The Human Spirit

Groundwork

Douglas R. McGaughey
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The Human Spirit - Groundwork

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Radically original in many respects, this is a bold, but persuasive orientation to engaging with 'spirit' and the human. Its key, compelling question, *"what makes spirituality possible for us as human beings in the first place?,"* helps reframe the discussion in an important way, privileging human reality as the locus of a critical interrogation of the reality of spirit, and rooting it in the challenges of our contemporary realities.

Gerald O. West (University of KwaZulu-Natal)

An exciting read and ambitious project by erudite scholars in command of the material, the book deals with a vast topic with an organising logic built on an in-depth knowledge and engagement with the Kantian tradition, including its promise and discontents. Neither romanticising nor domesticating the pervasive reality of violence, it is very candid about the place of religion in our discourses without falling into the trap of equating religion with "bad" and spirit/spirituality with "good."

Robert Vosloo (Stellenbosch Univeristy)

Embodying poetic hearts, philosophical minds and spirited imaginations McGaughey and Cochrane take us on an insurrectionist journey, elegantly remapping what it means to be human, and requiring readers as participant navigators to restrict and resist the intrusion of epistemic baggage shaped through centuries of tradition, dogma and silencing.

Mohamed Seedat (University of South Africa)

McGaughey and Cochrane have produced a truly integrated collaborative work that self-proclaims the "audacious" task of reformulating how we think about Spirit. It is about creative capacities, mind/brain, causality, free will, morality, consciousness, and beauty. In short, it is about being human.

Paul Laurienti (Radiology, Wake Forest Medical School, USA)

Not just another expression of forms of particular spiritualities, faiths, let alone worldviews or ideology, nor merely a book on religion or spirituality, the authors rightly put their focus is rather on "the Human Spirit", on "what enables each and every one of us to and become human in the first place." A major value of this work is that it is non-dogmatic and it will resonate not only with those who strive to embrace the 'universal human spirit' but also with the search for transformation that enhances positive traits in humanity.

Evance Kalula (Law, University of Cape Town)

For social scientists like myself, this is a valuable source for understanding the underpinnings of the concept of spirituality and the ways in which it may be incorporated in health and development work.

Ellen Idler (Sociology, Emory University)

This is an intellectual cup of desperately needed cold water to a field of practitioners increasingly lost in a desert of inadequate language, a lifeline to a company of practitioners drowning in a stormy sea of conflicting intellectual currents. Provoking and disturbing those who live on the false summits of religious thought and philosophic practice it offers much needed precision, rigor and the necessary language for talking about the one thing every human shares and human capacity derives: Spirit.

Gary Gunderson (FaithHealth, Wake Forest Baptist Health, USA)

The authors have tackled a vitally important, but much neglected, subject: the Human Spirit. For too long this topic has been described and analysed within the confines of particular religions or tradition, but the Human Spirit is far deeper and wider than this and is manifest far beyond any religious boundaries. This is very much a ground-breaking attempt to describe, comprehend and assess the reality of this Spirit.

Francis Wilson (Economics, University of Cape T own)

It's difficult to imagine a social and behavioral scientist, such as myself, not finding this book challenging in a number of ways and not least in its frontal assault of positivism and propensity to shake the foundations of hegemonic constructions of knowledge in psychological science, especially with respect to the mind-body problem. I would encourage readers to suspend judgement long enough to let propositions that are advanced in this well-written and thoughtful book settle, and be enriched by its many virtues.

Dan Christie (Peace & Conflict Studies, Ohio State University)

I seldom use the word spirit with any confidence but this book brings spirit back home, helping me see that it is not something to discover out there but that it lives as a unity of all the facets of our being. This sweeping and radical treatise – covering philosophy, psychology, theology, neuroscience, history, social science, medicine, physics – re-orients what each of these has to offer towards a spiritual view of life as a learning journey, as practical as it is moral and, might I add, joyful.

Doug Reeler (Community Development Resource Association, Cape Town)

In an age when conflict and violence appears to be rampant and organized religion is causally associated more with terrorism than with peace, this book serves as a way to separate chaff from grain. It reminds us that we are greater than the sum of our physical organs, invites us to find common ground for a definition of what cannot be described in physical terms, and sign-posts a path that brings us closer to the possibility to "exercize our Spirit and spiritual capacities with fully moral responsibility to the best of our ability regardless of our self-interest."

Anna Tharyan (Psychiatry, CMC, Vellore, India)

This important book encourages us, regardless of what belief system we hold dear, to discover and explore the extraordinary power of the "human spirit" within all of us to imagine what may be possible, and to effectively pursue that vision, making a powerful case for a more holistic and creative approach that offers a moral infrastructure with immense positive potential for our communities, our institutions, and our society.

Kevin Barnett (Public health Institute, CA, USA)

McGaughey and Cochrane's groundwork cuts across numerous intellectual disciplines and fields, ranging from public health to behavioral health, resilience, trauma, medicine, economics to education and even philanthropy, as well as being highly compatible with the emerging field of positive deviancy.

Teresa Cutts (Clinical psychology, Wake Forest Medical School, USA)

With rich insights regarding what makes and keeps human life truly human by focusing attention on the spiritual capacities that distinguish human beings, the authors lead us on a quest for conceptual clarity that is not merely philosophical but, as they put it, "intensely practical." It deepens our understanding of how our creative freedom – the universal gift of Spirit – can enrich our willingness to transcend individual self-interest and embrace personal, interpersonal, and communal responsibility.

Gerald Winslow (Health Policy & Leadership, Loma Linda University, USA)

What resonated most was its explicit shift from the "normal" philosophical, religious or mystical question of "what is spirit?" to the more practical – but no less complicated – question of "what makes it possible for a human being to experience spirit?" This book offers a comprehensive map of where spirit fits within the human condition – from the standpoint of multiple philosophies, traditions and worldviews – and provokes the inquiry that's needed to awaken us to spirit.

Doug Easterling (Social Sciences & Health Policy, Wake Forest Medical School, USA)

By tackling the subject of The Human Spirit, McGaughey and Cochrane have taken on a monumental task that may have been addressed in the past, albeit superficially, or perhaps rooted in specific theological or philosophical schools of thought, but almost never explored in the tangible, practical, concrete ways in which it impacts human activity, agency, and society.

Kanwaljeet J. S. Anand (Pediatrics, Stanford University, USA)

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This collaborative work goes back to a friendship that began at the University of Chicago and Chicago Theological Seminary some forty years ago. The evolution of our thinking, each individually, has regularly dovetailed over those years, sometimes with considerable gaps of time but always with a sense of a fundamental commitment to action towards, and hope in a world that better represents the highest of which we are capable as human beings in the face of the lowest of which we are also capable. Accompanying us on that journey has been a host of companions, colleagues and friends whose own thought and actions have helped keep our hopes high. We cannot name them all; but they will know who they are. It is they and those like them we wish to acknowledge above all in a book that is preeminently about the human spirit. Some must be noted, however.

This project began in our work with a team of people in South Africa and the USA exploring what spiritual capacities (and religious assets, not the same thing) might contribute to changing the endemic and challenging issue of interpersonal violence (see our Preface). We gratefully acknowledge those involved – academics, practitioners, and community researchers: out of this work that the idea of "spiritual capacity" first arose.

A key ally has been Gary Gunderson, our long-term colleague and friend. Regularly hearing us talk of human spirit and spirituality and convinced that it is both timely and vital to the work we do together in community and public life, he insisted we write this book and provided some financial support. Encouraging us when we might easily have given up, he shares our view that this work is of signal importance in face of fundamental questions today about human being and becoming. We are particularly grateful to him.

A number of people read the first draft and either endorsed our approach to publishers or gave us useful feedback (or both), including Kanwaljeet "Sunny" Anand, Kevin Barnett, Dan Christie, Teresa Cutts, Doug Easterling, Gary Gunderson, Ellen Idler, Evance Kalula, Paul Laurienti, Doug Reeler, Steve Scoggin, Mohamed Seedat, Anna Tharyan, Francis Wilson and Gerald Winslow. We are extremely grateful to them too. And to Wikus van Zyl of AFRICAN SUN MeDIA for his enthusiastic support for this project.

To our families and friends we also express appreciation and thanks, for they bore with us despite being repeatedly over-dosed with our particular intellectual medicine.

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PREFACE

This book is about the human spirit. It sets out to establish the basis upon which we may grasp the fullness of our experience as human beings, of our unity with life, and of wonder – but, especially, as capable, to a profoundly significant degree, of acting in the world so as intentionally to transform nature and ourselves for good or ill and, hence, as being capable of taking responsibility for that fact. What we have to say about this is general and foundational, hence, a groundwork. The origins of our interest, however, were particular. They were provoked by a practical concern that raises hard questions about what it means to be human in the face of the egregious interpersonal violence that transcends any specific context and marks every society across the globe to the point that the World Health Organization treats it as a major public health issue of our time.

In South Africa, the home country of one of the authors, interpersonal violence is a plague, affecting not only women and children but also men (who are actually overwhelmingly both the perpetrators of interpersonal violence and its victims). In part, this is a result of systematic damage done to family and community structures by colonial and Apartheid policies over a long period of time, but also of very high levels of enduring poverty and toxic inequality that continue to mark South African society. As elsewhere in the world, many attempts have been made to address the causes of interpersonal violence with varying degrees of success. In South Africa, both authors have had a role in a particular study that, over the last three years or so, has sought to focus on the potential of religion and spirituality in addressing the male role in interpersonal violence (including constructions of masculinity and also of race).[1]

A central question in this research was whether or not there are "spiritual capacities" in individuals or communities that can be identified, strengthened, or drawn upon to open up positive responses to violence or the threat of it. Interpersonal violence also can be viewed, at least in part, as the consequence of a truncation of one's spiritual capacities so that *one eclipses or suppresses one's personal responsibility* and fails to exercise one's creative freedom on the basis of principles that are "right because they are right." Frequently that failure comes because one acts either out of pure self-interest driven by material appetites and priorities or out of the desire to obtain status and prestige (honour) in the eyes of

[1] The research project, known as SCRATCHMAPS (Spiritual Capacities and Religious Assets for Transforming Community Health: Mobilising Males for Peace and Safety), is a joint effort of the International Religious Health Assets Programme in the Faculties of Humanities and Health Sciences at the University of Cape Town, the Institute for Social and Health Sciences at the University of South Africa and the South African Medical Research Council.

others. Plato already pointed out (*Republic*, Book IX, 584d-585a) that one falsely believes one has elevated oneself when one acts on the basis of honour rather than on the basis merely of appetites *but has not yet learned the significance of "reason"*[2] *for supervising the appetites and honour*. Our project by no means embraces the metaphysics of Platonic Rationalism in its account of spiritual capacities, but we do share with Plato an analysis of human motivation that places practical reason above theoretical reason, and it is here that the question of the human spirit most strongly emerges. This begs a key question, of course: Just what do we mean by spirit or, for that matter, spirituality?

The question is neither trivial, nor specifically religious. Just as the destruction of bodies is linked to the damage done to spirit (think torture, or malnutrition), so too the reverse will be true: the healing of bodies goes hand in hand with the healing of spirit. A diminished, abject, despairing, threatened or surrendered self is a dispirited self. When rage arises and a refusal to accept this situation takes hold, in one form or another the self may take revenge (though a motivation for violence may involve more than the mere desire for revenge). Then the human spirit turns destructive. Persons will suffer but so, too, will families, communities and ultimately, society itself.

The search for understanding human spirit is thus not abstract but intensely practical. At the same time, the practical challenge forces us to think more carefully about what we mean by the human spirit and its capacities, and not only in one place or one situation. In this integrated work by two authors, each working on different parts of the discussion to an outline worked out by both, we try to answer this question. Our reach is deliberately general: it rests on our understanding of what it means to be human. It is aimed at providing a perspective on human spirit and spirituality that is applicable to any situation through time and space. It is not tied to any particular religious tradition but, rather, shapes all religious and, for that matter, secular traditions and even scientific practice.

Writing about spirit and spiritually inevitably evokes the question of religion. The reality of violence that first prompted our inquiry leads one to make the rather obvious and common observation that historical religions or faiths are all too often themselves implicated in violence at various levels. Equally obvious to any impartial observer, however, is that persons who embrace an historical religion or faith also possess powerful capacities with access to interpersonal, material and institutional resources otherwise unavailable for positively addressing and responding to violence. We take an agnostic position vis-à-vis institutional

[2] "Reason" is placed in quotation marks because it has multiple meanings (e.g., metaphysical abstraction or empirical, instrumental reason). We speak of reason in the context of humanity's spiritual capacities both to understand the world (theoretical reason) and act as agents capable of and, hence, responsible for, consciously initiating sequences of events that nature on its own otherwise cannot accomplish (practical reason). We say more on this in the book.

religions or faiths, but we do so on the grounds that any distinction between "good religion" and "bad religion" already begs the question of just what one means by religion.

As is quite common, in our research on violence many people sought to distinguish between religion and spirituality, tending to see religion as pejorative and spirituality as positive. Such a distinction, however popular it may be, is in our view a false one, predicated upon a limited view of religion as describing particular kinds of compromised faith and faith traditions. Any attempt to treat spirituality as a way out of the fraught history of empirical religions or problematic dogmas ultimately runs into the same difficulties: all we would discover is another tangle, for spiritual traditions are no less diverse or free of ambiguity than religious faiths. Even if one could distill from them some generalised set of commonalities or "family resemblances" (Wittgenstein) should one so choose, they make up a wild and woolly landscape of thousands of ideas and practices, each with its own particularities and certainties.

We do not, therefore, intend to describe various spiritual phenomena nor, through some kind of sifting of their content, do we seek a common denominator among them. Our focus is thus not on the mere phenomena of human spirituality – its appearances – but rather, on its condition of possibility. So we ask: *what makes spirituality possible for us as human beings in the first place*?

An answer to that question has profound implications. It can act to affirm any and all particular historical or empirical expressions of spirituality and what they hold to be valid and true by uncovering what binds them together at the most fundamental level; at the same time, it allows for a critical appraisal of where they fall short.

Spirit is at the core of human life, a claim we will substantiate. Just what that means, however, is not obvious. In many cultural or philosophical traditions spirit has been understood as 'life energy' or 'life force.' Whether in terms of energy, breath, wind or similar dynamic metaphors, there is a long tradition of seeing spirit as intimately linked with life. We will discuss this approach later (critically), but we would like to note our own links to an international, collaborative initiative built around a focus on the "leading causes of life" (defined as connection, coherence, agency, intergenerational "blessing," and hope),[3] as contrasted with what works against life or "causes death" (noting that human beings invest huge amounts of energy, thought, and resources of one kind or another on combatting or attempting to avoid the latter).

[3] Gary R. Gunderson and James R. Cochrane, *Religion and the Health of the Public: Shifting the Paradigm* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), Chapter Four: "The Leading Causes of Life: Pathology in Its Place", pp. 59-79.

Life in this case is more than mere biological existence or a general condition of everything that exists but, specifically, that which marks what it means to be human. The notion of spirit is central to this in our view; indeed, as we shall argue, it is distinctive of human being and becoming (here we open ourselves to a charge of anthropocentrism, which we will address). The promise of this human and humanizing vision of spirit stretches well beyond where we have actually arrived in our lives and social arrangements but it is not forlorn nor is it misplaced. We see it as inspiring, hopeful and vitally necessary in a world that cannot be imagined as unconnected and not interdependent.

In response to our position, we might expect at least two further reactions besides possible accusations of anthropocentrism that are worth addressing at the outset. One could read our argument, either approvingly or disapprovingly, as atheistic. Our turn to the human being is not a turn to atheism if by that one means a denial of any divine reality beyond the phenomenal world to which we have access. About such a reality, however, we can only speculate or operate on the basis of faith, for we can neither prove nor disprove it. For us the crucial issue is not whether or not one believes in a divine reality, but, rather, what difference, for good or ill, it makes in the world if one does.

One could also interpret our position as "mere" humanism, that is, as affirming secularism and rejecting religious faith in favour of reason (a term we do use). This, too, would be wrong. What we emphasise throughout in our understanding of human being and becoming are the *limits* to reason and the *necessity* of faith. Here we mean by "faith" not belief in some historical religious tradition but rather the assumptions we must *necessarily* make to explain at all how we experience and can act in the world as we do, both in its objective and in its subjective dimensions. Central to those assumptions is the so-called "cosmological" question: If something cannot come from nothing, from whence does everything come? We readily employ the metaphor "God" for that ultimate origin. However, one steps beyond the limits to finite, human reason when one proceeds to employ anthropomorphic projections onto that "X" (or Noumenon) and, as a consequence, all too readily assumes that one can "speak" and "act" for God. We find humanity no more dangerous and destructive than when it assumes to occupy the divine throne and we are only for that reason reticent to engage in "God-talk."

Finally, a comment about the role of the two authors. The project as a whole is the product of years of research and concrete on-the-ground engagement by each of us, even if in very different contexts. It is the consequence of discussions that began in graduate school and have extended over forty years through shared reading lists and conferences across the globe, regular extended walks, international discussion groups with colleagues, and interactions with graduate students in virtual reality over many semesters. Its "face" is a composite that blurs

the lines of our individual personalities. Neither of us would have reached this point in our reflections that find expression here were it not for the influence of the other, and the present text is the product of a genuinely joint authorship.

Nonetheless, Douglas McGaughey's book, *Religion Before Dogma*,[4] may also be seen as a precursor to some of what appears here, and, in fact, he provides the core argument of this project (we would also strongly encourage interested readers to access McGaughey's personal website where many aspects of "critical idealism" – as understood by Kant – may be found: www.criticalidealism.org).

Out of this has come our shared understanding of spirit, introduced in Chapter One, which is rooted in McGaughey's extensive studies of ancient Greek thinkers (particularly Plato and Aristotle) and, especially, in his engagement with thinkers of the tumultuous Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries in Europe – the epoch in which many people sought to come to terms with what we might call the "modern" world, when science achieved a status previously unheard of and out of which the contemporary idea of human rights emerged.[5] Whereas the view of spirit that emerges in our thought is clearly influenced by the "Copernican turn" of this era to the human being *per se* in all fields of human knowledge and endeavor, we believe it not to be restricted to it at all, for there are echoes of such an understanding in many other human cultures that have, in their own ways and times, articulated spirit as central to our being in the world. Why this should be so is what we set out to probe.

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[4] Douglas R. McGaughey, *Religion before Dogma: Groundwork in Practical Theology* (New York; London: T & T Clark, 2006).

[5] **Note on references**: the bibliography includes most references in our text but, to avoid overburdening the reader, it excludes some that are secondary, many of them in German and many to classical works that have been translated over and over again. However, these other references are provided in the relevant footnote for any reader who wishes to pursue them further.

INTRODUCTION

This deeply ambitious, even audacious project aims at reframing our discourses about spirit and spirituality. Its goal is to establish a secure foundation for what we mean by spirit, and to do so in a manner that is not bound by any particular intellectual, cultural, or religious tradition but is available to all; and it turns out to be just as relevant to science.

We do not get to this goal by attempting to distill the "essence" of spirit and spirituality from its wildly diverse forms and practices in human experience. That task, as we have said, is largely fraught with too many variations, ambiguities, and contradictions to succeed except perhaps as a descriptive exercise; not, though, as a critical one. A critical exercise commences, to be sure, only with the stimulation given by particular phenomena, by appearances, but its concern is not the identification of the *essence* of the phenomena themselves. Rather, its concern is to identify what makes it *possible* for a human being to experience the particular phenomena in the first place. It is in this sense foundational.

This does not mean that we ignore particular understandings and expressions of spirit and spirituality across cultures and through time. In fact, we genuinely hope that those who live out of a particular historically or culturally defined spirituality will find here a deep enough view to encompass what they experience, yet one that simultaneously helps sharpen and enrich the core of what they value.

Anyone who hopes to find a defense of their, or any anyone else's, particular understanding of spirit and spirituality here will be disappointed, however. We are clear that it is *through* such particularities that spirit is inevitably expressed because we only experience it as embodied human beings. Yet at the same time, beyond any *particular* understanding, we wish to show that spirit is definitive of what it means to be human, that it marks any and every human being at any time in any place irrespective of any particular personal, cultural or historical particularities.

In pursuing this task we will repeatedly emphasise that a full understanding of spirit as that which necessarily governs what it means to be or become human must include a negation and an affirmation of equal status: a rejection of any duality in our being (we can neither reduce spiritual reality to some material explanation, nor detach spiritual reality from material reality); and, an insistence that our spiritual capacity, infused in every act, places before us the moral responsibility for how we act.

Spirit is thus not simply a "part" of what it means to be human; it is *how* we are human. Seeing this is decisive both for our life together with others, and for the world and its other creatures as well.

From this perspective on spirit we will also address the range of phenomena that we call spirituality, as we have noted a (bewildering) multitude of embodied forms of spirit that marks human existence through time and space. Each kind of spirituality has particular features that set it off from others. Yet each, at its best (as an expression of the highest of which we are capable as human beings), reflects that spiritual capacity with which – at least as long as we retain any personal sense of our humanity – we are *all* endowed. This, which we can call personhood, is what we seek to identify and celebrate.

As human beings we are not "just spirit" of course. We are also governed by animal needs or desires (for food, shelter, warmth and so on) as well as social needs and desires (for attachment, affirmation, prestige, status and the like). We are a unity. Any specific form of spirituality, even when it seeks to transcend such needs and desires, is also infused with elements that reflect them. It also likely, then, to reflect a measure of need or of self-interest, perhaps to the point where the interests of others and their humanity are harmed. At this point it becomes negative, working against others in destructive or "evil" ways.

In short, any particular spirituality that excludes, stands against, or damages others, either on the basis of some limited and limiting claim to possess ultimate authority or truth or in pursuit of some limited self-interest (personal, communal, national, religious, cultural, racial, gendered or other), will find no succour in these pages. The spirit for which we advocate calls us to transcend all such limitations, not by ignoring its various very human (and necessary) personal, local, linguistic or cultural expressions, but by reaching for the deepest and the highest that lies at their heart of which we all are heirs, the one thing that unites us as human beings with a responsibility for how we act in the world: the spiritual capacity we all possess.

Chapter One, the most crucial one upon which all else rests, begins with the most fundamental point: what do we mean by spirit? We show that this requires *a crucial distinction between "appearances" and "concepts,"* which in turn opens up the way to consider the intimate (ineradicable) relation between body and mind but avoids any object-subject dualism. Spirit is now seen *not* as an essence alongside some other essence but as a set of human capacities that go beyond mere intelligibility or rationality. Spirit, we show, is inescapably grounded in but not reducible to the physical universe. It consists of the creative freedom of the human being (including our ability to alter nature) with the moral demand to take responsibility for that freedom, in addition to theoretical and practical reason and capacities of judgement. In short, spirit is more than a mere collection of mental attributes or capacities as well as being an indivisible unity. It includes considerations of the relationship of the individual human being to other human beings, to other creatures, and to the world in general. With this in mind, we are also freshly able to speak about the meaning of religion.

Expanding upon its implications in Chapter Two, we contrast our interpretation of spirit as the capacity for creative freedom with (as we see it) a few common misunderstandings of spirit. Each "misunderstanding" is rooted in a perspective whose undoubted value we must and do affirm, but each in our view either overestimates or underestimates the nature and significance of the human spirit. They include psychoanalytic reflections on the human psyche and its constitution, the search for an understanding of mind in neurobiology and neuroscience, an influential critical realist perspective in physics and cosmology, various philosophies of life or life-energy, the ideas of rationalistic mysticism, mindfulness or spiritual practices, and the consciousness (or "spirit") of other creatures.

As the first of several chapters to expand on the implications of our view of spirit, Chapter Three picks up on a widespread but influential model, especially in the field of health, that describes the "whole human being" as a bio-psycho-social unity to which, sometimes, "spiritual" is added (but seldom with conviction). We probe this model and compare it to a relatively recent, innovative attempt to unite the subjective and the objective basis of our experience by combining psychoanalysis with neuroscience. In both cases, we argue that proper attention to our experience, whether subjective or objective, as always grounded in appearances to which – through our agentive mind – we still have to add understanding, is necessary in order to come to a better grounded understanding of the whole human being as indeed simultaneously bio-psycho-social and spiritual. Spirit now is not something to be added to the bodily, the psychic or the relational; rather, it is the condition of the possibility of our experience as body, psyche and social being.

In Chapter Four we focus on the profound tension between that which enhances life and that which diminishes it. Spirit as we describe it is not some neutral term, an abstract concept; it is crucially about being and becoming in the world. It is thus also about basic questions of life and death. We therefore address the tension inherent in our creative freedom as such: that as the ineradicable and irreducible capacity for creative freedom that defines what it means to be or become human, it can be exercised in either good or bad ways. Which option (good or evil) is intended is not ultimately determined by external imperatives even if they influence us but, rather, by us. We cannot control the consequences of what we intend, but we can and must decide whether we intend life or death, both in the metaphorical and in the literary senses of the terms. Here, without denying the reality of death but echoing the logic of Paul Tillich's *The Courage to Be*,[1] we assert the priority of life over death as the basis of the moral order to which we are called to be true.

[1] Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952). Tillich (p. 165) defined the courage to be as "self-affirmation … [which] presupposes participation in something which transcends the self."

We then move on in Chapter Five to discuss spirit in practice. Without denying the weight of the material world – the "realm of the actual" – we describe the world governed by spirit as the "realm of the possible." If the material world constrains us to "what is," then the dynamic power of spirit seeks "what can and ought to be." This shift in focus applies not merely to how we understand ourselves (objectively, with respect to theoretical reason) but also to our grasp of our own intentionality (subjectively, with respect to practical reason). On this basis we distinguish between "interests" (where our intentionality is directed outwardly toward aims and goals in the world) and "disposition" (where our intentionality is also directed inwardly toward our capacities and our internal control over our responsibilities). Because we have control over our disposition in and towards the world, hence, over how we use our autonomous, creative freedom for good or ill, we are accountable for it. We can (and do) establish the ends, procure the means, give ourselves permission to act, and necessarily invoke the principles to justify our acts.

Here we spell out the grounds for such claims more fully, contrast our position with the popular and widely discussed "Golden Rule" (as a possible global ethic), point to the difference between "morality" and "ethics," show why relativism is inadequate regarding our action in the world, and spell out the meaning of corporate (joint) responsibility for various aspects of our life together.

Chapter Six deals with "spirit in context," where we explain why any attempt to understand human spirituality on the basis of one or another particular spiritual tradition or indeed on some kind of consensus or common denominator across traditions is unproductive, and with the "ecology of spirit," where we engage with some concrete expressions of our human spiritual capacity that might be seen as transcending particular traditions.

We end in Chapter Seven by talking about why this all matters to us today whoever and wherever we are and under whatever conditions. A poverty of spirit seems pervasive in our time in the form of dogged assertions of one identity against others that issue in wars and indiscriminate acts of terror, or in narcissistic isolation from others as in the widespread orientation of many to a cult of "me, mine, more" that especially marks this era of excessive consumption and extreme commodification. Against this, we assert the promise of spirit, which can be described as the elevation of possibility over actuality. That more *is* possible, in the best sense of our humanity and of our life together in the world we inhabit with other creatures too, is not just the hope of spirit; it is its nature.