Insights into Spirituality

Based on Semi-Structured Interviews

OTTO LASKE, IDM, 2022

Dedicated to Those
Who Contributed to IDM Spiritual Interviews

Thank you!

Introduction

- What is called 'spirituality' has an enormous literature worldwide, but empirical studies as to how people articulate it when asked to do so based on their own experience are rare.

- When we ask people in semi-structured interviews following 'prompts', or keywords, such as 'decisive moment in my life', they become very articulate indeed about how they first became aware of a transcendent and transindividual dimension in their life.

- The interviews I have conducted are of this kind: they unbury unceasing 'internal conversations' by prompting people to put into language what 'comes to mind' when they relating themselves to a transcendent realm, i.e., a realm that is not either natural, social, practical, and not even cultural in the conventional sense.
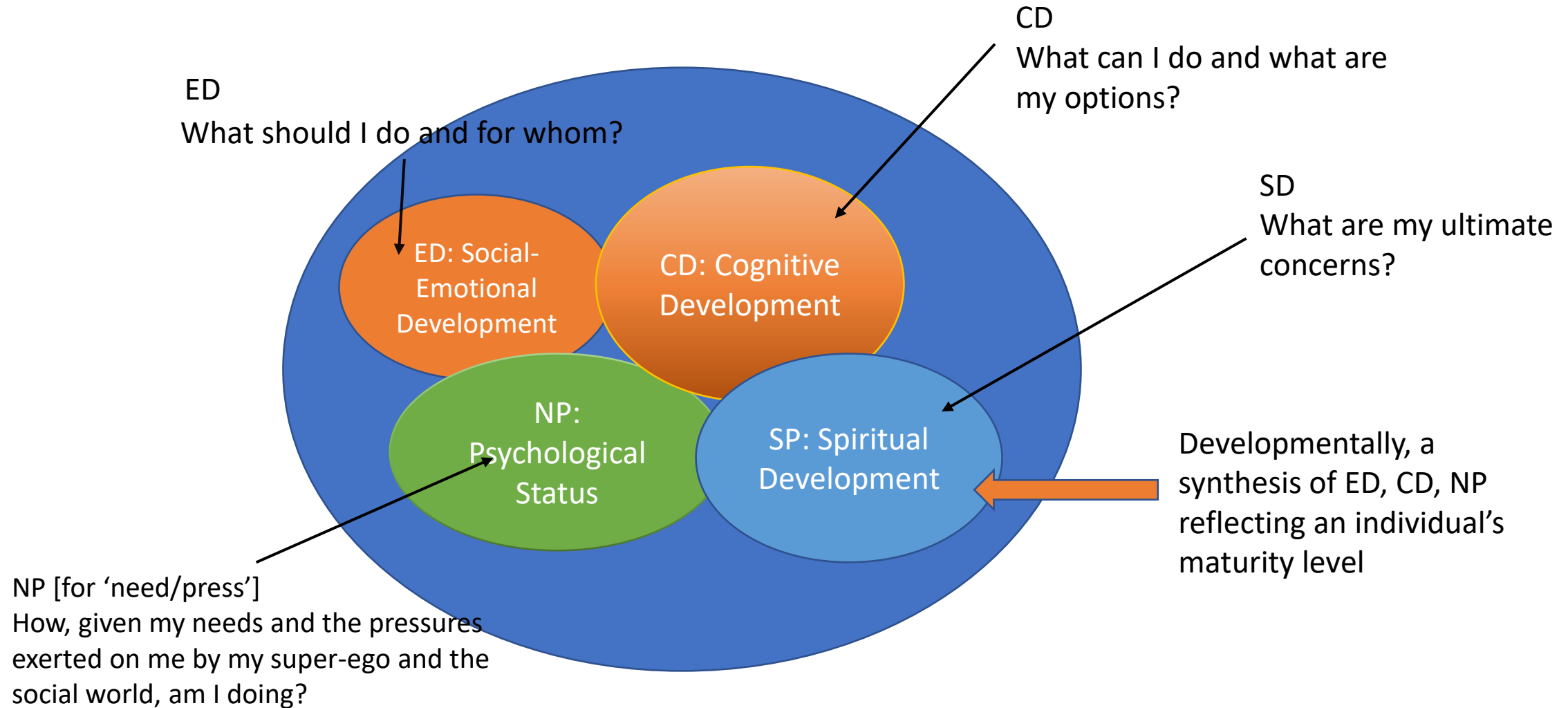
Spirituality Viewed Empirically and Developmentally

- I approach spirituality from an adult-developmental point of view, seeing it as a dimension that defines an individual's *personality*, in ways that go beyond the social-emotional, cognitive, or psychological profile of a person.

- While social-emotional issues have to do with the question of 'what should I do and for whom'? – answers to which determine how people position themselves toward others; and while cognitive issues have to do with 'what can I do and what are my options', based on my present level of thought complexity; and psychological issues which focus on the issue of 'how am I doing'? – spiritual issues, in my approach, have to do with the question: 'what are my ultimate concerns on account of which I am doing what I am doing?

Methodology

- If spirituality is seen as requiring mental growth – as distinguished from mental health – and as being one among other 'dimensions' of personality that is 'under development' over an individual's entire lifespan, two questions arise:
  - (1) at what point during an individual's development does spirituality set in?
  - (2) how is the emergence of spirituality helped or hindered by the other three dimensions of mental growth: social-emotional, cognitive, and psychological?
- I call these questions 'methodological': they presuppose a theoretical approach to adult development.
- The approach I am using in my research on spirituality is called CDF, Constructive Development Framework.

Embedding of Spirituality in Personality [according to CDF]

ED
What should I do and for whom?

CD
What can I do and what are my options?

SD
What are my ultimate concerns?

ED: Social-Emotional Development

CD: Cognitive Development

NP: Psychological Status

SP: Spiritual Development

Developmentally, a synthesis of ED, CD, NP reflecting an individual's maturity level

NP [for 'need/press']
How, given my needs and the pressures exerted on me by my super-ego and the social world, am I doing?
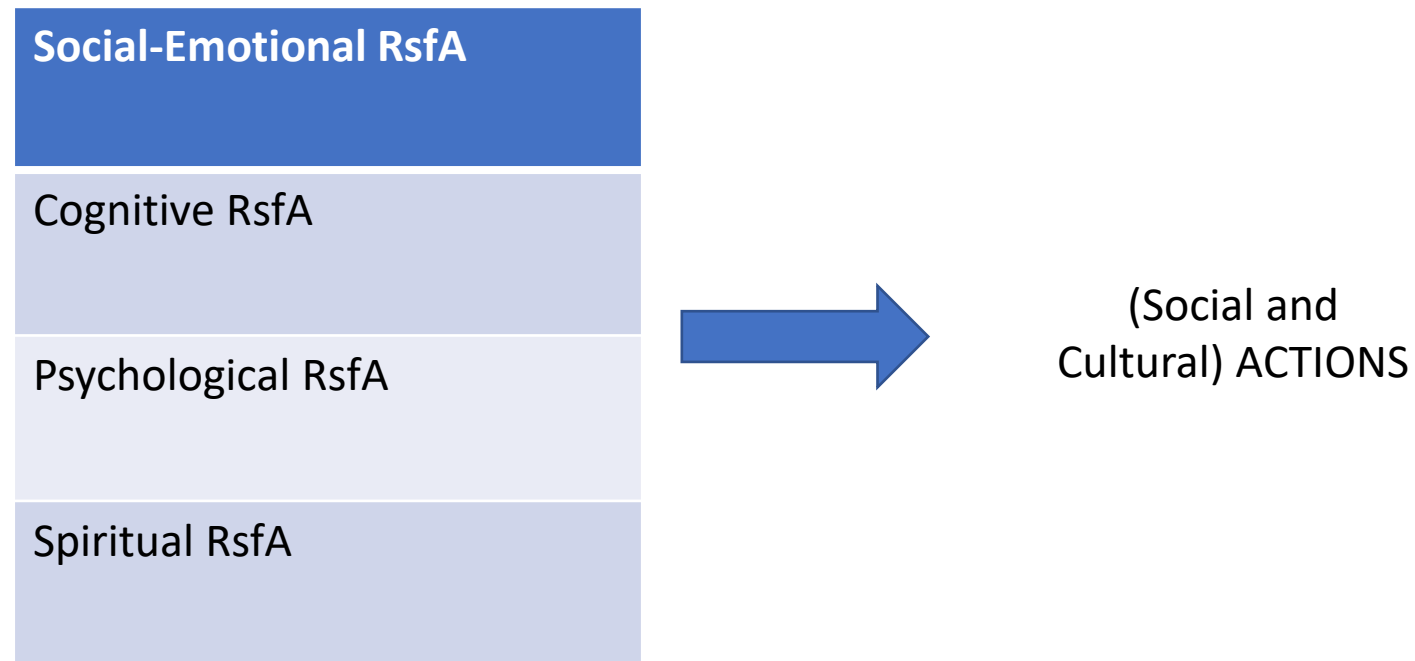
Spirituality as a Dimension of Human Agency

Humans have agency (they are not by nature victims).
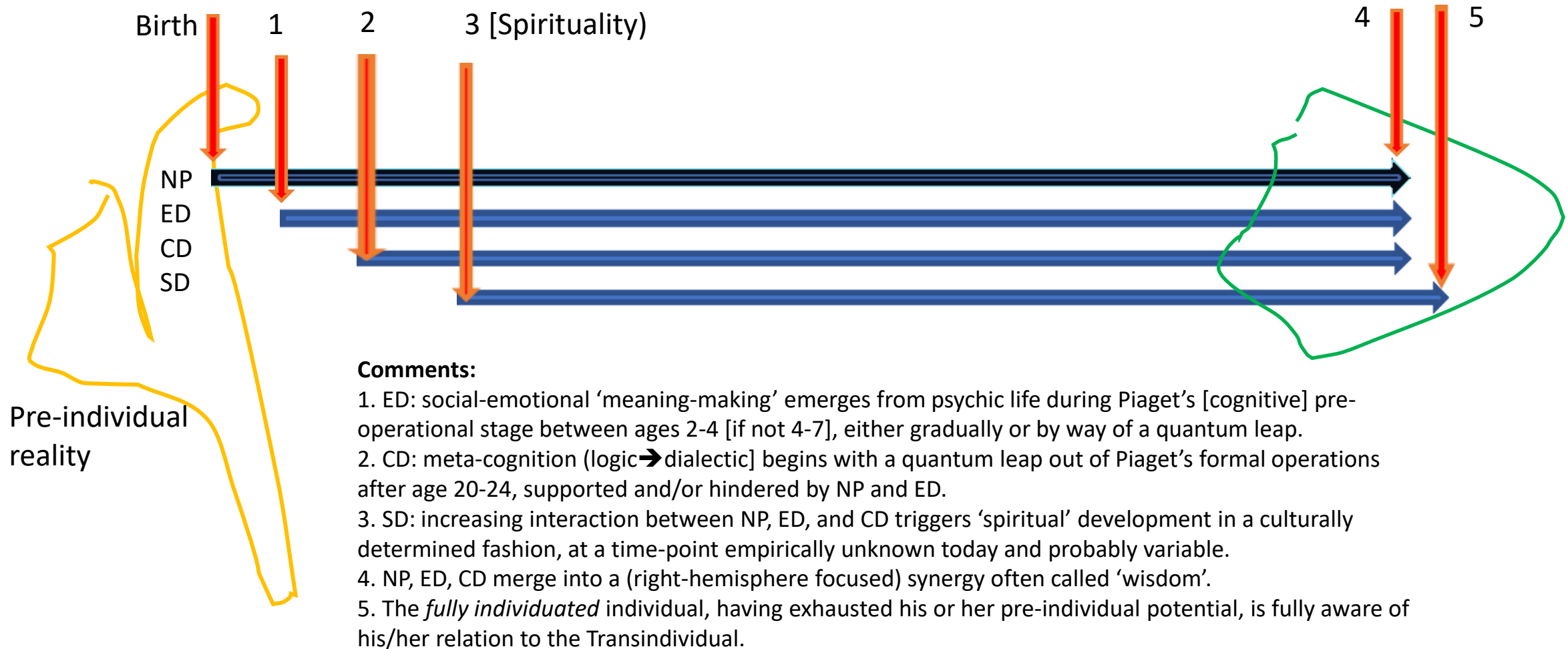They are social and cultural actors following Reasons for Action.
Spirituality is one of the dimensions that provides humans with Reasons for Action.

Social-Emotional RsfA
Cognitive RsfA
Psychological RsfA
Spiritual RsfA

→ (Social and Cultural) ACTIONS

Spirituality as a Dimension of Individuation

- Individual development is one thing; the individuation of individuals on their way to becoming 'personalities' is another.

- Individuation is the process by which the uniqueness of individuals arises.

- While all individuals share that they develop over the lifespan, they are all different in how they achieve uniqueness.

- Based on the spiritual interviews I conducted I conclude that 'spirituality' speaks to the uniqueness of an individual.

- "Tell me about the way you are spiritual, and I will tell you in what way you are individuated".

- Spirituality brings about a synthesis of all developmental strands an individual has brought to completion.

Where is the Onset of Spirituality?

Birth   1   2   3 [Spirituality)   4   5

NP
ED
CD
SD

Pre-individual reality

Comments:
1. ED: social-emotional 'meaning-making' emerges from psychic life during Piaget's [cognitive] pre-operational stage between ages 2-4 [if not 4-7], either gradually or by way of a quantum leap.
2. CD: meta-cognition (logic➔dialectic] begins with a quantum leap out of Piaget's formal operations after age 20-24, supported and/or hindered by NP and ED.
3. SD: increasing interaction between NP, ED, and CD triggers 'spiritual' development in a culturally determined fashion, at a time-point empirically unknown today and probably variable.
4. NP, ED, CD merge into a (right-hemisphere focused) synergy often called 'wisdom'.
5. The *fully individuated* individual, having exhausted his or her pre-individual potential, is fully aware of his/her relation to the Transindividual.

Spiritual Development Follows Adult Development

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Preliminary Conclusions

- Based on my interview, spirituality is one of the four dimensions of Mind that has an empirically understandable onset and development over the human life span.

- Based on a preliminary analysis of 5 interviews (to which you contributed), spirituality appears as a synthesis of social-emotional, cognitive, and psychological (behavioral) aspects of human personality.

- 'Synthesis' means that in each individual, spirituality is shaped according to a person's level of adult development over the lifespan, in a way that leads to individualized relationships between the profiles shown previously.

Further Research

- Much further research is needed to ascertain how exactly the four profiles shown on the initial slides may relate to each other over a person's lifespan.

- My hypothesis is that in each individual, the four CDF profiles are not only related differently, but their relationships may also shift over the human lifespan.

- Whatever these shifts, it is already clear that spirituality can best be seen as a gathering of all developmental strands that define a person; they increasingly 'merge' to 'individuate' a person, making a person distinctly different from others.