

SPIRITUALITY, RELIGIOSITY AND HAPPINESS: IDENTIFYING THE NEXUS

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Received 8 September 2023

Revised 15 October 2023

Accepted 19 October 2023

Published Online 2 January 2024

Using data from 52 countries in Wave 5 of the World Value Survey conducted during 2004 and 2008, we test two alternative approaches in spirituality measures. The first is based on the more traditional understanding that spirituality is associated with meanings, God, prayers/meditation and formal religions. The second is based on the common spiritual teachings of all the major religions that are summarized by the LIFE (Love, Insight or Wisdom, Fortitude and Engagement) framework proposed by Ho, LS (2014). *Psychology and Economics of Happiness: Love, Life and Positive Living*. Oxford: Routledge. It was found that this alternative approach, which focuses on the spiritual teachings rather than theology, offers better explanatory power for Total Life Satisfaction (TLS). An interesting finding is that under this specification the coefficient on meaning turned negative, suggesting that those whose lives are weak in Love, Insight, Fortitude and Engagement have yet to find meaning and are less happy. Through a series of stepwise regressions, we conclude that more spiritual people are indeed happier (H1); that religious people indeed tend to be happier mainly because religious people tend to be more spiritual (H2); that the essence of spirituality and meaning lies in Love, Insight, Fortitude and Engagement (H3). These virtues are all grounded on transcending the narrow self and on a “reverence for Life” as propounded by Schweitzer. Finally, religious attendance does promote happiness. The effect is small but stable and statistically significant. It may have to do with the social network this offers (H4).

Keywords: Religiosity; spirituality; transcendence; meaning; reverence for life; love, insight, fortitude, engagement; mental capital.

JEL Classification: D03, D10, D60, D64

*I thank Yew-Kwang Ng for his comments and Minhui Liu for very able assistance with the data processing.

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1. Introduction

Spirituality has been understood in diverse ways throughout history.¹ Ammerman (2013) offered a taxonomy of the meanings of spirituality that had different numbers of adherents, with invocation of a religious tradition, ethics and God being the most popular. One useful definition of spirituality was offered by Fisher (2008):

Spirituality is concerned with a person's awareness of the existence and experience of inner feelings and beliefs that give purpose, meaning and value to life. Spirituality helps individuals to live at peace with themselves, to love God (for those who believe in God) and their neighbors, and to live in harmony with the environment. (p. 10)²

Thus, spirituality is generally considered as always involving, among other things:

- deep meaning and in particular a purpose in life³;
- higher and transcendental, as opposed to mundane, more self-serving aspirations⁴;
- love, truthfulness and wisdom that transcend ethnicities and cultures,
- a faith that good outcomes, including in particular the prospect of living in heaven, eternal bliss, eternal life, nirvana, etc., will befall those who practice spirituality.

Although religiosity and spirituality are often considered to be related, religions are generally more formal and usually if not always related to religious institutions such as churches or religious denominations. Still, citing Pargament (1997), Bond and Leung (2013) noted that “religion means different things to different people” (p. 23) and that “no single definition is likely to be completely adequate” (p. 24). But notwithstanding this messy aspect about religion, all the major religions of the world are known to have specific teachings that comprise (a) theological teachings, (b) rituals and (c) spiritual teachings. Whereas theological teachings and rituals vary from religion to religion, the commonality of spiritual teachings among religions are striking. In particular, all the major religions from Christianity to Islam to Hinduism to Buddhism teach about Love, Truthfulness, Faith and Practice. All the major religions ask us to be humble, especially before God and the spiritual masters that they revere, and to find meaning in life.

Ho (2020) proposes that ultimately finding meaning in life lies in spiritual growth, which is growing wiser — more in tune with life itself, growing freer, less subject to the bondage of one's weaknesses and then more at peace with oneself. (p. 1)⁵ Spiritual growth is a process of increasing transcendence: breaking out from the narrow self to embrace a life that is bigger than one's own, transcending the biases that humans are liable to, given

¹ Fisher (2009) offers a good discussion on diverse interpretations and the multiplicity of dimensions of spirituality.

² Although transcendence is not mentioned explicitly, it is implicit in loving God and loving one's neighbor, as transcendence is transcending from one's own self to connect with God and one's neighbors.

³ Snyder and Lopez (2006).

⁴ Stillman *et al.* (2012) found evidence that spiritual people are less likely to engage in conspicuous consumption or materialistic ways, which reflect their less self-serving concerns.

⁵ This strikes a common chord with Wong's definition of existential wellbeing. Wong's Faith-Hope-Love model stresses transcending suffering and finding inner peace and harmony as the key to inner peace. See Paul Wong: <http://www.drpaullwong.com/spiritual-existential-wellbeing/>.

one's limited life experiences to which all humans are inevitably subject to, transcending the names and labels that humans instinctively associate with various preconceptions without even thinking about them, transcending ethnic boundaries, cultural boundaries and religious boundaries to embrace an existence that humans aspire for.

Examples of spiritually developed personalities include Albert Schweitzer, Jiddu Krishnamurti, Mother Teresa and Thich Nhat Hanh, among others. Schweitzer was well known for his philosophy of "Reverence for Life", for which and for his years of medical service in Africa he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. His humanism transcends race, religion or nationality. Similarly, "Krishnamurti was concerned with all humanity and stated repeatedly that he held no nationality or belief and belonged to no particular group or culture. In the latter part of his life, he travelled mainly between the schools he had founded in India, Britain and the United States, which educate for the total understanding of man and the art of living. He stressed that only this profound understanding can create a new generation that will live in peace".⁶ Mother Teresa, another Nobel Peace Prize recipient, devoted her life to serving the poor and destitute around the world, though she was best known for her charitable work in India. Thich Nhat Hanh is well-known for his book *Living Buddha, Living Christ*, which teach spiritual practice transcending religious boundaries because spirituality is by definition transcendental.

A key study question in this study is whether spirituality can transcend religions. Our results suggest that there may not be anything mystical about spirituality, and that it is indeed possible to be spiritual — through a deep respect for life and sharing, without being religious. This was echoed by Pope Francis when he openly expressed that even atheists could go to heaven: "The Lord has redeemed all of us, all of us, with the Blood of Christ: all of us, not just Catholics".

2. Spiritual Growth as Progressive Transcendence

Love, Truthfulness, Faith and Practice can be roughly rewritten as Love, Insight (Wisdom), Fortitude (Resilience) and Engagement. These four (with the acronym "LIFE") are related and there is a rich literature in psychology on each of these.⁷ They mirror the concept of "Reverence for Life" propounded by Schweitzer. Economists define capital as "produced means of production". In the psychological context, mental capital can be defined as the formation and accumulation of mental habits which eventually become a person's second nature. Mental capital is a "stock" as distinct from "flow", and can be positive or negative, depending on whether those mental habits help or obstruct a person's development. When it has been formed, mental capital will contribute to the "production" of "mental goods" (positive emotions or affects) and "mental bads" (negative emotions or affects) much like physical capital contributes to the production of physical goods. Transcendence turns a person who has a large stock of negative mental capital into one who is able to see a bigger

⁶ <https://krishnamurticentre.org.uk/krishnamurti/>.

⁷ Examples are Fromm (1956) on Love; Baltes and Staudinger (2000) on Wisdom; PsyCentral, <https://psychcentral.com/lib/the-psychology-of-mental-toughness#1> on Fortitude; and Kelders *et al.* <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.00926/full> on Engagement.

picture, is more open-minded and accepts the lives of other humans as equally important and valuable. This way one accumulates spiritual capital.⁸

Love gives us a sense of purpose; Insight shows us how to love; Fortitude enables us to maintain hope and optimism; Engagement is putting the spiritual teachings into practice in our daily lives. Nurturing Love, Insight, Fortitude and Engagement is a process of habit formation, and the habits formed constitute emotional capital or mental capital,⁹ while nurturing Love, Insight, Fortitude and Engagement to a higher level of transcendence and connecting to all humanity represents a process of spiritual growth.

Zinnbauer *et al.* (1997) noted that while religiosity includes both individual and institutionalized components involving prescribed theology and rituals, spirituality is more akin to individual practice involving personal experiences of the transcendent. This means that spirituality must be entirely authentic. A “religious” person without personally and authentically going through spiritual growth does not really benefit from the religious teachings. In this regard, Thich Nhat Hanh had this to say:

The living teaching expressed by the lives of the Buddha and Jesus should always be the models for our practice. The sutras are not the living teachings of the Buddha. To receive the true teaching, we must emulate the life and work of the Buddha himself. The same is true of Christianity. The Gospels in their written or even oral form are not the living teaching of Jesus. The teachings must be practiced as they were lived by Jesus.¹⁰

Veselska *et al.* (2018) using a simplified eight-item spirituality questionnaire based on Gomez and Fisher (2003) and an index of religiosity based on the frequency of church attendance and self-rated importance of faith found that spirituality but not religiosity is associated with better health and higher life satisfaction among adolescents. This paper finds similar results that apply to the overall adult population using a large set of data from the World Value Survey and a novel set of variables to capture the essence of spirituality that is based on “reverence for Life”, namely Love, Insight, Fortitude and Engagement.

We argue that those who are well developed in Love, Insight, Fortitude and Engagement will have discovered purpose and meaning, (this covers the “*personal domain*” as discussed in Fisher, 1998), will have resolved the inter-personal relationships between the self and others (this covers the “*communal domain*”), will have found harmony with nature and the environment (thus covering the *environmental domain*), and, through forgetting the self and discovering the greatness of Life beyond the ego and living an engaged life wisely without distinction to ethnicity, culture, religion and the names and labels of the world

⁸There are different definitions of spiritual capital, but transcendence is often cited. Palmer and Wong (2013) defined it as “the individual and collective capacities generated through affirming and nurturing the intrinsic spiritual value of every human being.”

⁹Ho (2001), p. 24, first introduced the term mental capital. The term was popularized in a Foresight Report from the UK Government Office for Science (2008) which defines mental capital as “a person’s cognitive and emotional resources. It includes their cognitive ability, how flexible and efficient they are at learning, and their “emotional intelligence”, such as their social skills and resilience in the face of stress. It therefore conditions how well an individual is able to contribute effectively to society, and also to experience a high personal quality of life.”

¹⁰Living Buddha, Living Christ by Thich Nhat Hanh | Book Excerpt | Spirituality & Practice (spiritualityandpractice.com).

achieves transcendence and inner peace (the *transcendental domain*). Fisher (1998) argued that the four domains “cohere to determine a person’s overall or global spiritual well-being”. The personal domain and the communal domain relate to love: self-love and love for others; the environmental domain and the transcendental domain relate to Insight. Fortitude is just persevering with these attitudes, while Engagement is putting the four domains in everyday life. Thus Love, Insight, Fortitude and Engagement “cohere” to create authentically a spiritual person’s transcendental and existential wellbeing.

3. Method

3.1. The key hypotheses to be tested in this study

In line with the understanding that transcendence is a key aspect of spirituality and offers a prospect of a fuller life beyond one’s narrow ego, Oldnall states that “each individual has spiritual needs” (1996, p. 139), and that “human spirituality in a very real sense... unifies the whole person” (*ibid*, p. 140). It is notable that the Values in Action as proposed by Peterson and Seligman (2004) have been associated with spirituality in a recent paper (Niemiec *et al.*, 2020).

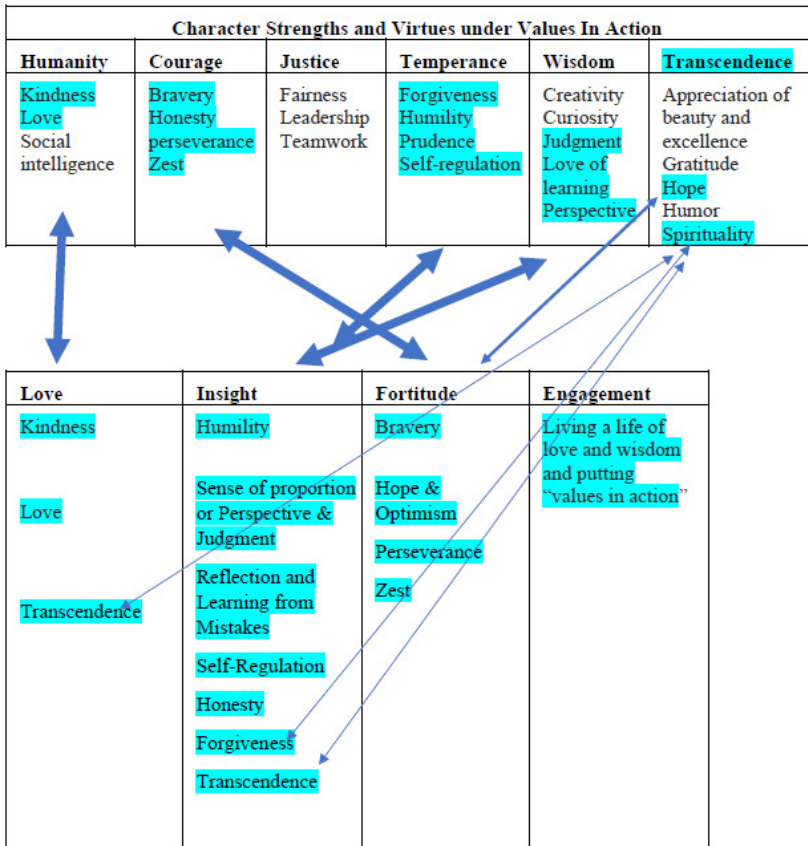
We can show that the Values In Action (VIA) framework aligns very well with Ho’s LIFE framework (Figure 1). The idea of Values in Action is living out the values in day-to-day life, which is the essence of Engagement. As shown in Figure 1, the overlaps between the two frameworks are striking. The only “character strength” that is not explicitly reflected in the LIFE framework is Justice. However, if LIFE is nurtured to a sufficient degree, then transcendence will eventually dissipate the self-centered ego, and a sense of fairness¹¹ will come about naturally as the person instinctively puts himself in the shoes of others.

Under the spirit of transcendence, “Spirituality carries no cultural, ethnic or religious labels. The only apt label in this context is human” (Ho, 2020, p. xii). Ho (2014) has further defined spiritual capital at the individual level is the “capacity to think beyond [oneself] and even to forget [oneself], simply devoting [one’s] life to making life a bounty rather than a burden for everyone”. Spiritual capital at the society level “refers to the interconnectedness of the human existence that awakens each individual to the common roots of humanity” (p. 34).

Taking this perspective of spirituality as a unifying force or the interconnectedness of the human existence and oneness with nature and life, which in essence is what transcendence means, it is in principle possible to divide any population into four categories:

- Spiritual and religious;
- Spiritual but not religious;
- Not spiritual but religious and finally:
- Not spiritual and not religious.

¹¹ Rawls (1985) proposed that justice is no different from a sense of fairness.



Note: The bi-direction arrows indicate the similarity or overlap between the two frameworks.

Figure 1. Commonality between Values in Action and LIFE

However, since there is progression in spiritual growth. Sharp distinction between spiritual and unspiritual people cannot be made. People can be more or less spiritual.¹² So the present study will test the following working hypotheses:

- That more spiritual people are happier (**H1**);
- Religious people tend to be happier mainly because religious people tend to be more spiritual (**H2**);
- That the essence of spirituality lies in Love, Insight, Fortitude and Engagement (**H3**);
- Church attendance tends to promote happiness primarily because of the social network this offers (**H4**).

¹² See also Fisher (2000). Some prefer to use the adjective “humanist”, but a humanist according to our definition is spiritual, depending on the degree of transcendence. See Pigliucci (2010) and Chirico and Gaggioli (2018). Ford et al. (2023) distinguished between “high spiritually grounded character”, “emergent spiritually grounded character”, “limited spiritually grounded character” and “low spiritually grounded character”.

Our study draws data from the World Values Survey (WVS). The WVS is a multinational survey aiming to investigate the values and beliefs of the public and to monitor changes in these values and beliefs through different waves of study. The first wave was 1981–1984. The latest is Wave 7 and covers 2017–2022. We initially used data covering Wave 5 and Wave 6, but found that Wave 6 data had omitted some key variables that are essential for the study. So we stick with Wave 5. We deem that the data that we use, though a bit dated, should not affect the validity of the tests that we are going to present.

3.1.1. *Participants*

Depending on the statistical model tested, our sample of participants ranges from 45,220 (**Model 3**) to 62,415 (**Model 0**), drawn, respectively, from 43 countries in **Model 3** and 52 countries in **Model 0**. Table 1 lays out the composition of the full sample and the subsamples in the various regressions. Because missing data become more serious as more variables are included, **Model 0** has the largest number of observations while **Model 3**, which has the largest number of explanatory variables, has the smallest number of observations. Table 2 lays out the key descriptive characteristics of the variables in each of the models tested. Note that the actual number of observations varies from model to model because they include different explanatory variables..

3.1.2. *Stepwise regressions*

This study uses data from the fifth wave of the WVS conducted during 2004–2008 involving 52 countries from around the world. For the purpose of this study, we follow the WVS and use the 10-point (1–10) scale for Total Life Satisfaction (TLS). The descriptive statistics of key variables included in the statistical equations are laid out in Table 3.

We adopt stepwise regressions, which we call **Model 0** and **Model 0a**, **Model 1**, **Model 2** and **Model 3**. In the progression we will include more and more variables. By comparing the change in the magnitude and the sign of the constant term and those of the coefficients on key variables, the nexus between spirituality and religiosity will gradually unfold.

Model 0 includes only socio-economic variables, religious denominations and country dummies. This is paired with **Model 0a** that adds one single variable about the importance of God to respondents (“*God_Important*”). We will ascertain how adding this single variable increases the explanatory power of the equation, and how this changes the coefficients on religious denomination dummies. Results are laid out in Tables 4 and 5.

Model 1 includes, in addition to socioeconomic and country dummies, all traditional spirituality-related variables including “*God_Important*”, as we include more explanatory variables, we expect the constant term to diminish, as the constant term represents the unexplained variations in the dependent variable TLS. Results are laid out in Table 6.

Model 2 includes, in addition to socioeconomic and country dummies, variables relating to the spiritual teachings of Love, Insight, Fortitude and Engagement respectively as capturing the essence of spirituality that is shared by all religions as well as the spiritual “nones”. Results are laid out in Table 7.

Table 1. Countries/Societies and the Samples in Statistical Models

| | Variables in Model 0: Only Socioeconomic Variables incl. Religious Affiliation | Variables in Model 0a: Model 0 + “God is Important” | Variables in Model 1: Model 0a + Traditional Spirituality Variables | Variables in Model 2: Model 0 + LIFE Variables | Variables in Model 3: Model 2 + Traditional LIFE Variables |
|--------------|--|---|--|--|---|
| Andorra | 946 | 941 | 934 | 936 | 925 |
| Australia | 1,157 | 1,143 | 1,147 | 1,119 | 1,090 |
| Brazil | 1,425 | 1,424 | 1,337 | 1,384 | 1,295 |
| Bulgaria | 863 | 834 | 791 | 765 | 705 |
| Burkina Faso | 1,040 | 1,032 | 964 | 879 | 824 |
| Canada | 1,714 | 1,703 | 1,687 | 1,679 | 1,640 |
| Chile | 911 | 879 | 844 | 835 | 775 |
| China | 1,326 | 1,225 | #N/A | 1,004 | #N/A |
| Cyprus | 952 | 952 | 950 | 936 | 932 |
| Egypt* | 2,929 | 2,927 | 2,780 | 2,880 | 2,738 |
| Ethiopia | 1,413 | 1,401 | 1,326 | 1,311 | 1,237 |
| Finland | 906 | 894 | 883 | 886 | 858 |
| France | 855 | 852 | #N/A | #N/A | #N/A |
| Georgia | 1,431 | 1,402 | 1,324 | 1,215 | 1,155 |
| Germany | 1,721 | 1,700 | 975 | 1,572 | 901 |
| Ghana | 1,373 | 1,365 | #N/A | 1,345 | #N/A |
| Hungary | 929 | 910 | 662 | 905 | 643 |
| India | 1,534 | 1,505 | 1,253 | 1,010 | 920 |
| Indonesia | 1,660 | 1,649 | 1,595 | 1,550 | 1,501 |
| Iran | 2,505 | 2,497 | 2,347 | #N/A | #N/A |
| Italy | 630 | 627 | 602 | #N/A | #N/A |
| Japan | 793 | 748 | 643 | 636 | 515 |
| Malaysia | 1,190 | 1,187 | 1,179 | 1,183 | 1,171 |
| Mali | 838 | 815 | 713 | 732 | 631 |
| Mexico | 1,349 | 1,349 | 1,316 | 1,305 | 1,266 |
| Moldova | 985 | 981 | 927 | 925 | 871 |
| Morocco | 1,153 | 1,150 | 1,114 | 991 | 957 |
| Netherlands | 648 | 641 | #N/A | #N/A | #N/A |
| New Zealand | 666 | 644 | 628 | #N/A | #N/A |
| Norway | 937 | 933 | 932 | 934 | 929 |
| Peru | 1,342 | 1,332 | 1,269 | 1,213 | 1,157 |
| Poland | 894 | 881 | 840 | 807 | 758 |
| Romania | 1,415 | 1,403 | 1,331 | 1,142 | 1,103 |
| Russia | 1,575 | 1,454 | #N/A | #N/A | #N/A |
| Rwanda | 1,043 | 1,041 | 1,034 | 967 | 958 |
| Serbia | 1,011 | 971 | 841 | 915 | 770 |
| Slovenia | 946 | 915 | 879 | 894 | 821 |
| South Africa | 2,729 | 2,718 | 2,681 | 2,628 | 2,554 |
| South Korea | 1,048 | 1,047 | 1,023 | 1,047 | 1,022 |

Table 1. (Continued)

| | Variables in Model 0: Only Socioeconomic Variables incl. Religious Affiliation | Variables in Model 0a: Model 0 + “God is Important” | Variables in Model 1: Model 0a + Traditional Spirituality Variables | Variables in Model 2: Model 0 + LIFE Variables | Variables in Model 3: Model 2 + Traditional LIFE Variables |
|---------------------|--|---|--|--|---|
| Spain | 1,061 | 1,045 | 1,009 | 993 | 942 |
| Sweden | 912 | 905 | 896 | 890 | 869 |
| Switzerland | 1,085 | 1,072 | 1,065 | 1,072 | 1,048 |
| Taiwan | 1,196 | 1,196 | 1,195 | 1,187 | 1,186 |
| Thailand | 1,429 | 1,429 | 1,415 | 1,413 | 1,397 |
| Trinidad and Tobago | 966 | 964 | 958 | 958 | 939 |
| Turkey | 1,280 | 1,274 | 1,230 | 1,089 | 1,042 |
| Ukraine | 875 | 831 | 753 | 755 | 645 |
| United Kingdom | 764 | 756 | #N/A | #N/A | #N/A |
| United States | 990 | 987 | 987 | 970 | 960 |
| Uruguay | 952 | 938 | 910 | 856 | 821 |
| Vietnam | 961 | 931 | 899 | 857 | 809 |
| Zambia | 1,164 | 1,151 | 1,056 | 1,024 | 941 |
| Sample size** | 62,415 (52) | 61,551 (52) | 52,125 (46) | 50,591 (45) | 45,220 (43) |

Notes: *Egypt is the excluded country among country dummies.

**Number in brackets refers to number of societies included in the model.

Model 3 includes, in addition to socioeconomic and country dummies, both the traditional spirituality and religiosity variables including *God_Important* and the LIFE framework variables. Results are laid out in Table 8. By comparing the coefficients and especially the changes in the constant term in each regression, we will draw interpretations about the nexus between religions and spirituality.

The traditional measures of spirituality framework of course also emphasize Love, Insight, Fortitude and Engagement. But what distinguishes formally religious persons is that they also believe in God, a supernatural being and Creator who is all just, and they also are affiliated with a religious denomination. An important question is whether formal religiosity contributes to subjective wellbeing once LIFE has been accounted for. This is why **Model 0** and **Model 0a** do not include the LIFE variables.

In our statistical tests, we will include, apart from socioeconomic variables, graduating extending to include traditional religion/spirituality variables and eventually also the LIFE mental capital variables. The traditional religion/spirituality variables include: “*Spirituality_Meaning*”, “*Spirituality_PrayMeditate*”, “*God_Important*”, “*Religious_Important*” and “*Religious_Attendance*”. While under the LIFE framework, under Love there are *Love_Family*, *Love_Friends* and *Love_Help*. These obviously relate to Fisher’s Communal Domain. Under Insight there are *Insight_Rich_Unimportant*, *Insight_Nature* and *Insight_Be_Myself*. *Insight_Rich_Unimportant* assesses the respondent’s

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Key Variables that Enter into Regressions in Full Sample

| | Total Valid Observations | Mean | Std. Deviation | Minimum | Maximum |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------|----------------|---------|---------|
| <i>Total Life_Satisfaction</i> | 83,018 | 6.6991 | 2.33667 | 1 | 10 |
| <i>Love_Family</i> | 80,662 | 9.6709 | 1.07112 | 1 | 10 |
| <i>Love_Friend</i> | 80,361 | 8.0263 | 2.1759 | 1 | 10 |
| <i>Love_Help</i> | 72,518 | 7.6957 | 2.03318 | 1 | 10 |
| <i>Insight_BeMe</i> | 70,613 | 8.088 | 1.89989 | 1 | 10 |
| <i>Insight_Nature</i> | 71,995 | 7.4242 | 2.16332 | 1 | 10 |
| <i>Insight_Rich_Unimportant</i> | 72,279 | 6.3458 | 2.7215 | 1 | 10 |
| <i>Fortitude_Faith</i> | 67,959 | 6.2524 | 2.918 | 1 | 10 |
| <i>Fortitude_Hardwork</i> | 76,915 | 6.7134 | 2.82891 | 1 | 10 |
| <i>Engagement_Creative</i> | 71,795 | 6.948 | 2.4135 | 1 | 10 |
| <i>Engagement_LifeGoal</i> | 70,629 | 7.9646 | 2.02444 | 1 | 10 |
| <i>Spiritual_Meaning</i> | 82,110 | 7.6892 | 2.57118 | 1 | 10 |
| <i>Spirituality_Pray-Meditate</i> | 69,529 | 0.766 | 0.4234 | 0 | 1 |
| <i>God_Important</i> | 81,990 | 7.7637 | 3.00566 | 1 | 10 |
| <i>Christian</i> | 82,966 | 0.4735 | 0.4993 | 0 | 1 |
| <i>Buddhist</i> | 82,966 | 0.0392 | 0.19417 | 0 | 1 |
| <i>Hindu</i> | 82,966 | 0.0233 | 0.1509 | 0 | 1 |
| <i>Jew</i> | 82,966 | 0.0017 | 0.04126 | 0 | 1 |
| <i>Muslim</i> | 82,966 | 0.1783 | 0.38274 | 0 | 1 |
| <i>Other Religions</i> | 82,966 | 0.0164 | 0.12714 | 0 | 1 |
| <i>Religious_Important</i> | 79,478 | 7.2446 | 3.169 | 1 | 10 |
| <i>Religious_Attendance</i> | 78,801 | 5.6294 | 3.2887 | 1 | 10 |
| <i>Active_in Community</i> | 78,293 | 0.4079 | 0.49144 | 0 | 1 |
| <i>Financial_Satisfaction</i> | 79,887 | 5.7689 | 2.4688 | 1 | 10 |
| <i>Income_Decile</i> | 76,800 | 4.5632 | 2.31179 | 1 | 10 |
| <i>Health</i> | 83,630 | 7.41 | 1.93397 | 1 | 10 |
| <i>Married</i> | 83,725 | 0.6327 | 0.48207 | 0 | 1 |
| <i>Divorced</i> | 83,725 | 0.0325 | 0.1773 | 0 | 1 |
| <i>Separated</i> | 83,725 | 0.0188 | 0.13567 | 0 | 1 |
| <i>Widowed</i> | 83,725 | 0.0613 | 0.2399 | 0 | 1 |
| <i>Education</i> | 83,412 | 5.2332 | 2.47125 | 1 | 9 |
| <i>Full time employee*</i> | 81,401 | 0.34 | 0.47372 | 0 | 1 |
| <i>Part time employee</i> | 81,401 | 0.0743 | 0.26232 | 0 | 1 |
| <i>Self employed</i> | 81,401 | 0.1229 | 0.32834 | 0 | 1 |
| <i>Retired/pensioned</i> | 81,401 | 0.1255 | 0.33132 | 0 | 1 |
| <i>Housewife</i> | 81,401 | 0.1463 | 0.35342 | 0 | 1 |
| <i>Student</i> | 81,401 | 0.0689 | 0.25325 | 0 | 1 |
| <i>Unemployed</i> | 81,401 | 0.099 | 0.29864 | 0 | 1 |
| <i>Female</i> | 83,878 | 0.5097 | 0.49991 | 0 | 1 |
| <i>age21_29</i> | 83,707 | 0.2152 | 0.41097 | 0 | 1 |
| <i>age30_49</i> | 83,707 | 0.3992 | 0.48973 | 0 | 1 |
| <i>age50_64</i> | 83,707 | 0.1925 | 0.39424 | 0 | 1 |

Table 2. (Continued)

| | Total Valid Observations | Mean | Std. Deviation | Minimum | Maximum |
|----------------|-----------------------------|--------|----------------|---------|---------|
| <i>age65up</i> | 83,707 | 0.1111 | 0.31423 | 0 | 1 |
| <i>Age</i> | 83,707 | 41.27 | 16.476 | 15 | 98 |

*Notes: Full time employee is the left-out categorical variable in all regressions. There is a category called “others” under employment status in the WVS survey. This category is excluded from this study because its nature is not clear. The actual number of observations varies from Model to Model because of the missing variable problem. Note also that we will not present the descriptive statistics for the sub-sample to save space.

understanding that money is only a means and is not the end of life and loosely relates to Fisher’s Transcendental Domain. *Insight_Be_Myself* relates to inner harmony and corresponds to Fisher’s Personal Domain. Finally, *Insight_Nature* assesses the respondents’ awareness about the importance of sustainability and living in harmony with nature and the environment and corresponds to Fisher’s Environmental Domain.

It is unfortunate that there is no question that directly relates to humility in the WVS survey. Humility is an important element of spirituality and wisdom. There are good reasons to regard *God_Important* as a proxy for Humility. But since *God_Important* is so crucial to most religions, this is deliberately left out in **Model 2** in an attempt to test the LIFE framework without any traditional religiosity variables. Insight or Wisdom has to do with a sense of proportion based on seeing the big picture and understanding the importance of realizing one’s own potential and being at peace with oneself and the environment (environmental and transcendental domains). Fortitude is much related to Love, which gives a purpose to struggling against all odds and a belief that one’s efforts will bear fruit. Engagement is living with a strong sense of purpose and being active living out one’s love and wisdom and being interested in things happening around one. Love, Insight, Fortitude and Engagement all have to do with waking up to a larger self and transcending instrumental concerns such as money. It is interesting to observe that our results indicate strongly that those who score high in these mental capitals appear to have found meaning in life.

4. Results

Model 0 includes only socio-economic variables including religious denominations. Results are laid out in Table 3. We note that the constant term is 1.766, which can be interpreted as what is unexplained by the explanatory variables listed. Given that the mean value of TLS is 6.77, we observe that even if there were complete fit for the socio-economic variables, 26.4% of the variance of the dependent variable remains unexplained. We may also note that of all religious denominations only Christianity and Other Religions carry statistically significant and positive coefficients.

Now we add a single variable, *God_Important*, to the list of explanatory variables in **Model 0**. We call this **Model 0a** (Table 4). Adjusted *R*-square rises slightly from 0.388 to

Table 3. Key Variables All from WVS

| | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|---|
| <i>TLS</i> | V22 How satisfied are you with your life (1) Most Dissatisfied (10) Most Satisfied | Scale 1–10 |
| <i>Spiritual_Meaning</i> | V184 Thinking about meaning and purpose of life (1) Often (2) Sometimes (3) Rarely (4) Never | Scale 1–4 converted to 1–10 and reversed. |
| <i>Spiritual_PrayMeditate</i> | V193 Moments of prayer, meditation... (1) Yes (2) No | Converted to dummy (1/0) |
| <i>Religious_Attendance</i> | V186 How often do you attend religious services (1) More than once a week (2) Once a week (3) Once a month (4) Only holy days (5) Once a year (6) Less often (7) Never | Scale 1–7 converted to 1–10 and reversed. |
| <i>Religious_Important</i> | V9 Religion important (1) Very important (2) Rather important (3) Not very important (4) Not at all important | Scale 1–4 converted to 1–10 and reversed. |
| <i>God_Important</i> | V192 How important is god in your life (1) Not at all important; (10) Very Important | Scale 1–10 |
| <i>Financial_Satisfaction</i> | V68 Satisfaction with the financial situation of household (1) Most Dissatisfied (10) Most satisfied | Scale 1–10 |

Table 3. (Continued)

| | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|--|
| Health | V11 State of health (subjective) (1) Very good (2) Good (3) Fair (4) Poor (5) Very poor | Scale 1–5 converted to 1–10 and reversed. |
| Income_Decile | V253 Scale of incomes (1) Lower step (2) second step (3) ... (9) Ninth step (10) Upper step | Scale 1–10 |
| Education | V238 Highest educational level attained (1) No formal education (2) Incomplete primary school ... (8) Some university-level education, without degree (9) University-level education, with degree | Scale 1–9 |
| Variable in statistical model | Variable in World Value Survey | Scale and explanatory note where appropriate |
| Love_Family | V4_Important in life: Family (1) Very important (2) Rather important (3) Not very important (4) Not at all important | Scale 1–4 converted to 1–10 and reversed. |
| Love_Friends | V5_Important in life: Friends (1) Very important (2) Rather important (3) Not very important (4) Not at all important | Scale 1–4 converted to 1–10 and reversed. |

Table 3. (Continued)

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| <i>Love_Help</i> | V74B It is important to help people living nearby; to care for their needs (1) Very much like me (2) Like me (3) Somewhat like me (4) A little like me (5) Not like me (6) Not at all like me | Scale 1–6 converted to 1–10 and reversed. |
| <i>Insight_Rich_Unimportant</i> | V81: Important to this person to be rich (1) Very much like me (2) Like me (3) Somewhat like me (4) A little like me (5) Not like me (6) Not at all like me | Scale 1–6; rescale to 1–10 (material wealth is only a means and not the ends) |
| <i>Insight_Nature</i> | V88: Important to this person looking after environment (1) Very much like me (2) Like me (3) Somewhat like me (4) A little like me (5) Not like me (6) Not at all like me | Reverse and rescale to 1–10 (sustainability is wisdom because it reflects ability to see the big picture and the long view) |
| <i>Insight_Be_Myself</i> | V65. I seek to be myself rather than to follow others. | Scale 1–5; reverse and rescale to 1–10 (reflects the understanding that being in charge of oneself is important) |
| <i>Fortitude_Hard_Work</i> | v120. In the long run, hard work brings better life — doesn't generally usually brings a better life | 1–10, need reversing |
| <i>Fortitude_Faith</i> | v. 122. 1 means “everything in life is determined by fate”, and 10 means that “people shape their fate themselves”. | 1–10, OK |

Table 3. (Continued)

| | | |
|--------------------------------|--|---|
| <i>Engagement_Creative</i> | “V80: It is important to this person to think up new ideas and be creative; to do things one's own way” (1) Very much like me (6) Not at all like me | Reverse and convert to 1–10 (engagement is a habit to be active and not passive; being creative is very active) |
| <i>Engagement-Goal in Life</i> | V67. I decide my goals in life by myself. | 1–4; reverse and convert to 1–10 |
| <i>Active_in_Community</i> | 1 if respondent is an active member in any of V24–V33 | Dummy. This can serve as one proxy for Engagement. But it is used as a control and appears in all equations. |

0.389, but the constant term that reflects what the explanatory variables do not explain is reduced significantly from 1.766 to 1.503 which is only 22.4% of the mean value of TLS (in this sample) of 6.7007. The coefficient on *God_Important* is highly significant. Except for *Other_Religions*, all religious denominations now carry a negative coefficient. Since the left-out group is people with no religious affiliations, we observe that the “nones” are generally happier than those with religious affiliations, once we control for the *God_Important* effect.

Next, we take away all the religious denomination dummies, and in their place add the traditional spirituality/religiosity variables (Table 6). Given the mean for TLS in this sample is 6.7234, the constant term of 1.304 still means that on average 19.4% of TLS cannot be explained by the explanatory variables included in the model.

Next, we test the alternative spirituality framework called LIFE (Table 7). We replace the traditional spirituality/religiosity variables with *Love_Family*, *Love_Friend*, *Love_Help*, *Insight_Nature*, *Insight_Rich_Unimportant*, *Insight_Be_Myself*, *Fortitude_Hardwork*, *Fortitude_Faith*, *Engagement_Creative* and *Engagement_Lifegoal*. We can see that all these “LIFE variables” carry coefficients that are both statistically significant and positive. The constant term diminishes to 0.149, which means only 2.2% on average of TLS (6.7404) cannot be explained by all the variables in the model. The drop from **Model 1** to **Model 2** is 17.2 percentage points!

Finally, we put both traditional spirituality/religiosity variables and the LIFE variables in the same model that we call **Model 3**. The regression results are laid out in Table 7. We can see that after both traditional spirituality/religiosity variables and LIFE variables are included, the constant term virtually diminishes to zero. Adjusted *R* square rises to 0.391. As we progressively move from **Model 0** to **Model 0a**, then to **Models 1, 2** and finally to **Model 3**, we observe a pattern: not only does the constant term that represents the unexplained component of total life satisfaction but also the mean of the dependent variable TLS in the increasingly narrower sample keeps rising,

Table 4. **Model 0:** Only Socio-economic Variables Including Religious Affiliation

| Dependent Var: TLS | Coef. | Std. Error | <i>t</i> | <i>p.</i> |
|-------------------------------|--------|--------------|----------|-----------|
| <i>(Constant)</i> | 1.766 | 0.072 | 24.376 | <0.001 |
| <i>Christian</i> | 0.064 | 0.022 | 2.853 | 0.004 |
| <i>Buddhist</i> | 0.005 | 0.056 | 0.092 | 0.927 |
| <i>Hindu</i> | 0.031 | 0.075 | 0.408 | 0.683 |
| <i>Jew</i> | -0.151 | 0.171 | -0.885 | 0.376 |
| <i>Muslim</i> | 0.044 | 0.042 | 1.034 | 0.301 |
| <i>Other Religions</i> | 0.155 | 0.06 | 2.601 | 0.009 |
| <i>Active_inCommunity</i> | 0.157 | 0.016 | 9.573 | <0.001 |
| <i>Financial_Satisfaction</i> | 0.366 | 0.003 | 105.561 | 0 |
| <i>Income_Decile</i> | 0.053 | 0.004 | 13.496 | <0.001 |
| <i>Health</i> | 0.242 | 0.004 | 57.355 | 0 |
| <i>Married</i> | 0.239 | 0.022 | 10.857 | <0.001 |
| <i>Divorced</i> | -0.002 | 0.043 | -0.043 | 0.966 |
| <i>Separated</i> | -0.018 | 0.057 | -0.315 | 0.753 |
| <i>Widowed</i> | 0.062 | 0.039 | 1.595 | 0.111 |
| <i>Education</i> | -0.004 | 0.004 | -1.043 | 0.297 |
| <i>Part time employee</i> | -0.048 | 0.03 | -1.569 | 0.117 |
| <i>Self employed</i> | -0.005 | 0.025 | -0.204 | 0.838 |
| <i>Retired/pensioned</i> | 0.084 | 0.032 | 2.661 | 0.008 |
| <i>Housewife</i> | 0.105 | 0.027 | 3.855 | <0.001 |
| <i>Student</i> | 0.078 | 0.037 | 2.11 | 0.035 |
| <i>Unemployed</i> | -0.135 | 0.028 | -4.874 | <0.001 |
| <i>Female</i> | 0.108 | 0.016 | 6.726 | <0.001 |
| <i>age21_29</i> | -0.038 | 0.034 | -1.124 | 0.261 |
| <i>age30_49</i> | -0.117 | 0.037 | -3.206 | 0.001 |
| <i>age50_64</i> | -0.064 | 0.04 | -1.596 | 0.11 |
| <i>age65up</i> | -0.008 | 0.048 | -0.169 | 0.866 |
| <i>R Square</i> | 0.389 | Observations | | 62,415 |
| <i>Adjusted R Sq</i> | 0.388 | <i>F</i> | | 514.872 |

Notes: Country dummies but one are included in all regressions but are not reported.
Mean of TLS in this sample = 6.6930.

from 6.693 in **Model 0** to 6.7007 in **Model 0a**, 6.7234 in **Model 1** and 6.7404 in **Model 2**, finally to 6.7663 in **Model 3**. Non-spiritual people are more likely not to respond to the questions related to spirituality, the sample retains relatively more spiritual people as the set of spirituality-related questions expands. Since spiritual people are generally happier, the average TLS also rises.

5. Discussions

From Table 8 an examination of the coefficients on traditional spirituality variables under **Model 1**, namely *Spirituality_Meaning*, *Spirituality_PrayerMeditate*, *God_Important*,

Table 5. **Model 0a** — Socio-economic Variables Plus God_Important

| Dependent Var: TLS | Coef. | Std. Error | <i>t</i> | <i>p.</i> |
|-------------------------------|--------|---------------------|----------|-----------|
| <i>(Constant)</i> | 1.503 | 0.076 | 19.712 | <0.001 |
| <i>God_Important</i> | 0.04 | 0.003 | 11.971 | <0.001 |
| <i>Christian</i> | -0.04 | 0.024 | -1.675 | 0.094 |
| <i>Buddhist</i> | -0.048 | 0.056 | -0.861 | 0.389 |
| <i>Hindu</i> | -0.055 | 0.076 | -0.73 | 0.465 |
| <i>Jew</i> | -0.194 | 0.174 | -1.115 | 0.265 |
| <i>Muslim</i> | -0.072 | 0.044 | -1.645 | 0.1 |
| <i>Other_Religions</i> | 0.041 | 0.061 | 0.679 | 0.497 |
| <i>Active_inCommunity</i> | 0.145 | 0.016 | 8.813 | <0.001 |
| <i>Financial_Satisfaction</i> | 0.363 | 0.003 | 104.206 | 0 |
| <i>Income_Decile</i> | 0.055 | 0.004 | 13.971 | <0.001 |
| <i>Health</i> | 0.243 | 0.004 | 57.355 | 0 |
| <i>Married</i> | 0.242 | 0.022 | 10.94 | <0.001 |
| <i>Divorced</i> | 0.005 | 0.044 | 0.106 | 0.916 |
| <i>Separated</i> | -0.018 | 0.057 | -0.312 | 0.755 |
| <i>Widowed</i> | 0.065 | 0.039 | 1.671 | 0.095 |
| <i>Education</i> | -0.004 | 0.004 | -1.06 | 0.289 |
| <i>Part time employee</i> | -0.051 | 0.031 | -1.681 | 0.093 |
| <i>Self employed</i> | -0.005 | 0.026 | -0.186 | 0.853 |
| <i>Retired/pensioned</i> | 0.066 | 0.032 | 2.078 | 0.038 |
| <i>Housewife</i> | 0.099 | 0.027 | 3.625 | <0.001 |
| <i>Student</i> | 0.079 | 0.037 | 2.144 | 0.032 |
| <i>Unemployed</i> | -0.143 | 0.028 | -5.125 | <0.001 |
| <i>Female</i> | 0.092 | 0.016 | 5.71 | <0.001 |
| <i>age21_29</i> | -0.044 | 0.034 | -1.284 | 0.199 |
| <i>age30_49</i> | -0.13 | 0.037 | -3.538 | <0.001 |
| <i>age50_64</i> | -0.077 | 0.04 | -1.933 | 0.053 |
| <i>age65Sup</i> | -0.022 | 0.048 | -0.459 | 0.646 |
| <i>R square</i> | 0.39 | No. of observations | | 61,551 |
| <i>Adjusted R Sq.</i> | 0.389 | <i>F</i> | | 503.109 |

Note: Mean of TLS in this sample is 6.7007.

Religious_Important, *Religious_Attendance*, we note that only *God_Important*, *Religious_Important*, *Religious_Attendance* carry positive and statistically significant coefficients. *Spirituality_Meaning* in **Model 1** does carry a positive coefficient but it is tiny and insignificant. Table 9 allows us to compare key parameters among the different models. First, we note that the constant term, which represents the variance in the dependent variable that is not explained in the model, progressively falls as more explanatory variables are added. *God_Important*, *Religious_Important*, and *Religious_Attendance* are the only traditional spirituality variable that continue to be statistically positive and significant, while all religious denominations became statistically insignificant after *God_Important*

Table 6. Testing Traditional Spirituality/Religiosity Variables (**Model 1**)

| <i>Dependent Var: TLS</i> | | Coef. | Std. Error | <i>t</i> | <i>p</i> |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------|--------------|----------|----------|
| <i>(Constant)</i> | | 1.304 | 0.076 | 17.069 | <0.001 |
| Religious and spirituality variables | <i>Spirituality_Meaning</i> | 0.004 | 0.003 | 1.308 | 0.191 |
| | <i>Spirituality_PrayMeditate</i> | -0.016 | 0.023 | -0.681 | 0.496 |
| | <i>God_Important</i> | 0.032 | 0.004 | 7.375 | <0.001 |
| | <i>Religious_Important</i> | 0.021 | 0.004 | 5.283 | <0.001 |
| Social economic variables | <i>Religious_Attendance</i> | 0.007 | 0.003 | 2.157 | 0.031 |
| | <i>Active_inCommunity</i> | 0.124 | 0.018 | 6.908 | <0.001 |
| | <i>Financial_Satisfaction</i> | 0.357 | 0.004 | 93.761 | 0 |
| | <i>Income_Decile</i> | 0.057 | 0.004 | 13.555 | <0.001 |
| | <i>Health</i> | 0.24 | 0.005 | 52.011 | 0 |
| | <i>Married</i> | 0.251 | 0.024 | 10.564 | <0.001 |
| | <i>Divorced</i> | 0.032 | 0.048 | 0.681 | 0.496 |
| | <i>Separated</i> | 0.011 | 0.061 | 0.172 | 0.864 |
| | <i>Widowed</i> | 0.053 | 0.042 | 1.249 | 0.212 |
| | <i>Education</i> | -0.006 | 0.004 | -1.586 | 0.113 |
| | <i>Part time employee</i> | -0.04 | 0.034 | -1.178 | 0.239 |
| | <i>Self employed</i> | 0.001 | 0.027 | 0.022 | 0.983 |
| | <i>Retired pensioned</i> | 0.06 | 0.034 | 1.737 | 0.082 |
| | <i>Housewife</i> | 0.084 | 0.029 | 2.862 | 0.004 |
| | <i>Student</i> | 0.082 | 0.039 | 2.073 | 0.038 |
| | <i>Unemployed</i> | -0.154 | 0.03 | -5.117 | <0.001 |
| <i>Female</i> | 0.073 | 0.018 | 4.121 | <0.001 | |
| <i>age21_29</i> | -0.065 | 0.037 | -1.782 | 0.075 | |
| <i>age30_49</i> | -0.137 | 0.04 | -3.463 | <0.001 | |
| <i>age50_64</i> | -0.08 | 0.043 | -1.859 | 0.063 | |
| <i>age65up</i> | -0.047 | 0.052 | -0.911 | 0.362 | |
| R square | | 0.393 | Observations | 52,125 | |
| Adjusted R Sq. | | 0.392 | <i>F</i> | 481.962 | |

Note: Mean of TLS in this sample = 6.7234.

was added (in **Model 0a**). Religious denomination variables are, for a good reason, dropped in **Model 1**, **Model 2**, and **Model 3**.

Table 9 shows that in **Model 3**, after the LIFE mental capital proxies are included, the coefficient on *Spirituality_Meaning* becomes negative and statistically significant. This suggests that those who are strong in LIFE find meaning, *while those who are lacking in LIFE are still seeking meaning and are less happy*. Moreover, all the LIFE mental capital proxy variables carry positive and statistically significant coefficients. Since all the LIFE variables as well as all the traditional spirituality variables (except *Spirituality_PrayMeditate*) are measured on a scale of 1–10, the sizes of the coefficients are comparable. We can see that almost all LIFE variables carry much bigger coefficients than the traditional spirituality

Table 7. Testing the LIFE Framework (**Model 2**)

| <i>Dependent Variable is TLS</i> | | Coef. | Std. Error | <i>t</i> | <i>p.</i> |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------|------------|----------|-----------|
| <i>(Constant)</i> | | 0.149 | 0.114 | 1.309 | 0.191 |
| LIFE variables | <i>Love_Family</i> | 0.065 | 0.008 | 8.104 | <0.001 |
| | <i>Love_Friend</i> | 0.025 | 0.004 | 6.429 | <0.001 |
| | <i>Love_Help</i> | 0.03 | 0.005 | 6.652 | <0.001 |
| | <i>Insight_Nature</i> | 0.012 | 0.004 | 2.923 | 0.003 |
| | <i>Insight_Rich_Unimportant</i> | 0.012 | 0.003 | 3.545 | <0.001 |
| | <i>Insight_Be_Myself</i> | 0.01 | 0.005 | 2.094 | 0.036 |
| | <i>Fortitude_Hardwork</i> | 0.015 | 0.003 | 4.902 | <0.001 |
| | <i>Fortitude_Faith</i> | 0.023 | 0.003 | 7.397 | <0.001 |
| | <i>Engagement_Creative</i> | 0.029 | 0.004 | 7.629 | <0.001 |
| | <i>Engagement_Lifegoal</i> | 0.017 | 0.004 | 3.811 | <0.001 |
| Socio-economic variables | <i>Active_inCommunity</i> | 0.118 | 0.018 | 6.536 | <0.001 |
| | <i>Financial_Satisfaction</i> | 0.353 | 0.004 | 91.84 | 0 |
| | <i>Income_Decile</i> | 0.057 | 0.004 | 13.096 | <0.001 |
| | <i>Health</i> | 0.226 | 0.005 | 48.091 | 0 |
| | <i>Married</i> | 2.12E-01 | 0.024 | 8.795 | <0.001 |
| | <i>Divorced</i> | 0.025 | 0.047 | 0.528 | 0.597 |
| | <i>Separated</i> | -0.016 | 0.061 | -0.269 | 0.788 |
| | <i>Widowed</i> | 0.068 | 0.043 | 1.571 | 0.116 |
| | <i>Education</i> | -0.015 | 0.004 | -3.645 | <0.001 |
| | <i>Part time employee</i> | -0.011 | 0.034 | -0.313 | 0.754 |
| | <i>Self employed</i> | 0.012 | 0.027 | 0.426 | 0.67 |
| | <i>Retired/pensioned</i> | 0.066 | 0.035 | 1.886 | 0.059 |
| | <i>Housewife</i> | 0.123 | 0.03 | 4.059 | <0.001 |
| | <i>Student</i> | 0.091 | 0.04 | 2.264 | 0.024 |
| | <i>Unemployed</i> | -0.119 | 0.03 | -3.939 | <0.001 |
| | <i>Female</i> | 0.088 | 0.018 | 5.002 | <0.001 |
| | <i>age21_29</i> | -0.028 | 0.038 | -0.738 | 0.46 |
| | <i>age30_49</i> | -0.094 | 0.041 | -2.314 | 0.021 |
| | <i>age50_64</i> | -0.041 | 0.044 | -0.921 | 0.357 |
| | <i>age65up</i> | 0.026 | 0.053 | 0.483 | 0.629 |
| <i>R square</i> | 0.392 | No. of observations | | 50,591 | |
| <i>Adjusted R sq.</i> | 0.391 | <i>F</i> | | 440.588 | |

Note: Mean of TLS in this sample is 6.7404.

variables. *Love_Family* carries a coefficient twice as big as that of *God_Important* (0.064 cf. 0.032, under **Model 3**).

In the psychology literature, spirituality is always associated with transcendence. Indeed transcendence is central to spirituality. Transcendence has many dimensions and can be in different degrees. It can be transcending the barrier between oneself and other people, the barrier between one's family and other families, transcending cultural boundaries,

Table 8. Putting LIFE and Traditional Spirituality/Religiosity Variables Together (**Model 3**)

| <i>Dependent Variable is TLS</i> | | Coef. | Standard Error | <i>t</i> | <i>p.</i> |
|--|----------------------------------|---------------------|----------------|----------|-----------|
| <i>(Constant)</i> | | -0.093 | 0.124 | -0.756 | 0.45 |
| LIFE variables | <i>Love_Family</i> | 0.064 | 0.009 | 7.353 | <0.001 |
| | <i>Love_Friend</i> | 0.026 | 0.004 | 6.201 | <0.001 |
| | <i>Love_Help</i> | 0.027 | 0.005 | 5.647 | <0.001 |
| | <i>Insight_Nature</i> | 0.013 | 0.004 | 2.962 | 0.003 |
| | <i>Insight_Rich_Unimportant</i> | 0.011 | 0.004 | 3.172 | 0.002 |
| | <i>Insight_Be_Myself</i> | 0.009 | 0.005 | 1.731 | 0.083 |
| | <i>Fortitude_Hardwork</i> | 0.012 | 0.003 | 3.912 | <0.001 |
| | <i>Fortitude_Faith</i> | 0.024 | 0.003 | 7.408 | <0.001 |
| | <i>Engagement_Creative</i> | 0.033 | 0.004 | 8.372 | <0.001 |
| | <i>Engagement_Lifegoal</i> | 0.013 | 0.005 | 2.921 | 0.003 |
| Religiosity and spirituality variables | <i>Spirituality_Meaning</i> | -0.01 | 0.004 | -2.9 | 0.004 |
| | <i>Spirituality_PrayMeditate</i> | -0.017 | 0.025 | -0.689 | 0.491 |
| | <i>God_Important</i> | 0.032 | 0.005 | 7.084 | <0.001 |
| | <i>Religious_Important</i> | 0.013 | 0.004 | 3.018 | 0.003 |
| | <i>Religious_Attendance</i> | 0.008 | 0.004 | 2.278 | 0.023 |
| Socio-economic variables | <i>Active_inCommunity</i> | 0.091 | 0.019 | 4.769 | <0.001 |
| | <i>Financial_Satisfaction</i> | 0.345 | 0.004 | 84.834 | 0 |
| | <i>Income_Decile</i> | 0.059 | 0.005 | 12.961 | <0.001 |
| | <i>Health</i> | 0.224 | 0.005 | 45.234 | 0 |
| | <i>Married</i> | 0.219 | 0.025 | 8.662 | <0.001 |
| | <i>Divorced</i> | 0.035 | 0.049 | 0.717 | 0.474 |
| | <i>Separated</i> | -0.003 | 0.064 | -0.049 | 0.961 |
| | <i>Widowed</i> | 0.073 | 0.045 | 1.63 | 0.103 |
| | <i>Education</i> | -0.017 | 0.004 | -3.938 | <0.001 |
| | <i>Part time employee</i> | -0.011 | 0.036 | -0.296 | 0.767 |
| | <i>Self employed</i> | 0.029 | 0.029 | 1.006 | 0.314 |
| | <i>Retired/pensioned</i> | 0.074 | 0.036 | 2.031 | 0.042 |
| | <i>Housewife</i> | 0.104 | 0.031 | 3.341 | <0.001 |
| | <i>Student</i> | 0.088 | 0.042 | 2.103 | 0.036 |
| | <i>Unemployed</i> | -0.147 | 0.032 | -4.589 | <0.001 |
| | <i>Female</i> | 0.064 | 0.019 | 3.42 | <0.001 |
| | <i>age21_29</i> | -0.047 | 0.04 | -1.178 | 0.239 |
| | <i>age30_49</i> | -0.127 | 0.043 | -2.984 | 0.003 |
| | <i>age50_64</i> | -0.086 | 0.046 | -1.848 | 0.065 |
| | <i>age65up</i> | -0.054 | 0.056 | -0.967 | 0.334 |
| <i>R square</i> | 0.399 | No. of observations | | 45,220 | |
| <i>Adjusted R Sq.</i> | 0.398 | <i>F</i> | | 388.686 | |

Note: Mean of TLS in this sample is 6.7663, the largest among all sub-samples.

Table 9. Summary Table with Key Coefficients for Testing Traditional Versus LIFE Spirituality Framework

| | Model 0 | Model 0a | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 |
|----------------------------------|--|------------------------|--|---------------------|--|
| | Only Socio-Economic Variables (52 countries) | Add God_Important Only | Traditional Religious/Spiritual Variables only | LIFE Variables only | Both Traditional and LIFE Variables Included |
| Sample size** | 62,415 (52) | 61,551 (52) | 52,125 (46) | 50,591 (45) | 45,220 (43) |
| Average of TLS in sub-sample | 6.693 | 6.7007 | 6.7234 | 6.7404 | 6.7663 |
| Constant term | 1.766 | 1.503 | 1.304 | 0.149 | -0.093 |
| Unexplained TLS (%) | 26.39 | 22.43 | 19.39 | 2.21 | -1.37 |
| <i>Spirituality_Meaning</i> | | | 0.004 | | -0.01 ** |
| <i>Spirituality_PrayMeditate</i> | | | -0.016 | | -0.017 |
| <i>God_Important</i> | | 0.04*** | 0.032*** | | 0.032*** |
| <i>Religious_Important</i> | | | 0.021*** | | 0.013*** |
| <i>Religious_Attendance</i> | | | 0.007** | | 0.008** |
| <i>Love_Family</i> | | | | 0.065*** | 0.064*** |
| <i>Love_Friend</i> | | | | 0.025*** | 0.026*** |
| <i>Love_Help</i> | | | | 0.03*** | 0.027*** |
| <i>Insight_Nature</i> | | | | 0.012*** | 0.013*** |
| <i>Insight_Rich_Unimportant</i> | | | | 0.012*** | 0.011*** |
| <i>Insight_Be_Myself</i> | | | | 0.01** | 0.009* |
| <i>Fortitude_Hardwork</i> | | | | 0.015*** | 0.012*** |
| <i>Fortitude_Faith</i> | | | | 0.023*** | 0.024*** |
| <i>Engagement_Creative</i> | | | | 0.029*** | 0.033*** |
| <i>Engagement_Lifegoal</i> | | | | 0.017*** | 0.013*** |

Note: Brackets in the sample size row indicate no. of countries in the subsample. * indicates significance at 10% level; ** indicates significance at 5% level; *** indicates significance at 1% level.

transcending ethnic boundaries, transcending religions and transcending labels and names.¹³ Maslow (1971) describes transcendence thus

Transcendence refers to the very highest and most inclusive or holistic levels of human consciousness, behaving and relating, as ends rather than means, to oneself, to significant others, to human beings in general, to other species, to nature and to the cosmos. (Maslow, 1971, p. 269)

Spirituality is about awakening, but awakening can be in different degrees. Love, Insight, Fortitude and Engagement can also be in different degrees. If well developed, one will become a very spiritual person. But most people are spiritual to some degree. Given that all LIFE variables as well as *God_Important* and *Religion_Important* carry positive significant coefficients, we can say that **Hypothesis 1**, namely, that more spiritual people are happier cannot be rejected.

The fact that once *God_Important* is added to **Model 0**, not one of the major religions carries a positive coefficient, strongly suggests that formal religions do not add to TLS other than the teaching that humans have limitations and that we all need to aspire to the values that God represents. All the great religions of the world teach about love and wisdom, and about fortitude and engagement. Our statistical results strongly support **Hypotheses 2** and **3** that the essence of spirituality lies in Love, Insight, Fortitude and Engagement which is grounded on transcending the narrow self and seeing life and nature and the cosmos in a holistic way. We may note that once the LIFE variables are included, in **Model 3**, the coefficient on *Religious_Important* has diminished from 0.021 to 0.013, representing a decline in excess of 38%. While still significant, the t statistic for the coefficient also dropped from 5.283 to 3.018. This suggests that the teaching about LIFE is a key reason why the religious think being religious is important.

Religious_Attendance carries a stable, small, but statistically significant positive coefficient. It actually increased from 0.007 to 0.008 after the LIFE variables are included, whereas adding the LIFE variables noticeably reduced the coefficient on *Religious_Important*. This is consistent with the hypothesis that church attendance promotes happiness primarily because of the social network this offers.

As indicated in Table 8, all the LIFE variables carry positive and always statistically significant coefficients. When they are included, the constant term, which generally represents the unexplained part in the statistical model, declines significantly. As mental and spiritual capital vitally important to human flourishing, they help procure meaning, inner peace and sense of self-actualization. When both traditional and LIFE variables are included, the constant term virtually declines to zero, suggesting that the LIFE variables and three key traditional spirituality variables including *God_Important*, *Religious_Important* and *Religious_Attendance* probably offer a rather adequate coverage of spiritual capital. The total contribution of the LIFE variables to TLS amounts to 1.85 points out of the mean value

¹³The Diamond Sutra, which is a Buddhist sacred text that recorded a dialogue between the Buddha and his disciples on wisdom, points out that labels and names are all mental constructs and are delusory.

of TLS at 6.7663. After adding the contributions of *God_Important*, *Religious_Important* and *Religious_Attendance*, as much as 2.244 points or 33.2% of TLS can be explained!

The results of this analysis support George Bernard Shaw's transcendental interpretation of religion as an understanding of life more than as faith to a theology (Pathak, 1985, p. 18). In addition, they corroborate with a recent finding by Holder *et al.* (2010) and another recent paper by Ford *et al.* (2023) which maintain that spirituality enhances happiness and human flourishing and that this is not necessarily related to formal religions.¹⁴ Similarly, to Shaw, instead of finding a religion that is "more true", there is a need for "redistilling the eternal spirit of religion" (Shaw, 1921, p. 59). As human civilization advances, there is an increasing need for distinguishing the theologies of religions from their spiritual teachings. It is the latter, not the former, that really counts. The theologies of religions are culturally based and have their historical origins. Spiritual teachings about Love, Insight, Fortitude and Engagement, on the other hand, are timeless and transcend cultures and ethnicities. Thus, "Shaw's creed... had to be, first, a faith to live by and, second, consistent with both the facts and logic. It must be real. ... The mystical part of Shaw's religion is its reason for existing; it is life and hope and purpose" (Baker, 2002, p. 14).

6. Conclusions

Fave *et al.* (2016) argued for the primacy of inner harmony and relational connectedness. Basic to inner harmony is inner peace, which ultimately has to be founded on wisdom and transcendence. Too much focus on the narrow self inevitably produces anxiety. In general, physiological needs are much easier satisfied than mental and spiritual needs. One needs to have the requisite mental and spiritual capital in order to procure mental goods and spiritual fulfilment. A sense of freedom from harm, freedom from worries, acceptance by one's peers and self-esteem (acceptance by oneself), love and self-actualization, all constitute "mental good needs". These higher order needs are essential to human flourishing, and they cannot be easily purchased with money as physical goods can. They need "mental capital" or the requisite mindset to obtain. This is why the major religions remain important to humanity: they all teach Love, Insight, Fortitude and Engagement. Ford *et al.* (2023) showed emphatically that "Individuals classified to the High Spiritually Grounded Character profile were the most likely to identify with a particular religious tradition (91%; $n = 123$)", report religion or spirituality as "highly important (55%; $n = 74$) and attend weekly religious services (50%; $n = 68$)" (p. 7).

Without spirituality, we are likely to mistake means for ends, and instrumental goals for final goals. Conspicuous consumption is not happiness, but to some people that is the way to gain recognition and a sense of achievement (an instrumental goal), and it is often the easier way, as real achievement not only requires effort but also wisdom. Making a lot of money is not happiness, but it often makes one feel good because it is sometimes taken as a symbol of success. All the great religions of the world teach that there is no need to make a

¹⁴Ford, Lipson and Miller did note that those classified to the High Spiritually Grounded Character profile were the most likely to identify with a particular religious tradition (91%; $n = 123$) and report religion or spirituality as "highly important (55%; $n = 74$) and attend weekly religious services (50%; $n = 68$)" (p. 7).

lot of money. Moving up the social or political hierarchy is not happiness, but again this may be taken as the mark of success.

As Fave *et al.* (2016) noted: “all religious and philosophical traditions identify the highest stage of human development with the transcendence from the individual self, by acknowledging its interconnection with a broader and more complex reality” (p. 19). When we talk about transcendence, we should understand that transcending the boundaries of religions is particularly important today. The great religions were all born in different cultural and historical contexts and so their theologies unavoidably are different. But fundamentalists do not realize that it is the spirituality teachings about transcendence that are important; theologies are not. Understanding the interconnectedness of the human existence and living a life that is connected to others takes wisdom and love, active engagement and fortitude and the capacity to transcend all boundaries, including the boundaries between religions.

The LIFE framework is also similar to the PERMA model of Seligman (2018). P as “positive emotion” directly results from living a life of Love (Relationships), Insight, Fortitude and Engagement. Both LIFE and PERMA include Engagement. LIFE offers Meaning and Achievement, as spiritual growth is indeed the greatest accomplishment that humans can get.

We can now conclude that more spiritual people are indeed happier (**H1**); that religious people indeed tend to be happier mainly because religious people tend to be more spiritual (**H2**); that the essence of spirituality and an important source of meaning lies in Love, Insight, Fortitude and Engagement (**H3**); and finally, that religious attendance does promote happiness, but the effect is rather small, and probably arises largely because of the social network this offers (**H4**). These results corroborate with a recent finding by Veselska *et al.* (2018) who conclude that spirituality but not religiosity is associated with better health and higher life satisfaction among adolescents. Our study shows that this result is true also for adults in general.

This study is based on Wave 5. It is unfortunate that some key variables used in the study have been dropped in later waves. It is hoped that other researchers will find more support for the thesis that all the great religions have the same and important spirituality teachings for humankind. A more enlightened attitude toward religions will help the cause of world peace.

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