

"Spirituality" - What on Earth is it?

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"Spirituality" - some definitions

"Spirituality" and "spiritual" are still most often used to refer to the religious or to an aspect of the religious life. This is the way many of the speakers at this conference will be using it. But they are also used with increasing frequency to refer to much that is only very vaguely religious or that is entirely secular. It is this second group of meanings that puzzles and sometimes alienates people, and it is this group that I want to concentrate on, because it intrigues me as a humanist and because it is the set of meanings that needs clarification within education. It is, of course, perfectly possible to consult a dictionary or an expert and come up with definitions of "spiritual" and "spirituality" that are distinct, meaningful, and acceptable even to humanists. Most dictionaries make a useful distinction between the overtly religious uses of the words (as in "spiritual leader") and uses connected with the higher elements of the human mind - and it appears to be this second usage that is intended in the educational debate, as Ofsted guidance indicates:

"Spiritual development relates to that aspect of inner life through which pupils acquire insights into their personal existence which are of enduring worth. It is characterised by reflection, the attribution of meaning to experience, valuing a non-material dimension to life and intimations of an enduring reality. 'Spiritual' is not synonymous with 'religious'; all areas of the curriculum may contribute to pupils' spiritual development."¹

Some of these qualities are certainly religious ones ("attribution of meaning to existence... intimations of an enduring reality") but at least Ofsted is trying to include the non-religious.

The Dalai Lama differentiates rather better:

"...I believe there is an important distinction to be made between religion and spirituality. Religion I take to be concerned with faith in the claims to salvation of one faith tradition or another, an aspect of which is acceptance of some form of metaphysical or supernatural reality, including perhaps an idea of heaven or nirvana. Connected with this are religious teachings or dogma, rituals, prayer and so on. Spirituality I take to be concerned with those qualities of the human spirit - such as love and compassion, patience, tolerance, forgiveness, contentment, a sense of responsibility, a sense of harmony - which bring happiness to both self and others. While ritual and prayer, along with the questions of nirvana and salvation, are directly connected with religious faith, these inner qualities need not be, however. There is thus no reason why the individual should not develop them, even to a high degree, without recourse to any religious or metaphysical belief system. This is why I sometimes say that religion is something we can perhaps do without. What we cannot do without are these basic spiritual qualities."²

Humanists, and many others, would not necessarily want to call those essential human qualities which contribute to the happiness of oneself and others "spiritual". I would prefer to categorise many of the qualities listed by the Dalai Lama as moral or emotional. But I appreciate his separation of those elements from the religious sphere, and it is a particularly useful separation when considering education, a separation long promoted by humanists in the interests of open and inclusive education.³

When I asked for a satisfactory definition of "spiritual" on the Q&A page of *The Philosophers' Magazine* last summer, I did not receive many answers (spirituality is not a subject that most philosophers today are interested in), but the ones I did receive were interesting. One firmly put me in my place, and understood where I was coming from only too well: "The meaning of 'spiritual' can only be mysterious to those materialists who have lost sight of the most important truth about our existence - that we are not mere animals but beings with a higher purpose and a non-material part." (*TPM*, Winter 2000) Another (*TPM*, Summer 1999) advised that the word was used with deliberate imprecision in education for pragmatic reasons, so that humanists and religious people could discuss it, both meaning that there is "something important about human beings beyond our mere mechanical ticking", but cloaking their fundamental disagreements about what that something is in vagueness. Another argued persuasively that it always means either "our mental well-being ... (sense of self, self-identity, self-worth, self-esteem...)" or it refers to "religious or pseudo-religious attitudes". I think that many of the examples that

¹ Ofsted Handbook for the Inspection of Schools, 1994

² Dalai Lama *Ancient Wisdom, Modern World* (Abacus), 1999, pages 22-23

³ For example: BHA pamphlet *The Human Spirit*, 1994, and John White in Ron Best (ed) *Education, Spirituality and the Whole Child*, 1996

follow will bear this out.

"Spirituality" out there

In mainstream culture, the several and distinct meanings that cluster around "spirituality" and "spiritual" are rarely acknowledged. Instead they are frequently blurred and conflated, and the resulting ambiguity is used to give a spurious respectability and status to quite ordinary ideas or emotions, together with an aura of mystery. Once attuned to the words, one finds them everywhere. They are very fashionable words, and often it's not at all clear what they mean – possibly the user does not know himself, or he is being deliberately obscure or using them as padding. One finds the concept used to raise the tone of a range of discourses, many of them lacking any real substance or credibility, in the media, the arts, advertisements, and "new age" beliefs. In these contexts it's not so much a word struggling to express the inexpressible as a word used to sound good and to avoid real thinking. "The meaning of a word is its use in the language," said Wittgenstein⁴, an idea now commonplace amongst linguists. Dictionaries record usage but often lag behind actuality. We need to look now at how "spiritual" and "spirituality" are used in the secular world, where they appear to have acquired lives of their own.

I'll try to group my examples, though sometimes this isn't easy because the words are used so ambiguously:

I'll begin with the pseudo-religious uses in the ubiquitous "new age spirituality". Indeed, these "spiritualities" are more secular than religious, having few of the attributes of religion: no hierarchies, no moral codes and no deities (unless one counts the great god Me). These beliefs, from feng shui to crystal healing and astrology, share a basis in pseudo-science, an almost complete self-absorption (in my body, my future, my success, my health, my relationships) and a love of pretentious language. They have much in common with "management-speak" where the idea of spirituality seems to be finding fertile ground and gaining credibility (among the credulous at least). An article on "spirituality at work" in *The Independent* (17/10/99) suggested that the third eye, feng shui, healing herbs, God and crystals all have a role in the work place, as does the *The Executive Mystic* (a book by American Barrie Dolnick). The blurb on a book on leadership refers to ideas "that can nourish the reader spiritually, intellectually and emotionally". A newly identified social group, "Bobos", apparently view their jobs as "intellectual, even spiritual" (*Observer*, 28/5/00). Broadsheet newspapers like *The Observer* (16/1/00) and *The Independent on Sunday* (23/1/2000) invite us to develop and test our "SQ" (spirituality quotient).

My well respected local FE / sixth form college, under the guise of Agenda 21 courses in sustainable lifestyles and work practices, offers one on "Spirituality ...[:]ancient and modern spiritual traditions, spiritual traditions of indigenous people of the world, healing, soul & spirit, reincarnation, Shamanism, healing [sic], experimental phenomena [?], ancestral beings, comparative religions, discussions with visiting speakers etc." Well might they begin their sub-literate course description with: "An understanding of, as well as a belief in, the meaning and context of spirituality is at least in part, (most probably inevitably), one of varied interpretation." I attended a short course on feng shui at my local adult education college and was irritated by the mixture of greed, superstition and bad science being peddled. These surely have no place in education, even adult education?

So this kind of thing is not confined to the wilder reaches of hippiedom, though this is where it flourishes and where it ought probably to confine itself. My entire paper could have been devoted to examples taken from the "new age" versions of "spirituality" but I will confine myself to a few more examples. A Body Shop leaflet offers me a philosophy, Aryurveda (and, strangely enough, some rather expensive products) that prolongs "physical and spiritual life and health". A flier for a magazine, *Enlightenment*, promises "a mind-altering (and potentially life-altering) voyage into the explosive mystery at the heart of the spiritual quest." Worried about the spiritual development of your pupils? Maybe a course on spiritual development at Kingston School of Psychic Studies will help you out. Or maybe a conference on "Soul in Education" offered by the Findhorn Foundation in October will give you something for next year's curriculum: "inner work and collective spiritual practice" or "opportunities to explore expressive arts creatively and as a tool for personal and spiritual integration". Or perhaps a book from the "New Spirit" book club will help, with resources for "mind, spirit and body" (that familiar triad, so puzzling to philosophers and so apparently obvious to everyone else): topics include nature, meditation, creativity, Christianity, Sufism, relationships, psychology, spiritual journeys, yoga, native wisdom, the afterlife, new philosophy, mindfulness. Not much help there for the poor educationalist trying to make sense of the concept or something manageable out of it. Maybe you should just be teaching horticulture: "People are walking away from the structures of religion which they are finding oppressive, but they are looking for the spiritual and finding that the divine is in nature," said Martin Palmer, discussing his new book *Sacred Gardens* (*The Independent*, 22/4/00).

And there are many other kinds of media appearance. Last year, I saw an advert on the side of a bus urging me to have "a spiritual adventure" – it was for a couple of books about snowboarding and surfing.

⁴ Ludwig Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations* 1 §43 , 1953

Journalists use it freely, and often meaninglessly or erroneously. A columnist in *The Observer* (21/5/00) wrote: "Watching 'Gladiator', you wonder what modern men are so starved of, what spiritual and psychic emaciation is going on...". And in *The Independent on Sunday* last June: "I've been sceptical about all things spiritual since I went to a public séance in Kilburn where the medium seized on a black woman in the front row and shouted, 'I'm getting a sense of bananas.'" One would almost expect PR experts like Max Clifford to exploit its self-importance, here writing about himself: "Money isn't everything, of course, but it also means I can give a lot to other people. I've become spiritually and financially enriched". (*Evening Standard*, 3/6/99) A travel feature in *The Guardian* (18/3/00) praised Montana for its "alpine meadows, ancient forests and spiritual space". It's often particularly unclear what people mean when they team it up with "religious", as in Tony Blair's "They have lent their support because they believe that the spiritual and religious significance of the millennium should be marked in the Dome".

The words are highly infectious. A letter to *The Independent* (12/2/00) wrote of cannabis: "Most indigenous peoples in tropical countries where it grows as a weed refuse to touch it in normal circumstances precisely because they have seen its spiritually damaging effect on habitual users". One in the *TES* last year complaining that schools must be failing to promote moral values as chaplains in the army were having to take remedial action on the moral front, was headed "Sharpen up spiritual values". Another in *The Observer* on 26/3/00 wrote of "...friendships that change. What was once physical becomes spiritual as contact diminishes and lives take different courses".

In the arts, it is, of course, a popular word. What critic or prince could resist something so impressive and so pretentious? Prince Charles used to advocate the spiritual in the kind of architecture that he favours, the neo-Classical, though nowadays, when talking about the environment, he uses it to mean "religious."⁵ [5] The American writer Rebecca Wells claimed in *The Guardian*, "My work is the result of my imagination dancing a psycho-spiritual tango." An *Independent on Sunday* book review (May 1999) raved, "Behind his review of the crisis in end-of-century country life, however, is his spiritual response to what gives it its fascination: the perpetual existence of the non-human [meaning animal life]". A musician on Radio Four last year finished his talk with "...and the fourth thing I like about Bach's music is its spirituality." And an *Independent on Sunday* art review (16/5/99) described, "Newman-like 'zips', spiritual conductors between the top and the bottom of the canvas, where the turpentine had dissolved the paint." A new (to me) group of artists called the Stuckists were said to be "in favour of a more emotional and spiritual integrity in art via figurative painting." (*Observer*, 14/5/00) In the beautiful and awe-inspiring Tate Modern, the text alongside a Joseph Beuys tell us that "he often used unusual materials for his sculptures, investing them with personal or spiritual significance".

When I went to the opening exhibition of the beautiful new Walsall Art Gallery earlier this year, I fully expected the labels to be full of "spirituality" - the exhibition was called "Blue" and brought together artworks linked solely by their use of this "spiritual" colour. A critic had written of it: "Peter Jenkinson [the curator] makes no bones about having a spiritual agenda." (*The Independent*, 23/2/00). But in fact the exhibition labels were mercifully free of the word, preferring to use the slightly more meaningful "sublime" and the much more meaningful "celebration". "Everything I do," wrote Damien Hirst of his contribution, "is a celebration, at the very least it's a celebration."

I use these examples to demonstrate the multiplicity of meanings, and the opacity (often deliberate) that therefore accompanies "spiritual" and "spirituality". These nebulous words almost always require to be further explained if they are to communicate clearly. In most cases it would be better to abandon them altogether and use one of the many more precise alternatives: moral, psychological, emotional, inspiring, beautiful, life-enhancing, joyful, thoughtful, reflective, abstract, mysterious, weird, exciting.... Many of these could stand in the place of "spiritual" in the examples I have given - the difficulty is usually to know which one to choose because we can only guess at the intention of the original.

Criticism does not come only from sceptical humanists like me. When David Bellamy, urging the churches to do more about the environment, talked to them in their own terms about the "spirituality of creation", the Rev'd Oliver O'Donovan, Regius Professor of moral and pastoral theology at Oxford University, commented rather coolly, "There will be suspicion of the rhetoric, the talk about 'soulship' and 'spirituality', which is not very likely to clarify our relationship to non-human nature". (*The Independent*, 1998)

Spiritual development in schools

It is no wonder that schools are confused. In England and Wales, "spiritual development" in the National Curriculum has meant that educationalists have had to decide what "spiritual" means in schools. But despite some useful interpretations from SCAA, Ofsted et al^{6 7 8}, nuances from the outside world creep in

⁵ Prince Charles' BBC Reith lecture, 17/5/00

⁶ *Spiritual and Moral Development, National Curriculum Council discussion document, 1993*: "The term 'spiritual' applies to all pupils. The potential for spiritual development is open to everyone and is not confined to the development of religious beliefs or conversion to a faith. To limit spiritual development in this way would be to

through the school gates and keep the confusion going. The word is tainted, ambiguous, and difficult to pin down or use with confidence, leaving teachers wondering what exactly they are supposed to be developing and inspectors scratching around, sometimes quite imaginatively, for evidence of it. And parents and other non-specialists don't understand it at all: I received an email from a parent the other day protesting vigorously at Ofsted's comment that her children's school was not fulfilling its obligation to promote spiritual development in all subjects, and wondering if this meant that Maths lessons were now supposed to begin with a prayer. The Scout Association seems confused too: spiritual development "...implies that Leaders and Members should be encouraged to develop an inner discipline and training, be involved in corporate activities, understand the world around them, help create a more tolerant and caring society, discover the need for prayer and worship...".⁹

A sixth former recently asked me whether I, as humanist, "believed in spirituality". When I responded by asking her what she meant, she replied, "Ghosts – that kind of thing." It is ironic that the supposed beneficiaries of "spiritual development" in schools understand so little about it – but perhaps this is inevitable when the word is such an embarrassment, and the development, such as it is, so implicit. You could ask an 18-year old what they thought of their mathematical or geographical education, or even their social, moral or cultural development, and they would at least know what you were talking about. I suspect that many 18-year olds are completely unaware that their spiritual development is a matter of interest to schools, and might well resent the interest if they knew about it. The word "spirituality" is usually only used within RE, where, understandably, it usually has religious connotations, as in "Buddhist spirituality".

There is, as one might expect, a vast range of views and advice amongst the professionals about what spiritual development in school might be. Articles, reviews and books attempting to define this elusive requirement appear frequently, but not necessarily helpfully. "Any teaching is 'spiritual' which opens a child's eyes to the position he as a human being occupies in the universe," writes the philosopher Mary Warnock, "...a lesson in palaeontology or geology, in biology, ecology or chemistry may be spiritual..."¹⁰. A description of "the spiritually aware child" in a recent *TES* Primary supplement (26/11/99) included: self knowledge, reflective awareness, sensitivity, striving, and, "central to all this", love. Heads, unsurprisingly in view of all this pressure to produce spiritually-developed pupils, are willing to include a range of attitudes and behaviours under the label, including: development of a relationship with God; developing personal values and relationships; responding to challenging experiences; creativity¹¹; and complete absorption in a task. The *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* has a similarly inclusive policy, publishing articles on subjects as diverse as religion and RE, emotional literacy, death education, Father Christmas, and relationships, in recent issues. Books aimed at this market also display considerable breadth of approach: books for children about love, happiness, confidence, self esteem, meditation, creativity, bereavement, leadership, God, dreams, yoga and miracles seem to cover every possible angle on spiritual development¹², though much of this does not seem to me to need this label, which can have the unhelpful effect of categorising, and lumping together with the quasi-mystical, a whole range of things that are quite normal in many lessons.

exclude from its scope the majority of pupils in our schools who do not come from overtly religious backgrounds. The term needs to be seen as applying to something fundamental in the human condition... it has to do with the unique search for human identity...with the search for meaning and purpose in life and for values by which to live."

⁷ SCAA *Discussion Paper on Spiritual and Moral Development, 1995*: "There are many aspects to spiritual development:

- Beliefs – The development of personal beliefs, including religious beliefs; an appreciation that people have individual and shared beliefs on which they base their lives; a developing sense of how personal beliefs contribute to personal identity.
- A sense of awe, wonder and mystery – Being inspired by the natural world, mystery, or human achievement.
- Experiencing feelings of transcendence – Feelings which might give rise to belief in the existence of a divine being, or the belief that one's inner resources provide the ability to rise above everyday experience.
- Search for meaning and purpose – Asking "why me?" at times of hardship or suffering; reflecting on the origin and purpose of life; responding to challenging experiences of life such as beauty, suffering and death.
- Relationships – Recognising and valuing the worth of each individual; developing a sense of community, the ability to build up relationships with others.
- Creativity – Expressing innermost thoughts and feelings through, for example, art, music, literature and crafts; exercising the imagination, inspiration, intuition and insight.
- Feelings and emotions – The sense of being moved by beauty or kindness; hurt by injustice or aggression; a growing awareness of when it is important to control emotions and feeling, and how to use such feeling as a source of growth."

⁸ *Promoting and evaluating pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development* (Ofsted, 2004) at [http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Publications-and-research/Browse-all-by/Education/Curriculum/Religious-education/Primary/Promoting-and-evaluating-pupils-spiritual-moral-social-and-cultural-development/\(language\)/eng-GB](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Publications-and-research/Browse-all-by/Education/Curriculum/Religious-education/Primary/Promoting-and-evaluating-pupils-spiritual-moral-social-and-cultural-development/(language)/eng-GB) [footnote added in 2009]

⁹ From Diana Wilson "Spiritual Development - Some Frequently Asked Questions", *Resource*, Spring 2000

¹⁰ Mary Warnock *An Intelligent Person's Guide to Ethics* (Duckworth), 1998, Chapter 6

¹¹ Geriant Davies "What is Spiritual Development?" *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, December 1998

¹² Words of Discovery catalogue, "Books to nurture children's personal growth"

"Awe and wonder" are often seen as being at the heart of spiritual development:

"It has to do with the cosmic shudder we all feel from time to time when contemplating the existence of life, especially our own self-conscious life, and of the universe....If Ofsted wants evidential criteria to help its inspectors, it is what the arts and contemplation of nature can bring about rather than religious knowledge, which should be top of the list," wrote Professor John White, of the Institute of Education, London.

But inspectors looking for awe and wonder in my borough's schools sometimes find it in strange places: "a pupil was in awe of a classmate's ability in a PE lesson"; as well as in more predictable ones: "a nursery pupil was in wonder [sic] at the hatching and growing of chicks", and in school assemblies and displays and science lessons¹³.

"Education has for its object the formation of character," said Herbert Spencer in the nineteenth century, and I do often wonder if "spiritual development" is just the trendy, politically correct, egalitarian successor of the "character development" that was so much part of our public school system until quite recently. Or is it just, as Terence Copley called it in a recent article in *RE Today* (Autumn 1999): "universal and inoffensive, the aromatherapy of the curriculum".

Humanists and spirituality

Non-religious humanists are divided on its meaning and use, not just here but in Europe and the USA too. Some want to "claim" it, others to abandon it to the religious sphere, and often humanists too are talking at cross-purposes. The differences are often about terminology rather than the concept. Humanists are not always clear what we are complaining about when we say that religious people have hijacked "spirituality". Are we saying that religious people deny that we can have rich, fulfilled aesthetic and emotional lives, or that they deny that we are religious – or is it something else we resent: the implication that we are all materialistic, in the worst sense of the word? The other side of the coin is interesting for a humanist too: writers like Terence Copley¹⁴ often seem to express regret that humanists and secularists have hijacked the words by pointing out and insisting on their non-religious possibilities.

The necessity of coming to terms with the use of these words in education has given the debate a particular stimulus, though many humanists retain a feeling that they have a general usefulness, to describe something beyond ideas of the moral being, the psychologically well adjusted, the aesthetically attuned – to label a concern about moral seriousness (rather than just moral reasoning) and a high view of human potentiality far removed from crudely materialistic ambitions. Others, though they see "a pragmatic advantage in claiming that Humanism is itself 'spiritual'", feel uneasy about using words carrying so much religious and pseudo-religious baggage: "I do not think that the word 'spirituality' can be used at all without the implication of a supernatural spirit", wrote one humanist recently¹⁵.

A lively debate in the American humanist magazine *Free Mind* finished in January 2000 with an even split between those who think that "clear-thinking humanists can rightly reclaim spirituality as one aspect of our working life faith" and those who thought it "meaningless" or "laughable nonsense", best shunned to "avoid repetitive, cumbersome explanations." Dutch humanists also argue about it in their magazine *Humanist* (February 2000), where a series of writers engage with this "in-word". Marjolijn Gelauf, a lecturer on humanist spiritual guidance, defends her "holistic" view of something "beyond the material world, a kind of life force beyond our understanding". A young humanist environmentalist, Remco Nigter, finds spiritual experiences in his daily life, in listening to music, for example, or in tuning in to other people and the natural world. Jan Haasbroek, director of a humanist radio station, on the other hand, is "allergic to holism" and suspicious of our tendency to label the "unknowable as spiritual ...the possibility exists that this life is all there is and is meaningless". A brief essay in a French periodical *Dossier* devoted to "Spiritualité(s)" (Autumn/Winter 1999/2000), wonders how an atheist who does not believe in spirit, or envisage anything independent of matter, can conceive of spirituality. The writer, Jean Claude Bologne, writes of his "embarrassment with clothes borrowed from a religious tradition", and yet his lack of anything else. The experiences he reluctantly calls "spiritual" include encounters with death and with the arts.

Towards a "materialist spirituality"

So does a sceptic like me have to be cynical about this ubiquitous and pretentious language? I must confess I tend to suspect its use, having noticed long ago how often it is used to gain the upper hand in discussion, to pre-empt criticism or argument. It is possible to argue about the beautiful or ethics or facts – but almost impossible to argue with the "spiritual", without sounding hopelessly materialistic and earthbound. But as a sceptic and a humanist, I'd like to defend and celebrate materialism (the philosophy, not shopping) and the earthbound – the title of my paper was deliberately chosen.

¹³ Ofsted reports, Kingston upon Thames primary schools, 1999

¹⁴ See for example, Terence Copley *Spiritual Development in the State School*, University of Exeter Press, 2000

¹⁵ Peter Heales *Can Humanists be Spiritual?* (Cerne Villa Books)

Materialism, the view that everything is made of matter, is a philosophy with a long and respectable history, though it is a perspective that many people find hard to accept, hence the widespread yearning for the "spiritual", and (sometimes deliberate, I think) confusion of the philosophical concept with "materialistic", which describes acquisitiveness and extravagant consumption – the philosophy of the shopaholic. Even if scientists and philosophers do come at last to the conclusion that human beings are simply a mass of chemicals, purely physical, our minds and our better feelings would still be something pretty marvellous, worth celebrating and cultivating. So is awe and wonder at the natural world, a "materialist spirituality" well evoked and defended by, for example, Richard Dawkins¹⁶.

Like Professor Dawkins, I do not believe that we have a higher purpose or a non-material part, and I do believe that we are "merely" (why isn't this enough?) highly complex, sophisticated and rather wonderful animals. But despite my philosophical materialism, I enjoy the arts, nature, friendship and love, and I have enough purposes and principles in my life to keep me going. Many of those who, like me, share and value deeply the experiences sometimes labelled "spiritual" would classify them differently, and more clearly and precisely. I think that such clarity (and, perhaps, attainability) should be part of our educational system.

Spiritual development and citizenship

We probably all share a desire to produce good citizens, socialised and sociable, and aware of their cultures, perhaps even cultured. And with some variation, we might all agree what moral, social and cultural development mean. That's the M, S and the C bits of SMSCD. But how do we deal with that first S – what would a spiritually developed citizen be like, I wonder? The place of "spiritual" in the list of desirables suggests that it must be something distinct from moral or social or cultural, though many people (including the Dalai Lama – see above) ignore this distinction. What, that schools can realistically nurture, is left, out of the many and varied non-religious interpretations I have discussed?

The identifiable and important things that are left are, I think, are emotional development or emotional literacy, and aesthetic awareness. Both are distinctly human qualities, both are desirable, and many mature and apparently well educated people are deficient in them. The general ugliness of our built environment and the existence of organisations like the Relationships Foundation, which aims "to place an awareness of relationships at the heart of decision-making, and so transform society's approach to social, economic and political issues" demonstrate the need. In education, organisations like Antidote and Re:membering Education do much useful work to remind us of this important aspect of educating "the whole child", and how, most importantly in these competitive times, it can raise school achievement. (See, for example, Re:membering Education's booklet, *Learning by Heart*.) Our society would be immensely richer, metaphorically, if we all had well developed aesthetic and emotional faculties. Imagine a society where young men were incapable of spraying graffiti or dropping litter because it was ugly! Where house-buyers demanded a real architecture for the 21st century and refused to accept mock this and neo- that. Where we all cared about nature and the environment because it is beautiful and vital to us psychologically, as well as for our physical survival. Or where our self-knowledge and our understanding of, and empathy with, others were so well developed that we were incapable of marrying the wrong person, or of hurtful words or actions. Those, for me, a humanist and a materialist, would be some of the qualities of a "spiritually developed" person, though I would never spontaneously use those words of anyone.

I'm not so naïve as to think that we can turn adolescents into emotionally mature aesthetes very easily, if at all. It would take thousands more years of evolution, not just a few PSHE or art lessons in school. Nature is against us, but often, once people have got over the hormonally-charged years of adolescence and young adulthood, they return to something like the enthusiasms and interests that they knew as children. Educationalists (and parents) must ensure that they have been given something to return to: empathy with and concern for others, a love of nature and concern for the environment, imagination and creativity, aesthetic awareness, even enjoyment of physical activity. These are manageable within the existing curriculum, and, even better, they are easily understood and achievable aims, unlike "spiritual development". They mustn't be driven out of the system by the more measurable and utilitarian elements, or by Citizenship education – unless we are going to define that very broadly, as I hope we can. We will not be producing good citizens if they know everything there is to know about community involvement and the political system, but have no idea how to live fulfilled, happy and worthwhile lives. I believe wholeheartedly in "education of the whole child", but my personal view is that sentimental, muddled and superfluous words like "spiritual" and "spirituality" have no real place in education, and should not be enshrined in law.

¹⁶ Richard Dawkins *Unweaving the Rainbow*