Chapter 7
Fundamentals of Human Development, Religion, and Spirituality

A central feature of both religious and psychological understandings of the human condition is that people are not static entities. Life from birth to death involves many changes in our physical, psychological, and spiritual makeup. In psychology, this issue has been explored through two major schools of thought—the psychodynamic tradition (see Chapter 5) and the cognitive-structuralist school. In this chapter, we will look at variations on the structural approach. In the following two chapters, we will expand our understanding of religious and spiritual development during childhood, adolescence, and adulthood by considering the empirical literature and some other approaches in the context of these theories.

7.1 Basic Issues in Developmental Theory

The most fundamental issue confronted by developmental theory is that of stability and change, an issue that has caused sharp disagreements in Western thought ever since the debates of Plato and the Presocratic philosophers. It is obvious that as we grow older we change, but at the same time we remain the same *person* in some essential way. Is this true, and if so how does it happen? How do change and stability apply to our religious and spiritual lives?

7.1.1 The Nature of the Change Process and Time

In general, three different kinds of developmental metaphors appear in human thought. In the first set of models, development is thought of like climbing a ladder. As we age, we climb higher and higher on the ladder through a universal, fixed set of stages and reach increasingly sophisticated levels of development, while still dealing with basic issues raised at lower stages (cf. Spidlik, 1986, p. 71, 2005, pp. 207–209; Casey, 1995). These **hierarchical** theories of development can be found in both Eastern and Western religious thought, as well as in psychologies as diverse as those of Jean Piaget and Abraham Maslow. In a second metaphor, life is seen as a circle, which proceeds through a series of predictable periods. During

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the early part of the cycle, we grow and add abilities as we encounter predictable, age-related life tasks, while in the later part of life we decline or reflect over what had gone before. This metaphor is developed in **life span** theories of development, which can be found in South Asian religious literature and in the work of psychodynamic psychologists like Erik Erickson. Both hierarchical and life span theories often think of development as taking place in stages. In hierarchical theories, only a few individuals reach the final stages of development, while lifespan theorists think of all individuals as passing through the various stages of life if they live into old age. In a third metaphor, development is thought of like a journey or—to use religious language—a **pilgrimage**. In this view, while certain kinds of experiences or processes may be shared between different individuals, each person follows a unique path in their life, and no particular stage has a special value above the others (von Balthasar, 1995, p. 82). Aspects of this can be found in certain Buddhist and Christian writings and form the basis of narrative theories of psychological development. This approach moves beyond stage theories and attempts to describe the complex phenomenological experience of development (cf. Hay, Reich, & Utsch, 2006).

Development involves change, but does any type of change qualify as development? Liebert (2000, p. 56) argues that in order to qualify as development, changes must involve (1) increased complexity, (2) a new way of psychological ordering that encompasses and surpasses prior stages, and (3) permanence. All three types of developmental models have ways of understanding complexity and how it both surpasses prior stages and acquires permanence.

Development takes place *in time*, and thus how a theory understands time and its relationship to human life will affect the nature of the theory. In philosophies such as Kant's, time is thought to be a mental category that underlies our ability to understand the world (see Section 2.2.3). In traditional religious theories, time is thought of on a cosmic or divine scale, with segments of earthly time set apart as sacred. In this view, our development is a small movement in a larger order, and the real nature of time is concealed from our ordinary vision. In East and South Asian religions, this development can be a process that extends across many lifetimes (Marek, 1988).

Brent Slife has noted that since the work of Sir Isaac Newton, Western science has held a different idea of time. Slife argues that in the Newtonian model, time is as follows:

- *Objective* and exists independently of the mind or consciousness
- *Continuous* and smoothly flowing
- *Linear*, an irreversible arrow moving from past to future so that the past is the sole determinant of the present.
- *Universal*, following the same mechanical laws everywhere
- *Reductionistic*, in that time can only be examined at particular moments or intervals, e.g., a particular age or phase of life, never as a whole.

Slife argues that this version of time is foundational for much of psychology but that when considering human experience from a developmental point of view

it does not work. He points out a number of anomalies that challenge a Newtonian view of time:

1. Human time appears to have a *subjective* aspect, because our perception of it is influenced by the culture and personal situation of the observer. Time as it is lived by us has a different quality for each person (Carr, 2004). For instance, time passes much more slowly for a young child than for an 80-year-old adult.
2. Developmental time appears *discontinuous*, with sudden breaks and lack of connection. This implies the possibility that "aspects of early development are temporary adaptations which have little to do with later development" (1993, p. 49) and that development emerges through a dialectical process rather than a smooth learning curve. Conversion experiences are a religious example of discontinuity (see Section 4.5).
3. Subjectively, people perceive time to be *nonlinear.* Linear views of time assume that causation moves in one direction from past to present, while nonlinear views hold open the possibility that what we anticipate about the future can also determine psychological phenomenon in the present. Christian understandings of hope are built around this nonlinear view of time.
4. Psychological laws appear to be different at different points in time, making them nonuniversal and *context-specific.* For example, older and younger adults may differ in how they relate to situations at work or in relationships.
5. Time has a *holistic* quality, because the meaning of events in time is not in the events themselves but how they stand in relation to other events, as in a narrative.

The perception of time as interconnected facilitates our ability to act and make meaning in various situations, rather than just passively process information (Slife, 1995). This critique suggests that development is more than just change over time (Scarlett, 2006). These issues will become apparent as we consider psychological theories of development, which are largely built on the Newtonian view of time.

7.1.2 The Nature and Goal of Development

Most theories of development, whether they are psychological, philosophical, or religious, presuppose a goal or endpoint to the development process, an ideal to be achieved, as well as a way of life to achieve it (cf. Hadot, Davidson, & Wissing, 1990; Hadot, 1995, p. 59; Druker, 1994). This is particularly true of hierarchical theories of development that need an understanding of what lies at the top of the hierarchy. While these goals may be based in part on empirical observations, they also carry with them cultural, philosophical, or theological assumptions about the nature of life, the human person, and the ideal society. These presuppositions are based on value judgments and are not "provable" in the scientific sense (Browning & Cooper, 2004, p. 214). They affect the entire theory of development and the kind of life that is described by it, since all aspects of growth are conceptualized as leading up toward

that goal. Global goals of development could include happiness, a sense of completeness or well-being, reproductive success, achievement of one's unique potential, a sense of meaning and purpose, and positive relationships or autonomous self-mastery (Ryff, 1989). Some goals may be more modest: becoming competent, functioning successfully within society, or simply shielding others from a toxic past (Kotre & Kotre, 1998). Our thinking about developmental goals may also depend on whether one focuses on generic spirituality (e.g., Benson, Roehlkepartain, & Rude 2003; Helminiak, 1987, p. 121) or a more specific religious conception of development. Hierarchical theories in Christianity or other religious traditions contain a tension between spirituality as a goal only achievable for a few and a vision of a religious life that is for everyone in everyday walks of life (Sheldrake, 1995, p. 136).

Pilgrimage theories can have multiple views of the goals and process of development. Religious models often envision a particular end goal of development that has a transcendent or mystical dimension beyond psychology and argue that there may be many paths to that endpoint (Butler, 2003, p. xxiv; Sparkman, 1986). On the other hand, some secular pilgrimage theories—including some versions of postmodern or evolutionary theories—begin with the view that there is no particular goal or meaning to life. Religious pilgrimage theories often view development as a process of discovering our true self, in which every stage in the journey is necessary and has its own value (von Balthasar, 1967, p. 244; Schweitzer, 1991). Relational views of this process might use images such as journey by which a bride and bridegroom develop love for each other (e.g., Bernard, of Clairvaux, *Sermons on Song of Songs*) or an increasing clarity of vision of the beloved (e.g., Mechtild of Madeburg, *Flowing Light of the Godhead*). Since most of our life journey is spent as adults, these theories often focus on adulthood as a key time for spiritual development (Helminiak, 1987).

7.2 Religious Models of Spiritual Development

7.2.1 Christian Perspectives

Early Christianity possessed no specific, developed models of spiritual growth. As in the classical philosophical traditions, writers produced works intended to give practical help with spiritual development rather than provide systematic statements of principles (Davidson, 1990; Hadot et al., 1990). These didactic writings began to be formulated in the third and fourth centuries when Christians founded religious communities in the Egyptian and Syrian deserts to pursue intense lives of spiritual seeking. Writers from this early period such as Evagrius Ponticus (345–399) believed that the Incarnation opened up new possibilities for development (see Section 3.1.1). If a person was willing to open themselves to God through physical and mental discipline, they could gradually become like God in a process of transformation known as **theosis** or *divination*, and at the highest level of development participate in the inner life of God (Athanasius, 1994b; Maximus, 2003; Sherwood,

1955, pp. 71–72; Palamas, 1983, pp. 76–85; Meyendorff, 1998b, pp. 143–145; Spidlik, 1986; Bartos, 1999, pp. 9–20). Similar ideas can be found in the writings of Reformation theologians like Martin Luther and modern Protestant writers, although they often use terms like **sanctification** or holiness rather than divination (Kärkkäinen, 2004, p. 5; Habets, 2006).

The concept of theosis was especially developed in the thought of Maximus Confessor (c. 580–662). Maximus argued that theosis is a lifelong process involving all aspects of the person. In this view, deification is not just a private mystical experience of union but a relational, cooperative activity involving God, the human person, and a supportive community. It leads to an interpenetration or mutual reciprocity based on the action of love so that we are caught up by God and reproduce the pattern and likeness of the Divine in virtuous conduct, inner simplicity, and unity. This likeness does not imply that we *are* God, just that we are able to resemble the Divine and have communion with it (Russell, 2004; Makrakis, 1977, p. 21; Louth, 1996, p. 101; Finlan & Kharlamov, 2006; Vishnevskaya, 2006; Pseudo-Dionysius, 1987, pp. 197–198; Cauchi, 2005). Maximus talks about four aspects or characteristics of the theosis process (Louth, 1996, pp. 88–91; Maximus, 2003, pp. 51–66, 117–118; Thunberg, 1995, pp. 118–131):

1. *Effort and Non-Effort*: While we need to engage in the kind of lifestyle and practices that make the process possible, deification ultimately takes us beyond our natural abilities and is a gift of God. The kind of challenges we must overcome will change with the developmental process, with some problems fading into the background and others becoming more acute.
2. *Transformation*: Deification makes us into a likeness of God through an ongoing personal encounter and imitation, which leads to new knowledge and the imitation of divine virtues like love. As a result, God is manifested through us in our virtues so that eventually our body and soul become "the clearest of mirrors" reflecting God (Louth, 1996, p. 115).
3. *Unification*: For Maximus, divinization is the uniting with God of those who have become like him. This union is a kind of mutual interpenetration (*perichoresis*) that respects the nature of each. It happens in part through love that draws us together with God, is embodied in our actions, and provides the ultimate meaning of life (Bartos, 1999, p. 331). It also overcomes divisions that are present within us and with the world, and increasing unity is associated with greater complexity in our spiritual life (Williams, 2003; Magaletta, 1996).
4. *Love and Freedom*: The evidence and result of theosis is the growth of love and freedom in our lives. As we become like God, we become united in love with the Divine and develop love and compassion for all other things that are also loved by God. Love thus promotes unity. This compassion helps us fight the problem of arrogance, which is always a temptation as we reach higher levels of development. In addition, theosis leads to spiritual freedom, a state of rest and satisfaction of desire as opposed to enslavement to passions. Life without this freedom is incomplete; with it, we can use our gifts to their full potential (Welch, 1996; Theophan, 1995, pp. 36–44).

In the Eastern Church, the Biblical story of the Transfiguration provides a model for deification, whereas in the Western church the sacrifice of the Cross and the Resurrection experience has greater emphasis (Spidlik, 2005, pp. 304–305).

In Western Christianity, during the Middle Ages, ideas about the goal of spiritual development changed in a couple of ways. First, more general ideas about human development began to emerge. As early as the 7th century, elaborate models dividing the lifespan into childhood, adolescence, and adulthood were developed, and by the 13th century, these models had entered theology and could be found in the works of monks like William of St. Thierry. These medieval works often made use of pilgrimage allegories to describe human life (Goodich, 1989). Second, models took on more of a relational and affective emphasis. The development of a deep relationship and identification with Christ was emphasized, resulting eventually in the experience of a **beatific vision**, "the intimate and joyful union of the souls of the blessed with God in glory" (Aumann, 1980, p. 42), a direct experience and knowledge of God (Thomas, 1998, I, q. 26, a. 1).

Western Christian descriptions of development typically contained three or four stages of the journey toward God. Central to these theories were three modes or "ways" of the spiritual life: the *Via Purgativa* (purgation), *Via Illuminativa* (illumination) and *Via Unitiva* (union). Some authors, especially those in Protestant Christianity, also added an initial stage, that of **awakening**. This is an emotional event that typically occurs in the context of a conversion-type experience of the reality and love of God. As a result of the experience and our response to it, there is a sense of liberation, an "emergence of the self from 'the prison of I-hood'," as well as feelings of nearness and love toward God (Underhill, 1990; Aumann, 1980; Merton, 2006, pp. 283–284).

Awakening is followed by the stage of **purgation**, when one is purified and develops the underlying character, personal habits, and mental attitudes necessary for progress in spiritual life. This is a painful process that involves significant suffering, but this pain is necessary and thus is a positive good that promotes growth. In this stage, there is a moving away from sin, formation of basic trust at conscious and unconscious levels (Groeschel, 1995), and development of **humility,** "a basic honesty about who one is and is not" (Frohlich, 1993, p. 193) that is essential in later stages of development. Specific goals and practices at this stage include the following:

- Moral reform and confession to promote self-knowledge and humility
- Physical discipline for control of things like food and sexuality
- Mental discipline, "guarding the heart" from unwelcome thoughts and images
- Detachment from created things through self-denial
- Detachment from the will through poverty and obedience

As purgation proceeds, we experience **illumination** or an increasing sense of God's presence, as well as feelings of love and unity toward all things (Inge, 1910, pp. 236–237). In this stage, one is "proficient" as opposed to a beginner but not yet perfected (Thomas, 1998, II–II, q. 24, a. 9). As the process continues, there is a sense that effort is needed to prepare the self for growth but that more and more

of development is due to the work of people or forces outside the person (Frohlich, 1993, pp. 206–207).

In the final stage of development, there is an increasing sense of **union** with God. The highest stage of development is described by many Christian writers in metaphorical terms using a variety of images such as a beatific vision, the intimacy of mutual love between bride and bridegroom (e.g., Bernard of Clairvaux, 1987, pp. 270–278), a vision of dazzling light (Mechthild, 1998, pp. 40–42), becoming like God (William, 1971, p. 96), a boiling over of God within (McGinn, 2001, p. 71), a state of *ecstasis* or going out of oneself, and a state of *epectasis* or increasing desire for God and penetration into the divine light (Merton, 2008, pp. 79–82). The use of metaphor in these descriptions is due to the intensely ineffable nature of the experience of "things that he who from that height descends, forgets or cannot speak; for nearing its desired end, our intellect sinks into an abyss so deep that memory fails to follow it" (Dante Alighieri, 1995, p. 379). In the Christian context, the emphasis is on a union of wills—a joining together in love for others rather than an experience of metaphysical union (Merton, 2008, p. 249; cf. Teresa of Avila, 1979, pp. 97–102).

Contemporary Christian authors have critiqued this traditional model of purgation, illumination, and union. For instance, Sheldrake (1995) points out that standard models obscure the individual nature of spiritual growth and the religious quest. They promote the idea that one leaves behind earlier stages as one develops, when in fact the states are constantly intermixed. In his view, spiritual development is more like an increasing refinement of vision, or increasing awareness of a voice or music; one learns to filter out competing images or sounds and come closer to the source of vision or music. Furthermore, progressive models obscure the fact that growth often involves gaining new abilities or ways of doing things only to give them up so that we can move on to something even better. This pattern of gains and losses is implicit in many Christian descriptions of development such as that of Teresa of Avila (Frohlich, 1993).

7.2.2 Concepts of Development in Hinduism and Buddhism

Traditional Hindu thought sees spiritual development in the context of the human life span. For instance, the *Laws of Manu* (Olivelle, 2004b) divide the life of the upper-caste Hindu worshipper into four stages or **ashrama**. The process begins during *bramacharya* when the child or adolescent works as a student and family member. They try to master the basic skills and cultural abilities necessary for life and study the Vedas under a teacher. In the second quarter of life or *grihastha*, one marries after mastering the Vedas and becomes a productive householder. The individual continues their spiritual study and observes traditional religious rituals and requirements for offerings. After the birth of grandchildren and around midlife one moves into *vanaprastha* or simple retirement and becomes a forest dweller. This stage marks the beginning of more intensive spiritual seeking, reciting the

Vedas and practicing compassion. Finally at the end of life, one enters *saanyasa* and becomes a renunciate, taking up an ascetic lifestyle and engaging in deep meditation. In practice, these last two stages are not sequential but represent different end paths of development. The stages refer to both a place of residence for religious exertion and also a mode of life. The model specifies the things that are possible and needful at various stages of life, providing a framework by which these may be normalized and valued, although the renunciate appears as the paradigm for the ideal holy person (Tilak, 1989; Olivelle, 2004a).

Since spiritual development in Buddhism happens in relation to meditation practice, many Buddhist views of development cannot really be understood without a knowledge of those practices (see Section 13.5.1). A somewhat more accessible example of development in the Zen Buddhist tradition is provided in the *Ten Oxherding Pictures* (Loori, 1999; Sekida, 1975, pp. 223–236). This series of pictures depicts the journey toward the Buddhist goal of discovering the emptiness of the false self and leaving it behind for our true self and a state of nondualism. It is a journey that begins with a state of emptiness and ends with a different experience of it (Gunn, 2000, p. 1). The pictures use the metaphor of the mind as an ox that must first be disciplined and then later forgotten. One version of the series of pictures goes like this:

- The herder realizes there is an ox (one's true nature) and searches for it
- The herder finds traces of it, confirming the search
- The herder sees the ox: an experience provides a first glimpse of enlightenment
- The herder catches the ox, which is wild and undisciplined
- The ox is tamed and tethered, discipline has begun
- The herder rides home on the ox, we remain at peace among difficulties
- The herder forgets the ox and is in repose: meditation is effortless
- The herder also disappears: a unity experience
- There is a return to the source where all is simple and effortless
- There is a return to the marketplace where the benefits are brought to others

At the end, the person has discovered his or her true self, which in Zen is paradoxically no self at all!

7.3 Early Genetic Theories of Religious Development

For over a century, psychologists have been actively creating innovative theories of psychological development. Many of these theories are relevant to an understanding of religious and spiritual growth. Some of these are important general theories of human growth, while others are more specific theories of moral development with concerns that overlap those of spiritual or religious formation (Worthington, 1989). Early theories in psychology moved away from a philosophical analysis of adult thought, such as that produced by Kant, and began to look at the genesis or source of mental life, how our abilities emerge or evolve from their earliest beginnings in childhood. This emphasis on genesis led to the development of **genetic psychology**,

which focused not on heredity (which was not well understood at the time) but on the developmental sources and processes behind the psyche. G. Stanley Hall and James Mark Baldwin developed early theories of genetic psychology and logic, which later formed a background for the genetic theories of Jean Piaget.

7.3.1 G. Stanley Hall

G. Stanley Hall (1844–1924) is an important figure in the early history of the psychology of religion (see Section 1.4.2). One of his contributions was the formulation of a theory of development that gave an important place to religion. The genetic psychology of Hall was built on the concept of **recapitulation** (cf. Freud, 1950), which is the view that the various states of development in the individual (*ontogeny*) recapitulate or repeat the stages in evolution or development of the species (*phylogeny*). For instance, Hall believed that the attempt to establish psychic unity that occurs in adolescences was a recapitulation of an earlier, paradisiacal time when humanity and nature were in harmony. Not unlike Plotinus (see Section 4.3.1), Hall believed that each person was "a fragment broken off and detached from the great world of soul" (1916, p. 66) and was born with a racial knowledge formed from past human experiences. While largely unconscious, this buried knowledge can surface, reinvigorating the person and forming the basis of new aesthetic, ethical, and religious sentiments. An implication of the theory of recapitulation is that the religious thought of children is like that of primitive peoples, and that teaching modern religious beliefs to children would be impossible or counterproductive (Wells, 1918), an idea later taken up by followers of Piaget.

Hall thought that adolescence was the key time for religious development, while older adulthood was a time of "senescence" and declining capacity (Hall, 1923). He saw the teenage years as a time of turmoil when unconscious materials from our racial past become available to us, and the psyche attempts to establish a new balance and mental unity. This turmoil meant that adolescence was a peak time for conversion experiences, which he saw as a natural or even necessary process. Adolescence was also a time for development of sexuality and increased capacity for love, which allows us to make connections with others and with our past. Hall believed that the adolescent transition should include a change in one's attitude toward religion, which can help us achieve our true place in the world. Like the liberal Protestant theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher, he believed that religion should be interpreted subjectively and independent of any particular doctrinal belief.

7.3.2 James Mark Baldwin

James Mark Baldwin (1861–1934) was an important figure in the beginnings of North American psychology who also had professional and personal interests in religion. Among other things, Baldwin was interested in *interpretation*, how we go

about thinking about reality and giving meaning to experience. He believed that our logic of interpretation passed through a series of stages, and he developed a theory of "genetic" logic to describe these changes (Wozniak, 2001; Baldwin, 1930). His theory is of interest in its own right but also because it provided the starting point for the work of Jean Piaget (Kohlberg, 1982).

Several key ideas underlie Baldwin's genetic theory. First, he accepted the concept of recapitulation as found in Hall. This means that early in development the individual tends to interpret things in the way they were interpreted in early human societies. Second, Baldwin had a social view of development, where growth in the real self occurs in dialectical social relationships between the individual and others. In this view, social relationships are vital for growth (1902, pp. 15–36). He argued that the individual is not only a passive recipient of information from the environment but also actively reacts, thus introducing novelty into the world (Valsiner, 2000, p. 29). He believed that these patterns of interaction and activity were relationally transmitted, learned through interactions with individuals and the group. In particular, he believed that children actively construct a view of an ideal self from things they appreciate and imitate, especially the moral and ethical behavior they see in others. The sense of self and other are thus closely related. The child is able to experiment with different ideal images through play and imitation, which in early development becomes the driving force of growth. This ideal—which is typically reflected in our understanding of God—then becomes the basis for religious development. Emotional connections are made with the idealized object, such as (1) a sense of dependence, where dependence refers to feelings of trust and faith, and (2) a sense of mystery toward the object (cf. awe, fear, holiness, sacredness) that makes the object worthy of respect (Baldwin, 1902, pp. 339–340). The object is looked up to because of these emotional connections. It becomes religious as the individual—through social learning from the group—comes to understand that this object has some real existence, and they experience a personal presence of the object. Like significant others, it can become an object we identify with and try to follow. Baldwin believed that our moral development was based on these affective activities of willing and role taking, along with our increasing ability to distinguish between inner and outer reality (Kohlberg, 1982).

Baldwin (1975) thought that some areas of cognitive experience lie outside the laws of formal logic, and thus a description of mental life in solely objective terms would be inadequate. In particular, he thought that traditional logical analysis could not account for biological and social aspects of reasoning, and that there are assumptions about reality buried in traditional logic that if used exclusively would distort our thinking. He favored an understanding of mental life using genetic logic, which is a logic of the knower. According to genetic logic, thoughts are not fixed entities but a continuous flowing process. Each thought is a unique entity that cannot be subdivided or equated with any other thought, although they can be subdivided into types or modes according to the type of object at the center of the thought. Critically, he believed that different kinds of logic applied to different sorts of objects so that,

for instance, logic as applied to moral objects would be different from that applied to sensory information. Paralleling Kant's distinction between pure and practical reason, he saw religious logic and reasoning as more connected with practical (utility) and affective interests. This type of logic allows for paradoxical thinking and also stresses the idea that the truth or meaning of a statement might depend upon context. Religious logic provides motivational interest directed toward a number of goals, including forming and becoming an ideal self (Wallwork, 1982).

Baldwin (1902, pp. 304–366) thought that religious development proceeded through a number of stages. In the early or *prelogical* stage, thinking is marked by spontaneity and a unity or nondifferentiation between the basic modes of emotional, practical, and intellectual thought. Religious dependence begins in this stage with a sense of trust in the environment and one's caretakers; it also involves growth of a sense of mystery. In early development, this sense of mystery and our image of the ideal become identified with God, who like our parents is a person who defies prediction and draws forth a reaction from us of reverence and awe. This is the beginning of religion, which Baldwin defined as "*emotion kindled by faith*, emotion being reverence for a Person and faith being dependence upon Him" (1902, p. 366). Our conception of this Person grows and matures as we develop because religious sentiments are dependent upon our ethical and social ones and thus change as these develop. However, religious thought often struggles in the second or *logical* stage when emotional, practical, and intellectual thinking becomes separated from each other, with discursive and critical intellectual thought gaining predominance. While logical thought is freeing, it also results in ignoring or disparaging certain kinds of experiences that do not fit within the logical categories of this level. This leads to a dualism between subject and object, mind and body.

In higher stages of development, one becomes freed from these problems through a reunion of the emotional and intellectual, as well as the redevelopment of imagination in religious thought. First comes a *hyper-logical* or aesthetic stage marked by contemplative intuition and immediate perception of knowledge and value. At this level, the person is able to directly perceive and interpret objects, bypassing practical and intellectual reason. Finally at the highest level was the *extra-logical* or moral and ethical stage of development. The ethical self that develops at this point is a social self which is conscious of its ability to do right or wrong. It is driven by sentiment and a sense of obligation to go beyond habit and strive toward an ethical ideal (1902, pp. 42–46, 304–306). It forms when the individual is able to overcome the antithesis between self-serving attitudes and compassion for others. At this stage, the person moves beyond emotion and intellectual thought to reasoning that is practical, active, and socially oriented. This ethical self is strongest if it is attached to a public self and anchored in a community with shared ideals.

A key characteristic of early psychological theories of religious development is that they primarily focused on childhood and adolescence. Although this perspective is contrary to the experience of many religious traditions, it formed the basis of cognitive-structuralist theories of development, which we will consider next.

7.4 Cognitive-Structuralist Theories of Development

Psychological theories of religious and spiritual development have an odd history. While there has been much written about religion and related topics from a developmental perspective, virtually none of the theories used by psychologists were specifically developed to help us understand religion or spirituality. Rather, most efforts have involved taking theories of emotional, cognitive, or moral development and applying them to the topic, viewing religion as using the same cognitive capacities, and following a similar developmental trajectory to other normal mental processes (Johnson & Boyatzis, 2006). Along with psychodynamic approaches (see Chapter 5), the main group of developmental theories used to understand religion has been **cognitive-structuralist theories** developed by researchers like Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg. These theories attempt to understand the human person by trying to identify underlying organized structures or schemas of mental activity. Cognitive-structural theories of moral development have been particularly popular, because morality is central to most religious traditions, even though it has features that are developmentally unique (Worthington, 1989). In this cognitive view, religious or spiritual development can be thought of as a kind of learning or change with transformational properties (Mulqueen & Elias, 2000).

7.4.1 Jean Piaget

Jean Piaget (1896–1980) stands as a giant among 20th-century developmental psychologists. While his theory has come under criticism from a variety of sources, almost all developmental theorists share the assumptions of his theory. These assumptions include the characterization of human life as a dynamic and changing natural process and the view that forces within move us toward progressively more complex and adaptive internal organization and structure (Vandenberg & O'Connor, 2005; Fetz, 1988) (Fig. 7.1).

Piaget was primarily interested in **epistemology** or how we acquire knowledge. Like Baldwin, he took a developmental or genetic view toward mental function (Piaget, 1971, p. 45, 1982). Unlike Baldwin, however, he took a more mechanical and structural approach to understanding the human person, seeing mental functions as governed by underlying organized structures or **schema** that act as lawlike systems and govern our ability to acquire knowledge, act, and solve problems (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969, p. 4). He believed that human mental processes often paralleled mathematical forms and should be studied using the procedures of natural science. His research was based upon observing and questioning children (including his own), while engaged in particular tasks.

Unlike Kant, Piaget thought there was no *a priori* beginning point to development (1997, p. 399) but that it proceeded through various structural equilibrium points marked by increasing scope, complexity, and stability. These equilibrium points are often referred to as stages, although he did not himself emphasize the

Fig. 7.1 *Jean Piaget.* One of the most important psychologists of the 20th century; his views of development had an enormous impact on the psychological study of moral and religious development. Photo courtesy of Jean Piaget Society

concept of stage in his work (Broughton, 1981b). Each of the equilibrium points marked a level of adaptation to the environment that balanced *assimilation* or incorporation of things into existing structures with *accommodation* and adjustment of structures to the demands of the environment. He believed that this development proceeded in a sequence governed by biological maturation rather than culture so that environmental factors could only speed or slow the process, although social interaction was necessary for it to proceed (Broughton, 1981a; Inhelder & Piaget, 1958, p. 338; Piaget, 1954, p. 361, 1971, p. 47). He did agree with Kant, however, that the process of knowing does not allow us to speculate about the nature of the reality behind that experience (Seltzer, 1977).

In the view of Piaget, children seek coherence and organization, and early in development acquire basic structures for processing sensory and motor information. This *sensorimotor* stage is later surpassed by *preoperational* or intuitive ways of thinking. This type of cognition is egocentric and marked by creative play with elements of fantasy and symbolism, which he saw as undesirable because of its tendency to reinforce the self-centered state of the individual (1954, p. 362, 1968, p. 90). As development progresses, egocentric stages are displaced, and thinking becomes more mathematical in quality. Intuitions become *concrete operations*, structures that allow for the grouping of similar elements and perceptions of equivalence or reversibility among patterns. During adolescence the development process culminated in *formal operations*, when verbal statements are substituted for objects. This abstract reasoning allowed for prediction of experience, as well as the development of propositional logic and scientific forms of thought that are valid for any content. Piaget believed that emotional factors did not need to be considered in this

process, for while they are present in values and life commitments, they come from the same structural base as cognition and thus add nothing to our understanding of the process of gaining knowledge (Inhelder & Piaget, 1958).

7.4.1.1 Moral Development

In his early work, Piaget (1997) became interested in the study of moral development. He thought that while the affective aspect of morality cannot be studied, we could enquire about its rational base. Like Kant, he saw the essence of morality in the respect an individual acquires for moral law (see Section 2.2.3). These rational rules correspond to "the deepest functional constants of human nature" and form the basis of moral emotions (1997, p. 186), although he believed that emotions should have no part in decision making as they led to false interpretations of reality. Piaget conducted his research on morality by observing children playing marbles and seeing how they actually made decisions about right and wrong in various situations. Other moral researchers like Lawrence Kohlberg have used similar methodologies, giving people situations like the Heinz dilemma, and seeing the reasoning they use in deciding what to do (see Box 7.1). The focus is not on what the person does—the content of the moral decision—but the *process*, how they come to conclusions about what to do.

  Piaget saw "two moralities" emerge during development (1997, p. 194). The first is dominant during preschool years and is an external or *heteronomous* form of morality that involves a focus either on egocentric needs or conformity and unilateral respect for others. While this form of morality is problematic it is not a stable system, and given freedom and the ability to interact with peers independent of adult influence, one's moral reasoning would eventually change. This would lead to a superior system of *autonomous* morality and justice reasoning based on mutual respect and reciprocity

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Box 7.1   The initial Heinz Dilemma (Kohlberg, 1984)

Dilemma III: In Europe, a woman was near death from a special kind of cancer. There was one drug that the doctors thought might save her. It was a form of radium that a druggist in the same town had recently discovered. The drug was expensive to make, but the druggist was charging ten times what the drug cost him. He paid $400 for the radium and charged $4,000 for a small dose of the drug. The sick woman's husband, Heinz, went to everyone he knew to borrow the money and tried every legal means, but he could only get together about $2,000, which is half of what it cost. He told the druggist that his wife was dying, and asked him to sell it cheaper or let him pay later. But the druggist said, "No, I discovered the drug and I'm going to make money from it." So, having tried every legal means, Heinz gets desperate and considers breaking into the man's store to steal the drug for his wife.

  Should Heinz steal the drug? Why or why not?

of relations as in Kant. Piaget thought that the transition to autonomous morality began around age 7 or 8 and concluded by age 11 or 12, with the development of a sense of distributive or egalitarian justice. He thought that this cooperative moral style formed the foundation of the mature personality. At this point, the individual begins to adopt adult roles and a life program that includes plans for changing society and becoming more successful than his predecessors (Inhelder & Piaget, 1958, pp. 335–343).

7.4.1.2   Religious Development

Piaget came from a liberal Protestant Christian tradition and sought to find a rational basis for religion and morality (Burman, 1994, p. 159). While he did not write extensively about religion or collect much meaningful data on the subject, he did have a conception of religious development and ideals that drew on positivist concepts, although he criticized certain aspects of positivism. He believed that values and religious ideas were evolving toward a superior understanding that should replace older views of morality and religion, so that traditional metaphysics and theology should be eliminated. His ideal religion was an individualistic one that adjusted religion to modern thought (Vidal, 1987). He also tended to accept the positivist model of conflict between science and religion. In his early treatise *The Mission of the Idea* (1916), he painted religious orthodoxy as an enemy of science and social salvation. He generally approved of Comte's ideas about history and saw societies evolving in similar ways, "from gerontocratic theocracy in all its forms to equalitarian democracy" (1997, p. 325, cf. pp. 336–337).

Piaget (1997) associated mystical experience and religious orthodoxy with immature and egocentric thought. He thought that mysticism comes from feelings of unilateral respect for parents and adults and is associated with imposed rules of ritual, taboo, and moral realism. He also believed that mysticism is connected with egocentrism in which individuals confuse their own wishes with those of God. This means that feelings of transcendence and the myths associated with them are irrational and have no value as beliefs. In more advanced stages of development, we should abandon these myths and substitute rational experiment and naturalistic explanations for supernatural mysticism. This development should climax in adolescence with the integration of a new rational religion into our life system and plans in which God and individual cooperate with each other.

Piaget's thinking had a strong influence on religious education. In the mid-1960s the British writer Ronald Goldman published *Readiness for Religion* (1968), a system for applying Piagetian insights to the religious training of children. Goldman thought that the Bible contained many highly abstract concepts that exceeded the concrete cognitive abilities of the child, leading to problems in religious education (cf. Lawrence, 1965). He thought that early education should focus on the life experience of the child and the Bible should be introduced later. This position has been widely rejected, as a number of studies have shown that children are perfectly capable of understanding scriptural narratives at early ages (e.g., Slee, 1990; Elkind, 1962; Hoge & Petrillo, 1978; Ashton, 1997; Csanyi, 1982). In fact, these narratives provide both inspiration and direction for

action (Coles, 1990, p. 121). Religious identity appears to be acquired initially through *practices*—things that we do—rather than *beliefs*, and even young children can absorb teachings about practices from Biblical stories.

7.4.1.3 Critique

Piaget's theory has been criticized on a number of fronts. First, a variety of aspects of Piaget's cognitive structural framework have been questioned:

1. *Inappropriate use of reductionism.* Piaget has been criticized for making a number of unwarranted reductionistic assumptions, including that (a) all of development can be explained on the basis of a single mechanism of assimilation and accommodation, (b) this mechanism is universal to all times, places, and individuals, and (c) moral or religious reasoning is just a subset of other kinds of reasoning and develops in the same way (Alexander, Druker, & Langer, 1990; Elkind, 1964, 1996; Rich & DeVitis, 1985). Many scholars reject this, arguing that different areas of cognition may utilize different developmental mechanisms.
2. *Neglect of agency.* The passive nature of the assimilation and adaptation process as described by Piaget appears to ignore the possibility of active learning and offers no explanation for important aspects of human experience such as goal-directed action, expressive activity, or the development of meaning and consciousness (Broughton, 1981c, 1981d; cf. Seltzer, 1977).
3. *Neglect of important process factors* such as (a) the relational, social, and cultural components of the developmental process, (b) the role of emotion in thought and behavior, and (c) the value of active imagination in the lives of both children and adults (Vygotsky, 1986; Cole & Wertsch, 1996).
4. *Neglect of the content and meaning of cognition*, even though Piaget realized that process and content were not entirely separate (Exline, 2002a; cf. Piaget, 1997, p. 85; Baldwin, 1902, p. 20).
5. *Unnecessary inflexibility in the Piagetian model.* The model has a limited number of categories, and this restricts the kinds of trajectories and growth outcomes that can be considered (Langer et al., 1990). Piaget's idea that the goal of development is a kind of distant objectivity that can be achieved in adolescence neglects the possibility of relational goals or cognitive development during adulthood (McGuinness, Pribram, & Pirnazar, 1990; Cartwright, 2001).

Second, his methodology has come under criticism because slight changes in the Piagetian tasks can produce large changes in performance (Burman, 1994, p. 156). In fact, Piaget himself noted that the children he interviewed provided answers closer to his theory than those interviewed by others (1997, p. 210). His use of a sample limited to middle class, male children and a small number of tasks and questions with a limited number of possible responses meant that his observations were generated using his own explanatory framework, making it impossible to truly test his assumptions (Broughton, 1981c; Vygotsky, 1986, p. 15; Rich & DeVitis, 1985). This means

that his emphasis on the autonomous moral conscience may be a reflection of cultural practices or his own liberal Protestant beliefs and values (Broughton, 1981e).

Third, there is also a question as to whether subsequent data support his ideas of moral development. Some studies have found his notions of the differences between children and adults to be exaggerated (Vianello & Marin, 1989). Even preschool children offer justifications for moral decisions based on concern for others rather than authority (Eisenberg-Berg & Neal, 1979), and Piaget himself complained that adults did not fit his model because of their poor psychological insight, tendency to adhere to custom or external influence, and their belief in the reality of moral laws (1997, pp. 190–191, 262–268; cf. 1968, p. 64). Research has not supported his contention that give and take with peers necessarily leads to higher moral development (Rich & DeVitis, 1985, p. 50) or that the age ranges for the thinking he describes are culturally invariant (Tanuwidjaja, 1974). This raises questions about the appropriateness of applying his model to moral or religious development.

7.4.2 Lawrence Kohlberg

Lawrence Kohlberg (1927–1987) initially set out to construct a theory of **justice reasoning**, or how people decide what is just or right behavior in situations where there are competing claims among persons. His approach to moral judgment thus focuses on the *process* rather than the *content* of decision making, which in his view allows for constructing a universal theory that need not account for individual and cultural differences in moral content. His approach was based on Piaget's cognitive theory and methodology, as well as the psychological ideas of Baldwin and John Dewey (e.g., Dewey & Tufts, 1932; Carpendale, 2000) and the philosophical ethics of Kant and John Rawls. There are two important ideas that are presuppositions to his work:

1. Like Kant, he believes there is a universal human capacity for moral judgment, as well as a set of values, rules, and principles for moral reasoning, including the concepts of reciprocity and equality, that can be agreed upon by all thinking individuals (1984, pp. 222–224).
2. These universal principles and values cannot be derived from simple observation. Just because something *does* happen (e.g., murder) does not mean that it *should* happen (i.e., that it is morally right). Deriving matters of value from fact commits a **naturalistic fallacy** (1984, p. 285; see Section 2.5.3). Rather, these rules must be presupposed and judgments made on a conscious rational basis.

On the basis of research evidence available at the time, Kohlberg believed that cognitive structuralism was the most powerful explanation for moral behavior, since social development and emotion are affected or mediated by cognitive structures. He felt that things like parental factors and the handling of "basic drives" were unrelated to the development of moral attitudes or behavior, although parental warmth encouraged learning of social norms (1984, pp. 27–28). Psychodynamic developmental factors like attachment were explainable using imitation and cognitive-structural

concepts (Kohlberg, 1984, p. 158), although specific attachments might speed up or slow down development and give it particular content and affective significance.

7.4.2.1 Stages

Like Piaget, Kohlberg believed that the development of justice reasoning proceeded in universal, fixed stages in an invariant sequence. His stage model was constructed after analyzing responses to situations like the Heinz dilemma (see Box 7.1). Unlike other moral thinkers like Baldwin and Levinas, he also privileged the idea of reciprocity or equality as the ultimate goal in human relations. Each stage in his theory of moral development is a whole worldview that represents an increasingly complex, universalized form of reciprocity (Burman, 1994; Kohlberg, 1984, p. 73). He referred to his model as a **hard stage model** with a fixed set of stages applicable to everyone, as opposed to hierarchical or **soft stage models** where development to higher stages is optional, and the final stages have a mystical or post-rational quality (Kohlberg, 1984, p. 248). However, Kohlberg rejected the idea of simple progress from heteronomy to mutual respect contained in Piaget's moral theory; rather, each level had two stages that showed a progression toward reversible thinking within that stage (see Table 7.1). At the lower and middle levels of development, moral reasoning revolved around obedience or social conformity. The reasoning given by Adolf Eichmann for his support of Hitler and the Holocaust is often used as an example of this kind of reasoning (see Box 7.2).

Kohlberg struggled with his ideas about the endpoint of moral development. He found that he could not reliably identify individuals who functioned at his hard Stage 6. He also believed that there were optional soft stages of development that occurred after age 30. He thought these additional stages would help to explain the existence of Christian moral virtues like agape love or altruism which did not fit well within the framework of reciprocity, but he was reluctant to include them in his model because it would introduce an ethical or religious philosophy into his theory that went beyond rational judgment (Kohlberg, 1981, pp. 345–356; 1984, pp. 212–249; cf. Dawson, 2002). However, he acknowledged that soft models might be more adequate for describing adult development. He considered the possibility of including a soft Stage 7 in his model. This stage would be reached when an individual begins to ask ontological or religious questions about the meaning or purpose of life and morality, and finds an answer in experiences of a transcendental, nondualistic, and post-rational nature that provides a cosmic perspective on reality and a loving relationship with it (1981, pp. 369–371; Kohlberg & Ryncarz, 1990).

7.4.2.2 Religious Development

Although Kohlberg wrote primarily about the development of moral reasoning, he also expressed thoughts about religious development and attempted to relate his theory to it. In his view, religious development may parallel but also differs from moral development as it deals with different kinds of questions. He argued that

Table 7.1 Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Development

Stage		Description
Level A;	Preconventional	Moral value resides in external acts or needs rather than persons or standards
Stage 1:	Punishment and Obedience	Literal obedience of rules to avoid punishment; egocentric focus *God pictured as powerful figure*
Stage 2:	Instrumental purpose	Right is meeting your own interests and having agreements that allow others to do the same *God will help you if you do what God wants*
Level B:	Conventional	Moral value in roles, conventional order and experiences of others
Stage 3:	Mutual relationships and conformity	Acts in ways that will gain or maintain approval and trust of others, as well as self-approval *God is a loyal trustworthy friend; you should behave correctly so you don't offend*
Stage 4:	Social system and conscience maintenance	Need to uphold laws and duties and make contributions so that society is upheld *God as supreme lawgiver over natural and Moral orders*
Level:B/C	Transitional; Postconventional, but not principled	Personal and subjective basis for choice based on what the individual thinks or feels is right
Level C	Postconventional	Moral value in shared standards, rights, duties
Stage 5:	Prior rights and social contract; utilitarian ethics	Rules are relative to the group but must be upheld because of mutual obligation; Rational decisions of morality based on "the greatest good for the greatest number" *God and individual mutually involved*
Stage 6:	Universal ethical principles	One should act in accord with universal ethical principles, which may conflict with laws; Principles include equal rights, individual dignity

Source: Kohlberg (1981) and Kohlberg & Ryncarz (1990)

Box 7.2 Eichmann's stage 1 reasoning

But to sum it all up, I must say that I regret nothing. Adolf Hitler may have been wrong all down the line, but one thing is beyond dispute: the man was able to work his way up from lance corporal in the German army to Fuhrer of a people of almost eight million.

I never met him personally, but his success alone proves to me that I should subordinate myself to this man. He was somehow so supremely capable that the people recognized him. And so with that justification I recognized him joyfully, and I still defend him (cited in Kohlberg, 1984, pp. 54–44).

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morality deals with the nature of the good life and the good person, while religion concerns fundamental questions about human nature and the human condition. Kohlberg believed that morality was a "logically independent realm" from religion

because (1) moral development occurs in people with no religious beliefs, and (2) individuals at a high stage of moral development can have very different religious views (1981, pp. 336–337). Some research data support this, suggesting that religious people often distinguish between universally applicable moral laws and those specific to their group (Nucci & Turiel, 1993; cf. Lourenco, 2003). As in the case of morality, Kohlberg assumed that there are universal issues like our relationship to the eternal, which people try to answer through their religious reasoning in an attempt "to affirm life and morality as related to a transcendent or infinite ground or sense of the whole" (1981, p. 321). He also speculated that a sixth stage of religious development such as the agape ideal might be a competitor for his own vision of a highest moral Stage 6. However, he later argued that agape assumes a Stage 6 morality; thus religious development depends on moral development (1981, p. 351).

7.4.2.3 Critique

Two types of critiques have been mounted against Kohlberg's theory. Narrower critiques have focused upon problems in his description of justice reasoning, while broader ones have questioned his presuppositions and methodology. Critics point out the following:

1. People cannot be placed at a single stage of moral reasoning or development, because different kinds of ethical dilemmas elicit different levels of moral reasoning from people. For instance, people deciding whether to drink and drive typically use lower levels of reasoning then when talking about the Heinz dilemma (Carpendale, 2000; Grover, 1980).
2. The theory ignores the possibility that moral development in general or justice reasoning in particular might vary according to gender or culture (Gilligan, 1982; Gibson, 2004; Gorsuch & Barnes, 1973). In Indian samples, researchers have tended to find similar stages, but the subjects responding to the Heinz dilemma also make use of moral and philosophical values that do not fit within Kohlberg's framework (Parikh, 1980; Vasudev & Hummel, 1987).
3. Rational views of justice reasoning neglect the relational character of morality (Gilligan, Murphy, & Tappan, 1990). A relational view focuses less on reasoning about principle or reciprocity and more about personal or group commitments, empathy, or the ability to take the perspective of others (Carpendale, 2000; Nucci & Turiel, 1993). Religious types of ethical reasoning, especially in theistic religions, often have a strong relational and communal component (Johnson, 1996a, 1996b; Gibson, 2004). Because of this, narrative might provide a better framework for understanding moral reasoning (Hermans, Kempen, & van Loon, 1992).
4. While Kohlberg attempted to define moral reasoning as a separate domain, studies with Western samples show that people think that (1) moral maturity cannot be defined solely on the basis of justice reasoning but involves characteristics of moral character and virtue such as integrity, dependability, self-control, and degree of care (Colby, 2002; Baumeister & Exline, 1999; cf. Baumeister & Leary, 1995);

and (2) morality and religion cannot be clearly separated because while it is possible to think of moral people who are not religious, morality is an essential part of religion (Walker & Pitts, 1998a, 1988b). Thus, Kohlberg's claim that religion and morality are independent is at the minimum overstated and clearly wrong for some individuals (Walker & Reimer, 2006).

5. Like many hard stage models, Kohlberg's theory has good reliability but a narrow range of application (Reich, 1993). For instance, a theory of moral development that focuses solely on justice reasoning has trouble offering an effective explanation of moral action (Batson, 1998). This is because moral judgment and action in real situations may be more related to other factors like character, courage, moral emotions like guilt, and the specific situation and self-structure of the individual (Blasi, 1983; Colby, 2002; Arnold, 2000; Grover, 1980; cf. Kohlberg, 1984, p. 337). Kohlberg himself admitted that judgment is not the only predictor of moral action (1984, pp. 70–71).

A final issue with regard to theories like Kohlberg's is the extent to which an understanding of moral development is relevant to religious or spiritual development. Some writers (e.g., Kant, see Section 2.2.3) have closely associated the two, while others have seen them as potentially separate. Recent work by Kevin Reimer (e.g., Walker & Reimer, 2006) has indicated an asymmetrical relationship between these concepts in the minds of many religious people. In this view, morality and moral thinking is a necessary prerequisite to religious practices and spiritual development, but moral thinking does not require spiritual underpinnings, although religious individuals will be influenced in their moral thinking by their religious beliefs and practices.

7.4.3 James Fowler and Faith Development

Probably the most influential modern theory related to religious and spiritual development has been that of James Fowler. Fowler is a theologian who worked at Harvard with Kohlberg and absorbed the outlook of the structural tradition in developmental psychology (Lownsdale, 1997).

7.4.3.1 Fowler's Conception of Faith

Fowler (1981, 1996) has articulated a theory of faith development. Drawing on ideas from Tillich and H. Richard Niebuhr, he defined **faith** as an evolving sense of sprit and relatedness to others that provides meaning and coherence and allows participation in "an *ultimate environment*" (1996, p. 21). It is a universal feature of human beings that gives coherence and direction to life, links people to each other and to a larger frame of reference, and enables them to deal with the limit conditions inherent in human life. In his view, faith is a more fundamental category than religion, which involves beliefs, practices and images that express and inform faith (Fowler & Dell, 2004). Faith involves patterns of (1) knowing or belief, (2) valuing

or commitment, and (3) meaning construction, typically expressed through narrative (1987, p. 56) (Fig. 7.2).

According to Fowler, faith is based in our sense of self that develops on several levels: an *emergent self* in infancy that forms the basis of imagination, a core or *embodied self* that appears in physical rituals, and an *intersubjective self* that allows us to develop shared frameworks and fantasies (Fowler, 1989). This faith creates triadic relationships between ourselves, others and "shared centers of value and power" (1996, p. 21). In this view, different kinds of personal identities in people can be thought of as coming from various sorts of relations with potential centers of value. Some people have multiple centers of value with no center; they have many compartmentalized identities and move between different interests and situations. Fowler called these people *polytheists*. This pattern is often found in contemporary culture, particularly in people who suffer from personality disorders (Haynes, 1998). Others are *henotheists*, who have an identity unified around a single center of power that is not of ultimate concern, such as money or status. A last group is made up of *radical monotheists*, who have "loyalty to the principle of being and to the source and center of all value and power" (1981, p. 23).
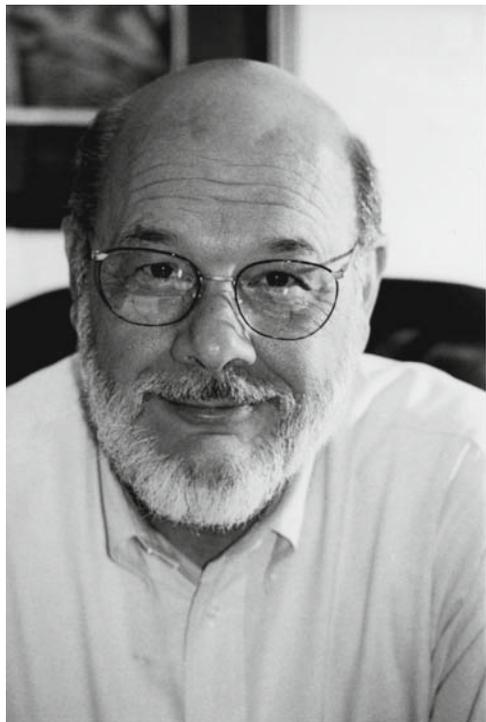

Fig. 7.2 *James Fowler.* A central figure in psychology and religion dialogue; his view of faith development has been enormously influential in both psychology and Christian theological circles. Photo courtesy of James Fowler

7.4.3.2 Stages of Faith

Fowler has developed a structural model of faith development that draws on the work of Piaget and Kohlberg. In Fowler's view, faith development parallels cognitive development and involves shifts between stages, each of which are "patterned operations of knowing and valuing" (1996, p. 56) that help us find and make meaning. Faith stages become increasingly complex as we move to higher levels, and each stage includes a worldview as well as a whole set of values, myths, stories and symbols that articulate them (See Table 7.2). Fowler believed his stages were invariant, sequential, hierarchical and universal, although in his later writing he has backed away from claims of stage universality (1996, pp. 57, 297; cf. 1999b). His stages parallel the stages of cognitive and ego development as outlined by Piaget, Erikson and the early childhood psychologist Daniel Stern (2000). Each stage typically involves being a member of a community that shares this faith. Transition to a new stage is triggered by a sense that old structures are no longer adequate, leading to disenchantment with old patterns and then a new beginning following a period of confusion and searching. Fowler explicitly argues that these new stages

Table 7.2 Fowler's states of faith development

Stage of faith (age)	Emergent strength/virtue	Other characteristics
0. Undifferentiated/primal (infancy)	Mutuality, trust pre-images of the ground of being	Parents most important source
1. Intuitive-projective (early childhood/preschool)	Imagination Images of numinous and Ultimate environment	Pre-operational magical thinking, fantasy Aware of God, religious issues (e.g., death)
2. Mythic-literal (school age)	Narrative ability Hearing and telling stories of faith	Concrete operations Faith based on shared traditions Synthesis by narrative form
3. Synthetic-conventional (adolescence)	Forming of identity, personal faith, typically without reflection	Formal operations Integration of what has been taught into a system; development of personality, attached to value system
4. Individuative-reflective (young adulthood)	Reflective construction of ideology Vocational dream	Evaluation of received values, critical choice of beliefs and values; self-persona differentiation
5. Conjunctive (mid-adulthood and later)	Awareness of paradox, depth of issues intergenerational responsibility for the world	Openness to other perspectives; move beyond questioning stance to acceptance
6. Universalizing	Detachment from ideology	Results in a "keonosis" or emptying of self, very rare

Source: Fowler (1981, p. 290, 1996)

are qualitatively different, although not necessarily better or more desirable than the old ones (Fowler & Dell, 2004). Conversion experiences do not necessarily bring about stage transitions, they tend to be involved when the individual shifts to an entirely different center of power or value.

7.4.3.3 Evaluation

Fowler's theory has been widely influential. It has all the advantages of a structural approach. It helps us understand universal features of faith and ways of knowing, allowing for comparisons between diverse groups and among individuals within a group, including those following non-religious paths of development. It also allows for comparisons between faith stages and with other types of development (Fowler, 1981; Rizzuto, 2001a). Fowler has even used it to conceptualize the process of cultural evolution in interesting ways (de Kock, 2000). He has also argued that congregations and religious groups have modal levels of development (1987, p. 97), a concept that might provide a useful framework for understanding religious communities.

Fowler's theory has also been subject to a number of criticisms:

1. His definition of faith is thought by some to be too broad, putting believers and unbelievers alike under the same heading, blurring distinctions between ethics, spirituality, and religious faith (Vergote, 1994, p. 234). This makes it difficult to understand how these things are different and might function in diverse ways in different contexts such as theistic and nontheistic religions (Kohlberg & Ryncarz, 1990; Wallwork, 1982) or how various aspects of a person's life might function at different levels of faith development (Rizzuto, 2001b).
2. The theory does not place faith development in the context of broader developmental issues including psychodynamic, emotional, experiential, relational, gender, and cultural factors (McFadden, 1999; McDargh, 1983; Parks, 1991; Streib, 2001a, 2001b).
3. It focuses on process over content and thus tends to assume all centers of value are the same, a questionable position (Hyde, 1990; cf. Fowler, 1981, pp. 273, 301).
4. It provides no account of the transformational mechanisms that help a person grow from one stage of faith to another (Wallwork, 1982), perhaps because these processes are not universal but vary according to object structure and socioreligious context (Rizzuto, 2001b).
5. It has weak empirical support, with little or no quantitative data and conceptual links that would tie the theory to other research (Hyde, 1990). Additionally, available research has been unable to identify many individuals at his highest stages of faith, which suggests that his conception of the goal of development may be problematic. Certainly his theory does not have a clear role for many of the higher stages of religious development such as illumination and union (Haynes, 1998).

6. It privileges individual autonomy over the important role of community, although he has tried to address this in later writings (Johnson, 1996a; Fowler & Dell, 2006).
7. It assumes that faith development proceeds in stages that are invariant, sequential, and hierarchical, a position rejected by many postmodernists (Streib, 2001a, 2001b). Fowler has responded to this, claiming that he is open to postmodern hermeneutic and interpretive insights, as well as the role of emotions and the unconscious (1996, p. 157). He has suggested some additions to his theory (e.g., Fowler, 2001); however, these are not well integrated with the rest of his thought and have not attracted much interest.

Fowler has been sensitive to the criticisms raised by postmodernists, although he has serious problems with parts of the postmodern movement because of its tendency toward relativism and minimizing the need for a core self, as in Kenneth Gergen's work (Fowler, 2001).

7.4.4 Fritz Oser and Religious Judgment

A different perspective on cognitive development and religion is provided by Fritz Oser and his colleagues (Oser & Gmunder, 1991; Oser, 1991a, 1991b), who have developed a theory of religious judgment. According to their definition, **religious judgment** is how the individual deals subjectively with the process of meaning making, coping with contingencies, and creating subjective security in a world of objective insecurity. It also involves how people think about their relation with the Ultimate. It provides a deep reflective or "mother-structure" that operates in the background most of the time but can be seen when crises challenge the way we understand the meaning of events (Oser, 1991a). As in other structural theories, the emphasis is on process, although Oser admits that "structures in the religious domain can never be entirely purified of content-aspects" (Oser & Gmunder, 1991, p. 61). Religious judgment is a part of a *religious consciousness*, which also involves construction of a relationship with an Ultimate being that can help us solve life problems.

Although Oser studied with Kohlberg and was certainly influenced by him, there are also important differences between the two scholars. Kohlberg was interested in religion only as it related to morality (Oser, 1997), while Oser is interested in describing a theory of religious rather than ethical judgment. Oser describes the differences between Piaget, Kohlberg, and himself in terms of how subject and object relations are handled. In Piaget, the focus is on intellectual development and the relation of subject to object. Kohlberg, on the other hand deals with social development and the subject-subject relation. Oser's theory differs from both as he deals with religious development and the relation of subjects to the Ultimate and thus to each other. As a result, Oser's theory is often thought to be less of a hard stage model than that of Kohlberg, although not as soft as Fowler's theory (Power, 1991, p. 128).

Oser sees that development is a process where the individual seeks equilibrium on seven bipolar dimensions that are important for religious judgment: transcendence vs. immanence, freedom vs. dependency, trust vs. fear or anxiety, sacred vs. profane, hope vs. absurdity, eternity vs. ephemerality, and functional transparency (seeing how things work) vs. opaqueness (having a hidden or magical quality). During different stages of growth, these dimensions are balanced in various ways, but development seeks a complex equilibrium that is finally achieved in the last stage (see Table 7.3). Stage transitions are often triggered by important life experiences or changes that cannot be dealt with adequately within existing cognitive structures and call for the integration of new elements of thought. Each stage is a holistic unity that involves the rejection of previous ways of looking at things while incorporating parts of the past. It contains a new worldview and way of interpreting experience,

Table 7.3 Oser's stages of religious judgment

Level	Orientation	Description
Stage 0	Undifferentiated	No distinction drawn between interior and exterior
Stage 1	Absolute heteronomy	Ultimate is exterior and may or may not help
		Direct activity of the Ultimate in the world
		We are dependent upon the Ultimate
		People react to the Ultimate, should follow its plan
Stage 2	"Do Ut Des"	Ultimate is exterior and will help if we pass tests and care about the Ultimate
		Direct activity of the Ultimate in the world
		People can influence the Ultimate
Stage 3	Absolute autonomy (Deism)	Ultimate has a separate sphere of influence
		The Ultimate is not active in the world but provides underlying order
		People are autonomous, responsible for themselves
		Religious and other authority may be rejected
		Atheists do not usually progress beyond here (Oser, 1991a)
Stage 4	Mediated autonomy	There is an unexplained part of life that only makes sense in relation to the Ultimate
		Ultimate is both transcendent and immanent
		Ultimate provides the basis for possibility of action, e.g., freedom, hope
		Ultimate acts in the world according to a plan through us; the world is the image of the Ultimate
		People recognize some dependence on an Ultimate without negating autonomy
		People engage in various forms of religiosity
Stage 5	Intersubjective religious	Ultimate seen as love for self and others
		Ultimate being part of all commitments but also transcends them in infinite freedom
		Ultimate is seen in others, mystical experience
		Loyalty to Ultimate shown in relations with others
		People are independent of religious community or salvation plan

Oser and Gmunder (1991) and Oser (1991b)

and with it a new subjective perception of our relationship with God. The outcome of each stage produces a set of competencies, which may or may not translate into action for various personal or situational reasons.

Like Kohlberg, Oser has tested his theory using participant responses to dilemmas. Early research utilized a sample of 112 individuals aged 8–75 from a town in Switzerland, but other research has been conducted in a variety of places with different samples, including some non-Western groups. Oser found that people could be assigned to different stages of religious judgment and that individuals in older age groups showed an increasing sense of autonomy and partnership with God (Oser, 1997). Oser also speculates about a possible 6th stage of development based on the themes evident in earlier stages. This stage would be a version of Stage 5 with an orientation toward "universal communication and solidarity" (Oser & Gmunder, 1991, p. 81). However, researchers have not identified people fitting this description, so its place within the theory is tentative.

7.4.4.1 Critique

Like other psychological theories of development, parts of Oser's theory are based in data, but other parts are dependent upon philosophical or theological assumptions. These are not empirically validated and color the way in which the data are interpreted (Oser & Gmunder, 1991, p. 7). In particular, theories like those of Oser and Fowler contain a final stage of development that has not been verified empirically (virtually no one fits the stage), but the theory is built around the value-laden assumption that this is the best and ultimate goal of development (Fowler, 1991, p. 36). This can mean that the theory does a good job of explaining things that fit within its assumptions, but a poorer job otherwise. It may also explain why theories like those of Oser and Kohlberg are similar in lower stages but diverge in higher ones (Oser & Gmunder, 1991, p. 3)—different conceptions of end goal lead to increasingly different pictures of development when one reaches higher stages.

Oser's theory is based on a typical 20th-century liberal Protestant view of Christianity that emphasizes individuality and downplays the role of community, although like Kohlberg he would agree that major religious traditions help sustain higher levels of development. As a result, his theory has been criticized as being unable to explain growth toward maturity in groups outside of liberal Protestantism, such as conservative or evangelical Christians. Research on Oser's stages also suggests that they do not capture important aspects of religious development during adulthood (Oser, 1997; Tamminen, 1994a). By ignoring the specific context provided by different religious groups, the model ignores the content of religious reasoning and risks neglecting the effects of environment on the developmental process (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

The focus on reasoning in Oser's theory—as well as that of Fowler—carries with it other limitations as well. For instance, it does not provide a clear understanding of how reasoning translates into action, how affect and unconscious processes contribute to religious judgment, or how religious experience interacts with

judgment when interpreting the meaning of events (Power, 1991; Rizzuto, 1991; Tamminen, 1994a). Oser has acknowledged the validity of some of these criticisms (Oser, 1991b).

7.5 Integrative Approaches to Religious Development

7.5.1 Ken Wilber

One of the most sophisticated integrations of Eastern perspectives with modern psychology can be found in the work of Ken Wilber. In an early work entitled *The Atman Project* (1996), Wilber outlines a transpersonal theory of development that draws upon sources in religion, psychology, and philosophy. While he recognizes the effects of culture on the individual, Wilber aligns himself with the perennial philosophy (see Section 4.3) and argues that there is a universal aspect to development. He rejects a mechanistic, materialist worldview in favor of a holistic and hierarchical one (see Wilber, 2000b) but nevertheless argues that many aspects of spiritual development show a stage-like progression (Wilber, 2000a, p. 134).

Like the perennialists, Wilber believes that we all have a drive toward Spirit. The process of ascent follows a hierarchical stage model of development, with lower stages in the model resembling those of Piaget (Rothberg, 1998). Wilber rejects the idea that we might have spiral paths of development where temporary regressions to lower levels may help us achieve higher ones; rather the spirit draws us on in a progressive, ascending path (Washburn, 1998). Unfortunately, we tend to pathologize, misunderstand, or feel threatened by stages higher than our own (Walsh, 1998).

Like many Eastern writers such as Sri Aurobindo (e.g., 1996), Wilber draws close parallels between development and evolution. However, the transpersonal framework views evolution as more than successive adaptations to the material world that convey reproductive advantage (see Section 6.2.1). Rather, **evolution** and development are progression toward transcendence—they are ultimately religious or spiritual in nature. Drawing on Hindu thought, Wilber believes that the goal of evolution is "Atman, or ultimate Unity Consciousness in only God" and is part of the "drive of God towards God" (1996, p. xvii). Development proceeds toward increasing differentiation and hierarchical integration, which is a reflection of universal processes of growth.

Wilber has outlined a stage model describing the path of personal evolution. Each stage involves the creation of *basic structures* such as sensorimotor abilities or formal operational reasoning. These structures remain available to the person in all stages subsequent to their emergence. At each stage, the individual also develops *transition structures* that are present at that stage but will disappear when the person moves on to a new level of development. Our experience of the self is an example of a transition structure, as it changes to new unique forms as we move from stage to stage (Wilber, 1986a).

During the first half of life, development proceeds in an "outward arc" of developing subconscious and conscious awareness of self and environment (see Table 7.4).

Table 7.4 Ken Wilber's stages of personal-transpersonal development

Stage (Substage)	Cognitive style Affective atmosphere	Conative or Motivational factors	Temporal/self Mode
Prepersonal (pleromatic)	Adualistic "Oceanic"	Instinctual	Pretemporal Oceanic
Prepersonal (uroboric)	Recognition of other Euphoria and fear	Survival and Physiological Needs	Pretemporal Reflexive
Typhonic (physical/ emotional bodies)	Differentiation of objects from self and each other Distinguishing various kinds of emotions	Survival Pleasure Principle	Momentary Narcissistic
Typhonic (image body)	Primary process Sensorimotor completion Sustained emotions	Wish fulfillment Anxiety reduction Survival and safety	Extended present Nonreflexive body-image
Mental-egoic	Secondary process Concrete/formal thought Dialogical language, emotions (e.g., love)	Goal direction Willpower Self-esteem needs	Linear, historical Extended past, future Egoic-syntaxical Personae
Centauric	Transverbal Vision-image, fantasy Spontaneous	Creative wishing Meaning seeking Self-actualization	Grounded in present Integrated
Low-subtle	Extraegoic Transpersonal	Paranormal siddhi	Sees past, future Out-of-body
High-subtle	Intuitional Sensory revelations Rapture, bliss	Compassion Love and Gratitude	Transtemporal Archetypal-divine
Low-causal	Final illumination Radiant bliss	Love-in-oneness karuna	Transtemporal Vanishing into God
High-causal	Cessation Samadhi; Ecstasy	Love-in-oneness Spontaneity	Transtemporal Formless realization
Ultimate	Ultimate Unity		

Wilber (1996)

These are the *prepersonal* and *personal* phases of development. This is followed in some individuals by a *transpersonal* phase, an "inward arc" that involves development of higher states of consciousness. The outward arc involves a series of stages at the gross level of development and perception that include many of the cognitive, emotional, motivational, and experiential changes discussed by Piaget and other developmental psychologists. The peak of the arc is the centauric stage, which is a creative, spontaneous way of being that has characteristics similar to the state of self-actualization described by Maslow. Following this in the inward arc are a series of subtle and causal stages that are marked by increasing experiences of connectedness with the world and others, including paranormal experiences. The final goal is an experience of unity with the world in which the self dissolves.

A key point made by Wilber is that there are both similarities and differences between less and more advanced stages of development, so that sometimes very advanced states of consciousness may be mistaken for immature ones. In this way of thinking, earlier modes of development like fantasy that are preverbal may have equivalents at transverbal or transpersonal stages of development that look like fantasy but are actually fundamentally different, because they are experiences of transverbal and transpersonal realities rather than internal states. He calls this tendency to confuse higher and lower experiences that are superficially similar the **pre-trans fallacy.** Wilber points out frequent examples of it in the writings of psychologists like Freud, who in his view mistakenly equated higher states of consciousness like the "oceanic feeling" with the undifferentiated consciousness of infancy and early childhood.

Wilber's ideas about psychopathology are built around his developmental theory. He believes that certain kinds of psychopathology tend to be characteristic of each level of development. Adults who are still in the prepersonal phases typically suffer from personality disorders, while in the personal phase one might suffer from existential problems such as concerns about personal authenticity or the meaning of life. In the transpersonal stages, one can also experience a variety of unusual experiences and problems such as surges of uncontrolled energy or "dark night" depression-like experiences that come, as the individual begins to detach from things that formerly provided pleasure (1986b).

7.5.1.1 Critique

Wilber's work is creative and offers a number of advantages. His theory attempts to go beyond strictly materialistic and naturalistic theories and embraces a holistic view of reality. It provides a framework for understanding **nondualistic** experience in a developmental perspective. His concept of the pre-trans fallacy provides a structure for understanding confusions that may plague a number of theories of psychological and spiritual development (Reynolds, 2004).

Wilber's work has been criticized by a number of writers, including some within the transpersonal movement. For instance, Frager (1989) notes that Wilber's view (1) is one-dimensional, linear, and hierarchical, unlike the inner growth process experienced by most; (2) tends to take concepts from traditions and use them outside of the supporting conceptual structure, drawing comparisons that ignore important differences; and (3) uses his own idiosyncratic terminology that is distinct from others in psychology. Others have suggested that his theory does not account for some critical data of experience, such as the presence of higher transpersonal experiences at lower levels of development, or the apparent effects of cultural or gender differences, and it tends to romanticize Eastern religious traditions like Buddhism (Rothberg, 1998; Rubin, 2003). Evolutionary theorists have attacked him for his view that neo-Darwinism is unable to explain some important aspects of our world such as the origin of life, the beginnings of sentience, and human self-awareness. Finally, some have

criticized the overly synthetic and non-relational quality of his theory (Reynolds, 2004). As a result, it may not be testable using traditional scientific methodologies.

7.5.2 James Loder

The work of James Loder (1931–2001) is important because he offers one of the few models of development that has both theological and psychological sophistication. He believed that theological as well as psychological perspectives were necessary to understand human development. This is not because he disagreed with theories like that of Piaget, Kohlberg or Fowler. Rather, he believed that human uniqueness, issues of purpose or value, as well as some more specific interpretive tasks either demanded or benefited from a theological perspective (1998, xiii, 4). As a result, Loder's theory is based on the idea that human development is shaped by spiritual transformation, while more psychological theories like Fowler's argue that spiritual transformation is embedded in human development, a view which tends to privilege psychological concerns over theological or spiritual ones (Balswick, King, & Reimer, 2005, p. 274)

A model that truly integrates theological and psychological categories is necessarily complex, and Loder's work *The Logic of the Spirit* (1998) is no exception. In his view, development takes place in two orders, divine and contingent, with the former surrounding the latter. The divine order is the source of grace that can remake human life and the environment within which development occurs, while changes in the body, soul (psychological ego), and sociocultural contexts lie within the contingent order. Spiritual development takes place on the boundary between the two and thus is affected by both divine and contingent orders. The divine order has the potential to affect the contingent order when surprise intrudes upon the fixed patterns of contingent time, providing the potential for transformation.

Loder argues that relationality has priority over rationality both developmentally and in terms of our "quality of being" (1998, p. 8). He defines relationality as the unity that is possible within a polarity of two things that are apparently opposed and possibly asymmetrical. This relationality is foremost an interaction between the person and the environment, sometimes between people, and most importantly between the person and God or the "ultimate ground of being" (1998, p. 10). Systems of meaning are constructed utilizing these relationships, and transformation occurs when something questions the current system of coherence and calls for a reordering. Inattention to incoherence leads to potentially destructive use of our abilities and must be avoided. Development is thus a series of coherences and is a fundamental human drive; incoherence such as between soul and spirit requires transformation or re-creation.

Loder provides a description of how the axes of psychological development, spirituality, and transcendence interact at various stages of life. Like Erikson, he believes that there are fundamental developments that take place at each stage which are important for later stages of development. His theory focuses primarily on the early foundational stages, although he also addresses some developmental concerns of adulthood.

Infancy. The task of the first stage of life is to construct a trustworthy world out of chaos, "a future that is indebted to but not controlled by the past" (1998, p. 88). Symbolic of the kinds of processes that take place at this stage is the response of the infant to a face. The prototype of religious experience that develops at this level is the sense of recognition, affirmation, and presence that one receives from an Other that provides satisfaction and harmony. This sense of the Face of the Other fights the "underlying negation of human existence" that manifests itself in loneliness, dread, and mistrust (1998, p. 105). It has analogies to later Christian religious experiences of the Creator Sprit, the face of Jesus as the face of God, and the experience of negation and original sin.

Toddler and Oedipal. Interactions with the environment produce autonomy, but also separation from the source of that autonomy, which leads to shame and inner doubt. These early childhood issues are of great significance, for here is formed the foundations of human freedom. This is the stage at which symbols and transitional objects are especially important, as the child's inner world is elaborated through imagination and play. It is a crucial period for religious development, for it is at about age 2–1/2 or 3 that the God representation begins to take shape. Successful negotiation of this stage will give the child a sense of imagination and an ability to construct and believe in a vision, as well as identify with parental models of good and bad.

School age. The beginnings of a coherent structure of life and work are laid down during the early school years. The child comes to this stage with two worlds, one that is literal, linear, rational, and socially controlled, and the other that is mystical, imaginative, and playful. During this stage, the child begins to form life narratives and structures that hold these two worlds together in a coherent picture. Role-taking that is active at this stage provides a prelude to work and participation in community, although this is only an approximation of true community or *koinonia* as envisioned in Christian religious thought. The problem comes when work and the linear world are emphasized at the expense of other areas, and personal worth becomes confused with work, as is possible in achievement-oriented societies. When this happens we develop attachments or even addictions to work, putting tremendous amounts of energy into them, trying to make them solve problems and meet needs for which they were not designed. Loder indicates that one of the values of a theological critique of development is to point out problems like this and remove the obsessive quality to work, reestablishing our worth on its original ground—the love of God.

Adolescence and young adulthood. Loder believes that in adolescence the individual begins a more explicit search for order. Developing a sense of this at the psychological level requires that we build up the ego and our identity in terms of things like ideology, values, and work commitments, as well as views of authority and love. We also begin to see that it is relationality that underlies all forms of order. We discover that friends can serve as transitional objects, as we develop our sense of identity. Because of this need for relationality, we have a need to behold its Face and develop a relationship with it. This is a religious task, and each culture and religion has its own version of what a *homo religiosus* should look like. Relationality with God is thus also developed in the context of our relationship with individuals, important groups, and the culture within which we live.

Young adulthood. In the ideal situation, this is a stage where creating and maintaining a dream with integrity have primary authority. This dream relates to individual concerns like work, but it also involves intimacy, the ability to create a shared dream and ultimately a love that is accepting, appreciative, and not possessive. All of this involves a restructuring of development at the level of the ego. We need to reverse our growth patterns and become more childlike. Through taking an active risk and expressing our identity to another person, we can overcome isolation, as well as confront negative aspects of our prior development. Ego identity and faith will end up stronger for this process. The paradox of going back to previous stages to move forward, and stripping ourselves of things to gain more, is a characteristic feature of religious concepts of development, especially those elaborated by theologian-psychologists with psychodynamic leanings (McDargh, 1983, pp. 56–57).

Middle and older adulthood. Loder's treatment of midlife and beyond is disappointingly short but thoughtful. Loder pictures the time of middle adulthood as one of ambivalence. Whether we have attained success or feel that we have not achieved our goals, there is typically a sense of depression or even stagnation that people experience. This forces us to reevaluate our lives, look again at where we have invested our energy, and seek a transformation of the ego to achieve balance. Loder views old age as a time of losses such as physical decline, decreasing work involvement, and declining independence. However, he sees that these losses have a benefit, in that they bring simplicity to our life and strip away things that distract us from the pure love of God.

7.5.2.1 Critique

Loder's theory is an innovative example of how modern psychology might be combined with theological insights to produce an interesting theory of development. Unfortunately, theories like those of Loder and Wilber have generated relatively little discussion among psychologists. This may be due in part to their generality, which makes it difficult to apply the theories in research or practice. Also, more strictly psychological theories like those of Kohlberg and Fowler come with built-in research methodologies that make it easy for investigators to test or develop them further, while Loder's ideas may be difficult to test.

7.6 Conclusion

Key issue: *Developmental approaches to the psychology and religion dialogue are heavily dependent upon the theoretical presuppositions of a theorist, including general views about the nature of time and specific ideas about the goal, trajectory, and diversity of development.*

Even a brief review of theories from psychology and several religious traditions reveals the complexity of the issues involved when talking about religious or

spiritual development. Some of the fundamental questions that must be considered include the following:

1. How does development *function in time*? Psychological theories tend to be built upon Newtonian versions of time that emphasize its objective and linear qualities; they assume that time functions similarly in all situations. Religious views of development often look at time from a non-Newtonian point of view and consider its subjective, forward-looking and holistic character.
2. What is the *goal* of development? In general, religious theories of development tend to emphasize transcendence, the ability of the individual to surpass the ordinary and find profound transformation. Psychological theories, on the other hand, tend to map out what is expected and predictable, with development involving a progression toward increasingly sophisticated ways of adapting to the demands of life within a linear time framework. Some theories such as that of James Loder attempt to do both.
3. What is the *trajectory* of development? When does religious development occur? Traditional religious views see childhood and adolescence as simply precursors to the primary period of growth that occurs during adulthood. Psychological theories have emphasized the importance that childhood patterns have for adulthood.
4. What is the *diversity* of development? How much similarity exists in the developmental trajectories of people across the life span? Religious and psychological theories have both pointed out common patterns, although it could be argued that many religious theories allow for more diversity in developmental process and outcome, while reductive naturalist theories emphasize their common pattern.

We will encounter these issues frequently as we turn to the specifics of child, adolescent, and adult religious or spiritual development in the next two chapters.