



## EXISTENTIAL PSYCHOLOGY

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## Phenomenological View of Spirituality at School

*The article compares the phenomenological content of the concepts "spirituality" and "religiousness". For this purpose the person's spiritual experience is described by means of a phenomenological method. The author distinguishes the essential content of spirituality, peak spiritual experiences on the basis of the structural model of existence developed by the Austrian psychotherapist Professor A. Lengle. The article touches upon the ways to spirituality, and also procedural laws of the transformation of spirituality into religiousness. It also brings forward some parallels between A. Lengle's doctrine and the descriptions of religious experiences of the Russian religious philosopher S.L. Frank.*

**Key words:** spirituality, religiousness, phenomenological method, education, peak experiences.

Where is the end of a spiritual feeling? Where is the beginning of a religious feeling? Can science answer such questions? Teachers have many similar questions today. In this article we will try to answer some of them, relying on the studies of spirituality and religiousness within existential and analytical psychology and psychotherapy [3, 4]. The author has found the parallels between researches of the modern Austrian psychotherapist A. Lengle and the Russian religious philosopher Semen Frank living in the first half of the last century, in particular, in the work "God is with us" (1946) [6]. We expound a phenomenological research of the problem as it is insufficiently considered in the aspect necessary for school to demarcate educational competences of education and church. Modern trends of orthodox priests' involvement in school, obviously, are related to the necessity of protection of spirituality in a man, relations of people, education. At the same time this undertaking meets with a considerable resistance, in particular because the school is still separated from the state in our country. Teachers resist to the strategy of protection of spirituality initiated by the government in such a way. The author thinks that the following reasons are the main.

First, the spheres of influence of the teacher and the priest are crossed in the field of education, but theoretical bases and task sharing are not stipulated. The educational effect of a good conversation doesn't necessarily entail salvation; for the majority of teachers the access to spirituality is not reduced to the experi-



ence received in church. Secondly, the modus operandi of the priest in school (as well as in church) – exhortation – convinces nobody today (once at school listening a report on moral education of a young father, I've heard the comment of a director sitting next to me "I was an instructor of the Central Committee of All-Union Leninist Young Communist League myself"). Exhortation is a way used by ideologists of the most different cultures and eras; it is severely criticized by religious thinkers, since a man of genius S. Kierkegaard<sup>1</sup>. It is not difficult to call to live correctly. Thirdly, even the teachers who believe in God are sure that faith is a very private matter, therefore there is no need to display it, especially there is no need to make it the instrument of influence. Apparently, it is characteristic for all people who have independently come to believe, grown in doubts and found a personal way, in difference, probably, from those who have organically adopted belief from parents and people around as it took place in pre-revolutionary Russia or is characteristic for other countries which have not endured persecutions. The mistrust phenomenon concerning the actively believing teacher from both colleagues and pupils takes place when there is a divergence of appeals and the inability to behave adequately in difficult situations which naturally and constantly arise at school.

How to treat the school priest's idea that all children and all teachers must have religious belonging? What is understood by the name of God by the person who goes to church and those one who does not?

### **The spiritual and the religious**

Let's start with the problem of comparison between the spiritual and the religious. There is a known approach from church positions which one can briefly formulate as, "the spiritual comes from the religious". Such position is theoretically proved. According to the church doctrine spirituality is an openness in relation to the metaphysical, "In the beginning there was the word and the word was God". It means that sense and order existed before human existence. Here is an excerpt from S. Frank, "... if my heart is restless pined, if its very essence consists of dissatisfaction, inclination to that we name the purpose, peak value, welfare, this highest, absolute Blessing is already given to me in a hidden form, somehow it allows to feel it – differently I could never

<sup>1</sup> Kierkegaard actively criticizes the "education" concept as it is given in Hegel's philosophy. According to Hegel education, is a definition of the way on which the individual can reach clear historical self-consciousness, thus he understands by self-consciousness understanding of the universal as the truth of own single being (the same understanding of education one meets in the works of Marx and, respectively, in the Soviet pedagogics). Kierkegaard speaks about it, as about education as exhortation. In the basis of exhortation and real education there is the same problem of existential transformation of the addressee. "If the concept of exhortation has an intensional filling in orientation towards something absolute (society laws in Marxian and Hegelian picture of being and relation to God and eternal pleasure in Christian religiousness), the education concept directly fixes the aspect of formation of personality, cultivation of abilities to be self" [9, p. 160–161]. For more details see [1].



look for it, could never understand its absence" [6]. At such metaphysical way of thinking the unconscious religiousness immanently inherent in people follows from the eternity of God. Religious philosophy seeks to make conscious the religious problematics which we constantly face in human life and practical activity.

Victor Frankl, the founder of logotherapy and existential analysis, had the same logic of researches<sup>2</sup>. V. Frankl had two especially important tasks. The first was to make extramental religiousness of the person conscious. As opposed to Z. Freud V. Frankl claimed that the extramental in the person is connected not only with the mental, but also with the spiritual. He wrote, "Communication with the transcendental is a characteristic of existention", and here he saw an important difference of existential analysis from humanistic psychology. Thus, Frankl discovers not only the unconscious, but also the transcendental in a man. From this point of view, an original soliloquy is not a pure soliloquy, but includes God as the third participant. He has formulated it in a brilliant phrase, "Taking no notice a man supposes God the precondition of everything ..." ("ahnungslos nichts ahnend setzt der Mensch Got voraus"). For Frankl God is a person's partner in the most intimate conversations with self. In this darkness of the internal there is his presence" [4, p. 11]. V. Frankl also tried to describe how belief joins the specifically human; he saw the source of belief immanently inherent in the person in a man's need for love and the initial nostalgia for something distant, not existing in reality. A. Lengle, V. Frankl's pupil, describes this experience as follows: "Melancholy is a feeling like thirst, greedy desire for water when one is thirsty. There is melancholy at the heart of our being; melancholy is unquenchable, so it can mean nothing but God [ib., p. 12]. Concerning love "it is that makes the loved thing or loved one real, gives that is loved or who we love, endow the quality of Being, "amo ergo est" – I love that is, the loved by me exists". Transcendence, according to V. Frankl, consists of melancholy and love, and love is a way to God. Love means intimacy (the absolutely personal sphere). "Transcendence and intimacy: the essential moment for both these things is the presence of God – eternal distance and eternal nearness at the same time. This makes God inscrutable since he is both the most intimate and the most comprehensive at the same time" [4, p. 12]. We see that in such understanding of God there come to light two forms demonstrating something extremely opposite: on the one hand, deeply intimate, close, personal, on the other hand, infinitely far, immense.

We should note that in German, as well as in Russian, the spiritual and the religious are different concept. In the German-language Wikipedia version they un-

<sup>2</sup> Victor Frankl (1905–1997), Austrian doctor, psychotherapist, founder of logotherapy and existential analysis. Being a Vienna Jew, for two and a half years was in concentration camps, having survived, wrote the book "Saying Yes to Life, Despite Everything" about his experience the concentration camp. In post-war years he became known all over the world thanks to this work and his lectures on protection of the person's spirit and personality.



derstand by "spirituality" the following: "Spirituality (Spiritualität) (from the Latin word spiritus – spirit) in a broad sense means spirituality (Geistigkeit) and points to spiritual (geistige) attitudes of any sort. In a narrow sense the word "spirituality" is used for designation of spirituality in the specifically religious context; in this case the word "Geistlichkeit" is also used. In the article from "Wikipedia" concerning the concept "Geistlichkeit", we read, "Geistlichkeit" means existence of relation with spirit (Geist) in a Christian sense of the word. In a daily speech the noun "Geistlichkeit" and the corresponding adjective "geistlich" are used for designation of religiousness, devotion or relation with church. Besides, in Christian theology these words are used for designation of the life of the Christians being under protection of the Holy Spirit (Heilige Geist). Thus, unlike Russian, in German there are three (instead of two) concepts one of which is spirituality; it means the spiritual in the widest sense. The concept Geistigkeit means intellectual, mental attitudes, and the concept Geistlichkeit means religious attitudes in fact. These remarks make it possible to understand the position of modern existential analysis better.

### **Spirituality and religiousness from the point of view of modern existential analysis: spirituality facets**

**Phenomenological view is an approach through the description of experiences.** "In existential analysis we understand spirituality (Spiritualität) as experience, instead of a kind of belief. It is a subjective experience when we feel that our being (Dasein) exists within something greater, something Great, something that surpasses us, that is out of our control, something that we cannot "command", what we simply join" (a fragment of the interview of A. Lengle published on a Catholic site <http://www.kath-kirche-vorarlberg.at>). In such approach it is a question of refusal of all theses which have metaphysical grounds. Existential analysis works as a phenomenological method. Everything what the person experiences may be a subject of its scientific interest. As a phenomenologist one can investigate that is revealed in the experience connected with spirituality. How does it feel to experience the spiritual? How does the spiritual show itself? How can one find a way to it? What do such experiences do with me? Answering these questions phenomenology gradually approaches to the essence of the person's spiritual experience.

**Spiritual is the deepening.** If we look at reality in a phenomenological way, we can see the spiritual in own experience of everyday life. Not obligatory it occurs in discussions on moral search of Tolstoy's heroes. The spiritual is experienced on the way home or "in the kitchen", i.e. in ordinary being. It is a question of the spiritual when I could understand someone, when offense gives place to forgiveness, when one simply stopped deeply moved by the beauty of a landscape, or a human woe. In the most general sense the spiritual is the deepening. Victor Frankl liked to cite a remarkable metaphor in his lectures. He



drew a circle and a square side by side on a board. Then he said that if to say to a person, "it is the same", then he/she either tries to see the likeness of the square and the circle at the expense of distortions, "looks for a circle quadrature", or once he/she understands that these are just two projections of a cylinder. Having broken in the third dimension, the person finds out that there is no need to distort anything: two mutually exclusive truths become projections of a deeper truth [7]. When behind the aggressive, irritating behavior of the pupil I start seeing his desperate attempts to protect own dignity, imperfect attempts, because no one taught him, then I change my understanding of the seen. At the same time I change my feeling towards this unformed, and the tone of our conversation also changes. The spiritual (but still not religious) experience is when in passing and noting an autumnal view outside the window, suddenly (bewildered) a man feels a lump in the throat, and suddenly realizes that dying of nature causes a fierce grief in me and set him/her thinking about the end of life which now excites because his/her loved ones pass away one by one, and behind a dull landscape there is a deep understanding of a transitory kind of own life. The essence of the spiritual is that the person sees any phenomena not in a banal and everyday context, but in an expanded context, especially, when we deal with that transcends our capacity of apprehension. In each attempt to be opened for it the person appears in the dialogue with that he/she cannot embrace by the mind and the experience yet. Understanding takes place only in such openness demanding courage. The signs of cognitive dissonance disappear <sup>3</sup>.

The experience of deepening leads to that the person looks for depth more and more willingly. Superficial impressions and discussions are insufficient for him/her. He prefers these to a position open for experience in those situations which contain signs of the conflict or border on the area inaccessible to understanding. In existential philosophy they call this position awakening. It is reduced to attempts to see the value of events of own life, own country, other people against the finite human life and the life which will continue after individual life in any other surpassing context. In such dialogue "there is a relation between my internal depth (or feeling, thinking, experience, proceeding from originally Own) and the internal depth of Another, the interlocutor. There is a close connection between the internal depth and the external distance in dialogue. Thus, we may say that detection of self in Surpassing is a characteristic of existence" [4, p. 15]. For the existential philosopher K. Jaspers suffering, guilt, death, fight and fortuity were such events surpassing a certain person. They are the main realities of life which the person cannot neither avoid, nor change, and therefore he/she calls their collision as "borderline situations" (Jaspers, 1986) [3]. They are necessary to

<sup>3</sup> Cognitive dissonance is a term from L. Festinger's cognitive and behavioral theory of motivation: two mutually exclusive truths make the person lose his/her balance; he/she develops learning activity to restore the equilibrium.



shock the subject's being and thus to awaken him/her for an existention (1956) [3]. The only reasonable relation to borderline situations is not to avoid them, but to meet halfway openly. This is a way to a really good life, existention, "To learn borderline situations and to live existentially is the same" (Jaspers, 1956) [3]. Thus, where is the spiritual?

1. In a deep personal (intimate) excitement.
2. In attempts to see depth, unwillingness to be content with formal, superficial.
3. In readiness to look for a sensible way out, to make an act which would correspond to own idea about the correct, instead of being imposed or simply habitual way of reaction; borderline experiences urge on this.

It is possible to notice parallels with the analysis of a religious feeling of Semen Frank whose researches were carried out not in the form of the analysis of religious texts, but in the phenomenological logic, appealing to the person's experience. He told, "In the basis of religiousness there is an experience". Observing religious feelings S. Frank to draw the conclusion that in the spirituality which has reached the level of belief, the nearest (intimate depth) and the farthest (which transcends our capacity of apprehension) are combined paradoxically: "Belief is nothing but completeness and relevance of spiritual life energy – self-consciousness deepened to perception of the last depth and the absolute basis of our internal life – heart burning by the force which is perceived as something higher and greater than me on its significance and value" (italics added) [6].

**Spirituality is a deep excitement by incomprehensible greatness of that surpasses you.** So, we have learnt that in a paradoxical way spirituality combines the internal depth with the external distance (maybe this is what I. Kant meant when said that two things surprise him: the sky of stars overhead and the moral law in us). We also have learned that the road to depth is difficult, in many religious and psychological doctrines it is also considered as a road to a human maturity. How much can a person understand? When do the disconnected things become consistent for him/her? It depends on the degree of his/her maturity, and maturity depends on the experience of understanding connected with "peak experience" of suffering and fight. In a wise oriental proverb two pupils, each one with his own truth, came to a Teacher to judge them. The Teacher told them, "Both of you are right. When you understand this, you will become teachers yourselves". The limits of understanding are described by known questions: "How could it happen?", "How can it be?" Each of us has many themes when ask these puzzled questions. However we can notice that in comparison with our children, probably, much more things we can already apprehend not as mutually exclusive aspects of a same thing, but as its facets. We just need to look at these things deeper, but this view was difficult for us in youth.



One can imagine some dispersing figure, convergence of that can be apprehended and understood in a consistent view of a wise man. How long can these phenomena be apart? Existential philosophy "says" that the most remote from each other can be connected only with the extreme spiritual experience, religious philosophy names this experience God, and it is always interfaced to self-understanding deepening: "The soul is an unlocked vessel; it has fathomless depth and there, in its depth, it is not just opened and it not simply touches God, takes Him, revealing towards Him – like a plant absorbs soil moisture by the roots, – but even lives a certain common life, so that He pours into it, and it pours into Him" [6]. S. Frank describes the experience of this last limit in such a precise way.

Thus, the spiritual assumes that one can find himself/herself in greater, and that he/she is a part of this surpassing Great. Phenomenological approach makes it possible to define spirituality as a deep excitement by the incomprehensible greatness of that surpasses you. **But it is not religion; it is psychology!**

Religion is a world outlook, the system of knowledge imparting understanding of self and the world to a person, promising salvation and specifying rituals and rules of life. Therefore, religion is much more, than peak spiritual experiences.

Thus, phenomenological approach gives a definition: spirituality is a deep excitement by the incomprehensible greatness of that surpasses you.

**Roads to the spiritual.** Langle distinguishes four roads to the spiritual [4].

1. **Spontaneous road** presupposes the unexpected impressive experience, disclosure of the beautiful, meeting with the value, with humanity. "It can make us happier, but can frighten us as everything that excites us too deeply and doesn't meet our expectations frightens us. One may experience God or own mission, predestination, in such situations. It is often called a lucid interval, experience of a miracle" [4, p. 16].

2. **Exercises (phenomenology).** Spirituality can be also experienced methodically. If to understand the spiritual as a phenomenological experience, access to the essential in being, then it is possible and necessary to train a phenomenological attitude in practical exercises: to learn to let go (des Lassens) and to open, allowing things and events to impress himself/herself freely (courage is necessary here, since openness entails risks), to learn to concede (Zurückstellen), giving himself/herself in disposal of circumstances, to penetrate into its essence better (paradoxically only the person with strong enough self is able to afford all this). In prayers, understanding, at a concert of classical music and in thousand other places we not only listen and understand the events, but we also are deeply excited by that it wants to tell us: this evening, this music, this experience of relations. The understanding carries us away in a certain depth touching infinity.

3. **Meditation** may also bring us to spirituality. They practise meditation in many religions. Here it is a question of spirit release, reflections, of calming spirit



to become “empty” so that the world could fill this emptiness, – all this is practised through relaxation, letting go (Lassen) and permitting (reality) to speak to self.

4. At last, **attentiveness** (Achtsamkeit) is special attitude which provides access to spirituality when it starts entering into our everyday life. Attentiveness is a not focused attention; here we do not concentrate, but freely reveal, and then we start finding and noticing many peripheral, at first sight, contents of consciousness and realizing them in the right way. Psychotherapists call this attitude “panoramic consciousness”. For a long time this attentiveness plays a great role in psychotherapy, for example, they try to rouse it by means of free associations in psychoanalysis, “warming up” in gestalt therapy and other approaches.

Roads to the spiritual are various. Another Russian thinker, remarkable scientist, writer G.S. Pomerants describes it, “The road to depth is a constantly opened and constantly restart process. Each true road is a process of a prayer, meditation, contemplation of God’s creativity in nature, love for neighbor ... It is better when some roads are interlaced” [5, p. 29].

#### **From the spiritual to the religious: four existential aspects of life**

The person’s being is like an island in the sea of unknown, incognizable, about what the person could say, “I even do not know that I do not know it”. Where are we from? Where do we go? What’s the purpose of all this? “The great sea where our being settled” gives few answers to all these questions. Though we stand on the lived-in safe soil of a middle part of the island, it is absolutely clear for us who we are and where we are, it takes only get accustomed more attentively, direct one’s eyes on the island coastline, and this “clarity” may easily disappear” [4, p. 16].

If we want to consider four aspects of human being in the world <sup>4</sup>: relations with the world answering a question, “Can I be here?”, relations with life asking a question, “Do you like life”, relations with self with a question “Do I have the right to be such, what rights do I have and what do I want?”, and, at last, relations with the future with a question “What is the sense of action?”, if to address to various aspects of life, we can trace a gradual transformation of the spiritual experience into the religious one. In these four aspects of life “peak experience” leads to “awakening for existentialism” just as it happens with the experience of borderline situations described by Jaspers. Let us briefly enumerate these experiences which are metaphorically similar to walks on a shore of various sides of our island of existence (we’ll consider in pairs the first and the fourth, and then the second and the third aspects of existence).

The first aspect of being in the world is related to knowledge and perception of life realities; it is accompanied by the feeling of surprise which promotes fundamental confidence in the world at sufficient experience of suffering and under-

<sup>4</sup> In A. Lengle’s concept the existation structure is presented by four existential motivations describing the relations with the world, life, self and the future (see [2, 3, 4, 11, 12]).





standing. Experiencing the basis of life, in his/her hour of need the person feels an amazing thing: life has a basis, despite everything it holds a man when habitual support are destroyed, this base does not allow him/her to fall into Nothing. Old people say, "It was never so that there was nothing". The basic trust in the world makes it possible to without fear, but it "is bought" at the price of a wide experience of suffering.

The fourth aspect closely adjoins the experience of trust in the world. It is connected with the experience of sense revealing. It teaches the person to understand the contexts in which he/she finds himself/herself, being guided by the content of a situation and to perform the work on revealing its existential sense [2, 11]. This habit of sense revealing leads the person to the problem of ontological sense – to God, because it is the Creator who knows the sense of own creation. The person cannot comprehend this sense, but it is possible belief that He, the Order surpassing you, exists. Belief finding is a deepest feeling of "embeddedness in being, security, well-being, and piece" (S. Frank had such description, but A. Lenge wrights the same).

The second aspect of being concerns life proper, understood as a change of events and experiences, breath, pulsation, stream, changeable and fluid sides of life. "I live. Do I like to live? Is it good to be here? Not only loads and sufferings deprive us of the pleasure of existence. Quite often because of the routine of everyday life, inattentive attitude towards life, suddenly everything becomes poor and insipid. In order to make life pleasant we need three pre-conditions: intimacy, time and relations. Can I establish and maintain intimacy with everything that surrounds me: things, plants, animals, and people? Can I allow another person near me emotionally? For what do I spare time? Time for someone or something means to devote a part of own life to this. Do I have relations on which I do not spare time, where I feel intimacy? If I have no intimacy, time and relations, there is a melancholy, coldness, and depression. If all this exist, I feel movement together with the world and self, in which I feel the life depth. The experience of such a kind forms a fundamental value of my being in the world, the most deep feeling of the importance of life" [3, p. 137]. The peak experience of this aspect of life is a gratitude for life and everything it gave. Even if something is already lost, it continues to live in the memory of my heart till my last hour.

At last, the third aspect is being by self or Personsein, the person's personality. The person has intended and brought himself/herself into this world not by himself/herself. Here he/she is given to himself/herself and answers for himself/herself, own personal depth, the essential, singularity, uniqueness. Who am I? In an everyday life the road to depth starts with the readiness not to leave self, not to leave in the known, compulsive, conformal, but to remain internally present, i.e. free. Such experiences conduct to experience of dignity of the Person and reverence for Another's personality.



Thus, **fundamental trust in the world, gratitude for life, belief in the order surpassing you and reverence for the person's personality** create the horizon of spiritual experience.

### Conclusion

The school founded on dialogue and respect, giving the experience of devotion and sense feeling remains one of the most powerful bearers of spirituality [1, 8]. The society founded on the respect for the dignity of its citizens is a society of cultural people. We may say that, finally, the child's upbringing, as well as healing in psychotherapy, comes from the spiritual. G.S. Pomerants said, "When I live deeply, I see the common soil from which all high religions, all the religions turned to a complete eternity grow. I am not afraid to take something from several traditions simultaneously. I accept assistance from everywhere where I find it. I do not get into the argument over better tradition. What is higher: religion within dogma, art free from dogmas, nature contemplation, love ...? Everything may be a road, and all roads to depth are met" [5, p. 28].

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