# Chapter 5
# Psychodynamic and Relational Approaches

Two years before William James published his classic *Varieties of Religious Experience*, a relatively unknown doctor named Sigmund Freud authored his first great work, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, ushering in the new field of psychodynamic psychology. Ten years later, Freud published *Totem and Taboo*, his first major work that attempted an analysis of religion. In the following years, the work of Freud and other psychodynamic theorists would provide a rich—and sometime contentious—platform for a religion-psychology dialogue.

**Psychodynamic** theories focus on cognitive, emotional, and relational dynamics within the individual, especially mental processes that are unconscious and outside of awareness. In particular, psychodynamic approaches focus on one or more of three different types of processes: (1) **drives** or instinctual processes that motivate behavior, (2) **structures** or internal patterns that provide organization for the personality, and (3) relations between the self and external or internal objects. Each of these types of processes has provided a basis for a psychological perspective on religion. In this chapter, we will consider Freud's drive-oriented approach to religion, the theory of Erik Erikson that has important structural features, and the object-relational theories of Harry Guntrip and David Winnicott. We will also consider the unique contributions of the psychodynamic theorist Carl Jung.

## 5.1 Sigmund Freud: Master of Suspicion

Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) was no friend to religion from the beginning of his career. Along with personal experiences that alienated him from Christianity, he was an admirer of some of the most important opponents to traditional religion such as Ludwig Feuerbach and Friedrich Nietzsche. His mentor Ernst Brücke was Vienna's most ardent positivist and a reductive materialist (Gay, 1998, pp. 12–34; Ramzy, 1977). Freud was thus influenced by Comtean positivism, which acted to constrain his choices in the development of psychoanalysis so that spiritual issues were neglected or reduced to material processes (Domenjo, 2000; Grotstein, 1992). Positivism carried with it a view of history that placed religion as a primitive phenomenon destined to be replaced by science, an idea that Freud elaborated in his work (see Section 2.3) (Fig. 5.1).

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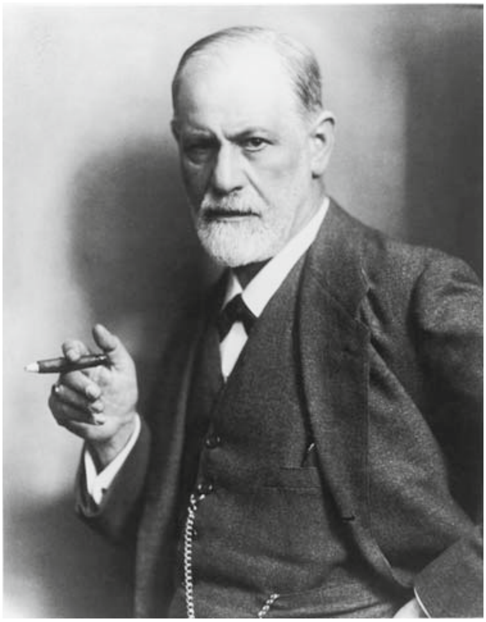

**Fig. 5.1** *Sigmund Freud.* One of the most influential figures of the 20th century, Freud had generally negative views on religion, although many theologians appreciated aspects of his work. Photo courtesy of Mary Evans Picture Library

Freud's initial outline for his vision is contained in the manuscript *Project for a Scientific Psychology* (1953). In this work, Freud developed the idea that the psyche could be entirely described using material processes that operated in the mechanistic fashion of 19th-century physics. The activity of the human psyche was simply "neuronal motion" (1953, p. 310). This material basis of his theory continued to be a principle in his later work, even if it was not explicitly articulated (Mackay, 1989, p. 222). Along with positivist and materialist ideas Freud also adopted the doctrine of **recapitulation**, the idea that the stages of development in human evolution, including psychological and cultural evolution, are repeated in the stages of development of each human being.

### *5.1.1 Basic Concepts*

Freud thought that all behavior was motivated by instinctual drives, particularly forces related to sexuality and aggression. He thought these drives were primarily active at the **unconscious** level of the personality, completely outside our awareness but able to govern our behavior. These drives govern the **id** or instinctual part of the psyche, which along with the **superego** or conscience and the **ego** or executive function make up the three main structures of the personality. The drives express themselves in different ways depending on the person's stage of development. For instance, Freud thought that around age 4 or 5 the sexual drive sets up an unconscious attraction between boys and their mother, leading to competition with the father and unconscious fantasies of murder. He termed this the **Oedipus complex**. Many of these urges are culturally inappropriate and threatening, so the ego utilizes **defense mechanisms** to try to express them in more socially approved ways. For instance, during **projection** the ego attributes unacceptable unconscious feelings like anger to other people or things.

### *5.1.2 Views on Religion*

Freud developed positions on the cultural origins of religion, as well as its genesis in the individual (Watts & Williams, 1988, p. 24). He had a long-standing interest in culture and in *Totem and Taboo* (1950) offered a psychoanalytic explanation for the **totem**, a special sacred object of devotion found in many societies that serves as a guardian spirit or helper. Totems are the focus of a number of prohibitions or restrictions for a group, and Freud argued that these prohibitions were the original source of many human moral ideas, such as the Kantian categorical imperative and incest taboos (see Section 2.2.3). While totems are usually animals or other natural objects, Freud believed that sometime in the distant human past there existed a "primal father" who served as a totem for a group but was murdered by them. He thought that the root form of every religion was a longing for this father and that religious ceremonies of atonement or celebration are recapitulations of the ancient murder. God is simply a replacement for the totem animal and father, although Freud did not know the source of this new idea. The assumption behind his idea is that there must exist a collective mind that retains a sense of guilt over the original murder, as well as progress made in human evolution. He thought that this collective mind developed by an unconscious reading of other people through their reactions. In essence, Freud argued that "God" is a projection of these human figures, a view that has some parallels in Epicurean philosophy (Long, 1986).

In the 1920s, Freud wrote about his concerns for the future of civilization and its ability to make continued material progress. In *The Future of an Illusion* (1961b) he built a case for the elimination of religion that has many similarities with Comte's Law of Three Stages. Freud argued that a key role of civilization is to combat and tame nature, which he viewed as a cold cruel destroyer that we must defend against. Our feelings of helplessness in the world are similar to our childhood feelings that our parents—especially the father—help us to combat. The value of religious ideas is that they offer a similar kind of protection and are thus really a form of a longing for a protective father. However, these traditional beliefs are not to be accepted because of their contradictions and lack of confirmation. Instead, human reasoning—Logos—can be our god, and we must turn to science as the only way can know about reality outside of ourselves. Religion retards the intellectual development of the individual, and it is ineffective as it has not made us happy. Instead, science should replace it. Freud believed that such antireligious ideas should be kept away from the masses but that eventually a turning away from religion is bound to occur. It will be difficult for those brought up with religion, but for others "sensibly brought up" the prospects may be better. While we must admit our "insignificance in the machinery of the universe" we can leave behind infantile attachment to a good God and move to confront the hostile world using our own resources, hopefully with the increased power that science will provide and a state of resigned endurance for things that cannot be changed (1961b, p. 63). Freud's thought here echoed that of Feuerbach (1957), who had argued the God is just a representation of a purified human nature and that reason needs to be applied to religion to destroy illusions that deprive us of power. Erik Fromm also held similar views, as he believed that God is really a human creation and a representation of our potential (Cooper 2006, p. 117).

Freud's theory of religion did not address the issue of religious experience. Soon after the publication of *The Future of an Illusion*, the French writer Romain Rolland sent Freud a letter asking about an unbounded, "oceanic feeling" that occurs in many people and is used as a source of energy in many religions. Freud responded to this by saying that he could not discover such a feeling in himself but that he presumed it was a regression to an early undifferentiated state of ego-feeling and narcissism that later became connected with religion. Thus, he minimized or denied the possibility of a state of pure consciousness or nonsensory and nonintellectual experience of reality (Leavy, 1995, p. 349). He rejected the idea that this could be a source for religion, thinking that nothing could be stronger than the sense of helplessness sustained by the fear of superior powers (1961a, pp. 11–21).

### *5.1.3 Impact and Evaluation*

As might be expected, Freud's ideas on religion met with some critical response from theologians. Albert Outler sardonically remarked, "If religious faith reflects an infantile regression, so [Freud's] naturalistic faith looks a good deal like the adolescent rejection of the father…" (Outler, 1954, p. 252). Freud's view of ethics as simply a regret for primal murder or other unacceptable desires challenged deeply held beliefs of many Christian groups, who believed that moral laws were universal imperatives of divine origin (MacIntyre & Ricoeur, 1969; Pannenberg, 1983, pp. 19–20). However, other religious writers, particularly liberal Protestants, had more sympathy for Freud's work. These writers recognized that religion could have illusion connected with it and found that Freud's work provided some useful ways of understanding this. They also appreciated the fact that psychodynamic theory contains a relational component that can be useful in the analysis of religious experience and development (Lietaer & Corveleyn, 1995; Jonte-Pace, 1999; Homans, 1970, pp. 14–15, 1968b). Niebuhr (1957, pp. 260–270) liked Freud's realistic view of the limits of reason, and pessimism is certainly the dominant tone in much of Freud's work (Burns-Smith, 1999). However, Niebuhr rejected Freud's naturalism as being unable to deal with the issues of transcendent freedom and historical context in their creative and destructive possibilities. Maritain (1957) argued that the problem with Freud was not his psychology but his metaphysical assumptions and rationalism that turned useful insights into reductionistic, hardened positions of limited validity.

Most of Freud's theory—including the details of his views on religion—is no longer widely accepted within psychology (Watts & Williams, 1988, pp. 26–28). Some of his basic premises about the material nature of brain processes and the doctrine of recapitulation have been rejected by modern biology and neuroscience. In addition, his cultural explanations such as developed in *Totem and Taboo* have been rejected by anthropologists because they lack any supporting data and simply assume at the beginning what he set out to prove (Girard, 1977, p. 193). Although many academics followed Freud in associating religion with pathology, some prominent scholars like Karl Jaspers rejected his conclusions and argued that psychopathology in religion was mostly to be found among fringe supporters (Jaspers, 1963, pp. 723–724). Nor does Freud's own psychoanalytic data provide support for his views on religion; he himself admitted that his religious views were not based upon his psychoanalytic investigations but were simply a restatement of older ideas using a psychological language and framework (Ricoeur, 1970, p. 234). Many today would agree with Belzen that Freud "transgressed flagrantly the frontiers of his professional competence" (Belzen, 1996, p. 28). At best his observations only apply to aspects of religion that appear at an immature stage in development (Vergote, 1969, p. 136).

A number of scholars have attempted to expand Freudian theory and apply it in a more constructive way to religion. One of the most active of these has been the Jesuit psychoanalyst William Meissner (1984). In his view, psychoanalysis, if properly expanded, can go beyond some of Freud's errors or religious prejudices and develop a respectful view that can coexist with and reinforce a religious perspective. Meissner accepts Freud's insight that religion can have an illusionary quality but points out that (1) this is only one type of religion or religious experience and that a consideration of development beyond infantile levels reveals many other more sophisticated types of experience; (2) illusion is not the same as delusion—it retains ties to reality but transforms it in ways that give it significance and is thus a vital and constructive part of human experience; and (3) Freud's analysis focuses exclusively on the father, while clearly the mother and other models are also important in religious development and experience.

Meissner argues that the philosophical neutrality of science is a myth, and he takes issue with two of Freud's assumptions. First, he challenges Freud's passive and mechanistic view of the human person, which does not fit the active, open, dynamic quality of how people really live. Second, he disputed the reductionistic tendencies in Freud's system. His objection to reductionism is its abstractionist quality, which removes psychoanalysis from lived experience. This empties the theory of meaning, giving it less value and validity. It also ignores the fact that the study of the psyche is interpretive in nature and not able to completely separate the observer and observed. By contrast, religion is sometimes excessively anti-reductionist, so psychoanalysis and religion have the potential to complement each other. However, Meissner admitted that the tension between religious and psychoanalytic views might not be resolvable due to the supernaturalistic quality of some aspects of religion such as mystical experience. Meissner went on to develop a theory of religious development that combined some traditional psychoanalytic ideas with concepts from object relations theory.

## 5.2 Carl Jung and Archetypal Religion

Carl Jung (1875–1961) had a diverse personal and professional background that was reflected in his work. His father was a Swiss Protestant minister and his mother's side of the family had strong interests in spiritualism and the occult. Ultimately, he rejected his father's Christianity but continued to be deeply influenced by Christian thought, Eastern religions, and spiritualism, all of which figure prominently in his theories (Koss-Chioino, 2003; Jung, 1989, p. 210; Bishop, 1999; Davis, 1996). In adulthood, he was exposed to Hinduism, Buddhism, and especially Taoism with its emphasis on the pairing of opposites (McGuire, 2003; Karcher, 1999). Jung was also influenced by a number of psychologists, including William James. He worked closely with Freud for a time but eventually came to a parting of the ways over a number of differences, including Freud's resistance to Jung's spiritual preoccupations (Shamdasani, 1999, 2000; Charet, 2000). The breakup with Freud affected Jung greatly, leading to a psychotic breakdown that lasted several years. Jung's work on alchemy and Taoist texts led also to his study of **synchronicity** or the simultaneous occurrence of apparently unconnected psychic states and external events (Jung, 1973, 1969a, p. 441; Haule, 2000) (Fig. 5.2).

### *5.2.1 Basic Ideas*

#### 5.2.1.1 Knowledge

Jung took a Kantian stance toward human knowledge (see Section 2.2.3). He believed that we have no way of knowing things-in-themselves because our mental structures

**Fig. 5.2** *Carl Jung.* A creative figure with diverse interests, Jung's ideas still play an important role in the psychology and religion dialogue. Photo courtesy of Snark/Art Resource, New York

are ultimately responsible for our observations about reality. He took this to mean that our psychological existence is an autonomous realm *sui generis* (1969b, p. 58, 1970, p. 79; cf. Section 4.3.3) so that while events like religious experience are very real they do not tell us about the world, only about ourselves (1967a, p. 86, 1969c, p. 194, 1969d, 1989, pp. 347–348). He drew from a vast array of sources in art, literature, religion, and psychology as he developed his ideas (Dourley, 1995a, 1995b; Helal, 1999). He was also a perennialist and believed that different kinds of literary, philosophical, and religious material displayed many common themes (Becker, 2001; see Section 4.3). Overall, this resulted in his taking a position that avoided the extremes of positivist objectivism or extreme relativism, although he did tend to emphasize the emotional and irrational aspects of human nature (Kotsch, 2000; Hauke, 2000, pp. 231–233).

#### 5.2.1.2 Libido and Balance

Jung followed Freud in utilizing the concept of **libido** or energy to understand the workings of the human psyche, although Jung thought that libido was a kind of general instinctual energy rather than specifically sexual or aggressive. Jung thought that psychic energy worked according to several principles similar to those of physics. According to **the principle of opposites**, structures in the psyche often work in opposed and antithetical dualistic pairs, each of which can be invested with energy, creating tensions between opposites that provide essential sources of psychic power. However, these pairs are also governed by the **principle of entropy**, which states that in situations of imbalance the psyche will act to neutralize energy differences and restore balance. This energy is not lost but conserved and redistributed according to the **principle of equivalence**, the view that the total amount of energy in the psychic system remains equal across time, although the location and function of energy may change (1967a, 1967c, p. 63, 1969a, pp. 18–28, 1969c, p. 197, 1969d, p. 584).

#### 5.2.1.3 The Self

A central concept in Jung's system is the **Self**. In psychology this term is often used to refer to the "conscious, perceiving center of awareness and agency" which we observe (D'Andrade, 1995, p. 163; Browning, 1968). However, Jung used the term to refer to the *totality of the human person* (1969b, pp. 186–187, 1969d, p. 82). Jung believed that there were three levels to the Self. The first level is the conscious mind, which Jung generally equates with the ego. The ego thus is subordinate to the Self, although it plays an important role in consciousness and the maintenance of the **persona**, our system of adaptations and the face that we present to the world. Underneath the conscious is the **unconscious**, an autonomous realm of emotional and instinctive forces out of our awareness. It is divided into the **personal unconscious**, which includes material specific to the individual that was at one time conscious but now forgotten or repressed, and the **collective unconscious**, which contains materials of a universal and impersonal character that are inherited. The unconscious is unlimited in scope and is thus ultimately unknowable and ineffable. Much of the content of the Self consists of pairs of opposites with one pole of the pair in our conscious mind, while the other pole resides in the unconscious and may be dormant (1969b, 1969c, p. 5).

#### 5.2.1.4 Archetypes

Jung thought that important aspects of our psychological life are determined by the collective unconscious. Especially important are the influence of **archetypes**, which are not specific contents but "*patterns of instinctual behavior*" (1969b, p. 44) or "a possibility of representation that is given *a priori*" (1969b, p. 79). These can assume different content depending on personal or cultural contexts. They are like the Kantian categories except that they are categories of imagination rather than reason (1969d, p. 518; see Section 2.2.3). They are ultimately unknowable; their meaning cannot be completely described but only indicated from what we see in consciousness. Throughout our lives, situations corresponding to the archetype activate them and produce primordial images in consciousness. The energy attached to archetypes gives them a numinous quality that is particularly evident in religious experiences and encounters with religious symbols (1969c, pp. 149, 184, 1967a, p. 232). Jung believed that many things in religion—like God—are either archetypes or have an archetypal quality connected with them. It is the relationship we develop with these archetypes and symbols—positive or negative—that lies at the basis of religion. In fact, religious symbols and practices have been the primary way that humans have learned about and related to our archetypes (1969b, pp. 5–7, 153–156, 1969d, p. 81).

*The Self and God as archetypes.* Because the Self encompasses the collective unconscious, as well as other parts of the personality, it also has an archetypal aspect and is ultimately unknowable in full (cf. Baumeister, 1998). Jung believed that the Self-archetype represents our potential for unity and self-transformation and that this archetype was indistinguishable from an image or archetype of God. He supported this idea by quoting Christian writers who said that God could be found within (1969c, p. 22). Jung believed that the God image is an archetype charged with powerful libido or energy so that it has a particularly numinous quality. As an archetype it acts as a living figure in a dialectical relationship with us, moving us toward a goal of wholeness (1967a, pp. 56–60, 85–90). Theistic views of God come about when we associate the Divine with characteristics of our parental **imagoes**, representations or images of our parents that are formed during the first four years of life (1969b, pp. 62–66).

*Other archetypes.* The collective unconscious also includes a number of other archetypes such as the shadow, anima, and animus (1969b, 1969c, p. 8). The **shadow** is the dark side of the personality, a trickster part of us that is childish and at times uncertain or self-defeating and in need of help. Although it has negative features, we must eventually accept it as part of our growth toward wholeness. The **anima** is a feminine principle with a spontaneous and youthful quality that is fascinating (1967a, pp. 324, 437, 1969c, pp. 28, 268; 1969d, pp. 75–78). This archetype takes many positive or negative forms, and is connected with the feelings of awe or devotion one might experience in church or nature. It is paired with the **animus** or masculine principle, which is more associated with aggressiveness, dominance, and utilitarian attitudes. Everyone possesses both anima and animus, although the feminine is hidden in men and the masculine in women until we discover them later in life.

#### 5.2.1.5 Symbols

While archetypes are not directly knowable, their contents can be experienced indirectly in visual and other forms as **symbols** (1967a, 1969b, 1969c, 1969d; see Section 12.4.1). In Jung's view, symbols serve a couple of necessary functions. First, they enable us to learn about contents of the collective unconscious while protecting us from the power of a direct contact. They offer new knowledge and a compensation for what is missing or has been forced out of consciousness. Second, symbols act to facilitate and empower the transformation process in the human psyche by reconciling tensions, bridging the conscious and unconscious and leading us toward wholeness. Since symbols are dynamic representations they have a numinous quality and must be experienced rather than passively viewed or rationally analyzed (Clift, 1982, p. 13). Since the Self is the key archetype of the personality (Heisig, 1999), symbols that represent the self or the God archetype are particularly important. They often take the form of pairs or circles as in a **mandala** drawing (Gollnick, 2001; see Fig. 5.3). In Christianity, Christ functions as such a symbol (Kings, 1997). Jung believed that one of the great potential contributions of religion was to provide symbols that could help with the process of personal transformation.

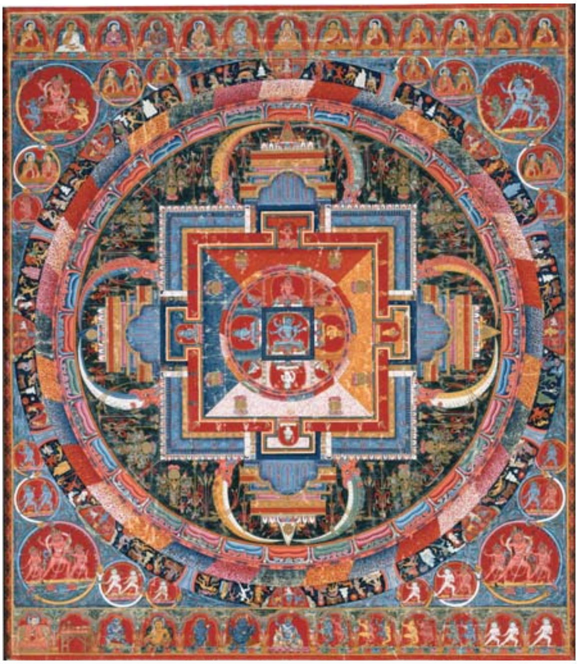

**Fig. 5.3** *Mandala of Jnanadakini* (from Sakya Monastery, Tibet). Like other mandalas, the image gives a symmetric, visual representation of an aspect of the world using concentric circles, squares, and religious symbols. Mandalas are used in Hinduism as well as Tibetan Buddhism. Photo courtesy of Metropolitan Museum of Art/Art Resource, New York

In his view, psychological forces appear in religious symbols, and thus it is impossible to completely separate religious and psychological issues. He believed that this interrelationship becomes particularly acute at midlife so that the problems of people after age 40 have an essentially religious aspect (Gunn, 2000, p. 189; Hillman, 1967, p. 54; Haule, 2000).

### 5.2.1.6 The Problem of Modern Man

Jung (1964) believed that trends in contemporary Western culture cause great problems for the modern person. In the past, the unconscious and irrational side of the Self was recognized in society, and symbols helped to harmonize conscious and unconscious forces. However, the rise of rationalism and scientific materialism has led to the devaluing or repression of our psychic life, particularly material that is archetypal in nature and unconscious (1970, p. 81). With the severing of links between the conscious and unconscious the individual develops a “rootless consciousness” and unconscious forces assert themselves in unpredictable ways to compensate (1969b, p. 157). This problem was made especially acute by the devaluing and rejection of religious perspectives, as religious dogma and symbols are the best means we have to access material in the collective unconscious. Jung blamed this partly on the inability of science to comprehend the irrational and imagistic aspects of human nature. He thought that the move to devalue or reject religion was foolish, even dangerous (1967a, 1969a, p. 367, 1969c). However, like Paul Tillich, he also criticized Christian theologians for their inability to articulate a religious message of relevance to modern man. He questioned the liberal Protestant abandonment of traditional symbols, sometimes in favor of a Freudian theory hostile to spiritual values (Dourley, 1995b, pp. 135–139; Jung 1969b, p. 104, 1969c, p. 333; Chapman, 1997). He argued that the real message of Christianity needed to be restated (1967a, p. 435, 1989, p. 210). While Jung denied that his psychology was a religion or even a worldview, he did see his depth psychology as a rediscovery and restatement of Western spirituality. He hoped that through belief and faith in symbols, people could once again participate in a religious message (1967a, pp. 230–231; Homans, 1968a).

### 5.2.1.7 Individuation

Jung’s key concept for describing spiritual and personal growth was **individuation**, a maturational process that involves the reuniting of unconscious materials with the conscious so that the person can achieve wholeness. The holistic Self and God archetypes provide a form for the process and drive it (1967a, 1969b, 1969c, 1969d, p. 207). The groundwork for this is laid in the first half of life, as we move from a kind of vague unified consciousness which Jung called **participation mystique** to a clearly defined and functioning ego based in consciousness (Dourley, 1995a, p. 284). This growth of the ego is necessary for development, but its increasing dominance creates a split between the conscious and unconscious aspects of our psyche. This leaves us in a state of disunity, with parts of our personality available in consciousness while opposite aspects necessary for balance remain submerged in the unconscious and inaccessible. At midlife, however, we start to become aware of these opposite, unconscious aspects of the Self such as the shadow and work to reintegrate them (Jung, 1969a, 1969b, 1969c; Schaer, 1950, pp. 120–126). Jung called the use of these opposites by the psyche to facilitate growth the **transcendent function** of the personality, a process he saw as similar to the union of opposites or *coniunctio oppositorum* discussed by medieval alchemists (1963, 1967b, 1968, 1969d, p. 489). The acceptance of the shadow and other unconscious material is experienced as a healing process and can be associated with religious experiences (Jung, 1967a, p. 433; Coward, 1985, p. 72).

While Jung's theory suggests that the highest levels of development are open to all, growth is a painful process, and in practice he seems to have believed that only a few will approach the goal of development (Rich & DeVitis, 1985; Jung, 1969b, p. 382). This goal is a numinous state of unity of consciousness and unconsciousness similar to samadhi or satori that he called **unus mundus** (1963, p. 540). This final growth requires an experiential process that is dependent both on our conscious activity and our choice to step aside and let the action of the Self or God archetype guide us toward wholeness. It is an emotional process that reflects the numinous quality of archetypal activity (Jung, 1969d, Dourley, 1995a, pp. 273–276; Haule, 2000; Becker, 2001). In this view, religious development is a coming to know our archetypes, particularly the God image, and our acceptance and integration of them into our personality.

Jung thought that the process of integration of conscious and unconscious could be speeded along by the technique of **active imagination**, where the individual is consciously presented with images from the unconscious and interacts with them. This allows the person to work through paradoxes and conflicts using symbols from the unconscious. The technique is similar to that utilized by Ignatius of Loyola in the *Spiritual Exercises*, a point which Jung expanded upon in later work (Jung, 1977, 1978; Becker, 2001; see Section 13.3.4). Jung himself was ambivalent about the role religion might play in the individuation process. Although he acknowledged that religious people might be able to use their faith as a path to growth (Jung, 1969d, p. 308; Haule, 2000), he also stated that it was impossible to utilize a religious system for individuation, because its inherently narrow understanding of God and the self might limit the active imagination (Becker, 2001). So while he saw religions as having a healing role, he seemed to view psychotherapy and the process of active imagination as superior, particularly for modern Europeans (Jung, 1967a, p. 356; Gomez, 1995; Coward, 1985, p. 73). However, his position on this important issue is often not clear or consistent.

### *5.2.2 Jung on Christianity*

Jung wrote two longer works on aspects of Christianity. In the first work, *A Psychological Approach to the Trinity* (1969c, pp. 107–200), Jung analyzed the Christian doctrine of the Trinity as an archetypal and powerfully numinous but impersonal symbol of the Self that can help in the process of individuation. He viewed sets of three like the Trinity as powerful symbols because they contain a third which is able to unite opposites. Nevertheless, Jung saw threesomes as defective in that they did not include a set of perfect oppositions. He argued that one way to correct the problem with regard to the Trinity would be to expand it to a *quaternity* with two pairs of opposites by adding a female figure or an evil figure to balance the good of Christ (Chapman, 1997). In *Answer to Job* (1969c, pp. 355–470), Jung developed this position further and argued that the almighty God of Job is also a dark God who is unfair, internally divided and not to be trusted, a God of opposites that includes evil as well as good (Gollnick, 2001; Boorer, 1997, p. 279). In a similar way, Jung also saw Christ as a numinous, impersonal symbol for the Self archetype (Edinger, 1992), but he thought that the symbol was incomplete because it did not include an evil or dark side.

In his second work on *Transformation Symbolism in the Mass* (1969c, pp. 201–296), Jung argued for the psychological efficacy of the Christian ritual that portrays the transformation process through rich symbolism. The mass portrays the eternal character of a divine sacrifice and represents the destruction of the self. He believed that the spontaneous manifestation of the Self archetype in the mass combined with the ego's choice to participate in sacrifice have an integrative function. In this view, the transformation accomplished in the mass can be seen as a rite of individuation.

Jung attempted to take an agnostic position on the existence of God, arguing that his Kantian position forbade him to make statements about the true nature of reality. Accordingly, he attempted to focus his theory on religion as a psychological reality in the individual and avoid dealing with its claim to truth (Jung, 1967a, p. 61; Bockus, 1968). His views on the subject beyond this are unclear. In an interview, he once said about his belief in God, "I don't need to believe, I know" (cited in Clift, 1982, p. 3). On the other hand, he also stated in his late work that the existence of a being like God was "highly improbable" (1963, p. 548).

### 5.2.3 Jung on Yoga

Jung visited India briefly and wrote about parallels between his theories and some versions of yoga. Jung saw yoga as a way of disciplining psychic instincts that had parallels with his own ideas about psychic transformation (1969c, p. 560). However, his treatments of yoga were largely carried out to illustrate various aspects of his own ideas rather than to understand the nuances of yoga philosophy and practice, and he actually rejected important aspects of yoga philosophy (Coward, 1985). He was also selective in his choice of sources, emphasizing the more dualistic Samkhya philosophy and avoiding devotional or monistic versions of Hinduism, or discussions of the Hindu concept of purusha or Self (Jones, 1993, p. 177). Some parallels that he drew include the following:

- Transformation as in yoga and his ideas of individuation
- The concept of Brahman–Atman and his idea of the Self
- The concept of prajna and his idea of libido
- The concept of enlightened mind and the collective unconscious
- Development through transcendence of opposites

Jung developed some of these ideas in his lectures on Kundalini Tantric Yoga (1975, 1976). In his view, the chakras discussed in yoga writings were symbols of transformation, and the awakening of the kundalini in yoga was a description of the transcendent process. Jung seemed to pass over a number of differences and discrepancies between his system and the chakra system of yoga. A major difference is that yoga practitioners believe that their philosophies actually describe the nature of the world and the human person, while Jung believed that they only described our inner psychological makeup. Other aspects of yoga philosophy that were rejected by Jung include the following:

1. The belief that we can realize the identity between Brahman and Atman and a blissful state in this life. In contrast, Jung believed the individuation process was never complete (Moacanin, 1992).
2. The belief that unconscious contents of the mind are obstructions to be removed. Jung argued that they were essential parts of the human person to be used in the process of growth (cf. Feuerstein, 1989, pp. 99–100).
3. The belief that a state of ego loss and pure consciousness is both possible and desirable. Jung believed that pure consciousness was impossible because consciousness requires an ego, and any egoless state was thus necessarily unconscious (Jung, 1969b, p. 288, 1969c, pp. 484–505, 1975, pp. 21–22; 1976, p. 17).

### *5.2.4 Jung on Zen*

One of Jung's most interesting dialogues with religion occurred in 1958 when he met with the Zen scholar Shin'ichi Hisamatsu (Shore, 2002). They noted many similarities in language and concern between them, particularly with regard to the Self. Jung shocked Hisamatsu by agreeing that one can and must free oneself from compulsions and the collective unconscious (Muramoto, 2002b; Meckel & Moore, 1992, p. 111), which seems quite at odds with his other views. However, there were also many obvious differences between Jung and Hisamatsu:

1. Jung sees the unconscious as ultimately unknowable, while the closest Zen equivalent to the unconscious, the state of no-mind, is actually a state of awareness that can be clearly experienced in awakening (Jones, 1993, p. 176),
2. While Jung and Zen both talk about the Self, they have different meanings for the term (Muramoto, 2002b; Okano, 2002). While the Jungian self is a phenomenon of the psyche, the Zen self lies beyond the parts of the psyche such as the collective unconscious, it is simply pure nondualistic awareness (Sato, Kataoka, DeMartino, Abe, & Kawai, 1992; Abe, 1992b).

3. Jung viewed individuation as a never-ending process and suffering as something that can be reduced but not eliminated, while Zen thinks that enlightenment and the removal of suffering are attainable in this life. This is because Zen practitioners believe they are able to remove the root cause of the problem—bondage to things like the collective unconscious (Meckel & Moore, 1992, pp. 109–117; Muramoto, 2002a).

Kasulis (1992) notes that there are a number of parallels between Jung's idea of individuation and Zen concepts like the need for active involvement on the part of the person, a desire to develop an inner freedom from compulsions or conflict, and a present orientation. However, there are also differences such as the Zen focus on total experience rather than just inner analysis, an orientation away from the self or ego, and the importance of a spiritual mentor (Kawai, 2002). So, while Jung often seemed to believe that he and Zen were talking about the same thing (Serrano, 1966, p. 100), there were really significant differences, which Jung seemed to attribute to mistakes on the part of Zen.

### 5.2.5 Jung's Ambivalence About the East

While Jung admired and studied Eastern thought (e.g., 1969d, p. 537), he frequently interrupted his discussions of Eastern texts with arguments against their widespread use in the West. We cannot copy or steal from other's ways, he would say; each must pursue their own path, you cannot graft one onto the other or onto each other's collective experience (Coward, 1985). In his view, Westerners were unable to assimilate the spiritual, pre-Kantian ideas behind Buddhism or Hinduism, and they were unable to place their trust in a spiritual guide like a guru. Instead, Westerners should exploit the resources in their own traditions, and make use of psychotherapy that offered a more dialectical kind of helping relationship (1964, 1966, pp. 58–59; 1969c, 1976, p. 31). He also believed that yoga and many Eastern practices were too structured and intuitive; they would strengthen the conscious mind that is already too strong in Westerners, thus inhibiting rather than stimulating growth (1975, p. 9).

### 5.2.6 Continuing Conversations

Jung's work has been marginalized within the field of psychology (Morey, 2005), but it still attracts interest from a variety of scholars. Contemporary writers in the New Age and pagan movements draw on Jungian concepts, although there has been little involvement of professional Jungians in these applications, and Jung would likely have rejected them (Tacey, 2001). More recently, some scholarly authors have taken a more critical look at Jung, including some of the unflattering aspects of his background and alleged problems such as anti-Semitism, Nazi sympathies, and sexual affairs with patients (Bishop, 1999; Charet, 2000; Budziszewski, 1998). However, there remains a small but devoted group of followers that use Jung as a basis for constructive dialogue between psychology and mainstream religious traditions.

#### 5.2.6.1 Christian Uses

Christian authors like Ann Ulanov (1997) or Wallace Clift (1982) have found much to like in Carl Jung. They agree with his views on the importance of experience, the close relationship between self and God, and the centrality of religion and the effects on modern society from growing disconnection from traditional symbols (Ulanov, 1999, pp. 9–11). However, most Christian authors that make use of Jung have developed systems that depart from some of his positions or reinterpret him in significant ways. Christian adaptations of Jung all agree that religious rituals and practices can be helpful in the process of individuation and spiritual growth and cite numerous examples in support of this (e.g., Welch, 1982). They see Jung as overly individualistic, ignoring the importance of community and relationships as instruments of love and forgiveness that can promote growth.

Other critiques of Jung have focused on his metaphysical or theological views about the nature of evil and the role of God in human life. Christian authors would argue that evil is not found within God but in the fracturing of the psyche and our relationship with God (Becker, 2001; cf. Tillich, 1951, pp. 249–252; Jung, 1976, pp. 283–297). In a Christian Jungian view, the crucifixion provides the point where good and evil meet and reconciliation takes place (Clift, 1982, p. 74). These authors would also reject the idea that God is simply a symbol for the human psyche. For instance, Welsh draws a distinction between the psyche or human personality and the soul, which is the aspect of personality, and the interior life that links the person to God. The two are separate although intimately related (Welch, 1982, p. 65).

#### 5.2.6.2 Relationship to Hinduism and Buddhism

Hindu and Buddhist religious writers and practitioners have not responded much to Jung (Heisig, 1999), but scholars studying these religious traditions have been highly critical of his writings. In their view, Jung provided his own meanings for Hindu and Buddhist texts that ignored their original meaning. He also rejected reports of religious experiences that conflicted with his theory, such as the pure consciousness experience (Gomez, 1995; Coward, 1992, pp. 248–250). This disregard for sources extended to Christian writings and practices as well (Boorer, 1997, pp. 287–294; see e.g., Jung, 1967a, p. 367). He has been accused of **orientalism**, a problem in 20th-century Western scholarship of Asian religions and thought systems marked by the following assumptions (Said, 1978):

1. Many distinct ideas and practices can be combined under one category of "Oriental" or "Eastern" without regard to important differences so that we can draw broad, universal conclusions about them.

2. These ideas are inferior to those of Europe and in need of corrective study or at the least need help from Europeans to properly express and interpret them
3. Asian ideas are not important in themselves, but only in terms of how they help Europeans better understand the world and themselves.

Jung's work is certainly marked by most or all of these problems, although it is also fair to say that he had great respect for the achievements of Eastern religions before it was popular to utilize them in psychological theory or research. However, his selective use of religious texts means that his assessments of religious traditions were likely inaccurate and thus of limited usefulness (Becker, 2001; Jones, 1993).

### *5.2.7 Critique*

It is difficult to give a fair evaluation of Jung's work because of the great range of sources and theoretical concepts, as well as the relative lack of relevant empirical data (Drake, 1996). As Chapman (1988, pp. 152–157) notes, Jung really develops three different theories in his work. First, Jung had a psychological theory based on energy, as in his principles of entropy and equivalence. Second, one can see in Jung's writings a phenomenological and mythological quest model focused on meaning and value, which is reflected in much of his work on symbols and archetypes (Hudson, 1996). Finally, Jung had a metaphysical or theological model that took positions on basic characteristics of human existence. It can be argued that it is not possible or desirable to evaluate these three theories together, as they have different levels of scope and focus on different activities and tasks. Nevertheless, his theory invites critique, both for its positive, innovative ideas and the numerous problems identified by psychologists and theologians (e.g., Loder, 1998, pp. 307–309).

Jung deserves commendation for his efforts to open a dialogue between psychology and both Christianity and Eastern religions. On the negative side, in addition to some of the difficulties already noted, his theory had a number of concealed and unproven metaphysical presuppositions that profoundly affected his conclusions. Jung made many statements claiming that his theory avoided metaphysics and did not represent a worldview (e.g., 1969a, pp. 376–379). However, it is abundantly clear that he actually took a number of important epistemological and metaphysical positions. Foremost of these was his Kantian stance that we are unable to have any knowledge or experience outside of the psyche (Dourley, 2001). More importantly, while Jung claimed neutrality with regard to the things he studied, he interpreted religion as a psychological reality and denied the possibility that religions might have any valid truth claims or that there is a possibility for transcendental encounter outside of the psyche—a position that is not particularly neutral (Jung, 1953, 1969c, pp. 360, 476; Dourley, 1995b; Vergote, 2003). So, while he championed the absolute, indisputable quality of religious experience (1969c, p. 104), he emptied it of substantive meaning. Other key concepts in Jung's theory such as the Self or collective unconscious are also metaphysical in nature (Coward, 1985, pp. 178–183) in that they are not directly observable and require significant reinterpretation of experience to make them fit with the data. Jung in fact admitted that metaphysical and religious ideas must be called into use at times, for instance, in understanding the experience of unity in the emergence of the Self (1963, p. 547). This makes his stated position of neutrality on religious issues even harder to understand. God could find a place in his theory, although Jung himself made efforts to distance himself from thinking of God as any more than a psychological reality (Bidwell, 2000; Bower, 1999).

Jung has been accused of claiming to offer an objective science but really offering his own private religion (e.g., Gomez, 1995). Richard Noll, one of Jung's most trenchant critics, claims that as early as 1910 when he was working with Freud, Jung expressed hope to transform psychoanalysis into something like a religious movement (Noll, 1997, p. 64; cf. Homans, 1995) and that his theory has ended up as a variety of European occult philosophy (Davis, 1996, p. 10). However, his theory seems to fall short of being a real religion. It lacks an ethical vision and seems to embrace a version of moral relativism strikingly at odds with his insistence that evil be recognized as a real power (Jung, 1969c, p. 197; Coward, 1995). Nor does it have a community of worshippers, a God to worship, or a theory of belief apart from experience (Segal, 1999; Storr, 1999). Nevertheless, the debate shows the strong positive and negative feelings that Jung's ideas continue to inspire in others.

## 5.3 Erik Erikson

Erikson (1902–1994) was an innovative thinker who used Freud as a starting point to produce the first fully articulated psychological theory of life span development (Erikson, 1964, 1982; Homans, 1978a, p. 15; Fuller, 1996). He was especially intrigued by exceptional development and did interesting work painting book-length verbal portraits of the great religious leaders Martin Luther and Mahatma Gandhi, who became his norms for development (Capps, 1996b; Zock, 1990, p. 118). Erikson rejected the idea that health simply involved a lack of sickness; rather the healthy personality was one that (a) actively works to master the environment, (b) shows a sense of unity within the self and relationally with those around them, and (c) accurately perceives self and world (Erikson, 1968, pp. 91–92, 1987, p. 598; Zock, 1997; Capps, 1984). He is often thought of as offering a functionalist approach that does not look at the nature of the objects or qualities but how they adapt to the environment. When applied to religion, functionalism avoids truth questions but asks how it assists persons in their development (Fuller, 1996). Functionalism is often a way of getting rid of transcendence, although this was probably not the case for Erikson (Zock, 1990, pp. 180–181) (Fig. 5.4).

### *5.3.1 Basic Concepts*

Erikson's general theory of development is founded on an **epigenetic principle** which states that (1) we have an inbuilt plan for growth into wholeness that unfolds throughout life, (2) this plan unfolds in a particular sequential order which includes

**Fig. 5.4** *Erik Erikson.* One of the most creative and complex psychodynamic thinkers, Erikson rose from humble beginnings to become a pioneer of life span development theory and research. His later writings in particular contained numerous references to religious or spiritual issues that remain important in contemporary discussions on psychology and religion. Photo courtesy of Harvard University

specific tasks that must be accomplished at various points, and (3) proper development at earlier stages is essential to success at later ones. This plan proceeded in eight stages, with each stage marked by a **developmental crisis** or turning point that provided the opportunity to add a particular strength, or the possibility of a failure that would lead to maladjustment, either of which could persist throughout life (1964, pp. 138–140; see Table 5.1). Especially important was the stage of *infancy*, which provided the opportunity for the formation of basic trust in others and the environment. *Adolescence* is also critical because it is during this period that we develop our **identity** a "sense of personal sameness and historical continuity" (1968, p. 17). An optimal sense of identity is important, because it gives us a sense

**Table 5.1** Erikson's stages of development

| Stage (age) | Crisis | Developmental task | Virtue |
|---|---|---|---|
| Infancy (0–2) | Trust vs. mistrust | Develop trust in self and others sense of continuity | Hope |
| Toddlerhood (2–4) | Autonomy vs. shame and doubt | Develop self-control without loss of self-esteem | Will |
| Early school (5–7) | Initiative vs. guilt | Independence in goals | Purpose |
| Mid-school (8–12) | Industry vs. inferiority | Independence/success in tasks | Competence |
| Adolescence (13–22) | Identity vs. role confusion | Develop identity | Fidelity |
| Early adult (23–30) | Intimacy vs. isolation | Form and nurture adult friendships Marriage and family | Love |
| Mid-adult (31–50) | Generativity vs. stagnation | Productivity and creativity Training the next generation | Care |
| Late adult (51-on) | Integrity vs. despair | Develop mature ideas of meaning Life review | Wisdom |

Source: Erikson, *Insight and Responsibility* (1964) of inner assurance and positive life direction, as well as supporting our physical and psychological well-being (Erikson, 1968, p. 165). It also provides resources for the development of intimacy, fidelity, and love in later stages of development (Markstrom & Kalmanir, 2001).

Erikson believed that identity is initially formed in adolescence through a combination of positive and negative movements (Erikson, 1968, p. 303). In **positive identity** we affiliate or identify with people and an ideology that we want to emulate. This kind of identity is traditionally formed with the help of community; it thus has links to the past, as well as an orientation to the future (Erikson, 1968, p. 310). However, it is also possible for us to form a **negative identity** that is developed as a reaction against or rejection of a particular community, set of ideals, or beliefs. In negative identities, we decide that whatever we are, we do not want to be like a particular individual or group we abhor. In extreme cases, groups of people with negative identities can become a **pseudospecies**, thinking themselves different and special, perhaps the only worthwhile group of people on the planet (1987, p. 580). This is a more common outcome among individuals or groups who have not achieved an identity, have lost it, or find it threatened in some way (Hoare, 2000; Erikson, 1968, p. 172, 1969, p. 431). Urban gangs can be seen as a secular example of pseudospecies behavior.

## *5.3.2 Application to Religion*

Erikson never articulated a systematic psychology of religion (Homans, 1978b, p. 233), so it is not often appreciated that religion had an important role in Erikson's work (Capps, 1996a). At about his mid-career mark he published *Young Man Luther*, a psychological study on the great Christian reformer, and *Gandhi's Truth*, a work on the Hindu religious and political leader. In these books, and his later work, he moved away from functionalism and developed existential aspects of his thought (Hoare, 2000, p. 29; Zock, 1990). While he was not involved in institutional religion, he claimed he was a Christian follower, and especially in his later works, he talked about the importance of our relationship to the Ultimate. These views likely were a reason for his declining popularity in psychology and the increasing interest in his work from theology (Hoare, 2000; Fuller, 1996). As a result, his work has not been especially influential in the psychological study of religion, but a number of religious writers with theological agendas have appropriated his work (e.g., Whitehead & Whitehead, 1979).

### 5.3.2.1 Religion and Development

Several stages in the Eriksonian framework have implications for religious development. The stages of infancy, with its development of trust, and the stage of adolescence and the formation of identity, are of particular importance.

*Infancy and Trust.* In Erikson's early work such as *Childhood and Society* (1950), religion was primarily linked with developmental issues such as trust (Zock, 1990, pp. 83–84). Erikson believed that we have a drive for essential wholeness that requires the development of basic trust in the environment. This gives a generalized sense of ourselves and the world around us as interrelated and good. He believed that organized religion is the major social institution that provides this sense of reassurance through teachings and practices like prayer and rituals. This trust is an early manifestation of religious experience and a basis for hope (Weigert, 1962, p. 7). Unfortunately, religious institutions can at times also be unhelpfully cold and cruel, which leads to a struggle to find other ways to find safety and wholeness (Erikson, 1968, pp. 83–84).

*Adolescence, Identity, and Ideology.* Especially beginning with *Young Man Luther*, Erikson began to explore the connection between identity and religion. His idea about identity as a center of the individual's life was similar to the concept of faith in Paul Tillich (Elhard, 1968). He believed that at various stages in our life we confront what can be called basic or existential anxiety over our dependence on others. This requires development of an existential identity that is separate from other aspects of identity (Erikson, 1958, pp. 177–182, 1969, pp. 396–400). For most people, the ideological resources of a religious tradition are used to do this; although as a functionalist Erikson believed that other ideologies might also satisfy this requirement (Zock, 1990, pp. 89–97; Homans 1978b, pp. 239–240). Furthermore, Erikson believed that a select group of people face the struggles of their age, reach beyond the answers provided by others and resolve this issue directly. They are the **homines religiosi** or religious geniuses like Luther or Gandhi who blaze new paths for humanity (Browning, 1973, p. 149).

*Later stages of development.* For Erikson, religion and spirituality are aspects of human experience that become a permanent feature at midlife (Hoare, 2002, p. 75). Erikson thought that religion also had a particularly vital role to play in old age by promoting integration and helping the individual deal with ultimate concerns. Other scholars have noted the religious nature of midlife in Eriksonian thought. For instance, religious themes appear in his concept of **generativity**, the midlife task of giving oneself to care for a younger generation, which provides an altruistic normative image of the human person (Browning, 1978, p. 264, 1973, pp. 163–164; cf. Clark, 1995). Recent research has found that the characteristics of highly generative persons such as strong hope, trust, and faith very often have a religious base and that generativity can be linked to a search for personal immortality (McAdams, Hart, & Maruna, 1998; McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1998; McAdams, 2006).

#### 5.3.2.2 Virtue

Erikson also developed an ethical and social aspect of his developmental theory that has relevance to religious life (Zock, 1990, p. 115). While he rejected automatic adherence to the moral dogma of a religion, he did think that each person needs to develop a principled ethic based on mutuality and the Kantian principle of treating others as ends and not means (see Section 2.2.3). He thought this adult ethical sense should be based on the integration of ideology with the superego in the adult personality. He equated the ideal ethical sense with the Christian concept of unconditional love, rather than a formal sense of justice as found in Piagetian developmental theorists like Lawrence Kohlberg (Hoare, 2000; see Sections 7.4.1 and 7.4.2).

In his later work, Erikson began to look at the positive virtues that emerged from each stage of development. He saw these as basic strengths that provide vitality for other positive characteristics. The virtues as portrayed by Erikson develop through living in a multigenerational community and are closely tied to religion (Erikson, 1964, pp. 113–114, 1968, p. 232; Zock, 1990, p. 205). For instance, Erikson saw that the virtue of hope or "*the enduring belief in the attainability of fervent wishes*" (1964, p. 118) is both the basis of and nourished by adult faith. The virtue of fidelity, "*the ability to sustain loyalties freely pledged in spite of the inevitable contradictions of value systems*" (1964, p. 125) is central to identity and is supported by ideology and affirming others, both of which can be provided by religion. His culminating virtue was wisdom, which involved a continued concern with life but a freedom from attachments (Erikson, 1964, p. 133; Capps, 1984). Work in the area of virtue has become very popular within psychology (see Section 11.1.2).

#### 5.3.2.3 Ritualization

Erikson thought that adult religious rituals were related in part to a common daily childhood activity he called **ritualization**: "an agreed-upon interplay between at least two persons who repeat it at meaningful intervals and in recurring contexts" (1966, pp. 602–603). The earliest ritualization was the greeting or affirmation and recognition of face and name between a mother and her baby. Such encounters have a paradoxical quality; they are both formal and familiar because of repetition but also playful and surprising. The earliest affirmation between mother and child carries with it a special emotional quality; since it is an exchange between unequals, it has a sense of "hallowed presence" (1987, p. 578). This gives a numinous quality to the encounter that will later form the foundation for the sense of numinous presence in adult religious rituals, especially personal devotions. Ritualization also provides a foundation for hope and for individual identity (Erikson, 1966, p. 605, 1968, p. 105, 1977, pp. 82–92; Capps, 1984).

Erikson believed that ritualization is intensely relational and becomes more complex, as new elements are added during development and an expanding circle of persons becomes involved. Adolescent and adult rituals are particularly important as they demonstrate our attachments to persons and ideologies. Some rituals like marriage sanction us to become parents and ritualizers to others—our children. Overall, Erikson had a positive view of ritual as making many important contributions to our life. However, he recognized that sometimes ritual can become separated from its natural social context. He termed this **ritualism**, the compulsive compliance or repetition of rituals on an individual basis that can become legalistic

(Erikson, 1966, pp. 609–618, 1977, pp. 90–105, 1987, 1996; Zock, 1990, p. 98; cf. Section 12.4.1).

#### 5.3.2.4 Transcendence, Subjective Identity, and the I

Along with our basic identity, Erikson thought we also developed a subjective identity, an awareness that we exist and have an enduring individual style that provides continuity in our relationships. Erikson developed a transcendent, almost mystical aspect of this thought through his writings on the "I" or numinous sense of awareness, existence, and life that goes with consciousness (1968, pp. 216–221, 1996). He believed that the "I" emerges from mutual recognition and interactions with an Other, who in early life is our maternal caretaker. Erikson thought that ultimately the "I" in each of us has a religious quality and that it is this inner "I" that Jesus addresses in the Gospels. If our experiences of recognition and interaction have been positive, God works during adulthood to play the role of a numinous Other that helps develop both our sense of "I" and our connectedness toward others, as well as helping us confront the issue of a possible eternal identity (Erikson, 1968, 1982, 1996; Capps, 1997a; Zock, 1990, pp. 100–101; Browning, 1973, pp. 153–154). However, if the person experiences rejection or lack of recognition, the Other is perceived as malevolent, encouraging the labeling of other groups as dangerous. This aspect of Erikson's thought has many parallels to the work of Niebuhr and even more closely resembles that of Tillich (Homans, 1978b).

### *5.3.3 Assessment*

Wulff (1997, pp. 405–408) has summarized some of the chief complaints about Erikson's work from the standpoint of psychology, including lack of clarity and consistency in his writing, shifting and vague theoretical constructs, and lack of overall systematic focus. The universality and nature of the individual stages in Erikson's theory of development have also been questioned. These problems make it difficult to construct an empirical test of Eriksons's ideas. His treatment of gender has also been labeled as inadequate or even offensive by some, as he associated the homo religiosi with a "feminine" mode of inclusiveness, holding, and passivity (Capps, 1996b; Zock, 1997). Critiques from theology have focused on the functional and outer-directed nature of his theory that tends to neglect religious experience. Specific complaints have also been directed toward his psychobiographical methods. For instance, Erikson's biography of Luther has been attacked as depending on unreliable primary sources and excessively focusing on Luther's psychological problems such as anxiety to the exclusion of other aspects of his story and character (Hendrix, 1995).

Erikson also differs from some religious writers in his view of the central aspect of the human person. For Erikson the center of the person was the ego and the identity that it constructs through interactions with the environment. In the traditional Christian view, the center of the personality is the **heart**—not our physical heart but the central part of the personality around which a true unified self can be built. This heart is known directly only by God—we must infer its existence and characteristics. It is *discovered*, not made; finding it is one of the goals of Christian life (Rahner, 1963, p. 277; Ulanov, 2001, p. 130; cf. Pannenberg, 1985, pp. 197–224; see Section 13.2.4).

Nevertheless, Erikson's theory offers some valuable insights. It can be used to understand issues that go on in the background of spiritual and religious development, or it may be taken as a model for understanding the stages and tasks of spiritual development (e.g., Tate & Parker, 2007). His focus on development throughout the life span offers a reminder of the importance of middle age and older adulthood, and his work on early trust has provided an enduring contribution to the psychology and religion dialogue. Scholars point out that trust is the foundation of hope, which allows us to develop purposeful intention and to move from willfulness to willingness, breaking our attachment to the present and opening up new possibilities (Meissner, 1987, pp. 186–187, 204–205).

## 5.4 Object Relations Approaches to Psychology and Religion

**Object relations theory** (ORT) developed as a movement within British psychoanalysis during the mid-to-late 20th century. It moved away from the Freudian emphasis on drive and structure and assumed instead a fundamental interrelatedness that does not idealize individualism (Chodorow, 1999, p. 117). Many of the British object relations theories had religious backgrounds and were sympathetic toward religion, partly because historical and cultural factors had caused the British Enlightenment to take place within instead of against Christianity (Watts, 2002c, p. 2).

### *5.4.1 Basic Concepts*

In ORT, motivation revolves not around sexual, or aggressive instincts (Freud), or inner conflict and balancing (Jung) but around a need to develop a significant existence that allows for self-realization through our relationships with other persons. Anxiety is produced not by conflict but threats to our ability to establish satisfactory relationships with others. This has led ORT theorists to develop the concept of object. For Freud, objects were anything that could satisfy a need, which in his system were instinctual in nature. In ORT, an **object** is "some person or persons to whom we can relate ourselves significantly so that life can be positively enjoyed, and come to have a meaning and value, and to be worth preserving" (Guntrip, 1957, p. 43). Objects that should fulfill that function but do not or have the opposite effect are referred to as *bad objects.* Many objects are external, but others exist as representations within the psyche that affect us even when the physical object is absent. For example, our parents continue to exercise an important influence on us through our internalized representations of them even when they are absent. These **internalized objects** may be incomplete; thus we can refer to *part* or *whole objects*. Furthermore, people may be unable to construct cohesive representations due to inconsistencies and conflicts; the different irreconcilable parts are separated into different objects; this process is known as **splitting**. Since objects are generally constructed from people and relationships we have early in life, they are laden with attached emotions and pre-linguistic experiences (Hill & Hall, 2002; Beit-Hallahmi, 1995).

In ORT, all psychic processes are viewed as reactions to our internal or external object environment (Guntrip, 1957, pp. 58–59). Object relations theories of religion contend that God appears in us as an object that at first is modeled after our parents. Later as we get older, the God object dissociates from them, becoming more universal and complex (St. Clair, 1994, p. 12). Since spirituality in a theistic context is thought about in terms of one's relationship to God, spirituality will be healthy or unhealthy depending on the quality of our God object and the relationship we have with it (Hall & Brokaw, 1995). ORT can be used in this context to (1) uncover the developmental roots of God images, religious practices or problems, (2) expose unconscious factors underlying religious practices and ideas, and (3) suggest additional ways of thinking about religion from a relational perspective (Miller, 2000; Jonte-Pace, 1999). This has generated a large and fruitful theoretical and empirical literature in the psychology of religion (see e.g., Section 8.3).

## *5.4.2 Harry Guntrip*

The object relations theorist who wrote most prolifically about religion was Harry Guntrip (1901–1975). He developed the work of his mentor W. R. D. Fairbairn (1889–1964) and tried to apply it to problems encountered by pastors (Hoffman, 2004; Guntrip, 1996).

### 5.4.2.1 Psychopathology

Guntrip (1957) believed that our unconscious is populated with the mostly unhappy, negative, and frustrating figures that we would like to forget but cannot because of our strong emotional attachments to them. He thought that negative emotional states were due to interactions with internalized bad objects. The tantalizing figure that promises but then disappears or withholds becomes a "Desirable Deserter," while the aggressive and persecutory figure forms a "Hated Denier." These objects cause deep divisions and conflict in the rest of the personality including the ego so that we actually interact with the world in different modes depending on which object is dominant. Dominance of the Deserter can lead to a *schizoid position* toward life, where we are afraid to love, while the Denier can lead us to a *depressive position* marked by fear and anger. Divisions in the personality can also occur when important figures behave inconsistently, leading to splitting of objects into good and bad parts. This splitting can then lead to further internal conflict and inconsistency in our behavior and mental life. Different psychopathologies develop as ways of dealing with these internalized bad objects. These bad objects can also become centers of meaning and value: in the Christian view they are false gods that we give ourselves to in devotion (Crosswell, 2000). Solving the problem of anxiety requires correcting problems with bad objects, but instead we often just use substitute gratifications that we hope will reduce anger or pain. Guntrip believed that lasting satisfaction could only be achieved by modifying object relations.

#### 5.4.2.2 Development and Transformation

Guntrip thought that mutuality rather than adaptation was the key to development. In early development, it is the relational environment provided by the mother that makes growth possible. Ideally our parents are not overly frustrating or dominating but provide an atmosphere of love and respect that encourages development of our personality without guilt or fear and with increasing competence in personal relations. This also increases our sensitivity to the environment, opening us to religious experience (1957, p. 72). Development progresses from an initial state of immature dependency to a mutual or mature dependency where we are capable of being alone but prefer to be together. This happens by (a) realization of our potential in good personal relationships marked by freedom, reciprocity, and mutual valuation and (b) development of a sense of personal reality and stable selfhood that provides defense against anxiety. Together, these represent what Guntrip called the *spiritual plane of life* (Guntrip, 1957, p. 130, 1969, 1973; Paul, 1999).

#### 5.4.2.3 Psychotherapy

According to Guntrip, **anxiety** is a kind of mental pain (1957, p. 24), and that when dealing with the pain and its source on our own becomes too difficult, we develop defenses such as depression or physical illness to cover up. Psychotherapy was designed to correct these problems by providing a positive relationship in which the therapist assumes the role of a good parent object, helps the person experience things within that have been concealed or ignored, and protects the person against the emotional dangers of the healing process. Thus, while psychotherapy might benefit from scientific study, it is most of all a personal healing relationship designed to restore confidence, faith, and hope and is not a scientific activity (1957, p. 185).

#### 5.4.2.4 Religion

For Guntrip, religion is "*an overall way of experiencing life, of experiencing ourselves and our relationships together; an experience of growing personal integration* *or self-realization through communion with all that is around us, and finally our way of relating to the universe*" (1969, p. 326). This definition implies that religion is relational in nature, ideally an experience of personal communion with an ultimate, all-embracing reality. Other experiences like work and family may thus have a broadly religious aspect, (1957, pp. 186–199) and rich relational experiences can provide a way of understanding religious experience. The definition also suggests that a prime function of religion is to lead us toward a sense of unity and integration that will impact the way we relate to others, our environment, and ourselves.

#### 5.4.2.5 Religion and Psychotherapy

Guntrip thought that psychotherapy and religion were both therapeutic in their goal. He believed that they had a bidirectional relationship. Religion could impact therapy: a sound religious faith and capacity for religious experience were desirable prerequisites for psychotherapy, and religion might have a therapeutic effect. On the other hand, therapy or help with psychological problems might help the religious life of the individual (1957, pp. 186–189). There were limits to this, however, as he believed that many personality structures from childhood were permanent and that all religion or therapy could do is help "maintain faith, courage and determination in facing and resisting difficulties that cannot be removed from the deeper levels of the psychic life" (1957, p. 192). Religious leaders needed to understand these therapeutic needs so that religion could promote and not harm mental health. Guntrip, as with other writers of his period, offered a therapeutic vision of religion that has been very influential but more recently has been challenged by some theologians and other scholars (see Section 10.3.1).

#### 5.4.2.6 Religion, Science, and Ethics

While Guntrip had great respect for science, he thought the idea that science could solve all our human problems was "simple minded" (1957, p. 197). While science can teach us a great deal, he believed that mechanistic science could not penetrate the subjective nature of relationality and that it could not discover the meaning, value, and purpose that lay at the heart of human existence. He saw reductionistic science as undermining basic human values and mental health. Ultimately, if we are to grow it must *matter* that we are mature and mentally healthy; thus a moral stance is necessary for personality change to take place and skepticism—scientific or otherwise—makes for poor prognosis in therapy. Moral values are important because they involve commitment to the kinds of personal qualities necessary to sustain the good human relationships that lie at the base of our life. It is values rather than mechanistic causes that form the basis of our motives, and it is these values that allow us to control the destructive potential of science (Guntrip, 1957, pp. 165–196, 1969).

## *5.4.3 David Winnicott*

Although Guntrip wrote extensively about religion, it is his other mentor David Winnicott (1896–1971) who is currently most influential in the psychology and religion dialogue. Winnicott was raised in a religious home and introduced to psychoanalysis by Oskar Pfister, a Christian friend of Sigmund Freud. Although he did not speak much about his faith, Winnicott had a lingering religiosity and theism that revived later in his life (Hoffman, 2004). Certainly many Christian ideas and attitudes are present in his work.

### 5.4.3.1 Distinctive Contributions

Winnicott (1990) is best known for his theory of development. He conceptualized childhood as moving in three stages from *absolute dependence* to *relative dependence* and finally toward *independence* (Abram, 1997). Like Erikson, he believed that good development was facilitated by a stable but responsive environment that promoted the formation of trust, confidence and a sense that the environment around us is a benevolent one (LaMothe, 1999). He referred to this as a **holding environment**. Most important in providing this environment is the relationship between child and mother, where the mother who in a "good-enough" way responds to the needs of the child. Winnicott looked at a quiet resting condition with the mother as a kind of original state of goodness. Good-enough parenting allows us to develop the freedom to express our true self, while failures in parenting lead to the development of a false self that simply complies with the demands of the environment (St. Clair, 2000, p. 67).

While this early dependence on the mother is essential, the child must eventually move away and establish independence. Winnicott believed that this crucial step occurred when the child was able to substitute other objects for the mother during her absence. He called these substitutes **transitional objects** or transitional phenomena (Winnicott, 1953). These transitional objects are formed in the individual prior to the onset of language abilities; thus they are emotional and experiential in character. Like all objects, they have an external and internal reality or meaning. They also have the ability to both connect and separate internal and external reality (Eigen, 1999; Abram, 1997, p. 311). For children, a blanket or teddy bear can serve as a transitional object.

After the transition to adulthood, the ability to form substitute representations that have emotional value remains in the individual. Winnicott and others often refer to this as the **transitional space** in the person, "an intermediate area of *experiencing*, to which inner reality and external life both contribute" (Winnicott, 1975, p. 230). It is a realm of symbolism that is the nexus for cultural activity, play, creativity, and religion (Winnicott, 1975, p. 224; St. Clair, 1994, pp. 14–15). In a Winnicottian framework, psychotherapy, spiritual direction—or even prayer—provides a holding environment and transitional space where creative work and growth can take place (Hardy, 2000; Meissner, 1984, p. 182). As with Erikson and some other writers, he recognized the sometimes playful quality of psychological processes (cf. Smith, 2004). Extending this idea, Ulanov (2001, p. 11) has argued that for reality to be real, we must encounter it in this transitional space and contribute an illusory, playful, and creative component, or it will have no meaning for us.

#### 5.4.3.2 Applications to Religion

According to Winnicott, religion does not happen inside or outside of us but in our transitional space, where it is centrally placed to affect all aspects of the self (Winnicott, 1975, p. 96; Meissner, 1987, p. 43). The space begins to assume religious functions early in life with the formation of a God-object or **God image** in the space that can act as a transitional object (Winnicott, 1990, pp. 100–101). Our initial God image is based on interactions with our parents, but it goes beyond this as well (Underwood, 1997). Perhaps it can be thought of as a kind of generalized sense of presence of what the world and others are like. Like other transitional objects, the God image has both objective and subjective components. However, unlike other objects, the God object is not abandoned by the psyche during development but remains a powerful part of our inner reality, especially in relation to the creative and symbolic capabilities of the transitional space (Banschick, 1992; McDargh, 1986). In this view, development of the symbolic is relational rather than instinctual (Jones, 1997). For Winnicott, mystical or religious experiences in part involve an encounter with this God object that is part of our subjective reality. Religious rituals like communion can create a kind of transitional space that might facilitate this encounter (Winnicott, 1990). Our religious life reflects the changes that take place in our God image over time. Religion can also assist the process of growth through training and practices that facilitate imaginative thinking (Pruyser, 1985).

Ulanov (2001) has developed an elaborate treatment of the God image based on Winnicott's theory. She notes that material for the image probably comes from a variety of sources, including personal experiences, ideas of family and friends, and official images from religious tradition and culture. It also sometimes includes projected materials, things about us that we have difficulty accepting and would rather push off onto God. Our God image thus has the potential to reveal things about ourselves to us. Depending on the materials that go into the image, we may see God as a positive and supporting, challenging, or very punitive.

For Winnicott, the self is a subjective sense of feeling real that develops as the child moves toward independence. If our needs mesh with the environment, this sense of self reflects our genuine feelings and needs. When there is a disconnect between the environment and our needs as in the failure of the holding environment, the person constructs a different self—a **false self** or mask—that helps the person comply with social obligations and feel better about deficits we may have in identity. This means that everyone develops a false self, that is, who we would be, if we were able to meet the demands of the environment and cope with its failings while meeting our own needs (Abram, 1997, pp. 268–269; cf. Winnicott, 1990). This kind of distinction between true and false self can also be found in religious thought, as in the writings of the Christian Spanish mystics and the work of Thomas Merton (Welch, 1996, p. 40; see Section 13.3.2). The false self is an illusion, and the problems that it causes play a prominent role in both Christian and Buddhist analyses of the human condition.

## *5.4.4 Assessment*

An implication of object relations views of religion is that to some extent our experience of God is affected or mediated by our personal history of relationships with others. Traditional theologians like Karl Barth would argue that this is the reason why theology cannot be built solely on personal experience, as the temptation is to construct a God according to human need or assumption rather than reality (Martyn, 1992, p. 147).

The application of ORT to God representations alters the Freudian understanding of religion in several important ways. First, it provides a nonreductive account of the origins of the religious and symbolic world and the relational organization of the religious imagination (McDargh, 1993). God representations are no longer thought to relate only to instincts and the father figure, and their use by the psyche has a healthy rather than purely defensive function. Second, the special nature of the God object suggests that it has the potential to change and influence behavior into adulthood (McDargh, 1992). As an early object, it can also influence the formation of other internalized objects that have transformational powers (Shafranske, 1992; J. Jones, 1997). Third, it moves toward a relational model of the human person that captures important aspects of experience. It is a model that works well in theological dialogue.

### 5.4.4.1 Limitations of the Object Relations Model

The strengths of the object relations model can also be its weaknesses. Jones (1997) notes that its focus on bonding as a key early developmental process can obscure other important issues like social context or the effects of instincts and drives. Also, by identifying people as objects, an object relations view of relationality sometimes leads to the faulty assumption that relations with people are the same as the relationships with nonhuman things that fulfill needs for us. However, when we relate to other people we typically see them not as an object (like, say a sandwich) but as a subject who is also a center of consciousness. There is an experience of mutuality that recognizes similarity of the inner experience of being human and the confirmation we receive from others. There is also an unpredictableness and tension that occurs between recognizing the other and asserting the self (Benjamin, 1999; cf. Sections 4.1.1 and 4.4.4).

The view of Winnicott that the goal of development is independence has been criticized as ignoring the fact that we are always dependent. Critics argue that dependency is a natural state that can have a healthy function in the context of a positive relationship and is not something we outgrow. Religions like Christianity call on us to recognize dependence and see gaps in development including parenting failures as inevitable (Ulanov, 2001). When it works well, religion can contribute positively to age-appropriate dependence. McDargh (1983, pp. 84–96) argues that our capacity to be alone but also tolerate dependency develops faith and trust in our relationship to a real, meaningful world and that this in turn supports development of the self and our ability to love. Refusal to accept dependence can be connected to a lack of faith.

The use of Winnicott's conception of the God object by religious writers has been criticized. Jones (1997) argues that analysts like Meissner who make use of Winnicott's work focus too much on the representational aspect of God images and neglect the fact that for Winnicott a transitional object is also a capacity for experience. In this second meaning, transitional phenomena are not objects but also types of experiences. They have an in-between or **liminal** character that offers a kind of psychological space between fantasy and the demands of reality that allows for renewal and creativity (see Section 12.4.1).

Another problem is that uncritical commentators often assume that adult transitional objects are exactly equivalent to Winnicott's childhood examples. For instance, religious rituals or narratives are often transitional in the sense that they involve both our inner and outer reality, but they have broader shared meanings and deal with many issues in addition to dependency such as identity (LaMothe, 1999). These adult transitional phenomena serve not only a protective function but also have transformative effects (Bollas, 1978). In fact, the transformative quality of the experience can itself become an object of representation so that our experience of change during adulthood can draw upon earlier experiences of change, raising old excitements and worries. God representations can include this transformational quality (Shafranske, 1992; Paul, 1999). Furthermore, it is not only the object itself but the relationship to the object which becomes key for adults.

From a theological perspective, ORT carries with it certain assumptions and limitations that can be problematic. Psychoanalysts rightly point out that they are limited to descriptions of experiences or objects and cannot speak about the God that the experience points at (St. Clair, 1994, p. 17). Some theological writers have also argued that ORT has a limited view of human nature. For instance, Burns-Smith (1999) points out that Winnicott assumes a highly optimistic view of human nature. He assumes that many human problems are not inherent in our experience but simply due to preventable failures in the environment. This would appear to leave little or no role for factors like faulty personal choices, biology, or instinct (Hoffman, 2004; Guntrip, 1973, pp. 133–136).

## 5.5 Conclusion

**Key issue:** *Any detailed and accurate understanding of the human person that hopes to comprehend our religious and spiritual life needs to account for our essential relational nature as well as individual uniqueness.*

Psychodynamic theories have contributed more than any other field of psychology to the dialogue with religion. One of the most important benefits of this interchange has been to highlight the important role of development in the spiritual and religious life. We will look at other views of religion, spirituality, and development in subsequent chapters (see Chapters 7, 8 and 9).

One of the strengths of psychodynamic approaches is that they contain explicitly worked out views of the human person. While these theories agree that human life is dynamic, worked out in tension between different competing forces, they disagree about the basis or ontology of personhood and what brings a person into being and makes them what they are. Zizioulas (2006) distinguishes between two different ontologies of personhood—substantialist and relational. In **substantialist ontologies**, it is assumed that there is some substance, quality, or essence of the human person that makes them what they are. Freudian theory is substantialist, because it argues that the power or energy from drives within the person is the primary factor behind human development. Substantialist ontologies are also found in other branches of psychology. For instance, cognitive views of the human person assume that rationality is the most important human quality, while neurobiological views argue that certain material processes and structures within the body are key. Substantialist ontologies are attractive to scientists because they are especially compatible with **monism**, the idea that everything can ultimately be reduced to a unified system or whole with no essential differences, an idea rejected by psychologists like William James (see Section 4.2.1). They also fit well in a culture that values individualism and places the independent, conscious self at the center of things. The alternative is a **relational ontology**, which argues that people gain their identity in their relations with others who are different from us in important ways but offer us the possibility of relationship. Relational ontologies emphasize the uniqueness and irreplaceability of each individual and their freedom, while substantialist ontologies focus on uniformity and conformity to law. According to relational ontologies:

- Gratitude should be a central response to life, since who we are is in large measure received from those around us
- Love is more than a feeling, it is a free relationship that helps provide identity and uniqueness
- Since our personhood is dependent upon relationship, it is not a quality we possess—it is *what we are*, and while it can be distorted in separation or our refusal to accept freedom and uniqueness, it cannot be lost
- If persons are essentially relational, they are best known in relationship.

Relational ontologies are of particular interest in the psychology and religion dialogue as most contemporary Christian theology (as well as key elements of classical Christian thought) is relational rather than substantialist in nature. Both relational and substantialist ontologies are influential in contemporary approaches to the dialogue. We examine some of these developments in the next chapter.