
PSYCHOLOGY AND RELIGION: HERMENEUTIC REFLECTIONS

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Brent Slife (this issue) contends that classic social science methods quite naively and rather presumptuously have claimed to be value-neutral when, in fact, they are anything but. First, they tend to presuppose a tendentious philosophical *naturalism* and *objectivism* that paints a picture of the world and its workings having little if any place in it for spiritual realities or religious meanings, except possibly as whimsical or even dysfunctional fantasies that need not be taken seriously. Second, they seem uncritically to presuppose certain moral ideals about how we ought to regard this world and each other and how we should properly relate to them (Reber, this issue).

Clearly, those of us who take religious meanings and spiritual life seriously stand in need of a revised ontology of the human realm and the wider world. This is especially true for those of us who are committed in our work to drawing on the best insights from both religion and psychology. For us, the prevailing naturalistic outlook affords us no fruitful way of interrelating ideas from these two fields. As serious and open-minded investigators, we probably would wish to incorporate psychological theory or research findings in our pursuit of understanding. However, it simply is not possible to do this in any straightforward manner. Such theory and findings are significantly colored by rarely acknowledged and examined assumptions about fundamental matters, like the nature of the world, knowledge, and the good life. We can't accurately or honestly ponder psychological notions or explanations until we have teased out these assumptions, detected what we can of their influence, and begun critically to assess them. Moreover, when we do this, we find that rather than aiding us in blending perspectives from religion and psychology, the naturalist outlook that

pervades much psychology either blots out religious realities altogether or distorts them by reducing them largely to playing a role in a drama of a fundamentally alien sort.

For example, the tacit naturalism of much social science views the "objective" world as a vast collection of material objects and forces to be mapped by empirical observation or explained by causal models or laws. Some versions of naturalism contend that absolutely nothing other than matter exists. However, as Huston Smith (1989) puts it, it is exceptionally hard to expunge mind, will, and spirit entirely from our picture of the world because "our thoughts and feelings are, on the one hand, too conspicuous to be denied, and on the other hand too different from what we experience matter to be to be [entirely] reduced to it" (p. 197). The solution usually is to allow for the reality of a separate mental or "subjective" sphere in which individuals experience the impact of outward events and harbor various attitudes and feelings toward them. But any such subjective realm remains a metaphysically subordinate and morally denuded one. The naturalistic outlook affords few conceptual resources for construing relationships among events in this realm, or between them and the outer world, except as links modeled on what are taken to be efficient causal connections in the "objective" world. Moreover, in a naturalistic social science, any subjective elements can enter into our accounts only if they are indexed or "operationally defined" by things such as physical movements or even marks on paper and pencil tests that have unmistakable existence in the material realm (Taylor, 1985a). This gives the greater accent of reality as well as causal predominance to brute material forces. In this view, for example, scientific knowledge is about facts, not values, and values, including moral and spiritual values, are viewed as only subjective, preferential sentiments about objective states of affairs—ones very likely shaped willy-nilly by impersonal physical or social forces. In Smith's words, "naturalism [is] the view that (a)

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nothing that lacks a material component exists, and (b) in what does exist the physical component has the final say" (p. 197).

A HERMENEUTIC ALTERNATIVE

In this article, I would like to indicate some ways that hermeneutic philosophy (Heidegger, 1962; Gadamer, 1989; Guignon, 1983; Taylor, 1989), sometimes termed ontological hermeneutics, might contribute to a more plausible picture of the world and the place of humans in it that would be open to religious claims and meanings. Also, I will suggest a few key ways in which such an ontology calls for a revised understanding of the aims and methods of the social sciences, including psychology. Finally, I suggest that a hermeneutic perspective gives us insights into what might be the most fruitful kind of interaction between psychology and religion. Some view them as essentially in conflict, of course, while others avoid such conflict by sealing them off from another in separate spheres. Neither approach is very helpful, obviously, to religiously inclined psychologists who want to draw in their work on possibly valid ideas from each realm. At this point, the alternative of seeking an intellectually and spiritually sound "integration" of religion and psychology beckons. From a hermeneutic standpoint, much of the spirit of this approach seems right on target, but still the idea or theory of integrating these fields seems flawed in important ways that call for rethinking the nature of their interchange.

The discipline called hermeneutics has been thriving for more than 300 years. Hermeneutics has played an increasingly influential role in what Polkinghorne (1983) calls the "long debate" in modern times over the proper mode of inquiry in the human sciences. Should they emulate the methods of the natural sciences or develop their own distinctive approach? Are human beings different in kind from objects in the natural world: Are they requiring such a different approach? Hermeneutics as a self-conscious procedure arose in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, concerned mainly with the interpretation of the bible and classic texts. Even though these works were consulted for important insights or truths concerning human life, reflective interpretation was often felt to be required because, as the modern world dawned, they seemed to be products of quite different and some-

what alien cultures of the past. Also, the Reformation had, in many quarters, undermined the Church's exclusive authority to interpret the Bible. Friedrich Schliermacher (1768-1834) broadened the scope of hermeneutics and clarified the role of the famous "hermeneutic circle," according to which our understanding of any *part* of a text, work of art, or individual life is shaped by our initial or assumed understanding of the *whole* of it, at the same time that our understanding of that whole is continually revised by our encounter with and modified understanding of its parts.

Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) expanded Schliermacher's ideas into a general theory of interpretation for the human sciences. A strictly naturalistic view of inquiry in the human sciences began to harden with the publication of John Stuart Mill's influential *System of Logic* in 1843, which presented a philosophical and logical foundation for empiricism and advocated the use of natural science methods in the study of human phenomenon as the only cure for what Mill thought of as the "backward state of the moral sciences." However, Dilthey argued forcefully that we simply do not understand our objects in the "human studies" or "human sciences" (*Geisteswissenschaften*) by subsuming them under general laws. "We explain nature; man we must understand" (Dilthey, 1958, p. 144). Rather, in these disciplines we need "to forge new models for the interpretation of human phenomena ... derived from the character of lived experience itself ... to be based on categories of 'meaning' instead of 'power,' history instead of mathematics" (Palmer, 1969, p. 103).¹ In these fields, according to Dilthey, we immediately grasp the meaning or import of a work of art or historical event in terms of categories of significance, purpose, or value, through a combined exercise of all our powers of cognitive reflection, empathy, and moral imagination.

¹He wrote, evocatively, that "in the blood of the 'knowing subject' constructed by Locke, Hume, and Kant, runs no real blood." Some of us, however, are leery of too sharply dichotomizing (1) full-blooded approaches to understanding lived human experience and (2) experimental or correlational research in social science, and then favoring one exclusively over the other (Richardson, Fowers, & Guignon, 1999). Correlational and experimental methods may be useful, even uniquely valuable, in detecting important patterns in human experience or behavior. The proper employment of such quantitative methods by itself in no way requires a social scientist to limit knowledge or understanding to mathematically formulated relationships among relatively decontextualized variables.

A few years ago, the noted anthropologist Clifford Gertz (1973) said something quite similar to Dilthey view: "Believing with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning. It is explication I am after, construing social expressions on their surface enigmatical" (p. 5). But Dilthey may have struggled with the implications of his ideas more fully than many contemporary advocates of a phenomenological or interpretive approach to human science inquiry. He appreciated that in the case of an individual life, one's understanding of one's own life as a whole shapes the meaning of particular experiences one undergoes, which in turn changes forever the understanding of one's life as a whole. Also, in the case of endeavoring to understand texts, others, or the past, one's understanding of the wider context of works or events conditions the meaning they have for us, just as that meaning shapes our view of what their context is all about. In other words, our interpretations of ourselves and events or others are inextricably embedded in a flux of "life relations," as he called it, leaving us with difficult questions about the *nature* of the interpretations we make of human events and, especially, how we can in any sense *validate* or *justify* them. As we draw closer to capturing the fullness of lived experience, we seem to risk becoming engulfed in a destructive relativism in which our knowledge claims lack any defensible basis and seem to amount to little more than blind, warring opinions.

There is a profound tension in Dilthey's thought between a concern for irreducible lived experience and meaningfulness and a search for objective knowledge of social life, between scientism and relativism, that I would suggest continues, unabated and generally unresolved, down to the present day. He wanted to escape scientism, speculative philosophy (represented especially by Hegel), and a slide into relativism. For a time, Dilthey had in mind constructing a "critique of historical reason" that would rescue human studies from arbitrariness and relativism in the same way that Kant's famous "critique of pure reason" was supposed to guarantee the objectivity and certainty of the findings of natural sciences like physics. But he never came close to accomplishing this task to his own or anyone else's satisfaction.

At the start of the twentieth century, a major transformation in hermeneutic thought took place, reflecting the growing

awareness that devising rules for interpreting humans is impossible and that the whole fascination with method is a by-product of the very scientism being called in question. The result was a shift from seeing hermeneutics as primarily epistemological or methodological, where the aim is developing an art or technique of interpretation, to today's ontological hermeneutics, which aims to clarify the being of the entities that interpret and understand, namely, ourselves (Richardson, Fowers, & Guignon, 1999).

An essential part of this transformation involves becoming clear that the aspiration to pristine, ahistorical standards for understanding, or truly an Archimedean point for discriminating knowledge from illusion and error, is not only unattainable but reflects, in part, questionable and, in a moral or spiritual sense, somewhat inauthentic motives or goals for humans. I hope to suggest some possible reasons for this claim and provide glimpses of an ontological hermeneutic alternative to scientism, dogmatism, and relativism in the remainder of this article, in line with the effort by some leading thinkers and theologians today to "steer a course between Enlightenment foundationalism and postmodern relativism" (Browning, 2004).

STRANGERS IN A STRANGE LAND

I find that critics of the kind of uncritically assumed naturalism and objectivism that underpins mainstream psychology—with whom I usually agree, for the most part—often have little or nothing to say about why so many intelligent and reasonably well-motivated social scientists adopt this approach to inquiry and why they persistently cling to it the face of questionable results and many objections that have been raised within and without the social science arena over the years (Bernstein, 1976; Richardson, et al., 1999; Root, 1993). Hermeneutic thought comes to our aid in making more sense of this situation.

To begin with, Taylor (1989, p. 34) stresses the central place occupied in the natural sciences by the exercise of a special capacity for abstraction that we might call "objectification." To adopt an objectifying stance toward things is to ignore or abstract away from most of the meanings of and relationships among events, experiences, and actions that show up in our ordinary experience of life (objectivism). Such abstraction and objectification allows us to discern and formulate context-free, universally applicable causal laws and models (naturalism). It is true that, over the years, some of us have learned to question the detached, somewhat depersonalizing, "spectator"

view of knowing² this approach entails and the one-sided orientation toward mastery and control it inscribes in practical life (Habermas, 1991). As a result of this questioning, we may conclude that there is no good reason, especially in the humanities and human sciences, to deny the validity of other kinds of knowledge or understanding, reflecting different ways of being emotionally and ethically immersed in the world. However, the stunning achievements of the natural sciences and the enormous practical benefits they have conferred have impressed and even awed many people in modern times. Science and its accomplishments seem to rise above the petty bickering and violent discord of the human race and to deliver the goods reliably in a unprecedented, tangible way. It is no wonder they have seemed to represent the very prototype for knowing and practice to so many for so long.

Charles Taylor (1989; 1993; 1995) argues that this way of knowing via abstraction and objectification is but one manifestation of a certain picture of the human self or agent as disengaged, disembodied, and atomistic or, in his words, "punctual," that shows up in many guises in modern thought and culture (1995, p. 7 ff.). This "punctual self" is "distinguished... from [the] natural and social worlds, so that [its] identity is no longer to be defined in terms of what lies outside ... in these worlds." Ideally, the modern self is ready to freely and rationally treat both itself and the outside world instrumentally, and to alter both in ways that better secure individual and social well-being as we conceive of it.³ Most interestingly, Taylor suggests that the notion of a punctual self confronting a natural and social world to which it has no essential ties is as much a moral as a scientific ideal. It "connects with ... central moral and spiritual ideas of the modern age," including, the ideal of "freedom as self-autonomy ... to be self-responsible, to rely on one's [own] judgment, to find one's purpose in oneself."

If Taylor is right, naturalism and objectivism are inherently linked to the conception of a punctual self and seem to be animated at their core not by just sci-

entific or epistemological aspirations, but a certain social and moral vision, as well. They incorporate and seek to advance the sort of "self-contained individualism" (Cushman, 1990) or "liberal individualism" (Sullivan, 1986) that many cultural critics and philosophical psychologists (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swindler, & Tipton, 1985; Cushman, 1990; Richardson, et al., 1999; Sandel, 1996) argue pervades modern culture and, while it may have helped to purchase valuable freedoms, does so at the price of much alienation. I would argue that this picture of things is also a "disguised ideology" and is ethically richer than critics of naturalism often appreciate (Richardson, 2005). In our cultural imagination, these punctual or self-encapsulated selves are not purely detached knowers and manipulative doers but also, at least implicitly, are conceived of as individuals imbued with human dignity, equality, and rights. In our world, even the starkest scientific materialism is colored to some extent by these (worthy) modern liberal values. The cornerstone of this ethical scheme has been called "the priority of the right over the good" (Sandel, 1996). We are free to define the good life for ourselves so long as we respect the right of others to do the same.

However, it is doubtful that this ontology coupled with a moral vision is fully adequate or is capable of supporting even its own best ideals over the long run. Confusedly, the notion of the priority of the right over the good seems to derive from a prior vision of its own of the good society and good life—one of free and empowered individuals, respecting one another's rights and going about their own business. These commitments are rather blithely assumed, not defended, and they do not obviously describe the best kind of life. Moreover, as Philip Rieff (1966) put it pithily, this particular ethical vision seems to leave us in the dilemma of "being freed to choose and then having no choice worth making" (p. 93).⁴ In the opinion of many thoughtful

²Dennet (1987, p. 5) remarks that "the objective, third person world of physical sciences" is "the orthodox choice today in the English-speaking world." Dennett adopts this outlook on the world, while hermeneutics insists it is derivative, not fundamental.

³Nelson (this issue) shows how this emphasis on power, instrumentalism, and control, as well as the ideal of value-neutrality that seems bound up with it, goes back to Francis Bacon.

⁴It seems worth revisiting the whole passage in *The Triumph of the Therapeutic* in which Rieff elaborates on this point. It says so many important things, so well, on the topic at hand. "When psychoanalysis frees a patient from the tyranny of his inner compulsions, it gives [him or her] a power to choose that is not otherwise [theirs]. Thus, the aim of psychoanalysis is the aim of science—power; in this case a transformative technology of the inner life. Where science is, there technology will be. This ultimate technology aims at increasing the range of choice. Yet, without a parallel range of god-terms from which choices may be derived and ordered, choice itself may become a matter of indifference or [one] will become a glutton, choosing everything.

critics from Tocqueville in the mid-19th century down to the present day, those ideals by themselves engender a social order that is too “thin” to ensure even their own survival.⁵ According to Michael Sandel (1996), the public philosophy by which we live, defined by these values, “cannot secure the liberty it promises, because it cannot inspire the sense of community and civic engagement that liberty requires” (p. 6). Sandel also remarks that it almost seems as if in American society, as it has evolved over the half century or so, “the triumph of autonomy in matters of religion, speech, and sexual morality were a kind of consolation for the loss of agency in an economic and political order increasingly governed by vast structures of power” (p. 118). In Sandel’s view, this happens because valuable rights and protections may have been procured for largely self-encapsulated individuals at the price of their no longer being able to find solidarity with others in hard-nosed dialogue about the good life and the good society.

Implicit in this modern, liberal individualist moral outlook is a sharp dichotomy between autonomy and oppression. Either individuals derive their desires and purposes entirely out of themselves or they must be, consciously or unconsciously, subordinating their wishes and choices to dominating individuals or groups (Guignon, 2004). The prevalence of this kind of either/or thinking provides another reason why social scientists and others cling to their naturalistic premises. Autonomy and personal freedom are a blessing, at least if we do not absolutize them at the expense of other values and virtues (or perhaps make an idol of them). But in the modern individualist outlook, it is hard to question naturalism and objectivism without great apprehension that we may be compromising legiti-

There is no feeling more desperate than that of being free to choose, and yet without the specific compulsion of being chosen; one is chosen. This is one way of stating the difference between gods and [humans]. Gods choose; [humans] are chosen. What [humans] lose when they become as free as gods is precisely the sense of being chosen, which encourages them, in their gratitude, to take their subsequent choices seriously. Put another way, the means: Freedom does not exist without responsibility (p. 93).

⁵For example the the political philosopher Ronald Beiner (1992) contends that the “central purpose of a society, understood as a moral community, is not the maximization of autonomy ... but the cultivation of ... a variety of excellences, moral and intellectual” (pp. 51-52). Beiner also comments that it is “not that liberal autonomy is a bad thing, but that without the ‘thick’ attachments provided by the kind of ethos that builds meaningful character, free choice ... hardly seems worth the bother” (p. 37).

mate autonomy in favor of self-subordination to questionable authorities or ideals. This outlook intimidates us into fearing or believing that someone may be trying to intimidate us! Thus, it can deter us from not questioning its interpretation of autonomy in a way that resembles the kind of arbitrary authority it abhors.

According to a naturalistic outlook, with its sharp division between subjective and objective spheres, mental or inner processes are construed mainly as beliefs or expectations about causal dependencies among events in the world or as affective (positive or negative) reactions to them. This results in a view of human action as largely instrumental maneuvering (Richardson & Bishop, 2002) among quite separate, fundamentally self-interested individuals. Such individuals may elect to cooperate rather than clash or compete with one another, but that will tend to be limited to temporary collaboration for purposes of ultimately individual satisfaction or gain. It should be obvious that assumptions about inherent self-interest and action as essentially instrumental in character are built in the conceptual ground work of many theories of personality and psychotherapy as diverse as the Freudian metapsychology and cognitive-behavioral therapy, for example (Richardson and Zeddies, 2000). Even if these theories stress self-realization or self-actualization more than instrumental prowess per se, such as client-centered therapy and Kohut’s Self Psychology, they still view mature individuals as drawing their purposes largely out of themselves and having mainly arms-length, contractual ties with others.

Ontologies have consequences. For example, some theologians worry about the phenomenal interest these days in “spiritual” beliefs and practices of all sorts. Does it reflect a “thirst for God: (in the language of Bernard of Clairveaux) in the best sense, L. Gregory Jones (1997) wonders, or does it manifest a kind of “consumer spirituality” that reflects a search for a “new commodity” than can somehow “satisfy the desires other commodities have failed to quench” (pp. 3-4). To Jones it seems telling that the habits of thought and practice associated with some contemporary forms of “spirituality” have, “if anything, little to do with morality, social institutions, or political power,” and it seems that “what really matters” for them “are the inner experiences of isolated individuals, cultivated and evaluated largely by those individuals” (p. 21). Well, how could it be otherwise in an ontology of encapsulated selves adrift in a

world of objects?

PHILOSOPHICAL HERMENEUTICS

There are many humanistic or existential-phenomenological viewpoints that humanize our picture of the world, stress meaning over mastery, and give greater weight to intimacy and communion with others as part of a fulfilled life. But they may not travel as far as one might think from naturalism's picture of individualistic pursuits in an alien or indifferent world. It is typically not clear on what *basis* personal meaning and social ties are to be chosen other than the "inner experiences of isolated individuals, cultivated and evaluated largely by those individuals." In other words, they have no reality or authority beyond naturalism's punctual self or the sphere of the subject. For example, the late Stephen Mitchell (1992), a leading "relational" psychoanalytic theorist, wrote that "psychoanalysts can no longer offer themselves in good faith as purveyors of wisdom or experts in the structure of the human mind, but rather as experts in the creative exploration of the contours and textures of individual subjectivity and the struggle for personal meaning" (p. 285). It is murky at best what place moral ideals of loyalty, forgiveness, or sacrifice, important to many religious (and nonreligious) people, could have in a life focused so intensely on individual subjectivity. Certainly, the self-emptying love of Christ or Buddhist ideal of an "empty self" make little sense in such an "expressive individualist" (Bellah, et al., 1985) account of the human enterprise.

I assume that Mitchell is an example of someone who takes what Slife (this issue) calls a "nonreductive, interpretive" approach to understanding human phenomena, one that is helpful so far as it goes but that still partakes of what Slife terms an inflexible "secularism," also analyzed in Reber (this issue), that tends to prevent taking the possible reality of God seriously. Elsewhere, we have suggested (Richardson, et al., 1999, p. 179 ff.) that many qualitative and interpretive methods in psychology have a similar feature. Such "descriptivist" approaches seek to describe the personal and social meanings that structure the human life world on its own terms rather than explain them (or explain them away) in a reductionist manner, by claiming to show, for example, that they are "really" the product of material forces operating behind the scenes or the inevitable result of fixed laws of behavior. However, one major diffi-

culty with this family of anti-positivist, descriptive approaches is that they have no way to explain what is a good or adequate description except by asserting that it must be an "objective" one! Thus, they retain a key element of the positivism against which they struggle. They depend upon attaining a facsimile of the utterly detached standpoint of the punctual self, which oddly alienates them from the rich meanings they seek to portray. A wide gulf between supposedly "subjective" and "objective" realms is still much in evidence in these approaches to inquiry (Bernstein, 1976, pp. 115 ff.).⁶ They override the extensive evidence that all such "descriptions" are highly selective and represent, in part, interpretations of events that indelibly reflect the commitments and ideals of the social scientist and her community (Gadamer, 1989; Warnke, 1987; Westerman, 2004).

If by abandoning an implacable "objectivism" this critique seems necessarily to fall into arbitrariness or "relativism," I invite you to think again (Bernstein, 1983). Our experience, reflection, and judgment, tested through honest dialogue with other points of view, leaves us with certain perceptions and convictions that we take quite seriously and find to be true at any given moment. We really can't do otherwise, we can't escape working assumptions and value commitments of one kind or another. I would contend that in a modern context we have to acknowledge that our understanding is always perspectival and limited and is bound to alter as we move toward greater understanding, down a pathway that typically is marked by both harrowing and happy surprises. But that means only that there is no final or certain truth, not that there is no truth at all. To claim that all moral or spiritual beliefs, our own and others', are utterly relative or without support—apart from announcing a grand belief that seems inexplicably to escape that condition—is to pretend once again to the sovereign status of the punctual self or a version of the modern "view from nowhere." Perhaps the fact that many naturalists, religious fundamentalists, and postmodernists, their enormous differences notwithstanding, share similar ambitions to a god's-eye point of view of this type is evidence for the temptation in modern times

⁶Michael Westerman (2004) discusses how such sharp gulfs between personal and world are laid down by a "Cartesian framework" which functions as a kind of rarely questioned "received framework" that guides most social science inquiry and greatly limits our ability to grasp the nature and significance of important human phenomena.

to assert an epistemology that extravagantly exceeds human limitations (Richardson, 2003).

It seems to me that theologians like Borg (1987, 1997) and Smith (1989), among others, have made significant strides toward getting modern naturalism in perspective. For example, Borg (1987) argues, "Those of us socialized in the modern world have grown up in a culture with a largely secularized and one-dimensional understanding of reality." Although "remnants of a religious view remain," we are thoroughly inculcated in the belief that "what is real is essentially the material ... ultimately made up of tiny bits and pieces of 'stuff', and all operating in accord with the laws of cause and effect" (p. 32).⁷ However, the "modern view is but one of a large number of humanly constructed maps of reality ... no more absolute than any of the previous maps ... and like its predecessors will be superseded." Indeed, today both experience and reflection point out ways that "reality behaves in strange ways stretch the popular worldview beyond its limits" (p. 34). Thus, in Borg's (1997, p. 26 ff.) view, there is no good reason not to take seriously the notion of a God or "Spirit" that both pervades and transcends the ordinary world.

Smith (1989) examines in detail the many inadequacies and inconsistencies of this taken-for-granted modern outlook, which he terms the "modern western mind set." He also takes his analysis a level deeper with the idea that all "world views," including this one, "arise from epistemologies which in turn are generated by the motivations that control them" (p. 197). Thus, modern "naturalism" arises from an epistemology of "empiricism" that "proceeds through sense knowledge, and that which connects with our senses is matter" (*ibid.*). That epistemology is generated by the modern proclivity that "aims relentlessly at control" (p. 200), to maximize instrumental control over natural and human realities, in part for what is thought to be knowledge for its own sake, but mainly to engineer these realities for human betterment. (I would add that this motivation typically includes advancing the liberal individualist values of human rights, dignity, and equality discussed earlier in this article.) Moreover, Smith points out, when we adopt the "results of controlled experiments" as our standard for knowledge, we "rule out the possibility of transcendence in principle" (*ibid.*).

Theological critiques of this sort open the door wide to a very different kind of metaphysical vision and sensibility. However, they provide us with only a little guidance when it comes to rethinking the kind of theory and purported knowledge of human society and psychology that the social sciences churn out continuously in great volume. Smith's idea that empiricism and naturalism are anchored in an overweening aspiration to instrumental control links up helpfully with the idea discussed above of naturalism and objectivism being underpinned by a "disguised ideology" of individualism and instrumentalism. But now we need plausible, more specific conceptions of human motivation, dynamics, and behavior in terms of which to begin to sort out the wheat from the chaff among standard psychological accounts of human activity—accounts which most often cast it in terms of assumptions that humans are profoundly separate, deeply self-interested, essentially aim at mastery or self-realization, and operate in a moral universe populated by few substantive moral meanings other than respect for human autonomy and rights (Slife, Reber, and Richardson, 2005).

I would contend that a hermeneutic ontology, however, outlines the human situation in a way that provides with at least a sketch of a needed, alternative conception of the human realm, one that is both more plausible in its own right than conventional naturalism and distinctly more hospitable to the moral ideals and spiritual realities spoken of by the world's great religious traditions. In this hermeneutic account, humans are "self-interpreting beings" (Taylor, 1989). Individual lives are "always 'thrown' into a familiar life-world from which they draw their possibilities of self-interpretation. Their life stories only make sense against the backdrop of possible storylines opened by our historical culture" (Guignon, 1989, p. 109). These lives are woven into the fabric of a holistic life-world where there are no sharp divisions between the person or mind on one side and the world, body, and others on the other side. The meanings we live by permeate and shape the practices and institutions of the "outer" world much as they belong to our "inner" life.⁸ There is cer-

⁷Borg adds, Even most "biblical scholars work within the modern academy, whose canons of respectability include a methodology that assumes the truthfulness of the modern worldview" (p. 33).

⁸Of course, these remarks about a holistic life world represent only the bare beginnings of an alternative ontology. But they might comprise an entering wedge for efforts to break out of modern subjectivism. Elsewhere, in this vein, we have argued that "if we take off the scientific spectacles that govern our ways of seeing things in high-level reflection, and think about how we actually experience things in everyday life, it is obvious that values

tainly a place for scientific knowing and an instrumental stance toward the world. But in this view there is a more fundamental, ultimately practical or moral kind of understanding⁹ that humans always and everywhere hammer out together, as they seek to understand the meaning for them of events, texts, works of art, social reality, and the actions of others, so that they can relate to them appropriately along the story-lines of their living.

This kind of understanding concerns more the worth of ends than the efficacy of means. In this view, a basic fact about humans, in Heidegger's (1962, p. 228) words, is that they "care" about whether their lives make sense and what they are amounting to. This means that they have always already taken some stand on their lives by seizing on certain roles, traits, and ideals. Indeed, they "just are the stands they take in living out their lives" (Guignon & Pereboom, 1995, p. 189). Taylor (1985b) develops this notion of care with the idea that humans do not simply desire particular outcomes or satisfactions in living. Rather, they always or inherently make "strong evaluations." Even if only tacitly or unconsciously, they evaluate the quality of their desires and motivations and the worth of the ends they seek in terms of how they fit in with their overall sense of a decent or worthwhile life.¹⁰ We are probably not going to be able to dethrone instrumental individualism with its one-sided ethical outlook—which appeals greatly to the moral sensibility of modern people, including social scientists—unless we can begin to articulate a plausible (I suggest) alternative of this sort as to what human action and striving are inherently all about.

Finally, this kind of understanding or interpretation is above all *dialogical*. In Taylor's (2002) words, in both everyday life and human science

inquiry, "understanding of a text or an event ... has to be construed, not on the model of the 'scientific' grasp of an object, but rather on the model of speech-partners coming to an understanding" (p. 126). In other words, understanding is the fruit of a process of mutual communication, influence, negotiation, accommodation, and struggle, as in a conversation or a relationship, something we are all familiar with when we stop to think about it.¹¹ This process may be defensively or inauthentically distorted, of course. But even better understanding, when it is achieved, is limited, context-bound, never final or certain, and will have to be regained or improved upon time and again in the face of new experience and unforeseen challenges.

Our very being as people and cultures is shaped at the core by this kind of intimate interplay between interpreter and event, past and present, self and other. To engage this process authentically or well requires qualities of character like courage and humility. A certain quintessentially human, exquisite, sometimes unbearable tension seems to be involved. On the one hand, we harbor self-defining beliefs and values concerning things we truly care about, in which we have a "deep identity investment," sometimes an investment in "distorted images we cherish of others" (Taylor, 2002, p. 141). On the other hand, since our ideals and our images of others and events are always partial or distorted in some way, we need not just to compromise and get along with others, but to learn from the past, others, or other cultures. In this sense, we depend upon them greatly in matters closest to our own hearts, an often uncomfortable and taxing situation.

To gain such learning, we have to open ourselves to other perspectives, let them call us to account and interrogate or interpolate us—one definition of "inter-

and meanings are experienced as "out there" in the world rather than as 'in our minds.' What normal person could see a child hit by a car and not feel that something bad had happened right there in the street, not just in somebody's mind? It is only a highly specialized and profoundly questionable characterization of 'reality' that could lead people to doubt the reality of badness, shamefulness or goodness in the world. If the word 'objective' is understood as the opposite of 'subjective,' that is, as referring to what exists concretely 'out there' in the world, then it seems that we have every reason to say, and no reason to doubt, that values are objective" (Richardson, et al. 1999, p. 225).

⁹Merleau-Ponty termed this "involved subjectivity." Hermeneutic writers sometimes refer to it as "engaged agency."

¹⁰Guignon (2003) explicates the Heideggerian notion of "authenticity," in a way that may clarify this point. Guignon distinguishes

between "constituent/whole" and "means/ends" styles of living. The former (more authentic) involves acting "for the sake of being a person of a particular sort, and you experience your actions as constituents of a complete life that you are realizing in all you do." The latter centers on acting "in order to achieve social approval or to attain the awards that come from having acted [effectively or] properly." Guignon comments that although "both the 'means/ends' and 'constituent/whole' styles of life may consist in the same or at least very similar actions, there is an important qualitative difference" between them, such as "between helping others in order to feel good, and helping others for the sake of being a caring, decent person." Or "between telling people the truth in order to gain their trust and telling the truth as part of being a truthful person."

¹¹Slife (this issue) discusses "theistic inquiry" in analogous terms.

polate" in the dictionary, by the way is "butt in"—and allow at least some degree of what Gadamer (1989) calls a "fusion of horizons" to take place, a melding of insights that to some degree incorporates old ones and new in a transformed outlook. In doing so, we sometimes incur a deeply personal, sometimes painful "identity cost" (Taylor, 2002, p. 141). The theologian Rowan Williams (1995) characterizes this process in terms of "conversation and negotiation" that are "of their nature unpredictable, unscripted." "The "other speaker/agent" often seems "obscure" to me, as if we were "speaking in a different language." However, the "difficulty of mutual understanding" is "inherent" in these exchanges and "could not be removed by a more adaptable or familiar medium" (p. 30).

From time to time, a social scientist or theorist breaks the mold of conventional thinking and strikes a note that greatly appeals to many readers or students. I suggest that a hermeneutic ontology usefully captures and clarifies what appeals to us about some of these efforts, and so can help us advance them, if we are so inclined. A rich example of such originality is Thomas Scheff's (1994; 2000; 2004) reinterpretation of rage, shame, and depression in less individualistic terms than usual. In Scheff's view, some kind of hurt or insult produces feelings of rejection or inadequacy that are not acknowledged, to others or even oneself (2004, p. 25-29). An essential part of this injury is that it threatens or severs a social bond. It is followed by a continuing spiral of "intense emotions of shame and anger" which is "experienced as hate and rage." This spiral of hatred and rage, rather than "expressing and discharging one's shame," masks it with rage and aggression. A "loop of unlimited duration and intensity," in which one may be angry that one is ashamed and ashamed that one is angry, can serve as the "emotional basis of lengthy episodes or even life-long hatred and rage."

Scheff (1997, p. 11) suggests the prevalence of depression and other ills in our society may stem from the fact that "human interdependency" and experiences of shame are "routinely denied" by us, reflected in the fact that "our public discourse is in the language of individuals, rather than relationships." In his view, this makes it difficult to effect what is often the best, sometimes the only cure for estrangement or hostility between individuals or groups, namely an "apology/forgiveness transaction." Healing through apology begins with acknowledgement of human interdependency. When the bond is threatened, both parties are in "a state of

shame," one for injuring, one for being injured. A successful apology allows both parties to acknowledge and discharge the shame evoked by the injury. The apology "makes things right" between the parties, both emotionally and cognitively. It repairs the breach in the bond. "The success of the action of repair is felt and signaled by both parties; they both feel and display the emotion of pride." Pride is another emotion Scheff wants to reinterpret, as the experience, at its best, of a mutually indebted accomplishment of something worthwhile rather than merely an individualistic sense of achievement or sheer superiority. Scheff's writing show no sign of his being interested in utilizing explicitly religious perspectives or values in his theorizing. But just as he creatively draws on traditional religious notions of community and forgiveness, we should feel free to incorporate and rework his ideas in more frankly theological accounts, should we judge that a fuller or more adequate portrayal of the realities at hand calls for doing so.

The brilliant social theorist and Jewish theologian Jonathan Sacks (2002)—who also writes movingly about forgiveness as a "word with the power to change a world"—illuminates what may be involved in dissolving the socially isolated and individualistic view of the self that has dominated modern psychology. Sacks suggests that much of the modern West has been dominated by answers to the question: "How can the destructive passions to which human beings are prone be turned to collective advantage? What happens when the sense of sin and the deeply internalized constraints of a religious age begin to weaken" (p. 143)? Hobbes' answer to this question was the Leviathan of the state, later political theory advocates less drastically a democratic polity and the rule of law, and Adam Smith and many since rely on the "invisible hand" of the market. All these schemes definitely have their virtues but propose in a somewhat utopian manner to turn indelibly self-interested, even avaricious, people into law abiding citizens of a stable social order. "Private vice would become public virtue when society was so organized to turn passions into interests" (Sacks, p. 144).

A key feature of all these schemes is their reluctance to characterize the good life or good society explicitly in moral or spiritual terms, even though they have ethical aims themselves, such as fostering individual autonomy and an fashioning a society that respects human rights—and it would seem that people must be capable of quite a bit of altruism and

self-restraint to make these systems work (Etzioni, 1996)! Nevertheless, we have been afraid to portray individuals as having any inherent bent toward character or community, lest some arbitrary or domineering ethical ideal be permanently enshrined at the heart of human personality. In Sacks' (1997) view, as in hermeneutic thought, we can't escape self-defining value commitments of some sort, and the cure for authoritarian or otherwise inauthentic tendencies is not to embrace relativism—to get rid of bad values by throwing out all values—but to open our hearts and minds nondefensively in dialogue to the possible validity of any serious claim or criticism that comes our way. Lacking this option, however, we have felt it necessary to portray humans in a highly individualistic and essentially competitive manner and then search for economic or political arrangements that will somehow channel radical self-interest into social order and peace.

According to Sacks (2002), such desperate measures are no longer necessary. He contends that “converging lines of thought” from many disciplines in recent decades are prompting a “paradigm shift in our understanding of human interaction ... and ... a richer sense of culture and community—what I call ‘covenantal relationships’—in sustaining social life” (p. 143). Just one example he cites is Francis Fukuyama's (1995) conclusion: “If the institutions of democracy and capitalism are to work properly, they must coexist with certain premodern cultural habits ... they must be leavened with reciprocity, moral obligation, duty toward community, and trust” (quoted in Sacks, pp. 151-152). Thus, “markets depend on virtues not produced by the market, just as states depend on virtues not created by the state” (p. 152), created instead in families, communities, friendships, and congregations. The paradigm shift involved here is that now meaningful social ties and more lasting loyalties underpin healthy competition (important as it is), rather than competition being fundamental and cooperation entering the picture only when it serves the competitive struggle.

In order to effect this shift, Sacks (2002) argues, we need to recast fundamentally one of the “governing presuppositions of modern thought,” namely “the concept of the isolated or atomic self, the ‘I’ with which thought and action supposedly began.” We have discovered, Sacks believes, that “this ‘I’ is a fiction, or at least an abstraction.” Personal identity at its very core is shaped through “continuous conversation with ‘significant others’” (p. 150), including

for Jews and Christians conversation with a loving and forgiving God—even though for Christians this “conversation” has a Trinitarian cast to it that would not seem quite right to Sacks. In any case, it is this ontological recasting of what it means to be a person or self as a “dialogical” (Bakhtin, 1981; Taylor, 1991) or “relational” (Slife, 2004) being that allows us to conceive of human action, our basic aims in living, and human fulfillment in badly needed new ways. There is hope that now we can lay to rest that false dichotomy that has so bedeviled modern psychology, forcing us to choose between radical personal autonomy and inauthentic submission to tradition or the will of others.

RELIGION AND PSYCHOLOGY IN DIALOGUE

A hermeneutic viewpoint of this sort might help us interpret as well as appreciate the limitations of different kinds of research on religious phenomena. For example, there are now a host of studies that have found significant positive correlations between measures of what appear to be normal, healthy religious beliefs and practices and a whole variety of measures of physical and emotional well-being. Now, it is essentially a matter of judgment or interpretation as to whether or not these are measures of healthy religious practice and genuinely worthwhile outcomes. In theory, someone could argue that these findings show childish or escapist religious practices are associated with certain temporary or only superficial benefits! I assume that a more reasonable case could be made that they indicate we would be wise to take religious practice seriously in a stressed out culture of narcissism that seems to breed many chronic, debilitating emotional problems in living (Schumaker, 2001). But that is a view I would have to defend, not just assert!

How much, though, do these findings really illuminate the business of living from a religious perspective? If our outlook is colored by naturalism and objectivism, we might be tempted to endorse such beliefs and practices as instrumentally conducive to well-being. But, of course, the findings don't go very far at all toward establishing this kind of a causal connection, and this sort of crass utilitarian interpretation guts the meaning of mature religious faith. Now, we can read into these findings some other, preferred understanding of human life and/or religious life, if we wish, but we can't claim decisive

empirical support for it. To make fuller sense of such findings, we would need to rely on some ontology of the human world we found plausible along with some number of thick descriptions of human action and experience in this realm, a variety of theoretical perspectives or interpretive lenses we believed were (and felt we could defend as) illuminating, and, ideally, additional kinds of empirical findings. By themselves, such correlational findings tell us very little. They encourage us to interpret their meaning in terms of one or another set of unexamined assumptions, and then stop thinking.

Finally, a hermeneutic view has further, radical implications concerning the nature of social inquiry. In Michael Westerman's (2004) words, we have to abandon a key ambition of modern social science to "construct explanations that are objective, final, and completely explicit." That goal is unattainable, in part, because investigators are "members of a culture who, themselves, are participants in the practices they are trying to understand better" (p. 30).¹² Thus, we can only attain understandings that are more in keeping with the limits and tragedies of the human situation, but may be richer and more beneficial, nonetheless. In the hermeneutic view, social science and theory are a "form of practice" (Taylor, 1985; Richardson and Christopher, 1993). They are essentially, in part, ethics and politics by other means, an extension of our search for justice, love, and wisdom in practical life. They are not fundamentally different in kind from our efforts to understand better what is going on in significant human relationships, in steering our lives, or in religious belief and practice, including our struggles at times with honest doubt.

INTEGRATION OR DIALOGUE

One appealing effort to avoid the problem of subordinating religious meanings to the distorting effects of naturalism and instrumentalism is to insist

¹²Even if they are trying to understand the most foreign of cultures or people, once they are contact with them a new, wider context of inter-human (and perhaps trans-human) meaning, communication and influence is in force, one which shapes them as they interpret and shape it, in turn, ad infinitum. Of course, we may discover that for us that new context of meaning we come to inhabit has a *trans*-human, as well. As Slife (this issue) discusses, key hermeneutic thinkers suggest shifts in understanding often seem to occur as a result of "*other*-worldly ruptures" that bring transcendence or a relation to the Divine into the very center of the picture.

on some sort of more democratic "integration" of the best insights of modern psychology and mature religious faith. In very general terms, this seems like a good idea. But the devil is in the details, as usual. The big question is, who or what decides on the terms of this integration? We might conclude that religion and psychology are utterly incommensurable and incomparable, making any choice between them simply capricious, or an arbitrary choice among authorities. But if, instead, we think meaningful integration is possible, then, I have argued at length elsewhere (Richardson, 2000; 2004), this is likely to mean that either one partner in the conversation is "integrated" in the preexisting terms of the other or both are "integrated" in the terms of yet some third perspective. In any case, one party will dominate in a somewhat arbitrary and dogmatic manner that violates the original intention, including a spirit of fair-mindedness and constructive criticism, of the integrationist program. After all, our very ideas of what "integration" or "dialogue" are or should be change and improve (we hope) over time. I suggest that the integrationist project sets in stone, in advance, a few too many, fairly abstract, ideas as to what that project should be all about.¹³

For example, it seems to me that integrationist thinking retains some elements of what Slife (2004) terms an "abstractionist ontology," modern naturalism being a prime example, some form of which has "dominated our Western intellectual consciousness, often without recognition, for several centuries" (p. 164). Such an ontology assumes that certain preferred timeless abstractions—like the conception of empirical theory, epistemological standards of controlled experimentation or purely objective description, or the idea of wholly reliable techniques in mainstream psychology—"are the most fundamental level of being and reality" (*ibid.*). In other words, giving primacy to such abstractions allows us to step out of the stream of lived experience entirely and achieve a high degree of autonomy from and mastery over it.

¹³To be fair, of course, we have to say something similar about hermeneutic thinkers use of the term "dialogue!" We can't avoid assumptions. And we can only question them in a piecemeal fashion, based on still other assumptions for the moment taken for granted. But they can be allowed to surface and be questioned. I would argue that this notion of hermeneutic dialogue is closer to lived experience and the actual practice of inquiry and so more porous or open to revision when experience or reflection seem to require it.

The idea of integrating religion and psychology seems to be colored at least somewhat by the aspiration to such an abstractionist understanding or account. Otherwise, any concept of or terms for integration themselves would be subject entirely to reinterpretation and revision as experience unfolds, in often unpredictable ways, leaving the notion of “integration” rather empty and unable to provide much understanding about what we are really doing.

However, I doubt that integrationist thinking amounts simply to a mistake. There is much more to it, which has to be appreciated if we are to make further strides in understanding. A close look at integrationist thinking suggests to me (Richardson, 2005) that this approach often represents a sincere attempt to blend psychological *methods* of inquiry with religious *vision* or faith. It seems plausible that such theorists are drawn to psychological methods not for purely “scientific” reasons, but because they represent a critical or objective approach that will help dispel false claims, expose wrongful bias, and identify inauthentic motives or beliefs in a desirable manner. So far as they go, these are worthy aims. And these thinkers are drawn to religious meaning because they feel that it speaks to genuine needs and aspirations in a somewhat shallow modern context. There is something very right about wanting to embrace both criticism and commitment in one’s work, and I suspect that it seems to many like an integrationist approach combines the best of both worlds.

But it is not that simple. Psychological methods of inquiry cannot serve as an independent test of belief or authenticity, because they derive their force partly from a naturalist ontology and a “disguised ideology” of an individualistic and instrumentalist sort. Those values of promoting legitimate autonomy and human rights certainly have their merits. And they are not likely to be slighted by integrationist thinkers who, happily, would appear to want to have them included in the conversation. But that is all they are, another voice in the conversation, another critical perspective to be judiciously employed in the struggle for understanding and wisdom—a somewhat flawed perspective, it appears, as it distorts human action in certain ways and may reflect too “thin” an ethical credo to support even its own best values of human rights and dignity (Sandel, 1996; Selznick, 1992). It should be emphasized, as well, that religious faith incorporates its own unique and powerful critical thrust, concerning, for example, the human propensity for destructive kinds of hubris,

idolatry, and self-deception, insights badly needed in our appraisal of modern culture and life.¹⁴

Is there a credible alternative to mutual estrangement or surreptitious domination? I think there is, and, as you might suspect, I recommend that we build one around the notions of mutual influence and dialogue outlined by ontological hermeneutics. What seems called for, I suggest, is not so much *integration* as full-blooded argument and *dialogue* between, on the one hand, the whole package of modern liberal individualist beliefs and institutions, and, on the other hand, religious faith and practice. We are in the midst of trying to figure out how to pull this off. But here is no good reason to think it impossible. After all, some measure of dialogue and constructive mutual influence between seemingly incommensurable viewpoints, leading at times, with courage and compassion, to deeper insight and greater understanding, happens every day in marriage, friendship, communities, and across cultures (Richardson, 2000). Hermeneutic notions of the co-constituting interplay between interpreter and event and self and other, and Taylor’s (2002) conception of a demanding dialectic between identity investment and identity loss, can serve as a guide in this process because they clarify what we seem, at bottom, to be doing, rather than arbitrarily impose some requirements for inquiry upon us, secular or religious. For example, hermeneutics effectively undercuts modern secular ideologies that demand an impossible autonomy of us and then guilt trip us, as it were, when inevitably we fail to live up to that standard.

Hermeneutics describes a pathway of understanding, made up of intertwined life-stories, that is not fully under our control and is full of surprises and sometimes unwanted, humbling insights. I believe a hermeneutic view of this process helps explain Slife’s contention (this issue) that understanding often concerns events and experiences that are not “repeatable” and that “knowledge is inherent in . . . unique and particular contexts.” I suppose some religious people might feel that a hermeneutic ontology’s stress on human limitations and uncertainty undermines religious faith or confidence. But I would suggest that these are simply the marks of an appropriate creaturely status, that a fuller appreciation of them, in our time, especially, can encourage

¹⁴Of course, religion, too, is prone to disturbing forms of dogmatism and mystification that, in part, gave rise to and may benefit from the influence of modern secular viewpoints.

us to rely on Divine mercy more than our own artifacts, and that all a reasonable religious confidence in the outcomes of inquiry and dialogue requires is the conviction that God is a God of truth.

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