Confounding the Divine and the Spiritual: Challenges to a Psychology of Spirituality

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Abstract The pervasive inclusion of God or "God-substitutes" (the "sacred," the "supernatural," the "ultimate") in the psychology of spirituality prevents the development of a truly psychological understanding. Misidentification of the spiritual with the divine projects the determinants of spirituality into a non-human, vaguely defined, ultimately intractable, and non-falsifiable realm. Two other difficulties follow: confusion about the essential nature of spirituality and indeterminacy regarding criteria to adjudicate true and false spiritualities. These three intertwined issues represent unavoidable challenges for the social sciences in general and psychology in particular. Building on the work of Bernard Lonergan, invoking the thought of Viktor Frankl, and citing long-standing Western theological and philosophical principles, this article elucidates these challenges and intimates a response, an explanatory and normative non-theological psychology of spirituality, which is open to theological elaboration.

Keywords Authenticity · Consciousness · Epistemology · Ethics · Existential psychology ·
Frankl, Viktor · Lonergan, Bernard · Psychology of religion · Psychology of spirituality ·
Spirituality: non-theist, true and false, definition of, criteria of

Introduction

What is spirituality, and is a scientific approach to it even possible? The considerations are multiple. From its inception but under coded names, Transpersonal Psychology has been concerned with the spiritual dimension of human experience (Elkins 1998; Schneider 2004; Tart 1975; Vaughan 1982; Walsh and Vaughan 1980; Wilber 1995, 1996). More recently, like religion, spirituality has also become a burning topic in other psychological circles (American Counseling Association 1995; American Psychological Association 1992; Bergin 1991; Clinebel 1995; Dueck 1989; Hinterkopf 1998; Holden 1996; Jones 1994; Lovinger

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1990; Pargament 1997; Paloutzian and Park 2002; Richards and Bergin 2005; Shafranske 1996; Sperry and Shafranske 2005). However, on all fronts reference to spirituality remains clouded in ambiguity. For example, also like religion, the meaning of spirituality remains uncertain. While essential and functional definitions represent two main differing approaches, scholars share no agreement on what religion is (Cohn 1962; Pargament 1997). As a global concept, *religion* includes a swath of disparate elements: customs, traditions, rituals, clergy, administrative systems, policies, calendars, beliefs, ethics, and oftentimes appeal to "God" variously named and conceived, revelation from God, and even union with God. Although, rightly or wrongly, some suggest that spirituality can be separate from religion (Elkins 1998), spirituality is certainly a facet of religion (Emmons and Crumpler 1999; Hill et al. 2000; Pargament 1999). But making this connection does not help explain what spirituality is. Zinnbauer and Pargament's (2005) discussion of the matter, for example, leads to a non-illuminating standoff, and Sperry's (2005, 2008) typology presents mere abstract possibilities (Helminiak 2008b). In fact, the term *spirituality* now often serves as a generic and politically correct way of referring simply to people's religion (Slife and Richards 2001; Spilka and McIntosh 1996; Watts 2001).

Important questions surround the psychological study of spirituality. What exactly is spirituality? How does it arise? What constitutes its inner functioning? What are the norms or inherent requisites for its usefulness or validity? How does it relate to other facets of religion and to the challenge of human living overall? To what extent is psychology even competent to study spirituality? What methods would be adequate to such study? How should a psychological understanding of spirituality bear on the personal spiritualities of clients in non-religious psychotherapy, and, indeed, what validity does a psychology of spirituality have in the face of the religions themselves? These questions are at stake in the present discussion—not to say that this article can address them all, but only to say that the matter is complex and that a truly scientific study of spirituality does need eventually to answer them.

Three pivotal issues confound the attempt to address those questions coherently. These three constitute serious challenges for a social science, and they are entangled in one core confusion: the identity of the spiritual with the divine. First, in contrast to theology or pastoral ministry, psychology needs to bracket questions about God and take God and other possible non-falsifiable religious and metaphysical entities or constructs out of its discussion of spirituality. A psychology of spirituality needs to "dis-identify" the spiritual from the divine. This is the core issue. The other two depend on it. Second, once the spiritual and the divine are distinguished, appeal to the spiritual no longer serves ipso facto to implicate spirituality, so there is need to distinguish the spiritual dimension of human experience in its generic operations, on the one hand, from spirituality, on the other hand. In this case, spirituality is recognized as one particular engagement of the spiritual, namely, the deliberate pursuit of growth in that generic, human, spiritual dimension. Third, if the spiritual is not the divine, appeal to the spiritual does not necessarily carry the guarantee of validity that appeal to divinity would confer. So there is need to determine criteria to distinguish true from false spiritualities. When achieved, the psychological determination of what spirituality is, how it functions, and what it requires to insure ongoing personal and societal advance must include such specification of criteria. Then, the advent of a scientific treatment of spirituality would revoke religion's traditional immunity from criticism, and psychology could assess the validity of people's spiritualities and religions (Helminiak 2008a). As shocking as these assertions might sound, especially in the current philosophical climate (Rosenau 1992), I argue that the psychology of spirituality will not advance unless it addresses these challenges and puts them in place. In the least, delineation of these

challenges makes clear what psychology is up against when it chooses to address spirituality.

The focus of this article is these three challenges. However, I believe that, in elaborating the challenges, I will also need to suggest an alternative approach to the standard conceptions. My own experience persuades me. I had first to conceive a viable alternative approach before I was able to discern and specify those three challenges, to recognize their seriousness, and to believe that it is possible to meet them in a way that is free from, yet open to, religious and theist elaboration. Theist religion so permeates the world in which most of us live, our personal religious needs are so pressing, and our religious commitments are so dear that it becomes almost impossible for us to see beyond religion and God when dealing with spirituality. Therefore, intimating a non-religious and non-theological alternative must be part of highlighting the challenges themselves. Elsewhere that alternative and applications of it have been presented in detail (Feingold 1995; Feingold and Helminiak 2000; Helminiak 1981, 1982, 1984a, b, 1986a, b, 1987a, b, 1988, 1989, 1992, 1994, 1995a, b, 1996a, b, c, 1997, 1998a, b, 2001a, b, 2002, 2005, 2006, 2008a, c).

An explanatory psychology of spirituality

What would the achievement of a coherent psychology of spirituality entail? In sum, the task is to move from merely describing what people do spiritually to explaining what they do. Suppose one wanted to study nutrition. Would one go to a supermarket and keep a detailed list of the items people buy? Would one suppose that, by noting the contents of shopping carts, one could understand nutrition? What does one do with the crazy glue, toilet paper, and shampoo in those carts, not to mention the snacks and other junk foods? Yet our study of spirituality has often followed the shopping-cart model (Feingold and Helminiak 2000): Dutifully respectful of every person's preferences, we catalogue people's beliefs and spiritual practices and compare them with one another (Hood et al. 1996). This "consumerist approach" could never result in an explanation of spirituality.

Kirkpatrick (2005) laments the amorphous state of research not only in spirituality and the psychology of religion but also in psychology as a field, a "hodgepodge of barely interconnected subdisciplines…inherently splintered due [to] its lack of a coherent paradigm" (p. 115). Similarly, Richardson et al. (1999) write that psychological students and professionals

> are genuinely fascinated with the topics under discussion…. But they worry whether research reported on these topics really sheds much light on them or comes up with more than what one philosopher of social science [Charles Taylor] calls "wordy elaborations of the obvious." They may be uncomfortable with mainstream psychology's claim to be a value–neutral science of human behavior. If it is strictly neutral, they wonder, how can it be relevant to human affairs…? Moreover, they see few signs that the social disciplines will ever even approach the natural sciences in explanatory or predictive power. (p. 1)

The "wordy elaborations" suggest the merely descriptive nature of much psychology. The question about "explanatory…power" and "lack of a coherent paradigm" points to my concern: a real science of spirituality. The question about the supposed value–neutrality of science echoes the third of the challenges listed above. Be it noted, however, that the point must be not only to acknowledge people's values—psychology already does so—but also

to take a stand on these values, to determine which values people *ought* to have, which values are good, healthy, wholesome. This latter matter, daunting as it is, must be resolved before human psychology is really dealing with its intended subject matter. Ultimately, at stake is the traditional philosophical and religious task—which seems quaint or even ludicrous in many intellectual circles today—to give a valid, coherent account of human nature. Thus, these quotes succinctly exemplify the concern of this article: the possibility of an explanatory science of spirituality.

The scientific ideal can be expressed in another way (Helminiak 1998a). The ideal of explanation is to determine the necessary and sufficient conditions that would account for spirituality and, on the basis of this determination, to propose the laws that universally govern spirituality. These laws would state the factors at stake in spirituality and their interrelationship. Said otherwise, the ideal is to determine the structures, mechanisms or processes, and triggers that pertain to spiritual integration and growth. The successful result of such an endeavor would be something like the equation attributed to Pythagoras: $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$. It applies to the co-planar right triangle in Euclidean space and to no other reality in the universe. This equation specifies the abstract essence of "right triangle-ness," the necessary and sufficient factors and their distinctive relationship that completely account for the triangle. Moreover, this equation and its understanding look nothing like a triangle in the physical world, and no physical triangle could possibly be so perfectly formed as to match the abstract equation precisely. Nonetheless, the Pythagorean theorem is exceedingly useful and fully relevant to everyday life. Likewise, the goal of an explanatory psychology of spirituality would be to specify the common factors and their patterns that apply to every particular instance of spirituality. Pursuing this goal, psychology would move beyond merely surveying beliefs, values, and religious practices to actually explaining how, why, and to what positive extent "generic" or "core spirituality" functions in and through any particular beliefs, values, and practices.

To approach that ideal would require facing the three challenges noted above—regarding (a) the divine, (b) the spiritual, and (c) the normative. These three cohere, so addressing one implicates the need to address the others: Norms (c) in spiritual matters (b) tend to be associated with the divine (a), which is presumed to be good (c), and the spiritual (b) is then considered to be the self-validating (c) expression of the divine (a) among us. This coherence and the illusiveness of the category *divine* contribute to the muddle in the discussion.

These matters are daunting. They inevitably implicate the thorny philosophical issues that are fundamental to all scholarly pursuits and to human living overall: epistemology and ethics. Reliance on the thought of Bernard Lonergan (1972, 1990, 1992) gives hope that these matters can be resolved. In the end, in a way different from that of Richardson et al. (1999; see also Richardson 1996), achievement of a scientific understanding of spirituality will entail re-envisioning the whole of psychology as an unapologetic, normative science— much as is contemporary medicine in its own right, which does not hesitate to tell people what they ought or ought not to do to restore and maintain physical health. I address each of the three challenges in turn.

The divine and the spiritual

Traditionally in Western religious circles, spirituality was conceived as a double affair. It had both a divine and a human side: It referred to one's relationship with God, and it entailed personal (spiritual) growth. These two facets of spirituality are of different kinds,

the latter open to psychological analysis and the former, not. Nonetheless, even in secular, social-science circles, relationship with God is commonly taken to be the defining essence of spirituality.

Spirituality as relationship with God

Writing for nurses in non-sectarian settings, Shelly and Fish (1988) state unabashedly, "That we are spiritual beings means a relationship with God is basic to our total functioning" (p. 29). In his psychological approach to spirituality, Sperry (2005) sets out "a basic theoretical assumption," namely, "that God exists" (p. 311). The same axiom controls the whole of Richards and Bergin's (2005) "spiritual strategy for counseling" and animates the discussion in Nelson and Slife's (2006) special issue of *Journal of Psychology and Theology*. Similarly, Hall and Edwards (2002) produced an instrument for "spiritual assessment"; the focus of the measure is "awareness of God and relationship with God" (p. 341). However, surely treatment of God exceeds the professional competence of psychologists as such. Moreover, every appeal to God entails non-falsifiable claims. As Thomas Aquinas noted repeatedly in his *Summa Theologica*, we may well know *that* God is, but we cannot know *what* God is. So *God* becomes a blank screen onto which people can project whatever content they wish, and there is no way of adjudicating the adequacy of those projections.

In contrast, were people's beliefs about God and their images of God the issues in question (Heller 1986; McDargh 1983; Rizzuto 1979), these would be amenable to psychological study since they are human matters, productions of the human mind. But, precisely as human matters, beliefs about God are simply one type of belief among a host of others, and the fact that the beliefs are about God gives them no more claim to accuracy nor reason to be respected by others than do ungrounded beliefs about anything else.

Therefore, what is said to be a relationship with God is more accurately recognized as a relationship with one's own ideals and aspirations that are projected onto God. Hall and Edwards's (2002) Spiritual Assessment Inventory exemplifies this matter patently. The inventory not only defines relationship with God but also assesses it—in terms of object-relations theory. But why assume that a relationship with one's God image actually correlates with a relationship with God? And why assume that object-relations theory should be the measure of adequate religion and spirituality? For example, built into the Disappointment subscale of this inventory is the supposition that it is unhealthy to feel frustrated or irritated with, or betrayed by, God; yet, according to Mark 15:34, even Jesus cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" In the Awareness subscale, the feeling of God's presence, the sense of direction that God gives to one's life, and the experience of communication with, and help from, God—these positively scored items might well imply delusions or hallucinations (Helminiak 1984b), and they could apply equally to some saintly person as to the terrorists who destroyed the World Trade Center or to religiously self-justified racists, male chauvinists, gay-bashers, and abortion-clinic bombers (Helminiak 1997). This inventory is vulnerable to legitimate criticism that it rests on purely gratuitous constructs.

Under analysis, the notion *relationship with God* breaks down; it hardly provides a basis for scientific study. Any psychological construct that includes God as an essential element inevitably results in a muddle. To what extent in particular cases a person might, indeed, be in relationship with God is a matter of theology, not psychology.

On the other hand, attention to the effects of such a supposed relationship on a person would seem to be proper to psychology—as would attention to the inherent or developed

human structures that allow such a relationship or attention to the human "meaning-making" capacity of which claimed relationship with God is a specific instance (Park 2005). Accordingly, psychology ought to address spirituality as a matter of personal integration and growth (Emmons 1999) and to bracket that other, theological aspect, relationship with God. Then, the legitimate scientific question about spirituality would be this: What is going on in people, how, and why, when they are engaged in spiritual pursuits, including what some might call "relationship with God"?

The need for a transcendent principle, and God-substitutes

It is not, however, easy to treat spirituality apart from God or, at least, apart from something that functions as "God." Even when conceived as a kind of personal growth, as in Transpersonal Psychology (e.g., Wilber 1995), spirituality is generally thought to entail self-transcendence, some kind of going beyond oneself. Accordingly, any adequate psychological account of spirituality must include some principle of transcendence. If God is ruled out as an inappropriate factor in a psychological study, some other similar principle must be delineated.

To be sure, many psychologists are aware that God cannot be involved in a psychological explanation if only because, wanting to be pluralistic, they recognize that not everyone believes in God in whatever form (The Gallup Poll 2007). So they avoid explicitly theist concepts like God, Allah, Brahman, or Creator and appeal, rather, to other constructs: higher power (Kass et al. 1991), the sacred (Elkins 1998; Hill et al. 2000; Pargament 1997), the supernatural (Rayburn 1996), the inscrutable and the transcendent (Schneider 2004), and the ultimate or absolute (Wilber 1996). On close analysis, however, these latter appear to be implicitly theist constructs, "God-substitutes" (Wulff 2003). They are superordinate, non-human, vaguely defined, and intractable, conceived in the image of an Exalted Other that stands in contrast to humanity and to which humanity relates. Appeal to God-substitutes does not eliminate, but merely obfuscates, the problem of God in a psychological treatment of spirituality. Such appeal implicitly presumes that the spiritual is the divine and that the essence of spirituality is commerce with some such non-human reality.

Elkins (1998) includes a 39-page chapter on "The Sacred," the most sustained analysis I have encountered. Nonetheless, ambiguity remains in Elkins's treatment, as is typical of the field. First, the presupposition is that spirituality is relationship with God: "Spirituality is always connected with our yearning for the divine" (p. 31). Second, the sacred is indiscriminately identified with the divine and other supposed metaphysical entities: "our yearning for the divine, the sacred, the mystery, the numinous, the transcendent, the ultimate, or whatever one wished to call that which lies beyond" (p. 31). Third and, one would think, necessarily, the sacred is some nonhuman reality because spirituality involves "our yearning" for "that which lies beyond." Moreover, explicitly, it would seem, the sacred is not oneself, not human, because for Elkins it is distinct from the soul: "The soul is…the deepest core of our own being. The sacred is…a powerful dimension of life….[It] provides the nourishing energy that feeds the soul and thereby produces spiritual growth" (p. 98–99). Nevertheless, finally, either the mind is itself divine or else the divine is merely another name for the mental or else the divine is not really essential to spirituality after all: "If one does not believe in God or a supernatural realm…the unseen order [i.e., that "beyond"] would be our own deeper nature….And religious conversion and mystical experiences would be seen as…originating in the deeper regions of one's own mind" (p. 69). The confusion in this treatment of spirituality exemplifies the problem I am highlighting. To

conceive spirituality as some amorphous phenomenon that encompasses also the soul and the sacred cannot possibly provide a coherent basis for an explanatory psychology of spirituality. At this point in history, Elkins (1998) may easily offer a popular audience a nonreligious spirituality, but it is not non-theist. Its reliance on the sacred and other God-substitutes unavoidably entails a devastating methodological problem: the confounding of psychology and theology, metaphysics, or "whatever one wishes to call" it.

The conflation of the spiritual and the divine, and oversight of creation

Identification of the spiritual with the divine is commonplace. Wilber's (1996) position, a version of Hindu thought, clearly exemplifies the point as regards Eastern philosophy and as uncritically integrated into Transpersonal Psychology: "The core insight of the *psychologia perennis* is that man's 'innermost' consciousness is identical to the absolute and ultimate reality of the universe, known variously as Brahman, Tao, Dharmakaya, Allah, the Godhead" (Wilber 1980, pp. 75–76). Campbell (2001) makes a statement to the same effect:

> Anyone who has an experience of mystery at all knows that there is a dimension, let's say, of the universe that is not that which is available to the senses. There's a wonderful saying in one of the *Upanishads*: "When, for a sunset or a mountain and the beauty of this or that, you pause and say, 'Ah,' that is participation in divinity." And I think that's what it is. It's the realization of wonder and also the experience of tremendous power—which people, of course, living in the world of nature are experiencing all the time: you know there is something there that is much bigger than the human dimension (program 6, track 3).

In the West, early Christian theologians conflated the spiritual and the divine when they used Platonic and Neo-Platonic thought to elaborate the notion of a personal God, inherited from Judaism (McGinn 1995). Plato, it seems, was so awed by the power of human insight—as, for example, in the achievement of Pythagoras's famous theorem—that he proposed that ideas were the really real and material things were merely imperfect copies. Moreover, Plato referred to those supposed realities in his projected World of Ideas or Forms as "divine" since in standard Greek usage *divine* simply meant perfect and unchanging. The divine originally included no implication of a creator; even the notion of a Demiurge was a later Platonic clarification. But Christian thinkers turned Plato's World of Ideas into the mind of God and the ideas themselves into the blueprints according to which God created earthly beings. Verbally, at least, Plato's divine ideas fitted effortlessly into Judaism's and Christianity's personal God, but substantively two very different realities—the human mind with its capacity for abstraction, and the creative power behind the universe—had been confounded. Highly influenced by Neo-Platonism, Augustine struggled to explain that, through understanding, the human mind somehow participates in the divine mind but without actually being divine. Still, the subtleties of the matter remained ambiguous, and Augustine's actual position is disputed (Cary 1997; McGinn 1995). The condemnation of the thought of Meister Eckhart in 1329 turned on this very issue (Colledge 1981; McGinn 1981). Thus, because of a conceptual confusion facilitated also by a terminological ambiguity, it is commonly accepted that the spiritual is, or necessarily has something to do with, the divine—even in the West, which also clearly affirms the inviolable distinction between the Creator and the created, which includes the human mind.

Other ambiguities played into this same confusion. In the Roman Empire around the beginning of the Common Era, *divine* referred to ultimate power. Given this usage, the

rather routine apotheosis of an emperor or other important figures was more a statement of fact than a blasphemy (Johnson 2002). The matter became difficult only when a more transcendent notion of God and Divinity entered the picture. A similar conflation of terms occurred in Hinduism and for similar reasons. "As they [the sages of the *Upanishads*] increasingly grasped the incomprehensible and unutterable nature of both *atman* and *Brahman*, these two ideas converged. They concluded that that which is called soul is identical with Ultimate Reality itself" (Muesse 2003). Current usage is again obscuring the important difference between these two ideas. Blatant examples are the use of the term *entheogens*—etymologically, sources of God within—to refer to hallucinogens (Forte 2000) and the use of the rhetoric "God in the brain" in reference to contemporary neurological research on religious experiences (Albright and Ashbrook 2001; D'Aquili and Newberg 1999; Hamer 2004; Newberg et al. 2001).

History explains how in the West and even in its modern psychology—and, likewise, in Eastern thought, Gnosticism, and New Age Religion—the spiritual and the divine could be so easily confounded. This historical explanation also suggests a solution to the challenge of a psychology of spirituality: Undo the confound; clarify the conceptual and terminological confusion.

A technically precise understanding of creation—and with it, a concomitant notion of Divinity—emerged only in 325 C.E. with the Council of Nicaea and its famous distinction between generation and creation, which was needed to specify the ontological status of Jesus Christ in Christian belief: "begotten, not made, one in being with the Father" (Lonergan 1976). Apart from this understanding, the descriptive characteristics of the perfect, unchanging, and abstract universal concepts of the human mind and the characteristics of the perfect, unchanging, and ubiquitous God might seem to pertain to only one and the same reality. But granted this understanding, by sheer dint of logic, the one cannot be the other; the created cannot be the Uncreated. Thus, "createdness" or "uncreatedness" is the essential determinant—not the other characteristics that can be predicated analogously of both God and the human mind.

Invoking the criterion of createdness, we can cleanly disidentify and precisely differentiate God and the mind. If we use the notion of *Creator* to specify God/Divinity as inviolably distinct from the *created* human mind and its products and if we use the term *spiritual* to refer to the human, mental phenomenon, then we have a conception of human consciousness free from entanglement with Divinity. We have a principle, consciousness, that goes beyond the physical and routinely transcends the here and now. We have a basis on which to account for spirituality, that requisite principle of self-transcendence. And this basis is "merely" human. Moreover, granted that the term *spiritual* also applies analogously to God, we also have a fully psychological account of spirituality that opens naturally onto theological extrapolation.

The usage of the terms *spiritual* and *divine* suggested here has solid grounding in the Western tradition. Of course, in the last analysis terminology is arbitrary; we use words as we agree to use them. On the other hand, the conceptual matters at stake in this terminological confusion are far from arbitrary. Whatever terms might eventually be used, the conceptual matters must be sorted out: The created and the Uncreated are inherently mutually exclusive.

An inherent human principle of self-transcendence

Explaining spirituality on the basis of the self-transcending capacity of the human mind, we would truly have a *psychology* of spirituality. "Religious conversion and mystical

experiences would be seen not as coming from God or a supernatural realm, but as originating in the deeper regions of one's own mind" (Elkins 1998, p. 69). Moreover, for those who wished, the overall picture could still include God conceived as the Creator, who, according to standard Western theology (Aquinas 1961 version, I q. 9 a. 2, q. 105 a. 5; Helminiak 1987b, chap. 5, 2008c, chap. 5) not only creates the human mind but also sustains it in being and continues to work in and through it. But the workings of the human mind, even when recognized as spiritual, remain within the domain of psychology; and the further questions about God's creative role, active and on-going, should be left to religious believers and theologians. Well conceived distinctions would both differentiate and interrelate the fields of psychology and theology in a comprehensive explanatory system (Helminiak 1998a).

Of course, it is one thing to make a general allusion to a self-transcending dimension of the human mind. It is another thing to specify this supposed inherent and fully human principle of self-transcendence. Bernard Lonergan's (1972, 1990, 1992) analysis of intentional consciousness provides the needed specification. By *consciousness* Lonergan means the highest dimensions of the human mind, what the ancient Greeks would have called *nous*; the Scholastics, *intellectus agens* and *voluntas*; the Hindus, *atman*; and the Buddhists, Buddha Nature. Often Lonergan (1992, pp. 372, 539–543, 640–642, 670–671, 696–697; 1972, pp. 13, 302) refers to this reality as the *human spirit*.

According to Lonergan, the spirit is only one facet of the human mind. Lonergan (1992, pp. 230, 481, 615, 620) calls the other facet *psyche*. Thus, the amorphous concept, mind, is differentiated into psyche and spirit, and the standard bipartite model of the human: body and mind, is refined into a tripartite model: organism (or body), psyche, and spirit (see Helminiak 2005, chap. 2).

That model is an exact parallel to that of Viktor Frankl (1962, pp. 100–103): somatic, psychic, and noetic, and to that of the School of Logotherapy (Institute of Logotherapy 1979): biological, psychological, and spiritual. However, with deference to religion and theist belief, Frankl (1988) preferred the term *noetic* to *spiritual* since "what we understand by the noological dimension is the anthropological rather than the theological dimension" (p. 17). That is, respecting the common usage that confounds the spiritual and the divine, Frankl was allowing that the spiritual referred to some realm beyond the human such that concern for meaning and purpose in life would be one thing, something human, and spirituality would be another thing, something theological. In contrast, I identify the noetic and the spiritual; and, consistent with the Western tradition, I freely use the words *spirit* and *spiritual* to name a facet of the human mind. I suggest that much of the contribution of existential psychology and logotherapy, when adequately nuanced, is already spirituality. I question the need to leave spirituality to religion. I deliberately use the word *spiritual*—for three reasons: (a) to highlight the true nature of the spiritual as a dimension of humanity; (b) concomitantly, to elicit a more adequate and more defensible conception of God and the divine; and (c) to provoke critical discussion about the nature of spirituality.

As I understand the matter (Helminiak 1987b, 1998a), the treatment of spirituality on the basis of the human spirit can account for most of what people mean when they speak of spirituality; hence, there is no need for a psychology of spirituality, as such, to defer to a supposed further dimension. The considerations about spirituality that a theist perspective could contribute are of a whole other order of explanation and would contribute nothing substantive to an adequate psychological account. For example, the ardent believer Isaac Newton freely acknowledged that God is the Creator of the solar system (Principe 2002), yet Newton did not include God as a factor in his equations. His explanation of how the solar system functions stood apart from any proposed account of how the solar system

exists. Even as Kepler stated explicitly in spelling out his three laws of planetary motion (Kors 1998), Newton also believed he had explained a part of God's creation, but insisting on this belief would have added nothing to his explanation of how creation functions. The explanation of existence itself and the explanation of an existent given pertain to disparate explanatory orders. This point applies also to spirituality. Clarifying this methodological point, I disregard Frankl's warning about calling the noetic the spiritual because, when the spiritual is dis-indentified from the divine, the noetic and the spiritual are one and the same.

An explication of the human spirit according to Bernard Lonergan

A brief account of the human spirit will suggest that it may well be a sufficient basis for a psychological treatment of spirituality. According to Lonergan (1972, 1990, 1992), spirit is that dimension of the human mind that is experienced as wonder, marvel, awe (see Schneider 2004). This experience results because humans are self-aware: The experienced distance between what we already know of ourselves (the "me") and the actual knower (the "I") (Mead 1974) produces a tension that gives rise to wonder and awe. We are aware of more than we know; our reach ever exceeds our achieved grasp. One common expression of this state of affairs is our spontaneous and ongoing generation of questions.

Questioning is a spiritual function that anticipates knowledge and moves us ever further toward it. The scope of our questioning is open-ended; it is potentially infinite. In the ideal, we would continue to wonder and question until we understood everything about everything. Our minds are geared to understanding all that is (Lonergan 1967, 1992); as the medievals phrased the matter, the intellect is *capax infiniti*, open to the infinite. At that point of ideal fulfillment, we would enjoy what traditional Western theology lists as an attribute of God: omniscience. Likewise, our valuing, our loving, is spiritual. In the ideal we would love everything that is loveable and in that love become one with all that is— and, again, in that fulfillment we would be like God, as Western theology has understood God. Accordingly, attention to the human spirit can open onto issues commonly thought to be strictly theological.

Human questioning is far–reaching. Among the questions that humans face are the big imponderables of life: Where did we come from? Why are we here? Where are we going? What is worth living for? These are the questions to which religions propose answers. But these questions are relevant even to non-religious people, and the answers of the various religions differ. The implication is that these matters have more to do with humankind than with whatever other supposed entities may be "on the other side." Accordingly, from an explanatory point of view, the specific content of the religious answers may not be as significant as the universal fact of the questions. Another implication is that these questions themselves should be recognized as spiritual—if for no other reason, because they are commonly associated with religion.

The human spiritual nature also shows itself in that we construct for ourselves, and live in, a meaningful world. Whereas other animals populate a habitat, we live in a universe. We are meaning-making animals. We live in a world "mediated by meaning and regulated [motivated] by value" (Lonergan 1972, pp. 112 [265]). Meanings and values are constitutive of our worlds, and meanings and values are prime expressions of our spiritual capacity. Other more or less synonymous parallel pairs of terms, some with religious connotations, confirm this interpretation and suggest the significance of emphasis on meanings and values: credos and commitments, visions and virtues, ideas and ideals, beliefs and morals, understandings and evaluations, knowledge and love.

It should be noted that Lonergan's use of the term *meaning* differs from that of existential psychology. For the existentialists *meaning* means significance, the relevance of something for me. But significance includes both understandings and evaluations, both ideas and ideals. For Lonergan meaning is a purely cognitive matter—in the etymological sense of the word, something related to knowing, not to evaluating. In contrast again, the standard psychological use of the term *cognitive* also includes evaluations (as well as emotions) and, thus, like the existentialist use of the word *meaning*, ambiguously wraps in one package both the intellectual and the volitional. Terminology in these subtle matters is difficult. Unfortunately, on all fronts the reigning psychological terminology is ambiguous. More attuned to precision in these matters, the classical and medieval worlds discerned within the human mind both intellect and will—even as today we commonly speak of knowledge and love as two related, but different, phenomena. The ambiguity surrounding contemporary psychological treatment of meaning and value contributes to the confusion surrounding spirituality.

Further compounding that confusion is psychology's reliance on a "mistaken view of the human mind as constituted by sense and imagination and devoid of intellect" (Adler 1985, p. 50). Uncritically accepting the modern notion of mind as devoid of any transcendent dimension, psychology models the mind on the computer (Gardner 1985), designed only for deductive and logical analysis, instrumental or means–ends or procedural rationality (Richardson et al. 1999). Widespread psychological confusion about distinctive facets of the human mind hobbles attempts to deal with spirituality scientifically.

In summary, the spiritual is a dimension of the human mind that is an inherent, dynamic, and open-ended principle of self-transcendence. A dimension of our own being, it points us ever beyond our current selves along a path of potentially unlimited unfolding. I do not present these assertions about the spirit as philosophical speculation that would need to be taken on faith. Presumably, these statements are verifiable by anyone who cares to attend to the inner workings of his or her own mind (Lonergan 1990, pp. 14–19). In this sense, these statements are empirically grounded and, as such, already constitute a kind of science or, at least, a testable scientific hypothesis. In this summary statement, the reference to self-transcendence and the image of a path of growth should elicit further associations with spirituality, for these notions are common to all the religious spiritual traditions. Therefore, it appears that the human spirit may, indeed, be a viable basis for a scientific treatment of spirituality.

Personal integration and spiritual growth

Still, there is more to the human mind than spirit: There is also psyche. It entails emotions, imagery, memory (Lonergan 1992, p. 481), and personality structures (Helminiak 1996a, p. 132) and is a stabilizing counterpart to the dynamism of the spirit. In a shifting balance that, in the mentally healthy person, both maintains fixity and allows for change and growth, psyche both constrains and sustains the unfolding of the spirit (Helminiak 1996a part three, 2008c, chap. 7). For example, states of fear, sadness, grandiosity, or self-protectiveness prohibit openness and distort awareness so that the spirit is not free to soar; on the other hand, confidence, security, care, and inquisitiveness elicit and support the self-transcending movement of the spirit. For better or worse, psychic states affect spiritual engagement.

Thus, increased psychological integration results in increased awareness of, and responsiveness to, the spiritual dimension of the human mind. Indeed, such responsiveness is the substance of human integration. When spirit is acknowledged to be one dimension of

the human, personal growth is ipso facto spiritual growth (Helminiak 1987b). Living with ongoing and habitual openness to one's human spirit is enlightenment. Passing experiences of the full array of the spirit's open-ended capacity are mystical moments (Helminiak 1984b; Roy 2003). And cultivated openness to one's spiritual potential sometimes results in "extraordinary" powers and "spiritual gifts." As just intimated, acknowledging spirit as an inherent dimension of the human mind allows for explanation of a wide range of phenomena associated with spirituality, and there is no need to involve God or God-substitutes in this psychological explanation. Dis-identification of the spiritual from the divine is a promising requisite for an explanatory psychology of spirituality.

Engagement with the spiritual and engagement with spirituality

The second challenge to a scientific account of spirituality is to define spirituality clearly. The point in question has already been made, but the context developed thus far allows for further clarification.

If the spiritual is an inherent dimension of the human mind, every human activity is spiritual. This is simply to say that activity that proceeds from the human mind, which is psyche and spirit, must by definition be spiritual. The human spirit shows itself in the generation of a world mediated by meaning and motivated by value. But every human being lives with some set of meanings and values, ideas and ideals, visions and virtues. In part these spiritual components are constitutive of human experience. Indeed, devoid of meanings and values, the distinctive qualities of humanity, an experience could not rightly be called human. Therefore, all human experience is spiritual. All human experience depends on the functioning of the human spirit.

By the same token, all also depends on the functioning of the body and the psyche. In addition to merely having a body, athletes dedicate themselves to physical health (body); and psychotherapists, for example, enhance their sensitivity to emotions (psyche). Similarly, some people, more than others, concern themselves with the meanings and values by which they live (spirit). Some dedicate themselves to enhancing the significance of their lives by relating their lives to matters that transcend the here and now. Some are committed to transcendent concerns. That is to say, some take deliberate concern for the spiritual. Such deliberate concern for the spiritual is spirituality. Thus, while, as human, all are engaged with the bodily, the psychic, and the spiritual—automatically, neutrally, non-committally—only some dedicate themselves to these facets of their humanity. Only some are engaged with spirituality.

Another way to make the same point is to invoke the metaphor of the spiritual path, journey, search (Hill et al. 2000), or quest. This metaphor is a constant across the religious spiritual traditions (Emmons 1999, p. 91 et passim). To be on the spiritual path is to be deliberately dedicated to enhancement of the spiritual within oneself. Because the religious spiritual traditions conceive spirituality in this way, a psychological treatment of spirituality should conceive its object of study in the same way. Therefore, I understand spirituality to entail deliberate dedication to the enhancement of the spiritual within oneself.

The necessity for this distinction between engagement with the spiritual and with spirituality arises when the human spirit is dis-identified from the divine. When the spirit is identified with the divine and, concomitantly, involvement with the spiritual implies commitment to something beyond the human, to be spiritual means to be engaged with spirituality, and these terms are commonly used in this sense. But I have specified the meaning of the spiritual and argued that it is not identical with the divine. As a result,

further precision in defining spirituality becomes necessary. To achieve and maintain this precision is the challenge. Different terminology might make this same distinction. For example, one could speak of the noetic dimension of human experience to indicate that universal characteristic of humanity and let *spiritual* and *spirituality* both relate to the deliberate pursuit of transcendence. However, as already noted, such fidelity to Frankl's (1988, p. 17) usage runs the risk of suggesting that the spiritual is not inherent and fully human, but something pertaining to some further, undefined realm. This risk is serious, and it entails debilitating methodological consequences, as already indicated. Therefore, with whatever terminology one might choose to make the point, the challenge of distinguishing the spiritual and spirituality must be met if psychology is to develop an explanatory account of spirituality. This second challenge follows directly from the first.

Assessing true and false spiritualities

The third challenge arises because of the other two. If the spiritual is not the divine and if spirituality entails deliberate commitment to the spiritual, in itself this commitment imparts no guarantee of validity to one's chosen set of ideas and ideals. As long as the spiritual is identified with the divine—and the presupposition is that God is good—any commitment to the spiritual, any spirituality, is ipso facto a valid, wholesome, correct enterprise. Not so, however, if the spiritual is a human capacity open to misuse. Although spirituality does mean a deliberate commitment to enhancement of the spiritual within oneself, one's conception of enhancement may well be mistaken. Spiritualities can be false as well as true. Good-willed commitment to programs of personal growth can be misguided and, despite good intentions, lead to personal and collective debilitation—a fact with which psychologists deal daily and a fact that September 11, 2001, and a long history of similar events should make indisputable.

   This disconcerting state of affairs entails the challenge to discern true from false spiritualities. As 1 John 4:1 (New Revised Standard Version) phrased the matter—granted, in a different conceptual system—"Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God [that is, whether they are true and good]; for many false prophets have gone out into the world." Similarly, 1 Corinthians 12:10 notes the need for "discernment of spirits." As long as "God" remains an available criterion, discernment may proceed apace or, at least, seemingly so. But when God is taken out of the discussion, some other criteria must be provided. To provide them is psychology's third, and perhaps most difficult, challenge.

   At this point another difference with existential psychology emerges. The prime concern of existential psychology is to help people find meaning in life. The presupposition may well be that the meaning is wholesome and worthwhile, but the existentialist concern, at least on the popular level, could also be understood to advocate meaning, period—any meaning, as long as it holds significance for the person in question. But a program of deception, theft, and wrongdoing could qualify as meaningful. Hence, it becomes necessary to specify that, for open-ended growth, one's purpose in living must be wholesome—because dishonesty and ill will eventually lead to a cul de sac; they are the sand upon which a house might be built and against which Jesus warned (Matthew 7:26). Needed is a determination of criteria for the good as well as some accounting as to why only commitment to the good suffices. In a pluralistic world rampant with radical post-modern relativism (Rosenau 1992), concern for the good cannot be an unspoken presupposition. This concern must be explicitly noted and elaborated. Indeed, at this point in history, this

concern must be argued and defended. To meet these requirements is the daunting third challenge to an explanatory psychology of spirituality.

The unavoidable normativity of religion and spirituality

Spirituality, like religion, is a peculiar topic of study. To some extent, other human topics could be studied in a value-neutral way: political affiliation, culturally-conditioned parenting styles, dream analysis, vocational choices. But religious traditions present themselves and their spirituality as *the* path to be followed. Religions are not neutral about the validity of their meaning-and-value systems, their beliefs and ethics. They propose them in the name of God, divine revelation, and sacred tradition; they impute ultimate validity to their spiritualities. A claim of validity is essential to spirituality. This claim participates in religion's insistence on its sui generis nature, the claim that religion involves "God," "the Holy," "the Ultimate," "the Sacred," as an essential feature (Pals 1987; Segal 1983; Smith 1987; see Helminiak 1998a, pp. 50–56).

A psychology of spirituality that would be explanatory—not just a descriptive or comparative study—must retain that essential and sui generis dimension of spirituality. Value-neutrality would ignore the very phenomenon in question. It would seem, then, that an explanatory psychology of spirituality must be value-laden. It must take a stand on values, not only to acknowledge that people have values but also to propose which values people ought to have. On the basis of criteria inherent in the process of human growth and spiritual integration itself, a psychology of spirituality must propose the criteria that specify the healthy trajectory of this process. Although this emphasis on normative values appears to fly in the face of the neutral nature of science, engaging spirituality is precisely to engage the question of normative meanings and values, so psychology can hardly excuse itself from grappling with this matter and still pretend that it is actually treating spirituality.

The normative implications of explanatory science

Besides, if truth be told, science is not a value-free enterprise (Bergin et al. 1996; Bernstein 1976; Beutler 1981; Beutler and Bergan 1991; Browning 1987; Doran 1981; Habermas 1991; Kelly 1990; Myrdal 1958; Richardson and Guignon 1991; Taylor 1989; Tjeltveit 1986, 1991, 1992, 1996; Wolfe 1989; Woolfolk and Richardson 1984). The very commitment to objective—that is, unbiased—investigation expresses a value that characterizes science, and this very value is itself under fire from radical post-modernism: Not all believe in the possibility of unbiased investigation (Jones 1994; Rosenau 1992). But while radical post-modernism makes its truth claim that there can be no valid truth claims and in the process dismisses self-contradiction as an irrelevant consideration and, thus, discredits every intellectual enterprise, science continues to do its investigation, to arrive at conclusions, and to prescribe responses. In matters of HIV/AIDS, stress, and cardiac conditions, for example, medicine does not hesitate, on the basis of its "best available opinion of the day," to prescribe some behaviors and forbid others: In its application, medicine is a prescriptive science. Even in the presupposition of its research, medicine is a normative science: It presupposes that health and life are to be enhanced. Otherwise, as a fully value-neutral stance, why not allow people to contract HIV, to live with stress, and to suffer cardiac arrest? Why suppose at all that life is better than death? As it turns out, in fact, every person holds standard, unacknowledged values—such as life, health, joy, personal fulfillment—in some form and order. My plea is simply that we be honest about the matter and acknowledge these universal human values, and I suggest they are rooted in the very makeup of humanity itself.

Physics and chemistry, the "hard sciences," are also ultimately value-laden enterprises. This fact is clear from the many positive technological developments that have transformed the contemporary world. Actually explaining any phenomenon opens the possibility of engaging that phenomenon more successfully, and the presupposition is always that success is better than failure. Value assessment colors all of human existence. Explanation and prescription—meanings and values—go hand in hand.

Accordingly, an explanatory psychology of spirituality would be a normative or prescriptive science—but with this critical difference: It would be normative not only in its application and motivation but also in its very theory. For spirituality is not only about the meanings and values that someone might hold; it is about the very process of wholesome meaning-making and valuing. It is about the supposed ultimate significance of life. By its very nature spirituality entails epistemology and ethics. To study spirituality scientifically is to take on the really big questions—What is really to be believed, and how ought one really to live?—apart from any easy appeal to personal beliefs, cultural traditions, or claims of divine revelation. As suggested here, the key to explaining spirituality would be, not appeal to God or a God-substitute, but appeal to the human spirit, which both is the source, and entails the criteria, of the meanings and values by which people live. Spirituality is about the ongoing personal integration and effective functioning of the human spirit. Spirituality is about the determination of true meanings and good values, of accurate understandings and valid evaluations, of correct ideas and worthwhile ideals. Although these are the very matters that, in a post-modern world, can subvert the very hope of any science whatsoever, these are the matters that an explanatory psychology of spirituality engages.

The spiritual basis of ethical norms

Is development of such a normative psychology possible? Again, Lonergan's (1972, 1992) analysis of intentional consciousness or spirit gives hope that it is. I have been speaking of the human spirit with use of a two-part, shorthand formula: meanings and values. Lonergan's account of the human spirit actually entails four "levels" or facets or dimensions: awareness, understanding, judgment, and decision. The first three relate to knowledge, correct meaning, and parallel the textbook account of the scientific method: observation, hypothesis, and verification. The fourth level relates to values.

According to Lonergan, these four levels structure the human spirit and, in their interaction, are the factors necessary and sufficient to explain its functioning. Effective functioning, the open-ended dynamism noted above, presupposes that the spirit operate in a particular way. Unlimited unfolding does not occur under all circumstances. As noted above, as a matter of psyche, fear or grandiosity can constrain this open-ended system. But even further, since decision (choice, value judgments) is a facet of the spirit's functioning, using his or her spiritual capacity, with more or less conscious determination, a person may also shut down the spirit's functioning: We can choose to be close-minded, obtuse, dishonest, and ill-willed. With theological elaboration, religion calls such choice *sin* (Helminiak 1987b, p. 119; Menninger 1973). My point is that, apart from all theology, the criteria of effective functioning are built into the human spirit.

On the basis of the four levels of conscious operation, Lonergan (1972) determines four criteria of effective spiritual functioning. Insofar as on a first level, awareness, one must be open to data, one should be as attentive as possible. Insofar as on a second level, understanding, one seeks to make sense of the data, one should be intelligent. To be intelligent does not mean to have a high IQ, but to use whatever IQ one may happen to have. Insofar as on a third level, judgment of fact, one seeks to confirm or disconfirm the accuracy

of one's understanding, one should be reasonable. That is, one should base one's judgments on the evidence; one should test one's understanding against the data. An affirmative outcome of this test results in knowledge: One attains to reality, one arrives at a fact, one achieves (something of the) truth. Finally, insofar as on a fourth level, decision, one chooses what response to make to one's knowledge, one should be responsible. That is, one should decide and act in a way that is consistent with one's knowledge; one should seek true value, not mere satisfaction; one should strive to keep open the whole system of spiritual unfolding.

Note that the "whole system" in question is not just one's spirit. This system includes also one's psyche and organism, with which the spirit interacts; it includes the sources of data that impinge upon the human agent; and it includes, as well, other good-willed seekers whose own gifts help to compensate for personal shortcomings and who help to correct one's mistakes. This is to say that appeal to the human spirit as a ground for epistemology and ethics is not reliance on pure subjectivity. The human spirit is an out-going dynamism geared to all there is to be known and loved. As such, the spirit is hardly a solipsistic principle locked into itself. It is, rather, the very principle by which one attains to objective reality.

Of course, there is no human experience, no known reality, apart from a human subject. The idealized "God's eye view" is sheer fancy. It is not a human possibility, nor is it what objective human knowledge entails. Involvement of a human subject does not mean that a process is "merely subjective," in the sense that it is inevitably biased, prejudiced, skewed. There can be open-minded, insightful, honest, and good-willed human subjects as well as close-minded, obtuse, biased, and evil ones. The threat to objectivity is not subjectivity, but the misdirection, prejudice, and distortion of subjectivity. Said simply and by way of example, it is the honest person who comes to know the truth. Or in Lonergan's (1972) trenchant words, "Genuine objectivity is the fruit of authentic subjectivity" (p. 292).

The specification of genuine or authentic humanity

Lonergan (1972) defines authenticity by citing the four criteria of spiritual health: "Be attentive, Be intelligent, Be reasonable, Be responsible" (p. 53; also p. 268). One is authentic to the extent that one follows these requirements. This account of authenticity is more precise than that of existential psychology for which authenticity usually does presuppose wholesome behavior but for which, especially on a popular level, authenticity could mean just being one's obnoxious, selfish, or even destructive self (Taylor 1992). In contrast, authenticity in Lonergan's sense would be only the path to truth and goodness.

But an objection could arise: It may be nigh impossible to find human subjects of such lofty character, ever committed to authenticity in Lonergan's sense; application of this approach to define and achieve unbiased knowledge and love would be but a dream. However, the essence of science is to articulate the pure case. Methodically defining ideal humanity is no more irrelevant to daily living than is the Pythagorean Theorem to clumsy construction projects. Besides, the objection suggests that Lonergan's account of human authenticity is irrelevant because it actually applies to only a few "saintly" or "enlightened" people and, as Machiavelli would insist, it strays far from how people really behave. Granted, for culpable or unconscious reasons, people may generally not meet the standards that our own beings require of us. Still, this state of affairs does not discredit a statement of these human requirements. Better to acknowledge human failings than to skew theory to square with them. Better to work at correcting our failings than to rationalize them by arguing that truth and virtue are culturally created fictions. As these considerations indicate, the rub in Lonergan's theory is that it touches too close to home: It claims to say what our nature implies and then calls us to become that. But such a claim and call are the very stuff

of religious spiritualities. This fact suggests once again that the present account may be on target.

Lonergan (1972, pp. 20, 53, 55, 302, 321) calls those four criteria "transcendental precepts." As precepts, they are requirements built into the very functioning of the human mind. They are transcendental in the sense that they apply across the board to anything and everything that the human mind engages. And they are transcendental in that they are merely formal principles, content-free: They do not predetermine *what* must be the outcome of any human activity; they mere specify *how* that activity ought to proceed: attentively, intelligently, reasonably, and responsibly. The transcendental precepts are absolutes that are not absolutist. They cut down the middle between modern certainty and radical postmodern relativism. Only "the devil" would protest that these requirements bias an activity.

Furthermore, apart from throwing to the wind all concern for logic and consistency, no one could discredit Lonergan's account of human spirit without, in the process, acting in line with that account: providing relevant evidence, proposing a likely interpretation of the evidence, confirming the validity of the interpretation against the evidence, and, thus, with good reason rejecting that account. One would confirm in one's doing the very four-level process that one's saying sought to discredit. It appears that Lonergan's analyses are not open to radical revision.

The startling boldness of the Lonerganian analysis

Clearly, Lonergan is onto something. His account of authenticity is grounded in a profound analysis of the human spirit itself—profound in the sense of being fundamental, baseline, ultimate, final. Far from being a culturally conditioned artifact, Lonergan's analysis operates at a level deeper than the diversity of cultures; his account of an inherent, human principle of "meaning-making" articulates that which generates, sustains, and transforms cultures. Insofar as every human enterprise presupposes engagement of the human spirit, there could be no human experience apart from this reality and no more fundamental human principle to employ to explain reality. One must engage the human spirit, one must rest on this selfsame principle, to pursue any conceivable human endeavor. Thus, it appears that Lonergan has reached rock bottom in accounting for truth, reality, and goodness and human advance toward them.

To be sure, these statements are but intimations of a theory that is subtle, complex, and far-reaching. After all, at issue in the enterprise of explaining spirituality is an objectification of subjectivity, a pointer to human self-directedness, a theory about theorizing. I do not pretend that these brief statements stand as an argued position. Argued elaboration of the position is available elsewhere (Helminiak 1984a, b, 1986a, 1987a, b, 1996a, b, c, 1998a, 2001a, b; Lonergan 1972, 1990, 1992). Here these statements stand merely to suggest how psychology might remain fully on its own ground yet meet its third challenge by acknowledging an inherently human and normative principle of self-transcendence. This principle could fulfill the function that God and God-substitutes fulfill in other, theologically embroiled approaches. Indeed, to acknowledge such a principle would be—at least, as understood here—to acknowledge the true nature of spirituality and to open a path to a coherent and empirically grounded treatment of it.

Conclusion

Highlighting the crucial mistake of identifying the spiritual with the divine, I have noted three intertwined challenges to an explanatory psychology of spirituality, and I intimated

such a psychology. Initial empirical testing provides support for this tack (Feingold 2002, 1995; Feingold and Helminiak 2000; Helminiak 1994), but the point here is not this intimated psychology. The point is to focus the challenges. Intimations of a possible solution to the challenges serve merely to highlight their nature. But by whatever solution, the longed-for result would be an almost unimagined achievement, successful realization of the scientific ideal in the case of the psychology of religion. This achievement would provide an evidence-based account of core or generic spirituality, applicable to all instances of spirituality; and ipso facto it would elucidate the focus and intent of any genuine pastoral practice (see Helminiak 2005, 2008a). It would offer, moreover, a promising basis for the construction of a global community (Helminiak 2008c)—a community in resonance with the pulsating soul of every woman and man on the planet; a community respectful of myriad religions and cultures that are themselves respectful of core spirituality; and a community supportive of the potentially unlimited unfolding that is the promise of our inherently spiritual species.

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