

WHOSE PSYCHOLOGY? WHICH CHRISTIANITY?*

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The publication of *Psychology & Christianity: Five Views*, (ed. Eric L. Johnson. IVP, 2010), marks a significant occasion in the ongoing faith-learning dialogue in psychology. The first edition of the book, *Psychology & Christianity: Four Views* (ed. Eric L. Johnson and Stanton L. Jones. IVP, 2000) has had a powerful effect in shaping this dialogue. From 2008 through 2010 alone, for example, there were approximately 29 new adoptions of the book for university-level courses (this represents about 25 percent of the CCCU¹ member institutions). Since the first edition appeared in 2000, the number of university course adoptions has likely far exceeded that number. “Perhaps the best evidence for the influence of the first edition,” one former staff member at IVP said, “is the publication of the second. In a sense the first

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1. The member institutions of the CCCU (Council of Christian Colleges and Universities) are committed to pursuing higher education in an intentionally “Christ-centered” fashion, where faith and learning are “integrated” in meaningful ways.

edition got the ball rolling on a lot of questions and influenced the terms of discussion enough that a new edition was needed.”²

This certainly fits my experience. Over the last eight years I have been a faculty member at two Christian universities, and have used *Psychology & Christianity* as a textbook for six of those years. Three of the four views presented in the first edition have had a profound impact on my thinking and teaching. As the book has appeared in a new edition, it seems an appropriate time to solidify past gains and to begin the process of dialoguing with the new text. To this end, I aim to do several things in this paper. First, I describe a theological and philosophical framework for thinking about the relationship between psychology and Christianity—a still-developing framework initially conceived in my interactions with the first edition of the book. In light of this framework, I then provide something of an in-depth retrospective review of the first edition, introducing the categories of “modern perspectivalism,” and “postmodern perspectivalism.” Next, I offer a third—Reformed and Reformational³—perspectivalism, a position that attempts to synthesize the key insights of the viewpoints expressed in the first edition. After evaluating the second edition of the textbook in light of this position, I conclude with some thoughts on the question of Christian engagement with the still-modern culture of contemporary academic psychology.

2. My thanks to Heather Mascarello, print publicity manager at IVP, for providing the data, and Emily Varner, former academic sales manager at IVP, for the quote.

3. By “Reformed” I have in mind a variety of Christian experience characterized by a vital commitment to the truths summarized in the Reformed confessions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. By “Reformational” I refer to the attempt to philosophize within the bounds of this confessional commitment, as exemplified by Dooyeweerd, Vollenhoven, and Clouser.

*A Theological and Philosophical Framework for
Conceptualizing the Relationship between
Psychology and Christianity*

As historians such as Norman Fiering⁴ have shown, the question of the relation of “pagan” learning to Christianity is an ancient one. Though the question easily predates the European settlement in North America (as Tertullian’s famous ponderings regarding the relation of “Jerusalem and Athens” attest), it was a central concern in North America’s oldest colleges. For example, in seventeenth-century Harvard and eighteenth-century Yale, students read William Ames’s *Marrow of Theology*, which contained not only a systematic description of biblical teaching, but also aspects of a full-fledged theory of the relationship between theology and the liberal arts.⁵ In subsequent generations, positions on the faith-learning question changed, yet Christian dominance of the North American university continued (in one form or another) for about three centuries. Though the subtle process of secularization had been underway since the mid-eighteenth century,⁶ it was not until the early- to mid-twentieth century that universities began explicitly cutting their ties to their Christian roots. McMaster University, for example, whose motto remains, “All Things Cohere in Christ,” did not officially break its ties to its Baptist roots until 1957.⁷ So, the old question that is addressed in *Psychology & Christianity* takes on a new hue. For the first time in centuries, Christians would need to ask their questions about the relation of Jerusalem and Athens from *outside* the academies that they had established (none of the authors in the first edition, and only one of the authors in the second edition writes from a secular university).⁸ Inevitably, then, the

4. Fiering, *Moral Philosophy*, 11–22.

5. Ames, *Marrow of Theology*; Miller, *New England Mind*, 154–80. For an exposition of the full-fledged theory, see Ames, *Technometry*.

6. Marsden, *Soul of the American University*.

7. Johnston, *McMaster University*, 261.

8. It is of course true that many Christians still teach and research within these now “secular” universities. But they most typically do so by asking *other* questions.

question must be reframed—how shall we relate “secular” learning to Christianity in a post-Christian era?

Which Christianity?

One question we must certainly address in this post-Christian context is, “Which Christianity do we desire to relate to secular learning?” The unwillingness to ask this question was—ironically enough—one of the major causes of secularization in the first place. As George Marsden has argued, as far back as the mid-eighteenth century, American educators dealt with the problem of Protestant pluralism by employing a “nonsectarian” strategy, which diminished theological distinctiveness and emphasized instead common moral convictions derived through a supposedly neutral and scientific methodology.⁹ This discomfort with theological particularity eventuated in an academic environment where liberal Christian open-mindedness became the context of its own eventual abolition.

It would be unfair to characterize participants in the psychology-Christianity debate as moralistic or simply “nonsectarian”; we do nevertheless find a tendency—by no means universal—to advocate a “mere Christianity” approach. To put the matter differently, the issue might be framed as the dialectic between Erasmian and Lutheran sensibilities. The great humanist Erasmus desired to go *ad fontes* for the sake of personal change, with impatience toward and suspicion of theology as hair-splitting “scholastic” argumentation. Luther, of course, wanted to go back to Scripture in order to arrange the teachings of Scripture in a systematic and theological fashion.¹⁰ In some ways Erasmus was right—it is more important to live well than to have every jot and tittle of one’s theology straight. Yet in other ways, Luther was right—that unless we get our theology straight we will not be able to live well. Certainly, we will not be able to *theorize* as well as we might as Christians if we are not able or

9. Marsden, *Soul of the American University*.

10. For a discussion of Erasmus, see George, *Theology of the Reformers*, 46–49; González, *Story of Christianity*, 2:10–13; McGrath, *Reformation Thought*, 53–58.

willing to define our belief system. We should not, therefore, shy away from making theological assertions, particularly when we desire to articulate a position on the relationship between Christianity and psychology. Perhaps Luther overstated the case in his famous debate with Erasmus, “take away assertions, and you take away Christianity.”¹¹ But Luther was right that when it comes to academic discussions such as his debate with Erasmus on free will or our discussion of the relation between Christianity and psychology: take away [theological]¹² assertions and one soon begins to wonder just what we are trying to relate to psychology.

There are irenic, polemic, and interpersonal reasons for foregrounding theological assertions in any discussion of the relationship between psychology and Christianity. On the irenic side, Christianity is bigger than any one theological perspective. As Vern Poythress and John Frame have long argued, Scripture is a treasure trove that can be profitably studied from a multitude of perspectives.¹³ Certainly this argument would apply to some extent to theological traditions, each of which may have a unique perspective that opens up the truth of Scripture. The extent to which a particular tradition offers unique and reliable insight into the Scripture is quite likely the extent to which a particular tradition would have something unique to contribute to psychology.

On a more polemic note, being explicit about one’s theological convictions should make more evident the adequacy of such formulations. It is possible, after all, that some theological perspectives will more effectively frame the issues in question. Some theological perspectives will be more hermeneutically useful in engaging the world of secular psychology.

Interpersonally, explicitness about theological positions would also most likely be helpful in understanding why people

11. Rupp and Watson, eds., *Luther and Erasmus*, 106.

12. In this paper I define a theological assertion as one that attempts to coherently set forth biblical teaching on a particular topic, not necessarily one that comes from the academic discipline of theology.

13. Frame, *Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, e.g., 191–94; Poythress, *Symphonic Theology*.

differ in their positions on the relation of psychology and Christianity in the first place. It is hard to have a discussion about the relation of psychology and Christianity when one's interlocutor has not told you what they mean by "Christianity."¹⁴

Given that one's position on the relationship between psychology and Christianity will inevitably reflect one's own (spoken or unspoken) theological commitments, it is only reasonable to expect me to outline the assumptions and influences I bring to the discussion. I belong to the Augustinian-Calvinist theological stream running through the Westminster Standards, Old Princeton Seminary in the nineteenth century, Westminster Seminary in the twentieth, now represented by institutions such as Reformed Theological Seminary (main campus Orlando, FL). My main theological and philosophical influences include Augustine, Calvin, the Westminster Standards, Jonathan Edwards, Abraham Kuyper, Herman Dooyeweerd, Dirk Vollenhoven, Cornelius Van Til, Roy Clouser, Michael Horton, and John Frame. In what follows I will outline briefly some aspects of this perspective that are crucial for relating psychology and Christianity.¹⁵

God's Sovereignty, the Two Books of God's Self-revelation, and the Glory of God: The sovereignty of God is a crucial insight for theoretical work in psychology. As Cornelius Van Til maintained decades ago, the fact that God is in control of "whatsoever comes to pass" is a truth that ensures that all things are *meaningful* because they have been pre-interpreted by God, and that all science is therefore *hermeneutical* in the sense that we cannot ultimately understand what we study until we have some (limited, creaturely) insight into this pre-interpretation.

14. In other words, explicitness about theological commitments can facilitate honest *dialogue*. See Johnson, "Gaining Understanding," 299–301 for a helpful discussion of the importance of dialogue.

15. To use the language of Johnson, what follows is something of an initial sketch of a Reformed and Reformational "metasystem" that holds together ideas that at first may seem contradictory. See *ibid.*, 304–10.

Scripture (which tells us about the sovereignty of God)¹⁶ affords insight into this pre-interpretation. Though the Bible tends¹⁷ not to provide the data of psychology, it provides the ultimate framework for the interpretation of the data of psychology, apart from which psychological science suffers greatly (as will be elaborated below). This framework may be helpfully summarized by—though not reduced to or replaced by—the traditional scheme of “creation, fall, and redemption.”

The traditional idea that God has revealed himself in “two books” is crucial. Scripture and creation both *richly* reveal God.¹⁸ The fact that God not only created all things, but also providentially sustains all things, ensures that the “two books” cohere, and both must be consulted if one desires to understand the world in which we live. The fatal mistake in any discussion of the relation of psychology and Christianity is *source asymmetry*—i.e., inappropriately emphasizing one book over the other. The idea here isn’t that there should always be “equal parts Bible and science” in psychology. Instead, the real challenge is to learn to read both books together, giving to each its own authority, necessity, sufficiency, and perspicuity.¹⁹

Any understanding of the pre-interpretation afforded by the Word of God must include the glory of God. The goal of both

16. For an excellent biblical defense of the traditional Calvinist doctrine of God’s absolute sovereignty, see Frame, *Doctrine of God*, ch. 4.

17. In my own Kuyperian tradition of relating faith and learning, some seem to insist that Scripture *never* provides data for any special science (like psychology). To pre-judge Scripture in this way is unscriptural. A Christian scholar always needs in every aspect of life to ask, “What does the Bible say?” and should not decide beforehand that the Bible has nothing to say about a particular topic. Still, for the most part, the multitudinous data of any science (including psychology) tend to be found outside of the Scriptures.

18. In other words, Scripture and creation are not *thin* revelations of God, but are rather *crammed* with God. See Powlison, “Do You See?”

19. This is the way Cornelius Van Til formulated the matter. Just as the Westminster Confession speaks of the necessity, authority, sufficiency, and perspicuity of Scripture, we ought also to speak of the same characteristics of the other “book” of God’s revelation.

texts is the same—the glory and praise of the Triune God.²⁰ If we stop at mere description, explanation, prediction, or control²¹ and do not end in doxology²² we have not fully exegeted either “text.”²³

I would therefore maintain that the traditional Reformed emphasis on the glory of God must also be an emphasis of any effort to relate psychology and Christianity. God’s main purpose in all that he does is his own glory. The chief end of psychology too is to glorify God. It follows that, if God always remains simply a hidden or underlying assumption of our psychological work, we have not fully discharged our responsibilities.

This set of considerations therefore raises a set of questions to be asked of any attempt to relate psychology and Christianity: is the sovereign, self-revealing, and self-glorifying God at the center of the approach? Are both books of God’s self-revelation given their due?

The “Kuyperian Paradox”: A great challenge of Christian scholarship is walking the razor’s edge between accommodation (uncritically accepting the assertions and assumptions of “secular” science) and world-flight (uncritically rejecting the productions of “secular” science). This is what I would call “the Kuyperian²⁴ paradox,” that two, seemingly mutually exclusive

20. The classic defense of the idea that God’s main purpose in making the world was his own glory is Jonathan Edwards’s “Dissertation” on “the End for which God Created the World,” in Edwards, “Two Dissertations.”

21. These are the four traditional goals of psychological research. See Goodwin, *Research in Psychology*, 25–26.

22. There are analogies here between the approach I am advocating and the ill-fated “doxological science” of my Presbyterian forebears, as told in Bozeman, *Protestants in an Age of Science*. There is an enormous difference, however, between the failed project of Baconian inductivism and the “engaged presuppositionalism” that I will advocate below.

23. Still, it should be kept in mind that creation not only praises God (Ps 19:1), but it also groans (Rom 8:22). Any explication of the creation’s praise of God must recognize that in this “old order of things” (Rev 21:4) creation’s praise is always intermingled with lament.

24. Named, of course, after the great Dutch thinker, Abraham Kuyper, who had a keen sense of antithesis, and yet was also a champion of common grace.

principles must be embraced by a Christian scholar.²⁵ The first of these is the notion of “antithesis”; the second, the notion of “common grace.”

Biblically, the idea of antithesis traces back to Gen 3:15, where God placed “enmity” between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, and all of biblical history can be viewed with some profit through that lens.²⁶ Philosophically and theologically, Augustine gave the most famous expression to this idea, arguing that the drama of human history has to do with the conflict between the two cities, the *civitas terrena*, or earthly city characterized by love of self, and the *civitas Dei*, or city of God, characterized by the love of YHWH. In principle and at root, these two cities disagree fundamentally about the purpose and meaning of life and about the source of true human happiness and flourishing. Within science, these differences manifest themselves in a variety of ways, and usually *subtly*. Antithesis does not imply an overt, over-the-top, Dawkins-like animosity toward religion.

Rather, antithesis manifests itself epistemologically and hermeneutically. In the City of God, the world is (ideally, at least) understood for what it is, a revelation of God, and the Scripture (as the Word of the God who is the light in which we see light—Ps 36:9) is given its primary epistemological place. Hermeneutically, careful and rigorous scientific and theoretical activity conducted properly in the light of Scripture ought to lead to the praise and glory of God. In the *civitas terrena*, any reference to Scripture as authoritative in the realm of science is ruled out.

This is not to say that Bible study ought to replace careful scientific work—far from it. This isn’t to say that the Bible is “a

My main disagreement with Kuyper, however, would be in the realm of apologetics. Because of the antithesis, Kuyper thought (evidential) apologetics futile. Though I don’t disagree with him on the problems with evidential apologetics, I do think that twentieth-century developments in apologetics raise some interesting possibilities. My own position will be described below.

25. Hence, a definition of paradox that I would embrace is, “a statement that seems contradictory, unbelievable, or absurd but that may actually be true in fact” (*Webster’s New Universal Unabridged Dictionary*, 1983).

26. Currid, *Study Commentary on Genesis*, 131.

scientific textbook.” But it is to say that without the Scriptures, scientific work will not flourish as it ought to. In particular, without the Scriptures, science inevitably suffers *hermeneutically*. In the city of man, the world is misinterpreted in multitudinous ways, but all such misinterpretations share this fundamental (and typically unspoken) assumption: *if* God exists, he is not relevant to scientific activity. And whenever science is carried out *autonomously* (without reference to God and his Word), it inevitably misses the theological point of its work.

It is important to note that many thinkers in this tradition have emphasized that the antithesis runs deeply through the Christian heart as well. Part of the “old man” in Adam desires to maintain autonomy, to engage in scientific and theoretical activity without any reference to God and outside of scriptural revelation. Indeed, from the very earliest days of the church, semi-autonomous reason (reason that has its own competence in its own sphere) has been embraced by substantial portions of the church.²⁷ Nevertheless, and as I will argue, such autonomy is ultimately, as Van Til often put it, “self-frustrative” and undermines not only the claims of the gospel but also the goals of science itself.

It is equally important to affirm the seemingly-contrary reality of common grace. Just as the antithesis runs through every citizen of the *civitas Dei*, it is likewise the case that God restrains sin within the *civitas terrena* and lavishes many good gifts upon its citizens, resulting in scientific and theoretical activity of the highest quality (oftentimes far exceeding the quality of work in the humble *civitas Dei*). A Christian scholar is therefore obligated to embrace these good gifts of God.²⁸ The affirmation of common grace should emphasize the goodness of creation and the joy and wholesomeness of scientific discovery *per se*. It should also emphasize, indeed, the brilliant scientific work that is being conducted *right now*.

This, then, is the second series of questions that must be asked of any approach attempting to relate mainstream psychological science and Christianity: does this approach attempt to

27. Clouser, *Myth of Religious Neutrality*, 98–99.

28. This famous argument is found in Calvin, *Institutes*, II.II.12–17.

walk the razor's edge, affirming both common grace and antithesis, or is one or the other emphasized?

The Modes of God's Providential Control: In the "Reformational" philosophical tradition of Herman Dooyeweerd, Dirk Vollenhoven, Roy Clouser, and others, the assumption of the sustaining and directing providence of God—alongside our pre-theoretical intuitions of the lawfulness and normativity of the world—is elaborated so as to articulate a notion of "modalities," or "aspects," which have to do with the characteristic and irreducible ways that God's creatures function in this world. When articulated within the traditional categories of the Reformed confessions, the idea may be expressed thus—one of the ways that God providentially controls the entirety of his creation is through the regularity of "laws" and "norms." These modes of providential control would include, for example, mathematical and biological laws (which are inviolable), and aesthetic and economic norms (which are violable, but only at a cost). It is this lawful control of the universe that makes proximate-level science (i.e., the reading of the book of God's works in such a way as to elaborate the lawfulness and normativity of creation—i.e., the *what* and the *how*) possible. The book of God's Words, on the other hand, generally provides for ultimate-level interpretation. It, generally speaking, answers the *why* questions.

This philosophical elaboration of the notion of the sovereignty of God is useful in three main ways. First, it helps us to understand common grace. The Spirit of God can restrain sin directly, of course. But all creatures are also subject to the laws and norms that govern creaturely life. Proximate-level success in life (including scientific and theoretical life) requires "obedience" to these norms. Scientific work violating the norms of logic,²⁹ for example, will most likely never be published. Likewise, scientific manuscripts that violate aesthetic norms (such as clarity of expression) will most likely suffer the same fate. Certainly these examples illustrate that norms are applied differently

29. We will leave aside the complexities involved in the articulation of these laws.

through history and in different cultures. Nevertheless, we all live and move and have our being in God's world, and we are all alike constrained by its lawful and normed given-ness.

The notion of modality is also useful in that it helps us to understand the typical scholarly moves within the *civitas terrena*. Theoretical life, like all of life, is ultimately religious—there must inevitably be some ultimate and irreducible criterion by which we make sense of the world around us. As Reformational thinkers have long noted, scholars who do not give theoretical primacy to God will inevitably give primacy to some aspect of God's creation. Failing to worship God, we worship the creature. By forcing a mere aspect of God's creation to account for all reality, one asks too much of the creature. The typical result is “reductionism.” Within psychology today, the *biotic* aspect tends to be accorded primacy—proximate-level findings are routinely and explicitly interpreted as being ultimately due to the products or by-products of unguided natural selection.³⁰ Though survival and reproduction are certainly key aspects of human functioning, the distortive nature of such explanations becomes evident, especially when theorists attempt to account for things like awe, language, or music (for example) in such reductive terms.³¹ Part of our task in engaging the world of “secular” psychological science, then, is detecting these reductive moves.

The need then, it would seem, would be for non-reductive psychological theories, which brings us to the final benefit of such an approach. The notion of modality gives us a sense of the complexity of psychological functioning in humans, which is related not only to the biotic, but also to the linguistic, aesthetic, and ethical, for example. A full-orbed and non-reductive

30. We may also see this tendency even at the more proximate level of “entity” theories, but these connections are subtle and I do not think inevitable. For a discussion of entity theories, see Clouser, *Myth of Religious Neutrality*, 72–76.

31. For such a reductive account of awe, see Keltner, *Born to be Good*, ch. 12. For a reductive account of language, see Pinker, *Language Instinct*, ch. 11. A reductive account of music may be found in Levitin, *Your Brain on Music*, ch. 9.

approach will attempt to keep this complexity in view, using “a multidimensional explanatory methodology appropriate to the subject matter in hand.”³²

Thus, the third question I will ask of each approach is whether it attempts to elucidate the complex modal inter-relatedness of psychological functioning or tends toward reductionism.

Presuppositional Apologetics: The reader may recall that Gen 3:15 is the foundational text teaching the principle of the antithesis. The “enmity” between the *civitas Dei* and the *civitas terrena* makes worldview conflict within science inevitable. Within the *civitas terrena*, science becomes one of the primary ways the knowledge of God revealed in creation is suppressed (Rom 1:18). Within the *civitas Dei*, science (properly understood) elaborates on Ps 19:1, showing in countless specific ways how all creation reveals the glory of God. This battle of worldviews would seem to imply that apologetic exchange is inevitable within scientific discourse.

We ought also to expect success as we seek to defend the Christian story over against the competing stories of secularized science. Without erring on the side of triumphalism (and given the exceedingly humble state of Christianity in the Western university it is hard to imagine triumphalism among Christian academics!), we may be encouraged by the optimistic tone of Scripture itself. Genesis 3:15, “the earliest foreshadowing of the gospel,” “is couched in the language of conquest.”³³ The seed of the woman would crush the serpent’s head. God mobilized his armies for the conquest of Canaan. In Acts, the gospel spreads from Jerusalem, to Samaria, to the end of the earth. One benefit of foregrounding the antithesis is that we keep in mind God’s mission to bring the gospel to every tribe, including psychology.

32. Chaplin, *Herman Dooyeweerd*, 61. See also Clouser for a detailed discussion of non-reductive theorizing. Examples of such methods already exist within psychology, these concerns regarding reductionism notwithstanding. See, for example, Sheldon, *Optimal Human Being*.

33. Letham, *Holy Trinity*, 34.

Antithesis does not imply world-flight—just the opposite. We do not leave those lost in unbelief to perish in unbelief. Neither do we leave disciplines mired in unbelief to falter in that unbelief. We must invite these disciplines, as David Powlison puts it, to “intelligent repentance.”³⁴ In the context of academic work, this also inevitably leads us to the question of apologetics.

In engaging psychology with an apologetic edge, we are not asking psychology to change its game. Contemporary psychology is inherently apologetic in the sense that it aims to provide a compelling and coherent understanding of mind and behavior given a particular set of (empiricist and naturalistic) worldview assumptions. Though these assumptions are not usually explicitly stated, we must not be naïve about the fact that in a science like psychology, what is being offered is more than a simple account of “just the facts,” but also a story that is thought to render these facts intelligible. God’s missional mindset requires Christians to embrace this apologetic side to the discipline.

Typically, if Christians engage in apologetic dialogue in science, they do so from an “evidentialist” strategy. As the term indicates, the facts of the science of psychology would be arranged in such a way as to show the reasonableness of Christian faith. Since God reveals himself through his creation, we ought to expect to encounter plenty of evidences for the faith, and so this strategy would certainly have much to commend it. The problem, however, is that evidentialist approaches tend to forget that their unbelieving interlocutors are not neutral with regard to the truth of Christianity. The antithesis shapes apologetic discourse powerfully—such that, again, as Paul put it, the truth of God clearly revealed in creation is suppressed in unrighteousness (Rom 1:18–20). Apart from the grace of God, those who begin in intellectual autonomy will end in intellectual autonomy. The problem with a simple evidentialist approach is that it does not explicitly challenge this suppressive tendency.

A useful alternative approach to apologetics is “presuppositional.” Such an approach recognizes that the way one weighs

34. Powlison, “Biblical Counseling View,” in *Four Views*, 209.

evidences depends powerfully upon the presuppositions and ultimate commitments that one brings to the exchange. A presuppositional apologetic therefore foregrounds these (often previously implicit) commitments and probes their explanatory adequacy. In my teaching of psychological science, I utilize a two-step argument based upon the apologetics of Cornelius Van Til:

In our dialogue [with mainstream psychological science] we first for the sake of argument assume that the naturalistic, evolutionary worldview [so widely employed within psychology] is true; that is, we put on naturalistic, evolutionary eyeglasses, so to speak. We then attempt to give a full accounting of the facts and successful (micro-) theories of psychology from this perspective—we ask, “Does the naturalistic, evolutionary worldview—particularly its theory of natural selection building upon unguided but fortuitous genetic mutations—make sense of phenomenon or theory x?” Does human language, for example, or our capacity to discriminate approximately one million shades of color, or our tendency to self-justify, or our disproportionately enormous brain size relative to other species make sense given this worldview and its chosen mechanism of explanation? We also ask, do the assumptions of science itself (such as the reliability of human reason and the regularity and lawfulness of nature) make sense given this worldview? Do things come into focus when we wear these eyeglasses? . . . Then, we ask our “empiricist” interlocutors “for the sake of argument” to assume the truth of Christianity, to put on Scriptural eyeglasses. We ask the same question. Does human language, or our tendency to self-justify, and so on, make sense given the Christian worldview? Do the assumptions of science itself fit within this worldview?³⁵

I have been utilizing this approach in my teaching for the last seven years, and I believe that it has three strengths. First, it balances antithesis and common grace. The reality of common grace is affirmed by maintaining that the (well-established) findings of empirical psychology cannot be dismissed but must instead be engaged and interpreted. The antithesis is maintained by challenging the adequacy of the autonomous and naturalistic

35. Kosits, “Redeeming Psychology Means Developing an Apologetic Edge,” 42.

framework of interpretation.³⁶ Second, it grants to psychological science the independence and legitimacy that it needs to flourish by distinguishing proximate-level and ultimate-level explanations (more on this below). Third, the approach makes intuitive sense.³⁷ When accounting for things like awe, language, and music, we compare the frankly strained explanations³⁸ of Darwinism to the simple fit afforded by the Christian worldview. Therefore, this is the fourth question that should be asked of any attempt to relate psychological science to Christianity—does this approach try to make an apologetic point? If so, does it employ evidentialist, presuppositional, or some combination of these approaches?

Whose Psychology?

Thus far I have argued that defining what we mean by “Christianity” can lead to greater clarity and transparency in any discussion of the relation of psychology and Christianity. Another major source of confusion in the discussion is the term “psychology” itself. Lay people tend to associate the word with therapy or counseling. Historically and etymologically, however, psychology has referred to the systematic study of the soul or the mind. What is the structure of the mind? What are its main

36. It is of course also true that an autonomous and naturalistic framework will oftentimes give a particular shape to the proximate-level findings of empirical psychology, and this deserves more attention than I can give it here. Yet, since empirical psychological findings are public knowledge (i.e., they are replicable events) they still must be afforded a high degree of respect.

37. That is, intuitive sense *to Christians* and also to those non-Christians who are able, for the sake of argument and empathy, to try on the interpretive lenses of the Christian worldview. Some non-Christians (usually the less tolerant ones) are unwilling and/or unable to look at reality through Christian eyes, however.

38. There are many areas where Darwinian explanations are not strained, but rather question-begging. “Adaptive” psychological or behavioral phenomena are regularly portrayed as proof of Darwinism. But Darwin co-opted the word “adaptation” from natural *theology* (see Browne, *Darwin’s Origin of Species*, 17). In other words, adaptations *used* to be seen as evidence of God. To assume that adaptations necessarily favor Darwinian theory therefore begs the question.

functions? How does the mind work? Take, for example, the first North American college textbook with the word “psychology” in the title, written by Frederick Rauch, published in 1840. The book dealt with topics such as consciousness, sensation, attention, memory, cognition, emotion, and choice.³⁹ This tradition of inquiry continues today and its most prevalent and obvious incarnation is the introductory psychology course offered by psychology departments worldwide.⁴⁰ The “view” that I will advocate in this paper presupposes *this* psychology (though it certainly has implications for other psychologies).

Though psychologists have long entertained an interest in abnormal mental functioning, therapy and counseling are newer phenomena, with separate genealogies. Further, though Freud pioneered his “talking cure” in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it wasn’t until the Second World War that therapy began to gain prominence in psychology. In response to the enormous number of traumatized soldiers, the US government invested funds in the training of clinical psychologists—who had previously been in the business of administering psychological tests but who would now attempt to help the traumatized to recover.⁴¹ Today, the number of psychologists engaged in providing therapy and other human services far exceeds the number of psychologists actively engaged with the traditional disciplinary questions. Hence, the association between the term psychology and the idea of therapy is not unfounded. Certainly therapy and counseling are now incredibly important parts of psychology, but these concerns *are* profoundly different from the classic disciplinary concerns of psychology and the

39. Rauch, *Psychology*. Instead of the term “cognition” Rauch referred to “thinking,” and the topic of choice was included in his discussion of “the will.” This shows that though the terminology of psychology changes to some extent over time (though less than you might think), the content of the discipline has continuity.

40. Though new topics have been added (such as the brain), the old topics covered by authors like Rauch continue to be explored in the Introduction to Psychology course. A superficial inspection of the table of contents of a contemporary introductory psychology textbook will attest to this.

41. Benjamin, *Brief History of Modern Psychology*, 163.

connection between science and therapy is often quite thin.⁴² Therefore, if a third edition of *Psychology & Christianity* is published, I would recommend two separate volumes, one with the original title, and another with the title, *Counseling & Christianity*.⁴³ It will serve the reader well to keep these distinctions in mind as we proceed.

Theoretical Activity in Psychology: Still, psychology proper and therapy and counseling do have more than a few things in common. Both are involved (at least to some extent) in theoretical activity, and a focus on this activity can help to frame the issues at stake. Admittedly, the subject matter of psychology sometimes exceeds the capacities of human language; we often know more in a pre-theoretical way than we can articulate theoretically—a dynamic that is especially observable in therapy. Psychology, however, is an attempt to put into propositional language the dynamic mysteries of the mind. So, while we admit the limitations of theory, we should also recognize that, if we really want to play the game of psychology, we shall inevitably enter into the domain of propositions and theory.

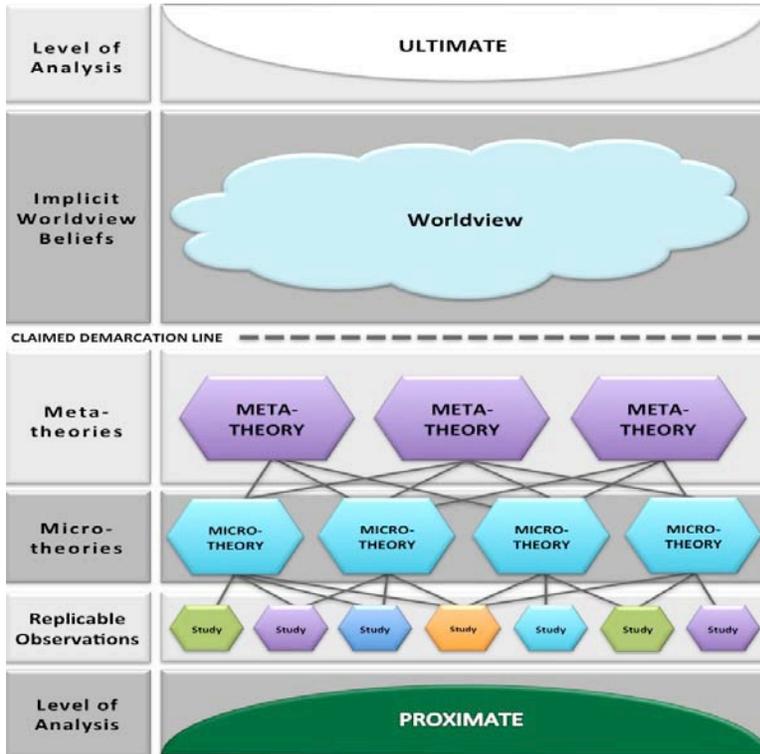
We must, therefore, have some sense of how psychological theory works in mainstream practice. Let me briefly sketch out how it works in the abstract, and then illustrate the phenomenon in a particular area of psychological science. In brief, theoretical activity in psychological science is a multi-level phenomenon,

42. Consider this: when the discipline of psychology finally got the couch in the 1940s, it was in a strongly neo-behaviorist phase in which truth claims had to be subjected to the most rigorous empirical test. Yet the theory of psychotherapy that was widely embraced by psychologists then was Freudian! Freud's theories had been held by psychology at arm's-length up to this point because they were perceived to be unscientific. Psychology's embrace of Freud for psychotherapy in the 1940s, then, was not due to science, which illustrates the point. See Benjamin, *Brief History of Modern Psychology*, 144, 164. The recent call within psychology for evidence-based treatments also reflects this reality (though providing evidence for the effectiveness of a particular therapy is still a far cry from deriving a therapy from science).

43. Interestingly, IVP has just released a volume titled *Counseling and Christianity: Five Approaches*, edited by Stephen P. Greggo and Timothy A. Sisemore (2012).

taking place along a proximate/ultimate continuum. At the most proximate level we have the “data” of individual studies, public and replicable construction-observations. One step up from that level we have proximate-level attempts to explain “how” the observed phenomenon works, i.e., the attempt to elucidate psychological or other types of “mechanisms.” We may call these “micro-theories.” The next, the “meta-theoretical” level, is more integrative, attempting to summarize massive amounts of scientific literature in order to make more general statements about human mind and behavior. Finally, we enter into the realm of explicit or implicit worldview beliefs or stories, which have a pervasive but usually unacknowledged influence on psychological theory because of the claimed demarcation line between facts and values. See Figure A below.

Figure A: The general structure of theory in psychological science



Let me now use the domain of cognitive dissonance research—a topic in the scientific sub-discipline of social psychology—as a concrete example. Again, we can conceptualize psychological theory as a multi-level phenomenon. The most proximate level of analysis is also the most public, having to do with the empirical realities described in scientific articles (or experienced in therapeutic exchange). Empirical research articles are the best example of this level of psychological work. The seminal article in the field of cognitive dissonance research was published in 1959 by Leon Festinger and James Carlsmith.⁴⁴ In this study, research participants were subjected to a tediously boring experimental task—of turning knobs again and again, and then placing blocks in a tray, dumping them out of a tray, and placing them back in the tray. In one condition of the experiment, participants were simply asked how they felt about the experiment. (They found it boring.) In two other conditions, the experimenter asked the participants to lie to the next participant (really a person in cahoots with the experimenter), telling her that the experiment was really quite interesting. Some of these participants induced to lie were paid \$1 and some were paid \$20. Which of these two groups do you think would end up feeling more positive about the boring experiment? Behavioral theory would predict that the bigger reward would be associated with more attitude change—that people would feel more positive feelings about the experiment if they were paid more to lie. But cognitive dissonance theory—which turned out to be correct—made the opposite prediction, the idea being that lying about one’s true feelings about the experiment (i.e., saying that they found the experiment interesting when they really found it terribly boring) created an unpleasant feeling of dissonance that the participants were motivated to reduce. Those participants who were paid \$20 (a lot of money fifty years ago) had sufficient justification for lying—as if to say, “Well, in reality I thought the experiment was boring, but they paid me \$20 so of course I lied!”). Those participants paid only \$1, however, did not have

44. Festinger and Carlsmith, “Cognitive Consequences.”

sufficient justification for their actions. Since they could not take back the lie, there was only one way to reduce dissonance—to change their attitudes toward the experiment. This is precisely what happened. The attitude scores in the \$20 and control conditions were negative—the experiment was boring and the participants said so. But in the \$1 condition, participants reported that they had positive feelings about the study.

The empirical “objectivity” of this experiment lies in its replicability.⁴⁵ If a psychologist desired, she could (with ethics approval) enact the same procedure and observe the same or very similar results.⁴⁶ The public nature of such studies is one of the great strengths of a scientific approach to psychology, and its greatest protection from slipping into mere opinion. In counseling there is a data-level analogy in the nitty-gritty interchanges that take place during a therapeutic session. But these data—though in many ways richer and more important—do not share the same “public” and replicable qualities. Hence, a greater degree⁴⁷ of subjectivity and interpretation always enters into “the data” of a clinical encounter (though a good therapist will always do her best to listen well before interpreting).⁴⁸

Within psychological science, however, we can make a cleaner distinction between data-level activity and theoretical activity (though the distinction still is not air-tight). All empirical articles describe what happened (and, presumably, what would happen again if replicated). Theory attempts to account for what is observed on a variety of more or less integrative levels. Again, at the most proximate level, psychologists use what we might call “micro-theories” to account for a narrow range of scientific data,

45. “Today . . . nobody believes that scientists can separate themselves from their already-existing attitudes, and to be objective does not mean to be devoid of such normal human traits. Rather, an objective observation, as the term is used in science, is simply one that can be verified by more than one observer” (Goodwin, *Research in Psychology*, 11). As these verifications or “replications” occur, confidence in a finding is increased.

46. The finding that people will change their attitudes to reduce dissonance has been replicated many times.

47. This is not to say that replicable events are entirely free from theory.

48. Storr, *Freud*, 119.

and these are clearly evidenced in the realm of cognitive dissonance theory. For example, the dissonance that Festinger and Carlsmith induced can be explained as being due to mere inconsistency between cognitions (Festinger's own theory). But this same dissonance may have arisen because of discrepancies between the self concept ("I am the kind of person who tells the truth") and action ("I lied")—the "self-consistency" approach to dissonance research. Another approach, the so-called "new look" theory, posits that dissonance arises when people feel responsible for producing foreseeable aversive consequences ("Boy, I lied about the experiment and now that student is going to be confused and bored!"). Then there is the "self-affirmation" theory, which holds that people feel dissonance when their self-worth is threatened through acts that challenge their sense of moral integrity. I do not intend to debate the worth of these theories at this stage but only desire to illustrate how "micro-theories" work in the field of psychology.⁴⁹

At the next level we have "meta-theories." I use this term in the way that psychologists Roy Baumeister and Mark Leary⁵⁰ use it, as a theory that integrates a broad variety of research findings in order to make a more general statement about psychological functioning. Whereas micro-theories explain only a very narrow band of experience, meta-theories are broader, yet still grounded in empirical observations. Baumeister and Leary do a masterful job of integrating massive amounts of empirical literature to argue that human beings have a "need to belong," which simply means that we function best when we have close relationships characterized by loving concern and frequent interaction. In my own introductory psychology class I have argued over the years—in a manner consistent with social psychologists Carol Tavis and Elliot Aronson⁵¹—that human beings also have

49. For a wonderfully concise summary of these micro-theories, see Harmon-Jones and Mills, "Introduction to Cognitive Dissonance Theory."

50. Baumeister and Leary, "Need to Belong."

51. Tavis and Aronson, *Mistakes Were Made*. See also Goethals, "Dissonance and Self-Justification."

a “need”⁵² or are *wired for* justification—we hence desire and tend to see ourselves in a positive moral light. Cognitive dissonance phenomena can be related to this broader meta-theory.⁵³

Psychological science as it exists today becomes increasingly ambivalent as theoretical explanations become more integrative or general. Baumeister and Leary acknowledge this in their article on the need to belong, saying that contemporary psychologists “have shown a pervasive reluctance to entertain sweeping generalizations and broad hypotheses,”⁵⁴ suggesting that even their painstakingly-researched and highly-documented theory pushes the limits of acceptability within the field of psychological science.

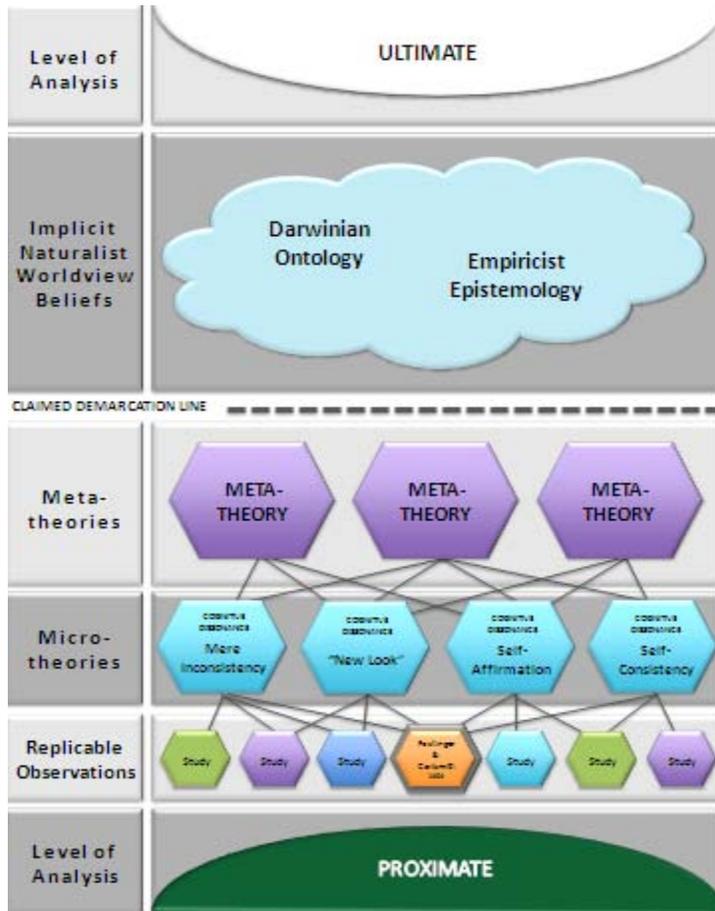
We might, then, be tempted to think of psychology as a purely inductive science, unwilling to venture into speculations when it comes to its work. This would be the wrong conclusion. Though it is true that psychological science is based in large measure upon solid, empirical study, “sweeping generalizations and broad hypotheses” do routinely enter into psychological explanation at an even more ultimate worldview level, particularly in the form of speculations concerning the evolutionary origins of the subject matter. Researchers are free to go beyond the data, beyond micro- and even meta-theoretical statements, and speculate as to the “ultimate” (i.e., Darwinian) significance of whatever they are studying. We needn’t go beyond Baumeister and Leary to observe this pervasive tendency: The need to belong, they argue, “presumably has an evolutionary basis. It seems clear that a desire to maintain and to form social bonds

52. This is not the place to address the problematics of “need” theories, though Christians ought to be cautious if they are to employ them. See, for example, Welch, “Who Are We?” I do think that the traditional Reformational notion of aspects of functioning provides a helpful way of re-conceiving the issue—humans do not flourish as well as they might when they are not functioning as designed in each modality. Conversely, however, a person may function well within many modalities and still be estranged from God—such a person cannot in an ultimate sense be said to be flourishing.

53. Indeed, the self-consistency approach of Aronson may also be portrayed as a meta-theory; see Aronson, “Return of the Repressed.”

54. Baumeister and Leary, “Need to Belong,” 498.

Figure B: The structure of theory in psychological science as it currently exists, using cognitive dissonance theory as an example



would have both survival and reproductive benefits.”⁵⁵ Likewise, if we posit a “need for justification” as a meta-theory to explain dissonance phenomena, it would be acceptable within current scientific practice to speculate as to its Darwinian basis. See Figure B.

55. Ibid., 499.

It is initially surprising that a discipline that is purportedly allergic to sweeping generalizations and broad hypotheses so regularly uses a sweeping and broad Darwinian worldview to interpret its hard-won findings. This is not to enter into the overly simplified “creation-evolution” debate, which is probably more of a red herring and distraction than we tend to admit or realize. The issue is that psychological science does indeed allow researchers to go well “beyond the data” and engage in ultimate/worldview-level theorizing, so long as that theorizing gives the ultimacy to evolution by undirected natural selection.⁵⁶ Natural selection has within science today the status of a “divinity belief,” a status that goes well beyond the evidence.⁵⁷ Any perspective that gives *ultimacy* to a created thing is, the reader should recall, idolatrous, setting itself up against the

56. I should add that Darwin’s theory of sexual selection is occasionally added to the mix to explain “extravagant” features like peacocks’ tails or, in the case of psychology, human mental abilities, which “look too excessive and expensive to have evolved for survival” (Miller, *The Mating Mind*, 11).

57. This is illustrated powerfully in Richard Dawkins polemic against belief in God, in which he replaces God with natural selection, which “explains the whole of life” (Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 116). In the realm of psychological science it is unusual to find micro-theories that can explain so much, but naturalists like Dawkins insist that, in the realm of biology, undirected natural selection *must* explain “apparent” design in nature because there is no other known natural process that can. “I have yet to meet a serious biologist who can point to an alternative to natural selection as a driving force of *adaptive* evolution” (Dawkins, *Greatest Show on Earth*, 18). Since there is no alternative, it *must* be natural selection. Though I respect Dawkins immensely for his passionate eloquence, intelligence, and love of the natural world, the fallacy here is obvious. The evidence for undirected natural selection’s omnipotence is extremely weak. It is, for example, the weak link in Jerry Coyne’s impressive array of evidence for evolution (Coyne, *Why Evolution Is True*, see ch. 5, “The Engine of Evolution”). But without undirected natural selection, the secular establishment simply does not know “what evolution is,” to borrow from Ernst Mayr’s phrase. In emphasizing the limitations of *undirected* natural selection, I follow Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies*, 12. For a sustained attempt to discuss the limits of natural selection (and should we not be able to talk about the limits of *any* scientific theory?) see: Behe, *Edge of Evolution*. My sense is that within mainstream psychological science it is simply assumed that natural selection is an undirected process. The notion of “divinity belief,” is, of course, Roy Clouser’s.

knowledge of God.⁵⁸ Only God is ultimate, and ultimate-level theorizing that neglects this fact will inevitably distort and err.

There are at least three possible ways to deal with the reality of ultimate-level sense-making in psychological science. One option, the least desirable of all, is to continue current practice without reflection. Another option would be to buckle down and insist that telling such “just-so stories” is illegitimate within scientific discourse.⁵⁹ Given that the ultimate-proximate level distinction is here to stay within psychological science,⁶⁰ however, this seems highly unlikely. The other much more difficult path—the one I advocate—is to identify ultimate-level sense-making for what it is—a way of bringing worldview-level beliefs into the interpretive game of psychological science. When this is identified as such, other worldview beliefs should be given an interpretive chance.⁶¹ But this pathway is difficult because of the perception that Darwinian stories, since they are stories of unguided material causation, are “scientific,” while theistic stories, because they are stories that may involve non-material causation, are not scientific. But stories are stories—the question is *which one makes best sense of what we see and what we assume and what we do in psychological science?* My claim is that Christian theism does it best.

Therefore, the fifth and final question that should be asked of any attempt to relate psychology and Christianity is: How does it conceptualize psychological theory? Does it attempt to balance both proximate and ultimate-levels of theorizing, or does it

58. This is not to say that Christians in psychology cannot avoid idolatry. My sense is that many Christians in psychology privately interpret evolutionary statements in psychological science as presupposing God, or simply dismiss the statements altogether.

59. Jerry Coyne’s criticism of evolutionary psychology is typical (Coyne, *Why Evolution Is True*, 228).

60. In psychology, “natural selection is uncontroversially an ultimate source of explanation” (Scott-Phillips, Dickins, and West, “Evolutionary Theory,” 43). This particular article, appearing in one of the discipline’s more high-profile venues, argues that the distinction is useful, but also frequently misapplied.

61. Here I would employ a modified version of George Marsden’s advocacy of a true pluralism within the “secular” academy. See Marsden, *Outrageous Idea*, ch. 3.

emphasize one or the other? Is it aware of the way ultimate-level commitments routinely creep into psychological science?

A Pair of Prevailing Perspectivalisms

The position I am advocating here has been influenced powerfully by the first edition of *Psychology & Christianity*, yet is a bit different from the positions described in that book. As I see it, the positions advocated in the first edition—*particularly when viewed from the vantage point of their usefulness in engaging psychological science*⁶²—may be reduced to two “perspectivalisms,” one modern, the other postmodern, to employ two over-worked terms. Modern perspectivalism is strong in its (implicit) affirmation of common grace, but weak in its (implicit) denial of the antithesis. Similarly, modern perspectivalism is strong in its commitment to carefully and accurately read the book of God’s works, nature (particularly human nature), but weak in its neglect of Scripture. Further, modern perspectivalism has a preference for micro-theories, bio-psycho-social aspects of human functioning, and a penchant for evidential apologetics.

Postmodern perspectivalism provides the opposite set of concerns. It is strong on antithesis, but weak on common grace, strong on Scripture, but weak on nature. It has a preference for ultimate-level theorizing, a focus on religious (faith-related) aspects of human functioning, and a general neglect of apologetics.

The position I will advocate offers a third perspectivalism that attempts to incorporate the strengths of both approaches, and correct for their shortcomings.

Modern Perspectivalism

The first position described in the book is the “levels of explanation approach” of David G. Myers. Myers is a social psychologist at Hope College in Michigan, the author of some best-selling introduction to psychology and social psychology

62. Again, this *is not* the primary purpose of some of the authors, so the critique that I offer is not so much of their position *per se*, but of their adequacy for work in the academic discipline of psychology.

textbooks, and the only psychological scientist in the first edition book. He is also a leading thinker on the relationship between Christianity and psychology, co-authoring, for example, the widely-adopted *Psychology through the Eyes of Faith*.⁶³ Myers's "levels of explanation" approach, described and applied in these two widely adopted books, has therefore had wide exposure in Christian universities and represents what I believe to be the most common (and common-sense) approach to relating faith to psychological science.

In the 1970s, Christian philosopher C. Stephen Evans described the position advocated by David Myers and those like him as "perspectivalism"⁶⁴—the idea being that each discipline has a valid but limited perspective on reality. If we consider, for example, a phenomenon such as memory,⁶⁵ we can look at it from a variety of "levels of explanation." At the broadest and most integrative [most ultimate] level, for example, St. Augustine reflected on the analogies between God's triune nature and the relationship among memory, understanding, and will.⁶⁶ Likewise, theologians could systematically study the ways the Scripture itself portrays memory as a barometer of covenantal faithfulness. On the level of philosophy, the interrelationship between memory and personal identity might be explored. Social psychologists look at the influences of mood on memory. Cognitive psychologists sometimes look at memory from a capacity standpoint, studying, for example, how much information people can hold in short-term memory. Biopsychologists might consider the brain regions and neurotransmitters associated with memory. Biochemists may delve into the complex molecular structure of those neurotransmitters. Physicists may be able to explain the general physical laws that govern how these molecules work.

63. Myers and Jeeves, *Psychology through the Eyes of Faith*. The first edition of this book appeared in 1987.

64. Evans, "Christian Perspectives," 106–8; Evans, *Preserving the Person*, 105–17.

65. Myers and Jeeves use memory as their key example—I have expanded on it here.

66. Teske, "Augustine's Philosophy of Memory."

The point that “perspectivalists” want to make is a good one—it is possible to consider reality from multiple levels of understanding. If one were to ask, “which is the correct level of understanding?” we would dismiss the question as ill-informed. Indeed, the validity of some form of a levels-of-explanation approach seems to be implied by the modal nature of God’s providential control of the universe. Fully understanding anything in God’s creation requires that we understand how it functions in each modality. So there is something fundamentally *right* about perspectivalism thus defined, and any Christian engagement with psychology will do well to retain this perspective. Indeed, the third perspectival approach that I outline in this article is in some ways an *integrative* levels-of-explanation approach.

The main problem with the levels-of-explanation approach advocated by Myers, however, is its modernity. Years ago historian George Marsden described the “evangelical love affair with Enlightenment science,” showing that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Christians in North America approached the faith-learning question from the vantage point of a “two-tiered worldview.”⁶⁷ Having adopted a version of the Enlightenment that was at least on the surface of things congenial to Christian faith, North American evangelicals simply assumed that science and faith would always cohere. Since science is objective, there was therefore no need to explicitly inject Christian assumptions into scientific work—a kind of “methodological secularization” took hold. Yet Marsden shows that this methodological secularization eventually morphed into a worldview secularization in which Christian viewpoints were no longer welcome in mainstream science. This is indeed the case in psychological science—we are allowed to *be* Christian, and even to write books on psychology from a Christian vantage point, or to quote the Bible or other Christian sources for broader intellectual context, but we must not insist that the Christian faith or the Christian God has any interpretive authority in scientific work *per se*. Yet, as I have contended above, this is unfair, for other (naturalistic and evolutionary) worldview assumptions

67. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, 131.

have free interpretive rein in psychology. Hence I think it is fair to say that modern perspectivalism is inattentive to the ways these ultimate-level commitments creep—or march!—into the discipline.

A Strong Emphasis on the Book of God's Works: Myers, as a scientist, is strong on creation. The proper posture of a psychologist is to be “humble before nature and skeptical of human authority.”⁶⁸ He notes that the leaders of the Scientific Revolution arose in a Christian milieu, and that we, like these scientific forerunners, ought to assume that we are dealing with “an intelligible creation,” and that we ought to “seek its truths by observing and experimenting.” The ideal is “disciplined, rigorous inquiry—checking our theories against reality . . .”⁶⁹ Myers is certainly right to take his Christianity as a mandate for open and honest scientific inquiry: “If God is the ultimate author of whatever truth psychological science glimpses, then I can accept that truth, however surprising or unsettling.”⁷⁰ We ought always to “put testable ideas to the test,”⁷¹ allowing scientific procedures to “clean the cloudy spectacles through which we view the world.”⁷² He is also certainly right to emphasize that careful attentiveness to God's creation leads to a “sense of awe and wonder.”⁷³

However, Myers, as a social psychologist, is not nearly as attentive to the book of God's Words. He discusses biblical teaching only insofar as it intersects with the current research concerns and findings of psychological science, and frames the issues in terms of whether the fields are contradictory or compatible. He is right to note that most of proximate-level psychological science is deeply compatible with a biblical view of the world. The asymmetry of his approach is apparent, however, in three main ways. There is first an asymmetry of depth. In

68. Myers, “Levels-of-Explanation View,” 55.

69. *Ibid.*

70. *Ibid.*

71. *Ibid.*, 58.

72. *Ibid.*, 57–58.

73. *Ibid.*, 58.

making the argument for compatibility, he somewhat hastily looks for parallels between the basic findings of social psychology (which he masterfully summarizes)⁷⁴ and the basic teachings of Christianity. We are told, for example, that social psychology's affirmation of the need for self-esteem is parallel to the Bible's idea of grace. Though there may be analogies here, the *differences* are more interesting (e.g., grace's devastating blow to moral self esteem). There is further asymmetry in Myers's repeated contention that we ought to put our ideas to the (empirical) test. Why only the *empirical* test? Are there not other tests that would be of interest to a Christian, such as compatibility with Scripture? Finally, Myers's asymmetry of approach is evidenced in that when science and faith appear to contradict, Myers seems to prefer to go back and re-interpret the biblical data, not the natural data, as in the case of homosexuality. In short, the book of God's Works seems to have interpretative primacy over the book of his Words.

A Strong Emphasis on Common Grace with No Sense of Antithesis: With such a strong affirmation of the legitimacy of psychological science, we find in Myers's approach an admirable first-hand sense of the way God's truth pervades the field. He rejects the idea that science and faith are "competing systems of explanation"⁷⁵ and instead emphasizes the compatibilities between Scripture and science. However, because Myers does not seem to discern the subtle and not-so-subtle ways unbelieving assumptions pervade psychology, he has little to say that would radically challenge or alter the highly secularized discipline. The current definition of psychology is embraced without comment, and he outlines seven different ways one might relate faith to psychology, none of which suggest that psychology would need to change in any way.⁷⁶ Yet, as I have indicated above, the prevailing assumption in the discipline is that one can

74. *Ibid.*, 61–65.

75. *Ibid.*, 54.

76. *Ibid.*, 60. The list is nonetheless an extremely useful menu of options for Christians in mainstream contexts.

have an adequate understanding of mind and behavior without making reference to God or Scripture. He is also uncritical of the pervasively naturalistic metaphysics and empiricist epistemology of the discipline. And though Myers is aware that bias can influence scientific work, he tends to interpret this bias as the discipline typically does,⁷⁷ in *individualistic* terms, as something that can be weeded out through empirical investigation. The biases of which I speak, however, are part of the sociology of psychological science, part of the worldview of psychological science, and are thus largely invisible and typically unruffled by empirical test.

An Implicit Acceptance of Reductive Explanations: Psychological science embraces three main levels of analysis, the biological, psychological, and social, i.e., the bio-psycho-social approach.⁷⁸ This approach, as Myers correctly notes,⁷⁹ is not inherently reductionistic but inherent to the nature of scientific inquiry—scientific explanations of necessity must isolate a few variables and make sense of them. Still, if reductionisms are understood to occur when one aspect of God’s world is given interpretive primacy, psychological science is still often guilty of reductionisms in two main ways. The first and least concerning of these is that individual psychologists (not Myers) have an understandable tendency to forget that they are dealing with just one or two levels of explanation and act as if their narrow focus is the key that unlocks everything else (recall, for example, Skinner’s optimism about reinforcement history). The second of these is much more systematic and pervasive. Again, psychologists today frequently posit Darwinian explanations as ultimate explanations, “We can see how—insert psychological phenomenon here—would have helped our evolutionary forebears survive in an ancestral environment,” etc. So it is simply not the

77. See, for example, Gerrig et al., *Psychology and Life*, 27.

78. Myers, *Psychology*, 8–9.

79. He explicitly frames his levels of explanation approach as an alternative to reductionism in Myers, *Human Puzzle*, 10–11.

case that psychology does not “answer the ultimate questions,”⁸⁰ as Myers claims.⁸¹

Evidential Apologetics: One can also discern a kind of apologetic in Myers’s writings, as has historically been the case for modern perspectivalists.⁸² In noting the many “parallels” between the findings of psychological science and the traditional pronouncements of Christian theology, Myers is implicitly claiming that scientific evidence corroborates or provides evidence for Christian faith. Science claims that human beings are unique in their rational capacity and need to explain and predict behavior, yet it has also pointed out the many ways we are “prone to overconfidence” in our thinking. Theology has likewise claimed that “we have dignity but not deity.”⁸³ Psychological science shows that we have a self-serving bias—a tendency to view ourselves positively even when we shouldn’t—as well as a need for self-esteem. Myers sees a parallel between these ideas and older religious teachings about pride and the need of human beings for God’s grace. Psychological science has also largely corroborated Christian beliefs about the importance of intact families and the benefits of a healthy faith life.

80. Myers, “Levels-of-Explanation View,” 56.

81. It is interesting, however, that Myers lists “natural selection of adaptive traits” as among the other “biological influences” of behavior, such as genes, brain mechanisms, and hormones. See Myers, *Psychology*, 8. But there is a difference between *observing* brain activity during a memory task using an fMRI, and *speculating* as to the Darwinian cause of that mechanism. One is based on observation, the other is not. This is why evolutionary psychologists readily distinguish between proximate and ultimate explanations, with evolutionary speculations being of the “ultimate” variety. “Proximate questions (explanations) have to do with mechanisms. They are ‘plumbing and wiring’ explanations, and generally answer ‘how?’ questions: How does the system work? Ultimate questions (explanations) concern the evolution of the trait. Generally, they answer the question ‘why?’: Why does this system exist, and why does it have the form it does?” (Gaulin and McBurney, *Evolutionary Psychology*, 15).

82. To use Marsden’s language, Myers is in this and other senses a modern-day “Warfieldian” (Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*).

83. Myers, “Levels-of-Explanation View,” 61.

In 2008, Myers expanded these arguments into a short book⁸⁴ in which he argues for the reasonableness of faith on the basis of psychological science. As is the case with all evidential apologetics (based upon the assumption of epistemological autonomy), he presents only a probable case. Further, the book is not necessarily a commendation of Christianity, but an argument for a more general and vague “faith.” Nonetheless, with endorsements from prominent atheists Michael Shermer and Jonathan Haidt, Myers is to be commended for so winsomely making a case for faith.

A Preference for Micro-theories: Since theoretical activity in psychological science tends to emphasize micro-level explanations of proximate-level empirical findings, Myers’s understanding of psychological theory has this same emphasis. When one of his interlocutors criticizes the personality theory of Alfred Adler, Myers correctly points out that the science of psychology does not pay much attention to such grand, more ultimate-level theories.

Postmodern Perspectivalism

In our contemporary intellectual context, the term “perspectivalism” tends to be used in a more postmodern sense.⁸⁵ (It is hence ironic that the term “perspectivalism” is reserved for an essentially modern position in the faith-psychology dialogue). If modern perspectivalism rightly notes that each discipline may offer a valid perspective on reality that does not contradict other levels, postmodern perspectivalism counters with the observation that multiple perspectives are possible within any given level or

84. Myers, *Friendly Letter*.

85. Kuklick, “On Critical History,” 59, says, “*Perspectivalism* . . . a close kinsperson of postmodernism,” is the idea that “competing worldviews are incommensurable and reflect incompatible ways of seeing the world, or even of talking about seeing a world. Christians—as well as perhaps feminists, Afrocentrists, gays and lesbians—may have insights that are irreducible to those of others, and experience has shown us that there is no rational way to adjudicate among such *Weltanschauungen*.”

discipline. Psychology is not a theoretically unified field.⁸⁶ Are we talking about functional or structural psychology, behavioral or gestalt, humanist, feminist, evolutionary, cultural, community, Buddhist, or Roman Catholic? Certainly these various schools will often offer complementary truths. But just as often they will likely offer conflicting perspectives.

It is also the case that history, personal and institutional bias, professional training and standards, and a variety of other factors will tend to institutionalize one or two of these perspectives and rule others out.⁸⁷ Progress in the sociology of science has made these points crystal clear. The work of Thomas Kuhn—now fifty years old—powerfully drove home the idea that “normal science” always operates within “paradigms.”⁸⁸ Historian of psychology Kurt Danziger applied these insights to the discipline of psychology, showing that psychology always operates within a variety of “social contexts of investigative practice,” which include the “prevailing standards of what constitutes scientific psychological knowledge.”⁸⁹ David Leary, another historian of

86. Or as Powlison, “Biblical Counseling View,” 197, puts it, “There is no unitary psychology.” To be fair, however, we do need to concede that contemporary psychological science is unified in several ways, primarily in its admirable “commitment to a *scientific* psychology” (Gleitman, Reisberg, and Gross, *Psychology*, 13). Still, as my historical examples illustrate, this commitment to empiricism has not produced a unified psychology. Another line of argumentation in support of this contention is the substantial mainstream literature on the “unification of psychology.” For perhaps the most high-profile contribution to this literature see Sternberg, *Unity in Psychology*. The great appeal of evolutionary psychology in recent years is also undoubtedly tied to its ability to deal with the “theoretical disarray” of psychological science. See Buss, “Evolutionary Psychology,” 1.

87. Powlison, “Biblical Counseling View,” 215, 217, notes that “ideas and practices do not exist in a vacuum; they happen somewhere,” pointing out that institutionalization runs through educational programs, clinics, licensing laws, insurance companies, publishers, and drug companies. “Power is wielded because theories and therapies are institutionalized.” He further reiterates the excellent postmodern insight that psychology can be considered “a system of institutional arrangements,” and that these institutions “are not givens of the natural order.”

88. Kuhn, *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.

89. Danziger, *Constructing the Subject*, 7, 11.

psychology, has argued persuasively that the history of psychology can be understood as a series or array of different metaphors, and, indeed that all scientific work—psychological or otherwise—is inevitably metaphorical.⁹⁰

For good reason, then, many Christian thinkers have embraced these postmodern insights, and have sought to forge Christian perspectives within the field, to shape “our own distinctive psychology.”⁹¹ Believers are charged to take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, so such an approach seems necessary and worthwhile. Nevertheless, the shortcoming of embracing these insights is that they have a distinctly relativistic sound to them. Is Christianity really just another “paradigm” or set of “biases,” or is it *the* Paradigm of paradigms?

For the last seven or so years, I have portrayed the other two approaches that I have found useful and attractive in the first edition of *Psychology & Christianity*, the “Biblical Counseling View,” and the “Christian Psychology View,” as “postmodern perspectivalist” approaches. Before I explain why I have portrayed these viewpoints as “postmodern,” allow me to provide a brief overview of both approaches.

The “Biblical Counseling View” of David Powlison and his colleagues is concerned primarily with applying the gospel of God’s grace in Christ to everyday struggles such as anxiety and worry, depression, marital struggles, fear of man, etc., believing that the gospel is the power of God, the only means to truly radical change in a human personality. The movement began as a conservative Christian variety of the antipsychiatry movement of the 1960s, and has developed into a flourishing ministry that has helped many Christians mature, including myself. The concern of the movement is primarily pastoral, and through its hub in Philadelphia, the Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation, it trains ministers and lay people to help themselves and others deal with their struggles in a Christ-centered way. As such, the movement is not *primarily* concerned with how to relate Christianity to the academic discipline of psychology *per*

90. Leary, “Psyche’s Muse.”

91. Powlison, “Biblical Counseling View,” 222.

se. For this reason, I am conscious of the fact that my criticisms of the movement are not entirely fair. I am asking very different questions. I am concerned with how—as a confessionally Reformed Christian—to engage the academic discipline of scientific psychology. They are primarily concerned about how the gospel changes people.⁹²

Arguably, the key insight of the Christian Psychology approach of Robert Roberts is that, if one embraces a broad enough definition of “psychology,” it becomes clear that Christians have long been engaged in the enterprise. Like the humanists of old, Roberts’s charge is *ad fontes!*, back to the original Christian sources of psychological insight. The major task of Christian Psychology is to “retrieve the Christian psychology of the past,” by allowing the old sources to speak for themselves (without imposing a foreign, modernistic psychological framework upon them) yet also translating these older works into language that we can recognize as psychology. The promise of Christian Psychology, Roberts argues, is that as contemporary Christians in the discipline become familiar with older Christian visions of the person, they may be set free from the distorting cognitive shackles of “establishment psychology.”

I have tremendous respect for Powlison and Roberts (as I do for Myers) and am convinced that they both have made seminal contributions to our shared goal of developing an authentically Christian psychology. I have (imperfectly!) incorporated the insights of Powlison and his colleagues into my own personal walk with Christ, as well as into my occasional preaching and practical theological work. I have been emboldened by Roberts’s Christian Psychology approach to have students study Jonathan Edwards’s *Religious Affections* in my history of psychology class. And I recently asked both of these men, alongside David

92. “We should not simply ask, ‘Is this the correct view,’ but rather turn that question into a more flexible, conditional one: ‘Is this a good view for understanding how my Christian faith relates *given this . . . setting . . .*’” i.e., as a teacher of psychological science (Johnson, “Gaining Understanding,” 298). For a representative and “big picture” overview, see Lane and Tripp, *How People Change*. The book begins with a tribute to Powlison as the father of the contemporary Biblical Counseling Movement.

Myers and others, to participate in a symposium I edited on the topic of “Redeeming Psychology.”⁹³ My criticisms of the viewpoints espoused in the first edition of *Psychology & Christianity* come from my own context, that of a university professor, charged with teaching “secular” psychological science from a faithfully Christian vantage point. It is when one looks at the viewpoints of Powlison and Roberts in *this* context that the shortcomings of their approaches become evident.

It is also from this vantage point of psychology professor that the chapters by Powlison and Roberts begin to feel a little “post-modern.” In one sense this is not fair at all to characterize these seminal thinkers as postmodern, because they are not relativistic or radically postmodern in their own thinking. But I have used this term for two primary reasons. The first is to remind my students that additional thought is needed—psychology departments at Christian universities could never simply adopt either position *as is*. We need to do more than simply develop a distinctively Christian view of persons; we need also to show that Christian psychology is not true for Christians only, but that a truly Christian psychology will be a universally true psychology (and to its credit mainstream psychology is still in the business of making universal truth claims). Second, the term fits because Powlison and Roberts do employ certain (valid and important) postmodern insights.

By virtue of their academic training alone, we might expect to see a more postmodern edge to their work. Roberts writes as a philosopher, and philosophers have long seen past the veneer of simple or unnuanced objective truth claims.⁹⁴ It is important to note that Powlison’s PhD is in the history and sociology of science, a discipline highly attuned to the ways in which science

93. Myers wrote, “Redeeming Psychology Means Taking Psychological Science Seriously.” Powlison wrote, “Redeeming Psychology Means Learning How to Better Use the Bible in Psychological Work.” Roberts wrote, “Redeeming Psychology Means Recovering the Christian Psychology of the Past.”

94. This is especially true of Christian philosophers. For a sustained refutation of the modern epistemological project, written by a Christian philosopher, see Wolterstorff, *Reason within the Bounds of Religion*.

falls short of its modernist rhetoric of objectivity and neutrality. It is therefore no wonder that Powlison's original essay employs many of the useful "postmodern" concepts originating in the sociology of science. For example, he argues that theory not only "selects facts based on what it has determined to be significant,"⁹⁵ but that:

all observations are constructed to a degree, but some observations may be pure artifacts. A theory tells us that certain things "have to be there"; the eye fills in the details wittingly or unwittingly. Sometimes people make things up. Research data is notoriously fluid and liable to be fudged; clinicians most often see what they expect to see. Sometimes dubious facts arise from complicity by the subjects studied . . . Sometimes bogus facts arise from biases built into testing instruments . . . In each case the fabrication may be calculated, but more often it simply just happens.⁹⁶

In what follows, I will attempt to situate Powlison and Roberts's essays within the theological and philosophical framework described in the beginning of this essay.

An Emphasis on the Book of God's Words: Perhaps it goes without saying that the biblical counseling approach of David Powlison puts an emphasis on the Scriptures. We are to turn to the Scriptures for a summary of "the Faith's psychology," and "our own 'psychology' will flourish" as we, for example, "unfold Ephesians 3:14–5:2 afresh."⁹⁷ Still, in this chapter Powlison says little about how we might derive a psychology from Scripture, the role of tradition, or the distinctively Reformed notion of faith within which he works.

The Christian Psychology approach of Robert Roberts is a bit different—less clinically-oriented than Powlison, and more philosophical and theoretical. Still, the emphasis is on the Scriptures, or on Christian tradition (an emphasis that involves interpretation of Scripture). Roberts argues that a distinctively Christian psychology ought "in large part" to aim to "retrieve the Christian

95. Powlison, "Biblical Counseling View," 201.

96. *Ibid.*, 202.

97. *Ibid.*, 221.

psychology of the past,”⁹⁸ contained in authors such as Augustine, Aquinas, Edwards, Kierkegaard, and Dostoyevsky. The Scriptures are for Roberts “the fountainhead of Christian ideas, including psychological ones.” Therefore, “much of the foundational work in Christian psychology” will include “the careful reading of Scripture.”⁹⁹ Indeed, the longest section of Roberts’s chapter is an exegesis explicating the “Christian psychology” of Matthew 5. Roberts does seem a bit more interested in scientific research than Powlison, but only in those areas having to do directly with religion. He would find important the study of “the impact of religious commitment on the healthiness or unhealthiness of mental and social functioning,”¹⁰⁰ for example.

A Strong Sense of Antithesis and Ambivalence toward Non-Christian Insight: David Powlison and I embrace the same theological tradition, so it should not be surprising that the themes of antithesis and common grace pervade his essay. The emphasis in this chapter, however, clearly falls on the antithesis.

There are phrases in Powlison’s essay that indicate an open-mindedness to secular ways of thought. “How then should we view psychological information? Bring it on . . .”¹⁰¹ “With a careful caveat about the theory-ladenness of data and with a well-trained ability to think from our own point of view (Heb 5:14), we can learn from and interact with anything.”¹⁰² He even concedes that “. . . at their best, [psychologists] know a great deal about people,”¹⁰³ and affirms the insights of various secular thinkers. “Freud’s observational and narrative abilities,” for example, “are dazzling.”¹⁰⁴

Still, his affirmations of common grace in this chapter are tepid. For example, he affirms that non-Christian theorists are assisted by “God’s providential common grace *scattering* bless-

98. Roberts, “Christian Psychology View,” 153.

99. *Ibid.*, 159.

100. *Ibid.*, 170.

101. Powlison, “Biblical Counseling View,” 204.

102. *Ibid.*

103. *Ibid.*, 199.

104. *Ibid.*, 202.

ings and restraining evils,”¹⁰⁵ and that there are “*instances of good sense and insight . . . scattered in psychology books.*”¹⁰⁶

Powlison’s sense of antithesis, on the other hand, is strong and unambiguous. “Sinners theorize sinfully about sinners.”¹⁰⁷ For Christians, “our theistic rational system is directly opposed by naturalistic rational systems,”¹⁰⁸ and “all [within secular psychology] agree that human beings are autonomous rather than responsible to an objective God who acts and speaks.”¹⁰⁹ These psychologies seem to try to prove that “anything but Christianity’s view of things is true.”¹¹⁰ Further, “a perverting dynamic works to undermine even the sharpest observations and best intentions.”¹¹¹ Unbelieving theories “systematically suppress . . . the truth . . .”¹¹² “Institutional structures tacitly shape many assumptions that work against the Faith.”¹¹³ Hence, because of the distorting “epistemological effects” of unbelief, “we must interact with secular knowledge with an intentional, self-conscious ambivalence . . .”¹¹⁴

There is a robust but less keen sense of antithesis in Roberts’s essay. A core conviction of Roberts’s Christian Psychology view is that secular psychologies have worldview commitments that oppose the Christian worldview. The reason he recommends that we retrieve the Christian psychology of the past, then, is that contemporary psychology “originates in various strands of the Enlightenment and Romantic individualism or science or scientism . . .”¹¹⁵ One of the major methodological aspects of Christian Psychology is “to read the [Christian psychological] tradition *pure*,” which means that we should strive to understand

105. *Ibid.*, 213; italics added.

106. *Ibid.*; italics added.

107. *Ibid.*, 208.

108. *Ibid.*, 209.

109. *Ibid.*, 208.

110. *Ibid.*, 209.

111. *Ibid.*, 203.

112. *Ibid.*, 221.

113. *Ibid.*, 216.

114. *Ibid.*, 203.

115. Roberts, “Christian Psychology View,” 149–50.

these older Christian thinkers on their own terms without modern psychology “contaminating”¹¹⁶ our understanding of the classics. “Thus one aspect of the method of Christian Psychology is prophylactic: It is to bracket the *substance* of twentieth-century psychologies so that we can put the Christian tradition in the psychological driver’s seat.”¹¹⁷ To keep a sharp edge, Christian psychologists must “be especially attentive to *differences* between the Christian tradition and twentieth-century psychologies.”¹¹⁸ Because Christianity has its own psychology, and because mainstream contemporary psychology originates in a very different faith commitment, “the measure that we lose touch with our own psychology and replace it with one of the psychologies of the establishment or some conglomeration of them, we will also lose touch with the apostolic faith.”¹¹⁹

An Emphasis on the Aspects of Faith and Ethics: Powlison is right when he says, “we are innately and thoroughly worshippers.”¹²⁰ All of life is religious, and the minutiae of day-to-day functioning reveal what we truly worship. Nevertheless, both Powlison and Roberts seem to focus on psychological functioning as it relates to what is traditionally called “the religious life,” i.e., human relation to God in faith and to others in love.¹²¹ “Life has to do with God,” Powlison (correctly) says, and biblical counseling resists any therapeutic intervention that “replace[s] faith in God.”¹²² Likewise, Roberts’s emphasis on the Christian psychology of old theologians and on the empirical study of religion puts the same emphasis on “religion” in this narrower sense, and his explication of the Sermon on the Mount emphasizes the ethical aspect of human life. Now certainly these are admirable emphases that fill a deplorable lacuna in con-

116. *Ibid.*, 155.

117. *Ibid.*, 156.

118. *Ibid.*, 157.

119. *Ibid.*, 171.

120. Powlison, “Biblical Counseling View,” 219.

121. In Reformational philosophy, these have to do with the pistis (or faith-related) and ethical (love-related) modalities of God’s providential control.

122. Powlison, “Biblical Counseling View,” 219, 218.

temporary psychological science.¹²³ Psychological functioning cannot, however, be reduced to its relation to these crucial aspects of faith and ethics. By God's own design, we function in a variety of other ways, and a satisfying and full-orbed Christian psychology would need to deal with the relation of psychological functioning to these other aspects of life too.

An Undeveloped Presuppositional Apologetic: One of the great strengths of Powlison's "biblical counseling" approach is his deep sense of the explanatory power of the Christian worldview, reflecting the Van Tillian origins of the Biblical Counseling Movement. The key to Van Til's presuppositional apologetic was the idea that the Christian worldview uniquely interprets the world. Again and again, Powlison emphasizes this point: "the truth rightly interprets every fact";¹²⁴ "only the Faith has a principle by which our tendency to distort can be continually corrected: God's point of view."¹²⁵ Borrowing from a Van Tillian analogy, he argues that those who do not see "with the Faith's eyes" necessarily distort the facts, as if operating "a powerful table saw set at a 75-degree angle. When [they] cut . . . a forest into boards, [they] cut . . . every board crooked. But the Faith sees it true; it cuts boards at right angles."¹²⁶ But this key apologetic insight is—ironically enough—undeveloped in biblical counseling, though for understandable reasons.¹²⁷ The main concern of biblical counselors is overwhelmingly to help Christians learn to live their lives in the light of the riches of Christ's

123. Recent investigation in "positive psychology" has begun to address these aspects of functioning from a scientific vantage point.

124. Powlison, "Biblical Counseling View," 201.

125. *Ibid.*, 202.

126. *Ibid.*, 203.

127. I say this underdevelopment is ironic not only because of the Van Tillian origins of biblical counseling, but also because apologetics figures prominently in the curriculum of the CCEF and is one of the main topic areas they use to organize articles published in the *Journal of Biblical Counseling*. But my sense is that the primary aim of these things is not apologetic exchange with non-Christians in psychology, but rather to equip Christians as they encounter secular ideas. Further, as a counseling movement, they understandably do not tend to engage psychological science.

redemption, not to show the explanatory superiority of the Christian worldview in an apologetic interchange with unbelievers. The apologetic of biblical counseling, they have said, is changed lives, and this indeed is the more important apologetic. But for those of us who teach the academic discipline of psychology, the theoretical apologetic must be developed. We must actually *show* that Christian faith does a better job of ultimate-level explanation than does the naturalistic/Darwinian worldview so dominant in contemporary psychology.

I have not discerned an apologetic in Roberts's chapter. Given that he thinks of modern psychology as coming from one faith position, and Christian psychology from another, the implication would seem to be that we are dealing with simple incommensurability. With no meaningful point of contact, apologetic exchange would seem to be out of line.¹²⁸ So in practice, neither of our postmodern perspectivalist authors has much to say—in these chapters at least—to the discipline of scientific psychology *per se*.

An Emphasis on Ultimate-level Theories in Psychology: Powlison writes with a keen awareness of the distinction between the “data-level” and the “theory-level” in psychological work. He is certainly right to reiterate the postmodern insight that “psychological knowledge never presents ‘just the facts,’” but that “theory has multiple effects on observation and research.” Theories select facts, and have a “blinkering effect on perception.” Humans necessarily “see with a theory-informed gaze,” and “a wrong theory distorts every fact, just as the truth rightly interprets every fact.”¹²⁹ But one gets the clear sense that the type of “theory” Powlison usually has in mind is *ultimate-level* theory. We see this when he compares “false theories” with

128. If, using again Marsden's terminology, Myers is a Warfieldian vis-à-vis apologetics, Roberts might be a Kuyperian. See Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, ch. 5. The genius of Van Til's apologetic—represented by Powlison—is that it reconciles the Warfieldian emphasis on rational proof and evidence with the Kuyperian emphasis on antithetical worldviews.

129. Powlison, “Biblical Counseling View,” 201.

“the Faith” and says that “information and observation must always be subjected to analysis from the standpoint of the Faith.”¹³⁰ “Theory and worldview provide the intellectual center of the psychological enterprise, the ‘doctrinal core.’”¹³¹ This ultimate-level understanding of theory is also evident when he discusses the lack of a theory able to unify the field of psychology.¹³² He is absolutely right when he says, “we often forget something very important. The Faith is a theory whose view of human nature competes head-on with the personality theories.”¹³³ Yet the “personality theories” that he has in mind are the more ultimate-level and “grand” classical theories, such as those of Adler and Freud, which are dismissed by mainstream psychology today as unscientific. Still, Powlison is correct to think of our faith as a “theistic rational system” that “is directly opposed by naturalistic rational systems,”¹³⁴ though perhaps today we might prefer to conceptualize our faith more as a story. He is also certainly right to claim that theory—when conceived in this ultimate sense—is institutionalized: “Power is wielded because theories and therapies are institutionalized.”¹³⁵ Theories in Powlison’s mind address big questions: there is a “big WHY? that anchors every theory.”¹³⁶ When he talks about how psychology lacks a “bridging theory”¹³⁷ to unify the discipline, he is also referring to an ultimate-level theory, a “Grand Unified Theory.”¹³⁸ He also speaks this way when he qualifies Kuhn’s statement that psychology has no paradigm.¹³⁹ It *is* unified in its belief that Christianity is at best irrelevant, Powlison argues.

130. *Ibid.*, 202.

131. *Ibid.*, 204–5.

132. *Ibid.*, 206–7.

133. *Ibid.*, 209.

134. *Ibid.*

135. *Ibid.*, 215.

136. *Ibid.*, 220. But micro-theories are probably more anchored by the empirical realities they attempt to explain.

137. *Ibid.*, 206.

138. *Ibid.*, 207.

139. *Ibid.*, 208.

Here again, Powlison conceptualizes theory as an ultimate-level belief that guides research.

Though Roberts has quite a bit less to say explicitly than Powlison on this matter, the theoretical bent of Roberts is also fairly easy to discern. The Christian psychologies contained in the writings of Augustine and Edwards, for example, or in the Bible itself, were not by and large “micro-theories” dealing with technical and highly-specific aspects of psychological functioning. They were “big picture” ultimate-level theories.

Powlison and Roberts are right. The Christian faith, contrary to what a modern perspectivalist would claim, can function as an ultimate-level theoretical perspective relevant to the interpretation of (and construction of) psychological data.¹⁴⁰ But the Christian faith does not imply that the micro-theories that are the lifeblood of psychological science need to be rejected or even revised. Would “the Faith” endorse Festinger’s mere inconsistency approach, Aronson’s self-concept, or Cooper’s “new look?” The Faith could easily endorse any of these micro-theories. This contest between micro-theories is a battle that needs to be fought in the context of the psychological laboratory. But the Faith does offer the higher-level explanation that renders dissonance phenomena (and each of the prevailing micro-theories) ultimately intelligible in a way that naturalism/Darwinism does not.

“Integration” as a Failed Alternative?

On the surface of things, one might think that the “integration” approach discussed by Gary Collins would provide a framework to marry the good of these two perspectivalist approaches. If modern perspectivalism emphasizes the book of God’s works, and postmodern perspectivalism emphasizes the book of God’s words, integration advocates have long argued that the two books of God’s revelation ought to be read together. To this end,

140. In my own “Reformational” philosophical tradition, it is more customary to conceive of the Christian faith as “pre-theoretical” rather than theoretical, and I would agree that it is indeed pre-theoretical. But worldview beliefs can be (and often are) made explicit in scientific discussions. They then become part of the network of theoretical beliefs.

Collins approvingly quotes psychologists Paul Meehl who said that he took “it for granted that revelation [i.e., Scripture] cannot genuinely *contradict* any truth about man or the world which is discoverable by other means,”¹⁴¹ and Harold Faw who believes that since “God has revealed himself in both his world and his Word, one’s grasp of his truth, finite and faltering though it is, will be enhanced by bringing these sources of truth together.”¹⁴²

Also, just as modern perspectivalism emphasizes common grace and postmodern perspectivalism antithesis, integration thinkers have espoused something similar to the balanced approach that I advocate. Clearly, the very fact that integrationists desire to bring theology and psychology together implies that psychology has something worthwhile to offer. It is just as clear that Collins writes with a clear sense of how Christianity is suppressed by the mainstream, recounting how during his graduate school days, “my professors largely ignored religion, and whenever it was mentioned in our textbooks the references were always negative,”¹⁴³ so that he would during his training have “to pretend that God did not exist in the counseling room.”¹⁴⁴ He says that psychology still clings “tenaciously to a rapidly disappearing, Enlightenment-based logical positivism.”¹⁴⁵

Despite these promising signs, and despite the fact that during the 1970s and 80s Collins inspired many psychologists with an “extraordinary integration vision,”¹⁴⁶ Collins’s essay in 2000 seemed to indicate that the integration movement was in bad shape. Collins very honestly admitted that although “academic institutions have promised prospective students that integration is at the core of their educational programs,”¹⁴⁷ “we still don’t agree on what the word *integration* means,”¹⁴⁸ that “the term

141. Collins, “Integration View,” 103.

142. *Ibid.*, 109.

143. *Ibid.*, 102.

144. *Ibid.*, 119.

145. *Ibid.*, 109.

146. Jones, “Integration View,” 104.

147. Collins, “Integration View,” 103–4.

148. *Ibid.*, 104.

remains confusing,”¹⁴⁹ and that “*Integration* has become a word shrouded in mystery, a slogan, a buzzword that gives us warm feelings but is used more as a gimmick to attract students than as a genuine scholarly achievement or a practical methodology.”¹⁵⁰

Though this was perhaps not his main goal, Collins’s essay emphasizes the confusion that can exist among integrationists—“there is no agreement about what we are integrating,” indeed, “integration is undefinable.”¹⁵¹ The targets of integration move—theology changes, psychology changes, clinical practice changes. Plus, approaches to integration are deeply personal—“surely there is a Gary Collins approach to counseling, writing, and teaching,” but this is only one person’s approach and it would be arrogant to lay it down as “*the* biblical approach.”¹⁵² Plus there are a multitude of considerations that integrationists need to incorporate, such as a deeper understanding of hermeneutics, eschatological orientation, cultural sensitivity, the question of outreach—how clinicians and academics need to dialogue and how to engage in social action.

In short, Collins’s chapter attempts to “integrate” too much and seems, in the end, to have to make some difficult concessions. For example, at the end of the essay Collins says, “I wish I could give a formula for integration,”¹⁵³ but he cannot. There are no “rules for integrating faith with practice.”¹⁵⁴ At times, he seems to question the entire project, fearing that “we have systematized and intellectually conceptualized psychology and theology so much that we have squeezed out the spiritual.”¹⁵⁵ Instead, he says, we must rely on the Holy Spirit so that “our lives become walking examples of integration.”

Collins is of course right, that we must rely on the Holy Spirit, and that the way we live our lives is infinitely more important than how airtight our theoretical systems may be.

149. *Ibid.*, 105.

150. *Ibid.*, 105.

151. *Ibid.*, 112.

152. *Ibid.*, 115.

153. *Ibid.*, 125.

154. *Ibid.*, 126.

155. *Ibid.*

(This is why I also feel that what the biblical counseling approach has to offer is ultimately of much greater value than what I have to offer.) Yet, theoretical life, for all of its limitations, is still a part of life, particularly for those called to academic vocations as teachers or students—we must learn to think well. And part of thinking well, as any teacher who has provided guidance on a term paper can attest, requires that we narrow our focus of attention. We need to ask, “Whose psychology? Which Christianity?” In my calling, I am interested in the relationship between my confessional Reformed Christianity and the psychological science that I teach my students day after day. Thus defined, my “integration” problem is not that difficult. (This does not, of course, mean that *solving* the problem is easy.) Any future efforts at integration will likewise need to be more focused in order to be successful.¹⁵⁶

A Third Perspectivalism—Reformed and Reformational

In what follows I will sketch out the perspective that I have employed in my teaching of psychological science at the university level—a perspective that has emerged as I have read and discussed *Psychology & Christianity: Four Views* with my students over the years.

Antithetical Openheartedness

Any Christian teaching psychological science would need to assume a science-affirming stance, such as that of David Myers. To some extent I live in that same world, read the same articles, use the same textbooks (though he actually *wrote* the textbooks), and teach some of the same courses. I, too, have supervised hundreds of undergraduate students in the design of experimental research projects. As scientific knowledge is public (i.e., replicable) knowledge it is also God’s knowledge. Common grace

156. The need to be careful in defining terms is certainly not an original idea, but is quite basic in the integration literature. See, for example, Stevenson, Eck, and Hill, *Psychology and Christianity Integration*, 177. This of course once again raises the question of the representativeness of this chapter.

isn't "scattered" here and there in psychological science. If we have eyes to see, it is to be found in every well-designed and valid empirical study.¹⁵⁷ Though often "trivial"¹⁵⁸ from the perspective of ministry, the findings of psychological science, when considered as disclosures of God's handiwork, are *far* from trivial—they glorify the God who made them. Hence, the insights of psychological science are to be embraced with open-hearted gratitude and wonder. And for those of us who work in the field, we have no choice but to embrace the good of the discipline.

I also want to maintain the same antithesis-affirming stance as Powlison and Roberts (and Collins). There really are institutional, epistemological, and metaphysical arrangements that exclude the Christian worldview. When considered from a sociological standpoint, psychology has a worldview and it isn't Christian—it is empiricist, and naturalistic.¹⁵⁹ Christians are certainly welcome to work in the discipline, but they are not allowed to challenge psychology's worldview commitments.¹⁶⁰ Interestingly, psychological science increasingly allows for ultimate-level (i.e., Darwinian) explanations of empirical data. We can put a Christian spin on this and say that God directed evolution, but this misses the point. The mainstream believes that Darwinian evolution is in direct opposition to theism, as Pinker and Bloom

157. Assuming there has not been a Type I error, that is. There is always a small chance (usually 5 percent in psychology) that incorrect hypotheses will be supported by the data. But over time, these errors can be weeded out when they fail to be replicated.

158. "The more distinctively 'scientific' a bit of psychological knowledge is, the less 'important' it will be" (Powlison, "Biblical Counseling View," 200).

159. In reality the situation is a bit more subtle than this. There is a sense in which any true statement already presupposes the truth of Christianity, but this is not the place to discuss this nuance. For an elaboration of this idea, see Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, ch. 6. One upshot of this idea, however, is that true scientific statements are indeed "theory-laden," i.e., they presuppose Christianity! This is why Christians can and should accord the greatest respect to scientific discovery.

160. A recent survey of attitudes toward religion within science finds that many scientists are indeed religious, though scientists tend to feel they must keep their faith "closeted" (Ecklund, *Science vs. Religion*, 43–45).

attest.¹⁶¹ Plus, even those Christians who assume that God directed human evolution (a non-Darwinian position, I may add) cannot be content with the incessant interpretive move of psychological science to reduce everything to adaptation for survival and reproduction (which presupposes a Darwinian rather than a distinctively Christian view of evolution).

Bridging Ultimate- and Proximate-level Psychological Theorizing

Psychology is simply one of many academic disciplines that has in its recent history been shaped by an “evolution revolution” in which “the metanarrative of Darwinian thought” is being applied to “make sense” of vast stretches of human culture and experience. “For better or for worse, we live in the Age of Biology.” Ironically, from the vantage point of Christian faith, this can be for the better. Though the Darwinian story has had a powerful impact on psychological science since its inception as an independent scientific discipline, never before has its function as an ultimate-level metanarrative been clearer.

The implication would seem to be this—since ultimate-level worldview beliefs do currently and powerfully shape theoretical activity in psychological science, Christians ought to insist that their own ultimate-level worldview beliefs be allowed to compete in the interpretive game of psychological science. This can, of course, be done well or done poorly. Nevertheless, attempts to demonstrate the coherence between ultimate-level (theological and philosophical) and proximate-level (meta- and micro-theoretical) beliefs ought to play at least some role in a distinctively Christian engagement with psychology. Certainly the biblical counseling and Christian Psychology approaches would have much to contribute to the articulation of these ultimate-level beliefs.

As a brief and superficial example, in the realm of dissonance theory, the Christian worldview would not presumably dictate under which circumstances any of the current micro-theories would hold (this would be a strictly empirical question), although it could provide an ultimate-level accounting for them

161. Bloom, *How Pleasure Works*, 4; Pinker, *Language Instinct*, 352.

all (consistent with Festinger's notion of mere consistency, human beings as the *imago dei* would presumably desire to be consistent with themselves, for example). Further, the meta-theoretical idea that humans have a need to see themselves (i.e., not merely be seen by others) in a positive moral light would also cohere nicely with a Christian anthropology. Again, such an accounting would not strictly speaking be "scientific" in the traditional proximate-level sense. It would be scientific only in the sense that Darwinian stories are scientific—i.e., that it provides a meta-narrative that coheres with what has been observed. The superiority of the Christian meta-narrative vis-à-vis Darwinism will be addressed below.

Non-reductive, Trans-aspectual Theorizing

An adequate approach to psychological science will concern itself with the multi-aspectual interrelatedness of human psychological functioning, without reducing this functioning to any single aspect. As we have seen, the Biblical counseling and Christian Psychology approaches not only tend to emphasize ultimate-level (more integrative) theorizing, but they also tend to focus in this theorizing on the life of faith and morality, the so-called "pistic" and ethical aspects of functioning, while a levels-of-explanation approach, with its implicit preference for micro-theories, tends to focus on the more mundane topics that characterize the discipline as it currently exists. The non-reductive, trans-aspectual approach that I am advocating would retain the insight of Powlison and Roberts that properly-directed pistic and ethical functioning is crucial to human flourishing, but it would also take counsel from the multitudinous other areas of psychological science and their contribution to our understanding of human functioning.

A Symmetrical, Hermeneutical, and Doxological Approach

With this full-orbed view of theory in place, Christians in psychology can (and must) keep both books open. The scientific methods employed in psychology should be understood as sophisticated but limited ways of reading the book of God's works. We can whole-heartedly encourage psychological science

to continue to develop these methods. But by insisting that the data- and micro-theory-levels of psychology are not hermetically sealed from worldview considerations, we can then insist that the book of God's Word provides the only ultimate-level perspective that renders the facts of experience intelligible. As Collins notes, there is a hermeneutical side to reading both books, and we should never expect to have a final read on either text. We should also always be working on improving our read of *both* texts—and reading both texts needs to be part of our *psychological* work. But as a Reformed Christian and a teacher of psychological science, I am convinced that accurate and insightful interpretations of both texts are readily available, and that the harmony that already exists between the two books is remarkable. Our job is to show that this is the case. I have argued that we ought to intentionally seek as the end of our psychological work God's own ultimate end in making the world—the glory of his own name. Demonstrating the harmony of the two books is one way Christians in psychology can fulfill this goal.

Engaged Presuppositionalism

Like Myers, then, I want to affirm that psychological science does not by and large contradict Christian commitment. He has laid down an admirable path of evidential apologetic engagement (flowing out of his detailed knowledge of psychological science) and has garnered the respect of the world's leaders in psychological science. But like Powlison, coming from the same Van Tillian vantage point, I want to say something bolder than "Christians are rational," or, perhaps, "Christians aren't crazy for being Christian." Instead, we want to argue that the Christian worldview is actually true, and therefore provides an ultimate-level explanation superior to the biological reductionism of Darwinism. But Biblical Counseling, as a pastoral movement within the church, has not brought the light of God's Word into the academic discipline of psychology itself. Psychological science, when considered from the vantage point of such pastoral con-

cern, may seem fairly trivial or unimportant,¹⁶² and pastors may not have time to read psychological science. However, Christians in psychological science need to apply Powlison's bold statements about the explanatory superiority of "the Faith" to their own areas of expertise. This would almost certainly need to be a collaborative effort among diversely skilled individuals all committed to a sweeping and unifying Christian vision for psychological science. When we *show, in hundreds of specific ways, that indeed the Faith does better*, we will have constructed "one long argument"¹⁶³ not only for the truth of Christianity, but also for the necessity of explicitly Christian perspective within psychological science.

For the last seven years or so I have been calling this apologetic approach *transcendental* perspectivalism. The word "transcendental" indicates that the approach is a type of argument, an argument that asks about the preconditions of experience. Made famous by Immanuel Kant in arguing that proximate-level categories such as cause and effect and the self are necessary in order to render experience intelligible, this type of argument was developed into a full-fledged apologetic by Cornelius Van Til when he shifted the question to one of worldview—which *worldview* is actually presupposed in experience?¹⁶⁴ His two-step argument, again, is to first, for the sake of argument, put the lens of your unbelieving interlocutor on and ask if things cohere,

162. This is unfortunate—there is much in psychological science that can help Christians.

163. This famous phrase comes from the opening line in the final chapter of Darwin, *Origin of Species*.

164. For an elaboration of this understanding of Van Til, see Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*. There are many within the Reformational philosophical camp who think Van Til's approach is "transcendent" rather than transcendental. and to some extent I think that is an accurate point—the Christian worldview can serve as an "Archimedean point" from which we can view all of reality, which, as Dooyeweerd said, is a transcendent vantage point. Still, I think we can frame Van Til's argument as transcendental by showing how Van Til is concerned with ultimate-level preconditions of knowledge (i.e., the ontological Trinity), while Dooyeweerd—like Kant—was concerned with certain proximate-level preconditions (i.e., for Dooyeweerd, the inner nature and structure of theoretical thought per se). But this is not the place to develop this argument.

make sense, and come into focus when wearing these lenses. This is not hard to do because psychological science is *already* engaged in a form of *Darwinian* transcendental perspectivalism, attempting to show how the Darwinian worldview is presupposed in and therefore makes ultimate sense of the facts of psychological science. (And in their attempts to do this we find the best examples of the limits of that paradigm).

The second step of the argument is to ask our unbelieving interlocutors to put on the lens of the Christian worldview and ask the same question, “Do these findings or successful micro-theories come into focus/make sense/cohere when looked at from the vantage point of the Christian worldview?” Van Til’s disarmingly strong assertion years ago that every fact makes sense only in view of the Christian worldview has in my own experience fit the findings of psychological science very well. We may begin, as Van Til did, with the assumptions of science itself (the lawfulness of the world and the reliability of reason)—these make much more sense in a Christian theistic context than in a naturalistic/Darwinist one.

Then we move on to the findings of psychological science themselves: the mysterious complexity of sense perception that goes well beyond the complexity of individual sense organs such as the eye; the fact that the left hemisphere has an “interpreter module” that seeks to construct plausible stories; that the human brain is, as evolutionary psychologist Geoffrey Miller put it, “wildly in excess of what . . . we would need to survive”;¹⁶⁵ that human beings can discriminate about one million different colors, that human beings create music and experience emotions like awe; that humans have the innate capacity to learn syntax-

165. Buckner and Whittlessey, “Why Sex?” The full quote, which I love: “The human brain is the most complex system in the known universe. It’s wildly in excess of what it seems like we would need to survive on the plains of Africa. In fact, the human brain seems so excessive that a lot of people who believe in evolution—applied to plants and animals—have real trouble imagining how natural selection produced the human brain . . . I think people are perfectly sensible in being skeptical about the ability of selection for survival to account for the human brain.” Again, Miller argues that it is Darwin’s theory of *sexual* selection that can do the heavy theoretical lifting (see footnote 56).

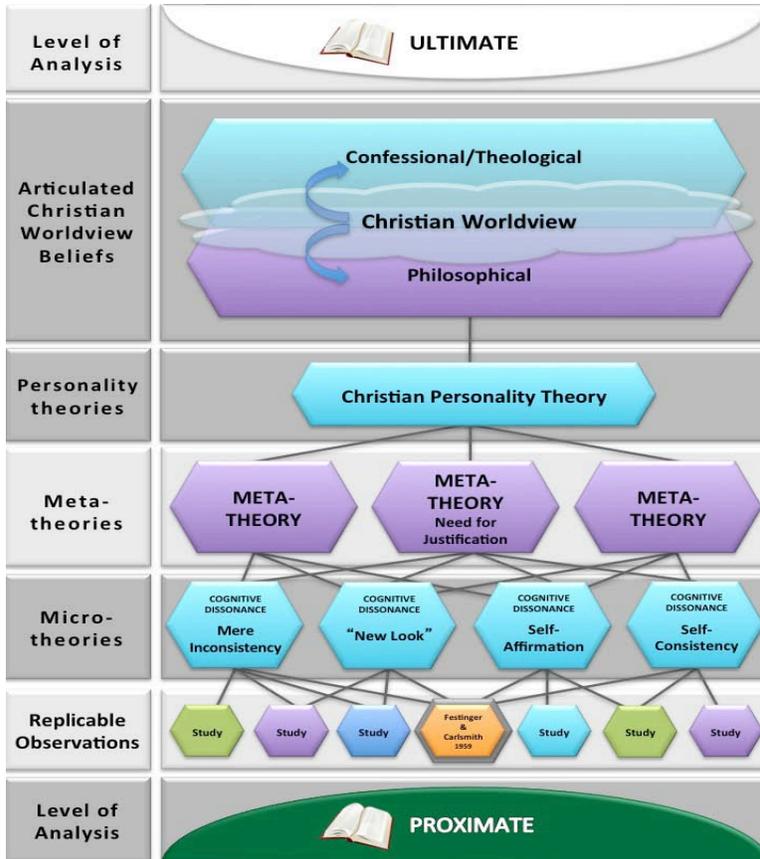
structured language; that human beings seem to have a deep need to justify themselves, etc. Each of these phenomena is difficult—sometimes exceedingly difficult—to account for in terms of gradualist Darwinist predictions, yet each coheres perfectly well with the Christian story. This isn't evidentialist apologetics, where we simply ask our debate partners to follow the data “where they lead”—people don't work that way. If we start in autonomy, we will end in autonomy. But it is an *engaged* presuppositional apologetics—in which we invite our partners to consider another vantage point, to see how well it coheres with the facts of psychology (and there can be no honest doubting that human language, human storytelling, love of music, and physiological complexity cohere with the Christian worldview), and, as Powlison put it, to invite them to intelligent repentance.

In short, transcendental perspectivalism is a fancy name that amounts to a simple yet bold idea—that apart from the Christian worldview psychological science can make ultimate sense neither of itself nor of its findings. Put differently, transcendental perspectivalism is a kind of Reformed/presuppositional natural theology.¹⁶⁶ All facts reveal and presuppose the God of the Christian Scriptures, and are ultimately unintelligible apart from him. The Christian psychologist is called to show that this is indeed the case.¹⁶⁷

166. The problem with traditional natural theology is its assumption of autonomy vis-à-vis nature, as Reformed thinkers have long noted. A presuppositional natural theology affirms what the Reformed tradition has always affirmed and what this essay has argued, that the natural world reveals God. We (i.e., *simmers*) need, however, as Calvin said, the “spectacles of Scripture” in order to *see* that this is the case. For a similar approach, see McGrath, *Open Secret*; McGrath, *Fine-tuned Universe*. Though I have just recently begun studying McGrath's approach, we do seem to share some of the same fundamental ideas, such as the idea that a presupposed (rather than rationally demonstrated) Christian faith, as he puts it, “makes sense” of the facts of science. For a classic statement on a Reformed/presuppositional approach to natural theology, see Van Til, “Nature and Scripture.”

167. See Figure C for a summary of the vision for psychological theory described above. Though this is not the place to develop the thought, this approach would provide an ideal context for a revival of old-style, narratively

Figure C: The structure of theory in psychological science advocated in this essay, using cognitive dissonance theory as an example.



The Second Edition of Psychology & Christianity

Since I have been interacting with the first edition of *Psychology & Christianity* for about seven years, and since my own views have been so powerfully shaped by the first edition, my strategy

rich, interdisciplinary personality theories, such as those advocated by Baumeister and Tice, "Rethinking."

in this essay has been to articulate my own position vis-à-vis the first edition before reading the second. In what follows, I will sketch out my initial impressions of the second edition in light of my reading of the first.

Levels-of-Explanation Approach Unchanged

The essay of David Myers is improved in that it contains a better description of what “levels of explanation” means, and some of the material has been updated. But the argument is essentially the same.

A More Winsome Essay on Biblical Counseling

Powlison’s beautifully revised essay is a delight to read. There is a clear movement in this essay toward the “antithetical openheartedness” that I have advocated above. The ambivalence toward common grace evident in the first essay seems all but gone, yet with no significant loss of antithesis. The repeated Van Tillian (and, he notes, Augustinian) refrain of how the Faith interprets things rightly strikes just the right balance. The following quote summarizes the tone of the entire essay: “There’s work to do and much to learn from many sources. But the credo orients, teaching us to see facts in their true context.”¹⁶⁸

In particular, the treatment of psychological science (which is part of “Psych-2” in his parlance) sounds much less post-modern—he affirms the usefulness of scientific insights, and, dropping the extended discussion of the theory-ladenness of data, correctly identifies the key shortcoming of psychological science: “psychologists tend to be unaware of the problematic nature of their underlying assumptions . . .”¹⁶⁹

The essay now includes some richly nuanced case study material, belying any who would dismiss biblical counseling as necessarily unsophisticated and simplistic. Powlison also does a wonderful job of conveying how difficult it is to capture concisely the dynamics of God- and Word-centered healing. A

168. Powlison, “Biblical Counseling View,” in *Five Views*, 248.

169. *Ibid.*, 255.

respectful reader's only choice is to dig deeper before she can draw a final conclusion.

My only criticism of Powlison's essay is that Biblical Counseling as therein construed still seems to leave the light of the CCEF's seminal achievement hidden under the bushel of a strictly church-centric vision. In this vision, the insights of secular psychology are to be mined for the good of the church. But the vision for how the insights of the faith are to be brought to the secular world of counseling seems vague at best. Powlison rightly says that a church with a flourishing counseling ministry will be an attractive missional fragrance in the culture at large. But what I would like to see is a more explicit apologetic agenda for showing the world of secular counseling that the Faith really does do better. This would seem to fulfill the first half of the CCEF's mission statement, "to restore Christ to counseling."

Part of this change would mean that biblical counselors will need to do a better job of acknowledging in very specific ways their deep connections—and, indeed, indebtedness—to secular psychotherapy (implicitly and explicitly evident in Powlison's new essay in many ways). As a ministry for Christians, the CCEF has in its writings emphasized how their approach *differs from* and *improves upon* secular psychotherapy while de-emphasizing what and how much has actually been learned from secular psychology. A better acknowledgment of secular psychology may gain them a greater hearing from the secular world of counseling. As they move in this direction I would see the CCEF doing for the clinical side of the discipline what the agenda described in this essay hopes to do for the scientific side. Further, demonstrating that Christian faith unifies these two perennially estranged and heretofore tenuously connected psychologies would be a powerful apologetic indeed!

A Christian Psychology Collaboration

The "Christian Psychology View" article has also undergone a substantial revision, mostly due to the fact that Robert Roberts has brought along a co-author—a psychological scientist named P. J. Watson, who has done excellent work in a variety of research areas, such as the psychology of religion. Watson has

become one of the leading spokesmen of the Christian Psychology movement, and his thought-provoking 2010 Bryan Institute Symposium presentation—part of the symposium launching the second edition of *Psychology & Christianity*—provided something of an inspiration for the title of this article.¹⁷⁰

The first half of this new essay now portrays the major idea of the original essay as “step one” in a two-step process. This first step, then, is to retrieve the Christian psychology of the past, and they continue to use Roberts’s interesting exegesis of the Sermon on the Mount. One difference in this first section of the essay, however, is that the tone feels more anti-scientific than the original essay.

That tone is corrected in the second half of the essay, written (presumably) by Watson. The second step of Christian Psychology is “operationalizing the Christian tradition,” i.e., formulating testable hypotheses of immediate and obvious Christian interest—topics in the psychology of religion primarily. For example, Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount explains that “hatred of God is explained by being mastered by Mammon.” This explanation could be tested empirically. He cites other studies, such as those that demonstrate a link between prayer and well-being in Christians.

Though these developments are certainly interesting, important, and exciting, this understanding of “the distinctively Chris-

170. An audio recording of this conference is available online. Watson’s session, “Whose Psychology? Which Rationality? Christian Psychology after Postmodernism” can be found at <http://www.bryan.edu/9414.html>. The talk has also recently appeared in print. My first response to his argument, which admirably attempts to cast “Christian Psychology” as ecumenical and broad in inclusion, was to think that a greater degree of theological specificity would be necessary than he seemed to indicate. After recently re-listening (and then reading the published article), I was pleased to discover deep compatibilities between our approaches. Still, I don’t think we can “out-narrate all other positions” without theological particularity. Indeed, my contention is that the Reformed and Reformational position I have laid out in this article provides the kind of narration that Watson calls for. See Watson, “Whose Psychology? Which Rationality? Christian Psychology within an Ideological Surround after Postmodernism,” 308.

tian goals of Christian psychology”¹⁷¹ betrays, I think, too narrow a view of Christianity. This is my Father’s world, and it includes more than the faith-related and ethical aspects of life (though, again, these aspects are absolutely central to human flourishing). God created all things, including the brain, sensory processes, human cognition, and language—so these things would seem to cry out for a distinctively Christian understanding as well.

One of Watson’s greatest contributions is that he puts flesh on the bones of the well-worn notion that all data are theory-laden. He has for decades been doing careful empirical work within the field of the psychology of religion, demonstrating that worldview bias is built into some of the widely used measures. For example, one scale takes endorsement of the statement, “people need a source of strength outside themselves”;¹⁷² as evidence of irrational belief. Another scale characterizes the belief, “God exists” as an indication of “existential avoidance.”¹⁷³ By subjecting scales to careful conceptual and empirical scrutiny and revising some of the measures, Watson shows that they become much more useful when studying Christian populations. Christians in psychological science should pay careful attention to Watson’s techniques for detecting when worldview bias has been built into the supposedly scientific measures themselves.

But the field of the psychology of religion has always been on the periphery of mainstream psychological science, and researchers within that domain have been perceived by the mainstream as being biased (either pro-religion or anti-religion).¹⁷⁴ Watson’s helpful work shows very clearly that this is the case! But there are many areas of psychology where the measures are not often in any obvious way anti-Christian. In Festinger and Carlsmith’s seminal cognitive dissonance study, described in detail above, participants were asked:

171. Roberts and Watson, “Christian Psychology View,” 166.

172. *Ibid.*, 172.

173. *Ibid.*, 168.

174. Baumeister, “Religion and Psychology,” 165.

Were the tasks interesting and enjoyable? In what way? In what way were they not? Would you rate how you feel about them on a scale from -5 to +5 where -5 means they were extremely dull and boring, +5 means they were extremely interesting and enjoyable, and zero means they were neutral, neither interesting nor uninteresting.¹⁷⁵

As is the case in many areas of psychological science, there are no obvious anti-Christian worldview assumptions contained in these questions. Indeed, Watson concedes the point, saying that there are many topics being investigated in psychology “that are not as worldview dependent,”¹⁷⁶ such as neuro-psychology, schizophrenia, and social influence. This quote, which comes at the end of the essay, seems to be a significant and problematic concession, for a variety of reasons. First, one could argue that most of the major research areas in the academic discipline psychology would fall into this category—neuropsychology, sensation and perception, language, cognition and memory, affective science, social psychology—most of the chapters in an introductory psychology textbook. Are we to think that Christian perspectives are unimportant in these areas? If so, this “Christian Psychology View” applies only to a narrow slice of psychological science and stands in essential agreement with a levels-of-explanation approach for the rest. Hence, the Christian Psychology approach appears to concede too much space to “the establishment.” Perhaps this concession is made because those areas that can be investigated empirically are “less ‘interesting’”¹⁷⁷ than the areas where conflict is obvious. But the bigger issue is Watson’s focus on the proximate-level aspect of psychological science—if anti-Christian worldview assumptions are embedded in the measures themselves, then we need to reassess. But, as I have been arguing, the most important way—though certainly not the only way—that anti-Christian worldview assumptions in mainstream psychological science manifest

175. Festinger and Carlsmith, “Cognitive Consequences,” 206.

176. Roberts and Watson, “Christian Psychology View,” 173.

177. *Ibid.*, 154.

themselves is in the realm of ultimate-level interpretations of data.

With these considerations in mind, I would like to propose a third step in the Christian Psychology agenda. I fully endorse the first step—retrieving the Christian psychology of the past. Indeed, in my history of psychology class we read Jonathan Edwards’s *Religious Affections* and follow Roberts’s guidelines for discerning the Christian psychology contained therein. I fully endorse the second step—individual measures need to be scrutinized according to Christian presuppositions, and topics of distinctive Christian interest ought to be pursued empirically. But Christian Psychology needs a third step that encourages Christians to enter into the thick waters of interpretation of mainstream psychological science. We need to look carefully at the current state of psychological science—those domains of psychology that are not in any obvious way, as Watson says, “worldview dependent,” nevertheless filter these hard-won proximate-level findings through the lens of an increasingly explicit and aggressively totalizing ultimate-level evolutionary worldview. Introductory psychology students are exposed to “the unshakable foundations of Darwinian theory,”¹⁷⁸ and are told that “the idea that the machinery of behavior and mind evolved through natural selection” is one of the “three foundation ideas for psychology.”¹⁷⁹ Again, this is not to enter into the “creation vs. evolution” debate, which only distracts us from the main issue—the current sociology of psychological science now routinely gives ultimate-level explanatory status to that which is not ultimate. An engaged Christian psychology approach will attempt to enter this discussion head-on and show that Christian assumptions do better in making ultimate-level sense of psychology’s proximate-level scientific findings.

178. Gerrig et al., *Psychology and Life*, 68. The idea being conveyed in this section of the text is that Darwinian theory is sound because it now sits securely on the “unshakable foundations” of Mendelian genetics.

179. Gray, *Psychology*, 8, 2.

Integration Presented as a Viable Option

Certainly P. J. Watson's contribution has strengthened the second edition of *Psychology & Christianity*. But perhaps the greatest improvement in the second edition of the textbook is the revision to the chapter on "the integration view." The chapter is written by Stanton Jones, a psychology professor at Wheaton College, one of the leading centers for the integration of psychology and Christianity. I am grateful that Jones pays homage to Gary Collins, the author of the original chapter on the integration view, as having inspired him to pursue a career in integration through the "extraordinary integration vision" that Collins had articulated in the late 1970s. Whereas the original chapter unintentionally portrayed integration as a being in a state of confusion, the new chapter has restored the luster of Collins's original, extraordinary vision.

Jones does exactly what needs to be done when one is in the business of relating faith to science—he defines his terms. Though Jones defines psychology as both science and practice, he thankfully emphasizes "the scientific aspects"¹⁸⁰ of psychology in this essay—which makes the essay immediately more relevant to folks like me charged with teaching psychological science, while not losing its usefulness for practitioners.

Jones certainly advocates something akin to a two-books approach, giving Scripture its primary epistemological place.¹⁸¹ Indeed, his definition of integration makes the issue primary:

Integration of Christianity and psychology (or any area of "secular thought") is our living out—in this particular area—of the lordship of Christ over all existence by our giving his special revelation—God's true Word—its appropriate place of authority in determining

180. Jones, "Integration View," 105.

181. Though Jones may not intend to do so, one potential problem with his formulation is that he seems to portray God's actions and God's words as having to do with a limited aspect of creation, while other parts of creation, such as neurons and memory, fall outside of God's actions and words. I will elaborate on this in the conclusion.

*our fundamental beliefs about and practices toward all of reality and toward our academic subject matter in particular.*¹⁸²

However, because Scripture “does not provide us all that we need in order to understand human beings fully,”¹⁸³ the careful study of creation is also warranted. He recalls how Collins had “called for Christians to draw on all the riches of Scripture”¹⁸⁴ in their integrative efforts. In his example of empirical research in the area of homosexuality, Jones demonstrates careful and respectful attention to the scriptural data relevant to that particular question. By focusing on the scientific evidence, he likewise gives emphasis to a careful reading of the book of God’s Works.

There is likewise a clear affirmation of common grace and antithesis in Jones’s essay, though not formulated in that language. For example, he speaks often of the areas of “tension” that exist between Christianity and psychological science. He rightly notes that “it is common today to view science in such a way that religious faith of any kind can have no impact on science or interaction with science,”¹⁸⁵ such as Gould’s position that science and faith can coexist so long as we assume that God has nothing to do with empirical happenings. And, very clearly, as a psychological scientist, Jones is highly receptive to empirical work.

Jones likewise does not explicitly address the multi-aspectual nature of human functioning, but his approach would seem to embrace the concerns addressed in this essay. As a psychological scientist, Jones finds interesting all aspects of human functioning, not just the traditionally religious or ethical. He also appears to share an aversion to reductive theories, explaining that the reductionism of the personality theories he encountered as a student was one of the early catalysts driving him toward an integrationist position.

182. Jones, “Integration View,” 102.

183. *Ibid.*, 101.

184. *Ibid.*, 104.

185. *Ibid.*, 105.

There does not seem to be much of an apologetic edge in Jones's essay. He seems more concerned with faithfully working through areas of "tension" between psychology and Christianity, articulating a position consistent with Scripture, rather than showing that the Christian worldview actually clarifies or improves psychology itself.

This neglect is related to his way of construing psychological theory. At times, Jones seems to vacillate between what I have called "modern perspectivalism" and "postmodern perspectivalism" in his essay. In an important section of the essay, Jones discusses "how science really operates,"¹⁸⁶ making the typical postmodern points that data are theory-laden, that theories are underdetermined by facts and that science is always a human endeavor that "must utilize metaphysically and ethically loaded concepts."¹⁸⁷ Though there is much truth to all of this, these ideas neglect the fact that there really are differences between proximate-level micro-theories, and more ultimate-level worldview commitments. Certainly these influence each other, but many micro-theories in psychological science are not fatally corrupted, as I have attempted—at least in a preliminary way—to show.

On the other hand, there are times when Jones (like Roberts and Watson) sounds a bit like a modern perspectivalist, when he concedes that "there are . . . many areas of psychological study where the most basic construals that nonbelieving scientists make about their subject matter are roughly in accord with how Christians might view the same subject."¹⁸⁸ In particular he has in mind areas "to which Scripture does not speak," such as "how neurons work, how the brain synthesizes mathematical or emotional information, the types of memory, or the best way to conceptualize personality traits."¹⁸⁹ But how is it possible, if psychological science is "metaphysically and ethically loaded,"

186. *Ibid.*, 113.

187. *Ibid.*, 115.

188. *Ibid.*, 116.

189. *Ibid.*

that there can be so many areas of psychological science that seem unproblematic?

Again, if we keep in mind the proximate/ultimate distinction, alongside the idea that, on an ultimate level there are *no* areas “to which the Scripture does not speak,” we can make some headway here. Though we need to be careful not to oversimplify the distinction, there really is a difference between scientifically rigorous empirical observation and ultimate-level interpretation. Such an approach will help us to avoid dichotomizing psychological science into areas of tension and areas of agreement. Insofar as we are dealing with publically accessible and empirically replicated data, there is agreement.¹⁹⁰ But insofar as we are dealing with the interpretation of these data, we will disagree, even when we are talking about neurons or memory. And since psychological science deals not only with data but also with higher-order interpretation, Christians in psychology must not concede this interpretive space to naturalism.

The New “Transformational” Approach

The textbook’s new essay on “the transformational psychology view” is written by John H. Coe and Todd W. Hall, both professors at Biola University, home of the Rosemead School of Psychology (a hub for the integration of psychology and theology), Talbot School of Theology, and the Institute for Spiritual Formation. Coe is Professor of Philosophy and Spiritual Theology, and Director of the Institute of Spiritual Formation. Hall is Professor of Psychology, and Director of the Institute for Research on Psychology and Spirituality. Rosemead offers doctoral degrees in clinical psychology and publishes the *Journal of Psychology and Theology* (edited by Hall, which tends to emphasize the clinical side of the discipline). The Institute for

190. We need, of course, to keep Watson’s work in mind here—it is possible that replicable anti-Christian operationalizations are in play. Also, this is not to say that trustworthy findings in science will never appear to contradict Scripture. Though such contradictions may eventually lead us to re-interpret the Bible (as Myers suggests), we need to remember that scientific findings often change over time, while the inspired Scriptures never do.

Spiritual Formation publishes the *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care*, which “serves as an evangelical forum for the theory and practice of Christian Spirituality.”¹⁹¹ Coe edits this journal. Given these emphases at Biola, it is not particularly surprising that Coe and Hall’s essay tends to emphasize spirituality, spiritual formation, and the “clinical” or helping side of the discipline. In short, they offer a “spiritual formation model of psychology,” which includes the move from “understanding to treatment.”¹⁹²

It should be noted that this chapter is a distillation of their book *Psychology in the Spirit: Contours of a Transformational Psychology*, which was published by IVP in January 2010, about six months before the second edition of *Psychology & Christianity*. I am open to the possibility that some of the questions raised by their chapter-length treatment may be resolved in what appears to be a long (446-page) and wide-ranging book.

Though couched in theological language that is at times, to me at least, a bit vague, the basic affirmation of the transformational psychology viewpoint is straightforward enough. Their approach articulates a yet-to-be-realized ideal in which psychology and psychologist both are transformed so that they better align with God’s purposes. The foundation of a transformational psychology, Coe and Hall emphasize, is the person herself. A person being transformed by the Holy Spirit will be open to reality, they argue, free from pathological and sinful distortion, and thus able to produce a body of literature (focusing on self, sin, and health) that will help in the practice of helping counselees grow as persons, which leads to further transformation of the psychologist herself. Thus, the transformed psychologist is the alpha and the omega of a transformational psychology approach.

Though there is much to affirm in this new chapter, I struggled to find answers to the questions that frame this essay, Whose Psychology? Which Christianity? Given the primacy of the person, Coe and Hall argue that all (Christian and psy-

191. Coe, “Call and Task,” 2.

192. Coe and Hall, “Transformational Psychology View,” 224.

chological) traditions must be considered “secondary”¹⁹³ to the truth-seeking psychologist herself. Since “transformation” would seem to presuppose an object or a discipline to transform, this indefiniteness vis-à-vis psychology led me to wonder at times precisely *whose* psychology they are seeking to transform. As one reads the chapter, however, it seems that “psychology” for Coe and Hall is more the domain of spiritual advisors and wise counselors, not primarily the scientific psychology taught in introductory courses in North America.

I also wondered *which Christianity* gave form to this approach. The tradition that seems to drive this vision is that of monastic Christianity, now in vogue in certain Evangelical circles, such as Biola. The posture of monastic retreat helps to understand the approach that the transformational model takes toward the already-existing psychologies. A person desiring to become a transformational psychologist will inevitably be in some sense connected to a tradition, they argue, but, just as a monk will for the sake of enlightenment pull himself out of society, a transformational psychologist will look “behind the veil”¹⁹⁴ of his tradition in order to forward his own quest for “firsthand”¹⁹⁵ spiritual and psychological knowledge.

The transformational approach may be in essential agreement with the two books approach advocated here. In addition to careful reflection on “preexisting psychological/scientific/theological reflections and theories,” a transformational psychologist will pay careful attention to “whatever is relevant from (1) Scripture, [and] (2) creation.”¹⁹⁶ But the chapter also seems to put strong emphasis on spiritual experience. The “firsthand work” of a transformational psychologist involves openness to “the experience of the Spirit and . . . the truths from Scripture, *as well as* . . . truths from observation and reflection.”¹⁹⁷ Though spiritual experience is certainly a crucial datum for any Christian

193. *Ibid.*, 201.

194. *Ibid.*

195. *Ibid.*, 202.

196. *Ibid.*, 207–8.

197. *Ibid.*, 202–3.

psychology, a Reformed and Reformational approach to knowledge would be exceedingly cautious in how such experience is utilized. In the Reformed tradition, the pervasiveness of sin (i.e., total depravity) means that all of our ideas—and experiences—are liable to be self-serving or deceptive and must therefore be tested against Scripture.¹⁹⁸ In the mystical spirituality that seems to permeate the transformational view,¹⁹⁹ such interpretive caution seems less necessary—God speaks directly to the human heart.

The rigorous interpretive caution associated with *sola scriptura* has its analogy in psychological science, of course. As Myers says, whenever possible, we should put testable ideas to the empirical test, checking our cherished notions against the text of the book of God's Works. Indeed, the rigors of the scientific method developed in the scientific revolution may have been inspired by the rigors of Protestant biblical exegesis,²⁰⁰ and were religiously motivated by a keen sense of how human sin and limitation distorts knowledge.²⁰¹ Any "openness to the experience of the Spirit" that lacks analogous rigor would seem, at least on the surface of things, to violate the historical "two books" principle. I don't know for sure how Coe and Hall would treat this matter, so I raise the issue only as a point for further discussion and clarification.

Likewise, there are moments when the transformational approach seems to balance the poles of the Kuyperian paradox, such as when they affirm, though somewhat vaguely, that "the

198. The best example I know of this is Jonathan Edwards's *Religious Affections*, which deeply probes the Scriptures to discern what sort of spiritual experiences are authentically Spirit-wrought, and which may not be. Perhaps Coe and Hall would endorse such an approach.

199. For a brief introduction to the Desert Fathers, whom Coe and Hall admire, see González, *Story of Christianity*, 1:138–43. Anthony, one of the great Desert Fathers, was said to wrestle with demons and receive visions from God.

200. For example, during the Reformation, "a return to the sources was urged: to the Book of the Scripture in one case, to the book of nature . . . in the other." (Hooykaas, *Religion and the Rise of Modern Science*, 112.)

201. Harrison, *Fall of Man and the Foundations of Science*.

unbeliever, by common grace, is partially able to apprehend the truth of something.”²⁰² The tenor of the chapter, however, seems to lean toward antithesis. We are told, for example, “the *spiritual-emotional development of the psychologist is foundational* to the process of arriving at deep truths about human nature.”²⁰³ Though this statement raises important epistemological questions that I will address below, and though statements such as these are usually qualified to suggest that non-Christians can still learn interesting things, the flavor of the chapter seems fairly negative. The negativity seems especially strong vis-à-vis the scientific side of the discipline. At one point early in the argument, for example, scientific methods themselves seem to be associated with psychologizing “outside of a relationship with God.”²⁰⁴

The trans-aspectual theorizing that would characterize a Reformed and Reformational approach seems to fall outside of their purview. The strong preference in the transformational approach, as one might expect, appears to be on “pistic” (faith-related) and ethical functioning, i.e., the “spiritual” dimensions of life. On the other hand, it seems that there is likely a role for apologetics in transformational psychology, though they do not say what that role is. The authors explain: “our treatment here of a transformational psychology is not primarily written for the unbeliever; otherwise, much of what follows would require a thoroughgoing apologetic or defense.”²⁰⁵ Given transformational

202. Coe and Hall, “Transformational Psychology View,” 214.

203. *Ibid.*, 205.

204. *Ibid.*, 200. Though I trust that this association is inadvertent, it is important to be clear that while the historical ascendancy of natural scientific methods in psychology is correlated with secularization, and though such methods are often used to forward philosophical naturalism, we should not assume that these methods imply a naturalistic worldview. Indeed, the usefulness and possibility of such methods does not fit neatly into a naturalistic worldview. As the title of Plantinga’s recent book implies, the “conflict” between natural science methods and religion is between science and the religion of naturalism, not between science and theistic religion. See Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies*. I, of course, want to make claims about Christianity specifically, not “theism” in general.

205. Coe and Hall, “Transformational Psychology View,” 204.

psychology's emphasis on Spirit-wrought experience accessible only to Christians, i.e., given the seeming lack of a "point of contact," it would be fascinating to read how they would propose to engage in such an apologetic dialogue.

Psychology, I have argued, ought to bridge ultimate- and proximate-level theorizing, as depicted in Figure C. The transformational approach seems to approach the task differently. Their approach "is less about the relationship between *two distinct fields of methodologies* (science/psychology and theology) . . . and is more about doing *a single unified—though complex—science and psychology of reality*."²⁰⁶ This approach is conceptualized as "a single act,"²⁰⁷ which seems counter-intuitive. Given that in psychological theory there are individual empirical studies, micro-theoretical and meta-theoretical levels, in addition to the more ultimate-levels of theorizing, such theorizing does not seem to be one act at all, but a deliberate, laborious, multi-step team effort. Though Coe and Hall are right in seeking to correct "a wrong turn in the history of modern science, which bifurcated the world into the 'scientific' and the 'ethical-religious,'" it does not follow that there is "no [methodological] distinction" between the way we study "natural phenomena" and "the contents of Scripture,"²⁰⁸ for example. I would like to hear more from them on how they propose to do this in "a single act."

The strong emphasis on the spiritual formation of the psychologist actually connects to transcendental perspectivalism in an interesting way. My approach has been influenced by the "triperspectival" epistemology of John Frame.²⁰⁹ Frame argues that knowledge always involves a *subject* (his "existential perspective"), an *object* (his "situational" perspective), and a *standard* by which we justify our knowledge claims (his "normative" perspective). Building on this framework, I have sometimes referred

206. *Ibid.*, 207.

207. *Ibid.*, 200.

208. *Ibid.*, 206.

209. As described in a variety of his works, including Frame, *Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*.

to my position as transcendental *tri*-perspectivalism, where the transcendental question (what are the necessary preconditions for *x*?) can be applied to the necessary characteristics of the *person* himself, asking, “What kind of person do we need to be in order to psychologize well?”; of the *object*, asking, “What sorts of things do we need to study to psychologize well?”; and of the *norm*, asking, “What sort of epistemological standards are necessary in order to psychologize well?” In this essay I have emphasized the normative side of things, arguing that the worldview afforded by the Scriptures (our ultimate epistemic norm) provides superior ultimate-level interpretation of replicable proximate-level findings.

Although *all* of the perspectives in *Psychology & Christianity* could be re-framed in these tri-perspectival terms, Coe and Hall—despite the questions I have raised—do raise some particularly important points about both the existential and situational perspectives. Existentially, as noted above, they put great emphasis on the spiritual formation of the psychologist herself—this *is* a point that has perhaps been underemphasized. It is the attitudes, experiences, and maturity of “the person doing psychology”²¹⁰ that are the keys to transformational psychology. Though they seem to underemphasize the sociological and cultural constraints of “doing psychology,” when they say, “the transformation of the psychologist is the determinative and foundational element for the process and product of doing psychology,”²¹¹ they are right that apart from authentic spiritual experience, a psychologist will not have access to at least *some* of the “deep truths about human nature,”²¹² and will—from their vantage point in the *civitas terrena*—inevitably psychologize for some motive other than the love and glory of God. Coe and Hall also rightly note that the “realities of faith” are not actually propositions *per se*, but certainties accessible only to those transformed by the Spirit.

210. Coe and Hall, “Transformational Psychology View,” 201.

211. *Ibid.*, 205–6.

212. *Ibid.*, 205.

This, then, has implications when we look at psychological knowledge from a situational perspective, i.e., from the perspective of the *objects* of knowledge. A Christian psychologist, who has access to these “realities of faith,” understands that these realities are psychological phenomena that must be included in a truly comprehensive understanding of mental life. It would follow, if psychology is indeed the study of mental life, that we ought not to exclude these psychological realities from our study even if they are difficult to access with traditional empirical methodologies. “A particular scientific or psychological methodology does not dictate reality.”²¹³ Amen!

These are relevant insights not only for counselors, but also for those of us who teach the scientific side of the discipline. What is lacking, however, is any practical sense of how to implement these insights, particularly for a person like me, charged with teaching psychological science. Coe and Hall ask us to look “behind the veil” of current practice and re-imagine what psychology might look like outside of the context and categories of tradition. This is of course necessary for those of us interested in “redeeming psychology,”²¹⁴ and I would heartily concur that we need to “be willing to rigorously and painstakingly observe and reflect on whatever is relevant”²¹⁵ to psychology. But how precisely ought these things be brought together in the context of a traditional psychology curriculum? Coe and Hall claim that “the person determines the process” of doing psychology, which in turn “determine[s] the product[s]” of psychology. But for those of us charged with teaching traditional psychology courses, such as introduction to psychology, research methods, social psychology, or cognitive psychology, the process and the products are already to a large extent determined before we teachers even begin to interact with the material.

In other words, whether it intends to or not, the transformational approach raises the crucial question of *cultural* transformation. Coe and Hall rightly claim that—within their

213. *Ibid.*, 203.

214. Kosits, “What Would It Mean to Redeem Psychology?”

215. Coe and Hall, “Transformational Psychology View,” 207.

own circles at least—psychology itself and the institutions in which it is taught ought to be transformed. But just how can a culture (like psychological science) be changed? This is a question that has received a great deal of attention lately, with books such as Andy Crouch’s *Culture Making* and James Davison Hunter’s *To Change the World*. And to that question we shall turn, as we conclude this essay.

Conclusion: The Varieties of Christian Commitment and the Culture of Psychological Science

At the beginning of this essay I suggested that the key orienting questions in the psychology-Christianity dialogue are: *Whose Psychology, Which Christianity?* My concern has been the interplay between psychological science and a particular—“Reformed and Reformational”—variety of Christian commitment. My hope is that this essay will provide at least some sense of the potential fecundity of such a commitment for Christians desiring to engage contemporary psychology in an integrally Christian way. I have also suggested that Christian approaches to psychology are always filtered through a reading—modern or postmodern—of our cultural moment.

To close this essay, I would like to return to some of these issues, but this time attempting to discern something of the nature of the Christian commitment of each of our authors, and how each variety interacts with *modernity* in particular.²¹⁶ Psychological science is still deeply ensconced within the modern worldview. Our engagement with *this* psychology will therefore radically depend on how we think about modernity. I also hope to show that though I tend to disagree with the various stances toward modernity advocated in this book, the Reformed and Reformational approach that I describe in this essay has assimilated insights from all five “views.”

216. This approach would seem to approximate the two-criterion strategy advocated by Johnson, where we evaluate the nature of an author’s Christian commitment, and their relationship to modernity. See Johnson, “Gaining Understanding,” 301–2.

David Myers is a brother in the Reformed tradition, teaching at a sister Reformed institution, and a well-respected and established psychological scientist. His laudable respect for empirical reality reflects the old Reformed idea that creation is a divine book to be studied with utmost care. For a concise critique, however, we may turn to Lesslie Newbigin, a brilliant expositor of modern Western culture,²¹⁷ who saw the matter clearly: a levels-of-explanation approach, or one that seeks “a *modus vivendi* between science and religion by representing them as [merely] two different ways of seeing the same reality . . . is, I fear, only a particular manifestation of that [modern] dichotomy between the public world of facts and the private world of values . . . ”²¹⁸ Myers’s vision for relating psychology and Christianity, wonderful in many ways, still reflects a kind of approach too decisively shaped by modernity, one that makes it difficult to mount what Newbigin called “a genuinely missionary encounter between the gospel and . . . modern Western culture,”²¹⁹ proclaiming Christ as Lord of every square inch of creation. Christians who advocate a levels-of-explanation approach may very well make important contributions to psychological science (and for this reason they deserve our respect), but are unlikely to challenge the convenient but false modern dichotomies between facts and values, faith and reason, that hamstring integrally Christian engagement with the sciences. Nevertheless, the Reformed and Reformational approach advocated in this essay has been powerfully shaped by Myers’s enthusiasm for psychological science, and proximate-level empirical work has an absolutely central role to play. Further, my approach is itself a kind of levels-of-explanation approach, albeit one that does not rigidly compartmentalize ultimate- and proximate-levels.

217. Newbigin’s description of modernity, his “profile of a culture,” is an apt portrayal of the assumptions of contemporary psychological science. See Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, ch. 2.

218. *Ibid.*, 66–67.

219. *Ibid.*, 3.

David Powlison, another dear brother in the Reformed tradition, reflects another form of the Reformed tradition profoundly shaped by modernity. Unlike the more accommodating mainstream version of Reformed Protestantism that we see in Myers, Powlison's Westminster Seminary is a product of the tensions reflected in the fundamentalist-modernist controversy of the early twentieth century, established in response to the liberalization of Princeton Seminary in order to preserve traditional Reformed and Presbyterian orthodoxy. Powlison's strong emphasis on the antithesis is a reflection of this reading of the modern cultural situation—Christians are to set themselves against the world and to develop their own, biblically-derived psychology. The fruit of this effort has been a body of insightful and practical writings on human motivation and Christian living—a body that has not yet made contact with mainstream psychological science. I called this approach—especially the version articulated in the first edition of the book—"postmodern" because it sees through the typical modern claims of theoretical and scientific neutrality and instead seeks to venture off and create a "psychology" of its own. Christians who are trained in biblical counseling will have a deep sense of how Scripture speaks to psychological issues but are also unlikely to learn much from or have much hope for mainstream psychology. Still, in the Reformed and Reformational approach that I have outlined in this essay, the insights of the Biblical Counseling Movement would have an important role to play, particularly in ultimate-level theorizing. Further, the devout and respectful attentiveness to Scripture advocated by the Biblical Counseling Movement is something that Christians in psychology ought to emulate.

In the first chapter of his book *Spiritual Emotions*, Robert Roberts discloses a bit of his location within the body of Christ. Both he and his wife have roots in the Reformed tradition—he grew up in the United Presbyterian Church, his wife in the Christian Reformed Church. Upon taking up his post at Wheaton College in 1984, they found a local Reformed congregation overly didactic, and "being as denominationally promiscuous as most Protestants these days," they tried out an Episcopal church, which they eventually joined. *"Theologically rich texts*

abounded” in this new environment. “In the Episcopal experience the engendering of spirituality in the service seems to come primarily *from reading*—from the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer—in the context of sensory dramatization. The apostolic tradition is there in all its glory—in *the books*.”²²⁰ Perhaps in some sense, then, we might understand the Christian Psychology movement—or at least Roberts’s seminal contribution to it—as deeply Episcopalian/Anglican in its sensibilities. The “step one” emphasis of Christian Psychology on carefully reading and “translating” pre-modern texts seems to link to Roberts’s experience in the Episcopalian Church. This deeply historical, tradition-rich approach compensates for a weakness in at least some versions of Reformed Christianity, and thus highlights how the diversities within the body of Christ can lead to our mutual edification in our common pursuit. Still, Roberts’s reading of the cultural situation has at times felt a bit postmodern, in a manner similar to Powlison’s first essay, which has led to a strong emphasis on developing a distinctively Christian psychology and a rejection of mainstream psychology’s self-definition as a scientific discipline.²²¹ Nevertheless, the work of Christian Psychology would also have an important role to play in a Reformed and Reformational approach to psychological science. For example, the “step one” work of Christian Psychology would, like the work of the Biblical Counseling Movement, provide invaluable help in contributing to ultimate-level psychological (i.e., personality) theory. Further, as described above, I see the Reformed and Reformational approach to psychological science described in this article as a potential “step three” in the Christian Psychology approach.

Stanton Jones’s wonderful chapter reflects his evangelical faith. One of the great strengths of this faith is its strong emphasis on the authoritative Scriptures, and a refusal to relegate its truth to a “religious” realm or level of explanation that is to be cordoned off from science. Yet there is nevertheless a kind of cordoning that takes place, which represents perhaps the most

220. Roberts, *Spiritual Emotions*, 3, 4, 5; emphases mine.

221. Roberts and Watson, “Christian Psychology View,” 149.

typical evangelical Christian response to the deterministic tendencies of modernity, in which divine and free human action are *contrasted* with the regular “mechanistic”/cause-and-effect concerns of scientific inquiry.²²² The reason we should not compartmentalize faith and science, Jones explains, is that God sometimes *intervenes* in this natural course of events. Likewise, he argues in another place, the human agent can freely (in an ultimately uncaused/libertarian sense) intervene (if you will) to overcome those determining factors that might otherwise push or pull a human being into sin.²²³ Though this avoids the dualism of a *rigid* levels-of-explanation approach in which matters of faith and matters of science are understood as *strictly separate* perspectives on the same reality,²²⁴ it creates a different kind of modern dualism, something like a god-of-the-gaps²²⁵ conundrum, in which we find God and human agency *outside* (or perhaps, more fairly, *alongside*)²²⁶ the normativity and lawfulness of creation. But from the vantage point of this essay, in which this normativity and lawfulness are to be understood as modes of God’s providential control, such a contrast makes little sense. Nevertheless, there are deep resonances between the integration approach he has described and the Reformed and Reformational approach sketched out in this essay—indeed, Jones himself has deep connections to the Reformed tradition and the approach I have outlined may be understood as a particular model of integration. The disparate findings, metaphors, and micro-theories of psychological science find their unity only in the light of the Christian worldview.²²⁷

222. This is similar to if not identical to what Dooyeweerd called “nature-freedom ground motive” or the pre-theoretical vision of reality characteristic of the modern period. See Chaplin, *Herman Dooyeweerd*, 43–44.

223. Jones, “Meaning of Agency and Responsibility.”

224. Again, my own view is a kind of levels-of-explanation approach, but one that rejects the modern notion that ultimate-level perspectives can and should be removed from scientific inquiry.

225. Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 66.

226. Jones, “Meaning of Agency and Responsibility,” 201.

227. Given the fact that Myers, Powlison, Roberts, and Jones have connections to the Reformed faith, I wonder if a volume on psychology and

Finally, Coe and Hall's helpful and challenging chapter reflects their fascination with pre-modern monastic Christianity. The psychologist, admitting that he cannot wholly separate himself from all tradition, still holds all psychological (and theological) traditions at arm's length, and through spiritual disciplines such as prayer and meditation is transformed into a person of deep faith and upright character, opening them up to reality, creating the possibility for deep insight into psychological truth. This approach, while decidedly anti-modern in some of its tenets, may also perhaps be understood as deeply modern in others. For example, the idea that we need to free ourselves from the blinders of tradition and authority is reminiscent of Enlightenment thinkers.²²⁸ Regardless of its position vis-à-vis modernity, the transformational approach with its keen epistemological insights and willingness to challenge the status-quo, also resonates with some of the deep impulses of a Reformed and Reformational approach. Indeed, this approach may be seen as "transformational" in at least two ways. First, my embrace of the Christian Psychology approach (i.e., recovering the Christian psychology of the past for its ultimate-level theoretical usefulness) will certainly raise the issue of the uniqueness of Christian psychological experience (as my reading of Edwards's *Religious Affections* attests). Second, my hope is that psychological science may be "transformed" as it embraces the truth of the Christian worldview.

Reformed Christianity might be warranted, where different visions of the Reformed faith have an opportunity to dialogue on matters psychological, as iron sharpening iron. My claim to having articulated a "Reformed and Reformational" approach could (and should) be contested. And given the number of institutions desiring to engage psychology from the vantage point of the Reformed faith, such a project might actually have an audience!

228. I need to be careful here—it is possible to find analogies *anywhere* if we look hard enough. But I wonder whether, if Coe and Hall were to revise Kant's classic essay, "What is Enlightenment?" so that it emphasizes the role of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the "scholar" they might not resonate with some of its sentiments, such as the need to be free from tradition and authority, and the motto of the Enlightenment, "Dare to know!," for example. See Kant, "What Is Enlightenment?"

In short, each of the contributions to the two editions of *Psychology & Christianity* can be understood as a way of incarnating a particular variety of Christian commitment in our modern world. Again—given that psychological science still draws its life from the modern worldview, our position vis-à-vis *modernity* remains crucial as we attempt to articulate what a Christian missionary encounter with psychology will look like. In sum, and with inevitable oversimplification, we may summarize the posture²²⁹ toward modernity of our five authors in this way: Myers: *embracing* modernity. Powlison: *contesting* modernity. Roberts and Watson (“step one” and “step two,” respectively): *suspending*, then *extending* modernity. Jones: *limiting* modernity. Hall and Coe: *spiritualizing* modernity.²³⁰ From my vantage point, none of these postures toward modernity (and hence psychological science) is entirely satisfactory.

So what sort of response to modernity does this “Reformed and Reformational” essay espouse? I shall turn to that concluding thought in a very brief moment. But first, in view of Coe and Hall’s (and *my*) belief that psychology itself and the institutes that teach it ought to be “transformed,” we should briefly say something along these lines.

Just what does it take to “transform” the world? Or, more particularly, what would it take to transform psychological science? Interestingly enough, two of the leading contemporary thinkers on this question provide exceedingly humbling responses. To ask if we can change the world, James Davison Hunter says, “is the wrong question.”²³¹ Contrary to the wide-

229. See the wonderful discussion of the difference between “postures” and “gestures” in Crouch, *Culture Making*, ch. 5.

230. I have also been playing with Andy Crouch’s categories: Myers *consuming* [modern] culture, Powlison *condemning* and/or *critiquing* and/or *copying* culture, Jones *critiquing* culture. Robert and Watson, and Coe and Hall are more difficult to classify using Crouch’s categories. But, as a complement to all of the authors, each is in Crouch’s term a *creator* of culture. The Reformed and Reformational approach that I advocate vis-à-vis psychological science can celebrate and make good use of these cultural products. See Crouch, *Culture Making*, ch. 4.

231. Hunter, *To Change the World*, 285.

spread belief that “cultures change when people change,”²³² Hunter makes a compelling—and somewhat depressing—case that this is simply not the case. Mainstream cultural change is a heavily contested, “top-down” phenomenon, initiated by certain types of cultural elites in certain types of cultural circumstances.²³³ Conservative Christians tend to be on the periphery, with little hope of effecting massive cultural change. Instead of aiming to change the world, Hunter argues, Christians ought to aim to be a “faithful presence within” whatever little corner of the world they inhabit.

In a chapter entitled, “Why We Can’t Change the World,” Andy Crouch raises some of these same issues. On the widest scale, cultural change is exceedingly difficult to effect, even by the most powerful (he cites the attempt by the United States to create a specific type of cultural change in Iraq as one example). “We can easily deceive ourselves into thinking that changing the world is a great deal easier than it actually is.”²³⁴ Still, Crouch gives some insight into how we may forge a faithful Christian presence within psychological science. “Our ability to change culture . . . is a matter of *scale*. On a small enough scale, nearly everyone has the power to change the world.”²³⁵ To effect change, he argues, we need to *make something* of the world in which we find ourselves, by creating cultural goods.

In this essay, I have outlined an approach to psychological theory that promises to display the coherence of the Christian worldview and its theoretical relevance to the discipline. In order for this or any other approach to have an effect, we need to *do* and *make* something with them. I believe that Christians in psychology now inhabit a cultural moment in which such activity is possible. Our little corner of the world isn’t *that* little—there are well over one hundred CCCU institutions, all of which are dedicated to forging Christ-centered approaches to the academic disciplines, all of which (presumably) have psychology depart-

232. *Ibid.*, 16.

233. *Ibid.*, 41–44.

234. Crouch, *Culture Making*, 193.

235. *Ibid.*, 196.

ments, with PhDs on faculty dedicated to the cause. If I may indulge in a wildly unrealistic act of imagination, what would happen if such faculty, trained in secular universities and methods, began to suppose that preparing for and engaging in a missionary encounter with psychological science is their primary scholarly and pedagogical calling?²³⁶ As Hunter argues, God's faithful presence toward us has at least four attributes: he pursues us, he identifies with us, he offers us his life, and he sacrifices for us.²³⁷ Given the freedom that we have within our respective Christian institutions, we can from the safety of such a location pursue psychological science, identify with it, offer it the life of God, and pour out our lives sacrificing for it. We would do so fully realizing that, to the extent that we *as psychologists* foreground our Christian worldview, we will solidify our status as cultural exiles, and that we are likely to be mocked, or, more likely yet, ignored. But inspired by the coherence of our Christian faith, by God's passionate commitment to glorify his own name, and by the evident need within psychological science itself, we may, despite the opposition, attempt to create winsome cultural goods of our own, trusting God with the results.

So what sort of response to modernity *does* this "Reformed and Reformational" essay espouse? Let us tentatively—and with much qualification—try this: *realizing* modernity. This approach ironically "realizes" modernity in the sense that the Christian worldview offers to a repentant psychology the promise of real progress in one of the central goals of the Enlightenment.

The greatest aspiration of modern science, its "Ionian Enchantment," is nothing less than the unification of knowledge. This enchantment, as E. O. Wilson explains, is named after the first of the pre-Socratics (at least according to the textbooks), the father of Greek philosophy, Thales of Miletus, Ionia. Thales famously sought to unify knowledge by arguing that all material reality ultimately reduces to water. Though his solution is now universally rejected, his quest, to find the key that unlocks all knowledge *immanently*, in the creation itself, continues to this

236. See Goheen and Bartholomew, *Living at the Crossroads*, 8–9.

237. Hunter, *To Change the World*, 241–43.

day. This quest, rightly characterized by Wilson as religious, is, for reasons discussed above, an Icarus-like wax-winged flight toward the sun, foredoomed to failure.²³⁸ The creation, in all of its magnificent and complex interrelatedness, cannot in the final analysis explain itself.

If I may revise Tertullian, only in Jerusalem can the Ionian Enchantment be requited. Laplace fundamentally misrepresented the reality that he had through mathematics described when, speaking of God, famously boasted, “I have no need of that hypothesis.”²³⁹ The Triune God is no hypothesis. He is the purpose and precondition of all that is, the one for whom and through whom all things exist, the one in whom all things cohere.

Psychology need not repent²⁴⁰ of its sophisticated methods, or its careful attentiveness to empirical reality, or its hard-won scientific and theoretical accomplishments. But it does need to repent of its marginalization of the One who ultimately gave it the marvelous *psyche* to study, the desire and ability to study it, and the Word that provides light for this path of inquiry. As it does, psychology will finally be in position to forge the unification that it has long sought.²⁴¹ The question implied in the

238. Wilson, who argues that “all tangible phenomena . . . are ultimately reducible to . . . the laws of physics,” claims that the daring of Icarus was not hubris but rather “a saving human grace” (Wilson, *Consilience*, 4–7, 266). For a sketch of *why* such a quest is foredoomed to failure, see the discussion on the modes of God’s providential control. For a fuller discussion, see also Chaplin, *Herman Dooyeweerd*, ch. 4.

239. He *was* likely right to reject the hypothesis of a deity who needs to *intervene* in the solar system “for frequent adjustment and repair” (Peters, “Protestantism and the Sciences,” 312). Laplace really did have no need of *that* hypothesis, which was a good thing—it signaled the advance of scientific theory. This again suggests the problems with relegating divine action to “intervention.” Laplace’s famous phrase misrepresents reality when it is used to imply that science can give a satisfactory accounting of the world apart from the One whose providential control of the universe extends even to its laws and norms.

240. I struggled over whether to use this word but decided to keep it, given that the issues at stake are ultimately religious.

241. See note 86.

title *Psychology & Christianity*, therefore, is not an esoteric debate for those with concerns peripheral to the mainstream. The admittedly “astonishing hypothesis” sketched out in this essay is that our answer to the question of the relation between Christian faith and psychological science may actually contain the answer to the most profound and elusive question of the discipline.

God has revealed himself in two books. These books are meant to be read *together*, and exegeted with the utmost care. As we do this, we shall move closer to Jonathan Edwards’s youthful dream “To shew how all arts and sciences, the more they are perfected, the more they issue in divinity, and coincide with it, and appear to be parts of it.”²⁴² One way to be faithfully present within our little and insignificant corner of the world of psychological science is to try to show again and again the unity of the two books, that all *psychological* things do indeed cohere in Christ, that the theoretical unity long longed for in psychology is to be found *inside* the wide rationality of the Christian

242. Edwards, “Outline of ‘A Rational Account,’” 397. For an estimate of when Edwards wrote this (i.e., in his mid- to late-twenties) see Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 482. I was, initially at least, disappointed to find, after having written this final paragraph, that Eric Johnson, the editor of *Psychology & Christianity: Five Views* beat me to the punch in choosing this as his closing quote. Whether this is a case of cryptomnesia (I had not to my knowledge read any of Johnson’s closing chapter until after writing this essay) or simply deep compatibility of vision, I am not sure. Perhaps it is both. But the Edwards quote, which I have long loved, is apt, so I decided to retain it. See Johnson, “Gaining Understanding,” 311. Incidentally, I did finally get around to reading Johnson’s conclusion. It is a lovely piece dealing with how we ought to approach the diversity of opinions expressed in *Five Views*. I fully affirm his suggestion that “this book’s vigorous debate points to a larger reality that lies behind all of the views, and this reality requires listening to all of them and appropriating the valid insights of each one, in order to get ‘the biggest picture’ we can.” (Johnson, “Getting Understanding,” 29). Although I don’t know how Johnson would feel about my claim that a specifically Reformed and Reformational metasytem can make a helpful contribution to this big picture (though he clearly has at the very least been strongly influenced by the Reformed tradition), I trust that this essay generally strikes the kind of tone he suggests and have inserted a few footnotes to that effect.

worldview.²⁴³ David Powlison is right—we have much work to do.

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243. As Newbigin said, “the conflict between the two views will not be [ultimately] settled on the basis of logical argument. The view will prevail that is seen to offer—both in theory and in practice—the widest rationality, the greatest capacity to give meaning to the whole of experience. This is as much a matter of faithful endeavor and costly obedience [i.e., faithful presence?] as of clarity and coherence of argument.” As is the case in “every true missionary encounter,” this is nothing less than a call to a “radical conversion,” to “a ‘paradigm shift’ that leads to a new vision of how things are and, not at once but gradually, to the development of a new plausibility structure in which the most real of all realities is the living God” (Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 64).

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