

ONTOPOIESIS AND SPIRITUAL EMERGENCE:  
BRIDGING TYMIENIECKA'S PHENOMENOLOGY  
OF LIFE AND TRANSPERSONAL PSYCHOLOGY

The concept of ontopoiesis, articulated in the phenomenology of life of Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka (2000), may have potent implications for transpersonal psychology. Transpersonal psychology grounds its major insights in the phenomenological inquiry into human consciousness (Braud and Anderson, 1998), using analysis of the wisdom traditions and interviews with human subjects as the source of knowledge of the workings of the mind beyond the ego (Louchakova, 2005a). In the current study, transpersonal psychological research regarding spiritual emergence uncovers ontopoiesis as an observable and describable intra-psychic phenomenon. Thus, the major insights of phenomenology of life find experimental verification in the phenomenology of psychological development. This mutual cross-fertilization between transpersonal psychological investigations of the developing mind and an ontopoietic vision of the phenomenology of life leads to a new understanding of the central role of the spiritual experience in human development, as a catalyst and as a locus of transformative personal growth.

DISTINCTIONS OF THE METHOD

The goal of this inquiry was to understand the relationship between the spiritual experience and the human condition. While drawing inspiration from the great works of phenomenological theology, I also realized how abstracted they are from actual human experience. Schleiermacher (1989/1994) and Otto (1924) focused on the meaning of religious experience, but certainly were not interested in structural psychological changes. Van der Leeuw focused on the descent of religious power (Dadosky, 2004), and Eliade (1959) attempted to address the hermeneutics of perception, but in both sweeping overviews, the individual human life remains in the background. James (1901–1902/1958) captured the extraordinary, yet I saw changes happen day-by-day, in the guise of the mundane. Lonergan's theory of intentional

consciousness (Dadosky, 2004) offered the most comprehensive perspective, but his Christian framework and analytic inventories didn't resonate with the experience of the sacred for people in secularized multicultural society.

Immersed in the daily experience of spiritual emergence in my work, I felt that the essence of change in my clients' experiences eluded articulation. There was something I couldn't capture, which resulted in an ever present sense of tension that lingered in the background. My assumptions regarding the process were not adequate. Psychology understands development in primarily cognitive terms, i.e. learning and assimilation (Piagetian model), while mystical-religious experiences (MRE) are interpreted as instances of religious *knowing* (Dadosky, 2004). Neither the concept of knowing nor learning captured what was happening to my students and clients. Reflections on *learning* did not resonate with the inner experience of spiritual emergence, as these were changes in the quality of their *being-ness*. Interpreting the MRE as a "learning experience" masked the core of change. In development that was happening concurrent with spiritual emergence, *being-ness* itself was the locus of change.

In reading Tymieniecka, I found the language that could correct the lenses used to interpret MRE. Tymieniecka's flowing, open style of description, and effortless explication of essential relations within the captured networks of life, along with the primary attention given to the unfolding currents of *being-ness* rather than structures consolidated in *knowledge*, helped to develop the intuition of the process. Thus, the focus shifted from epistemology to the *ontological intuition*. Applied to the intra-psychic processes of people with MRE, Tymieniecka's method made the innermost processes in the psyche with MRE visible, thereby spotlighting processes never touched upon by psychological research. As a result, my clinical presence with clients who were experiencing spiritual emergence vastly improved. As a researcher, I wedded the language and frameworks of Tymieniecka's phenomenology of life to Husserl's original introspective method, and combined the first person (introspective) method with the second person (interview and account analysis).

### *Informants*

Data were collected over a period spanning 17 years in the form of more than 2000 accounts of various spiritual experiences reported in focus groups, in individual counseling, and in formal as well as informal interviews with adult education students, participants in public workshops on spirituality, and psychotherapy clients in the process of spiritual emergence. In a few cases, I had the opportunity to bear witness to the unfolding of spiritual experiences