

TOWARD SPECIES MATURITY: SPIRITUAL PSYCHOLOGY  
AND THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY  
(1998)

**Introduction**

As the twentieth century draws to a close, it is increasingly clear to a growing number of the people on the planet that life on earth, as we experience it, is not working very well. There are many views as to why this is the case-- a spectrum of thought and feeling that stretches from the most reactionary to the most radical--and so far there is little agreement. For, indeed, there are many factors that contribute to this state of malfunction of the systems by which we live, so that any understanding of the situation needs to be very complex and provisional, and any, even partial, solution must take into account many parameters. And perhaps the most confusing element in all this is that we do not yet see clearly what is actually happening, and that much remains unknown about our current state and what we can do about it.

Nevertheless, more and more people around the world are hard at work at different solutions to the problems as they conceive them. The litany of difficulties is now familiar, stretching from the environmental issues of resource depletion, pollution, and species diversity loss, to economic issues of unemployment, exploitation, and gross disparity in wealth, to those of political oppression, human rights, and democratic apathy. Accompanying these are social issues of violence, alienation, drug addiction, health issues, overpopulation, epidemic disease, and infant mortality, and educational issues of illiteracy, child neglect, and irrelevancy of much educational practice to life in a post-modern world. There is the constant presence of warfare and armed conflict, fueled by scarcity and an international weapons trade, and a growing level of destruction from natural weather conditions, due to the instability of the natural systems that normally shelter us. No culture on earth is working well, there is a growing gap between rich and poor, and the systems by which we have sustained life on earth in the past are now stretched to the breaking point. There are many warning signs that, unless we change our collective ways as a species, the future will become increasingly a nightmare of bare survival in a global landscape bereft of the plenty and beauty that the earth has provided in the past.

In short, as a species, we are in a crisis of immense proportions and at a point where our ways of living on earth are in question. Part of our response is to insist on, and reinforce, the old ways, and reactionary fundamentalism in all forms is rapidly emerging as a force in planetary life. But another response is to accept this crisis, even if we do not fully understand it, and

begin to search for new ways of living that will relieve the suffering we presently experience. As the situation grows more obviously worse, more and more people are joining in this quest, recognizing that the "death" of old ways is accompanied by the "birth" of new, and that in the very complexity of these times, in the chaos and ferment, lie the seeds of the new. The species, having sensed its potential extinction-- first in the atom bomb, and now more recently in the environmental holocaust-- is awakening to new possibilities for life on earth and to solutions to the many problems we face, as individuals, nations, and a species.

This awakening entails not only outer change, but an inner change in mind and heart as well. It is not enough to change the forms of our living; we need also to transform our consciousness--how we think and feel, and so behave. So far most of our attention as a species has been focused on the need for outer change, and only a few voices have spoken for the necessity to transform human consciousness as an aspect of moving through this crisis. But more are now joining this chorus and affirming that such inner change is essential, both to support the outer changes and, more fundamentally, to transform our very human nature so that the changes we make can be sustained into the future.

In sum, the species needs to mature as well as the world change, and it is this challenge and the inner process of species maturation that this paper addresses. As a species, we need to grow up and begin to take a fuller level of responsibility for who we are, for our relationships to each other and other life forms, and for where we live. We need to find ways of living that sustain rather than destroy life on earth, and ways of knowing ourselves that support these ways of living. The planetary crisis, then, is a challenge and an opportunity, not only to establish more sustainable outer systems by which to live on earth, but also to transform our inner ways of thinking and feeling and, thus, behaving so that we match on the inside the harmony and health we seek to create around us. And to do this we need to look closely at the human soul, psyche, and personality and at how they contribute to, or impede, this transformation of self, other, and world. This is a purpose of Spiritual Psychology.

### **Species Forerunners**

At all times in history, there have been people, or groups, in cultures, who have carried the vision and images of the future's possibilities, and have dedicated their lives to making these images real. These individuals, or groups, are at first often maligned for their thinking and actions, for they bring the status quo into question, and it is only later that they are

recognized, often after their death, as having carried and expressed something that the culture, or nation, or species needed in order to mature. Their vision initially puts them at odds with their culture and social norms, and the new ways they express in their life and work are often at first rejected. Yet, later, they are accepted and used widely by others in their own cultures, and sometimes throughout the world.<sup>1</sup>

In this present crisis, there exist on the planet such people and groups who are carrying the vision and images of the next step, both for particular cultures and for the species as a whole, and who are trying, often against great odds, to make them real. These ideas and images reside in them, they are not derived from current cultural/societal norms, and they, therefore, have a particular force in them, which constitutes a spiritual calling for the person and, eventually, a step of maturation for the culture. World-famous examples of such forerunners abound, but, more important, really, are the many, many lesser known, and unknown, instances of the lives of men and women, and groups, who have been responsible in this way for the development and maturation of the species over the centuries, both within their own cultures and time and across cultures and history.

We think of these people as having spiritual strength, as strong souls rooted in, and expressing, a vision which is not immediately shared by those around them, but which turns out to be effective in furthering the maturity of the species. Often, initially, as I said above, they are criticized for their views, but in time, it turns out that they had a valuable contribution and that they were articulating and standing for something that was actually buried in the consciousness of many people who were too immersed in their present life-conditions to speak for it themselves, or who were identified with the status quo in ways that kept them from seeing this possibility. These "species forerunners" were in touch with both their own gift and with the potential of the species, and were willing to risk rejection in order to express their vision. And they had the spiritual strength of soul to carry this out.

In these forerunners we sometimes recognize an aspect of ourselves that is also capable of taking such a stand-- a certain strength of spirit, a calling in our own souls that we secretly yearn to honor and fulfill. And in this way such a person, or group, can inspire us to leadership, even if we work in a different field and time and culture, for this image of spiritual strength is transcultural and common to the species, so that this expression stirs in us the desire to express, within our own life, our particular gift, even if it is not immediately received and acknowledged by the culture around us. Species forerunners, then, inspire us far beyond the confines of their particular time and place in history, both by their action and by their example, for we

recognize in them something of ourselves, and are inspired to express more fully our convictions and gifts within our given culture and circumstances. They model for us strength of soul, we eventually honor them for this, and they encourage us, in our own immediate lives, to stand closer to our own soul and express its vision and force more fully.

In this present global crisis, we can presume that the images and ideas of the new possibilities for the species reside actively in a few strong individuals and a growing number of people, and groups, who are in all parts of the world, and that these humans, like their earlier counterparts, are most likely encountering resistance and criticism, as well as support, from their fellow human beings. In this light it is instructive to ask yourself, "do I know any of these people, or know of them, and how am I responding to their ideas and actions? Or is there an idea, or image, about new ways of being in me that is seeking a fuller expression?" And it is also interesting to ask yourself, "How am I resisting the changes that I see need to happen, both in my life and the larger life of the species? How am I identified with the status quo and afraid of the needed changes?" Both sides are always represented in our experience, just as they are also present in the species forerunners, and often, in fact, what is most inspiring to us about the lives of these people is not only what they did, but the struggle and choices they experienced in order to carry out their vision. It is always important to see both sides-- the vision and the resistance-- and then choose what will bring each and all further along this path of maturation. Of course, this can never be known completely and clearly, but again and again we are making choices that impact, for better or worse, our lives and the life of the species and the planet as a whole and we are in some tiny way responsible for the fate of the earth.

Further, given that the nature of the current crisis is global and that the species as a whole is involved, I think that the ideas and images for the transformation of individuals, cultures, and the species reside in all of us, not just in a few, and that it will take all of us, or at least a critical mass of humans, to take a stand for them, if we are to effect the profound change that is called for. In distinction from previous crises, where a strong leader, or group, was sufficient, here, I believe, each of us is called to respond and be leaders wherever we are, so that the species as a whole transforms and matures in its ways of living, thinking, feeling, and being. The responsibility for this species maturation is collective, and requires all of us to play a part, large or small. There still needs to be inspired leadership, but it needs to be expressed through a greater and greater number of people. In this sense we need to tap not only the spiritual strength of individuals and groups, but also

that of the species as a whole, and draw on it for the vast amount of work that is needed. The individual can no longer wait for the leaders to solve the problems. The problems are too big and it is clearer than ever that the leaders we have are not always to be relied on for creative solutions. Everyone on earth shares the fate of the earth, and everyone has a contribution to make.

To do this we need to learn to work deliberately on the process of inner transformation and the development of spiritual strength and vision in each person, young and old. We need to learn to support the spiritual maturation of individual, group, and species, so that we can address and deal with the great challenges that face us today. We cannot just make outer changes, for without the inner support they will not last, and the habits of consciousness will recreate the old forms. Inner and outer change need to go hand in hand, and the question is how can this inner work of transformation of our consciousness as individuals, groups, nations, and species, best be supported? How can we strengthen each other spiritually to take on the task of planetary transformation and see it through? How do we reach and educate existing leaders and people in positions of power and authority, and insist that they "grow up"? How do we educate each other and all citizens to recognize and respond to this challenge? And how do we educate the next generation to a full expression of the images of the new within them so more of them become species forerunners? This is where Psychology and a better understanding of the process of inner maturation and the transformation of consciousness can be of use. And, specifically, we need a psychological understanding and practice that includes the spiritual dimension of human experience and explores how spiritual strength in individuals and groups can be deliberately cultivated and expressed within the context of daily psychological, social, political, economic, and ecological life. We need a psychological theory and practice which helps people not only deal with the many personal and social problems we all face, but also roots them in their true nature, or soul, and helps them discover the strength of this spiritual connection and to make use of it within the context of their daily lives. This is a purpose of Spiritual Psychology.

### **Spirituality and Religion**

Before turning to this central concern I think it is important to clarify that when I am speaking of spiritual strength and the spiritual dimension, which the species forerunners manifest, and which we ordinary folk both fear and seek, I am not referring necessarily to a person's religious experience and/or affiliation. In the past religion has been the major and socially-approved

repository of our understandings of the spiritual dimension, but in the last decades this understanding has expanded beyond religion and religious forms and is now being explored by scientific and psychological fields of thought and practice.<sup>2</sup> In the last decade of the twentieth century we are beginning to realize that the experience of the spiritual dimension is a natural part of every human being's experience, whether he/she is religious or not, and that it can be addressed directly and worked with outside of any religious context. Religion, of course, often does support this process of spiritual maturation, but we also know many instances where its forms have contributed to a loss of connection and spiritual strength. *So I am positing in this paper that spirituality is a common human birthright, which may, or may not, be expressed in religious language and form in the person's life, and that it exists independent of these forms in a person's life experience as a human birthright.* A person can be, therefore, an atheist and still strongly connected to his own soul and spirit. Conversely, a person can be very religious and quite disconnected from the spiritual dimension.

From this we can take a further step and say that, in distinguishing spirituality from religion in this way, we may also be making room for a new image and possibility of spiritual life itself to emerge at the end of the twentieth century--one that focuses on the earth more than heaven, and on ordinary earthly life in all its human fullness here and now more than the hereafter. In the past the emphasis in spiritual life within a religious context, with a few exceptions, has been on transcendence, and rising above the human condition to a "better place", either in one's mind, or to a place like Heaven, or Nirvana. Earthly and heavenly existence were thus polarized, and one tried to leave the former to achieve the latter. As we have come to the realization of the limits imposed on us by the earth, and the necessity of our growing up and taking a fuller level of responsibility for our planet home, I think there is also a shift in our sense of where spiritual life resides, and a growing emphasis on the more immanent and human aspects of our spiritual experience. I sense we are being called to become more fully embodied, or incarnated, and to live more fully here on earth, to bring heaven here in our behavior, and not wait until the afterlife. In all religions there are hints of this earthly spirituality, but for the most part it is minor and even suppressed. Yet now, in this crisis, it is emerging in many forms which I believe are harbingers of a species-wide shift in the image and practice of spiritual life--one that will more fully accord with our emerging species maturity.

I will come back to this at the end of the paper, but only will say here that central to this emerging earthly spirituality, I believe, is the reowning of a species-wide projection of our own divinity onto God, or the Goddess, or

Whomever. All religions have posited a more powerful Being to whom we may have different relationships, but Who in all cases, is superior and stronger than we are. This has worked up to a point, but has kept us children in some ways, and it is now necessary that we reown this collective projection and claim our own divinity fully as mature human beings. This does not mean that the Divine no longer exists, but it does mean that, in reowning our projection of our divinity on the Divine, we join It as co-creators and perhaps even, as Nikos Kazantzakis said, "saviors of God".<sup>3</sup> In doing this we are both growing up as a species and using our maturity to care for our common home planet and creation.

This is the key, and it will take the work of everyone of us to discover how to do this. Again, the issue is one of spiritual connection and strength-- how this is developed and how it is often stunted-- for when this projection is in place, we have disowned to some degree our spiritual strength and responsibility. In the last decades within Psychology we have begun to find ways in which to work with this process of spiritual maturation so that this projection, eventually, is reowned and spiritual strength, maturity, and responsibility become available to ordinary human beings for creative and practical expression on earth. This is a purpose of Spiritual Psychology.

### **Search for a Spiritual Psychology**

Psychology is a child of the twentieth century, and throughout these hundred years it has attempted to describe and address the inner problems of the human being, viewing them in a variety of perspectives that stretch from the behavioral to the transpersonal. Earlier antecedents to this attempt are Shamanism in its many cultural forms, and Religion, both of which, again in countless variations, try to heal the inner disturbances of the individual and to restore health, harmony, vitality, and a sense of belonging to the world. Religion and Shamanism, however, both posit a larger divine order with which the person can be joined, whereas Psychology, until recently, has not.

During the course of the twentieth century, Psychology has grown to treat a wider and wider range of difficulties of personal and social existence, and developed many branches and sub-fields in this effort. Except for a few pioneers of a larger perspective within the field, however, most attention over the century was paid to the struggles of personal existence and the personality and to the influence of the unconscious realms of the psyche, and it is only recently that the field has gradually turned its attention more fully to the spiritual dimension, to the soul, and to the larger order of Life which had previously been the domain of Shamanism and Religion. With each development over the century the field has reached more deeply into human

experience, and included a wider and wider spectrum of that experience as real, and I think it is no mistake that, as the century ends, the spiritual dimension of our experience is emerging as a central focus for healing and health in some schools of psychological thought and practice. In this the field as a whole rejoins its older siblings, Shamanism and Religion, but brings with it a scientific and secular context for this inquiry, so that the understandings can be more precise and available in all phases of human life.

Of course, all the psychological schools of the twentieth century continue to grow, and some would still deny the existence of such a dimension in human experience, but at the century's end, as a whole, Psychology, in its many languages, is beginning to reframe its central quest and question of what really constitutes a whole human being so that it includes the spiritual dimension of human existence, and the sense of a person connected not only to his/her personal world and present society, but someone in a creative relationship to the larger culture, to the natural world that surrounds and nourishes all beings, and to the larger order of Life. Sometimes this inclusion is explicit, sometimes it is implicit, and there are advantages and disadvantages in both, but my guess is that in another hundred years, and perhaps sooner, as the field continues to mature, the spiritual dimension, implicit, or explicit, will become not only part of the field, but central to it and its understanding of human nature.

The languages in which this recent development of the field is taking place are many, and, as I said, some are implicit, some explicit in their acknowledgment of the spiritual dimension and its efficacy as a healing and guiding force in human individual and social development. But either way, increasingly, a deeper spiritual center within the person is being recognized as real and influential, and its relationship to personal existence-- both the problems and possibilities-- is being carefully explored. This deeper spiritual center has many names-- "Soul", "Essence", "Big Mind", "Core Being", "True Nature"-- and each person will have his/her way of referring to it, but what is exciting is that, whatever the name, this reality is being accepted and cultivated within the secular, scientific field of Psychology. It is being studied and the tools of science are being brought to bear on an invisible reality, just as earlier they were brought to bear on what was more visible and tangible in human experience.

Further, this new psychology is transcultural and planetary in context in that, while still honoring the diversity of culture and the uniqueness of the individual, in its recognition this human spiritual center within each of us as the organizing principle of human life it acknowledges what we have in



common as individuals, cultures, species. Obviously, this needs to be done in ways that do not reduce the diversity of our inner and outer lives, but in acknowledging this spiritual center in all people we are also acknowledging the interconnectedness of all life, the interbeing that joins us. Therefore, our psychological understanding of spiritual maturation must bear not only on the individual level, but on the levels of group, culture, nation, and planet. This is a large order and will take time to work out, but this frame allows us to think in terms of the species as a whole and its degree of psycho-spiritual maturity, for it is composed on the relative immaturity, or maturity, of all members of the species, and a change at any level, for better or worse, will affect the whole. This is a purpose of Spiritual Psychology.

*Now, if we put this new development in Psychology together with the need addressed above to strengthen individuals, groups, and the species as a whole in the expression of new images and ideas that will lead to the transformation of person, culture, and planet, we can say that a psychology that includes the spiritual dimension and so cultivates spiritual strength, expressed at all levels of social organization, can be of great help in transforming human consciousness and helping the species move through this planetary crisis creatively.* It's as if the spiritual dimension were a vast resource, as yet largely untapped, that we can learn to draw on to address the crisis we are facing. If we can find ways, using the principles and practices of psychology, to access the images and ideas of the new and help give them form in mature attitudes and behavior, this can make a significant contribution to the transformation of how we are living. The potential for spiritual strength is in everyone; the question is how to bring it forth and help make it effective, as it is in those individuals we admire and who over the centuries have advanced our collective maturity. In the last decades of this century a growing number of people have embarked on this search for a psychology that can do this. This paper and the ideas herein are a small part of that worldwide effort. The term I use for this emerging psychology is "Spiritual Psychology", but I want it to be clear that this is only one of many countless ways in which people all over the world are looking for ways to help the species mature and the planet survive, and that we need many languages and many approaches to effect this transformation of consciousness and consequent behavior.

### **The Soul-Wound and Spiritual Hunger**

The main problem we face is that the spiritual dimension and its resources are not immediately accessible to many of us, and there are many blocks that need to be worked through in order to establish this connection to

our spiritual center and to draw strength consistently from it. There is, in most of us, a degree of alienation and disconnection from this source of strength and wisdom within us, and this impairs us and takes us in other directions with our lives. It is to a discussion of this condition of spiritual disconnection that I would like now to turn as a way of beginning to explore how psychology can help in the gaining of species maturity. To do this I want for present purposes to use the word "soul" to represent this spiritual center, while acknowledging that this is only one of an infinite number of words for this experience of deep connection to Life, to the larger divine order, from which spiritual strength is drawn. I need a word in order to write about this experience, but I want to be very clear that the word is not the experience and that this experience is described in many different ways, both in different cultures and in different individuals. This, in fact, is the very beauty and strength of this experience of connection to the spiritual dimension-- that it cannot be reduced to one word, but remains an ineffable experience which is very central to the human condition and which we recognize as common to all in all its differences.

Following on this, I want also to make explicit an assumption on which this thinking is based, namely, that the human being is born as a soul as well as a personality, and is connected at life's beginning through the soul to all Life. In contrast to the personality, which develops gradually over the time from birth, the soul is present immediately at birth and fully present from then on, although, as we shall see, often it is marginalized and becomes quite hidden and peripheral in our conscious experience. We are born as souls as well as personalities, and we are born into particular families, cultures, and conditions that shape the development of both soul and personality. The problem is not that there is no soul, but that the connection to the soul is lost, or attenuated, or wounded. And this loss, which is very painful, is then compensated for in a number of ways within the development of the personality and the larger society.

Ideally, the child is received into the family and culture as a soul, i.e. as someone who is unique, who has a gift to give, and a calling to carry out on earth that is special to him/her and which the species needs in order to develop further. The personality then, again ideally, develops in relation to this gift, and the person, over the course of his/her lifetime, develops the necessary personal understanding, skill, and maturity to fully express this gift and take his/her place in the culture as a contributor who advances it. He/she is, then, able to draw on the spiritual strength and the confidence in the spiritual dimension which this connection brings, even in the face of resistance and misunderstanding, and to pursue a vision--image or idea--that

brings both personal satisfaction and an experience of contribution beyond his/her immediate personal life. This is the ideal-- rarely realized-- of soul-connection and gift-realization through the instrument of the personality and the experience of receiving and giving within the context of the human and natural community that is welcoming at this deep level.

More often, however, what happens is that the soul/child is **not** welcomed and received fully and the gift not looked for and nurtured. Rather, very often the child is seen as something less, or as a "tabula rasa", or as a personality only, or is born into a situation where the soul is not seen and received, so that there is an experience of being unwelcomed as a soul, of being rejected at this level of our being. This is in distinction to the many forms of psychological wounding that western psychology has documented so assiduously, i.e. wounds to the personality as it is developing, for this is prior and deeper, and constitutes a rejection of our essential being, and a wound to the connection to our soul, so that we lose confidence in our true nature. Ironically, later psychological trauma often covers this soul-wound, rendering it more deeply hidden, and in some cases the actual psychological wounding is a compensation for this deeper sorrow of unwelcome. But the point is that this wound of unwelcome attenuates and weakens the connection of the person to soul and the spiritual dimension, and is the source, then, of a sometimes subtle, sometimes obvious alienation, or disconnection, from oneself, from others, from Nature, and from Life.

This condition is further complicated by the fact that the personality proceeds to develop within the norms of a particular culture, and a person's degree of connection to the soul will also be shaped by this process. If the particular culture recognizes the soul and has norms that support this connection, even if the immediate family does not, the person will have an easier time staying connected. If, on the other and more usual hand, the culture also largely ignores this dimension, as ours does, and instead puts great emphasis on the development of the personality and its success and achievement, then the soul-wound can be reinforced again and again over time and the person, as a soul, experience sustained unwelcome. In this case the connection can become quite attenuated and an experience of severe loss of soul eventuate. One writer has referred to this as a process of "soul murder"<sup>4</sup>, and, though the connection is never completely severed, it can become severely attenuated and lose all influence in the person's life. The soul's energies become marginal and blocked, and a person lives only tangentially in relation to them. This will affect not only how the person lives as an individual but his/her relationships with the wider human

community. And it will also affect our relationship to Nature and the other species with whom we share the planet.

This spiritual alienation is so deep-seated in our attitudes toward Nature and the natural world that it is very hard to see it, and yet the environmental degradation and the depletion of non-renewable resources, not to mention the extinction of species, are the result of a radical disconnection from our souls, and a separation from that aspect of ourselves that is deeply connected to the natural world. This is to the largest degree true of industrialized societies, east and west, but increasingly this attitude has spread around the globe and is overwhelming cultures where this connection was in tact, to some degree, in the past. Native cultures around the globe clearly had a strong experience of this connection, and children in all cultures do initially, but the priorities of most cultures now fairly quickly sever this connection to Nature, or drive it to the periphery of consciousness, and its loss contributes, in a hidden way, to the spiritual hunger and starvation so rampant now.

Of course, in the last twenty-five years the environmental movement has begun to address these conditions from its perspective and to call for new ways of living that will allow the ecological systems to be sustaining and sustained. Deep Ecology, and more recently, Eco-psychology,<sup>5</sup> have spoken about the inner side of environmentalism and gradually the spiritual context for this work has emerged to join its initial scientific orientation. Interestingly, in this field it is very clear how science and spirit can work together, for they are two sides of the same coin. Spirituality provides the values and intention and Science the know-how and strategies for implementing changes that will lead to sustainable practices and harmonious relationships at the interspecies level. Psychology can proceed in the same spirit.

I want to emphasize in all this that the soul itself is not wounded, but the connection to this force and source within us is. We forget who we are in essence, and become identified with whatever patterns of attitude and behavior seem to insure survival in our particular setting. These patterns can be functional, or dysfunctional, but in both cases they exist apart from the deeper guiding force of the soul, and the person, no matter how successful in terms of family and culture, experiences a secret hunger for the soul and this connection. This is what I mean by soul-hunger, or what Mother Theresa terms "spiritual starvation". I believe that we now have in the industrialized countries an epidemic of spiritual starvation, or soul-hunger, that is quite unrecognized, and that this condition is now spreading to the developing and indigenous nations as we globalize our economy and communication systems. It is sad that the very cultures that have experienced greater

connection, and could have taught us what they know, are being decimated by the sweep of western popular culture around the globe. We are experiencing a loss of spiritual knowledge and diversity just as we are losing biological diversity, and, though there are many people who are now recognizing this and working hard to change the direction of our growth, the direction still largely holds, and the epidemic of hidden spiritual starvation spreads.

Usually, in spite of these general conditions of our life, there are in most cases a few people in our experience who do welcome us as souls, and this makes an enormous difference, and often influences our life-choices in a profound way. This may be a parent, but more often it is a grandparent, or a teacher, or priest, or family friend who is less involved with the immediate upbringing and so can see more fully who is there. This is the godparent's responsibility--to see and welcome the soul and guide the child's spiritual development. This presence in a person's life can counterbalance the wounding to some degree, but for every one of these there are usually many more who do not, and so usually the balance tips toward spiritual suffering and loss. Yet the soul is always there, and, in fact, seeks constantly to restore this connection. And paradoxically, the person secretly yearns for it, even while expressing attitudes and behaviors that increase the separation and alienation, at times clandestinely touches this dimension of experience, and, at some point, in most cases, sets out on a search, conscious or unconscious, to restore the connection he/she has lost.

And certainly it is possible to restore the connection and to learn to live more fully from it. The people we admire have done this, often in the face of great obstacles and suffering, for it is the natural direction an human life seeks to take, given the chance, and the force of Life is inexorable, even if it can be blocked and stunted. In fact, often species forerunners have overcome a great deal of spiritual wounding in order to pursue and express their vision, for it seems the soul also can make use of this suffering and transform it to be part of the gift that is given. It becomes, rightly held, a means of understanding and compassion, and, though initially a liability, in the end, it becomes a source of spiritual strength.

This spiritual hunger is largely invisible and unrecognized, and yet it is shaping the lives of most of us in hidden ways, and is a central factor, I believe, behind the many forms of social dysfunction, ecological degradation, and economic exploitation that we are currently experiencing. It is a hidden condition in the lives of both the wealthy and successful and the poor and disenfranchised, though there are exceptions to this in all socio-economic classes, and it is masked by economic short-sightedness and

greed, social violence, and personal despair, which are increasingly central to our collective lives. Many thinkers have pointed to the soul-destroying nature of western society with its emphasis on individualism and materialism and I think we can also say the same of the systems of communism and totalitarianism. Of course, the picture is more complex than this, and there are many places in western and world culture that the soul shines through, but this does not obviate the fact that there exists in western society an immense unrecognized condition of spiritual starvation, generated by a deep and hidden wound of unwelcome to the soul. It is this wound that generates the alienation and separation from one's spirit, from others, and from the natural world, and blocks a person's capacity to take a stand and express the vision and gift which is his/her birthright and which the species needs for its maturation. Therefore, Psychology must address this level of wounding and its relationship to the more familiar levels of psychological suffering and dysfunction, healing and development, if we are to foster spiritual strength and maturity in individuals, groups, and the species as a whole. All that we know of personal and psychical suffering and development can be used, but this information and skill needs to be set in a larger spiritual context that includes the soul, and the loss, and restoration, of connection to who we most deeply and truly are.

What is needed, then, is a way to heal the soul-wound and help the person heal, transform, and develop his/her personality and psyche so that the soul can be restored to the center of a person's life and its strengths and gifts be realized. And to do this, as I have said, we need a psychology that includes soul, psyche, and personality, and that examines the relationship not only between these three, but also between person and community, person and culture, and person and planet. It is not enough to focus on the individual level alone, or on the social/cultural, or even the planetary, but, because these are all aspects of one vast system we call Life-- a system we are increasingly recognizing as self-organizing, coherent, and seamless--, we need to find a way to work with all these levels and their interplay as one system. Any change at any level affects the others, and the process of healing and transformation proceeds, or is blocked, on all levels at once. So, if we are looking at an individual, or a group, or a culture, or a nation, of course, we pay close attention to the details at that level, but we need always to hold this experience and this work within a planetary context and be aware of how change at these levels affects the planet as a whole system. This is why we can talk about the species as a whole, and our relationship to other species and to the planet. We, the human species, are a bio-psycho-social-spiritual entity and what we choose to do, or not do, makes a big

difference. In this paper I am using the term "Spiritual Psychology" to describe how we might work at these various levels, and I focus here mostly on the individual, for this initially is the easiest to understand and is where we return again and again. But I could also call this orientation "Global Psychology", and, starting from the planet as a living system, work down to the individual. The point is that all levels of organization and life are inherently interrelated, and what is needed now is a way of conceiving and working with the dynamics of healing and development at all levels as well as at any one. In this sense, perhaps the best term would be "Spiritual/Global Psychology", but, for simplicity's sake, I use the term "Spiritual Psychology" here, holding it in this planetary context.

### **The Principles and Patterns of Spiritual Psychology**

Now, in order to address the vast amount of detail in any of these systems and levels of organization, person to planet, I have found it useful to focus on and identify the principles and patterns by which any particular level is operating. *Spiritual Psychology, therefore, is rooted in the recognition of, and cooperation with, a specific set of principles/patterns that we assume, if they work at any level, must work at all levels.* The value of this approach is that, once these principles/patterns are identified, then specifically appropriate methods and techniques can be derived from them that address, not only the particular level, but the particularities of each situation.

This approach of identifying the principles/patterns that underlie phenomena and process rather than developing a concrete set of techniques and tools also provides a larger perspective on the problem being considered and often unique means for specific and creative treatment at any level. It also provides the means to study the interplay and effect of this intervention on other levels of organization within the planetary system. In short, it provides a lens that leaves the practitioner free to respond creatively to specific and unique situations while providing some heuristic guidance for his/her intervention that relates that intervention to other levels of organization.

I will give here only three examples each of the principles/ patterns of Spiritual Psychology, and save for a later date a fuller treatment of this topic.<sup>8</sup> One is a principle we have already discussed, that of a center, or organizing principle, which provides the guiding context for any system. At the individual level, we see increasingly the presence of the soul as the organizing principle of a life-time, whether, or not, it is followed. At the group level we are discovering a similar center that can organize and transform the life of a group. In organizations this center is often identified

as the vision behind the organization, or purpose, to which the organization may, or may not, be connected. From this we can posit that different cultures and nations have similar centers-- manifest, or not-- and that the planet itself is guided by a central principle which is seeking to realize the planet's wholeness as a living system. At this last level we can see the emergence of, first, the League of Nations, and now the United Nations, as a planetary expression of the presence of such a guiding center, and the struggles among the nations as an expression of the difficulties of developing a personality to fully realize a coherent and mature world vision.

Another principle is "disidentification". Psychologically this means the experience of gaining perspective, or stepping back from something we have been identified with, or attached to, and seeing it in a larger context. We see this principle at work spontaneously in people's lives, and it can be used consciously to balance polarities in the personality, or move through crises and transitions. At the group level, we see it operating in the resolution of conflicts, the healing of wounds through the act of forgiveness, and through shifts in sense of purpose and direction. At the organizational level we see it in changes in organizational structure, for example, recently, downsizing, and in the retooling of industries, or the work force, for new uses. At the national level we see it in the letting go of certain systems of governance and ideology, for example, in the recent collapse of Communism in Russia. Of course, the details and complexities of these levels differ vastly, and how this principle works does also, but behind the differing phenomena, the principle can be seen as operative in essentially the same way.

A third principle is "inherent wisdom". This means that the system, at whatever level, somewhere inside knows what is best for it, and what the next step is in its further maturation and self-expression. This is most easily seen at the individual level, where it is possible to help a person find access to their own inner knowing and wisdom and to remove the obstacles to this knowing in their personality. It is also becoming possible to help groups do this same thing, for example, to discern within a dialogue among the members what the best way is to proceed on a certain task they have in common. And professionals are now working with larger groups, organizations, and communities in this same spirit of eliciting the inner knowing of the system rather than imposing solutions from the outside. This, for example, is changing the nature of international development work.<sup>9</sup> And from this we can posit and explore the possibility that nations, and the planet herself, possess an inherent wisdom which we can learn to access and draw on, not only to resolve the present difficulties, but to continue to grow and evolve as a species and planetary system.



Three examples of patterns will also suffice here. The first is that of "polarity". Within the individual we see the pattern of polarization of psychological elements, accompanied by projection and/or repression. This pattern "disowns" an aspect of our experience while identifying with its opposite. This creates imbalance and conflict in the personality, and consequent suffering. At the group level we see polarity as a pattern between subgroups, as in "inside/outside" groups, or between groups where a "bad", negative image is projected on the other while the positive is identified as the "good" group. We see this same pattern in organizations and nations, for it underlies much of the international and interracial conflict in the world today and the lack of understanding and acceptance of differences and diversity.

A second pattern is "reactivity". In any system there are elements that are reactive to the force of change and growth within the system. This reactivity provides a certain stability to the system, but it also impedes the system's development. At the individual level, there will always be some degree of fear and resistance within the personality to change and growth that from a larger perspective is valuable and needed. At the group level, we see this often expressed in resistance among members to take new directions, so that a subgroup becomes reactive and reactionary to the direction the group is taking. At the cultural and national level we see this, for example, in the various forms of fundamentalism that are now present throughout the world, or in the level of greed that is rampant in the United States and our refusal to see ourselves as part of a larger planetary system of economic distributions and well-being.

A third pattern is "value and meaning". At the individual level a person attributes value and meaning to certain aspects of his/her experience and tends to invest time and energy in these pursuits. They have meaning to him/her and so shape the direction and expression of daily life. At the group level there will exist collective values and meaning that influence the group's life, and such value and meaning will also exist in cultures and nations, manifesting as priorities, rituals, celebrations, and choices. Any human system will have implicit, or explicit, values and meanings by which it operates, and when these are lost, or questioned, the system destabilizes, with the possibility of disintegration, or transformation to new values and meaning. This pattern is evident on the planet in the search described at the beginning of this paper for new ways of being and the questioning of familiar ways of living on earth.

*Spiritual Psychology identifies principles and patterns by which systems work at different levels of organization and studies their interplay in*

*supporting the process of soul-realization and spiritual maturation. A change at any level will affect all levels, sometimes obviously, sometimes subtly, and so all levels have to be taken into account, even if you are working predominately at only one. The levels are in constant interplay, and the principles and patterns help to know how, and where, to intervene in ways that support the process of maturation without disrupting, or blocking, it.*

So, given all this, as we become better able to recognize and cooperate with the principles/patterns which are in operation at the moment in the process of growth and development in any dimension of experience, and intervene at the appropriate level of organization, we can begin to heal the soul-wound, to restore the soul to its central place in our experience, to cultivate spiritual strength and vision, and so to forge a stronger collective connection to the spiritual dimension--person to planet. The soul's energy begins to be felt in our individual and collective lives and with this comes and a fuller expression of our potential, as individuals, nations, and species through the vehicles of psyche and personality, culture, society, and nation. Gandhi called this energy of the spirit "soulforce" and he drew on this in his confrontation with the British Empire in India again and again. We need to learn how to cultivate soulforce, or spiritual strength, in ourselves and each other, to heal the wounds that create blocks to its expression and to feed the soul in ways that empower it in us to make the needed changes, inner and outer, in how we live on earth. This is a purpose of Spiritual Psychology.

### **Soul as Cell in the Body of the Species**

In this work, the place we start and the place we always return is the person, for the individual's spiritual maturation remains central to this endeavor, even when we are working with much larger systems. A person who is disconnected from his/her soul and has buffered this loss with a range of psychological and social compensations, ranging from the functional to dysfunctional, will affect the people and groups around him/her, and this secret hunger and the attempts to sate it, will sow suffering on all sides. Conversely, a person who is connected, who has healed this primal soul-wound and whose personality expresses the purpose and gift of his/her life as a soul on earth will also affect people and groups, and will be an agent of inspiration and healing on earth. And in-between these two extremes is the majority of us, both wounded and healing, who do the best we can and can learn to do better.

A person can be thought of as a cell in the body of the species, and his/her health will affect the whole, even if invisibly, much as the health of a

single cell in the heart contributes to the health of the whole organ. So the focus of this work rests foremost on the individual and his/her relationship with the soul and returns here again and again. This emphasis both safeguards the particularity of human existence and the diversity of the species, while affirming the inherent interconnection of all peoples on earth, whether in large or small communities, for the soul is social and links us with all life as well as with our unique individuality. It is necessary, obviously, to deal with larger human systems, but each individual is still unique, and the health of these systems rests ultimately on the health of those who compose it. So the person remains prime in this discussion of planetary life.

In saying this I am not saying that one person is always connected and another always not. Rather, there is a continuum and everyone has experience over the whole span of it, but in different degrees. The value of deliberate psycho-spiritual work is that you can increase the degree of connection in a person and decrease the degree of disconnection and, with this shift, the consequent attitudes and behavior that spring from these respective states of consciousness. The soul-woundedness and consequent psychological wounding generates the experience of disconnection, but a very wounded person can at some moments be deeply connected to his/her soul and the spiritual dimension. Likewise, a person who is capable of sustained connection can at some moments lose it. In all there is a process of gradually discovering how to stay connected and to express the soulforce of one's life more and more fully and effectively, and this is a long and very complex endeavor. To some degree it occurs naturally simply by living life; people mature more or less well, given half a chance, and the inherent direction of life is toward this spiritual maturity. But there are many obstacles and no guarantees, and often a person becomes blocked in this development and remains chronically disconnected and immature. So there is reason to reflect on what might help to support people to grow in the direction of psycho-spiritual maturity, both for their own sake and for the lives of those around them, and for the sake of the planet.

In the process of individual psycho-spiritual development, leading to spiritual maturity and realization, different issues will need attention at different moments in time/space, and a skillful helper will be able to recognize where the work is needed and what to do, or not do. At times, for example, work on personality healing and development will be foreground, at others, the deeper work of the transformation of the psyche through work with unconscious energies and images, and at still another the work with the energies of the soul, manifested as wisdom, or responsibility, or life-purpose

and meaning, and with the alignment of personal will with these core intentions. Work with individuals within a spiritual context needs to include all these dimensions and their interplay in order for the helper to be effective in supporting the process of realization. If only one, or at most two, are emphasized, work, and consequent healing and development, will be limited.<sup>10</sup> This is also true of work at all the other levels of organization.

### **Case Examples**

The details of this work must wait for a full treatment later, but let me give two examples now for the purposes of illustration of how the principles and practice of Spiritual Psychology can help an individual grow into a more sustained connection to soul and a fuller expression of spiritual strength and vision.

#### **Martin**

Several years ago a man, Martin, in his late forties came to consult with me. He had had a career as a successful businessman, traveling to all parts of the world, but in the last year he had suffered from Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and had been forced to let go of much of his work and income. As we worked he became aware of a deeply wounded part of himself that had developed in childhood as a result of a distant father and alcoholic mother, a part that had considerable sensitivity and artistic ability. He saw that this part had been neglected and that it carried certain aspects of his soul that he had never expressed. He also saw that his drivenness was in part an expression of his nature and part a compensation for the lack of love in his family and the desire to get approval and success to fill this void. He also realized that he was putting this same pressure on his son to achieve, and that it was keeping him at a distance from colleagues in his work out of fear of competition and an underlying experience of inadequacy. As he uncovered these personal wounds, he began to be clearer about what he was drawn to express as himself. This led to not only reshaping his work life so that he was able to keep a better balance in his health, but he instituted new guidelines at work for employee relations and organized his life so family vacations became possible and his relationship with his son vastly improved. His interest in art also blossomed, and here he discovered as well an interest in West African art. This led to a trip to West Africa and eventually to helping establish cooperatives in that area to support the work of indigenous artists and to sell it there and in other parts of the world. He also served on a number of corporate boards, and was able to help these companies begin to think about

conducting business in more sustainable ways. And, in time, his health returned and he became in his own way a species forerunner.

### Rebecca

The second example is of a woman, Rebecca, who became ill with cancer. Initially she was terrified and pursued a number of traditional treatments aimed at eradicating the cancer from her body. During this time she struggled alone with this disease, for she had been raised to be very independent and self-reliant, and was quite isolated from others. She did, however, at one point join a cancer support group, and through this experience, began to realize that she was not so alone and that she could both draw support from others and give it in return. For several years the cancer went into remission, but she continued to expand her community of support and became active in teaching health care providers about the experience of being a patient. When the cancer returned, she had established a large community of friends and colleagues and was active in cancer work, and with them she began to explore alternative, or complementary, approaches to healing, and brought these experiences both to her community and to the physicians who were treating her. She continued to teach as long as she had the strength, and in interviews with her at the end of her life, expressed gratitude for the cancer, that it had taught her to overcome the fear of death that had been so strong in the beginning, that it had given her a wide community of care and love, and allowed her to be of use to others who were suffering in a similar way. She was known and loved throughout her community and had established herself as an authority on cancer and the range of treatments possible. She too, in her own way had become a species forerunner.

These examples are perhaps misleading in that they are dramatic in the changes they portray and most often the shifts are far less obvious. But they can serve as models to illustrate the process as long as we do not think this always happens so clearly. In many cases it does, but there is no guarantee that the soul will heal and blossom, and in every life this process takes a different and unique course. There is also no guarantee that the planet will survive, and the course of this healing is yet unknown. So in all this work, there is a large element of the unknown, and faith is required to pursue it in the face of uncertainty. But the point here is that the principles/patterns of Spiritual Psychology can be used to support deliberately this process of spiritual maturation, and that this support can help heal the soul-wound and the accompanying psychological wounding, empower the soul to express,

and spiritually strengthen the person to realize more fully his/her particular gift and contribution.

### **Leadership in a Time of Crisis**

If all that I have said above is a useful perspective on the present crisis we are in as a species and on the need for species maturation, then we can say that the next immediate need is for people who, in whatever field, are willing to work on the transformation of human consciousness, their own and others, toward the development of spiritual strength and the realization of species maturity as we have talked about it here. Each of us need to become, as I said at the beginning of the paper, species forerunners, and contribute our unique gift to the healing and resolution of the present crisis we, as a species, are in. And we need, in turn, to help others also, and this points to the necessity for training and education along several lines.

The first is to retrain people in positions of authority and power to think, and so, act, in a new way. The old ways are no longer working and not only are the systems, as a result, not functioning well, but the leaders themselves are increasingly confused and stressed.

The second are the next generation who are just entering the workforce. They need training in new ways of thinking, not only because to them will fall the major work of transformation, but also because this new consciousness resides in them more strongly than in previous generations, and they often suffer from finding no outer form to work in that resonates with their inner knowing.

The third are the people themselves, the ordinary citizen, of whatever age. Here the work is educational to support the emergence of planetary consciousness and the willingness to make the needed changes in lifestyle and habits. And this group is important also because for this to happen, everyone has to be a leader and take responsibility for his/her part in the process of transformation.

And the fourth, but certainly not the least important, are the world's children. They carry within them the seeds of the future and the consciousness that can contribute to the maturation of the species. All too often this is ignored in the face of the demands of the prevailing system, and young people who could well contribute to this advance of the species are instead blocked and stunted in their development, wounded as we have described above, and often become contributors instead to the immature status quo.

For all these groups we need to develop interventions and educational/training curricula that support and foster the transformation of

consciousness within a global context and make these available at whatever level people are working and living. This can be done, as it has in the past, through training programs, consulting, and education, but here I think the telecommunications networks can be used to make this material available worldwide to those who can use it. This is particularly challenging, for there is not only the development of the curricula themselves, but the challenge of putting them into forms that can disseminate the ideas on a global basis while still maintaining the integrity and complexity of the process, and protecting the cultural and individual diversity that are the hallmark of a healthy system.

This will be the work of the next century, beginning now, to link the species together in our common consciousness and to support diversity among us and in our relationship to other species. And, in all this, where before we have counted on species forerunners to lead, now we need to take that responsibility ourselves. The forerunners can continue to inspire us, and we can perhaps be more welcoming to them as they emerge and call for new ways of being and living, but we cannot wait for them now, but must each take the steps toward maturation that will enable us to play such a part. We have what we need to do this, and the challenge is clearer every day. Humanity as a whole is called to "grow up" and how each of us responds will make a difference to the outcome of this critical time on earth.

### **The Twenty-first Century**

If we return now to our initial concern of how to transform the consciousness of the human species so that we can begin to think, feel, and act in ways that will sustain rather than destroy life on earth, we can see more clearly from the above the range of work to be done and some of the things to keep in mind while doing it. We can see the usefulness of the principles and practice of Spiritual Psychology in doing this work at different levels of organization and in supporting the interplay between the dimensions and levels, person to planet. And we can see how much is still unknown about this work and how much needs to be explored and developed. Hopefully, in the next years this work will proceed in all parts of the world, in many languages, and gradually we will come of age as a species and move through the present crisis. The ideas presented here are only one and a tiny part of the great search for means to improve the conditions under which we and all beings on earth live. There are many views of what to do, many conflicts from which we will learn what is most useful, and there is still much unknown about what really will help. What will the next century hold for us? Clearly there is an opportunity as the old

century ends for us to assess where we are and where we are going. People all over the earth are engaged in this reflection, and predictions abound. This paper has framed this question in terms of the species potentially coming of age and taking a step in maturity, and it has laid out a way of thinking about, and cooperating with, this process, using the principles and practice of Spiritual Psychology. This is one among a vast number of attempts, and yet it can perhaps provide a place for some to start and continue on. The focus for this work remains practical in the sense that it bears on the educational, economic, social, political, ecological arenas of our life on earth and their transformation through the maturation of the consciousness that directs these activities. We work on the inside so that the outside can be changed, which in turn supports change inwardly.

### **Soul on Earth**

And, as I mentioned at the beginning, I think we will also see, as this process continues, the emergence of a new spirituality which is distinct from any religion and from the more familiar forms of spirituality that we have seen so far on earth. This spirituality will be focused more on the fullness of life on earth than on life in the Hereafter. It will no doubt take countless forms, both in different individuals and in different cultures, but its common characteristic, I believe, will be one of celebrating and protecting earthly life, accepting that birth and death are part of a larger order and that everything that we need in order to heal and strengthen the systems by which we live and to give and receive love one to another is here on earth and among us. It will celebrate the body and our sexuality as sacred, it will affirm those ways of political, economic, and social being in the world that are healing and just, it will celebrate the diversity of the human and natural species and the interdependence of all life forms, and it will confirm the earth as divine, a force of spirit in its own right, and as our common home.

From a psychological perspective, as I said before, this emergence of an earthly spirituality will mean reowning our collective projection of our divine and mature spiritual nature on God, or the Goddess, or any Divine Power, and beginning to take full responsibility for our lives on earth. This does not mean that we will deny the Divine in any way, but that we will come into a new relationship to it and the forces of nature, one which is co-creative, or interdependent, rather than dependent, or separative, or denying of this larger order. This reowning of the projection and consequent new relationship will shift our species' experience of the Divine in a dramatic way and empower us to care for each other as we imagine the Divine now cares for us. This is a large order and will take decades to happen, but we see



signs of this emerging already in many different forms and my sense is that in the next century this earthy experience of the divine order will become central to how we live as a species on this planet.

This reowning and "growing up" will also enable us to bring what we have imagined as heaven onto earth and heal this split between heaven and earth with which we have lived for so long. In doing this we will own our divine responsibility and learn to act in ways that preserve and nurture the earth as our common home and to affirm and protect the differences that exist between us as individuals and cultures and species. This is not to say that other realms of the Universe do not exist and that we are alone on earth, but rather that we need to learn to tap our spiritual resources to render life on earth healthy and creative for all, that this is our part in the Universe, and, if we don't do this, and the earth does not become held as sacred and consequently renewed, but continues to waste away because of our lack of maturity, we will have lost an opportunity, much as an individual can lose such a moment in his/her life and waste away in old patterns that are no longer life-giving. There are no guarantees, but there is an opportunity in this global crisis of the species and it is ours now.

Will the next century be one of continuing destruction, disintegration, and species-suicide, or will it be one of renewal and rebirth to a new way of thinking and living on earth? Will a new civilization emerge, characterized by "an harmonious integration and cooperation, pervaded by the spirit of synthesis"<sup>11</sup>, or will the old forms continue to escalate the levels of personal and social violence and environmental degradation until we are living in a global wasteland? With us, the human species, lies the response. We are the most powerful species on earth, and, therefore, have the most responsibility for her well-being. She has provided us with everything we have; will we return the gift? The fate of the earth-- all species', and our own-- is in our hands. We have this privilege and this opportunity, and it remains to be seen what we choose.

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<sup>1</sup> Great figures are recognized across cultures and the Nobel Prizes and other transcultural prizes are established to honor those whose work is global in scope and for humanity as a whole.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, recent work in the fields of Biology, Quantum Physics, and Systems Theory.

<sup>3</sup> See Kazantzakis, N. The Saviors of God. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1960).

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<sup>4</sup> See Shengold, L. Soul Murder.(New York: Ballantine Books, 1989).

<sup>5</sup> See Joanna Macy, Coming Back to Life.(Stoney Creek, CT: New Society Publishers, 1998).

<sup>8</sup> In these papers I am laying the groundwork and in future writings will go into the detail of the actual work.

<sup>9</sup> See the recent development work in the Balkans of Adam Curle and other, described in his book Another Way. (Oxford: Jon Carpenter Publishing, 1995).

<sup>10</sup> This means that we need to develop a multi-focal vision for this work that can hold the sweep of "nesting" and interdependent systems stretching from person to planet and back.

<sup>11</sup> See Roberto Assagioli, Psychosynthesis. (New York: Viking, 1971).