RELIGIOUS BELIEF (NOT NECESSARILY) EMBEDDED IN BASIC TRUST AND RECEPTIVITY

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Abstract
Questioning Erikson (1965, 1968) and Rümke (1949), the first aim of this research was to relate a sense of basic trust to various approaches to religion. A second aim was to explore a religious coping attitude of receptivity, taking a more distant view of the problem situation in question. This study explores whether the relation between basic trust and receptivity on the one hand and religiosity on the other depends on the way people approach religion. Wulff (1991, 1997) identified four approaches to religion, which can be located in a two-dimensional space in the dimensions of inclusion versus exclusion of transcendence and literal versus symbolic. Results from a sample of adults suggest that second naiveté, as a measure of symbolic belief, relates positively to basic trust, whereas orthodoxy as a measure of literal belief did not. Erikson’s and Rümke’s statement depends on the approach to religion.

INTRODUCTION
Belief and faith can be associated with trust. When Hutsebaut (1995) asked people to describe their meaning of the two terms, three layers of meaning emerged. The first was a belief in other people, in a happy ending, in a good solution despite everything. This can be described as Erikson’s concept of basic trust. A second layer was belief in a transcendent reality. A third layer was belief in a personal God. Hutsebaut (1995) concluded that some kind of basic trust seemed to be basic to religious belief in the sense of belief in a transcendent dimension and/or a personal God.

The first aim of the present study was to operationalise these three layers of meaning and to explore the relations between them. We argue, moreover, that an attitude of openness could be situated in between basic trust and a belief in a transcendent dimension. This attitude is what Alma, Pieper and Van Uden (2002) call ‘receptivity’. A second aim of this research was to develop the concept of receptivity further. In sum, we think that basic trust is a necessary condition for receptivity. The latter can lead to openness to, or belief in, a transcendent dimension or a personal God.
Basic trust

The finding of Hutsebaut (1995) can be associated with what Erikson (1965, 1968) and Rümke (1949) claimed about belief and unbelief. Rümke described belief as accepting something to be true and acting on that assumption. No intellectual grounds for this belief have to be given. All of life is based on trusting belief, so everyone must believe in some way. According to Rümke, there is an element of general trust in religious belief. Belief guides us in our development and he concludes, quite radically, that unbelief can be seen as a developmental disorder. Erikson (1965, 1968) related religion to basic trust and basic mistrust, both of which are elements of the first sub-phase of his model of psychosocial development. Basic mistrust (a sense of inner dividedness, of having been deprived or abandoned and of being at odds with oneself and others) assumes metaphysical reality in the form of clearly defined evil. Religion promises to arm and protect people against this evil by ritually restoring a sense of trust in the form of faith. This is a sense of basic trust: a sense of being all right, of trusting both oneself and others. It amounts to a conviction that there is meaning in what one is doing and in the frustrations one has to endure.

Trust, then, becomes the capacity for faith, a vital need which must be grounded in some institutional confirmation. Furthermore, according to Erikson (1968), unbelievers are trying to satisfy their need to feel safe or to feel a deep sense of inner goodness in a technological world. When this need is unsatisfied, it continues to increase a deep sense of basic mistrust. Based on the reasoning of both Erikson and Rümke, it can be stated that religious belief should be rooted in a sense of basic trust. It can be predicted that people who believe will also have a sense of basic trust. By the same token, religious unbelievers should have a sense of basic mistrust. We will argue that this hypothesis will depend on the approach to religion.

Receptivity

Basic trust can be seen as a prerequisite of an attitude of receptive openness. Fortmann (1965) situated receptivity within Maslow’s growth process of self-actualisation. Ideally it means that acting, growing or developing is not really determined by needs, because these biological needs are transcended (Schachtel, 1959). In addition, according to Fortmann (1965), there is considerable inner freedom and not much anxiety. The attitude and perception are receptive, detached, and not distorted by desires.