

Exploring the Intersection of Spirituality and Religion: Transcendence, Secularism, and Personal Beliefs in Contemporary Society

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This paper explores the intersection of spirituality and religion, focusing on how transcendence, secularism, and personal beliefs shape contemporary spiritual practices. It examines the philosophical foundations of transcendence, the rise of existentialism, and the distinction between spirituality and religion. Secularism's role in fostering personal spirituality and reducing religious authority is discussed, alongside the psychological and societal impacts of spiritual transcendence. The paper also critiques the limitations of spirituality, emphasizing the need for a balanced approach that integrates cognitive development and mental health perspectives.

Keywords: Spirituality, Transcendence, Secularism, Existentialism, Personal Belief

Introduction

The transcendence to the “external world” and the “superior place” can be explained in terms of religion, metaphysics, and human existence (Verhoef, 2017). For Plato, the idea of virtuous humanity is radically transcendental and above all the cause of all beautiful and beneficial things (Warmington & Rouse, 1956). From philosophical and religious perspectives, the problem of transcendence and its cause were related to the best existence, God, and substances outside this world.

Existentialism, a philosophical theory that is distinctive from modern philosophy as a contemporary antidote to sensual pleasures created by the enlightenment period, advocates personal freedom, value, sense of responsibility, and moral restraint (Dukor, 2015). A critical view of this philosophical trajectory would demonstrate that atheism is rapidly forming in the human mind because of the assault on religion by science and the insane desire of humanity to escape fear and apprehension. In industrialized countries, especially in the United States, many citizens think of themselves as spiritual, not religious. They are still part of certain religious communities, where they can diligently perform rituals and open their minds and souls to the divinity.

The Origin of Spirituality

All religious beliefs contain a unique blend of selfless dedication and fervent desires, obedience and rebellion, sensory directness and spiritual abstraction, gestating a certain degree of emotional tension, sincerity, and firmness in internal connections (Simmel, 1992, p. 269). Religiosity originates from forms of inter-individual interaction, and then a new category (i.e. religion) has been formed, allowing the forms and contents stemming

from interpersonal relationships to be fully utilized. Religiosity infiltrates as well as configures social relations, and the latter makes religion possible. Its deep foundation lies in the noteworthy analogy between individual behavior towards God and individual treatment of the social community. Therefore, religion produces the behavioral patterns that exist between individuals and their social groups.

Secularism is often understood as a trend and movement that challenges religious authority and privatizes religion. In this sense, secularism provides the conditions for the rise of individual spirituality: religion no longer has unchallenged authority, and individuals can pursue spirituality according to their own needs. Scholars such as Tschannen contend that the connotation of secularization is not the disappearance of religion, but refers to the fact that although religious experiences may still have a significant position in the personal lives of most people, the status that religion once held in society no longer exists, and its structural position in modern society has been dramatically and permanently changed (Tschannen, 1994). What changes is not the relationship between individuals and religion, but the position of religion in the social structure corresponding to other major social systems, as well as the functions performed by religion in the global system.

In the context of secularism, religion gradually declines, which triggers the flourish of spirituality, as spirituality satisfies citizens' need for faith and moral awareness that religion cannot offer. Despite the atheism, when the moral development of a citizen starts discovering and concerning the common interests of all humanity, the opportunity to expand from the race-centeredness to the world-centeredness can also be characterized as postconventional or "spiritual" stage, according to Ken Wilber (2007). During these processes, individuals have a deeper understanding of religion and their exploration of spirituality will gradually unfold. Though there are deep spiritual roots and practices within religion, spirituality has a complicated and multidimensional nature and is considered to be innate to existence and difficult to strictly define. Spirituality, also known as the deepest true self among citizens who awaken together, not only accepts states and experiences, but also accepts stages and stations on the path of life growth.

The Difference Between Religion and Spirituality

"Religion" usually refers to believing in a specific religion and adhering to the various doctrines of that religion, while "Spiritual" refers to a person's belief and pursuit of a divine existence or ultimate meaning that transcends the material world and is higher than the individual, but does not necessarily practice this belief in a specific religious way (Lim & Yi, 2009). Religiosity reflects the nature of society and institutions, while spirituality is more linked to individual trust and experience. Spirituality can be studied through a series of issues concerning peace, transcendence, pleasure, and sympathy; the questions related to religious belief should focus on participation in rituals about faith and meeting some canons.

Religious beliefs and practices are formed through the interaction of daily life, and religion's power and authority unfold in habitual and embodied actions. In contrast, different authors' definitions of spiritual concepts include how people comprehend and live to achieve their ultimate meaning and value (Muldoon & King, 1995), sacred subjective experience (Vaughan, 1991), beyond the quality of religious belief, seeking inspiration, reverence, awe, meaning, and purpose, even those who do not believe in good (Murray & Zenter, 1989). So, when a speaker says "I am spiritual", he or she may be trying to convey the following layers of meaning: (1) I believe that there exists a transcendent existence, power, or meaning above the material world (such as God, cosmic consciousness, great creators, causal cycles, etc.); (2) I am willing to explore, comprehend, and establish some kind of connection with it; (3) This belief has given me meaning in life and inner peace, but I don't need

to practice it through the teachings and rituals of any particular religion; (4) I establish connections with spirituality in my own way, such as meditation or contemplation.

Ken Wilber (2007) proposes “Integrated Spirituality” as a novel way to appreciate the world, which comprises of AQAL (all quadrants, all levels). Compared to spirituality, religion always tends to endow its norms or customs with a sacred and inviolable characteristic at the beginning and comprises of many rituals and customs that the community respects. The more devout the believers are, the more they will strictly follow these norms or habits.

There is no necessary relationship between a person’s religious beliefs and their spiritual experience. Religious people can gain further spiritual experiences based on their own beliefs. For example, Christians feel their personal communication with God, or Buddhists obtain spiritual experiences that can only be understood but not expressed through meditation and other means. Furthermore, theists do not necessarily have to solely believe in a single religion. It is acceptable for spiritualists to believe in gods from multiple religions at the same time, as long as they believe they have experienced the existence of these gods without the need to prove it. In this respect, spirituality can be considered a form of faith in God, but in a way that is tailored for the individual.

The Relationship Between Spirituality and Transcendence

Spirituality is a way of one using divinity to build a connection between one’s being and transcendence. It can be inferred that spirituality and transcendence have an approximately positive association. Spiritual Transcendence Scale (STS) suggests that people with high spiritual level can also score high on Prayer/Meditation Enjoyment, Universal Connectedness, Greater Goals, Enrichment of Humanity, and Closeness to the Deceased, which are pivotal elements related to spiritual transcendence (Lace, Haeberlein, & Handal, 2017). Spirituality, therefore, evaluates a single, fundamentally unified, transcendental view of the various strivings of nature while placing more social emphasis on the encounter with divinity (Piedmont, 1999).

In general, research has shown that higher endorsement of spirituality is positively associated with psychological adaptation and overall mental health (Blumenthal et al., 2007; Ciarrocchi & Deneke, 2005a; 2005b; Mayoral-Sanchez, Laca Arocena, & Ceballos, 2010; Fitchett, Min, Peterman, & Cella, 1996). Those who are identified as low in spirituality tend to suffer a considerable amount of psychological distress. The investigation of differences in psychological pain among emerging adult males and females of high, moderate, and low spirituality per the Daily Spiritual Experiences Scale (Underwood & Teresi, 2002) demonstrates that females are inclined to report a high degree of psychological distress and treatment needs when they endorse lower levels of spirituality. The relationship between spirituality and psychological adaptation can be attributed to the increased sense of social support that individuals have experienced, as well as the personal actualization and self-help practices learned through religious practices (e.g., meditation, reflection).

Spirituality is the process by which humans transcend themselves, which means being pulled beyond the boundaries of limits, captivated by something other than one’s self, and relaxed or liberated from one’s fixation on oneself. Philosophically speaking, self-transcendence can be regarded as the human direction towards goods that can often require individuals to make great personal sacrifice for the sake of something greater than the self, and whose benefits are not easily or best understood in terms of personal interests or welfare (Frey & Vogler, 2019). A life in pursuit of beauty and nobility is neither primarily self-oriented or egoist, nor holding happiness and well-being as the eventual purposes of mankind. Conversely, individuals need to better understand their nature as a society and spiritual being and place themselves within a larger whole.

In a secular setting, the relevance of transcendence is usually expressed by the term “horizontal transcendence”. The idea is that “non-believers are not immune to transcendent feelings of awe and beauty” (Coleman, Silver, & Holcombe, 2013, p. 11). A characteristic of horizontal transcendence is that people recognize the transcendental value that we live in a secularized and spiritually diverse modern society and do not announce absolute truth when expressing transcendental values. From this point of view, transcendence is horizontal if it means opening to others who are mutually reducible. From an existentialism perspective, the transverse ethical dimension has a strong normative nature that describes us as culturally rooted and interrelated and requires us to remain open to articulation of values other than ourselves. Faith in humanity and all its flaws can be understood from an angle of horizontal transcendence. This transcendence highlights the focus on the individual, and at the same time recognizes the uniqueness of each individual.

The Limitation of Spirituality

Some people who believe in spirituality assert that anything irrational is spirituality, as if no matter how self-centered or irrational the pre rational tremors or pains may be, it is a profound spiritual or religious experience (Wilber, 2007). Strengthening these areas in consciousness that are most likely to hinder maturity even makes selfishness, pre rationality, and pre custom impulses appear very spiritual, yet they do not transcend reason, but are under reason. This has led to a proliferation of anti-intellectualism (replacing transcendent rationalism), which quickly slides to pre rationalism and unfortunately promotes narcissistic methods in meditation and spiritual research (while sliding from world-centeredness to nation-centeredness and self-centeredness). Because the feeling of self-centeredness and the feeling of world-centeredness are both sensations, the two are confused, and in this confusion, any strongly felt or expressed content is considered spirituality.

However, spirituality still promotes cognitive development and encourages a comprehensive understanding of human nature, our position in all things, and our relationships with the world and other sentient beings we inhabit. In order to integrate spirituality into mental health therapy and seek truly comprehensive perspectives that integrate premodern, modern, and postmodern perspectives, people can utilize Spiritually Augmented Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. By maintaining an optimistic attitude towards future, people can learn to accept inevitable things in life and seek their meaning and value. In this way, a person can discover one’s role and mission in life, striving and dedicating oneself to it.

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