

# E

TICA

## INDAGAÇÕES E HORIZONTES

Maria Formosinho  
Paulo Jesus  
Carlos Reis  
(Coord.)



## CAPÍTULO VIII

### THE PSYCHOLOGY OF RELIGIOUS, SPIRITUAL, AND MORAL DEVELOPMENT: CONCEPTUAL AND EMPIRICAL RELATIONSHIPS

James M. Day<sup>1</sup>

In this chapter we examine some conceptual and empirical dimensions in the psychology of religious and spiritual development and their relationship to models in the psychology of moral development, taking into account several theoretical perspectives and related bodies of research.

#### 1. “Faith” and Moral Development: An Essential Correlation

In Fowler’s six-stage model of faith development and Oser’s five-stage model of religious judgment development there is an assumption that religious and spiritual development are closely related to moral development. Both acknowledge the influence of Kohlberg’s elaboration of Piaget’s concept of moral judgment. It is impossible to make any serious appraisal of Fowler’s and Oser’s models without examining the conceptual relationships between faith development, religious judgment development, and moral judgment development, and any serious assessment must consider efforts that have been made to submit these conceptual relationships to empirical testing. For Fowler (1981, 1996), and Oser and colleagues (Oser & Gmunder 1991, Oser & Reich 1996) religious reasoning and spiritual meaning-making include components of moral reasoning. For them, it is thus entirely logical that stage transition in moral judgment reasoning precedes, and is likely to affect, stage change in religious and spiritual development. Given that all people must wrestle with and resolve moral dilemmas that confront them throughout life, they will do so whether or

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<sup>1</sup> Université Catholique de Louvain, Belgique.

not religious beliefs, practices, or belonging to communities of faith are part of their moral experience. Since moral questions figure in religious and spiritual ones, movement in moral judgment will have consequences for the mechanisms and processes in the formulation of religious and spiritual understanding (Day, 2008a, 2010b; Day & Naedts, 2006; Day & Youngman, 2003).

If the logic of this approach appears reasonable, the weight of empirical evidence does not necessarily support the case made by Oser and Fowler as to the “direction” of effects between moral and religious considerations. Observations of stage and structure and comparisons between moral judgment and religious judgment based on thousands of subjects have not shown a clear pattern of moral judgment’s “precedence” to religious judgment. If, on Oser’s or Fowler’s terms, in views they shared with Kohlberg (1984), we would have expected to find moral judgment stage at levels equal to, and/or, mostly, higher than, faith development stage or religious judgment stage. We find instead a broad scattering of relationships: in some cases in conformity to Oser’s and Fowler’s suppositions moral judgment scores are higher than ones on religious judgment, but in other cases the reverse. On the whole, one finds no statistically significant difference between the two, calling into question the relationship between religious development and moral development assumed in Fowler’s and Oser’s models (Day, 2002, 2007a; Day & Naedts 2006, Day & Youngman 2003). Whether religious judgment is distinct from moral judgment, or at its core a version of moral judgment “dressed up in religious garb,” has by now been established as a matter of further testing for the psychology of human, especially adult, development and the psychology of religion.

## **2. Piagetian and Neo-Piagetian Models: conceptual, methodological, and empirical challenges**

We have observed that empirical research calls into question whether Fowler’s construct of “faith” is specific enough to distinguish it from more general ways of framing meaning-making activity, leaving some researchers to wonder whether Fowler’s model of faith development can be viewed as a “hard stage” model. We may also wonder, given the empirical evidence cited here, whether Oser’s construct of religious judgment is sufficiently distinct from moral judgment to warrant its utility as a measure of religious or spiritual development. These problems may in turn incline us to wonder about the utility of these models in applied domains.

In our view these conceptual and empirical problems echo problems common to Piaget’s earlier work and to other neo-Piagetian models across a host of domains (Day, 2008a, 2010b). In the paragraphs that follow we consider some of these problems, and suggest, in the light of recent research using

the Model of Hierarchical Complexity (MHC), some ways of improving the cognitive-developmental model for the psychology of religious and spiritual development, at once substantiating the claim that religious and spiritual development can be usefully studied in terms of stage and structure, and supplementing our understanding as to how this understanding might be applied.

Commons and Pekker (2005) laid out a very clear appraisal of the problems we have also identified and shown to be pertinent to models and measures in religious, spiritual, and moral development (see also Day, 2008a, b; 2010b, c). With Commons and Pekker, we would argue that the most consequential problems across domains in Piaget's own work, and in models drawing on Piaget's notions of stage and structure, may be summarized as follows:

- a) A lack of precision plagues the stage definitions within the models, especially when it comes to half-stages, often characterized as transitional between stages;
- b) Stage logic in the models is inferred from observation, without clearly enough defining what constitutes, or should constitute, an increment in developmental movement, structural transformation, or hierarchical attainment;
- c) Without such clear conceptions of what qualifies as an increment in developmental movement or attainment, it is difficult to lay out, and measure, how to conceive of higher order performance;
- d) There is a problem of horizontal decalage, the problem of uneven performance across tasks by some individuals, again, throwing into question what qualifies as adequate stage definition;
- e) In addition to horizontal decalage, and related to it, is the problem of age-stage decalage. This problem has to do with those instances in which younger subjects sometimes perform with greater competence than they would be predicted to do in the models concerned, while some older ones perform less well than they "should" according to the models' logic. In such cases there is a broader spread of competencies in relationship to age and stage than we "should" expect in the models' conceptions of stage and their relationship to development across the life cycle;
- f) Piaget's supposition that formal operations should obtain by late adolescence has been unverifiable; some adolescents "make it" to formal operations, while many do not;
- g) On a related note, Piaget's model did not account for the prospect of post-formal operations, and where post-Piagetian models have tried to do so, there has not been, at least until very recently, a clear consensus among them as to how many have been found, and what their relationships are to one another, and to formal operations;

h) Finally, there has been a proliferation of stage models in a variety of domains (ego development, parental development, aesthetic development, emotional development, role-taking development, identity development, intellectual development, moral and religious development) with no clear explication of how models are, or ought to be, related across domains (Commons & Pekker, 2005; Day 2008a, 2010b, c).

### **3. The Model of Hierarchical Complexity and the Psychology of Religious, Spiritual, and Moral Development**

For several reasons, Commons's Model of Hierarchical Complexity (MHC) offers a promising way of modeling development. It is a model that preserves and demonstrates evidence for the central insights of Piaget's theory and provides rigorous and robust empirical evidence to support it. In so doing, and in demonstrating how linear development occurs in a widely varying number of domains, it restores and advances the hope of a descriptive and empirically verifiable model of development across domains. The MHC also effectively addresses the problems identified in the preceding paragraphs associated with Piaget's work and neo-Piagetian models in the psychology of religious and spiritual development and their relationships to moral development.

According to Commons and Pekker (2005), elaborating on Commons and Richards (1984), the Model of Hierarchical Complexity presents a framework for scoring reasoning stages in any domain as well as in any cross-cultural setting. Scoring of stage is based not upon the content or the subject material, but instead on the mathematically calculated complexity of hierarchical organization of information in items, and problem-solving tasks. A given subject's performance on a given task at a given level of complexity represents the stage of developmental complexity the subject can use in a given domain.

As we have observed elsewhere (Day, 2008a, 2010b), the MHC is rooted in what Commons and Richards (1984) call a Theory of General Stage Development. This theory describes a sequence of hard stages varying only in their degrees of hierarchical complexity, relying on empirical studies in which 15 stages have been validated. Commons and Richards show, as do subsequent studies, how Piaget's stages and substages of cognitive development are validated and find a place in their stage scheme. Arbitrariness in stage definition, a common critique of other stage theories and models, is addressed in the MHC by its grounding in mathematical models, benefiting from the use of Rasch Scaling Analysis, which analyzes items in terms of their relative complexity, and allows researchers to establish clear increments across levels of complexity. This enables researchers to establish hierarchical sets of tasks whose order of complexity can be clearly formulated, measured, and compared, both within

domains and across them. Rasch Analysis permits researchers to construct items for scales of stage complexity and to measure the merits of their statements at any given interval of stage they wish to assess, with immediate feedback from Rasch scaling as to whether their proposed item fits the criteria for increase in complexity over the previously constructed item. Thus, the MHC, in association with Rasch analysis, has permitted researchers to test Piaget's conceptual order of stages, and the concrete forms of the stage structures he proposed, allowing us the rigorous empirical validation of Piaget's basic conceptions of stage and structure, and of stage order, and universality.

Of particular interest to students of adult psychological development is the power of methods and precise modeling permitted by the MHC to clearly describe and validate four postformal stages (Commons, 2003). In so doing, the MHC helps us appreciate that there are postformal stages, and provides tools for understanding and promoting competence in cognition in situations of complex problem-solving in adult life. In keeping with its aims to understand how cognition develops across domains, the MHC helps us understand why and how cognitive competence may develop within a given domain, and across (or not) other domains in the adult years.

The Model of Hierarchical Complexity is an immensely useful conceptual and empirical model and set of methods which preserve Piaget's vision of linear, hierarchical, universal, and stagewise, development, validating the stages he initially proposed, and remedying problems that have accompanied cognitive-developmental stage theories across a wide variety of areas of human experience. The MHC has also proven useful in the psychology of religious and spiritual development, allowing for the charting of stages in cognition involving religiously related problem-solving scenarios, and permitting researchers to respond to some questions and controversies in the field. To date, there are some seventy published studies in behavioral science using the MHC, of which several consider religious cognition, and problem solving where religious elements are concerned (Day, 2013a, b; 2008a, b; 2009, 2010b; Day, Commons, Bett, & Richardson, 2007; Day, Richardson, & Commons, 2009; Ost, Commons, Day, Lins, Crist, & Ross, 2007). These studies employ a valid and reliable measure called the Religious Cognition Questionnaire (RCQ) and have demonstrated the utility of the MHC in establishing stages of religious cognition, showing relationships between religious cognition stages in the MHC and religious judgment stages in Oser's model. The studies operationalize and demonstrate the existence of postformal thought in the domain of religious cognition, establishing ways of comparing religious cognition and moral cognition. They respond to questions such as how people manage varying degrees of complexity in moral problem solving when elements of religious belief, belonging, and authority are entered into the moral scenario (e.g., whether people of religious conviction are prepared to abandon complexity in favor of religious authority when solving moral problems) (Day, Commons, Bett, & Goodheart

2007c; Day 2008a, b, c, d; 2010b; Day, Richardson & Commons, 2009). We have demonstrated that there are postformal stages in religious cognition that are parallel to the four postformal stages outlined by Commons & Richards (2003). We have also shown that people reasoning at postformal levels are less likely than others to abandon their highest level of achieved complexity in problem solving in other domains when elements of religious authority enter into problem solving situations (Day, 2010b; Day, Commons, Bett, & Richardson, 2007; Day, Richardson, & Commons, 2009).

#### **4. Religious and Spiritual Development and Learning in Adulthood: Postformal Stages, Cognitive Complexity, Religious Issues, and Moral Problem-Solving**

If we are to consider the specificity of religious and spiritual development, and their relationships to development in other domains, including moral development, we would do well to take a closer look at the question of postformal stages. We would assume that their onset would not occur until after adolescence, and that, in an increasingly complex world, knowing more about how some people attain postformal attitudes, competencies, and experience, and apply postformal reasoning in religious and spiritual domains would help us better understand the construct of postformal stage. This could also help us better appreciate postformal operations and their relationships across domains, and aid us in helping others learn and grow toward postformal perspectives and behavior. It would do so convincingly if we would endorse the classical developmental notion that increased capacity in psychological development brings with it good both for individuals (enhanced problem-solving and relational abilities), and for the social world in which we live. On these grounds, we purport to show how the classical notion of individual development for social good (enhanced capacity for perspective-taking, greater ability to listen and take into account the views of others and thus help individuals as well as groups face and solve multivariate problems, greater ability to grasp the developmental features in others' thinking and thus, in professional as well as personal roles, help others attain maximal growth in their own lives) holds in the domain of religious cognition, and its relationships to religious belief, belonging, spiritual practice, and moral development.

What do religious belief, practice, spiritual disciplines, and faith experience resemble in persons who have attained postformal operations in reasoning about religious and spiritual issues? What is the moral life of persons at postformal stages like, and how, when confronted with religious elements in moral decision-making, do their thinking and behavior compare and contrast with people at "lower" stages?

Commons and Richards (2003) provide a highly useful review of the literature on the logic of postformal stage conceptions, relevant debates, and critical appraisals of validation studies in this domain. In so doing they conclude that psychologists have been thus far successful in charting and measuring postformal operations of human perceiving, reasoning, knowing, judging, caring, feeling, and communicating. Studies using the Model of Hierarchical Complexity, have examined the question of postformal operations in measures of problem-solving capacities across several domains, including algebra, geometry, physics, moral decision making, legal judgments, and informed consent. Our own studies have validated the existence of postformal stages in cognition assessing and describing problems where religious elements and authority are invoked, and widely known spiritual sayings (Commons & Richards 2003; Commons & Pekker 2005; Day, 2010b, 2013a, b; Day, Richardson & Commons, 2009). On the basis of our research, as well as the research and meta-analytic studies of Commons and Richards (2003), and Commons and Pekker (2005), we agree with Commons' assertion that there are four empirically verifiable postformal stages, with his description of these stages as briefly outlined, below:

1. Systematic Order: at this stage subjects are able to discriminate the working of relationships between variables within an integrated system of tendencies and relationships. The objects of the relationships are formal operational relationships among variables. Commons asserts, on the basis of empirical validation studies, that probably only 20% of the American population is able to function at this level. Our research in samples of hundreds of Belgian, British, and American subjects in the domain of moral, religious, and spiritual development bear this out across the three countries studied.

2. Metasystematic Order: subjects act on systems, and systems become the objects of metasystematic actions. The systems are made up of formal-operational relationships, and metasystematic actions compare, contrast, transform, and synthesize systems. Commons and Richards point out that research professors at top universities, whose work relies on their capacity to operate in this way, provide an example of this kind of cognitive operation in action, and some of its utility is not only for personal, but also for social good. In our own studies, we have found that some advanced graduate students, as well as people with doctoral degrees and/or who must conceive and direct research activities in their work settings, function at this level in moral and religious problem solving, and in their assessments of religious elements in moral decision making and ways of describing classical spiritual statements and axioms.

3. Paradigmatic Order: here subjects are capable of creating new fields out of multiple metasystems. It follows logically that metasystems are the objects of paradigmatic actions, sometimes in ways that orchestrate new paradigms out of improvements made across metasystems which are themselves "incomplete" from a paradigmatic point of view. Commons and Richards cite the example of Maxwell's 1817 equations, which proved that electricity and magnetism

were united, as an example of this kind of creative operation, and describe how such creative action may pave the way for further paradigmatic moves, citing, for example, Einstein's development of "curved space" to describe space-time relations, replacing Euclidean geometry with a new paradigm.

4. Cross-Paradigmatic Order: subjects at this level of cognitive complexity operate on paradigms as objects of thought, creating a new field of thought, or radically transforming a previous one. If thinkers operating at this order of complexity are rare, ready examples from the history of science demonstrate the existence of such an order and its mechanisms and processes. Commons and Richards (2003) provide several persuasive examples, such as Descartes' coordination of paradigms in geometry, proof theory, algebra, and teleology, in developing the paradigm of analysis. In this vein, Commons & Richards (2003, p. 208) have also shown through studies that some subjects operate in this way when faced with problems designed for research in cognitive complexity. They also indicate that Rasch Analysis can validate both the order of complexity of items and possible responses to them, on the orders of complexity represented in the four postformal stages, including this one (Day, 2010b).

We have demonstrated (Day, 2010b; 2013a, b; Day, Richardson, & Commons, 2009) that logical inferences in the study of postformal operations can be made in comparing stages of faith, and of religious judgment development, with stages in the Kohlbergian paradigm of moral judgment. Such inferences yield the observation that stages in the psychology of religious development already shown, empirically, to parallel stages 4 and 5 in Kohlberg's model (i. e. stages 46 in Fowler's model, and 4 and 5 in Oser's) would qualify for inclusion as postformal stages in faith and religious judgment development. Operations and structural components requiring the management of complexity and solving of problems at orders higher than those in Piaget's descriptions and proofs of formal operational reasoning, have been applied and tested in this light, in the domain of cognition concerning religious concepts, beliefs, practices, and decisions where religious elements are taken into account. We have shown that moral judgment stages and faith and religious judgment, parallel to moral judgment at stage 4, would fall under the systemic stage, and those parallel at stage 5 and 6, would fall under the metasystemic stage (Day, 2010b; Day, Richardson, & Commons, 2009). Thus we have shown that there are stages in moral and religious cognition and thinking about spiritual sayings that qualify as postformal stages, and are specific to psychological development and learning in adulthood.

Kohlberg (1984, 1986) at least implicitly acknowledged the need for understanding postformal cognition in the moral domain when he argued that morality ultimately cannot explain itself. Kohlberg held that theories of moral reasoning and its development cannot, in the end, account for why one would decide to act on behalf of the good, or why one would make commitments to certain moral principles and try to effect their translation into potential forms

of action. The fact that one knows, cognitively, how to describe, justify, propose, and advance such principles and articulate their relationship to action, does not resolve the question of why one would try to act on their behalf. It was on these grounds that, in the language of postformal stage, Kohlberg imagined a paradigmatic stage, positioned as a seventh stage, in his hierarchy of stages of moral judgment. Of particular interest for our own research, and the purposes of this chapter, Kohlberg described this stage as a spiritual stage, articulated in the language issuing from the world's religious traditions, and related to their notions of wisdom, understanding, and perspective in relationship to morality. In this paradigmatic stage, the subject would construct a paradigm capable of operating on systems of moral reasoning, including hierarchies such as Kohlberg's model proposed. This articulates, as Kohlberg put it, a cosmological, and explicitly "spiritual" articulation of a transcendent logic providing an impetus for moral action, and a standpoint from which action could be judged as good. This paradigmatic stage in Kohlberg's model forges an explicit connection between moral reasoning and religious concepts and systems, and in the language of the Model of Hierarchical Complexity and, as we have outlined, a move from metasystemic to paradigmatic reasoning (Day, 2010b).

## **5. Object Relations Theory, Religious Experience, and the "Transitional"**

We have emphasized from the outset of this chapter that questions regarding the relationship between psychological development and religious and spiritual elements, dimensions, attitudes, affiliation(s), and participation have marked psychological science since its very inception. Early work in psychoanalysis was colored by fierce debates over these questions, with, at the extreme ends, those who, like Freud, contended that psychological maturity would, and should, preclude religious beliefs and practices, and obviate the need for any reference to "spiritual" language. In a dissimilar vein are those who, like Jung, held that what psychoanalysis could discover touched on the most fundamental, and noble, religious and spiritual impulses in the human psyche, and in human culture. These debates continue, but are characterized by an increasing openness, at least in some quarters of psychodynamic theory and practice, to the notion that, as in other branches of psychological investigation, questions of the epistemological claims of religious belief should be treated as lying beyond the purview of scientific know-how, while religious and spiritual phenomena, should be treated as worthy objects of study without a priori assumptions as to their inherent worth. It lies beyond the scope of this chapter to furnish a detailed handling of the debates that have occurred, and of the full range of opinion in the current literature. On these grounds we point to the excellent work of Dobbs (2007), Hood (1995), Jones (1991), McDargh (1983, 2001),

Meissner (1984), Paloutzian & Park (2005), and Rizzuto (1979, 1993, 2001) for more extensive portrayals, discussions, and applications.

One of the major psychodynamic theoretical approaches linking developmental psychology and clinical practice has been called the object relations school. Rooted in classical Freudian psychoanalysis, there emerged in England a group who emphasized the importance of affective variables from the very earliest moments in life, even from conception onward, in how people develop their understandings of self, other people, and the world. The group included people who were to become towering figures in the development of psychoanalytic thinking and the practice of psychotherapy as Ronald Fairbairn (1943), Harry Guntrip (1975), Donald Winnicott, and, more recently, Christopher Bollas (1987, 1989). Particular attention was devoted to the mother-child relationship, and to the characteristics of mother-infant interaction that gave rise to pathological, or, instead, healthy psychological functioning later in childhood, adolescence, and into the adult years. Donald Winnicott, trained both as a pediatrician and a psychoanalyst, was affiliated during much of his life with the Tavistock Institute in London, arguably the most important venue for psychoanalytical thinking in the English-speaking world in the 20th century. He was twice president of the British Psychoanalytical Society (Day, 2008b).

Winnicott's contributions to theory, practice, and research were numerous and have continued to have a huge impact on psychoanalytical thinkers concerned with human development and the place of religious and spiritual experience and development in it (Day, 2007a, 2008b). We focus here on three of the best-known of his concepts. These are good-enough mothering, transitional objects and spaces, and the false self.

Over the course of clinical practice as a physician and psychotherapist working with infants, young children, and their parents, and collaborating with others in research projects concerned with early relationships between children and their parents, Winnicott observed that a foundational element for psychological growth was an experience of "good-enough mothering" in infancy and early childhood. The good-enough mother, Winnicott stated, was that biological mother or other caregiver whose sustained attention and availability provided the infant with an experience of profound welcome, continuity, and legitimacy in the world. Gradually, an infant benefiting from such constancy and good will on the part of the mother figure, learns to accept frustration, express emotion in ways both honest and appropriate to the maintenance and enhancement of relationship, and explore and enjoy relationships as venues for learning and creative expression (Day, 2007b; Winnicott, 1971).

When the environment of early experience is characterized instead by constant frustration of basic needs, for feeding, holding, and sharing, or by patterns of ambivalent, inconsistent presence and absence, the baby comes to feel deeply uncertain as to the legitimacy of her/his own needs, lacking in trust toward the mother and the world, and fragmented in feelings toward

self and in relationships. Babies beginning in this less favorable climate, when it is made heavier by harsh and rigid parental behavior and capricious discipline, are at risk of becoming children, and later adults, who come to feel that features of themselves are so undesirable that they must be cruelly repressed, even split off from the self. Since they cannot tolerate the “taboo” elements in themselves, they project them outward, imagining them as disembodied, even demonic, forces, or characteristics of others, who in turn are apt to become scapegoats. Such others are targets for the frustration, even hatred, they have internalized from their early environments. Children beginning in such circumstances are likely to develop what they will later come to feel is a “false self,” something that has been a workable compromise between that for which they longed, and what was demanded of them in order to be acceptable, but which no longer satisfies because it feels quite “unreal,” and thus deeply alienating (Day, 2007b, 2008b; Guntrip, 1971; Winnicott, 1971).

Even in the best of developmental circumstances, the need arises to help the child move from a position of nearly absolute dependence, to a measure of autonomy. In the early stages of this process, what Winnicott called the “transitional space” in the mother-child relationship, babies develop mechanisms of self-stimulation in order to console themselves in moments when they lack mother’s attention, and claim an object in their environment in which they invest meaning. These objects are, in their experience of them, neither wholly external nor internal, not fully of their own imagining or fantasizing, yet populated with the stuff of their internal worlds and fantasies. The objects (of which teddy bears are the best known example) of relationship between the infant and his/her environment, and the way they are handled by the mother and other members of the child’s family, become part of how the child makes the transition toward the capacity to move beyond the sphere of the parents and immediate group to the wider world. What s/he comes to feel is the character of the “transitional space” which the teddy bear or other object occupies, the space “in between” him/herself and the others who are constitutive of his/her earliest experiences, carries over, and becomes a kind of residue that will forever affect the climate of relationship in the child’s life. Benevolent environments, experienced as deeply supportive and creative by the child, become part of how it feels for the child to imagine him/herself, and what it will be like for her or him to enter into relationships with others. Residual feelings from such foundational experiences of relationship, and the play of dependence and autonomy, will, when positive, incline the person to generosity, self-sharing, and delight in discovering the distinctive character of others. Intimacy with another will be viewed with hope, and as contributing to the enrichment of the self. When negative, or when, in analytic terms, transitional phases and behaviors are frustrated, or unaccomplished, the feeling of irresolution and

incompleteness remain. Others may be perceived as potentially fascinating, but threatening, especially in experiences approaching intimacy. Fragility in others becomes more difficult to manage in relationship, because of anxiety aroused in the self.

For Winnicott, there were clear implications for very concrete features of human functioning. Thus, according to their quality of early experience of self and others, people might be more inclined toward moral benevolence, creativity, playfulness, sturdiness of self, resilience, and life-giving interactions with others. Conversely, they might show moral rigidity and self-centeredness, lack of creative action, fragmented experiences of self, and inconsistent, ambivalent conduct. In the latter case, according to Winnicott, this made for a particular heaviness for others both because of what one was likely to demand or do, and because of one's inability to listen, understand, take in, and genuinely give room to others.

All the authors in the object relations group remark on the consequences of personal development for interpersonal well-being, and give vivid examples tracing how the quality of early relationships and transitional phenomena color intimate relationships in adulthood. Several authors have developed work which has contributed to the psychology of religious and spiritual experience. Winnicott himself made theoretical and clinical observations regarding the pertinence of his insights to understanding religion, and its contributions or obstacles to human development. He argued, for example, that at its best, religion could serve as a creative transitional environment, permitting creative regression, reappropriation, and renewal in psychological development, and, through its association with ritual, symbol, and artistic expression, serve as a creative adjunct to healthy relationships, and psychotherapy, in constant service to individual persons, societies, and cultures.

## **6. Sociocultural Models of Religious and Spiritual Development: Narrative, Voice(s), and Identity**

In sociocultural approaches to the psychology of religious and spiritual development, and their relationship to moral development, there is an insistence on the richness of social diversity in religious experience, and the ways in which language and story-making come to shape religious and spiritual belief, practice, and identity. For example, researchers in the field of "narrative psychology" emphasize the irreducible importance of narrative and story-making in human experience, for identity, communication, resolution of dilemmas and making of decisions, sense of belonging, and meaning in life. They make the observation that when people talk about life experience, and religious experience, they do so in story form: people don't just document experiences, they flesh them out in time and in context in the form of narratives. Kenneth Gergen (1994), a lea-

ding scholar in social psychology who has contributed to the “narrative turn” in psychological science, calls narratives “forms of intelligibility that furnish accounts of events across time. Individual actions... gain their significance from the way in which they are embedded within the narrative” (p. 224). Narratives are characterized by (a) an established, valued endpoint; (b) events recounted are relevant to and serve the endpoint; (c) events are temporally ordered; (d) its characters have a continuous and coherent identity across time; (e) events are causally linked and serve to explain the outcome; (f) the story has a beginning and an end (Gergen 1994, p. 224). Ruard Ganzevoort and Heinz Streib have made significant contributions to the narrative emphasis in the psychology of religious development. Ganzevoort has shown how the elaboration of religious elements in life stories among the elderly help them to increase self-esteem, take stock of gains and losses across the life cycle, renegotiate and improve adult relationships with peers, friends, and children, and prepare for death (Ganzevoort 1998, 2006; Ganzevoort & Bower, 2007; Tromp & Ganzevoort, 2009). Streib has shown that understanding narrative facets of religious experience may help us better appreciate just how much styles as well as stages come to characterize the ways we see ourselves, others, religious experience, religious groups, and God. He has revealed a particular interest in people who have joined or are leaving fundamentalist and other sectarian groups, and who have converted to, and left, a variety of religious groups and spiritual movements and practices over the life course. His work is pertinent to a general reevaluation of stage theory, especially that proposed by James Fowler (with whom Streib has long collaborated) (Streib 1991, 1997; Streib, Hood, Csoff & Sliver, 2009). Streib’s work, complemented by other, recent, studies (Brandt, 2009; Day, 2009; Fournier, 2009; Paloutzian, 2009) on conversion and deconversion underscore how richly contextual are the nature of identity processes in how people move into, and out of, religious groups and spiritual practices, and how, again, what we already know augurs for further, longitudinal work in the psychology of religious and spiritual development.

To some degree, researchers in narrative approaches to religious and spiritual development help us understand that human subjects are to some degree multivocal, framing our identities and descriptions of self and world, and God and religious experience, partly in function of the audiences to whom we are addressing ourselves, and whose narrative conventions interweave with our own. In this sense sociocultural approaches, including narrative research, shift us from conceiving of religious and spiritual development and learning within subjects to an emphasis on such development within relationships, including the families, communities, societies, and cultures, within which we come to construct our understanding of self and world. These, in turn, could have considerable consequences for religious and spiritual education, pastoral practice, and training in psychology and pastoral theology (Day 1993, 2001,

2002, 2006; Day & Jesus, 2013; Day & Naedts, 2006; Day & Tappan, 1996; Day & Youngman, 2003).

Sociocultural contexts, including narrative, with their emphasis on the social construction of identity, religion, and definition and practice in spirituality, sensitize us to gender, culture, and religious affiliation in how religious development is described, and how religious elements become appropriated in critical life decisions. As we have attended closely to gender variables in the religious and spiritual development of adolescent boys and girls, and adult women and men, we have clear evidence that they talk differently about religious experience, definitions of religion, and religious decision-making, and that, in terms of religious context, young people in Belgium and in England whom we studied spoke differently about decisions concerning moral dilemmas according to their religious affiliation, cultural background, and degree of relative integration or alienation from dominant cultural contexts (Day, 2000, 2009).

Gender differences which have consistently appeared in our studies parallel those observed by Gilligan (1996) and Tannen (2001), and documented in meta-analyses of studies in sociology, anthropology, philosophy, biology, and psychology, by Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (2003). If Brabeck & Shore (2003) are critical of some of these distinctions, on the basis of their meta-analysis of studies in psychology on gender differences in moral and epistemological reasoning, we have robust results across thousands of subjects, showing gender differences in both moral and religious orientations. These underscore that people speak in different voices or styles, even languages, as they negotiate gender in relationship to the things they are talking about. Donahue (1995) and Greeley (1989) are among those who have demonstrated that what we would call “narrative” features of contextual discursive differences between Protestant and Catholic subjects are associated with different behavior in marriage; they have shown that emphases in the different traditions translate to behavioral differences among and within married couples, at least within the English-speaking world. Thus, we have considerable evidence that the sociocultural approaches offer an important contribution to understanding religious and spiritual development not only on conceptual, but also on empirical grounds.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter we have outlined several models of religious, spiritual, and moral development in psychological science, insisting on the utility of working with mixed methods, both quantitative and qualitative, towards a better appreciation of cognitive, affective, and conative variables in the ways human beings try to make meaning, and how their meaning making connects with their action in the world.

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