on how one understands the "ethical

naturalism" to which neo-Aristotelians are committed. Third, I argue that
through a deeper exploration of the evaluative standpoint from within our
human form of life as "meaning-seeking animals" we can come to appreci-
ate better the importance of spirituality for human beings throughout
recorded history up to the present and why we can be described as *homo
religiosus*. I also discuss the draw to theistic spirituality in particular.
Finally, I consider and respond to three important objections to giving
spirituality, especially theistic spirituality, a central place within the good
life: viz., (1) the wholeness objection; (2) the autonomy objection; and (3)
the social peace objection.

In "Desire and the Spiritual Life," Fiona Ellis notes a common objection,
articulated by Nietzsche and others, against traditional religious forms of
spirituality: it supposes that religious outlooks, such as Christianity and
Buddhism, deny a place for desire in the spiritual life by regarding desire as
undesirable and so as something to be transcended. The charge then is that
these views denigrate our this-worldly existence (a version of "the wholeness
objection"). Ellis questions the fairness of this objection and seeks to give an
account of the proper place of desire in the spiritual life that avoids both a
problematic otherworldliness that rejects all desire and an equally problematic
blank acceptance of desire. Some desires are desirable; some are not. To make
sense of this, Ellis suggests that we need to move beyond a focus on appetitive
desire to recognize non-appetitive desires that are responsive to objective
values. It is such desires that are proper to the spiritual life. Ellis argues that
this concession to "Platonism" (of a sort common to theistic religion) need
not involve any problematic otherworldliness, and she further argues that
Schopenhauer's work (representative of a Buddhist-type outlook) can be read
in this light.

In "Between Heaven and Earth: Sensory Experience and the Goods of
the Spiritual Life," Mark R. Wynn draws on Aquinas's account of infused
moral virtue to explore a kind of good of the spiritual life that is "between
heaven and earth" in that it concerns our relationship to created things as
properly ordered to our relationship with God and so is a "hybrid good."
Wynn also draws on William James's discussion of conversion experience
to explore how the senses can contribute to the realization of such goods.
The important point is that religious converts "enjoy not only a new
relationship to God, but also a newly enlivened appreciation of the every-
day sensory world," a "transfiguration" in light of "divine glory." There can
be two key forms of perceptual change here: (1) "a deepened sense of the
significance of the sensory order considered as a whole," i.e., a general
change in "hue"; and (2) "a deepened sense of the differentiated

significance of objects," i.e., specific changes in "salience." Wynn thus seeks to show how achieving the goods of the spiritual life not only involves the proper ordering of our thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and behavior, but also a heightened quality of sensory experience.

In "The Jewish Sabbath as a Spiritual Practice," Samuel Fleischacker explores the nature and significance of keeping Shabbat, which is central to Jewish life. Fleischacker discusses how Shabbat as a spiritual practice is first of all about *not* doing certain things, thereby relieving us of concern for material needs and work (even ideal work) and making room for other important activities: viz., spending time with family and friends, sharing meals, singing, reading, praying, worshipping, attending religious services, and otherwise living out and contemplating the "telos of creation." The restraints of Shabbat also shape our lives as a whole through cultivating and enacting a "Shabbat-consciousness," which includes cultivating a humility that frees us from various forms of idolatry. Shabbat provides a "frame" with which to appreciate our work and the goodness of creation; it also helps us to perceive the world and human life in a particularly Jewish way (cf. Wynn on perceptual change resulting from religious conversion). Additionally, Fleischacker shows how the structure of Shabbat connects up with central aspects of Jewish theology, such as negative theology and the avoidance of idolatry. He ends with some reflections on what keeping Shabbat has to teach us about spiritual practices and spirituality in general.

In "The Power of the Spoken Word: Prayer, Invocation, and Supplication in Islam," Mukhtar H. Ali examines the role of the spoken word in Islamic spirituality. He begins by discussing "the Word" in Creation and in the Qurʾān and how they along with the human soul are seen as mirrors of one another, as knowledge of each can lead to a better understanding of the others, and in the case of the human soul, it is perfected by actualizing the realities of the Qurʾānic verses within itself. Here the Islamic spiritual practices of prayer, invocation, and supplication have great importance, as Ali goes on to explore. These practices help to cultivate attitudes of worship, gratitude, and humility, as well as the remembrance of God as central to Islamic spiritual life. Ali's discussion here can be seen as providing a response to a common charge against theism as undermining human well-being in making us submissive to God (a version of "the autonomy objection"): for Ali, humble submissiveness to God in prayer, invocation, and supplication is in fact most truly liberating as it contributes to our human perfection and spiritual awakening.

In "Aristotelian Friendship and Ignatian Companionship," Karen Stohr draws on Aristotle's account of friendship and St. Ignatius of Loyola's

account of companionship to consider how we can be a good friend or companion to others during their times of despair, grief, suffering, and isolation that are occasioned by serious illness, trauma, or death. The key issue here is how we can cultivate and practice a way of being fully present (or "coming close") to others during such times. Stohr argues that this requires that we accompany them on a difficult journey along an uncertain path and become aware of and then avoid our tendencies to make others' suffering into something more palatable for ourselves (in order to cope with our own fears and insecurities) and thereby fail to be fully present to others in their suffering and so to be a genuine source of consolation. Drawing inspiration from St. Ignatius's *Spiritual Exercises*, she writes: "Ignatian consolation requires that we *be* the presence of God for another, but it does not ask us to make sense of God or the suffering."

The issue of suffering is taken up in a different spiritual context in Richard White's "Starting with Compassion." White draws on the Buddhist tradition, though, as his title suggests, he seeks to provide, with his account of compassion, a starting point for anyone interested in the spiritual life, since an authentic spiritual life must take us beyond our selves. Compassion can also be a path toward and expressive of a spiritual wisdom regarding the world and our place within it. Here there is a primacy of practice over theory. White first discusses the nature of compassion, which he contrasts with pity and empathy. He also contrasts a typical Western conception of compassion as a self-achievement (i.e., a personal virtue) with the Buddhist conception as a self-overcoming. Next, he considers and responds to some common objections to compassion by Western philosophers (viz., the Stoics, Kant, and Nietzsche), who consider it a vice insofar as it expresses weakness and abandons personal autonomy. White argues that compassion in fact often expresses inner strength and the abandonment of selfish concerns is a good thing. Finally, White explores some practical ways of enhancing compassion in our lives and thereby also achieving greater spiritual enlightenment.

In "Identifying with the Confucian Heaven: Immanent and Transcendent *Dao*," May Sim explores the question of whether Confucianism should be seen merely as a moral philosophy or as a moral philosophy *and* religion. Against those who deny its status as a religion, Sim seeks to show that Confucianism can be seen as affirming transcendent values and thus counting as a religion and offering a "spiritual way of life." In particular, though it differs from Western theistic religions in certain respects, Sim argues that Confucianism offers an account of the divine ("Heaven," or *tian*) that is the ultimate source of all things, and it also offers an ideal of ultimate personal

transformation (i.e., "sagehood") that requires aligning oneself with a cosmic source of meaning and ethical purposiveness (i.e., "identifying with the Confucian Heaven"). She makes her case by exploring the goal of becoming Heaven-like in the writings of Confucius and Mencius, which requires that we align ourselves with the way (*dao*) of Heaven as expressed in the standards of ritual propriety (*li*) within a culture embodying the *dao*, or in our virtue-inclined human nature, or in the goodness inherent in the wider world.

In the final essay, "Agnostic Spirituality," John Houston writes on behalf of the agnostic who falls somewhere between the extremes of the confident, self-satisfied religious believer and the confident, self-satisfied unbeliever. He calls attention to a not uncommon phenomenon that is rarely considered by these extremes: viz., the person who deeply and perhaps desperately wants to believe in God (under some conception) because of the great goods of religious faith (understood here as *theistic* faith), but is simply *unable.* And when this involves the loss of a previously cherished faith, the resulting experience can be disorienting and sometimes crushing. Houston is thus concerned with a particular kind of agnosticism, viz., "open" or "Socratic" agnosticism, which claims ignorance of matters of religious faith and ultimate reality, but is still very much concerned with them. Houston then draws on scripture and the work of William James to make the case for an agnostic spirituality that seeks to maintain religious faith without belief, on the basis of hope, where one acts *as though* God exists.

It is my hope as the editor of this collection that these essays will prove both intellectually and spiritually beneficial for the reader.