

SECULAR PSYCHOLOGY: WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

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Although both psychology and religion are concerned with many similar issues (e.g., health and well-being, meaning and purpose) and treat them in some analogous ways (e.g., counseling) they have long been formally separated. This formal separation is due, in part, to the secularization of modern society, which, according to most definitions, means that "religious ideas, practice, and organizations lose their influence in the face of scientific and other knowledge" (McLeish, 1995, p. 668). For many secularists, relying on faith in supernatural beings or processes is tantamount to the primitive superstitions of undeveloped societies (de la Chaumiere, 2004). In these societies, argue the secularists, the practice of religious superstition often subjugates members of the society to an unseen authority and an unjustified dogma in a way that works against the free exercise of thought and results in closed-mindedness and developmental stagnation. For the secularist, notes Gunton (1993), "the worship of God takes place necessarily at the expense of human individuality and freedom" (p. 26). Moreover, because power is typically held and wielded by those few individuals who claim a privileged relationship to supernatural beings and forces—such as priests, shaman, and the like—the common person has little choice but to obey their commands.

Upon consideration of the historical and current repercussions of these conditions, modern day secularists, including secular psychologists, have concluded that religious authorities and ideas ought to be rejected as a basis for society and treated by academics as oppressive and/or irrelevant holdovers from an earlier, more primitive stage of society (de la Chaumiere, 2004). In this sense, secularization stands for more than simply separating scientific disciplines like psychology from religion. It also relegates religion to a second-class status because reli-

gion relies on faith for its truth claims and as a result simply cannot be in the same class as disciplines like psychology that rely on knowledge gained through proper scientific inquiry (Kaplan & Saccuzzo, 2001). "Faith," asserts research psychologist, Gary Heiman (1998), "is the acceptance of the truth of a statement without questions or needing proof" (p. 7). Scientists, on the other hand, he argues, "question and ask for proof" (p. 7), "by obtaining empirical, objective, systematic, and controlled observations that allow them to describe, explain, predict, and control the behavior. Each finding is rigorously evaluated in a skeptical yet open-minded manner, so that an accurate understanding of the laws of behavior can be developed" (p. 11). For the secularist, scientific epistemologies are not only different from, but also superior to religious ones.

At first blush, we may want to applaud the state of affairs secularization seems to have brought about. After all, many scientists and laypeople alike believe that secularization helped bring us out of the dark ages and into the bright glow of the enlightenment by successfully extricating academic disciplines—particularly those in the natural and social sciences—from religious control (Sagan, 1997). But religion has not been altogether left behind in the wake of an evermore scientific and secularized society. A number of psychologists, for example, are religious people who attend church and espouse a religious worldview (at least in their personal spiritual life), as do many of the students in their classes, the participants in their research, and the clients on their couches (Bilgrave & Deluty, 1998; Gallup & Lindsey, 1999; Larsen, 1996). Several psychology departments in America are housed within Universities that are sponsored by churches and guided by mission statements with explicitly religious objectives. Many psychologists also recognize religion as a viable psychological research topic (Emmons, 1999; Spilka, Hood, & Gorsuch, 1985), and for psychologists who are therapists, sensitivity to their own and their clients' religious

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beliefs and practices is not only a necessary component of multicultural awareness but it has also helped therapists develop a number of techniques that can be applied to religious and nonreligious clients alike (Bergin, 1980; D'Souza & Rodrigo, 2004; Genia, 1994). Thus, although secularization has changed the nature and quality of the relationship between psychology and religion it has not undone the relationship altogether. Religion still matters for many people, including psychologists, at some level.

PROBLEMS OF A SECULARIZED PSYCHOLOGY

The four articles in this special issue examine the character and significance of this secularized relationship between psychology and religion by paying special attention to the potentially problematic and easily overlooked consequences secularization has brought about for both psychologists and religious people—including religious psychologists. This first of the four paper set introduces the issue and examines some of the main problems that arise out of the modern secularized relationship between psychology and religion—specifically problems that stem from secular psychologists' failure to recognize and appreciate peoples' religious experiences and religion's ethical resources. In what follows, I will discuss how secular psychologists' efforts to disentangle psychology from religion are inconsistent with the intentions of early secularists who recognized the important and necessary role of religion in academia and never intended for it to be excluded from the marketplace of disciplinary ideas. I will also make the argument that where secular psychologists have tried to exclude religion—as a topic of research, for example—they have only limited their capacity to understand human life and describe the full range of human experience. Finally, I will describe some of the problems that result from secular psychologists' disregard of the spiritual and ethical resources of religion that could help psychologists better recognize and evaluate the moral assumptions and implications of their research, theories, and therapy.

A Departure from Original Secularism

One thing that makes secularism so appealing is its resistance to unexamined claims of authority and unquestioned dogma; and not just religious dogma and authority, but any dogma and authority that curtails our capacity to think freely and critically. Jacoby

(2004) has noted that this central aspect of secularism is especially attractive to an American culture whose identity as a nation is in large degree defined by the rejection of an oppressive monarchy that stood in the way of free thought and action. Indeed, it was in the American colonies and later the United States that one of the earliest and longest lived forms of secularism, known as freethought, really flourished. Freethought is defined as:

the practice of attempting to form one's opinions independently of tradition, authority, established belief, preconception, prejudice or any agenda that might compromise the free exercise of thought. It is pertinent both to religious and to non-religious beliefs. Freethought has at times been narrowly described as entailing an anti-religious perspective, but a free-thinker would deny such a view on the ground that any constraint necessarily impedes the free exercise of thought. Thought cannot be forced to run in specific channels or to maintain a prescribed point of view if thought is to remain free (Wikipedia, 2005).

It is important to note that many early free-thinkers were not anti-religious. Colonial free-thinkers, for example, ran the gamut from atheists to agnostics to devout Christians (Jacoby, 2004). Regardless of their theological differences they shared a common opposition to any set of ideas that constrained one's ability to think freely. Indeed, the primary concern of early American freethinkers and many of their European counterparts was not religion as much as it was the unquestioned and unexamined assertion or acceptance of truth claims made by any discipline or person (Barbour, 1997). In this sense, freethinkers had much in common with the early secularists of the 17th Century, who sought to question all assertions of truth that were not justified by rational argument, but who also never intended for religion to be singled out and excluded from the academic community. Smith (2001) observed that, "science and religion were allies at the beginning" (p. 80), and Pannenberg (1996) has noted that early secularists, "with relatively few exceptions, understood themselves to be devout Christians, and would have been scandalized by the thought that they were depriving Christian truth claims and morality of public influence" (p. 31). For early secularists, argue Smith, Pannenberg, and Barbour, religion played a necessary and important role in the academy, but only insofar as religious ideas, along with philosophical and scientific ideas, could be subjected to critical examination. In secularism's original design, then, religion was not supposed to be cast out of the academic discourse community, though secularists did

seek to expose and reject any faith-like, dominating claims to truth that were accepted without question and critical examination.

Granted, many of the dominating claims to truth in Western culture have come from religion over the course of the last several centuries, and so it is understandable that religion has been the primary discipline criticized by secularists. Moreover, a number of these criticisms have been and continue to be warranted and helpful as they have challenged the taken-for-granted assumptions and practices that contribute to war, oppression, prejudice, terrorism, and blind obedience (de la Chaumiere, 2004). But why single out religion? Shouldn't any unexamined dominating claim to truth in any discipline of study also be undesirable in so far as it interferes with our capacity to think freely and critically? Feyerabend (1988), Kuhn (1970), Polkinghorne, (1983), Slife & Williams (1995), and Slife, Reber, and Richardson (2005), among others, have uncovered a number of the hidden assumptions scientists and psychologists take for granted in their theories, research methods, and practices. In this special issue, Nelson and Slife's articles question the domination, and perhaps even dogmatism, of non-religious assumptions like naturalism in science and psychology. Could not secularists also critically examine these assumptions to see if they constitute the kind of unexamined dominating truth claims that hinder free and critical thinking? Indeed, to be fully secular, in the original sense in which the term was intended, should not secularists, as Pannenberg (1996) suggests, even maintain a healthy suspicion of secularism itself?

My review of the secular literature in the natural and social sciences found few signs of this kind of critical self-reflection, but an overabundance of papers focused solely on exposing and rejecting religious, spiritual, and supernatural truth claims. This predominantly anti-religious bent in the scientific literature is perhaps best exemplified by the earliest and longest published secular magazine, *The Freethinker*, which takes as its grounding principles a very different tack than did freethinkers of the late 18th Century and the early Secularists of the 17th Century. Its founder and editor's original manifesto reveals a singularly anti-religious agenda:

The *Freethinker* is an anti-Christian organ, and must therefore be chiefly aggressive. It will wage relentless war against Superstition in general, and against Christian Superstition in particular. It will do its best to employ the resources of Science, Scholarship, Philosophy and Ethics against the claims of the

Bible as a Divine Revelation; and it will not scruple to employ for the same purpose any weapons of ridicule or sarcasm that may be borrowed from the armoury of Common Sense (Foote, 1881, p. 1).

According to its current editor, Barry Duke (2005), little has changed since Foote announced the magazine's purpose nearly 125 years ago. "The *Freethinker* has remained faithful to Foote's founding principles and has never wavered in its opposition to religion" (para. 4). Similarly anti-religious rhetoric is found in the writings of many contemporary secularists (see, e.g., Vaughn, 1997). Richard Dawkins (2003), for example, admits an open contempt for religion and describes religious beliefs as nothing more than "mind viruses" (p. 117). Although not all secularists are as antagonistic towards religion as Foote, Dukes, and Dawkins, most contemporary secularists do define secularism primarily in terms of its opposition to religious, supernatural beliefs. The Council for Secular Humanism (1980), for example, states in *A secular humanist declaration*: "As secular humanists, we are generally skeptical about supernatural claims... We consider the universe to be a dynamic scene of natural forces that are most effectively understood by scientific inquiry... We find that traditional views of the existence of God either are meaningless, have not yet been demonstrated to be true, or are tyrannically exploitative" (para. 13).

Clearly, the definition and purposes of secularism have changed significantly from its initial meaning and intentions, as Pannenberg (1996) has observed:

The modern emancipation from religion was not the intention but the long-term result of reconstituting society on a foundation other than religious faith. No break with Christianity was intended by those who based public culture on conceptions of human nature rather than religion. In fact, Christian ideas continued to be socially effective, although they were gradually transmogrified into secularized beliefs, and it is not surprising that, in time, many people forgot where the ideas came from in the first place" (p. 33).

In this sense, it is not secularism's original meaning or intention, but its modern manifestation that is decidedly anti-religious and forgetful of secularists' original intentions, which were not to exclude religious ideas at all.

But why should we be concerned with the current of anti-religious secularism that runs through contemporary psychology and other natural and social sciences? Couldn't the departure from original secularism be a good move for psychologists? The remainder of this article attempts to answer these questions by focusing on three noteworthy and

problematic consequences that follow from the modern anti-religious form of secularism and suggest a need to reconsider the decidedly anti-religious secular psychology of today. First, I will argue that modern secularism results in an incomplete psychology of human life because it excludes many religious aspects of life that are widespread and important to many people, including many psychologists. Second, I will contend that where secular psychologists do include religion in their psychological theorizing, research, and therapy it is often transformed, operationalized, and instrumentalized in such a way that the meaning of the religious experience is drastically changed. Finally, I suggest that the anti-religious agenda of modern secularism keeps secular psychologists from availing themselves of religion's significant and potentially useful spiritual and moral resources that may help psychologists better recognize and critically evaluate the ethical assumptions and implications of their theorizing and their research and therapy practices.

An Incomplete Account of Human Experience

In *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, written over 100 years ago, William James (1902/1999) warned very plainly against the exclusion of religious experience from the academic pursuit of human understanding. James argued that, "to describe the world with all the various feelings of the individual pinch of destiny, all the various spiritual attitudes, left out from the description—they being as describable as anything else—would be something like offering a printed bill of fare as the equivalent for a solid meal" (p. 543). James makes at least three points here worth reiterating. The first point is that there are a variety of feelings, attitudes, and experience that are religious in nature and significant to human life. Secondly, he asserts that religious experiences are as describable as any other human experience and cannot therefore be excluded on the grounds that they cannot be studied and understood. Finally, James makes it clear that any description of human life that excludes religious experience will be incomplete and will fail to provide a full and rich understanding of human life.

With regard to the first and third points, data collected from polls and surveys conducted over the last half-century indicate that religious feelings, beliefs, attitudes, and experiences are as prevalent and significant today as they were in James's time. Gallup polls

conducted over the last 50 years indicate that over 95% of Americans believe in a God or higher power, 60% describe religion as very important in their lives, and nearly 70% of Americans are members of a church or synagogue (Gallup & Lindsay, 1999). Though the percentages are significantly smaller among psychologists, many of them also report having religious beliefs, experiences, and practices. Nearly one-half of the members of the American Psychiatric Association and the American Psychological Association report a belief in a God or higher power and one-third of clinical psychologists and two-fifths of psychiatrists agree with the statement, "My whole approach to life is based on my religion" (as reported in Larsen, 1996). Today, as in James's day, many people, including many psychologists, feel, think about, and behave according to their experience of being connected to something greater than themselves that gives their life purpose, meaning, and value.

Religion and religious experiences are also important to a psychological study of human being because, for many people, religious beliefs and practices are interconnected with many of the other topics psychologists study in their research and address in their therapy. Studies conducted over the last half-century suggest a strong relationship between religious feelings, thoughts, and behaviors and other psychological phenomena like prejudice (Allport and Ross, 1967), happiness (Abdel-Khalek, 2006), addiction (Dunn, 2005), mental health (Wilchinsky & Kravetz, 2005), and self-esteem (Krause, 2003). Though psychologists might disagree as to whether religion has a good or bad influence on these other psychological aspects of people (e.g., Larson, 1996; Ellis, 1996), they do agree that religious thoughts, feelings, and behaviors have a significant impact on many people and their psychological well-being. In this sense, religious experiences are not only psychological in their own right—that is, they have a cognitive, affective, and behavioral quality of their own that is worth investigating—but they are also bound up with other psychological phenomena that many psychologists study and agree are important aspects of human being. Consequently, a full psychological understanding of human being would require an examination of people's religious experiences as well as a study of the relationship of those experiences to these other psychological phenomena that psychologists investigate and find important.

Given its abundance and relevance to other psychological phenomena, it is surprising how rarely

religious experience is mentioned in mainstream psychological texts. I recently looked through nine popular introductory psychology texts and found only one reference to religious experience or religion, and that reference was made only for the purpose of justifying religion's exclusion as a psychological topic because it is "beyond the scope of science" (Morris & Maisto, 1999, p. 10). Wulff's (1997) review of the history of the psychology of religion leads him to similarly conclude that religion has never been well received by the mainstream of psychology but has remained firmly situated on the periphery of psychological theorizing and research for the last century.

The rarity with which religion is mentioned in mainstream texts is even more curious when we consider James's claim that religious experience is "as describable as anything else." A number of psychologists, including James himself, have taken up the charge to describe peoples' religious experiences and seem to have done so quite successfully. James's *Varieties* has become the grounding text of this effort and it continues to provide psychologists with theoretical ideas, research topics, and methods of study a century after its publication. Few texts have rivaled the depth and breadth of James's description, his compelling use of biographical narrative, and his rigorous critical evaluation of religious experiences from a psychological perspective. More recently, Allport & Ross (1967), Maslow (1964), and Spilka, Hood, & Gorusch (1985), among others, have utilized a variety of research methods and analysis tools to research religious experiences and the religious motivations and practices that may be predictive of other psychological phenomena. Indeed, there are now several scholarly journals and texts that focus explicitly on religion as a topic of psychological study and there is even an APA division that emphasizes religion as its subject matter (see Emmons, 1999, for a review). Still, even though religion is recognized as a worthwhile topic for psychological study among some psychologists, it has not been accepted into the mainstream canon of the discipline as have other similarly widespread and important topics of human experience (Miller & Thoresen, 2003). Its glaring absence in the 9 introductory texts I reviewed adds support to this point.

One could argue, as do Morris & Maisto (1999) in their introductory psychology text, that the reason why religious experience, unlike other psychological phenomena, has not been included in the main-

stream of psychology, is because it is "beyond the scope of science" (p. 10). However, this hardly seems like a reasonable argument since a number of scientific studies involving religious beliefs, experiences, and practices have been conducted and because many other human phenomena that are just as difficult to study scientifically, if not more so, are included as valid topics of psychology (Haque, 2001; Miller & Thoresen, 2003).

Consider altruism as one example. Altruism is a topic of psychological study that is regularly discussed in psychology texts, especially social psychology texts, but has evaded clear description. Buss (1998) calls altruism "puzzling and problematic" (p. 254), Franzoi (2000) questions its existence, and Batson (1987) argues that the altruism most psychologists investigate is really "pseud altruism" (p. 68), or a disguised form of egoism. Psychologists have had similar difficulties defining, studying, and explaining many other topics of the discipline (Miller & Thoresen, 2003).

Part of the reason for this difficulty is that psychological phenomena like altruism cannot be directly measured and there is no agreed upon measurable behavioral manifestation of them. One cannot simply observe a helpful behavior and conclude that it was altruistic when the behavior could just as likely reflect other emotions and motives, like egoism. A person who jumps into an icy river to rescue a car crash victim may be seeking attention from the media, relief from the guilt she would feel if she didn't try to save the person, or rewards in heaven for a good deed done. She might have an altruistic gene or a sense of duty brought on by the norm of reciprocity just as easily as an altruistic intention. Thus far, no scientific study of altruism has succeeded in disentangling an altruistic motive for helping from these and other egoistic motives and causes, yet altruism continues to be included in the mainstream of psychological topics.

Despite all the ambiguity and difficulty psychologists face in defining and studying altruism and other topics, they still include these phenomena as important psychological topics because they matter to so many people and affect the way they conduct their lives. I found altruism discussed many times in each of the 9 texts I reviewed and it is the topic of several texts and chapters in texts on psychology. In fact, when it comes to altruism and other topics that are not easily studied using the scientific method, psychologists have moved beyond the scope of science to include other nonscientific methods, like case

analyses, autobiographical narratives, and other qualitative studies that have facilitated increased understanding of the topic (see, e.g., Kohn, 1994; Monroe, 1996; and Oliner & Oliner, 1988).

Why haven't similar methodological adjustments been made for religion and religious experience, especially when we consider James's (1902/1999) second point, that these experiences are "as describable as anything else" (p. 543)? Morris and Maisto's (1999) assertion that religion is "beyond the scope of science" makes the method appear more important than the phenomenon of interest and a full understanding of human being. If as James argued, leaving religious experience out of any account of human life, including a psychological account, results in only a partial or incomplete understanding of human thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, shouldn't one expand the scope of methods to include those that are appropriate to a study of religious phenomena? This is precisely what James did in the *Varieties*. He conducted his study of religious experience qualitatively, rather than empirically, because a qualitative method seemed appropriate to the subject matter under investigation. He counted the costs to the religious experience too great to subject it to a scientific study that would replace "private and personal phenomena," which are "realities in the completest sense of the word" with the "hollow," "abstract" generalities of science that "deal only with the symbols of reality" (p. 542). James seemed to realize, having examined his own religious experiences as well as those of others, the importance of fitting the method to the phenomenon, rather than excluding the phenomenon from study.

Given that religion is not any less important to people than other human experiences or any less describable, and since there is precedent for including alternative research methods in studies of other psychological phenomena, like altruism, there seems to be no reasonable justification for the exclusion of religion from mainstream psychology. The only difference between religion and altruism as psychological topics of study, it would seem, is that altruism is not explicitly affiliated with the religious discipline that modern secular psychology opposes and so can be included as a viable psychological topic, even though psychologists have basically failed to explain it. Religion, by contrast, may be as universally important to people as altruism and it may significantly impact the way they live their lives, but because of psychology's secularization, it is typically left out of mainstream texts and remains on the periphery of

general psychology's description of human life. Consequently, as a result of modern secularism's opposition to religion, secular psychology can provide only a limited account of human life that inevitably leaves out the religious beliefs, practices, and experiences that matter to many people and influence other aspects of their psychology in significant ways.

Religion Transformed

As just mentioned, for James it was more important and proper to fit the method to the phenomenon than to exclude the phenomenon altogether or transform the phenomenon to fit the method. His concern with the scientific method, specifically, was that the rich significance of people's personal religious experiences would be replaced with scientific abstractions and symbolic generalities that rob the experience of its meaning. One problem with a secular psychology that is anti-religious and committed to science, then, is that whenever secular psychologists do include religion in their research, they risk transforming the religious phenomena into something other than what they mean to the religious people experiencing them. For example, in the face of science, religious practices and motives often become natural variables to be manipulated, controlled, and predicted. A recently published article by Pascal Boyer (2004), aptly titled "Why is religion natural?" illustrates this point well. Boyer, a cultural anthropologist, asserts that "the lesson of the cognitive study of religion is that religion is rather 'natural' in the sense that it consists of by-products of normal mental functioning. Each of the [mental systems involved in religious experience] is the plausible result of selective pressures on cognitive organization. In other words, these capacities are the outcome of evolution by natural selection" (p. 31).

Religion, in Boyer's (2004) article, becomes a natural and human process in that the qualities and experiences that religious people attribute to God and their relationship with God are now understood to be the qualities and experiences of the naturally evolved human mind. Dr. Nelson will have more to say in his article about the historical developments within science and psychology that have supported this kind of transformation from religious experience to naturalistic explanation. The secularism of today that has come about as a consequence of these historical changes now treats religious experience or spirituality as a human process or property. Daniel Helminiak

(2001) reflects this perspective in his article, *Treating spiritual issues in secular psychotherapy*, when he asserts that “within the human mind there is a self-transcending dimension that can rightly be called *spirit*. Rather than God, Ultimate Consciousness, or some other metaphysical principle, the human spirit would be the primordial basis for talk of spirituality” (p. 166). From the perspective of later secularism, notes Martin Buber (1952/1999), “religion has never been anything but an intra-psycho process whose products are ‘projected’ on a plane in itself fictitious but vested with reality by the soul...man, having attained to clear knowledge, must recognize that every alleged colloquy with the divine was only a soliloquy, or rather a conversation between various strata of the self” (p. 13). Of course, there is no evidence that spirit is human rather than godly; there is only the unproven dominance of modern secularism’s assumption of naturalism—an issue that Slife will discuss in greater detail later in this series.

On the one hand, a naturalistic and humanistic view of religious experience makes it reachable by empirical psychological research because it is now explicitly understood to be an aspect of human thought and behavior rather than some obscure unobservable human/divine interaction. On the other hand, humanizing religion in this way disregards the very core belief of most religious people—that there is a God or higher power with whom people have very real relationships—and religion is no longer religion on its own terms. Should not psychologists want to understand this experience as it is experienced rather than change it? Given that psychologists have conveniently transformed religion into a variable of human thought and behavior that can be studied and manipulated, measured and predicted without any need to ever speak of God, the answer seems to be no.

In addition to using religion as a research variable, modern secular psychologists also use empirically based religious practices, like prayer, as therapeutic techniques that foster mental health without themselves or their clients having to buy into the belief system that supports the practice. Helminiak (2001) puts it this way: “Without taking a theological stand on the validity of petitionary prayer or the occurrence of miracles, the therapist can understand the processes in the human psyche and spirit through which prayer sustains hope and trust and can legitimately affirm prayer as a practice that advances integration of the dynamic human spirit” (p. 175). In this sense,

religious practices are instrumentalized. That is, they become the tools by which therapists help their religious clients integrate the “dynamic human spirit,” (Helminiak, 2001), self-actualize (Maslow, 1964), create health and subjective-well being (Seligman, 2002), or work out “intra-psycho” conflicts (Freud, 1927/1989). Religion becomes a means to the religious individual’s psychological ends in a way that is inconsistent with the religious person’s understanding of religious practices.

The problem is that many people experience their religious life as beginning with and being sustained by personal contact with a divine being who is greater than and different from the human mind. Prayers are not just mental activities for these people, but a connection with God. Religious people experience prayer, as Buber (1952/1999) describes it, “as mutual contact, as the genuinely reciprocal meeting in the fullness of life between one active existence and another” (p. 33). And, according to William James (1902/1999), “Prayer is religion in act; that is, prayer is real religion.... [It is] the very movement itself of the soul, putting itself in a personal relation of contact with the mysterious power of which it feels the presence” (p. 506). If psychologists truly want to study religion as religion and not something else, argued Paul Pruyser (1977) almost thirty years ago, they:

must deal with God; for religion is the establishing, experiencing, and nurturing of a relation between God and man. A psychology of religion without some evaluation of God is a narrow undertaking. Though it is true that the reality of God cannot be asserted or denied by psychology, it is also true that a deliberately agnostic attitude on the part of the scientist cannot do full justice to the nature of the experience of God in believing subjects” (p. 70).

From the perspective of many religious people, prayer and other religious practices do not exist in a theological vacuum that allows them to be divorced from God and people’s relationship to God. Consequently, prayer, as a secular psychotherapeutic technique would have to be something altogether different from religious prayer because it is attached to an anti-religious worldview and belief system. As a result it is no longer what it was before. The scientific study of these religious variables has transformed those variables into something other than what they originally meant to the religious people experiencing them. Speaking of this transformation, Miller and Thoresen (2003) acknowledge that “any scientific operational definition of spirituality is likely to differ

from what a believer means when speaking of the spiritual" (p. 27). "From the believers' perspective," Miller and Thoresen continue, scientific definitions "fall far short of representing or comprehending the real thing, the essence of what is experienced as spirituality... The believer is surely not meaning anything like an underlying neurobiological event or structure when speaking of what is spiritual" (p. 27). Beit-Hallahmi and Argyle (1997) similarly note that "the researcher's gaze is always at odds with the direct experience of the actors; there is a wide gap between the language of the observer and that of the actor. Where the actors see devotion the researcher finds underlying motives and causes which are economic, political, and personal" (p. 12).

Without including God, psychologists are not really studying religion as many religious people experience it and they are using psychotherapeutic techniques that have a completely different meaning and purpose than they would have in a religious context. They are studying and applying something else, something vaguely resembling or shadowing religion that has been altered to fit their secular and scientific worldview, but is not properly religion at all.

The Exclusion of Ethics

As is the case with religion, many secular psychologists' understand ethics in an added-on or extra-disciplinary way. That is, they recognize the need for ethical codes that provide useful guidelines for therapy or research involving animals or human participants, but they do not consider ethics itself to be a properly psychological topic. Morris & Maisto (1999) make this position clear in their introduction to psychology text:

Philosophy and religion deal with such important issues as ethics, human values, aesthetics, and the nature of life—issues that cannot be resolved through research, but rather are matters of faith or logic. Psychology does not seek to compete with or replace philosophy and religion. Psychologists strive to describe and explain human thought and behavior. But questions of what is right or wrong, good or evil, are value judgments, and beyond the scope of science (p. 10).

When psychologists, like Morris & Maisto (1999) assert that important religious and philosophical issues like ethics, aesthetics, human values, and the nature of life are beyond the scope of science and, therefore, also psychology, they place artificial boundaries on psychology, religion, and philosophy by suggesting that they address separate aspects of human experience and therefore do not have overlapping concerns.

On a superficial level, it does appear that psychology simply focuses on a different aspect of human life than does philosophy or religion and does so using a different method. But, if we consider the matter more thoroughly, as have many theoretical and philosophical psychologists (Polkinghorne, 1983; Slife & Williams, 1995; Richardson, Fowers, & Guignon, 1999), it becomes obvious that philosophical and religious issues like ethics, human values, aesthetics, and the nature of life have everything to do with psychology.

Perhaps no text better reveals the artificiality of the ethics boundaries that secular psychologists place between religion and psychology than C. Marshall Lowe's (1976) classic text, *Value orientations in counseling and psychotherapy: The meaning of mental health*, which describes modern secular life as one in which people look to psychologists as "new moral authorities" or "secular priests" who "make moral pronouncements in the name of science in the way the clergy was called upon for religious directives" (pp. 16-17). Following on Lowe's observations, Frank (1978), Richardson (2005), and Cushman (1990) have each pointed out that psychologists' "moral pronouncements", like the psychotherapeutic pronouncement that individual autonomy and self-fulfillment is right and good for people, are always, inescapably ethical. Whether acknowledged or not, psychology's topics of concern, like those of religion and philosophy, include ethical value judgments about what is good or bad, right or wrong (Bergin, 1991). Every one of the 9 introductory texts I reviewed covers topics relating to these issues, including ethics in relation to psychological research, values as they differ across therapeutic orientations, aesthetics in terms of physical beauty, and the nature of life as understood by Darwin's theory of evolution. In each case, implicit assumptions about right and wrong, good and evil, beauty, and the nature of life inform the theories of the discipline.

The problem is that many psychologists are unaware of the ethical assumptions and values that inevitably sneak in to their theories, methods, and practices despite their best efforts to eliminate or minimize them (Richardson, Fowers, & Guignon, 2000). They do not realize that psychology, like the scientific method and other social sciences, is itself a product of philosophy, developed by people with particular ethical, aesthetic, and religious values that influenced their understanding of the nature of life and how best to study it (Bernstein, 1983; Bohman,

1991). Dr. Nelson describes in his article in this issue how early scientists, like Galileo and Newton, developed their science in relation and response to their deeply held and valued religious assumptions and beliefs (see also, Barbour, 1997). Indeed, secularism itself was conceived by religious people for whom “the very distinction between the secular and religious had a Christian basis. That Christian basis was the awareness that the existing social order was imperfect and provisional; it was not yet the kingdom of God” (Pannenberg, 1996, p. 29).

Not unlike their scientific and secular forbears, when psychologists practice their discipline they also promote a particular understanding of the good life, beauty, and truth that is informed by philosophical and religious assumptions and beliefs, though they tend to do so implicitly (MacIntyre, 1984). Consider egoism as one example. A majority of philosophers, including Thomas Hobbes, John Stuart Mill, and Jeremy Bentham have long advocated the position of ethical egoism—the idea that it is good to pursue one’s own interests. This ethical sanction for selfishness was further reinforced by the writings of evolutionary theorists who saw natural selection as a process that favors selfishness. Summarizing this position, Dawkins (1976) asserted that “A human society based simply on the gene’s law of universal ruthless selfishness would be a very nasty society in which to live. But unfortunately, however much we may deplore something, it does not stop it being true” (p. 3). By the time psychology came on the scene, ethical egoism was so dominant an assumption in philosophy, biology, and other disciplines (e.g., economics) that it was not only seen as the right way to live one’s life but as the natural way of life. “Ethical egoism, in short, begets psychological egoism,” argues Kohn (1994), “that is, a common belief that we should restrict ourselves to self-interest, however that belief manifests itself, will ultimately incline us to see this exclusive devotion to self as a fact of life” (p. 196). The consequence is a psychology that almost without exception, and generally without question, assumes that people are naturally egoistic:

Certainly, in the present, ever more biologically disposed state of psychological theorizing, egoism has, for many, reached the point of unquestioned and unarticulated fact. It is the ontological nature of human being to be egoistic. Consequently, human beings, as any other natural beings, are understood to be under the governance of selfish biological forces operating in accord with the immutable laws and principles of natural selection. Egoism simply has become the natural and inevitable foundation of human being (Gantt & Reber, 1999, p. 17).

Because many psychologists do not recognize egoism and other assumptions of their discipline as assumptions that often derive from and always entail ethical commitments, they cannot be considered or examined as to their moral usefulness or desirability.

Unlike psychology, religion has long concerned itself with ethical issues and value judgments and has been at the forefront of examining morals, values, aesthetics, and the nature of life for thousands of years. Over the course of that time religious thinkers have developed many valuable methods for examining ethical assumptions and values (Nelson, 1996; Rae, 1995; Tillich, 1963). Granted, a number of these methods and ideas may not have been critically examined for dominating and unquestioned truth claims that might stand in the way of free and critical thinking, and so should be challenged and examined in the way original secularism suggests. But, as Slife (this issue) shows, the traditional methods of psychological science are similarly guilty of unquestioned truth claims and unexamined theological assumptions. Nevertheless, there are a number of religious methods that have been challenged and carefully evaluated by philosophers and religious thinkers alike, as well as applied to a variety of everyday issues (e.g., hermeneutics). Disregarding religion’s significant moral resources, as modern secular psychologists are prone to do, keeps psychologists from utilizing some of these more effective, critically evaluated methods to examine and negotiate the moral dynamic of therapy, the underlying values of the scientific method, and their implicit understanding of what constitutes a good and healthy existence.

Also, by not dialoging with religion, as well as philosophy, about these issues, secular psychologists will either remain unaware of their values and ethical assumptions, or they will lack the philosophical and religious sophistication necessary to adequately deal with the moral questions of life and to resolve the ethical dilemmas that psychologists inevitably face in therapy, the laboratory, and the classroom. In short, they will either not recognize the need for critical examination of the potentially dominating, unquestioned truth claims of their discipline that secularism requires or they will not be capable of carrying out that examination.

CONCLUSION

Recognizing these and other drawbacks of secularization, some psychologists advocate a form of

integration of psychology and religion. But before any rapprochement can be reached the second-class status of religion will have to be addressed and rectified. Otherwise, religion risks being subsumed or even cannibalized. At this point in our history, religion has been relegated to an inferior discipline in academia and the broader culture and can at best only be the subject matter of psychological study. It cannot be the theory, method, or means by which to understand and treat human life. This means also that many moral and spiritual aspects of life are dismissed or devalued. Finally, it means that religion can have no part in a genuine dialog with psychology because religion is either viewed as subordinate to psychology or it is transformed by psychology into something other than what it is. A true integration of psychology and religion, if possible or desirable at all, would require the fair participation of both disciplines in a genuine dialog about the values, ethics, and worldviews that are mutually ideal for studying the full experience of human beings.

One step secular psychologists might take toward increased dialog and resolving the problems their current anti-religious form of secularism creates is to practice secularism in the way it was originally understood by critically examining all dominating, unexamined assertions of authority and truth, including its own. The purpose of the four papers in this set is to do just that—to examine in historical and contemporary contexts the unquestioned assumptions of secular psychology that are problematic for both religious people and psychologists. If nothing else, this kind of examination would likely result in an increased disciplinary self-awareness and humility in relation to truth as secular psychologists recognize their own dominating assumptions and practices and their unquestioned acceptance of them. It might also level the intellectual playing field as psychologists and practitioners of other disciplines acknowledge their shared difficulties in supporting their truth claims—including difficulties they share with religious people—and engage each other in more inclusive and productive dialog with those disciplines that share an interest in understanding the physical and human world.

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