Human Studies
https://doi.org/10.1007/s10746-024-09719-4

EMPIRICAL STUDY / ANALYSIS

The "Spirit" of New Atheism and Religious Activism in the Post-9/11 God Debate

Adrian Rosenfeldt[1]

Accepted: 6 March 2024

Abstract
In this article I examine the contemporary discourses and debates that surround the sociology of spirituality, with especial attention to the term "spirituality". To counter the widespread belief that this term lacks clarity and utility, I suggest reconsidering Max Weber's use of the term "spirit," as it refers to a recognisable ethic that results in specific behaviour, while still retaining its religious and spiritual connotations. Through focusing on two influential English figures in the post 9/11 God debate in the West, Richard Dawkins and Karen Armstrong, I provide a brief case study of how Weber's understanding of "spirit" serves great utility in illuminating what drives the ideas, identity-making and behaviour of contemporary atheists and those defending religion. By utilising Weber's "spirit," rather than the term spirituality, I demonstrate that this enables us to dig deep into the social context and backgrounds of these two individuals, and to avoid taking their statements at face value – a common criticism of sociology of spirituality studies. I argue that the use of "spirit," in terms of a recognisable ethic that results in specific behaviour, would benefit the sociology of spirituality. This is because it grounds the God debaters' ideas and beliefs in a recognisable human experience that eludes reductive distinctions and disembodied abstractions.

Keywords Spirituality · Religion · Science · New Atheism · Autobiography

Sociology of Spirituality

Despite a very noticeable increase in the attention paid to spirituality in the human sciences, a problem of clarity and definition persists. This has been widespread and much commented upon (Flanagan & Jupp, 2007; Fuller, 2001; Holmes, 2007; Voas

✉ Adrian Rosenfeldt
a.rosenfeldt@latrobe.edu.au

[1] La Trobe University, Plenty Road and, Kingsbury Dr, Bundoora VIC 3086, Australia

Published online: 08 April 2024

& Bruce, 2007; Watts, 2020; Wood, 2010). Entire papers have been written lamenting this state of affairs and offering various solutions. It is possible to identify three main areas of contention when trying to make sense of the lack of clarity in the sociology of spirituality. Firstly, there is the problem of the perceived subjectivity of spirituality and its unworldly nature, that is not amenable to rigorous and sociological scientific study. Secondly, there is the concern that the modern usage of the term spirituality is too nebulous, individualistic and solipsistic, and contains unheralded ethical ideas about what constitutes a good life. Thirdly, there are contentious debates around the modern distinction between institutional religion and individual spirituality, the latter of which harbours the assumption that a spiritual self can transcend its cultural and social underpinnings. By exploring briefly these three major areas of contention in the sociology of spirituality, it will become evident that a different methodology is required so that modern spirituality can be grounded in a particular social context, rather than becoming an indefinable abstraction.

In addressing the first area of contention, Matthew Wood suggests that a more "properly sociological interpretation" of spirituality is needed and that the sociology of spirituality suffers from "a lack of attention to social interactions, and to the wider contexts of people's lives and biographies" (2010: 275). Wood maintains that this is a major lapse in sociological methodology and that all sociologists of spirituality should, in the words of Courtney Bender, "ferret out connections, communities, and accrued religious habits and language" (Wood, 2010: 281). Voas and Bruce (2007) also argue that the influential Heelas and Woodhead Kendal project (2005) – the study of the spiritual habits of a small town (Kendal) in northwest England – was flawed in that the statements of the individuals who partook in this study remained largely uninterpreted and were taken at face value. Voas and Bruce maintain that this was due to the authors' perceived belief that spirituality is fundamentally subjective and therefore does not need to be contextualised. This again points to the problem of a lack of sociological interpretation and definition within the sociology of spirituality. Galen Watts also argues that a clear distinction needs to be made between the study "for" and "of" spirituality, and that it is only the latter with which sociologists should be concerned, as it frames spirituality "as a socio-cultural construct with a distinct genealogy" (Watts, 2020: 591f.). By trying to make the sociology of spirituality more sociological these critics allude to the fact that spirituality is of its very nature, something that is perceived to transcend social context. This is recognisable in the Western Christian tradition in one of Jesus' most influential teachings, the "Parable of the Good Samaritan". This parable emphasises that human beings are spiritual beings who transcend their social context, their tribe, as they are all equal in the eyes of God. From this Christian perspective, it would therefore be counterproductive for the sociology of spirituality to follow current sociological practice, where individuals are contextualised in terms of their race, gender, class, sexuality, disability, and age, as it would ignore their universal spiritual nature. Therefore, it is arguable that there is the danger that by making the sociology of spirituality more rigorous, in terms of contemporary sociology, that it will jettison its important traditional transcendent spiritual connotations.

Peter Holmes suggests that as the integration of spirituality into sociology has been challenging, it is possible an entire new field may be necessary (Holmes, 2007:

34f.). Holmes' argument is supported by Flanagan (2007: 1), who points out that the term "spirituality" is unlikely to be found in the index of sociological works and suggests that this is due to the belief that spiritual concerns are not conducive to "higher analytical matters". The idea that spirituality is not amenable to sociological analysis can be traced to the lingering 19th century positivistic and scientific foundations of sociology, with its accompanying suspicion that anything subjective that cannot be quantified and qualified in an empirical manner, is not worthy of serious study. Nevertheless, the fairly recent emergence of "sociology of emotions" in the 1980s, would suggest that spirituality is not antithetical to sociology. In Hochschild's foundational text for the sociology of emotions, *The Managed Heart* (1983, 2003), she argues that sociologists need to challenge the preconception that emotions are trivial due to their subjective nature. Harris (2015) emphasises that as emotions are pervasive in human relations, sociology can no longer afford to discount their importance due to their subjective nature but must rather emphasise the social dimensions of these emotions. This same approach could be suggested in relation to the sociological study of the subjective nature of spirituality, but the question remains as to how this can best be achieved. In this article, I will suggest a possible solution to this first area of contention.

The second area of contention is perhaps best identified by Bender (2010) who maintains that "spirituality is bedevilled not by a lack of definitions but by an endless proliferation of them" (2010: 5). This points to the perception that the study of spirituality is not grounded upon a recognisable definition of the term, "spirituality". In his review of this compendium, *The Sociology of Spirituality* (2007), David A. Palmer makes the conjecture that, "The risk here is that without making a rigorous effort to devise an operational concept, academic discussion of spirituality may follow, uncritically, popular conceptions, and become as fuzzy as the mixtures of practices, feelings and 'pamperings' which typically go under its label" (Palmer, 2009: 427). It is arguable that this fuzziness and nebulousness emanates not just from the plethora or modern forms of spirituality and spiritual practices, but from the often unacknowledged ideological and biographical influence that is embedded in modern understandings of the term "spirituality". Woodhead in her 2010 study of spirituality, contends that embedded in the term spirituality "is a real, and important, debate about the nature of a good life in a good society going on here" (2010: 45). Watts also contends that in the sociology of spirituality, "the field's major controversies revolve around fundamental and longstanding debates over the good society" (2020: 590). In this way, the term spirituality is encumbered with an unacknowledged ethical position and worldview. One of these worldviews, as identifiable in the modern usage of spirituality, emanates from late 19th century Western Romanticism with its notion that a Rousseauian self is best served by being free from traditional and institutional norms and regulation. Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor calls the predominance of this particular worldview in the last half century in the West, the "age of authenticity," where individuals are perceived to be able to create their own destinies in a material and spiritual sense, free from the restraints and moorings of traditional institutions, not the least of which is the Christian Church (2007: 473–476).

This brings us to the third area of contention, that revolves around Mathew Guest's (2007) claim that the modern distinction between religion and spirituality is that the

latter is concerned with the interior and the experimental, and the former with the official and the institutional. Robert C. Fuller helps us to contextualise this distinction by pointing to the rise of the SBNR (spiritual but not religious) movement in the 1960s counterculture in the West as being a result of the belief that spirituality is concerned with inward growth and self-development (private sphere), whereas religion is concerned with adhering to official institutions and denominational doctrines (public sphere). Although the private/public distinction helps to historicise and to contextualise modern sociological understandings of spirituality, it is noticeable that this distinction lacks utility due to the many exceptions that fall outside of this framework. For example, Martin Luther King's Christian religious and spiritual beliefs were not in alignment with the official institutions of his time but rather challenged them.

To shed further light on this third area of contention it is worth engaging with William J. F. Keenan's (2016) claim that the ideological distinction between religion and spirituality is part of "a phoney holy war," where a plethora of academics and intellectuals persist in trying to delegitimise religion. Keenan argues that this ideological slant is based on individualistic secular, spiritual beliefs of modernity that the human condition is best studied in subjective isolation, to distinguish it from the "over-socialised conception of the 'religious' believer" (Keenan, 2016: 154). He also contends that it is far from the case that modern spirituality is free from its religious connotations and argues that:

> There is much implicit in our believing, and belonging and begetting, that falls outside our ken; most notably, perhaps, the complex, polyvalent and multi-layered traditions we 'belong to' and the 'inheritances' passed onto us from past generations. (Keenan, 2016: 142)

Keenan's contention here directly addresses what I perceive to be one of the most pressing concerns of the sociology of spirituality: its need for a more sophisticated interpretative sociological framework that can dig deep into complex and often hidden cultural religious heritage that is recognisable in modern forms of spirituality. In addressing this third area of contention in this study, I will provide two contrasting examples that support Keenan's claim that modern spirituality is far from being free of its religious residue.

In this brief overview of these three areas of contention that currently occupy the sociology of spirituality, it has become apparent that they all concern a perceived lack of sociological analysis. It is my belief that this can be improved upon by replacing the term spirituality with an alternative term that openly recognises its cultural and social underpinnings. In this way unacknowledged ethical ideas and unworldly abstractions can be better recognised and placed into a particular sociological framework and social context.

A Reconsidering of Max Weber's Conceptualisation of the Term, "Spirit"

It is by returning to the work of founding sociologist Max Weber that it is possible to provide more clarity and definition to the sociological study of spirituality. My

main idea is both simple and novel: contemporary sociologists of spirituality need to adopt the Weberian notion of "spirit" instead of the contemporary term of spirituality. To understand how this will work, it is first necessary to reacquaint ourselves with Weber's formulation of "spirit".

In *The Protestant Ethic and the "Spirit" of Capitalism* (2002 [1905]) Max Weber is very careful to properly define what he means by "spirit":

> We shall nevertheless provisionally use the expression "spirit of capitalism" for that attitude which, in the pursuit of a calling [berufsmäßig], strives systematically for profit for its own sake in the manner exemplified by Benjamin Franklin. (Weber, 2002: 19)

In this famous and influential text, Weber argues that Franklin is animated by Martin Luther's idea of a calling where each individual is called or compelled to fulfil one's duty in a secular sense, through work. Under Luther's reformulation, work was not just a pointless form of drudgery but had a spiritual connection, as it had been assigned by God. It should be clarified here that in German, "Beruf" does not mean "a task set by God" but rather Weber points to the proximity of profession and vocation, the latter corresponds to "calling," the former contains the dimensions of meaning that are expressed in English by "profession" and "vocation". In this way Weber contends that Luther is responsible for bringing about this new cultural connection between work and spirituality – a product of the Reformation – and for devaluing the monastic style of life as now being a fruitless pursuit. What is perhaps most striking about this definition is the fact that Weber uses Franklin's autobiography to back up his claim, as it illustrates that he takes life writing as an important cultural artifact that can be studied and analysed. In my book, *The God Debate: New Atheist Identity-Making and the Religious Self in the New Millennium* (2022), I argue that autobiography is the literary acme of overt identity-making, where the author is presenting an ethical exemplar to emulate. It is because of this I believe autobiography provides a valuable resource to sociologists, as the authors present both a conscious ethical narrative, that can often be contrasted with an unrecognised unconscious counternarrative. It is also the case that autobiographies present to the larger public a carefully crafted identity of how they want to be perceived in the wider culture.

It is through interpreting Franklin's autobiography in a particular way, that Weber recognises a "spirit" in terms of an ethic, that is a particular form of behaviour. Weber puts it this way: "[the text contains] the character of an ethically slanted maxim for the conduct of life. This is the specific sense in which we propose to use the concept of the 'spirit of capitalism'" (Weber, 2002: 11). In this way Weber interprets external behaviour that can be situated in a recognisable social context, as being guided by an internal spiritual and religious conviction, an ethic. Here Weber's methodology addresses critics' concerns that "spirituality" needs a socio-cultural anchor and that individual's statements should not be taken at face value. This is evident in the fact that Weber emphasizes that the use of the term, "spirit," can only have meaning when it is recognisable as an ethic based upon a "'*historical individual*,' that is, a complex of configurations in historical reality which we group together conceptually from the point of view of their cultural significance to form a single whole" (Weber, 2002: 8).

I, therefore, surmise that there are three reasons for Weber to place such faith in the importance of Franklin's autobiography: (1) its cultural importance is recognisable in the fact that in America and the Anglosphere it became one of the most influential and well-known autobiographies ever written, (2) it addresses the spiritual dimension of human beings, portraying a recognisable "spirit" that drove Franklin to act in a particular way, (3) it is worthy of sociological study, as it presents behaviour that contains an overt ethic: it is prescriptive and instructive. By contending that a recognisable Protestant work ethic is detectable in Franklin's autobiography – a "*historical individual*" – Weber is then able to generalise that this spirit/ethic is what drives the capitalist behaviour of Protestant Europeans, in a way that is not overly recognisable in their Catholic brethren. This is what philosopher Karl Popper would call a falsifiable claim, in that it is one that can be tested as it is based on something that can be quantified. Many critics have done just this and have found Weber's thesis wanting. However in the nebulous contemporary field of the sociology of spirituality, a falsifiable methodology such as Weber's is imperative.

My Methodology: A Study in Contrasts

I have chosen two contemporary God debaters, Richard Dawkins and Karen Armstrong, as they are both prominent English intellectuals who believe that it is their ethical duty to publicly proclaim their two contrasting interpretations of religion and spirituality. Whereas Dawkins maintains that religion and spirituality need to be expunged from society, Armstrong maintains that the modern West leans too heavily towards rational and scientific thinking and needs to better cultivate its current unsophisticated understanding of religion and spirituality. Through an examination of these two God debater's professional pronouncements and by engaging with their autobiographies – they have both written more than one – I present their interpretative "tropes of legitimation" in such a way that it helps us to recognise a spiritual ethic that drives and colours their past, present and future. Weber's understanding of social time also plays a role in my methodology, where conversion and deconversion narratives are situated in the autobiographer's perception of their past, through the prism of their current convictions and social ideals. In this paper, I argue that in both their cases, Dawkins and Armstrong are driven by a particular spirit or ethic, one that is recognisably Protestant and the other that is Catholic. For this reason, they provide two instructive contrasting cases that illustrate that lived experience and identity-making spills into religious critique, intellectual positions and ideas, and vice versa. I have found these areas of spillage and saturation most illuminating in that they reveal the very different social backgrounds that inform the life writing and professional ideas of Dawkins and Armstrong, that I argue are best illuminated using Weber's term "spirit". In this way, the seemingly subjective "spirit" that drives these two God debaters will be clarified and delineated in a recognisably sociological manner.

Richard Dawkins

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Richard Dawkins' atheist manifesto *The God Delusion* (2006) became a lightning rod for discussion and debate, in connection with both religion and science. In his article "The Evolution of Atheism" (2012), Stephen LeDrew claimed:

> The publication of Richard Dawkins' *The God Delusion* in 2006 was a major cultural event. It signalled the beginning of a phenomenon now commonly known as the New Atheism, marked by a series of bestselling books arguing against the existence of God and the dangers of organised religion. (LeDrew, 2012: 70)

The term, the "New Atheists," was first used in 2006 by journalist Gary Wolfe in an article for the British magazine, *Wired*. Wolfe was referring to Dawkins, Sam Harris, and Daniel Dennett and their respective atheist texts, *The God Delusion*, *The End of Faith* (2006), and *Breaking the Spell* (2006). A year later Christopher Hitchens published *God is Not Great* (2007) and was the last member to be added to this group. With the death of Hitchens in 2011 the New Atheist cultural phenomenon has waned. Nevertheless, Dawkins' ongoing influence as a leading advocate for science and atheism remains unchallenged in the wider West.

In the preface to his best-selling atheist manifesto Dawkins contends that *The God Delusion* "is intended to raise consciousness – raise consciousness to the fact that to be an atheist is a realistic aspiration, and a brave and splendid one" (Dawkins, 2006: 1). As well as framing atheism as an ethical and aspirational enterprise, Dawkins' mission carries a social justice element: he hopes that his book will help "people to 'come out'. Exactly as in the case of the gay movement" (Dawkins, 2006: 4). In these public pronouncements it is possible to detect a "spirit" in terms of ethical behaviour that underlies Dawkins' approach to religion and atheism: he feels he has a vocation and that it is his duty to proselytise his particular atheist scientific truth to those who find it hard to escape their cultural religious conditioning. This highlights Dawkins' belief that it is possible and indeed ethical to rise above and to separate yourself from your cultural and religious background.

Protestant "Puritan" Fundamentalist New Atheists

Critics have pointed out a Puritan streak in the New Atheists' discourse, which is particularly evident in Dawkins' statements on religion, spirituality, and science. In his study entitled "God and the New Atheism," American theologian John F. Haught makes this conjecture:

> What stands out above everything else in the new atheism is its cognitional and ethical puritanism … Intellectually, the new atheistic Puritanism takes the form of an uncompromising scientism that sanitizes our minds by scrubbing off all the griminess of faith. (Haught, 2008: 95)

Here Haught stresses that Dawkins and the New Atheists exude a particular Protestant ethical Puritan predilection for cleanliness of thought, word, and action. Dawkins stresses that he went through a "normal Anglican upbringing" (Dawkins, 1995), even though his parents were scientific and rational. Fellow New Atheist, Christopher Hitchens, also referred to himself as a "Protestant atheist" (Hitchens, 2011: 468). By recognising the underlying Protestant spirit that drives Dawkins and his co-conspirator to action, I argue that "culture," or "lived experience," colours how the participants in the God debate think, even when they explicitly disavow this influence. There also seems to be a connection between Haught's accusation that the New Atheists show signs of an ethical Protestant puritanism and the other popular perception that they share a great affinity with Protestant American fundamentalists. This is justified by the fact that Protestant American fundamentalists, and Dawkins and the New Atheists, both eschew any allegorical or metaphorical interpretation of biblical texts, and take a literal approach where the Word is self-evident and unchanging. This is most noticeable in Dawkins' attack on physicists in *The God Delusion*:

> I wish that physicists would refrain from using the word God in their special metaphorical sense. The metaphorical or pantheistic God of the physicists is light years away from the interventionist, miracle-wreaking, thought-reading, sin-punishing, prayer-answering God of the Bible, of priests, mullahs and rabbis, and of ordinary language. Deliberately to confuse the two is, in my opinion, an act of intellectual high treason. (Dawkins, 2006: 19)

This militant attempt to claim all religious belief is literal and easy to define stands in sharp contrast to the sociology of spirituality's struggle to make meaningful distinctions between religious faith and spiritual beliefs. Dawkins' stringency here can be seen as largely connected to his understanding that personal subjective beliefs are weighted towards religion and spirituality, whereas scientific beliefs and practices should always be recognised as being more objective, and free from cultural and superstitious practices.

The Public Professor of Science

> We come to know what is real … We can detect it directly, using our five senses … aided by special instruments such as telescopes and microscopes; or even more indirectly, by creating models of what might be real … with or without the aid of instruments. Ultimately, it always comes back to our senses, one way or another. (Dawkins, 2012: 18)

In *The God Delusion* Dawkins argues that critics have mistakenly labelled his interpretation of religion and science as belonging to the nineteenth century (Dawkins, 2006: 156). One of the surprising critics of New Atheism, literary theorist Terry Eagleton, maintains that "Dawkins is a true child of nineteenth-century Positivism" (Eagleton, 2009: 88) – a notion spearheaded by sociologist Auguste Comte – who argued that scientific truth is based exclusively on what human beings can see, touch,

smell, hear and feel. Eagleton points to the cultural context of Dawkins' positivistic empiricist scientific belief: "There is a very English brand of common sense that believes mostly in what it can touch, weigh and taste, and *The God Delusion* springs from, among other places, that particular stable" (Eagleton, 2006). This is a considerable claim, given that in holding the position of The Simonyi Professorship Chair for the Public Understanding of Science for thirteen years – 1995 until 2008 – Dawkins has been a leading public representative and proponent of science in the UK. Therefore, due to Dawkins' position and influence, when he defines science and religion, he is speaking for more than just himself, he is disseminating a particular discourse into the wider culture.

Although Dawkins does address critics who label his particular scientific worldview as positivistic and "nineteenth-century," he misunderstands their criticism as pertaining only to his "awkward" questions about the validity of miracles that appear in the Bible (2006: 156f.), whereas Eagleton's criticism focuses on the fact that Dawkins' old-fashioned English sensibility makes it likely that he "would not be Europe's greatest enthusiast for Foucault, psychoanalysis, agitprop, Dadaism, anarchism or separatist feminism" (Eagleton, 2006). Eagleton's criticism here is that Dawkins' conception of truth and "what is real" is particular to a "readily identifiable kind of English middle-class liberal rationalist" with a nineteenth-century understanding of science, who disdains all the "isms" of twentieth-century thought. In this way, Eagleton contextualises Dawkins' positivistic pronouncements as being parochial rather than objective and universal. This is not something that Dawkins would agree with. For example, in *The God Delusion* Dawkins states: "There is an answer to every such question, whether or not we can discover it in practice, and it is a strictly scientific answer" (Dawkins, 2006: 57). I contend that by challenging the universality of Dawkins' scientific claims, Eagleton is following Weber's methodology, by interpreting in a "specific sense" "concrete configurations" that are "individual in character," so as to better understand and recognise the culturally specific spiritual ethic that guides his behaviour and ideas. It is this approach to Dawkins' identity-making and professional pronouncements that avoids the pitfalls that Wood identifies in the sociology of spirituality: namely, personal accounts of spirituality have been accepted without sociological interpretation. To further make sense of this sociologically definable ethical spirit in Dawkins' work and identity-making, we need to turn to his two memoirs, where we can reconnect his abstract ideas to his cultural heritage.

Deconversion

> The autobiographer chooses those events from the past which will form a story, a "personal myth." For autobiographers since Augustine, that personal myth has frequently been founded on the biblical narratives of conversion and salvation. (Henderson, 1989: 3f.)

I argue that the spirit that permeates Dawkins' autobiographies and writings on religion is shaped by a cultural ethical "spirit" and sensibility. This ethical "spirit" owes at least something to the long-shared history that religion and autobiography have

in the West (Heehs, 2013: 3f.; Norris & Inglehart, 2004: 218f.; Smith & Watson, 2010: 105). In his study entitled *Writing the Self: Diaries, Memoirs, and the History of the Self* (2013) Peter Heehs maintains that the autobiographical tropes of a formative childhood and an adult spiritual transformation were established in St Augustine's *Confessions* (397–400). This is evident in the famous passage where Augustine berates his childhood self for stealing pears – a retelling of the Garden of Eden story – and leaves behind his adolescent lustful desires in a turn to spirituality. The autobiographical genre in the West has a strong religious underpinning, where identity is shaped by embracing a Christian narrative, or by rejecting it. In their study, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (2010), Smith and Watson contend that "After the sixteenth-century rise of dissenting sects in the Protestant Reformation, spiritual autobiography was increasingly employed to defend a community of believers" (Smith & Watson, 2010: 111). As an example of this, they point to John Bunyan's *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (1666) where "an ideal dissenting self assesses itself in terms of Puritan religious prescriptions" (2010: 112). In this formulation, autobiography portrays an authentic ethical spiritual self in relation to a former inauthentic spiritual self that has been rejected.

There are definite parallels with the Protestant narrative of de-conversion in the way Dawkins portrays his turn from childhood religious belief to adult atheism, in terms of a journey towards a rational ethical self. This transformative moment, typical of a spiritual autobiography, is pivotal to Dawkins' first memoir, *An Appetite for Wonder* (2013), in which he rejected his emphatically held childhood/adolescent religious beliefs and "became strongly and militantly atheistic" (142). In this memoir of Dawkins' formative years, he describes his childhood self as "gullible" and "naïve" (2013: 80, 77). It is only when he has grown out of this childhood state, Dawkins proudly proclaims that "I shed my last vestige of theistic credulity, probably at the age of about sixteen" (2013: 142). Throughout Dawkins' telling of the early years of his life story, there is a distinct binary in place, equating religious belief with a childhood primitive state of irrational conformity, and adulthood with an enlightened rational agency. This is evident when we examine Dawkins' reflections on his past self: "I am struggling to reconcile the child with the adult that he became … I feel incredulous that I am the same person as the young book-despoiler and the young empathy-failure" (Dawkins, 2013: 98f.). Dawkins' interpretation of his former self follows Weber's conceptualisation of social time where current convictions, social ideals and values determine and shape the past, whether it be an autobiographer, an historian, or a social scientist.

In *The God Delusion*, Dawkins maintains that the Western mind-body dualism has been resolved by modern science. He makes the unsubstantiated claim: "Like most scientists, I am not a dualist" (Dawkins, 2006: 180). Dawkins argues that childhood is not only a time of credulity, naivety and ignorance, but it is also a breeding ground for human beings' "instinctive dualism" (2006: 179). Dawkins cites psychologist Paul Bloom's idea that religion is a by-product of an inherent "dualistic theory of the mind" that is instinctual in a child's conception of their self (2006: 179). Ironically, Dawkins creates a dualistic ethical binary between the child dualist who is innately predisposed towards religion, and the enlightened adult monist who through reason and logic has risen above this human instinctual state. This dualism, where human

beings evolve and separate from their human nature and their instincts – a separation of mind and body – is borne out in the separation that Dawkins feels subjectively between his child and adult self. It does seem that there is a paradox here of which Dawkins is not aware. This paradox is inherent in the fact that by claiming to be a monist Dawkins is at the same time espousing a form of dualism, that has its origins in Christianity, especially in relation to the writings of St. Paul, who emphasised the split between the material and the spiritual (flesh and spirit). If we were to take at face value Dawkins' claim that he only adheres to the methodology of science, we would miss the cultural religious residue that so obviously informs his outlook and ideas. It is through following Weber's interpretative methodology that we are better able to see the unacknowledged cultural ethical "spirit" that legitimises Dawkins' belief that it is a duty of every human to raise their consciousness towards an enlightened adult self.

Dawkins' Teleological Ethical Template

In Dawkins' second memoir *Brief Candle in the Dark* (2015) he explains his reason for entitling a series of lectures "Growing up in the Universe":

> I meant "growing up" in three senses: first, the evolutionary sense of life's growing up on our planet; second, the historic sense of humanity's growing out of superstition and towards a naturalistic, scientific apprehension of reality; and third, the growing up of each individual's understanding, from childhood to adulthood. (Dawkins, 2015: 110)

Dawkins believes that it is only through evolving to a modern monistic scientific understanding of reality that these instinctual childish states can be discarded. Ironically, his belief that the purpose of life is to evolve out of primitive childish religious thinking to an enlightened adult scientific worldview, is one such *a priori* teleology. This is because part of Dawkins' dichotomous methodology can be traced to his belief that human beings are naturally predisposed to a teleological understanding of nature, but that through rational scientific thinking, they can overcome this human instinct. Dawkins defines teleology as "The assignment of purpose to everything" such as "Clouds are 'for raining'" (Dawkins, 2006: 181). He claims that "childish teleology sets us up for religion" and that it leads human beings wrongly to assign a God responsibility for the origins and the maintenance of life (2006: 181). Dawkins believes that teleology is innate in human beings, "Children are native teleologists, and many never grow out of it" (2006: 181). Here it is evident that Dawkins equates childhood with not only a dualistic sensibility but with a teleological mindset as well. This illustrates the way in which in Dawkins' autobiographies and his non-fiction books on science and religion, an unconscious undermining of his arguments occurs through a disjunction between his subjectivity and the ethic and ideas that he puts forward in the God debate. This is evident in Dawkins' noticeable lack of self-awareness that he himself has a dualistic and teleological worldview and that his reasoning often fails to explain his own methodology. This important interpretative element of understanding Dawkins' outward identity-making and ethical "spirit," and his sometimes

contradictory professional pronouncements, is what critics have argued is missing from the sociology of spirituality studies, with the Kendal study being one prominent example. This is why reconsidering Weber's methodological understanding of "spirit" as an ethic helps sociologists to not take an individual's pronouncements at face value, but rather to recognise and interpret their identity-making and cultural background.

In this first case study, it is evident that Dawkins' belief that it is the ethical duty of every individual to raise their consciousness above their childhood, religious and superstitious human instincts, has a recognisably Protestant Puritan spirit. This Protestant ethical spirit has resulted in specific behaviour – the deconversion narrative – and in Dawkins' English 19th century positivistic understanding of science, where empirical facts form the only basis of knowledge. In examining his autobiographies, it also becomes evident that the ethical spirit driving Dawkins' identity-making at times undermines his professional statements on science and religion, especially in the case of his unacknowledged dualism and teleology. It is by examining the way that Dawkins expresses his interpretations of his life in his autobiographies, along with his professional pronouncements concerning atheism and science, that it is possible to present Dawkins as being driven by a particular spiritual ethic. In turning to our second case study of religious historian, Karen Armstrong, we can contrast and compare these two God debaters by recognising a particular "spirit" that informs the way they put forward ethical life narratives that illustrate what it is to lead a good and authentic life.

Karen Armstrong

On February 28, 2008, two years after the publication of *The God Delusion*, religious historian Karen Armstrong decided to use her Templeton prizemoney to set up *The Charter for Compassion*. This charter is based on Armstrong's belief that there are pressing reasons for challenging current conceptions of religion and religious belief. *The Charter for Compassion* states:

> The principle of compassion lies at the heart of all religious, ethical and spiritual traditions, calling us always to treat all others as we wish to be treated ourselves. We acknowledge that we have failed to live compassionately and that some have even increased the sum of human misery in the name of religion.

The charter's call for religions to unite in ethical and spiritual compassion is intimately connected to the two reasons Armstrong got involved in the new millennium God debate: the events of 9/11 and the rise of the New Atheist movement's polarising claims about religion. Armstrong is not alone in recognising the significance of the events of 9/11 – Dawkins has also stressed that this is what galvanised him into writing *The God Delusion* (Dawkins, 2006: 1, 303, 306). Armstrong explains the impact 9/11 had on her this way:

> September 11 changed my life … Suddenly my subject had acquired a terrible new relevance. I wish with all my heart that it had not happened this way … I see this as a form of ministry … revelation … we all live in one world. The study of other people's religious beliefs is now no longer merely desirable, but necessary for our very survival (Armstrong, 2005: 304).

There is something urgent and providential in Armstrong's claim as to why she partakes in this meaningful and life-changing work. Armstrong's engagement with the New Atheists was driven by a particular "spirit," in Weber's understanding, that contained an ethic that has driven her to action: it was her duty to counter erroneous claims about Islam and to argue that religion was inherently violent. The ethical spirit that drives Armstrong's sense of being part of an active "ministry" is something she feels is fated. She puts it this way:

> And so I spend a great deal of my time helping people to understand Islam … but I have to understand that after the revelation of September 11, I too cannot isolate myself from the problems of the world. (2004: 304f.)

Here Armstrong presents her interpretation of why she feels fated to connect with the larger world and this goes against her own need for a peaceful solitary life that her religious writing had brought her. Instead, she argues that "Our task now is to mend our broken world; if religion cannot do that, it is worthless. And what our world needs now is compassionate action" (2004: 304). It is here we can detect an ethical spirit that drives Armstrong to engage with the larger world, that is very different from the modern inward-turning SBNR (spiritual but not religious movement), and is much better equated with what Casanova (2009) argues is the original understanding of secularisation: when a monk would leave the monastery and take that religious sensibility out into the world.

Mythos and *Logos*

In her histories of religion, Armstrong not only makes a clear distinction between premodern and modern religious belief but also frames her argument in terms of *mythos* and *logos*:

> In most premodern cultures, there were two recognized ways of thinking, speaking, and acquiring knowledge. The Greeks called them *mythos* and *logos*. Both were essential and neither were superior to the other; they were not in conflict but complementary, each with its own sphere of competence and it was considered unwise to mix the two. (Armstrong, 2009: xi)

Armstrong's use of the dualistic *mythos*/*logos* places her in direct opposition to Dawkins' view that he and all modern scientists have a monistic understanding of reality. A major part of Armstrong's thesis on comparative religion is that the modern West is unbalanced in that, "Today we live in a society of scientific *logos*, and myth has fallen into disrepute" (2009). She contends that *logos* is the tool or domain of sci-

ence and is a "pragmatic mode of thought that enabled people to function effectively in the world … [and] had, therefore, to correspond to external reality" (2009). In contrast to *logos*, Armstrong maintains that, "Myth has been called a primitive form of psychology … to help people negotiate the obscure regions of the psyche, which are difficult to access but which profoundly influence our thought and behaviour" (2009). Armstrong argues that myth, or *mythos*, and religion are the gateway to self-knowledge and are best understood as being a non-cerebral active pursuit: "Religion, therefore, was not primarily something that people thought but something they did" (2009: xii). It is noticeable that Armstrong's mission to help the masses better understand religion, especially in the case of Islam after the events of 9/11, is both an active and intellectual ethical pursuit.

Ostensibly through her use of the *mythos*/*logos* distinction Armstrong tries to distinguish her ideas and arguments from the idolatry and abstractions of the New Atheists and religious fundamentalists, which she dismisses as too *logos*-centric. To make this point Armstrong argues that we need to turn to her histories of God that demonstrate how premodern religion was based on mythic and symbolic thinking and was more sophisticated than it is today: "The idols of fundamentalism are not good substitutes for God; if we are to create a vibrant new faith for the twenty-first century, we should, perhaps, ponder the history of God for some lessons and warnings" (Armstrong, 1995: 457). In her first bestselling religious history, *A History of God*, she explains:

> This book will not be a history of the ineffable reality of God itself, which is beyond time and change, but a history of the way men and women have perceived him from Abraham to the present day. (Armstrong, 1995: 5)

Armstrong's distinction here between a negative definition of God as "ineffable," and a positive belief that there can be a "history" of the way this God – "him" – is "perceived," points to a conflict at the heart of her methodology as a historian: she speaks of God as being "beyond time and change," and yet her history must be defined by these terms. I argue that Armstrong's paradoxical conceptualisation of God is not only informed by her need to separate herself from the New Atheist and modern fundamentalist understanding of religion, but by her cultural background as a Catholic nun. For this reason, any ethical spirit that is driving her to forcefully put forward her views on religion needs to be interpreted through the lens of her autobiographies.

Counterculture Convent

It is significant that a religious historian such as Armstrong has published three memoirs because it illustrates that she views herself as more than an objective interpreter of facts. Armstrong's recognition of the role that lived experience plays in her histories of religion is also evident in her autobiographical preamble in *A History of God* (1995). In coming to understand the ethical spirit that drives Armstrong's religious activism, it is important to note that her first published work *Through the Narrow Gate* (1981) was a memoir of the seven traumatic years she spent in an English Catholic convent in the 1960s, at the height of the counterculture. In Armstrong's

estimation, the ethical spirit that drove her to cloister herself away was itself countercultural, in that it went against all the mainstream beliefs among the youth at the time in the West: individualism, secularism, the rise of science, and the importance of individual freedom and liberty. In Armstrong's memoir, she conveys the idea that she was guided by an inner-directed spirit in the form of an ethic that compelled her to want to enter a religious convent at the age of seventeen: "To me the world had proved an unsatisfactory place. It wasn't enough. Only God with His infinite perfection could complete me" (Armstrong, 1981: 2). The ethical spirit that moved Armstrong into action, is framed as a rational reckoning that is clear and straightforward. She writes: "If the gospels were true, it seemed to me, then logically there was nothing else to do but become a nun and give my whole life to God" (2). It is notable that Armstrong's belief that she should cloister herself away from the world follows a Catholic tradition, as Martin Luther famously maintained that a monk was wasting his time in a monastery and needed to go out into the world and work in a vocation. Armstrong's inner-directed religious rebellion against the predominant secular counterculture also challenges the belief prevalent in the sociology of spirituality, that there is a clear distinction between inner-directed spirituality and institutionally-driven religion.

In *Through the Narrow Gate* Armstrong tells the story of a young nun who is unable to narrow her worldly horizons and to transform herself into a religious being. Time plays an important role in the fact that her older self interprets her younger "self," when she was in the convent, in a negative sense: "I could conform outwardly and make a pretty good job of that, but inwardly I remained the same: worldly and full of self" (1981: 137). In this memoir the older Armstrong portrays the Catholic nuns as constantly berating her younger self for using her intellect: "You're so full of yourself, aren't you? … When are you going to learn to lay aside this wretched critical faculty of yours? … You're full of pride, Sister, full of intellectual pride" (1981: 151). It is noticeable in this portrayal of her early life that Armstrong has a sense of her "self" as *logos*-centric and worldly. She entitles the seventh chapter of this first autobiography, "The Death I Have to Die," in which she elaborates that the job that a novice has to complete is to destroy her worldly rational sense of self. She writes, "Only when her old worldly self has been smashed to pieces can God build up from the rubble a new, Christ-centred individual" (1981: 135). This ethical duty and job of a novice nun to be suspicious of the rational self resonates in Armstrong's excursions into the God debate, where she is highly suspicious of the *logos*-centric nature of Dawkins and the New Atheists understanding of religion. It is through recognising an ethical Catholic spirit in Armstrong's autobiography that we are able to better understand the reasons for her behaviour in a concrete manner. In this way, I am able to interpret Armstrong's "mission" by following the methodology that Weber used in *The Protestant Ethic and the "Spirit" of Capitalism*, illuminating the "tropes of legitimation" as present in the Catholic religious beliefs that the nuns taught her in the convent and her religious activism in the God debate.

Wanting to Present a "true" Story of Muhammad

Armstrong claims that her first biography, *Muhammad: A Biography of the Prophet* (1991), was written in reaction to the anti-Islamic feeling that followed Ayatollah

Khomeini's fatwa made against Salmon Rushdie for writing *The Satanic Verses*. She remembers, "*Muhammad* began as polemic. I wanted to refute accusations of Rushdie's partisans and set the record straight" (2009: 277). Armstrong recollects that "the writers who were denouncing Islam so vehemently in the papers this morning presented their views as hard, incontrovertible fact. Most of their readers would not know the true story of Muhammad" (2009: 275). It is noticeable here that Armstrong has external and internal reasons for writing this biography of Muhammad: she believes that externally, in the wider West, there is a misrepresentation of the Prophet in the media that needs to be rectified; she also feels an inner compulsion to write a biography of Muhammad, claiming, "The dread that had impelled me to write *Muhammad* would not go away" (2009: 282). The verb "impel" is a striking example of the way in which Armstrong expresses her interpretation of this past event, which implies she had little choice in the matter and that this is a psychological process. This particular psychological interpretation can be connected to Armstrong's contention "that Muslims and Westerners were increasingly unable to understand each other and were all hurtling toward some nameless horror" (2009: 282).

I maintain that there is a particular Catholic ethical spirit that drives Armstrong's need to interpret Islam in the way that she does. In writing a biography of Muhammad, Armstrong contends that she had to develop a new historical methodology. She argues that a leap of sympathy was a necessary development for her as a historian of comparative religion due to the fact that Islam is the most alien to her of the three monotheistic faiths: "While writing *Muhammad*, I had to make a constant, imaginative attempt to enter empathically into the experience of another … Unless I could make that leap of sympathy, I would miss the essence of Muhammad" (2005: 279). It is discernible here that Armstrong the historian and biographer believes that to approach a religious figure you need to enter into their experience completely. This belief seems to stem from Armstrong's own experience as a Catholic nun where she was taught to give up her critical worldly self so that she could better approach Jesus and God. Armstrong claims of her biography of Muhammad: "Writing his life was in its own way an act of islām – a 'surrender' of my secular, sceptical self, which brought me, if only at second hand and at one remove, into the ambit of what we call the divine" (2005: 279f.). It is noticeable here that Armstrong's methodology for writing a biography of a religious figure involves her belief that any bias, or what might best be described as Baconian "Idols of the Mind," must be "surrendered" or stripped away before a "true" life story can be told. This tells us two things: firstly, that Armstrong believes it is possible to write a "true" account of a person's life, and secondly, that the only way to write a true biography is to give up or to lose part of your identity. For example, Armstrong's use of the word "secular" is of interest in "my secular, sceptical self". "Secular" here is best interpreted as worldly and rational in a modern Western post-Enlightenment sense, evident in her contention that the "sceptical self" must be "surrendered" if she is to approach the divine. A suspicion of the sceptical self is traceable to Armstrong's own life story where the Catholic nuns berated her for not being able to "lay aside this wretched critical faculty". Ultimately there is a personal vocational element to the task that Armstrong has set herself as a historian, that is intimately connected to a Catholic ethical spirit where *logos*-centric outward rational processes are to be sublimated so that religious drives can prevail.

Although they arrive at very different ideas about religion and knowledge, Armstrong and Dawkins share a similar sense that they have been fated and called to join the God debate. In this second case study it has become clear that Armstrong's belief that it is her duty to emphasise the compassionate nature of all religion is driven by a particular Catholic ethical spirit that has resulted in specific behaviour: setting up the Charter of Compassion and emphasising the *logos*-centric nature of New Atheism and post-9/11 Western criticism of Islam. Through examining her autobiographies using Weber's understanding of "spirit," I present the case that her transformative experiences as a Catholic nun legitimise her ethical declarations that religion and modern society need to be more *mythos*-centric and less rational and to take on Dawkins' opposing views on religion, truth and what it is to lead a good life.

Conclusion

The central contention of this article is that the sociology of spirituality could be advanced by exchanging the nebulous term "spirituality" for Weber's understanding of "spirit," in terms of a recognisable ethic that results in specific behaviour. Through an examination of two contrasting case studies of contemporary God debaters, Dawkins and Armstrong, I have demonstrated that it is possible to identify an ethical spirit that underlies their activism and professional pronouncements. This ethical spirit, whether inadvertently Protestant, or overtly Catholic, is recognisable in "*historical individuals*" and is based on "concrete configurations," following the methodology used in Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the"Spirit" of Capitalism*. By reutilising Weber's term "spirit" in this way, I address the three areas of contention I have identified in the sociology of spirituality – modern spirituality's perceived subjectivity and unworldliness, the term's lack of definition and utility, and the unheralded ethical stance embedded in the term "spirituality" – without losing important spiritual and religious connotations.

I have employed an interpretive methodology in this study that focused on the communitive form and expressions of Dawkins and Armstrong, that I identify as Weber's "spirit," rather than their patterns of argumentation. In this way, I have been able to address criticisms of the sociology of spirituality, that it needs to better "ferret out connections, communities, and accrued religious habits and language," rather than taking statements concerning religion and spirituality at face value. This approach has been revealing and has been greatly illuminated by studying the autobiographies of the two God debaters. In the first case study, it has brought to light that Dawkins' professional statements on religion, science, and atheism, are dualistic, teleological and share Protestant Puritan tendencies when it comes to transcending human nature. This does not align with Dawkins' professional claims to be a monistic scientific atheist, nor with his belief that modern scientists have abandoned inherently religious understandings of reality. Critics' claims that Dawkins' scientific worldview is positivistic and "nineteenth century" can also be better substantiated by recognising this Protestant "spirit" that is noticeable in the deconversion narrative as presented in his autobiographies. In this way the unheralded Protestant "spirit" that is detectable not only in his interpretation of his own life story but that which informs Dawkins' atheist

scientific worldview, is neither nebulous nor detached from his social relations and lived experience. Therefore, through utilising Weber's methodology, I am able to put forward my thesis that the atheist English professor of science has an ethical spiritual nature, a Protestant "spirit," despite disavowing such religious subjective states as being illusory and delusional.

A major finding of this study has also been that Armstrong's disagreements with Dawkins and the New Atheists are only ostensibly over intellectual ideas on God and religion, but at a much deeper level are due to the way they interpret, portray, and present their lived experiences. In the second case study, focused on Armstrong's autobiographies and her religious biographies and histories, I have discovered that although she has been overt about her Catholic identity, she has not consciously recognised the Catholic ethical "spirit" that calls her to surrender her sceptical *logos*-centric self when approaching religion. I have argued that it is this particular spirit, founded in the Catholic convent she attended for seven years, that drives and legitimises Armstrong's need to set up an ethical Charter of Compassion and to champion the *mythos*-centric merits of Islam in the modern West. This second case study has also brought to light the connection between the narrative Armstrong presents in her autobiographies, of a young countercultural adolescent who is taught by nuns to reject her rational critical self, and her profession as an adult religious historian who advocates for the West to become less *logos*-centric. The sociology of spirituality's distinction between inner-directed spirituality and outer-directed religion has also been challenged by Armstrong's inner-directed institutional Catholic "spirit," that informed her 1960s rebellion against the secular Western counterculture. Lastly, I have demonstrated how Armstrong's identity-making in the God debate betrays a Catholic Christian "spirit" and understanding of religion and the self that is transformative rather than stable. This finding emphasises the important role that time and interpretation play in the way that Armstrong presents her younger self, and how this contributes to and informs her present understanding of religion and religious history.

It is by utilising Weber's understanding of "spirit," instead of spirituality, that I have been able to make sense of the ethical identity-making of these two participants in the post-9/11 God debate, in such a way that reunites their mythic religious and atheist life-narratives and abstract intellectual ideas, back into the fabric of human lived experience. By doing so I have shown that modern spiritual understandings of inner subjective states do not need to be nebulous unworldly solipsistic abstractions but can be interpreted and studied in a rigorous sociological manner.

Funding Open Access funding enabled and organized by CAUL and its Member Institutions. The author has received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Declarations

Conflicts of Interests The author declared no potential conflicts of interests with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

References

Armstrong, K. (1981). *Through the narrow gate*. St. Martin's Griffin.
Armstrong, K. (1991). *Muhammad: A biography of the prophet*. HarperCollins.
Armstrong, K. (1995). *A history of God: From Abraham to the present: The 400-year quest for God*. Mandarin Paperbacks.
Armstrong, K. (2005). *The spiral staircase*. Anchor Books.
Armstrong, K. (2009). *The case for God*. Alfred A. Knopf.
Armstrong, K. (Ed.). (est. 2009). *The charter of compassion*. https://charterforcompassion.org/.
Bender, C. (2010). *The new metaphysics: Spirituality and the American religious imagination*. University of Chicago Press.
Casanova, J. (2009). The secular and secularisms. *Social Research*, *76*(4), 1049–1066.
Dawkins, R. (1995). Dr. Richard Dawkins interviewed by Nick Pollard at new college on february 28 (1995). *Third World Traveller*, available at: http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/Dawkins_Richard/RDawkinsinterview_NPollard.html
Dawkins, R. (2006). *The God delusion*. Bantam.
Dawkins, R. (2012). *The magic of reality*. Black Swan.
Dawkins, R. (2013). *An appetite for wonder: The making of a scientist*. Black Swan.
Dawkins, R. (2015). *Brief candle in the dark: My life in science*. Transworld.
Eagleton, T. (2006). Lunging, flailing, mispunching. Review of *The God delusion*, by Richard Dawkins. *London Review of Books*, October 19, 2006.
Eagleton, T. (2009). *Reason, faith, and revolution: Reflections on the God debate*. Yale University Press.
Flanagan, K. (2007). Introduction. In K. Flanagan, & P. C. Jupp (Eds.), *A sociology of spirituality* (pp. 1–22). Ashgate.
Fuller, R. C. (2001). *Spiritual, but not religious understanding unchurched America*. Oxford University Press.
Guest, M. (2007). The embodied spirituality of the post-boomer generations. In K. Flanagan, & P. C. Jupp (Eds.), *A sociology of spirituality* (pp. 181–200). Ashgate.
Harris, S. R. (2015). *An invitation to the sociology of emotions*. Routledge.
Haught, J. F. (2008). *God and the New Atheism: A critical response to Dawkins, Harris, and Hitchens*. Westminster John Knox.
Heehs, P. (2013). *Writing the self: Diaries, memoirs, and the history of the self*. Bloomsbury Academic & Professional.
Henderson, H. (1989). *The victorian self: Autobiography and biblical narrative*. Cornell University Press.
Hitchens, C. (2011). *Hitch-22*. Allen & Unwin.
Hochschild, A. R. (2003). *The managed heart: Commercialisation of human feeling*. University of California Press.
Holmes, P. (2007). Spirituality: Some disciplinary perspectives. In K. Flanagan, & P. C. Jupp (Eds.), *A sociology of spirituality* (pp. 23–42). Ashgate.
Keenan, W. (2016). A phoney holy war: Reflections on the myth of spiritual revolution. *Implicit Religion*, *19*(1), 131–198.
LeDrew, S. (2012). The evolution of atheism: Scientific and humanistic approaches. *History of the Human Sciences*, *25*(3), 70.
Norris, P., & Inglehart, R. (2004). *Sacred and secular: Religion and politics worldwide*. Cambridge University Press.
Palmer, D. A. (2009). Book Review: A sociology of spirituality – edited by Kieran Flanagan and Peter C. Jupp. *British Journal of Sociology, 60*(2), 426–27.

Rosenfeldt, A. (2022). *The God debate*: *New Atheist identity-making and the religious self in the new millennium. Palgrave Macmillan*.
Smith, S., & Watson, J. (2010). *Reading autobiography: A Guide for interpreting life narratives* (2nd ed.). University of Minnesota.
Taylor, C. (2007). *A secular age*. The Belknap Press of Harvard University.
Voas, D., & Bruce, S. (2007). The spiritual revolution: Another false dawn for the sacred. In K. Flanagan, & P. C. Jupp (Eds.), *A sociology of spirituality* (pp. 43–62). Ashgate.
Watts, G. (2020). Making sense of the study of spirituality: Late modernity on trial. *Religion*, *50*(4), 590–614.
Weber, M. (2002). [1905]) *The protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism* (P. Baehr & G. C. Wells, Eds., Trans.). Penguin Group.
Wood, M. (2010). The sociology of spirituality: Reflections on a problematic endeavor. In B. S. Turner (Ed.), *The new Blackwell companion to the sociology of religion* (pp. 267–285). Wiley-Blackwell.
Woodhead, L. (2010). Real religion and fuzzy spirituality? Taking sides in the sociology of religion. In D. Houtman, & S. Aupers (Eds.), *Religions of modernity: Relocating the sacred to the self and the digital* (pp. 31–48). Brill.