


**HUMAN FORMATION FROM AN INTEGRAL PERSPECTIVE: DIALOGUES  
BETWEEN SPIRITUALITY, ETHICS, AND MORALITY IN PSYCHOLOGY**

**A FORMAÇÃO HUMANA EM PERSPECTIVA INTEGRAL: DIÁLOGOS ENTRE  
ESPIRITUALIDADE, ÉTICA E MORAL NA PSICOLOGIA**

**LA FORMACIÓN HUMANA DESDE UNA PERSPECTIVA INTEGRAL:  
DIÁLOGOS ENTRE ESPIRITUALIDAD, ÉTICA Y MORAL EN LA PSICOLOGÍA**

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**ABSTRACT**

Spirituality, ethics, and morality have increasingly gained prominence as interpretative keys for understanding human development and rethinking integral education in educational contexts. This chapter aims to examine, from a psychological perspective, how spirituality, morality, and ethics are articulated and how they can underpin projects of integral education oriented toward humanization, the critical exercise of consciousness, and openness to transcendence. It begins with a conceptual clarification in which spirituality is understood as the search for meaning and self-transcendence, morality as a system of sociocultural norms and practices, and ethics as critical reflection on human action, highlighting its structuring role in the constitution of subjectivity. Subsequently, a theoretical-reflective literature review with a qualitative approach is developed, encompassing different psychological traditions: Viktor Frankl's Logotherapy; contributions from Humanistic and Transpersonal Psychology; existential and phenomenological approaches; the Psychology of Religion; psychoanalytic contributions; cultural and systemic perspectives; Positive Psychology and neuroscientific investigations of spirituality; studies in moral and developmental psychology; Historical-Cultural Psychology; and Liberation Psychology. The analysis indicates that, despite being grounded in diverse epistemological matrices, these approaches converge in recognizing spirituality as a dimension that organizes the experience of meaning, guides moral judgment, and qualifies ethical action, transcending the confessional sphere and assuming psychological, pedagogical, and social relevance. Finally, it is argued that integrating spirituality, ethics, and morality into integral education—in dialogue with Ken Wilber's Integral Psychology and with proposals that incorporate spiritual resources and practices—fosters self-knowledge, the cultivation of values, and the capacity to attribute meaning to existence, contributing to the formation of more critical, responsible, and internally integrated subjects.

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## RESUMO

A espiritualidade, a ética e a moral vêm ganhando relevo como chaves interpretativas para compreender o desenvolvimento humano e repensar a formação integral em contextos educativos. Este capítulo tem por propósito examinar, a partir da psicologia, como espiritualidade, moral e ética se articulam e de que modo podem fundamentar projetos de educação integral voltados à humanização, ao exercício crítico da consciência e à abertura à transcendência. Parte-se de um esclarecimento conceitual em que a espiritualidade é compreendida como busca de sentido e autotranscendência, a moral como sistema de normas e práticas socioculturais e a ética como reflexão crítica sobre o agir humano, destacando-se sua função estruturante na constituição da subjetividade. Em seguida, desenvolve-se uma revisão bibliográfica de caráter teórico-reflexivo e abordagem qualitativa, que percorre diferentes tradições psicológicas: a Logoterapia de Viktor Frankl; as contribuições da Psicologia Humanista e Transpessoal; as leituras existenciais e fenomenológicas; a Psicologia da Religião; os aportes da Psicanálise; as perspectivas culturais e sistêmicas; a Psicologia Positiva e as investigações em neurociências da espiritualidade; os estudos em psicologia moral e do desenvolvimento; a Psicologia Histórico-Cultural e a Psicologia da Libertação. A análise aponta que, apesar de assentadas em matrizes epistemológicas diversas, essas correntes convergem ao reconhecer a espiritualidade como dimensão que organiza a experiência de sentido, orienta o juízo moral e qualifica o agir ético, ultrapassando o âmbito confessional e assumindo relevância psicológica, pedagógica e social. Argumenta-se, por fim, que integrar espiritualidade, ética e moral à educação integral – em diálogo com a Psicologia Integral de Ken Wilber e com propostas que incorporam recursos e práticas espirituais – favorece o autoconhecimento, o cultivo de valores e a capacidade de atribuir significado à existência, contribuindo para a formação de sujeitos mais críticos, responsáveis e interiormente integrados.

**Palavras-chave:** Espiritualidade. Desenvolvimento Moral. Educação Integral. Subjetividade. Psicologia e Educação.

## RESUMEN

La espiritualidad, la ética y la moral han venido adquiriendo relevancia como claves interpretativas para comprender el desarrollo humano y repensar la formación integral en contextos educativos. Este capítulo tiene como propósito examinar, desde la psicología, cómo se articulan la espiritualidad, la moral y la ética, y de qué manera pueden fundamentar proyectos de educación integral orientados a la humanización, al ejercicio crítico de la conciencia y a la apertura a la trascendencia. Se parte de una clarificación conceptual en la que la espiritualidad se comprende como búsqueda de sentido y autotranscendencia, la moral como un sistema de normas y prácticas socioculturales, y la ética como reflexión crítica sobre el actuar humano, destacándose su función estructurante en la constitución de la subjetividad. A continuación, se desarrolla una revisión bibliográfica de carácter teórico-reflexivo y enfoque cualitativo, que recorre distintas tradiciones psicológicas: la Logoterapia de Viktor Frankl; los aportes de la Psicología Humanista y Transpersonal; las lecturas existenciales y fenomenológicas; la Psicología de la Religión; las contribuciones del Psicoanálisis; las perspectivas culturales y sistémicas; la Psicología Positiva y las investigaciones en neurociencias de la espiritualidad; los estudios en psicología moral y del desarrollo; la Psicología Histórico-Cultural y la Psicología de la Liberación. El análisis señala

que, a pesar de asentarse en matrices epistemológicas diversas, estas corrientes convergen en reconocer la espiritualidad como una dimensión que organiza la experiencia de sentido, orienta el juicio moral y cualifica el actuar ético, trascendiendo el ámbito confesional y asumiendo relevancia psicológica, pedagógica y social. Finalmente, se argumenta que integrar la espiritualidad, la ética y la moral en la educación integral—en diálogo con la Psicología Integral de Ken Wilber y con propuestas que incorporan recursos y prácticas espirituales—favorece el autoconocimiento, el cultivo de valores y la capacidad de atribuir significado a la existencia, contribuyendo a la formación de sujetos más críticos, responsables e interiormente integrados.

**Palabras clave:** Espiritualidad. Desarrollo Moral. Educación Integral. Subjetividad. Psicología y Educación.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Spirituality, morality and ethics have been affirmed, in recent decades, as fundamental dimensions to understand human development in its complexity, especially in the fields of psychology and education. In a contemporary scenario marked by crises of meaning, weakening of community ties and growing medicalization of emotional experiences, this discussion gains special importance. In the educational and psychological sphere, these dimensions appear as central axes in the promotion of well-being and mental health, in line with the findings of the epidemiology of religion and spirituality presented by Levin (2022) and with the reflections on solidary coexistence developed by Gerone (2015).

This chapter is based on the premise that discussing spirituality, morals and ethics is an indispensable condition for rethinking human formation and educational processes in an integral perspective. To speak of integral formation implies going beyond the accumulation of technical and cognitive skills, also contemplating the cultivation of ethical, affective and spiritual dispositions that sustain coexistence, responsibility and the meaning of existence. In this horizon, spirituality is understood as an experience of self-transcendence and search for meaning that guides the subject to act responsibly and in solidarity, configuring itself as a symbolic and emotional dimension in which moral and ethical values are rooted.

In the field of psychology, spirituality, morals and ethics have been approached by different theoretical matrices that, although they start from different foundations, converge in recognizing the relevance of these dimensions for the constitution of human subjectivity. The main psychological perspectives treat spirituality as an integrating force, articulated with the search for meaning, the formation of conscience and moral development. The classic and contemporary authors examined in this study offer a consistent overview of the articulation between spirituality, ethics and morals. Although, in most of the psychological schools analyzed, this articulation is not the explicit focus, it appears as a correlated and interpretative theme, present in a transversal way in reflections on subjectivity, behavior and human development.

In view of this, this chapter seeks to answer the following question: how can spirituality, morality and ethics, understood in their psychological interrelations, contribute to a conception of integral education that favors the full and humanized development of the subject? In response to this question, the objective is to analyze, from the perspective of psychology, the interfaces between spirituality, morality and ethics, discussing how such

dimensions can support proposals for integral education guided by humanization, critical awareness and transcendence.

From the methodological point of view, this is a literature review of a theoretical-reflective nature, with a qualitative approach and exploratory character. From the outset, the breadth of the theme and the multiplicity of possible references are recognized; Even so, the cut made allows the construction of a comparative and integrative analysis between different psychological traditions, evidencing their convergences around the integral formation of the human being. This chapter is the result of the activities developed at GEPEES – Study and Research Group on Education, Ethics and Society – and at CCDEB – Science Center for the Development of Basic Education –, both dedicated to reflection on integral education and its interfaces with morals, ethics and spirituality.

## **2 SPIRITUALITY, MORALS AND ETHICS: CONCEPTUAL DELIMITATIONS**

In this article, spirituality is understood as the dimension of the human experience that involves the search for the meaning of life, the feeling of belonging, empathy, joy, solidarity, and the cultivation of values that transcend the material. It is a condition inherent to human nature, prior to and independent of religion, but which can be expressed in it. Spirituality is, therefore, an experience of transcendence and integration, which enables the subject to understand himself, the other and the world, guiding life in an ethical and meaningful way.

Based on this basis, the present analysis, based on Gerone (2025), articulates this understanding with the concepts of morality and ethics. Morality refers to the set of norms, laws and social customs that guide human behavior, configuring itself as a practice and cultural tradition of a collectivity. Ethics is understood as a critical and conscious reflection on acting and living well, aimed at the search for a just life and dignity. Thus, while morality regulates coexistence and establishes limits, ethics guides the meaning and intentionality of actions, allowing human beings to reflect on the why and what for of their acts.

In this way, spirituality confers depth and meaning to human action; ethics offers reflective and evaluative direction; and morality translates such principles into concrete practices of coexistence. Such dimensions, analyzed here together, structure consciousness and guide the integral formation of the subject, the foundation on which an education committed to dignity, freedom and humanization is built.

From this conceptual basis, it is understood that spirituality, morality and ethics are intertwined as formative dimensions of conscience and constitute the basis of an integral

education. This approach is reinforced by Ken Wilber's (2001) Integral Psychology, which proposes a model that seeks to integrate the various dimensions of the human being, including the spiritual, into a single framework, and by authors such as P. Scott Richards and Allen E. Bergin (1997), who advocate the integration of spiritual strategies in psychotherapy.

According to Moll et al. (2017), integral education proposes the full development of the human being in all its dimensions: intellectual, emotional, bodily, social, ethical and spiritual, recognizing the subject in its entirety and overcoming the fragmentation between reason and sensitivity. Educating integrally, therefore, means favoring self-knowledge, the development of values and the ability to attribute meaning to one's own existence, enabling learning to also become a process of inner formation and commitment to the other.

### **3 OVERVIEW OF SPIRITUALITY, ETHICS AND MORALS IN PSYCHOLOGY**

In Logotherapy, Viktor Frankl (1989) postulates spirituality as the expression of the will to meaning and self-transcendence, recognizing it as a healing and formative force of the human being. Humanistic and Transpersonal Psychology, represented by Abraham Maslow (1962; 1964), Carl Rogers (1961) and Stanislav Grof (1988), presents spirituality as a dimension of psychological maturation, associated with self-realization, authenticity and the fullness of existence. Phenomenological Existential Psychology, inspired by Rollo May (1975) and Irvin Yalom (1980), conceives spirituality as an existential experience that emerges from the confrontation with freedom, finitude and ethical commitment to life. The Psychology of Religion, a specific area for the study of spirituality, emerged with the contributions of William James (1902), Gordon Allport (1950) and Ancona-Lopez (2002), who investigated the role of religious and spiritual beliefs, symbols and practices in the constitution of subjectivity and morals, showing how faith and meaning influence ethical behavior and psychic balance. In the thought of Freud (1927) and Jung (1978), although in different ways, dialogues with religiosity emerge: the first interprets it as a projection of human needs for protection, while the second recognizes it as a symbolic expression of the psyche and a path to individuation.

In other approaches, in Cultural and Systemic Psychology, represented by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979), Gregory Bateson (1972) and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1990), spirituality emerges as an ecological and relational phenomenon, manifested in the interactions between individual, culture and community. In Positive Psychology and the Neurosciences of Spirituality, a specific area of studies on the subject, Kenneth Pargament (1997; 2007), Harold Koenig (2012), Martin Seligman (2011) and Lisa Miller (2021),

empirically reveal that spiritual experience is associated with emotional resilience, empathy, hope and mental health, strengthening the ethical dimension and inner balance. Contemporary Moral Psychology, with Jonathan Haidt (2012) and Darcia Narvaez (2014), demonstrates that moral judgments result from the integration between emotion and cognition, indicating that morality is also an expression of empathy and spiritual awareness.

Developmental Psychology, represented by Lawrence Kohlberg (1981), James Fowler (1992), Fritz Oser and Paul Gmünder (1991), shows that faith, values and spirituality evolve throughout life, contributing to the formation of ethical judgments and moral maturation. In Historical-Cultural Psychology, from Lev Vygotsky (1998) and Alexei Leontiev (1978), spirituality is associated with the symbolic and relational production of meanings, mediated by language, culture, and affectivity, a view deepened by contemporary authors such as Brandenburg (1998), Estep Jr. (2002), Olivares Rosado et al. (2022), and Borges & Zambrano (2023). Finally, the Psychology of Liberation, by Ignacio Martín-Baró (1986; 1998; 2011), proposes spirituality as ethics and social commitment, proposing a psychology focused on human liberation, solidarity and the transformation of structures of oppression.

Despite the different theoretical emphases, these perspectives find a common point in recognizing that spirituality is a formative dimension of consciousness, a promoter of meaning, a guide to ethics, and the foundation of morality. This convergence reinforces the dialogue between psychology and education, which can share the importance of the integral development of the human being. Psychology, by investigating the processes of self-knowledge, morality and transcendence, offers scientific and humanistic foundations to understand spirituality as an experience of meaning and psychic balance. Integral education, in turn, translates these understandings into pedagogical practices, aimed at humanization, ethical coexistence and emancipation. Thus, it is observed that, although they start from different references, the various psychological currents are articulated by understanding spirituality as an integrating force of human life, a dimension that unites reason, emotion and transcendence, articulating knowledge and values in ethical and moral formation. This convergence sustains the conception of integral education as a formative project that integrates knowledge and meaning, cognition and affectivity, freedom and responsibility, promoting the full and humanized development of the being.

If Frankl's Logotherapy focuses on the individual search for meaning as the engine of existence, Humanistic and Transpersonal Psychology expands this view by postulating self-transcendence as a stage of broader psychological maturation. Elaborated by Viktor Frankl,

Logotherapy is defined as a theoretical-practical system with regard especially to the search for the meaning of life. For Frankl (1989), there is a self-transcendence in the human being, and this makes the human being seek and have the desire for meaning in life. However, according to the author, currently, in society, this will to meaning is flawed. More and more people turn to us psychiatrists, complaining of feelings of meaninglessness and emptiness, of a sense of futility and absurdity. They are victims of mass neurosis today (Frankl, 1989, p. 82). Frankl also points out that this emptiness of meaning is due to the absence of the value of self-transcendence in society, thus causing neuroses and suffering, and it is the responsibility of mental health professionals, psychotherapists, and psychiatrists to help people heal themselves, through a relationship between the somatic dimension: bodily phenomena and physiology, psychological dimension: instincts, conditionings and cognitions, ethical dimension, which derives from the Greek *nous*, and means spirit (Frankl, 1989).

From the perspective of integral education, this view has formative value. When pedagogical practices recognize that the human being is moved by meaning. To educate, from this perspective, is to help the subject to find meaning for his experiences, to transform suffering into learning and to recognize himself as responsible and free. Frankl's Logotherapy inspires, therefore, a pedagogy of meaning: an education that embraces the spiritual dimension of the human being, helping him to integrate body, mind and spirit. In this approach, knowledge is not an end in itself, but a means to promote dignity, self-knowledge, and transcendence. Integral education, by incorporating Franklian spirituality, becomes a space of humanization where learning is also discovering the purpose of existing and acting responsibly in the face of life and the other.

Humanistic and Transpersonal Psychology, represented by Abraham Maslow (1962, 1964), Carl Rogers (1961) and Stanislav Grof (1988), has consolidated itself as the "third force" of modern psychology by proposing a vision of the human being centered on his self-realization, freedom and potential for transcendence. Maslow (1954; 1962) introduced the notion of self-transcendence, a stage that goes beyond the ego and leads the individual to the search for meaning, altruism and integration with something greater. Rogers (1961), in turn, highlighted the actualizing tendency, an innate drive for growth and authenticity that flourishes in contexts of empathy, acceptance and congruence.

In addition, Grof (1998) expanded these ideas by recognizing that psychological development can include transpersonal states of consciousness, in which the subject



transcends his or her individual identity, favoring experiences of unity, responsibility, and care for life. From this perspective, spirituality emerges and can be understood as a dimension of psychological maturation, expressed in the capacity for empathy, openness and inner integration. Self-realization and self-knowledge are understood as forms of lived spirituality, in which personal growth is articulated with ethics and morality as an expression of human plenitude. This vision, by emphasizing the flourishing of potentialities and ethical commitment to the other, is close to the proposal of integral education, which seeks to form subjects aware of themselves, of the other and of the world.

While Humanistic and Transpersonal Psychology focuses on the potential for self-realization, phenomenological existential psychology deepens the analysis of the fundamental conditions of existence. In it, spirituality emerges as a central dimension of human experience, intimately linked to the awareness of freedom, responsibility and finitude, as defended by May (1975) and Yalom (1980). In this framework, the meaning of life is not given automatically, but is constructed from the confrontation with the "givens" of existence, death, freedom, isolation and lack of meaning. For May (1975; 1989), issues such as anguish, meaning, will and the value of life are structuring elements of the human being, and spirituality can be understood as the inner movement that emerges when the individual becomes aware of these existential dilemmas and chooses to act authentically.

### 3.1 ETHICS AND MATURITY IN THE EXISTENTIAL PERSPECTIVE

Ethics and morals, in this perspective, cease to be external rules to become expressions of the inner coherence of what the subject chooses based on the value he attributes to his own life and the lives of others. In this way, spiritual development is not limited to the acquisition of beliefs or the explicitness of dogmas, but translates into a movement of existential maturation: the subject perceives himself as free, recognizes his responsibility, faces the finitude of life and assumes an ethical posture before the other and the world. This process of internalization and conscious choice of one's own way of being in the world is articulated with educational proposals that aim at integral human formation, in which learning is not reduced to technique or content, but to the construction of meaning, the cultivation of values and the formation of consciousness.

Starting from existential anxieties, the Psychology of Religion offers a specific field to investigate how belief systems and spiritual practices manifest themselves in human behavior. This field constitutes a consolidated area of study on the relationship between

religious and spiritual behavior, beliefs, and experiences. According to Ancona-Lopez (2002), this area investigates how religious and spiritual experience influences attitudes, values, personality and mental health, understanding religiosity as a psychological, symbolic and social phenomenon. The first systematic studies date back to the beginning of the twentieth century, with William James (1902), who analyzed religious and spiritual experiences as inner experiences of meaning and personal transformation. Subsequently, Gordon Allport (1950) distinguished the intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions of religiosity, showing that faith can both promote moral maturity and serve superficial social interests. In this way, the Psychology of Religion broadens the understanding of spirituality as a constitutive dimension of subjectivity and human development, offering subsidies to reflect on ethical formation and integral education. by recognizing that the search for meaning and the cultivation of values are an essential part of the human experience.

The view of the positive contribution of religion is contrary to that of Sigmund Freud. In *The Future of an Illusion*, Freud describes that religion caused neurotic symptoms and psychotic symptoms, and was therefore not healthy as we can see in Krindges (2016). The criticism of religion is not based on discussions about the existence or not of God; nor does it disqualify the importance of the religious phenomenon (that which belongs to the Spirit), but it does pay attention to the psychological value of religious ideas, which, in Freud's context, were associated with human anguish and the need for protection. The neurotic and the believer (the one who believes) need to be saved, they are pertinent aspects of those who need to feel protection. Another association is that the neurotic is saved by obsessive rituals of repetition, which is often found in religious practices. To avoid this, it is necessary to seek the meaning of life with regard to the subject's own responsibility for his life and for the meaning he gives it, not simply by religious means. This will have an ethical and moral unfolding, when the subject assumes and adopts from conscience, as stated by Krindges (2016).

For Gomes and Famelli (2009), within a Jungian view, numerous neuroses are mainly linked to the fact that the religious needs of the soul are no longer taken seriously by psychology. Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961) treats religion as an analytical psychological factor. It is important to point out that Jung was the son of a pastor, so he woke up to religious and symbolic manifestations and how they were represented in the human mind. In this context, Jung considered that religion was associated with a force equivalent to an instinct, a genuine phenomenon in the process of individuation of the subject (Jung, 1978).

In this regard, the phenomenon is understood as something inherent to human nature, it is spirituality, which is expressed in symbols, such as religion. Aware of the symbolic importance, Jung (1978) points out that the human being develops a religious attitude, regardless of creed, as this allows self-knowledge. It is also understood that the *self* can be associated with the idea of spirituality, because, in Jung (1978), it is something existential and belongs to the personality, the soul and the human spirit. The ego, in turn, is formed throughout human development, especially in social relationships. This refers to the construction of religious creeds and dogmas, which occurs in religious cultural socialization or in the religious community. Thus, it is possible to understand that in Jung there is a connection between spirituality and religiosity with the growth and individuality of the person.

The Freudian and Jungian perspectives, although opposed in many aspects, converge on an essential point: both recognize that the spiritual dimension, whether understood as belief, symbolism or search for meaning, exerts an influence on psychic balance and human development, sometimes through conflict, sometimes through integration. While Freud warns of the risks of alienation and the unconscious repetition of religious patterns, in Jung it is possible to elaborate an education aimed at the integration of the psyche, in which the self is recognized and cultivated. Integral education, inspired by these perspectives, proposes a pedagogy that recognizes interiority as a space of formation: a place where rational knowledge meets the symbolic, the emotional and the spiritual. In this sense, spirituality becomes the foundation for ethical and moral development, leading the subject to an expanded awareness of himself, of the other and of life.

The contemporary approaches of Cultural and Systemic Psychology, represented by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979), Gregory Bateson (1972) and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1990), understand human development as an interdependent process between the individual, the environment and culture. From this perspective, spirituality emerges as an ecological and relational phenomenon, manifesting itself in the interactions and systems that structure social life.

Bronfenbrenner (1979), when proposing the Ecological Theory of Human Development, highlighted that personal growth is the result of the dynamic interaction between different contexts, family, school, community and culture, which allows us to understand spirituality as an experience mediated by bonds and belonging. Bateson (1972), by introducing the concept of ecology of the mind, reinforced the idea that mind and environment constitute an integrated system, in which symbolic and communicative

processes are essential for balance and learning. Csikszentmihalyi (1990), in his studies on the flow state, emphasized that human fulfillment and the sense of transcendence arise when the individual finds harmony between attention, purpose, and creative engagement with the world.

Thus, Cultural and Systemic Psychology broadens the understanding of spirituality and morals, situating them as collective and contextual constructions, shaped by shared relationships, practices, and values. This reading shows that ethical and spiritual development emerges in coexistence and cooperation, sustaining the principles of integral education, which values dialogue, empathy and the feeling of belonging as foundations for human and social formation.

Positive Psychology and the Neurosciences of Spirituality have stood out for offering empirical bases for the study of the relationships between spirituality, well-being and mental health. Researchers such as Kenneth Pargament (1997; 2007), Harold Koenig (2012), Martin Seligman (2011), and Lisa Miller (2021) demonstrate, through longitudinal studies and neuropsychological analyses, that spiritual experience is associated with emotional resilience, strengthening bonds, and building life purpose. Pargament (1997) was one of the first to propose theoretical models that explain how spiritual and religious practices help regulate stress and cope with adversity, while Koenig (2012) evidenced, in systematic reviews, that spirituality is positively correlated with indicators of mental health, quality of life, and ethical behavior. Seligman (2011), when developing Positive Psychology, included spirituality among the components of human flourishing, highlighting virtues such as hope and compassion. Gratitude, in particular, has been extensively researched by Robert Emmons (2013), who positions it as a central element for well-being and spirituality, strengthening values and ethical engagement.

The work of Lisa Miller (2021), especially in "The Awakened Brain", deepens the neuroscientific understanding of spirituality. His studies, using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), demonstrate that spirituality is not just a psychological construct, but has distinct neural correlates. Individuals with an active spiritual life exhibit an increase in cortical thickness in brain regions associated with sensory perception and self-reflection, suggesting that spirituality can strengthen neural networks related to consciousness and perception. Miller argues that the human brain is innately primed for spirituality, and that nurturing that ability can lead to greater resilience, well-being, and protection against depression.

These approaches, by integrating science and spirituality, reinforce that moral and ethical principles are not limited to the fulfillment of norms, but express a spiritual awareness in action, oriented towards the care of oneself and the other. This understanding offers important subsidies to integral education, which, by valuing self-knowledge, empathy and the cultivation of values, contributes to the formation of emotionally balanced, socially responsible and spiritually aware subjects.

### 3.2 BIOLOGY, COGNITION, AND SPIRITUALITY

In Psychology and Neuroscience, geneticist Dean Hamer (Divine Heritage – How Genes Can Influence Faith, 2005) proposes that predispositions to spiritual experiences may have biological bases. Hamer identifies the VMAT2 gene as possibly related to self-transcendence, a phenomenon that manifests itself in the individual's tendency to transcend personal interests and seek connection to something greater. Although this hypothesis is still under investigation, it suggests that spiritual experiences may have universal components linked to human biology, reinforcing the notion that spirituality is a recurring characteristic in different cultures.

Complementing this perspective, cognitive anthropologist Pascal Boyer (Religion Explained: The Evolutionary Origins of Religious Thought, 2001) addresses religion as a byproduct of human cognitive evolution. For Boyer (2001), the mind has specialized cognitive modules that interpret natural and social phenomena, attributing to them agency, often supernatural. This mechanism, called agency detection, explains why religious beliefs are both familiar and counterintuitive, making them easier to memorize and disseminate. According to this author, religiosity emerges as an evolutionary adaptation, helping in social cooperation and in the understanding of complex events, while spirituality is related to the subjective experience of meaning and transcendence.

From a neuroscientific point of view, brain imaging studies demonstrate that spiritual practices and religious experiences involve regions such as the prefrontal cortex, the ventral striatum, and limbic structures, areas linked to decision-making, emotional regulation, and reward perception. These data indicate that spirituality and religiosity are processed in integrated brain circuits, which combine cognitive evaluation, motivation and subjective experience. Thus, these dimensions cannot be understood only as cultural phenomena, but as interdependent bio-psycho-social experiences.

These perspectives indicate that spirituality is an intrinsic dimension of the human condition, present both in biological processes and in symbolic and cultural experiences. By recognizing this integration, integral education broadens its formative horizon: it ceases to treat spirituality as a belief or subjective value and begins to understand it as an ontological and cognitive need, linked to the development of consciousness, empathy and emotional self-regulation. In this way, integral education finds support in these contemporary discoveries by understanding that spirituality is a formative dimension of consciousness and learning. To educate spiritually is, therefore, to favor the full development of the human, a being that thinks, feels, acts and recognizes itself as part of a greater whole.

### 3.3 CONTEMPORARY MORAL PSYCHOLOGY

Contemporary Moral Psychology, represented by authors such as Jonathan Haidt (2012) and Darcia Narvaez (2014), has broadened the understanding of the psychological processes that sustain morality, showing that moral judgments involve both cognitive and emotional components. Haidt, in his research on the intuitive foundations of morality, argues that ethical decisions are guided primarily by automatic moral emotions, such as compassion, indignation, and gratitude, which precede rational reflection. This model, known as social intuition theory, shows that morality emerges from human interactions and from the cultural and spiritual influences that shape the values of each society.

In a complementary way, Narvaez (2014) highlights that moral formation is deeply linked to emotional and neurobiological development, being the result of affective experiences lived since childhood. The author proposes that empathy, care, and emotional self-regulation are fundamental for the construction of moral and ethical awareness, reinforcing the importance of the social and educational environment in the cultivation of these skills. These contributions point out that ethics and morals are not reduced to logical reasoning or compliance with norms, but are expressions of a spiritual and relational awareness that develops in coexistence. In this sense, Contemporary Moral Psychology offers important foundations for an integral education aimed at the formation of empathetic, autonomous and ethically responsible subjects, capable of acting with sensitivity and discernment in different social contexts.

In developmental psychology, Lawrence Kohlberg (1981), expanding on Jean Piaget's studies on cognitive development, proposed a theory of moral development in stages, which describes how individuals evolve in their understanding of justice, rights, and duties. For

Kohlberg, morality is progressively constructed, and religion can act as a symbolic and referential context for the subject to interpret norms, values and ethical dilemmas. He noted that faith and religious beliefs often provide cognitive frameworks that guide moral decisions, integrating normative and cognitive dimensions of development.

Complementing this approach, James Fowler (1992) developed the Theory of the Stages of Faith, which describes how religious and spiritual understanding evolves throughout life, following the cognitive, affective and social maturation of the individual. Fowler identifies stages ranging from intuitive and projective faith in childhood, through literal-concrete faith in adolescence, to more symbolic, reflective, and universalizing forms in adulthood. According to Fowler, faith understood as a psychological structure of orientation and meaning develops in interaction with social and cultural experiences, and not only by religious transmission, indicating that religiosity integrates cognitive and existential dimensions of human development. Subsequent investigations by Fritz Oser and Paul Gmünder (1991) delved into the relationship between moral development and religiosity, exploring how ethical values are articulated with spiritual and cultural beliefs. These studies have shown that morality is not constructed in isolation from the religious or spiritual context, but that the interaction between norms, cultural values, and faith contributes to the formation of more complex ethical judgments.

The theories of Kohlberg, Fowler, Oser and Gmünder demonstrate that spirituality is a formative dimension of moral conscience, as it guides the subject in the construction of meanings, empathy and responsibility for their actions. Integral education, in the light of these authors, has the task of favoring the path that involves autonomy, reflection and internalization of values. By recognizing that morality develops in dialogue with spirituality and faith experiences, education is committed to forming subjects capable of understanding the other, living with difference, and acting ethically in plural contexts. To educate integrally is, therefore, to accompany the human being in his moral and spiritual growth, helping him to develop critical thinking, compassionate awareness and ethical commitment to community life.

In Historical-Cultural Psychology, although Vygotsky (1896–1934) did not dedicate himself specifically to religion, his work evidences engagement with cultural and symbolic themes related to spirituality. Research such as those of Brandenburg (1998) and Estep (2002) shows that Vygotsky's concepts allow the analysis of the construction of religious meaning as a social and cultural mediator, showing that spirituality can be formed both from

the concrete experience of the subject and from institutionalized doctrines, always considering symbolic mediation and the social context. The internalization of these experiences follows similar principles to language acquisition and the formation of higher mental functions, allowing the child to develop personal and subjective meaning. The studies by Olivares Rosado et al. (2022), Borges, and Zambrano (2023) highlight that spirituality should be considered as a symbolic, affective, and relational dimension of development, mediated by culture, language, and social bonds. Its inclusion in education contributes to the integral formation of the subject, allowing students to connect experiences, emotions and values, in line with a secular, plural and democratic education.

In the context of integral education, by recognizing that the formation of spiritual meaning occurs in social interactions and affective experiences, the educator is called to promote pedagogical environments that stimulate curiosity, listening, empathy and imagination. From this perspective, learning also becomes an act of transcendence, in which the person reconstructs the world and himself through language and symbolic experience. Valuing the symbolic, the emotional and the relational means recognizing that learning is acquiring knowledge and attributing meaning to existence and coexistence. Spirituality, in this horizon, manifests itself as a process of continuous humanization, a path of dialogue between culture, consciousness and otherness, which makes education a space of plenitude and meaning.

Ignacio Martín-Baró, a social psychologist, philosopher and Jesuit priest, is one of the leading exponents of Latin American thought committed to liberation and social justice. His work constitutes a milestone in the consolidation of Liberation Psychology, a current that proposes an ethical, spiritual and communitarian reading of the human being in its historical and social context (Martín-Baró, 1986; 1998). In his reflections, Martín-Baró articulates faith and political commitment, drawing inspiration from Liberation Theology and authors such as Marx and Paulo Freire. He understands that human liberation is an integral process, which involves both the transformation of social structures and the overcoming of subjective alienation. This spiritual dimension is therefore inseparable from ethics, hope, and social responsibility.

By bringing this perspective to the educational field, spirituality takes on a formative character, guiding education as a process of humanization and ethical engagement with collective life. Integral education, from this point of view, is not reduced to the accumulation of content or technical skills, but involves the cultivation of awareness, empathy and



commitment to the common good. Martín-Baró understands that knowledge must emerge from dialogue and social practice, constituting itself as an act of liberation and transcendence. His proposal of a psychology and education focused on liberation highlights that true human formation occurs when the subject is able to unite reason and affection, criticism and solidarity, faith and transformative action. This view is amplified by theologians such as Miroslav Volf (2011), who, in a dialogue with contemporary pluralism, argues that faith can serve as a resource for reconciliation and social justice, rather than a source of conflict, reinforcing the connection between spirituality and the common good.

#### **4 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The present investigation started from the question: how can spirituality, morality and ethics, understood in their psychological interrelations, contribute to a conception of integral education that promotes the full and humanized development of the subject? The analysis carried out allowed us to recognize that spirituality, ethics and morals occupy a central place in the different currents of psychology and constitute indispensable foundations for human formation and for integral education.

Although each psychological approach has its own epistemological assumptions, the analysis showed significant convergences. Frankl's Logotherapy, Humanistic and Transpersonal Psychology, Phenomenological Existential Psychology, Psychology of Religion, Freud and Jung's psychoanalytic perspectives, Cultural and Systemic Psychology, Positive Psychology and the Neurosciences of Spirituality, Contemporary Moral Psychology, Developmental Psychology, Historical-Cultural Psychology and Liberation Psychology converge in recognizing spirituality as a formative dimension of consciousness, promoter of meaning and guide of moral action. This convergence, identified from different theoretical traditions, reinforces the scientific and humanistic legitimacy of spirituality as an object of psychological study and as a pedagogical foundation.

It is noted that spirituality transcends the religious field and assumes a psychological, ethical and pedagogical character. It is intrinsically related to the construction of meaning, self-knowledge and the ability to act morally towards the other and the world. Thus, spirituality is also revealed as an educational process, in which the subject learns to recognize himself as part of a totality, to cultivate empathy, to seek coherence between thought and action and to exercise freedom responsibly. The contemporary contributions of authors such as Ken Wilber, P. Scott Richards and Allen E. Bergin, Robert Emmons, Lisa Miller, Jeff Levin and

Miroslav Volf, incorporated in this study, reinforce the relevance and relevance of this discussion, evidencing that the integration between spirituality, mental health and human formation is an expanding field in the psychological and educational sciences.

From this understanding, integral education emerges as a privileged space for the development of these human dimensions. To educate integrally means to recognize that knowledge is not restricted to the transmission of contents, but involves the construction of meaning, the cultivation of sensitivity, the exercise of ethics and the experience of spirituality as a practice of humanization. In this horizon, spirituality ceases to be a peripheral aspect and becomes a formative principle: an axis that unifies reason, emotion and transcendence in the search for human plenitude. Psychology, by revealing the processes of self-transcendence, empathy and self-regulation, offers scientific and humanistic foundations to education; This, in turn, translates such foundations into pedagogical practices that promote ethical coexistence, respect for diversity and the emancipation of subjects.

However, important limitations are recognized in this study. First, the breadth of the theme and the multiplicity of possible references required a cut that, although grounded, does not exhaust the diversity of psychological and educational approaches to spirituality, ethics and morals. Second, the selection of authors and currents, although representative, does not include all relevant contributions, especially from non-Western traditions and emerging critical perspectives. Third, the theoretical-reflective character of the study, although necessary for the construction of a conceptual panorama, limits the discussion on the practical implications and concrete challenges of the implementation of spirituality in integral education, especially in secular and plural contexts.

In view of these limitations, we can point out possibilities for further study for future research. First, the conduct of empirical studies that investigate how educators and psychologists understand and integrate spirituality into their practices, identifying challenges, strategies, and results. Another possibility of deepening would be the analysis of concrete experiences of integral education that incorporate the spiritual dimension, evaluating their impacts on the cognitive, emotional, social and ethical development of students. Finally, future studies could focus on the discussion about the ethical and political limits of the inclusion of spirituality in public education, considering the secularity of the State, religious pluralism and the rights of families and students.

It is concluded, therefore, that spirituality and integral education are intertwined as complementary dimensions of the same project: to form conscious, solidary human beings

capable of integrating knowledge and wisdom, technique and sensitivity, freedom and ethical commitment. To integrate spirituality into education is to recognize that the formation of the being is not exhausted in knowledge, but is realized in the encounter between the human and the meaning of life. This study, by mapping the contributions of psychology to this discussion, seeks to contribute to the strengthening of the dialogue between science and humanization, between reason and transcendence, between education and human plenitude.

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