

## IMPORTANT REASONS TO STUDY RELIGIONS AND SPIRITUALITY

Jeff B. Pool, Ph.D.  
Eli Lilly Chair in Religion and Culture  
Professor of Religion  
Chairperson, Department for Studies of  
Religions and Spirituality  
Berea College  
Berea, Kentucky

### Introduction

In this essay, I offer an answer to the following question: "Why should one study religions and spirituality or religious and spiritual phenomena?" *Several important reasons recommend the neutral, non-religious, descriptive, or phenomenological academic exploration, examination, and analysis of religions, religious communities, or religious traditions, specifically, and human spirituality, more generally.* Many scholars and numerous academic departments that dedicate themselves to this field of studies have identified the same or similar reasons and factors as well.<sup>1</sup> Although the discussion that follows most certainly contains many if not most of the major reasons and factors that strongly encourage a neutral, non-religious, descriptive, or phenomenological academic exploration, examination, and analysis of religions and human spirituality, I do not claim to present an exhaustive list. I offer eighteen reasons, however, that strongly recommend studies of religions and spirituality or religious and spiritual phenomena.

### I. Begin with Facticity and Universality of Religions and Human Spirituality

*One should study religions, other religious and spiritual phenomena, and human spirituality more broadly precisely because these phenomena exist throughout the world, in all human cultures, and in all periods of human history.* The geographical and historical universality of religious and spiritual phenomena indicates their vast importance in human life, community, and culture. Thus, in order to understand humans, their communities, their motivating values and traditions, and many other features of their cultures (such as art, music, architecture, among numerous other examples), one must understand human spirituality and its many expressions, including specific religions, religious communities, as well as other religious and spiritual phenomena.

## II. Learn That Religious and Spiritual Phenomena Emerge from and Shape Human Culture

*Studies of religions, other religious and spiritual phenomena, and human spirituality more generally will increase awareness of and understanding about how these phenomena help to produce, emerge from, and shape all features of human culture.* Human cultures constitute entire or "whole ways of life" or systems: patterns of behavior, customs, food, language and other modes of communication, acquired and accumulated knowledge, educational processes and patterns, forms of social organization, institutions, material artifacts, arts, music, technologies, ideas, values, symbols, style, mood, characteristic attitudes of human groups toward themselves and their world, worldview, and *ethos*, among many other human processes, patterns, practices, and products — including spiritualities and religions.<sup>2</sup>

Vilmos Csányi has shown that anthropologists generally identify three major overlapping spheres of culture: (1) "social culture" or "the interrelationships of people"; (2) "material culture" or "the production and use of artifacts"; and (3) "mental culture" or "those ideas not manifested in the other two [spheres of culture]."<sup>3</sup> P. C. Munding also has developed a more specific, yet complimentary and broadly-applicable, socio-biological definition of culture that emphasizes the relationships of culture and biological processes as well. Munding defined the notion of "culture" as "... a set of populations that are replicated generation after generation by learning — an overt population of functionally related, shared, imitable patterns of behavior (and any material products produced) and, simultaneously, a covert population of acquired neural codes for those behaviors."<sup>4</sup> Even more specifically, Edward Farley, a theological anthropologist, has described culture as "the traditions that govern beliefs and behavior," "[the] aspect of a social system or society" that provides a society "with its sense of direction" and that "carries its values through a deposit of symbols." Moreover, according to Farley, societal "subsystems and institutional vehicles" carry culture and serve "... to legitimate, [to] maintain, and [to] transmit the traditions" of culture.<sup>5</sup>

Religious and spiritual phenomena, including religions themselves, constitute elements of human culture more broadly. Moreover, as a vision for all of reality and a way of human life, a religion expresses itself in all basic features of human culture, especially as reflected in the three large and overlapping spheres of human culture that Vilmos Csányi identified: (1) social culture; (2) material culture; and (3) mental culture. On the one hand, in order to understand the depth-dimension of human culture, one needs to study religions, spiritualities, and other religious and spiritual phenomena. On the other hand, in order to understand the multiple cultural features of religious and spiritual phenomena, one needs also to study and to understand the multiple features of cultures themselves. Humans produce religions, spiritualities, and other religious or spiritual phenomena as aspects of their cultures: in other words, cultures produce those phenomena. Additionally, though, religions, spiritualities, and other religious and spiritual phenomena, with all of their own cultural features, also influence and shape the larger cultures that gave birth to them and from which they emerged.

### **III. Encounter Sources of Many Historic and Contemporary Human Conflicts**

*One also should study religions, other religious and spiritual phenomena, and human spirituality more broadly, especially from a neutral, non-religious, descriptive, or phenomenological academic exploration, examination, and analysis of these phenomena, because many of the major historic and contemporary conflicts among people have arisen from extreme religious and spiritual differences.* Studies of the histories of religions, religious communities, and spiritualities reveal the origins of many differences and the sources of major historic and contemporary conflicts, often differences that have originated from unfounded fears, biases, or misplaced zeal. As a result, such studies can help to increase understanding, not only about other religious or spiritual perspectives, but about the depth-dimension of human history more generally, therefore, also to begin the process of overcoming historic and contemporary conflicts through deepened inquiry, persistent dialogue, and expanded understanding.

### **IV. Identify Need for Multiple Approaches**

*Through studies of religions, other religious and spiritual phenomena, and human spirituality more generally, one discovers multiple dimensions of these phenomena, expressions of all dimensions in human experience, histories, and cultures more broadly.* For that reason, such studies proceed from multiple disciplinary or methodological perspectives: history, literary studies, psychology, sociology, philosophy, theology, anthropology, archaeology, economics, political science, gender studies, as well as several other methodological perspectives. As a result, one learns through such studies about the need for multi-disciplinarity and interdisciplinarity in studies of religious and spiritual phenomena, in order to discern and to understand the many different facets of such phenomena. One method will help to disclose knowledge and understanding about one facet, for example, of a religion or a religious phenomenon, but will not succeed in helping to discern all features of a religion, in the same way that a microscope, while enormously useful, will help the researcher learn about different features of the universe than an equally useful telescope will provide.

### **V. Discover Differences between Advocative and Neutral Studies**

*One also should study religions, other religious and spiritual phenomena, and human spirituality more broadly, especially from a neutral, non-religious, descriptive, or phenomenological methodological orientation, because such studies will teach one about the differences between advocating for a religious or spiritual perspective and describing or teaching about that perspective.* When one studies religious and spiritual phenomena of any kind from a specific religious, spiritual, or even philosophical perspective, one does so as an advocate for, an apologist for, or a defender of that specific viewpoint or value-orientation. As another version of this advocative orientation, similarly, when one studies religious and spiritual phenomena of any kind from an antagonistic religious, spiritual, or philosophical perspective, one does so as a polemicist against such phenomena, also proceeding from a biased perspective, a point of view that already

presupposes the erroneousness, falsity, or dis-value of religious and spiritual phenomena prior to any study of them. When one examines and analyzes religious and spiritual phenomena from a non-advocative and non-antagonistic perspective, however, conducting such studies from a *neutral, non-religious, descriptive, or phenomenological methodological viewpoint, one more clearly can perceive the biases in both advocative (religious or apologetic) and antagonistic (anti-religious or polemical) perspectives.*

## **VI. Identify and Suspend Biases**

*Studies of religions, other religious and spiritual phenomena, and human spirituality more broadly, again especially from a neutral, non-religious, descriptive, or phenomenological academic exploration, examination, and analysis of religions and human spirituality, help one to develop the important ability to identify one's own biases or assumptions and, at least temporarily, to set them aside, to bracket them, to suspend them, or to hold them in abeyance.* In this way, one begins to learn how to examine the facts themselves, rather than one's own assumptions about the religious and spiritual realities or phenomena that present themselves to perception, observation, and examination. Such studies, as a result, help to provide the possibility for dispelling prejudices, biases, and misunderstandings about various religious and spiritual phenomena that quite often religions, religious communities, or religious people themselves have perpetuated about the religious or spiritual perspectives of other people or even of themselves.

## **VII. Distinguish Categories of Study from the Realities Themselves**

*One also should study religions, other religious and spiritual phenomena, and human spirituality more broadly, especially from a neutral, non-religious, descriptive, or phenomenological methodological orientation, because such studies will help one to perceive the differences between the categories on the basis of which one studies religious or spiritual phenomena and the empirical realities of those phenomena themselves.* The concepts with which people popularly describe religious and spiritual phenomena, as well as the analytical categories and criteria that scholars employ in their academic studies of such phenomena, provide conceptual frameworks through which to isolate specific cultural phenomena as religious or spiritual phenomena, through which to focus descriptive and analytical attention. Such studies of spiritual and religious phenomena, however, can help one to discover the significant differences between those categories of analysis and the religious and spiritual phenomena themselves. Without proceeding with a neutral, non-religious, descriptive, or phenomenological examination of religious or spiritual phenomena, people often do not perceive the differences between the empirical realities of religious or spiritual phenomena and the categories that people have used to identify and to classify them in daily discourse or even that scholars employ to study them more analytically.

### **VIII. Perceive Need for Religious and Cultural Literacy**

*Studies of religions, other religious and spiritual phenomena, and human spirituality more generally will increase both religious and cultural literacy.* As numerous teachers about religions, religious communities, spirituality, and other religious or spiritual phenomena know, many of their students do not know or understand many of the basic features, histories, or developments of their own religious or spiritual communities, traditions, or heritages. In other words, increasingly, especially in the United States, as a result of many factors, demographic studies increasingly indicate a profound illiteracy among the general population about religions and spirituality.<sup>6</sup> The neutral, non-religious, descriptive, or phenomenological academic exploration, examination, and analysis of religions, religious communities, or religious traditions, specifically, and human spirituality, more broadly, therefore, will increase religious literacy for the dedicated student, even religious literacy about one's own religious community, tradition, or heritage. Such studies of religious and spiritual phenomena, consequently, will similarly increase literacy about the depths of the larger cultural contexts as well.

### **IX. Dispel Fears, Discourage Conflicts, and Encourage Peace**

*One also should study religions, other religious and spiritual phenomena, and human spirituality more broadly, especially from a neutral, non-religious, descriptive, or phenomenological methodological orientation, because such studies will help to dispel fears about various religious or spiritual perspectives that one has received from one's own community, traditions, or heritage, to discourage conflicts among religions, or between religious or spiritual communities, and between religious or spiritual perspectives, and to encourage efforts toward peace.* Eliminating the fear of other people or communities by learning more accurately about their values, traditions, and practices will encourage openness, tolerance, respect, and even appreciation for the diversity in other religious or spiritual perspectives. Finally, such understanding, tolerance, respect, and appreciation can contribute to peace-making among peoples with different religious perspectives: whether internal to a religion itself, as between Shiite and Sunni communities in Islam, or between Muslims and Buddhists, Muslims and Hindus, or Muslims and Christians, among numerous other religious and spiritual communities.

### **X. Encounter Vast Range of Ideas and Possibilities**

*Studies of religions, other religious and spiritual phenomena, and human spirituality more generally present students with a vast range of human visions of reality, values, practices, and ways of life.* Through such studies, students will discover and will explore diverse human possibilities for understanding and living in the world and with other people. Studies of religions and spirituality will expand human knowledge and understanding for people, especially as people also seek purpose, meaning, and direction in their own lives.

### **XI. Discover Points of Convergence among Different Religious or Spiritual Perspectives**

*Studies of religions, other religious and spiritual phenomena, and human spirituality more generally, again especially from a neutral, non-religious, descriptive, or phenomenological academic exploration, examination, and analysis of religions and human spirituality, help one, not only to identify and to appreciate genuine differences among religious or spiritual perspectives, but also to identify and to appreciate points at which very different religious or spiritual perspectives converge.* Quite often, those who arrive new to studies of religious and spiritual phenomena come with the intention of learning about perspectives that they understand as vastly different from their own points of view. Studies of religious and spiritual phenomena, however, often surprise students by disclosing points of deep convergence or points where very different religious or spiritual perspectives share some basic human values, aims, and aspirations. Such education can clear the way for cooperation and collaboration in goals and projects for the common good.

### **XII. Identify the Narrative Dimension of Human Life**

*One also should study religions, other religious and spiritual phenomena, and human spirituality more broadly, because such studies disclose the power of stories in human life, societies, and cultures.* A religious and spiritual community, or most certainly a major religion of the world, maintains itself on the basis of one major story or one cycle of stories about the origins, purposes, and destinies for that religious or spiritual community or religion. Moreover, as studies of even non-religious human communities also indicate, all human communities tell founding and guiding stories about themselves. Studies of human life and community uncover a narrative dimension of human experience, which helps to account for the human love of stories.<sup>7</sup> Studies of religions and other religious or spiritual phenomena help to demonstrate this claim through one category of human cultural phenomena. For humans, stories, and especially the great religious and spiritual narratives, help humans to interpret the realities of the worlds that they have received and in which they find themselves, to guide their lives and behavior, as well as even to shape those realities, and to envision their meanings, purposes, and destinies.

### **XIII. Examine Essential and Historical Human Questions and Answers about Reality and Life**

*Through studies of religions, other religious and spiritual phenomena, and human spirituality more generally, one encounters some of the most profound and fascinating questions and answers in enduring human concerns about the origins, purpose, meaning, and destiny of the universe and human life.* One discovers through studies of religions and spirituality ways in which humans have interrogated reality for themselves and have proposed epistemological, emotional, volitional responses to the questions that have emerged. Increasingly in a profoundly scientific and secular world, many people who study religious and spiritual phenomena encounter such human questions and responses for the first time in their lives or at least encounter clear and profound articulations of such human questions and responses for the first time. Although such religious or spiritual

questions and answers remain the subjects of observation, description, and analysis, students of these phenomena also experience opportunities to ponder such questions and answers for themselves.

#### **XIV. Invitation to Life of Meaning and Purpose**

*Also, because religions and spiritualities pursue the meaning and purpose of all reality, human life, and human community, studies of religions, other religious and spiritual phenomena, and human spirituality more broadly, introduce those who study these phenomena to these quests and, thereby, serve as invitations to join such quests.* Although the stated goals for studies of religious and spiritual phenomena relate primarily to academic knowledge about and understanding of these phenomena, one who studies these phenomena will discover specific religious and spiritual quests for meaning and purpose: such discoveries function as invitations to those who encounter them. Often, studies of religions and spiritualities awaken these quests for the first time, or even deepen such quests that already have begun, in those who study these phenomena.

#### **XV. Enhance Understanding of One's Own Tradition/s**

*Studies of religions, other religious and spiritual phenomena, as well as human spirituality more generally, indirectly can help one to develop an enhanced understanding of one's own tradition and heritage.* Even if one already participates in a religious or spiritual community or tradition and understands one's own tradition well, sometimes studies of other religions or spiritual communities can alert one to facets of one's own tradition or heritage: to facets of one's own tradition that one may not have perceived previously; to weaknesses in one's own tradition that dialogue with another and very different tradition or community could enhance; and even to strength's in one's own tradition that one may have assumed, but not explicitly recognized, prior to such studies. Studying traditions (religious or otherwise) other than one's own tradition often helps to illuminate one's own tradition profoundly, shining light on hitherto un-perceived or uncritically-assumed-and-examined elements or components and on areas that require more profound development or examination.

#### **XVI. Respond to Contemporary Interest in Religious/Spiritual Phenomena**

*Studies of religions, other religious and spiritual phenomena, as well as human spirituality more generally, can prepare one to communicate knowledgably and wisely about these phenomena in a world where people express intense and extensive interest in such phenomena.* In the contemporary world, many people, whether or not they regard themselves as religious or spiritual, demonstrate much interest (often, however, with very meager or even inaccurate knowledge) about religions and spiritualities. Studies of religions and spirituality can prepare one to address such intense and often passionate interests with knowledge, understanding, and wisdom about these complex phenomena, helping people, thereby, to move beyond misinformation, mere opinion, and even common biases or prejudices.

## **XVII. Encounter Resources for Changing the World**

*One also should study religions, other religious and spiritual phenomena, and human spirituality more generally, because such studies examine resources with which to improve the contemporary world.* Religions, spiritualities, religious or spiritual communities, and religious or spiritual traditions also contain many positive features and values, despite negative events and actions that originate from religious motives or on the basis of religious and spiritual claims or beliefs, events that have occurred historically and that continue to occur in contemporary global human society. Many of those religious and spiritual traditions advocate ways and means for improving the world and have done so for many centuries! Studies of religious and spiritual phenomena will present those traditions as *resources* to address current problems, crises, issues, and needs in human life, experience, society, and culture. Many of the previous reasons for studying religious and spiritual phenomena also contribute to improvement of the contemporary world, creating conditions for the possibility of collaboration among people of all religions or spiritualities in projects for the common good of the larger world and not merely for human life as part of the world.

## **XVIII. Develop Important and Transferrable Skills**

*Finally, studies of religions, other religious and spiritual phenomena, and human spirituality more generally can help one develop important and transferrable skills.* As previous points in this essay have suggested, studies of religions, other religious and spiritual phenomena, and human spirituality more generally, especially from a neutral, non-religious, descriptive, or phenomenological methodological orientation, require some special attitudes, skills, and procedures: suspension of biases; empathy for the values, convictions, attitudes, and perspectives of other very different people and communities; careful formulation of questions and investigative procedures; careful perception, observation, and listening; skills for careful, fair, and appropriate comparison; ability to describe clearly, accurately, and coherently; skills for careful and responsible gathering and analysis of data; ability to re-construct various perspectives responsibly, critically, and yet constructively (in the sense of problem-solving); ability for cross-cultural study and understanding; among a variety of related skills and abilities. Such skills and abilities, as well as the attitudes and values that motivate their acquisition, can make students of religious and spiritual phenomena "marketable" in many other professions or fields of study as well.

## **Conclusion**

Although I have provided a lengthy list of reasons on the basis of which one should study religions, spiritualities, and religious and spiritual phenomena more generally, other scholars may identify many more important reasons as well. These present reasons and factors in themselves, however, supply a solid basis for engaging in studies of religious and spiritual phenomena.

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ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> See the following examples: Case Western Reserve University, Department of Religious Studies, "Why Study Religion?" (<http://religion.case.edu/undergraduate-programs/why-study-religion/>); Pamela Crabieh, "The Importance of Studying Religions and the Religious Phenomenon," *Politics, Cultures and Religions in Southwest Asia Blog (2006–2015)* (<http://pchrabieh.blogspot.com/2010/01/importance-of-studying-religions-and.html>); William A. Graham, "Why Study Religion in the Twenty-First Century?" *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* 40 (Summer/Autumn 2012) (<http://bulletin.hds.harvard.edu/articles/summerautumn2012/why-study-religion-twenty-first-century>); William Gruen, "The Case for Religious Studies" *Inside Higher Ed* (22 August 2016) (<https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2016/08/22/understand-todays-world-more-students-should-study-religion-essay>); Jacob Neusner (Brown University), "Why Study Religion?" (<https://www.saintmarys.edu/files/Why%20Study%20Religion.pdf>); Richard Schiffman, "Why We Need to Start Teaching about Religions in School," *Huffington Post* (3 June 2012) ([http://www.huffingtonpost.com/richard-schiffman/why-we-need-to-teach-religion-in-school\\_b\\_1394060.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/richard-schiffman/why-we-need-to-teach-religion-in-school_b_1394060.html)); "Why Study Religion?" (<http://studyreligion.org/why/index.html>); St. Mary's College, Department of Religious Studies, "Why Study Religion?" (<https://www.saintmarys.edu/academics/departments/religious-studies/why-study-religion-theology>); University of Northern Iowa, Department of Philosophy and World Religions, "Why Should I Study Religion?" (<https://uni.edu/philrel/why-should-i-study-religion>); University of Pennsylvania, Department of Religious Studies, "Why Study Religion?" ([https://www.sas.upenn.edu/religious\\_studies/why-study-religion](https://www.sas.upenn.edu/religious_studies/why-study-religion)); Nathan Schneider, "Why the World Needs Religious Studies," *Religion Dispatches* (21 November 2011) (<http://religiondispatches.org/why-the-world-needs-religious-studies/>); University of Arizona, Department of Religious Studies and Classics, "Why Study Religion?" (<http://religion.arizona.edu/students>); University of California Davis, Department of Religious Studies, "Why Study Religion?" (<https://religions.ucdavis.edu/about/why-study-religion>); University of California Riverside, Department of Religious Studies, "Why Study Religion?" (<http://religiousstudies.ucr.edu/about-the-department/why-study-religion/>); Wake Forest University, Department for the Study of Religions, "Why Major in Religion?" (<http://college.wfu.edu/religion/students/why-major-in-religion/>); Mark Wallace, "Why Study Religion?" Swarthmore College, Department of Religion, (<http://www.swarthmore.edu/religion/why-study-religion>); Kaylyn Walton, "Why You Should Take a Religion Class," "Tufts Blogs," "Inside Admissions," Tufts University (<http://admissions.tufts.edu/blogs/jumbo-talk/post/why-you-should-take-a-religion-class/>); James Madison University, Department of Philosophy and Religion, "Why Study Religion?" (<https://www.jmu.edu/philrel/why-study-religion/why-study-religion.shtml>); Irish Society for the Academic Study of Religions, "What Is the Academic Study of Religion?" (June 2012) (<https://isasr.wordpress.com/about/what-is-the-academic-study-of-religion/>); Washington University, Department of Religious Studies, "Why Study Religion?" (<http://religiousstudies.artsci.wustl.edu/why-study-religion>); and Religious Studies Project, "What Is the Public Benefit of the Study of Religion?" (26 November 2012) (<http://www.religiousstudiesproject.com/podcast/podcast-what-is-the-public-benefit-of-the-study-of-religion/>).

<sup>2</sup> Bruce Grelle, "Culture and Moral Pluralism," pp. 129–30, in *The Blackwell Companion to Religious Ethics*, ed. William Schweiker, Blackwell Companions to Religion Series (Oxford, England, United Kingdom: Blackwell Publishing, Ltd., 2008); and Malory Nye, *Religion: The Basics*, 2d ed. (New York, New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2004), 43–44. As an elaboration of this understanding, also see Clifford Geertz's still very influential *anthropological* descriptions of the concepts of "ethos" and "worldview": Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York, New York: Basic Books Publishers, Inc., 1973), 127.

<sup>3</sup> Vilmos Csányi, *Evolutionary Systems and Society: A General Theory of Life, Mind, and Culture* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, General Evolution Research Group, 1989), 148.

<sup>4</sup> See P. C. Munding, "Animal Cultures and a General Theory of Cultural Evolution," *Ethology and Sociobiology* 1 (September 1980): 183–223.

<sup>5</sup> Edward Farley, *Good and Evil: Interpreting a Human Condition* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Fortress, Press, 1990), 56.

<sup>6</sup> Stephen Prothero has argued that the distinction between *spirituality* and *religion* (in the widely-used self-designation, "spiritual but not religious") usually *suggests* "disdain for so-called organized religion," "authentic piety" as "fundamentally a matter of practice, not belief," or "religion stripped down to its experiential dimension." Prothero decries this tendency as "a form of faith that denies its connections to the institutions, stories, and doctrines that gave it birth—religion without memory." He regards the popular sharp distinction between "spirituality" and "religion" as a reflection of "religious illiteracy" in the United States (Stephen Prothero, *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know—and Doesn't* [New York, New York: HarperOne, An Imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, 2007], 5, 146, 147). Reid B. Locklin, in his argument for "a spirituality of institutional commitment," also argues against the validity of this popular distinction from his own perspective as a Roman-Catholic theologian and teacher of "religious studies" (Reid B. Locklin, *Spiritual But Not Religious? An Oar Stroke Closer to the Farther Shore* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2005), 2-5, 132–35). Also, see the following questions about this demographic tendency: John Blake, "Are There Dangers in Being 'Spiritual but Not Religious'?" CNN Website (9 June 2010, 11:47 a.m.): <http://www.cnn.com/2010/LIVING/personal/06/03/spiritual.but.not.religious/index.html>.

<sup>7</sup> Stephen Crites has argued convincingly "... that the formal quality of [human] experience through time is inherently narrative" (Stephen Crites, "The Narrative Quality of Experience" *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 39 (September 1971): 291. Extending this line of thinking, according to Paul Ricoeur, "[a] life is no more than a biological phenomenon as long as it is not interpreted." Ricoeur argues that, in telling and writing a story, "the process of composition, of configuration, does not realize itself in the text but in the reader, and under this condition configuration makes possible re-configuration of a life by way of the narrative. More precisely: the meaning or the significance of a story wells up from *the intersection of the world of text and the world of the reader.*" On "the act of reading," "rests the ability of the story to transfigure the experience of the reader." In other words, "the act of reading" "completes the work." Ricoeur identifies a "pre-narrative capacity" in human life, constituted by three principal "points of support" or "anchor" points, that dwells "in the living experience of acting and suffering," a capacity that "requires insertion of the narrative and perhaps expresses a veritable need for it": (1) "the structure of human acting and suffering itself" contains a "network" of a "semantics of action" that reflects "the same order" as "the plots of stories," "the same phronetic intelligence" that "guides" both "the concepts of action (and of passion) and that of the story"; (2) through "symbolic resources of the practical realm," humans already articulate action "in signs, rules and norms" ("action is already mediated symbolically"); and (3) human experience reflects a "pre-narrative quality." On this basis, Ricoeur describes "life as an incipient story" or "an activity and a desire in search of a narrative." According to Ricoeur, as we apply "to our understanding of ourselves" "the play of sedimentation and innovation" that operates "in the works of every tradition," "... we learn to become the *narrator of our own story* without completely becoming the author of our life" (Paul Ricoeur, "Life: A Story in Search of a Narrator," trans. J. N. Kraay and A. J. Scholten, in *Facts and Values: Philosophical Reflections from Western and Non-Western Perspectives*, ed. M. C. Doeser and J. N. Kraay [Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1986], 126, 127-29, 31).