

Individual Psychology and the Study of Spirituality

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Abstract

The author first explores religion and spirituality by means of the presidential addresses of two prominent scholars—one in the area of the psychology of religion, the other in the field of spirituality. Reviewing the history of spirituality provides for differentiating between spirituality as personal transformative experience and spirituality as an academic discipline studying that experience. This review provides a segue for introducing Individual Psychology as a critical collaborator in the search for greater understanding of spirituality. The author presents Adler's psychological theory as a key component for understanding religion and spirituality in a holistic and dimensional manner. It demonstrates how religion and spirituality, as constituent aspects of humanity, can be understood without appeal to a dualistic supernatural reality. He proposes four specific criteria for measuring the degree of wellness exhibited by an individual or group's spiritual path.

Can spirituality be differentiated from religion as an object of study for psychologists? Should it? Are there measurable differences between the two concepts? The debate going on among psychologists of religion is both vigorous and pointed (Helminiak, 1996; Pargament, 1999; Pargament, Sullivan, Balzer, Van Haitsma, & Raymark, 1995; Spilka & McIntosh, 1996; Vande Kemp, 1996; Wulff, 1997). Neither psychologists nor theologians can agree on a comprehensive answer (Bechtle, 1985; Coleman, 1997; Schneiders, 1986; Williams, 1979).

Whether seen in a positive or negative light, the topics of religion and spirituality—and their interactions with psychology and psychotherapy—are of great importance today. The world, advancing as it is into a more *and* less harmonious global economy, remains torn by a number of ideological and regional conflicts (Huntington, 1996), each of which can also be characterized, perhaps more authentically, as religious conflicts (Küng, 1996). In this article, my intention is to encourage Adlerian practitioners to consider a thoughtful reengagement of Individual Psychology in the study of these important topics. The article represents an exercise in *critical collaboration* (Küng, 1987/1988). This specialized cooperation may be described as a reciprocal enterprise within which psychology acknowledges religious and spiritual responses as important, perhaps essential, human experiences while providing a responsible, ongoing critique of them; at the same time religion and spirituality as practiced by the individual and the community represent, for

psychology, sources of first-order information about human beings consciously engaged in their ultimate concerns (Emmons, 1999). The practitioner of Individual Psychology, as a critical collaborator then, provides a setting not only for understanding religiously and spiritually oriented persons, but also for understanding the world within which religionists orient themselves. Of special interest is the nondualistic approach of Individual Psychology that is compatible with that single reality within which both the religionist and psychologist take stock of the world.

Coincidentally, presidents of both the American Psychological Association's Psychology of Religion Division (#36), Kenneth Pargament, and the Society for the Study of Christian Spirituality, Sandra Schneiders, addressed aspects of the religion-spirituality debate in inaugural speeches for their 1998 terms. Consideration of their contributions goes a long way toward understanding the scope and seriousness of the matter for Individual Psychology.

Pargament (1999) acknowledged a *de facto* differentiation between religion and spirituality in academic discussion today. He noted that spirituality was often defined in contrast to religion, that religion tends to be seen as traditional and institutional and to be contrasted with more nontraditional and individual spirituality. Schneiders (1998), too, tacitly acknowledged the differentiation between the terms spirituality and religion. Her tack, however, was to acknowledge their relationship yet distinguish them by focusing on the varied applications of spirituality. She explored the concept of spirituality both as individual experience and as the academic discipline that studies that experience.

Differentiating Religion and Spirituality

Pargament's (1999) more immediate concern was the psychology of religion, focusing as it does on the contemporary changes in meanings of "religion" and "spirituality." He feared that as "the construct of religion is losing its richness, breadth, and potency," so too, the psychology of religion moves toward "greater boundary confusion" (pp. 14–15). He acknowledged this ongoing differentiation and cited statistical studies that document the separation of the concepts. However, he lamented the characterizations that have often been made to frame spirituality in a generally positive light and religion in an increasingly negative one. Such distinctions, he insisted, are not supported by the cited data. On the other hand, Pargament contended, spirituality is "becoming differentiated from religion as an individual expression that speaks to the greatest of our capacities" (p. 6).

Pargament (1999) saw potential dangers in considering spirituality as a construct separate from religion. Besides the concern over ungrounded studies, Pargament contended that if spirituality continues to be understood as an

“individual” phenomenon and opposed to religion as “institutional,” psychologists will tend to forget that the institution has a relationship with the individual and that the individual always operates from a social context. What is at risk, Pargament asserted, is “the opportunity to learn how people express their faiths within the context of their lives” (p. 9). Another danger of polarization is that of characterizing spirituality as “good”—oriented toward personal well being—and religion being characterized as “bad”—somehow being detrimental to human well being. Pargament objected that acceptance of such a dichotomy foreshortens appropriate studies of both phenomena. Simplistic dichotomizing ignores incidents that indicate that spiritual paths aimed at pursuing “the highest of goals” can also be used in a dysfunctional manner (e.g., Jonestown in Guyana, the Branch Davidians in Waco, Heaven’s Gate suicides). It can also overlook important critical studies about religion, such as how “some forms of organized religious life facilitate well-being whereas others impede it” (p. 10).

However, the most serious danger that Pargament (1999) believed should be avoided is that of “losing the sacred core” of the psychology of religion (p. 19). He was concerned that current definitions of spirituality include the search for various nonsacred goals such as wholeness, truth, community, meaning, and self. For him, this amount of diversity makes for unclear boundaries. As a result, psychology of religion is in danger of losing “what makes [it] unique” (p. 11). Without a sense of professional uniqueness, he argued, the discipline is without focus and set adrift. Thus, Pargament concluded that psychologists of religion could acknowledge this search to be the central function of religion by defining spirituality as “the search for the sacred” and thus make it a legitimate object of study (p. 12).

Spirituality as Transformative Experience

In her address, Schneiders (1998) wrestled with the differences between the lived experience of spirituality and the academic discipline in which it is studied. In this way, she acknowledged spirituality as both distinct from and related to religion. The study of the phenomenon of spirituality, which was Pargament’s concern, received a decisively different reading here. Her comprehension of spirituality was derived from research and in-depth dialogue which spanned Catholic and mainline Protestant theological communities—in the United States, Latin America, and Europe (see Schneiders, 1986, 1989). Among the important contributions Schneiders provided from her research is the historical contextualizing of spirituality and the building toward a consensual definition of the phenomenon.

Historical development of spirituality. Schneiders (1989) pointed out that “spirituality” is as ambiguous a term as “psychology.” Both words describe

fundamental dimensions of human being. Further, they describe “the lived experience which actualizes that dimension” as well as “the academic discipline which studies that experience” (p. 678). To try to grasp the complexity of the concept in a manageable fashion, she provided a historical survey of the term as it refers to personal experience—from its coining to the present.

The term “spirituality” was fashioned by St. Paul, the major contributor to Christian Scripture. He used *pneumatikos anthropos* or “spiritual person” to distinguish the believing Christian from *psychikos anthropos* or the “natural person.” The term was coined to get at the experience of the early Christians who underwent what they understood to be the influence of their God’s spirit. Thus, those so influenced could be distinguished from those who were not so influenced.

Paul’s definition was the understanding of “spiritual” and “spirituality” until the 12th century, when, with the philosophical development of scholasticism, spirituality came to mean being the opposite of matter and embodiment. In the 13th century, the distinction was made between spirituality and temporality. This juridical distinction allowed for contrasting ecclesiastical power to secular power. Only in the 17th century did the term come to designate the interior life of the Christian. But at this point, Schneiders (1989) observed, “the term often carried pejorative connotations” (p. 681). That is, spirituality was frequently associated with heretical forms of spiritual practice and opposed to a more sober and proper “devotion.”

By the 18th century, still retaining its reference to the interior life of Christian faith, spirituality was used to distinguish between the ordinary life of faith and the exemplary life of perfection. At this point, the position of spiritual director became important to one’s spiritual development. By the turn of the next century and into the 20th, spirituality was firmly established “as the practice of the interior life by those oriented to the life of perfection” (Schneiders, 1989, p. 681). Thereafter it has been possible to distinguish between “dogmatic” (or “theological”) and “anthropological” approaches to the understanding of spirituality. These terms are described later in more detail.

Defining spirituality. Another important contribution by Schneiders was that early on she suggested a flexible definition that is gaining acceptance in both psychological and theological literature. She (1986) suggested that spirituality is “*the experience of consciously striving to integrate one’s life in terms not of isolation and self-absorption, but of self-transcendence toward the ultimate value one perceives*” (p. 266; italics added). Though different from Pargament’s concise “search for the sacred,” there is a great deal in her original definition that commends itself to contemporary psychology. “Striving” emphasizes what Emmons and Crumpler (1999) considered “the growing goals revolution in psychology” (p. 18). The task of “integrating” one’s life

suggests both systemic and psychodynamic theory, perhaps along the lines of Jung and the task of individuation (e.g., 1912/1953). Issues of "isolation" and "self-absorption" imply an existentialist understanding and social psychology as the context for development of therapeutics (e.g., May, Angel & Ellenberger, 1958). Value perception is a concept frequently discussed within goals-oriented psychologies. The constructionist and narrative schools emphasize the importance of a person's developing values in his or her life around which he or she creates meaning (e.g., Berger, & Luckmann, 1966; Freedman & Combs, 1996; Kelly, 1955). Self-transcendence is a prominent theme within transpersonal psychologies today, for example, though adherents in other schools wrestle with it as well (e.g., Van Kaam, 1981).

Arguably, it is Individual Psychology that attends to all these characteristics in an intentionally congruent manner (as I argue later in this article.) So it is in some ways unfortunate that Schneiders (1998) felt it necessary to recast her original definition as, "the experience of conscious involvement in the project of life-integration through self-transcendence toward the ultimate value one perceives" (pp. 1, 3). She considered her modification a slight one—a reformulation that allowed for "the passive dimension of the spiritual life" (p. 12). Nevertheless, for Individual Psychology—more than the aforementioned psychologies—Schneiders's term, "conscious involvement," gets sufficiently at the primary agency of the human being. Still, given the richness of its implications, psychological research would operate better with Schneiders's earlier definition.

At the same time, I can appreciate the continual need to fine-tune such an important concept. Schneiders (1998) acknowledged that "the discourse on spirituality has become so widespread in our culture that it risks becoming a catch-all term for whatever anyone takes seriously" (p. 3). This observation set less easily with Pargament (1999), who believed that the psychology of religion was in danger of losing its way if virtually anything can be considered spiritual even if it lacks reference to the sacred (p. 11). Schneiders disagreed—with qualifications. She offered two considerations that help cast spirituality as a transformative experience within its broadest understanding, what might be called the exclusive-inclusive consideration and the hierarchical consideration.

Schneiders (1986, 1989) distinguished between theological or dogmatic approaches and anthropological approaches to spirituality. For those who approach it from a theological, *exclusive* understanding spirituality is understood as "the life derived from grace," a grace that originated in Christianity's God (1989, p. 682). Thus, spirituality can only apply to non-Christians by some extended analogy. By contrast, for those who approach it from the anthropological, *inclusive* understanding, spirituality is "the structure and dynamics of the human person as such" (p. 682). Within a broad range of

psychological theories, this spirituality would be understood as the self. The anthropological approach signals a turn from an interior consideration to a concern for the whole human person.

By *hierarchical*, Schneiders (1998) distinguished aspects of spirituality as the vertical and the horizontal. The vertical allows for distinguishing among spiritualities that claim theistic underpinnings (e.g., Christianity), those that are nontheistic (e.g., Buddhist and Confucian spiritualities), and those considered altogether secular (e.g., "ecological or feminist spiritualities," p. 8). The horizontal recognizes that each world religion embraces spiritualities that involve "focusing on a coherent tradition . . . [and] a particular creed, code, and cult" (p. 8).

Pargament (1999) seemed to prefer an exclusionary vertical approach to understanding spirituality. Schneiders (1998) seemed to adopt an inclusive horizontal approach. For her, Christian spirituality exists within the greater "mega-discipline of spirituality"; the group recognized as "specifically theistic religious spiritualities" (Schneiders, 1998, p. 8). She found "there is a growing consensus in recognizing that Christian spirituality is a subset of a broader category that is neither confined to nor defined by Christianity or even by religion" (Schneiders, 1989, p. 683).

Spirituality as an Academic Discipline

Having resolved the terminological difficulties surrounding the transformative experience, at least enough for a continuation of the dialogue, Schneiders delineated a number of aspects that comprise spirituality as an academic discipline. Two of these, its methodology and its subjective nature, are especially pertinent to psychological study of spirituality.

Methodology. According to Schneiders (1998), "Spirituality . . . is intrinsically and irreducibly interdisciplinary" (p. 3). This characteristic follows, she proposed, from the multifaceted nature of the transformative experience under consideration. "Every topic of study in this field," she observed, "requires that several disciplines be used together in a reciprocally interactive and not merely juxtaposed way throughout the process of investigation" (p. 3). Thus each discipline provides methods and perspectives that may differ from those of other disciplines. In analyzing the disciplines that interact, Schneiders categorized them broadly as "constitutive" disciplines and "problematic" disciplines.

Constitutive disciplines are the fundamental disciplines that, on the whole, "function as a background or frame of reference" (Schneiders, 1998, p. 6). Of necessity, they function "in relation to the subject matter precisely because they supply the positive data of . . . experience" (p. 3). In Schneiders's field of

Christian spirituality, these disciplines primarily include biblical study, Christian history, and theology. For Schneiders, Judeo-Christian scripture constitutes “divine self-revelation” and history provides the “lived human response to revelation” (p. 4). Together these “poles” provide first-order “positive data” of the spirituality enterprise. By contrast, theology provides second-order reflection “on one or both [poles] or the relationship between them” (p. 4).

Theology is not to be understood as a secondary player in this account. Schneiders held that its position is indispensable in the study of Christian spiritual experience. “It is primarily an analytical and critical tool, among other tools, for the understanding and criticism of spirituality phenomena” (p. 4). As such, it also functions more as a problematic discipline.

Problematic disciplines are those disciplines “which are called into play by the problematic of the particular object of research” (Schneiders, 1998, p. 5). For instance,

Suppose the researcher has focused on the spirituality of the 16th-century Carmelite mystic and reformer, Teresa of Avila. If the research problem is finally defined as the role of the humanity of Jesus in Teresa’s spirituality, theology, which from another standpoint is one of the *constitutive* disciplines, would be the primary *problematic* discipline If the issue is the role of achievement and self-esteem in Teresa’s spirituality, *developmental psychology* and/or *feminist theory* might be the problematic discipline(s). (Schneiders, 1998, p. 5; italics added)

Thus, for any given project, reciprocal interaction among disciplines is a must. And Schneiders’s writings are replete with references to psychology and the role it can play as a “problematic discipline.” For spirituality projects wholly or partially outside of Christianity *per se*, similar interactivity among disciplines would be expected. Constitutive and problematic disciplines would interact in a critically collaborative manner as they seek to understand the transformative experiences in question. The constitutive disciplines would include those that deal with the source(s) of revelation (whether perceived as divine or not), the historical presentation of the experience, and disciplines which intentionally reflect on the revelation and experience under examination. Psychology, sociology, literary criticism, anthropology, philology, and the like remain the list from which problematic disciplines would be determined—based on the particular needs of the research project and the problem being investigated.

Subjectivity. Schneiders (1998) readily admitted there are difficulties in the formation of an academic discipline that does not make supported claims about its scientific objectivity, a concern well known to psychology (e.g., Bevan, 1991; Koch, 1981). Spirituality is no exception. It is especially vulnerable because, Schneiders noted, scholars in this area usually approach

spirituality with “real, intensely personal questions” that have implications for the scholars’ lives. Her terminology for this inherent subjectivity, is the *self-implicating* nature of spirituality (p. 9).

This self-implication, admittedly, affects the research generated directly, but not necessarily always in a negative way, Schneiders (1998) asserted. She conceded that it is difficult to get beyond “a fixation” on an individual’s own religious experience and into the “public forum of intersubjectively available data . . . and mutual criticism” (p. 9). But spirituality is not alone in this challenge given a contemporary regard of knowledge. Acknowledging the postmodern critique about scientific knowledge (Kuhn, 1970; Lakatos, 1978; Popper, 1959/1968), Schneiders contended, “there is no presuppositionless, nonperspectival knowing mind that conforms to a free-standing object known in its totality and without affecting it” (p. 10). Nonetheless, she insisted that the researcher must somehow gain “methodologically valid access to subjective data without denaturing the [spiritual] experience” (p. 9). Thus, besides guarding *against* “skewing one’s research . . . by a slanted formulation of the questions, methodological manipulation, [and] a selective interpretation of result” (p. 9), the scholar of spirituality may subsequently bring “a passionate honesty in the search for the truth no matter where that might lead” (p. 9).

This balanced approach is not a simple task, Schneiders (1998) admitted. Nonetheless, she insisted that spirituality as an academic discipline affirms the critical ideals of modern scholarship. Such criticisms “need to be seriously engaged if spirituality is to find its niche in the academy as a self-respecting and respected partner in the search for knowledge and wisdom” (p. 9). Still, this critical engagement is not the same as adhering to mistaken modernist ideals of scientific objectivity: “The challenge to the Enlightenment subject-object dichotomy, its ideals of methodological purity, and its confidence in the mathematical certitude of research results,” Schneiders reiterated, “is characteristic of the postmodern sensibility” emerging today (p. 10).

Schneiders (1998) urged retaining the critical ideal of modernity and applying it to the postmodern situation as it affects spirituality. If spirituality develops at all, she contended, it will be in the context of postmodernity. Schneiders acknowledged the benefits of deconstructionist postmodernism, but found greater utility in constructive postmodernism. Schneiders suggested several characteristics of constructive postmodernism that constitute a receptive intellectual climate for spirituality as an academic discipline. These characteristics included,

[It] is willing to admit, even embrace, the superiority of holistic approaches . . . that reject the matter-spirit, nature-culture, subject-object dichotomies. . . . It recognizes the transcendent dimension of human experience as constitutive of personhood, rather than illusory, and as susceptible of respectful investigation

that can be validated even if not proved. It acknowledges the integration of the human into a universe that is not dead matter but living organism . . . and its ideal of understanding is less control, prediction, and domination than mutuality and relationship in wholeness. (p. 10)

Thus, Schneiders (1998) effectively differentiated the study of spirituality. She maintained that identifying the academic discipline provides the precision for studying the transformative experience. As a scholarly discipline, spirituality is intended to explain spiritual experience "as it actually occurs, as it actually transforms its subject . . . toward self-transcending life-integration" (p. 3). An immediate benefit of an approach that can distinguish spirituality from religion *without* severing the relationship is the segue it provides for psychology's analysis. Thus, Schneiders's appeal to postmodern, holistic sensibilities is especially pertinent to the contribution of Individual Psychology.

Individual Psychology as Critical Collaborator

Individual Psychologists are not newcomers to considering religion and spirituality as accessible to psychology. Spirituality as a life task is a frequently stated if untried theoretical proposition (Mosak & Dreikurs, 1967/2000). A full range of religions has been observed from the perspective of Individual Psychology in North American literature. Authors have compared Adler's approach to Confucianism (McGee, Huber, & Carter, 1983), Buddhism (Croake & Rusk, 1980; Leak, Gardner, & Pounds, 1992), Judaism (Kaplan & Schoeneberg, 1987; Weiss-Rosmarin, 1958/1990), and Native American religions (Kawulich & Curlette, 1998; Roberts, Harper, Tuttle-Eagle Bull, & Heideman-Provost, 1995/1998). Some Baha'i contend that Individual Psychology coincides with a number of its tenets (Blumenthal, 1987), as do some Rosicrucians (Eriksson, 1992). Christianity appears most frequently in the literature (e.g., Huber, 1986; Savage, 1998) from perspectives representative of both Catholicism (Merler, 1998; Newlon & Mansager, 1986; Saba, 1983) and Protestantism (Gregerson & Nelson, 1998; Watts, 1992). The most common analytic tool employed by Adlerians is applying a measure of *Gemeinschaftsgefühl* (community feeling) in one way or another (Croake & Rusk, 1980; Eriksson, 1992; Huber, 1986; Leak, 1992; Leak et al., 1992; McGee et al., 1983; Roberts et al., 1998; Saba, 1983; Savage, 1998; Watts, 1992).

However, few of these authors addressed spirituality *per se*. Given the recent development of spirituality as an academic concern, this omission is understandable. So, to explore more fully the implications of Individual Psychology for the study of spirituality, Schneiders's 1986 definition is used as a baseline: "the experience of consciously *striving* to *integrate* one's life in terms

not of isolation and self-absorption, but of *self-transcendence* toward the *ultimate value* one perceives" (p. 266; italics added). Given Schneiders's call for interdisciplinary study, Individual Psychology—in critical collaboration—can assume a role as problematic discipline in the discussion. This assumption is applied by reviewing each of the four primary components of the definition—*striving*, *integration*, *self-transcendence*, and *ultimate value*. Below, I develop these components as criteria for spiritual wellness from the perspective of Individual Psychology. Holism as an aspect of the integration component is addressed among these, but it should be noted beforehand that all the components are interrelated and are divided out here for purposes of clarity and discussion only.

Striving. Human striving is not only a periodic, conscious activity, by means of which the individual seeks after a current, temporary goal. The Individual Psychologist understands striving to be the essence of life, the very activity of living. Movement constitutes life, growth toward an end state. The end state in this sense cannot always be identified before hand, but it also embraces a goal, something sought as if it exists, whether or not it can be objectively identified or considered real by agreed on standards.

If striving is the primary movement of humanity, what is it striving after? Humans strive for perfection, and, once they know the way, "for an ideal community" (Adler as cited in Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1964, p. 283) in which each individual has a place of belonging. People move unceasingly from a position that is interpreted as inadequate—a "felt minus"—to a position of adequacy, or a "fictional plus." This movement is something people experience daily in mundane events such as feeling hungry and seeking satiation or drifting into inattentiveness and being called back to alertness. The minus is tantamount to desire; the plus has to do with satisfaction, completion, or perfection. But the plus also embraces that striving which a given human designates as an issue of ultimate concern, final goal, that person's subjectively understood "eternal destiny." Adler (cited in Ansbacher & Ansbacher) contended that the individual, "as an ever-striving being could not be like God." Therefore, he or she posited a being free of striving; a "God, who is eternally complete, who directs the stars, who is the master of fates, who elevates man from his lowliness to Himself, who speaks from the cosmos to every single human soul" (p. 275).

Because the human is always socially embedded, "completion" involves seeking out connection and belonging to the greater community—to everybody, everything—to the perfect society. It is this *ultimate* aspect of normal human striving (addressed in a separate section below) that points to one's spiritual capacity. In this sense, ultimate striving is similar to the social dimension of striving to belong. Adler (cited in Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1964) insisted that one's ideal interest in society "comes to life only when it proves itself valuable *sub specie aeternitatis* for the welfare of humanity" (p. 295). It

is from this perspective that Individual Psychology is in a position to contribute criteria for determining which forms of spirituality facilitate wellness and which impede it (Pargament, 1999). That is, a *first criterion* is apparent in relation to this component of spirituality. One can measure the benefit of an individual's striving within present-day society by considering to what degree the striving after one's ultimate concerns manifests as cooperation on the communally useful, contributing side of life rather than as non-cooperation on the self-serving side of life.

Integration. Individual Psychology operates differently in terms of integration than other self and psychodynamic theories. Where most theories propose integration to be a somewhat conscious activity involved in the maturing of the individual, the Individual Psychologist accepts that a certain level of integration is fundamental to being human. Rather than trying to draw together disparate aspects of a person's life *into* a unified maturation process, Individual Psychology recognizes that a person is *already* unified. It is discovering or recognizing the unifying goal on a conscious level that is, for Individual Psychology, the difficult task of maturing. The theoretical component within Individual Psychology that accounts for an integrated style of living is the concept of holism. This holistic understanding is a major contribution of Individual Psychology to the understanding of personality and potentially of spirituality. It can help understand the movement of the spiritual person whether that person adheres to theistic beliefs or not.

Holism is the philosophical attempt at understanding the complexity of life without reducing it to opposites. It is not original to Adler, but something he adopted from Smuts (1926). Holism is not the forced juxtaposition of separate things, in the sense of body and mind being related. Rather, it is a dynamic interconnection of the human person that also goes beyond the individual. It describes a process that organizes toward greater and greater wholes—like the living cells that constitute organs and the organs that together constitute the body. That is, humans are not composites of anything—at least by the standards of Individual Psychology—but whole living organisms, part of planet Earth, which is part of the greater cosmos. When the whole human person is fully functioning, the Individual Psychology practitioner speaks of wellness.

At a very early age the developing child uses dualistic constructs (e.g., right-wrong, failure-success) as orientation devices focused on immediate and long-range goals. Through a hit-and-miss process, the child eventually learns the behaviors that help accomplish immediate aims. These aims become interrelated as they are worked out within the person's biased apperceptive schema, and thus that person's original integration, the development of a unified approach to life, takes place.

During the same developmental period that children are dealing with pre-operational ways of thinking—prior to age 5—their first god-concepts begin to take shape. This dualistic thinking in a *nonreligious* sense appears in such pair-

ings as black-white, up-down, good-bad, right-wrong, love-hate, help-hinder, and reward-punishment. However, operational thinking only comes later. By early adolescence, the child becomes capable of abstract thinking and being able to form and reformulate an idea without believing it *actually* exists as it is conceived. But coming around the age of 12, a great many years have passed during which time the god-concept is reified and reinforced before actually being challenged by abstractly thinking “larger” than a 5 year-old’s god-concept. The early concept leaves an understandably heavy imprint on the individual’s religious content and spiritual processing of life.

Although antithetical thinking originates in childhood, it is used for orientation purposes throughout life. Many dualistic pairs have religious connotations, including sinful-saved, light-dark, good-bad, mind-body, death-resurrection, heaven-hell, and natural-supernatural. While such dichotomizing may reflect spirituality’s roots in pre-operational thinking, such antithetical aspects of religion and spirituality may be further reinforced because of their orientation toward ultimate, final, polar ends of the individual’s goal. Too often adults forget to rethink antithetical constructs in a more abstract way, paying allegiance to earlier ways of thinking and continually confusing them as directly correlated to reality. It is an insight of Individual Psychology that strict adherence to such fictive orientation devices constitutes a lowered measure of relative wellness. It is by moving away from such dualistic, either-or thinking and into a dialectical, both-and mode, that a person accepts that there is more to reality than his or her own experiences and imaginings. The ability to surrender and revise a viewpoint as more reliable data becomes available constitutes a measure of greater wellness. Thus, a *second criterion* for evaluating spirituality from the psychological perspective becomes evident: a determination of the degree to which a person’s spirituality is closed, judgmental, and prejudiced rather than open, tolerant, and impartial.

Self-transcendence. Looking for something “out there” in terms of transcendence is no longer a viable alternative for many contemporary people. But Adler never hesitated to think in terms of something beyond the individual. For him, the person quite naturally reached beyond the known to posit and test new ideas about the great unknown. This reaching is the path of all human knowledge (Popper, 1959/1968). Humanity is not the whole thing; neither is it disconnected from all that is. Conceiving of transcendence as “out there” potentially disconnects humanity from the very process of transcendence. Adler understood even the ends of the universe as connected to and part of the greater whole—of which humans are part:

If [the individual] can be a good friend to all . . . and contribute to them by useful work and a happy marriage, he will never feel inferior to others or defeated by them. He will feel . . . at home in the universe. . . . He will feel, “This world is my world. I must act and organize, not wait and expect.” He will be

wholly sure that the present time is only one time in . . . history . . . and that he belongs to the whole human process—past, present and future. (Adler, 1931/1980, p. 262)

Schneiders (1986) highlighted self-transcendence in the contexts of *neither* isolation, *nor* self-absorption; *neither* not-centered, *nor* self-centered; *neither* no-meaning, *nor* only *my* meaning. Rather, people have meaning in their social embeddedness. The person's individual meaning has a share in the common sense. Adler (cited in Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1964) contended that reason "is the integration with the social demands of our life and the resulting insight in their social relatedness" (p. 290). He insisted that the idea of the self-bounded person is an artifact, that is, a contrivance, a mistaken idea of being human: Being human is social being. Each individual is indivisibly enmeshed in a social world. Transcendence, then, is first and foremost the movement from an incorrectly perceived *Ichgebundenheit* (ego-boundedness) to a more accurately understood *Gemeinschaftsgefühl* (community feeling).

And so a *third criterion* against which to measure a person's spirituality has to do with his or her perception of being connected beyond himself or herself, that is, being part of and contributing to the greater community. The degree to which the individual's spirituality leads away from the isolation and self-absorption of acquiescing in the face of life's challenges and toward the greater community is, again, a measurement of that person's relative wellness.

Ultimate value. How people define their personal goals of perfection is constitutive of their style of living: It is the endpoint toward which their life line is guiding them, sometimes clearly and sometimes not so clearly. Nonetheless, people live and move *toward* what they value—always in regard to immediate values, but also toward what they perceive as ultimate value.

For many, Adler admitted, God represents their ultimate values. For Adler (cited in Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1964), this *idea* of God represents a "concretization of the idea of perfection, the highest image of greatness and superiority" (p. 275). Even more, Adler wrote that having a goal "signifies life" (p. 277)—life that is experienced in the very striving after that goal—as well as in the innumerable immediate goals which make up the individual's notion of reality. Adler contended that this striving "always flows from the insecurity, the constant inferiority feeling of needy mankind" (p. 277). The person—"an ever-striving being"—is aware that he or she cannot experience such perfection and instead strives "to attain something of the strengthening grace and the gracious strength of the divine goal" (p. 277). Adler guessed that it took an immeasurable amount of time to arrive at that conceptualization of God as highest good, as safety and protection of the *group*. But, significantly, it was in protecting the group that the conceptualization of God also

became protection for the *individual*. God became a people's connection. A common god-concept aims beliefs at a unified, common goal.

But is a person's god-concept *only* an idea? Adler (cited in Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1964) was quite clear that from the perspective of Individual Psychology, God *is* an idea and "a gift of faith" (p. 277). That is, God is at *least* an idea, inasmuch as humans cannot conceive of a god without some mental image or conceptualization. But Individual Psychology "cannot banish God from the world" (p. 306). So in this sense Adler's formulation says nothing of some greater reality but points to the human psychic process of fictitiously conceptualizing a deity.

Fictions are creations that make sense to a person by making sense of the world (Vaihinger, 1911/1935). Thus, the fictive formulation of a person's ultimate value does *not* imply falseness, but it *is* a function that is both useful *and* useless, integrating *and* antithetical, self-transcending *and* self-binding depending on how the person uses the formulation. It is understandable, if ironic, that human concepts of *divinity* can help *and* hinder a person's *humanization*.

Adler's use of fictions in regard to ultimate value, then, present a *fourth criterion* for evaluating the wellness of a person's spirituality. The Individual Psychologist does *not*, however, judge in terms of truth or falsehood. Individual Psychology is not designed to judge religious dogma, Adler insisted; practitioners "must leave Christian guidance to those qualified for it" (cited in Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1964, p. 306). Rather, an individual's ultimate value is a criterion of judging his or her spirituality in terms of its ratifying the other criteria. The measure of a person's ultimate value is itself a meta-criterion—to the degree that his or her highest value encourages useful striving, to the degree that it encourages integrating open-mindedness, to the degree that it encourages self-transcendence toward greater community interest—to that degree his or her highest value is a valid criterion for measuring wellness.

Conclusion

I have reviewed the discussion about whether psychology can legitimately study spirituality (Pargament, 1999) as well as the invitation by the scholars of spirituality that psychology be active in the interdisciplinary undertaking involved (Schneiders, 1998). I then offered specific examples of how Individual Psychology interfaces with the major components of spirituality. These have led to tentative findings in need of exploration.

Spirituality as human phenomenon. As defined by the scholars of that discipline, spirituality coincides with movements that Individual Psychologists understand as the individual's lifestyle. Thus, spirituality can be understood as an innate capacity which can be developed, much as a person's capacity

for language or interest in contributing to society. I propose that rephrasing Schneiders's (1986) definition of healthy spirituality in terms of Individual Psychology could make it more available to psychology without losing its facility within the academic discipline.

Spirituality is the individual's conscious movement from a felt-minus to that of a fictional-plus, holistically experienced as a unifying factor not rooted in self-boundedness but in community feeling aimed at full participation in an apperceived perfect community.

Here is a fully human, holistic understanding of an individual spirituality that is part and parcel of a person's self-styled becoming. Its *specific* movement is colored by the individual's biased apperceptions, including acceptance or rejection of specific religions that provide meaning for his or her life. Its *general* movement can be understood as living consciously *focused on ultimate concerns*. An individual's specific spiritual movement can also define self-transcendence and perhaps provide a common version of the ultimate value perceived by a given community.

Criteria of wellness. A second finding is constituted by the four critical criteria against which Individual Psychology can measure spirituality to determine its relationship to wellness or illness. Spirituality contributes to a person's wellness depending on (a) whether the striving after his or her ultimate concerns generally manifests on the contributing side of life rather than on the self-serving side of life; (b) the degree that his or her spiritual path is characteristically open, tolerant, and impartial rather than closed, judgmental, and prejudiced; (c) the degree that the individual's spirituality leads to connection with greater humanity rather than to isolation and self-absorption; and (d) the degree that his or her perceived ultimate value ratifies the wellness criteria of striving, integration and self-transcendence.

Overall, Individual Psychology provides an adequate baseline for a research project to evaluate the psychological movement of a person's individual and communal spirituality. Untold research opportunities lie ahead for Individual Psychologists interested in contributing to this growing field. They are in a unique position to pursue the academic study of this life process given Individual Psychology's status as a holistic, goal-oriented psychology.

Note

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