Opinion

Photo of the Day | It's Thursday!



Students sit in lawn chairs at South Campus on Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2026. People have been enjoying the warm air before fall begins.
PHOTO BY MORGAN BLANCHARD, STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER / THE DAILY CAMPUS.

SPIRITUAL BUT NOT RELIGIOUS? IN DEFENSE OF PLURALISM.

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There's been a recent phenomenon among younger generations identifying as "spiritual but not religious." It is part of a broader cultural dissatisfaction with organized religion, particularly with Christianity.

Religions are typically based on oral or written traditions or stories that carry life lessons. They are repetitive, ritualistic and leave their practitioners with the feeling of belonging to something greater than themselves. Their purpose is to teach and unite. In other words, a religion is a grouping of similar outlooks on the metaphysical. The "metaphysical" is beyond what the human eye can perceive and has been the subject of much speculation. The study of the metaphysical is motivated by a need to organize the world into more digestible parts. In that same spirit (pun intended), spirituality is simply the belief in the existence of something metaphysical, or the Beyond.

The declining popularity of organized religion has left a hole in the spiritual and communal needs of young Americans. Religion is meant to provide structure and a guide on how to live. It is also very useful in developing a bond with a trustworthy community. Religion creates social and financial safety nets. Religion is supposed to provide its practitioners a group of people to rely on in times of crisis. It is a way to feel less alone in such a large universe and is a necessary comfort for many people.

Organized religion's recent failing is in the thing that defines it: organization. When there is too much structure in spirituality (which is the basis of religion), the hand that once felt guiding is suddenly looming. It becomes something impersonal and stiff — less of a frame of mind and more of a stringent set of rules.

With the rise of social media, individualism is at an all-time high. There is a constant struggle to balance the loneliness and need for connection and community with the need for personalization. This push-and-pull has negatively impacted many young Americans' views on organized religion.

The more vague and malleable "spirituality" has comfortably slotted into the power vacuum that organized religion has left behind. But is it really just a recent trend to be spiritual but not religious?

Being "spiritual but not religious" is a rebranding of pluralism. Pluralism is a philosophical framework that promotes the understanding of different religions. It seeks to see the usefulness and purpose of each religion. It is a movement that goes beyond simple coexistence between religions. Pluralism is a way to swap out the lens that you view the world through.

Pluralism has been around since the birth of religion. The Renaissance was a product of Greco-Roman paganism colliding with Christianity in an explosion of philosophy and art. Religions have always branched off from and borrowed from each other. Humans have always cherry-picked which aspects of religion seemed appealing to them. The more general idea of spirituality just gives a name to this phenomenon.



Art of person meditating. Spirituality has filled the space that organized religion used to fill for young Americans.
PHOTO COURTESY OF PICRYL.

It is natural to combine spiritual traditions. The decline of a singular uniting name for a religion does not mean that humanity is losing its faith. The modern idea of individualism has just caused the lines drawn between faiths to dissipate. One singular uniting state-sponsored religion is not enough for a multi-cultural world. With the rise of social media, young Americans are being exposed to all different kinds of ideas on the meaning of the metaphysical. In turn, they have become more open-minded and pluralist in recent years. But these ideas are not new, they are just more accessible.

Children will continue to try to summon "Bloody Mary," "Charlie-Charlie" or the next ghost that is brought into the collective consciousness. Ouija boards were a popular Christmas gift for a reason. Speaking of Christmas, the origin of the holiday itself is pluralist. What we think of as "Christmas" was a merging of the pagan holiday "Yule" and early Christian celebrations. The blurring of lines between spiritual ideas is a time-honored tradition.

So cherry-pick away; it's in your bones. If a spiritual idea is particularly inspiring, don't be afraid to absorb it into one of your pluralist worldviews. It is a natural progression of the human tendency to want to make the vastness of reality make sense. Just be sure to give credit to where the ideas came from.

ENGINEERING CAN BE DEFIANT

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With the University of Connecticut's STEM career fair taking place this week, the conversation around the moral and ethical implications of a career in engineering is becoming ever more relevant. As a discipline heavily involved with defense, AI and numerous other controversial and ethically questionable industries, engineering has garnered a reputation as a somewhat cold and unfeeling field of study.

Its role in the oversized influence of Big Tech in our society and the widening wealth divide that has resulted from it has caused many to view engineering as nothing more than a tool of the powerful and corrupt to maintain their preferred status quo. This reputation is not unearned. As an aspiring engineer myself, I've found that most career opportunities available to me are somehow related to these morally fraught industries either directly or indirectly.

Despite this tendency to align with the interests of oppression and injustice, I still firmly believe that engineering as a discipline can be an extremely potent force of defiance against those interests.



UConn students attend the fall career fair on Sept. 22, 2026 at the Student Union. The fair was an opportunity for students to meet potential employers and practice their networking skills.
PHOTO BY NORA MARIANO, STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER / THE DAILY CAMPUS.

This claim may seem strange given the abundance of examples to the contrary, but I believe that when the fundamental principles of engineering are examined directly, it can be seen for what it is: the pursuit of change.

While it can often be distorted by the valid discontent towards engineering-adjacent industries, the general definition of engineering remains the same: Engineering is the practice of applying scientific and mathematical principles to solve real world problems. The nature of this practice, whether defiant or oppressive, lies in how those problems are defined. More than anything, engineering is a tool, a powerful method of changing our everyday reality for better or for worse.

When injustice, inequity and harm to life are the problems engineers are tasked with solving, amazing advancements become possible. It is a pathway to break many of the bonds that reality has imposed on us and that we have imposed on ourselves. Through diligence and compassion, engineering has created medical advancements that defy some of the fundamental ideas of nature. Prosthetics, artificial organs and other devices have allowed those who were previously bound by biological limitations to supersede them.

Advancements in transportation and communication have connected people and communities that would have previously been inescapably separated. Through this spirit of ingenuity for the benefit of humanity, we have managed to break even the chains of gravity. Natural limitations which once seemed immutable have been overcome through engineering.

Unfortunately, the opposite can also be true. When problems are defined on the basis of personal interest and prejudice rather than universal compassion and respect for human dignity, engineering can serve to limit and oppress people. The same capacity to break bonds can also be used to build them.

The modern state of constant digital surveillance and influence was enabled by technologies engineered to process and disseminate massive amounts of data. The violent atrocities committed around the world are only made possible by advancements in military technology. Tragically, these applications of engineering have become the most prevalent in the modern era. Those with the wealth and power to define the direction of engineering are more interested in enriching themselves at the expense of others than in leveraging the massive potential of engineering as a humanitarian tool.

Engineering, like all disciplines, is vulnerable to the corrupt power structures that govern our society. The same force that allows humanity to defy the fundamental laws of nature, when forced to exist in an inequitable and apathetic environment, now serves to uphold and strengthen the unjust will of those in power. and strengthen the unjust will of those in power.

Nevertheless, I still have hope for the future of engineering. At its core, engineering is not an institution, a company or a person. It's a practice. The effect it has on the world and the problems it works to solve are not determined by some unfeeling autonomous force, but by those who practice it. Engineers ultimately hold the power to decide which problems they'll work to solve, which ideas they'll endeavor to defy and whose interests they'll advance.

The self-interested power structures that have corrupted the practice of engineering are only able to do so if those with the skills and passion to be engineers don't recognize the power they hold. As part of the next generation of engineers about to enter the workforce, I'd like to offer some advice to both my colleagues and to anyone at UConn who wants to make the world a better place: break the chains that deserve to be broken, solve the problems that need solving and most of all, be defiant. You have the power to do great and terrible things. Use it responsibly.