

Ecology and Spirituality:

What is Spirituality?



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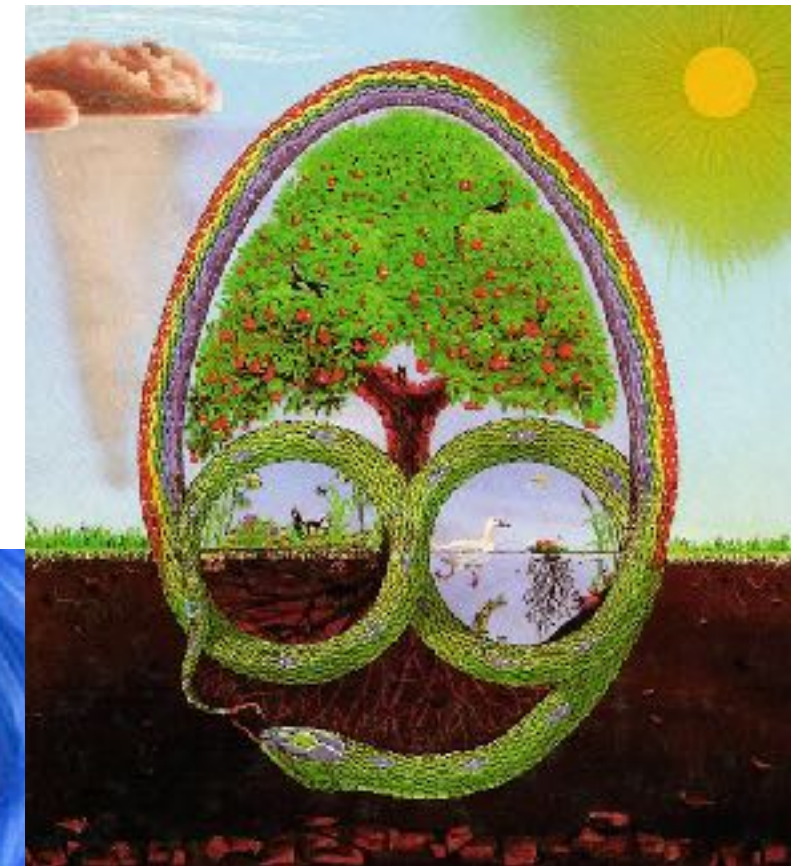
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Overview

- Origins and etymology.
- Spiritual but not religious.
- Personal Religion.
- Vernacular Religion.
- Ordinary Theologies.
- Indigenous Perspectives.
- Alternative Spiritualities.
- Pop Culture Spiritualities.
- Personal Mythology.

Spiritus

- Etymology - *Spiritus* - Latin, Breath.
- The breath as a sort of life-giving essence.
- Association with the air - is this an ecological connection from the beginning?
- Associations today with the immaterial, metaphysical, non-corporeal, etc.
- *Spirituality* - a broad phenomenon.
- *Spiritualism* - a specific 19th century religious movement.



Spiritual and Material?

- The divorce of spirit from the physical in many Western traditions was reinforced in the seventeenth century by Rene Descartes' (1596-1650) famous separation of mind and matter into two distinct domains or substances.
- In the Cartesian model, matter was the domain of rational scientific enquiry, while mind, or the soul, was portioned off for religion.
- Spiritual/Material, Supernatural/Natural, Mind/Matter...
- Jan Platvoet (2004) argues that this opposition of mind and matter has become central to Western ways of thinking about the world, and suggests that evidence for its foundational influence can be found in the number of different ways that Western scholarship duplicates the dichotomy in different terms:
- “One is ‘the material’ versus ‘the spiritual’, another the ‘physical’ versus the ‘metaphysical’, a third ‘the empirical’ (world) versus ‘the meta-empirical’ (realm), and a fourth, the ‘seen’ versus the ‘unseen’. A fifth, finally, is the testable world, which is taken as the (one and only) object of research of the sciences, versus the meta-testable realm(s) postulated by religious beliefs (and by certain kinds of metaphysical philosophy)...” (Platvoet, 2004, pp. 175-176).
- “To us supernatural means very much the same as abnormal or extraordinary. Azande certainly have no conception of the 'natural' as we understand it, and therefore neither of the 'supernatural' as we understand it...It is a normal, and not an abnormal happening...belief in witchcraft is quite consistent with human responsibility and a rational appreciation of nature” (Evans-Pritchard, 1975, p. 30).



Spirituality

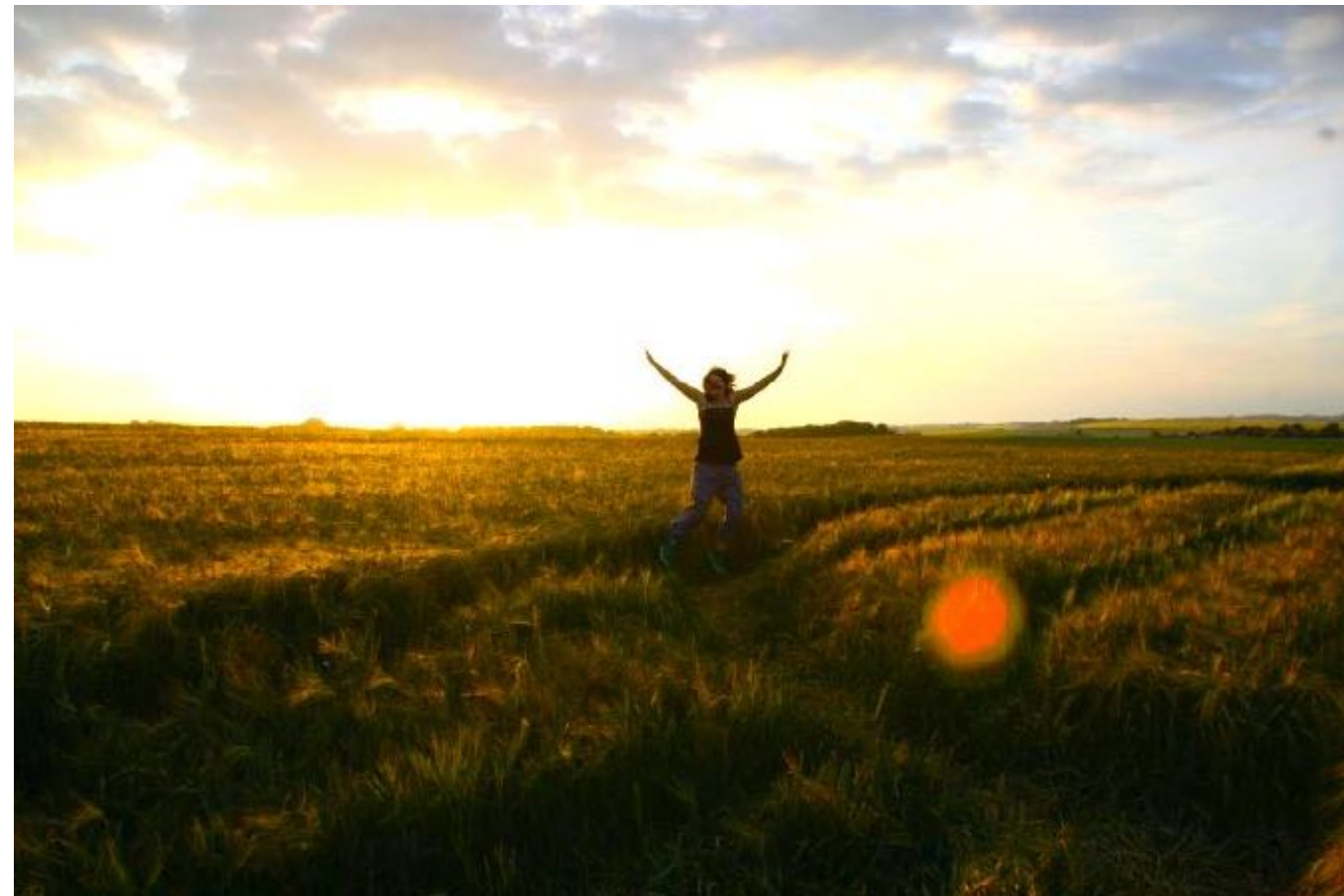
- Margaret Chatterjee:

“The term ‘spirituality’ exerts a certain seductiveness [...] It is often used as if we all knew what it means. And yet the uses are so various that there seems to be a question mark set against any such assumption, for often there is not even a family resemblance between the various uses we come across” (Chatterjee, 1989, p. vi).
- “To some extent, a varied repertoire of definitions can reflect a healthy and rich diversity of scholarly approaches. Beyond a certain point, however, multiple definitions may undermine professional communication and scientific and scholarly progress” (Oman, 2013, p. 24).



Sociological or Phenomenological?

- We can approach Spirituality from (at least) two different perspectives.
- **Sociologically** - in terms of how spirituality is understood and practiced, and the social functions it performs. Usually adopts an *etic* position.
- **Phenomenologically** - in terms of the different ways that people *experience* spirituality and have spiritual experiences. Moving towards an *emic* understanding.
- We will focus on sociological perspectives in this lecture, because we can explore the phenomenological angle in more detail later on in the module.



Spiritual but not Religious

- Heelas & Woodhead (2005) write:

“...survey after survey shows that increasing numbers of people now refer to themselves as spiritual” (2005, p. 1).
- They argue that a subjective turn has taken place in society.
- They propose the terminology to make this distinction ‘life as’ and ‘subjective life.’

12. DATE OF BIRTH AND AGE
If you are not sure, please give your best estimate.
Date of birth: Day Month Year Age

☒ **SPIRITUAL BUT NOT RELIGIOUS**

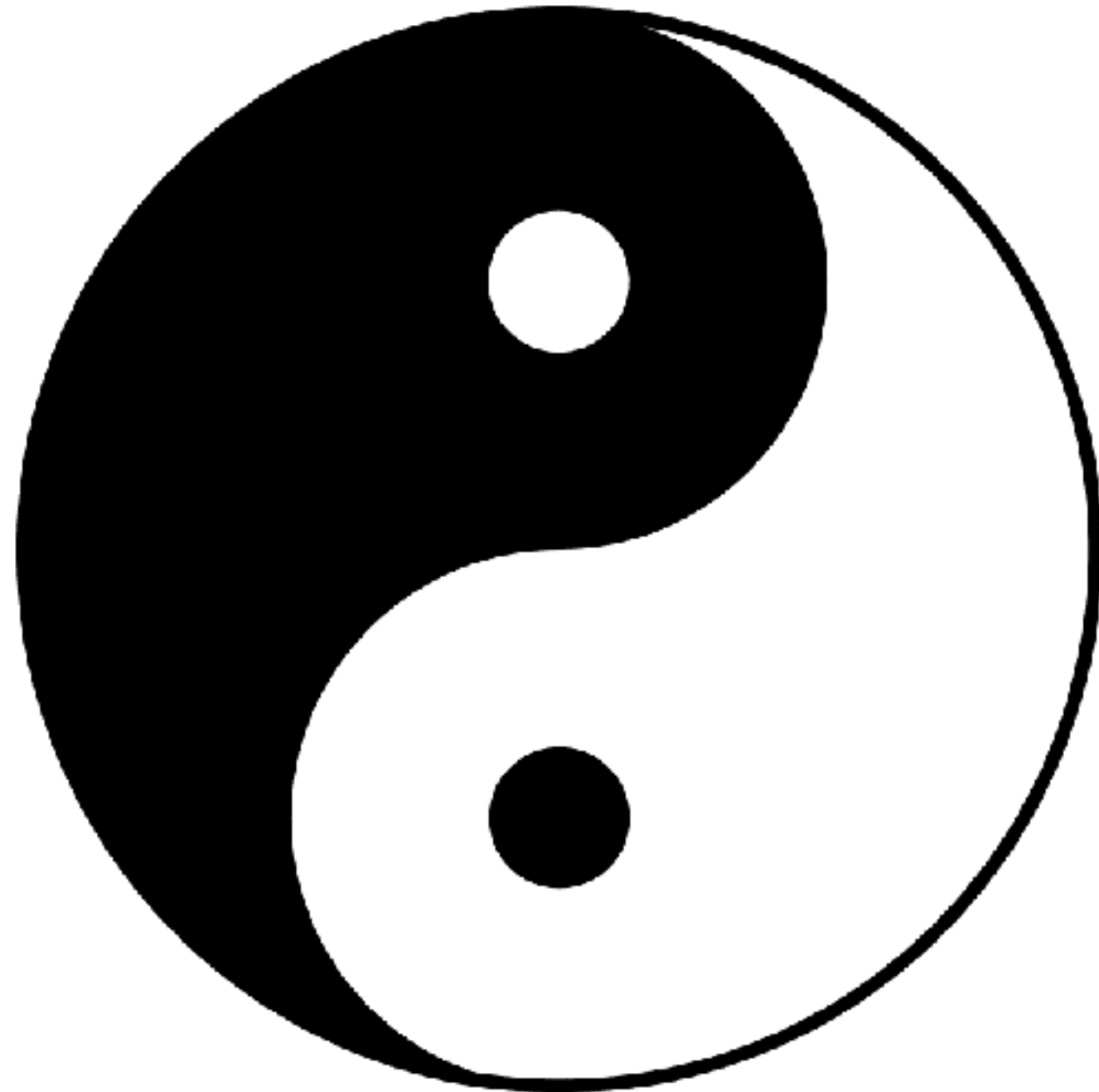
13. What is your personal belief system?

☐	Catholic
☐	Protestant
☒	Spiritual But Not Religious
☐	None of the Above.

MARITAL STATUS

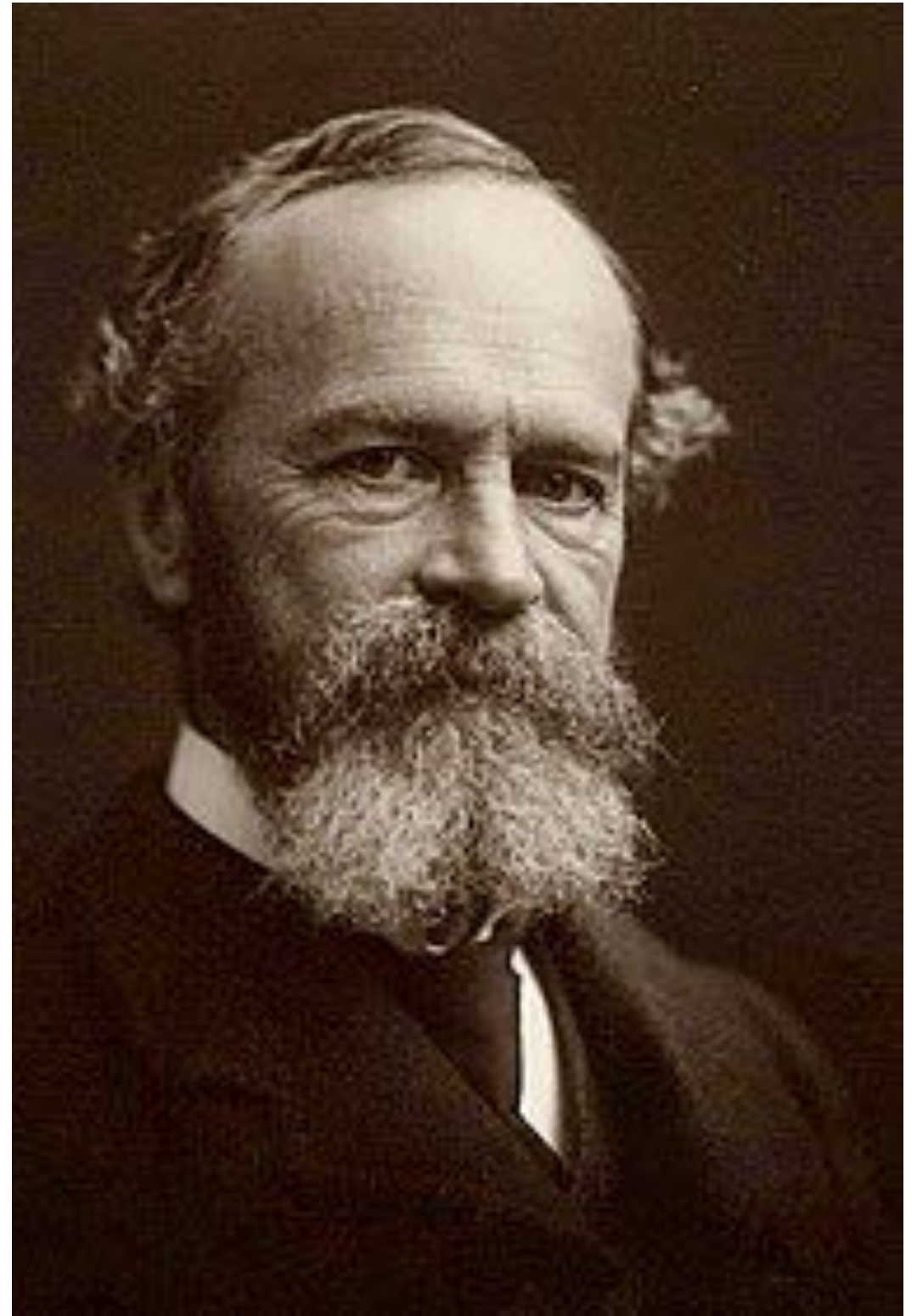
Spiritual but not Religious

- Heelas and Woodhead make a distinction:
- **Life as** - emphasises a transcendent source of significance and authority to which individuals must conform at the expense of the cultivation of their unique subjective-lives. Most likely to be in decline (e.g. mainstream religions).
- **Subjective life** - emphasises inner sources of significance and authority and the cultivation or sacralisation of unique subjective-lives. Most likely to be growing (e.g. spiritualities) (Heelas & Woodhead, 2005, p. 6).
- Graham Harvey (2016) does offer some critiques of this distinction.



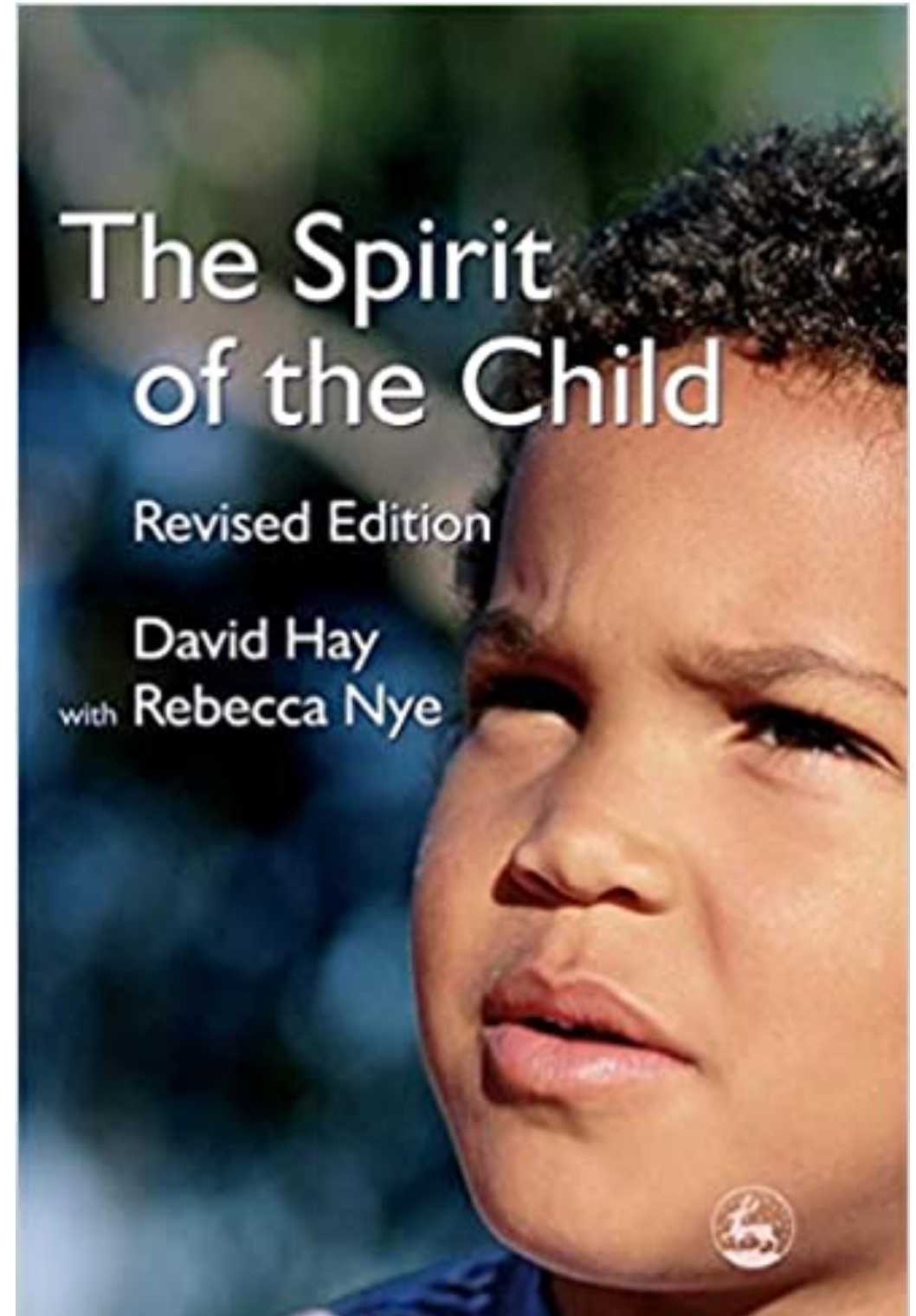
Personal Religion

- Philosopher William James was most interested in the phenomenology of religion – how it was experienced.
- In his book *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) he discusses what he calls ‘personal religion.’
- “...the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual[s] in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine...” (James, 2004, p. 39).



Personal Religion and Spiritual Orientation

- David Hay and Rebecca Nye conducted research into children's spirituality.
- '...spirituality is the potential to be much more deeply aware of ourselves and our intimate relationship with everything that is not ourselves...' (2006, p. 22).
- Very open and inclusive view of spirituality.
- Clear to see the connections with ecological behaviour.



Vernacular Religion

- “...vernacular religion is 'religion' as it is played out on a day-to-day basis in the life of the individual” (Bowman, 2000, p. 85).
- “...spiritual rituals and events performed, largely by women are either conveniently overlooked by religious authorities or seen as contentious by more rigid perspectives on religious belonging.... [W]omen’s participation and worship at spiritual sites draws our attention to the continuum of practices that run between life-course rituals and acts of spiritual embodiment and worship, making it difficult to maintain... distinctions between cultural and religious practices...” (Purewal & Kalwa, 2010, p. 383).
- Where do we draw the line between spiritual and everyday practice? Is there a line?



Ordinary Theologies

- Sociologist Jeff Astley coined the term 'ordinary theology.'
- Refers to beliefs and ideas beyond doctrine, often informed by personal experience.
- Often takes on a much more heterodox nature (e.g. communication with dead relatives, etc.)
- The 'theology and theologising of [those] who have received little or no theological education of a scholarly, academic or systematic kind...' (Astley, 2002).



Indigenous Perspectives

- “What is immediately apparent in traditional native religions is that both narratives of spiritual experiences and religious practices transmit extraordinary encounters with **spiritual realms that are not separated from ordinary life lived in relation to local bioregions**. Thus, to talk about indigenous religious traditions it is necessary to situate them within their lived communities, or lifeways” (Grim, 2006).
- Reveal that Western distinctions between the spiritual and the everyday are not necessarily universal (and as we have seen with Vernacular Religion above, are not really separable even within Western contexts).
- As an illustration Jan Platvoet points to Ghanaian Akan spirituality, which expresses an entirely different ontological and cosmological framework:

“...for the Akan, their spirituality implied no opposition at all to the material, the empirical, the touchable and the testable. On the contrary, Akan believers postulated several kinds and degrees of materiality for the spiritual and thereby integrated the spiritual into their own physical world. Actually, the dichotomous categories ‘spiritual’ versus ‘material’ and so on were completely absent from Akan minds and language” (Platvoet, 2004, p. 186).



Alternative Spiritualities

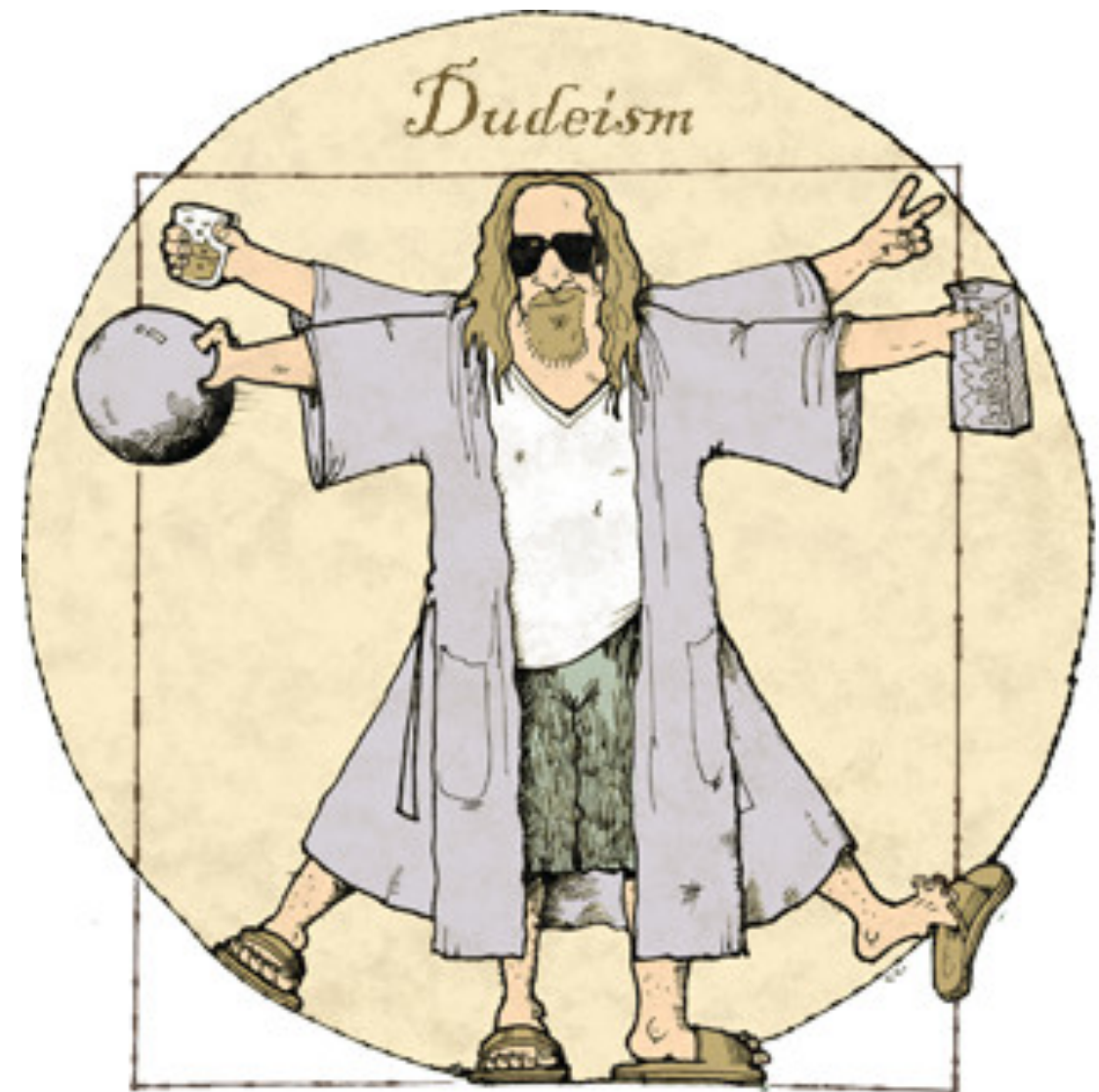
- Marion Bowman (2000) identifies some core features of Alternative Spiritualities:
 1. **The Personal Quest** - search for meaning.
 2. **'Mix and Match' Spirituality** - incorporation of diverse beliefs and practices.
 3. **Remythologising** - old myths are reinterpreted, new myths are created.
 4. **Healing** - a concern for healing and well-being.
 5. **The Golden Age and 'Noble Savages'** - e.g. Celts, Indigenous traditions.
 6. **Hidden Wisdom** - e.g. theosophy, channeling, ley lines.
 7. **Past Lives and Reincarnation** - incorporation of metaphysical beliefs.
 8. **Interconnectedness** - all life exists in an interconnected web.
 9. **Sacred Landscapes** - belief that certain locations are 'power centres,' e.g. Glastonbury.
 10. **Pilgrimage** - travelling with purpose to connect with people and place.



(Bowman, 2000, pp. 86-93).

Pop Culture Spiritualities

- Sociologist Adam Possamai has suggested that religion and spirituality are moving into a new phase, blending with different forms of mass popular media.
- “Hyper-real religions are innovative religions and spiritualities that mix elements of religious tradition with popular culture” (Possamai & Lee, 2011).
- Examples include Jediism, Dudeism, etc...



Personal Mythology

- “...each individual has a notion of how the universe works and of his or her place in it and connection to it. One's personal mythology includes all the interacting and sometimes conflicting thoughts and feelings a person harbors about the world, both consciously and unconsciously. These myths shape the actions individuals take and the interpretations they give to their experiences...” (Krippner, 1990, p. 139).



Summary

- We can think about spirituality sociologically and phenomenologically.
- Spirituality is often distinguished from religion in terms of its subjectivity, though this can also be contested.
- Spirituality or personal religion can be understood as our framework for making sense of our place in the cosmos.
- Vernacular religion shows that the boundaries between religion, spirituality and everyday life are permeable and flexible.
- Ordinary Theologies show that real-world interpretations of religious and spiritual traditions can be heterodox.
- Indigenous perspectives often collapse any sort of distinction between the spiritual and the mundane.
- Alternative Spiritualities and Hyper-Religions are changing the spiritual landscape (which has always shifted and changed, so what's new?)

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