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* Full length article
PUBLICATION POLICY

Christian Psychology encourages scholars from all disciplines to submit research papers relevant to Christian Psychology.

Christian Psychology is also especially interested in ideas for a discussion/focus article to be published at the beginning of an issue and for an entire issue that explores a single theme of relevance to Christian Psychology. Well-written papers of any size are welcomed. In other words, the journal has no word limits for submitted manuscripts.

Authors submitting a manuscript should:

- Use Microsoft Word software and follow the current style guidelines of the American Psychological Association.
- Include an abstract ranging between 150-250 words
- Include keywords (about 5)
- Include a biography (title, degree(s) and institution(s), specializations, etc.)
- Include a mailing address and email

Manuscripts, ideas for discussion articles, and book reviews can be emailed to Lydia Kim-van Daalen, Managing Editor of Christian Psychology at lydiakim.vd@gmail.com.

Papers should be submitted as an email attachment. In the accompanying email, the author should guarantee that the attached manuscript has not been previously published and that it is not under concurrent review by another journal.

All submitted contributions will be acknowledged and processed as quickly as possible. Placing of accepted articles is based on the theme of a specific issue and potential backlog of contributions.

CHANGES

This issue of Christian Psychology (previously Edification) is the first without Paul J. Watson as the editor. As a result, I’d like to take a moment to express my gratitude, on behalf of the Society, for Paul’s significant editorial labors over the past six years. There are many things the Society has done for which I am thankful. However, I think it fair to say that our journal, Christian Psychology, is the Society’s single most important contribution to the world of psychology and counseling. And this is due in no small measure to Paul’s efforts. His intelligence, high scholarly standards, Quaker spirit, tolerance of diverse perspectives, research experience and unique research orientation (the Ideological-Surround Model), and his own Christian commitments have made Christian Psychology a significant forum in the field and also given the Society a degree of credibility we would not have without it. Thanks Paul for your tireless (and sometimes thankless) efforts on behalf of the Society, the Christian community, and the field of psychology.

Because of Paul’s retiring, we will have a few guest editors until the next editor is appointed. For the editor of this issue, we welcome Peter Hampson. Formerly Professor of Psychology and Lecturer in Cognitive Psychology, and Head of the Department of Psychology at the University of the West of England, he is currently a Fellow at Blackfriars Hall, the Dominican academic community at Oxford University. His scholarly interests are the relation between theology and psychology; Thomist anthropology and moral psychology; and religion, theology and transdisciplinarity in contemporary higher education. He is currently collaborating with theology and psychology colleagues in Bristol, Oxford, and Virginia Commonwealth Universities on such areas of theology’s interdisciplinary relationships, and an empirical and conceptual study of moral behaviour which combines an existential model with an integrated approach to character inspired by Aquinas. He also wrote the focus article for Edification 6.1 entitled, “The Role of Habitus in Christian Moral Psychology.”

The former name of our journal, Edification, is a central theme in the writings of the first avowed Christian psychologist, Soren Kierkegaard. However, some of our supporters have complained that it sounds more like a name of a magazine than an academic journal and that it doesn’t clearly express the purpose of our journal. So, we have decided to change the name of our journal to ONE that directly expresses our agenda: Christian Psychology. We hope this will make it easier to find our journal on-line and will encourage more authors supportive of the agenda of Christian psychology to submit articles.

Lydia Kim-van Daalen
Managing Editor, Christian Psychology
Theistic Psychology and the Relation of Worldviews: A Reply to the Critics

Jeffrey S. Reber and Brent D. Slife
Brigham Young University

Prompted by recent critical commentary on theistic psychology and psychotherapy, this paper examines the conventional frame of theism and naturalism—as separable and hierarchical worldviews—that is typically implied by critics of theistic psychology. Using Daniel Helminiak’s (2010) critique of theistic psychology and psychotherapy as our exemplar, we show how this conventional frame rests upon an assumed dualism that portrays naturalism as the superior worldview for science because of its assumed greater objectivity and theism’s assumed greater subjectivity. Closely following the philosophy of science and social science literature we challenge this dualistic approach to relating these two major worldviews of Western civilization, and show that naturalism is as capable of subjectivity and thus bias, dogmatism, and fragmentation as theism or any other worldview. We discuss how this leveling of worldviews does not threaten psychology with epistemological relativism, as some critics assert, because it assumes a non-dualistic ontology in which the subject/object dualism that gives rise to relativism is not presupposed. We close by discussing how this alternative framing of the relation between worldviews allows for a pluralism of worldviews, including a theistic worldview, to guide the advancement of psychological science.

Keywords: worldviews, relationality, naturalism, theism, hermeneutic realism
the relevant worldviews, theism and naturalism, are understood and related to one another. Naturalism is relevant, of course, because it is so often considered integral to science. Griffin (2000) puts it this way: “Science, it is widely agreed in scientific, philosophical, and liberal religious circles, necessarily presupposes naturalism” (p. 11). Even the historian of psychology Thomas Leahey (1991) considers naturalism to be “science’s central dogma” (p. 379). Although these statements, we believe, tend to exaggerate the dependency of science on naturalism, there is no question that they are correct about how many researchers and commentators view that relationship (see Griffin, 2004 for a review).

Naturalism, as we mean it here, is the philosophy or worldview that only natural (as opposed to supernatural) events really matter, whether for theory, research, or practice (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2007). One of the most important implications of this worldview is an understanding of knowledge advancement, especially scientific knowledge advancement: researchers should not postulate or assume the transcendent or the supernatural when formulating hypotheses, deciding modes of inquiry, or explaining data. In this regard, some scholars sharply distinguish methodological naturalism from metaphysical naturalism, claiming that the former does not involve the latter (e.g., Bishop, 2009). As we will describe, however, this distinction is more blurred than is often understood, because important aspects of the metaphysical and ontological subtly undergird and lead to the methodological and epistemological (Griffin, 2004).

If naturalism is the central dogma of science, then theism is the central dogma of many faith traditions. Theism is the worldview that a God (or Gods) is actively and currently engaged with and makes a meaningful difference in the practical world (Barbour, 1997). This divine involvement, as we will discuss, is not a deism that relegates God’s activity to a specific time period (e.g., creation), nor is it a dualism that limits God’s involvement to a corner of the universe (e.g., the supernatural realm; Slife & Reber, 2009). For the thoroughgoing theist, divine involvement is a present, ongoing, and difference-making activity. However, if divine activity truly makes a difference in the world, then excluding it, as the naturalist does, is problematic for a complete and comprehensive science (Plantinga, 2011)—hence the significance of how one views the relationship between theism and naturalism.

As we will describe, our critics conceptualize and relate naturalism and theism (and implicitly methodological and metaphysical naturalism) in the familiar, modernist manner of treating worldviews atomistically and arranging them hierarchically according to the assumed dualism of objectivity and subjectivity. In contrast to many of our critics, we have an alternative perspective on the relationship of naturalism and theism, and indeed on the relationship among worldviews in general. Following several prominent themes in the philosophy of science and hermeneutic literatures, we assert that theism and naturalism are not separable and hierarchically arranged conceptions, as the modernism of the conventional dualist framework suggests.

Worldview Relations: The Conventional View
A key theme regularly implied by critics of theistic psychology is demarcation. Demarcation is a term used by philosophers of science to denote “attempts to specify criteria that allow drawing a hard and fast distinction between what can be considered science and non-science” (Larmer, 2012, p. 137; Schaferman, 1997). Our exemplar critic Helminiak (2010), for example, draws a clear line of demarcation between theology and science asserting that, “the concerns of theology and of the sciences are irreducibly different” (p. 50; see also Alcock, 2009) and he supports this demarcation using the criterion of method, stating that “theology and psychology are ‘methodologically disparate disciplines’” (p. 50). The implication he draws from this methodological demarcation is that theology is a non-science because its methods are not scientific whereas psychology is a science because it employs the scientific method. This methodological line of demarcation between science and non-science has been used regularly throughout science’s history. Whatever form it takes the basic process is the same: some criterion or set of criteria are assumed that separate science from non-science and those criteria must be defended to preserve ontological, epistemological and/or “methodological integrity” (p. 50) and to “maintain the meaning of scientific” (p. 50). In this section we examine a major demarcation criterion of modern psychology that undergirds Helminiak and other’s criticisms of a theistic approach to psychology: the dualism of objectivity and subjectivity.

Modernist Dualism
As we will show, psychology is a modern science. Not only was it developed in the time period of modernism, but it is also based on many modernist assumptions (Whitehead, 1925; Vidal, 2011). One of these pervasive modernist assumptions is the dualism of objectivity and subjectivity, with subjectivity representing things as they are known in the mind and objectivity referring to that which can be known about the thing in itself (Searle, 2004; Osterlund & Carlile, 2005). That which is known in the mind is thought to be subject to the influence of personal and cultural values, assumptions, and interpretations whereas that which is known of the thing in itself is considered free of the influence of such biases, or at least their influence is significantly reduced and controlled (Stiles, 2009; Fishman, 1999; Taylor, 1995). In a recently published article (Slife, Reber, & Faulconer, 2012) we have demonstrated the perverseness of this form of modernist dualistic thinking in the many psychology research methods texts that are
used to educate and train psychologists to distinguish subjectivity, which “is based totally on personal feelings” (Schweigert, 2012, p. 4) and “is susceptible to . . . bias” (p. 5) from objectivity, which is based on “systematic observations” that are “unambiguous and uncontaminated by biases” (p. 2).

These modernist differences between subjectivity and objectivity imply two key features of the dualism of subjectivity and objectivity. The first feature, separability, is the assumption that the two realms of dualism, the subjective and the objective, are separable and, in fact, truly different realms. This is the reason, of course, that modernist science has presumed that subjectivity (biases, values) must be separated from the objective world, as far as possible, to attain truly valid and objective knowledge (Daston & Galison, 2010). The second feature of dualism, superiority, follows directly from the first: the objective realm, at least with respect to knowledge advancement, is considered to be a better source of knowledge than the subjective realm (Daston & Galison, 2010). Subjectivity is too opinionated, value-laden, and error-prone to produce knowledge equal to objective knowledge. Even a true understanding of human subjectivity (e.g., cognitive neuroscience) should, in this sense, be an objective (unbiased) understanding.

Traditionally, this distinction between objectivity and subjectivity has played an important role in the development and arrangement of methods within science (Jackson, 2012). The scientific method, for example, was developed to eliminate, reduce, and control the influences of subjectivity on the research process so that only objective knowledge remained (Mitchell & Jolley, 2007; Schweigert, 2012; Slife, Reber, & Faulconer, 2012). Once established, the scientific method quickly became the gold standard for scientific investigation, due in large part to its allure of superior objectivity against which other methods were then compared and could be arranged along an implicit continuum from more to less objective methods (Daston & Galison, 2010). The adoption of this modernist dualism at the methodological level also influenced the arrangement of academic disciplines and fields of study within higher education. Historically and today, academic disciplines that use scientific methods to study their subject matter (e.g., the natural sciences) have been intentionally and institutionally separated from those that rely on interpretive methods (e.g., the humanities) with the former seen as “objective and neutral” while the latter are understood to be “subjective and charged with values” (Runciman, 2002, p. 2; Berlin, 1974).

**Worldview Separability**

A number of historians, theologians, and scientists have suggested that theism and naturalism have become part of this dualistic arrangement of fields and ideas (e.g., Byl, 2002; Griffin, 2000; Müller, 2010; Plantinga, 2010). Indeed, as two of the major worldviews of Western civilization (Smith, 2001; Griffin, 2004), they may be the most important systems of ideas organized by this dualism. Many people, including the critics of a theistic approach to psychology, perceive the theistic worldview to be more subjective because it is understood to be “a sheer assertion of religious faith” (Helminiak, 2010, p. 65) that is “grounded in nonfalsifiable claims” (p. 67) and “metaphysical speculation” (p. 49; see also Hibberd, 2009, 2012; Gasser, 2007; Stenger, 2007). The naturalistic worldview, on the other hand, is perceived to be more objective because it focuses on the empirically observable and rationally describable regularities of the natural world using systematic and replicable scientific methods that are taken to be neutral with regard to metaphysical claims and other ideological biases (Craig & Moreland, 2000, Rouse, 2002). The result is a wide divide between these two worldviews, with theism on the subjective side clearly separated from naturalism on the objective side. Here we examine two key features of the dualistic arrangement that grounds the conventional way of relating the worldviews of naturalism and theism: separability and superiority.

**Worldview Dualism**

We begin with the more explicit characteristic of the conventional view: separability. Separability is the idea that theism and naturalism constitute radically different worldviews that can be understood and exist apart from one another. The move toward separability stems from the now strongly disputed traditional story developed by a number of 16th century humanists and protestant reformers, 18th century French *philosophes*, and 19th century scientists that “scientific progress had been held back by the Church during the Middle Ages” (Hannam, 2011, p. xvi). The supposed conflict between religion and science during this time and the stifling effects believed to have followed from that conflict, however untrue they may have been, led enlightenment thinkers to believe that science needed to be disentangled from the church in order for science to progress (Brooke, 1991).

The separability conception was developed as a partial solution to this pernicious issue. Indeed, it is currently popular for many philosophers and theologians to frame naturalism and theism as being almost independent of each other, both in property and in purpose (Barbour, 2000). In Stephen J. Gould’s (1997) terms religion and science are to be understood as “nonoverlapping magisteria” (p. 16) with each having a separate realm of influence and teaching authority. The dualism of objectivity and subjectivity provides precisely the boundary and justification needed for this separability frame with its claim that the objective realm is the main province of naturalism and the subjective realm is the territory of theism. True to this “solution,” Barbour (1997), like Gould, describes this dualistic separability frame as a “way to avoid conflict” wherein “each [world-
view] has its own distinctive domain and its characteristic methods that can be justified on its own terms. Proponents of this view say there are two jurisdictions and each party must keep off the other’s turf. Each must tend to its own business and not meddle in the affairs of the other” (p. 84).

This separability solution provided in part by modernist dualism has also been adopted as the ethical position of many modern professional societies, including the American Psychological Association. The APA Council of Representatives’ (2007) resolution on religion and prejudice makes this ethic clear as it echoes Barbour’s (1997, 2000) and Gould’s (1997) descriptions of separability and draws a stark line of demarcation between science and non-science. The resolution reads:

It is important for psychology as a behavioral science, and various faith traditions as theological systems, to acknowledge and respect their profoundly different methodological, epistemological, historical, theoretical and philosophical bases. Psychology has no legitimate function in arbitrating matters of faith and theology; and faith traditions have no legitimate place arbitrating behavioral or other sciences (para. 4).

Given its standing and even institutionalization within the discipline, we refer to this separability framing of the relationship of naturalism and theism as the conventional view.

The APA resolution on religion and prejudice (2007) asserts that psychology and faith are “profoundly different” (para. 4) at almost every level. This radical difference implies that even if psychologists and people of faith are interested in the same phenomena and activities (e.g., forgiveness, prayer, meditation) their ideas about those phenomena, their methods of studying those phenomena, and their interpretations of the phenomena are completely unique and wholly different from the other. There may be chance parallels here and there but these two approaches and the naturalistic and theistic worldviews they represent would not depend on each other for knowledge. On the contrary, each of these approaches refers only to its self-contained epistemological criteria for tests of its knowledge claims (Reber, 2006b).

The APA resolution on religion and prejudice also implies that any violation of this notion of separate domains would result in bad science and bad theology, a sentiment strongly shared by Helminiak (2010) and other critics of a theistic approach to psychology (Alcock, 2009; Hibberd, 2012). Note the language against violations of these nonoverlapping magisteria in the resolution: “it is outside the role and expertise of psychologists as psychologists to adjudicate religious or spiritual tenets” and “those operating out of religious/spiritual traditions are encouraged to recognize that it is outside their role and expertise to adjudicate empirical scientific issues in psychology” (APA, 2007, para. 25, emphasis added). The resolution does state that psychologists can “appropriately speak” to the psychological implications of faith “when relevant psychological findings about those implications exist” (para. 25) and people of faith “can appropriately speak to theological implications of psychological science” (para. 25), but that is only possible because those implications occur within the relevant domain of expertise. If religious activities or beliefs promote psychological health, for example, it is appropriate for psychologists to study those psychological health outcomes because psychological health is within the domain of psychology. The precepts and values of the faith that inform the religious activities or beliefs, on the other hand, are off limits because faith belongs to the non-psychological, non-scientific, subjective domain. Such is the perspective of many psychologists in the discipline, including many in the psychology of religion (Piedmont, 2008; Nelson, 2009).

One challenging implication of this separability perspective is that it leaves psychologists who are also theists little choice but to compartmentalize their theism and their psychology (Clark, 1993). As one professor described it (Nelson, 1999), he had to learn how to wear two hats. When he went to work at the psychology laboratory he wore the hat of naturalistic, scientific psychology and operated according to all the assumptions, values, and meanings of that worldview. When he went to church or studied the Bible he put on his faith hat and operated according to all the assumptions, values, and meanings of that worldview. This meant that God’s activity only mattered in the realm of faith and worship. God was wholly irrelevant to the natural events and causes this professor studied and interpreted in his psychology lab.

This compartmentalization approach is not just a matter of separability. It is, as we will discuss in more detail in the next section, also a matter of superiority. The professor who claimed to wear two hats takes the hat of naturalistic psychological science to be superior to the hat of faith in the context of his work in the lab where he assumes he must conceive of his “world” as dealing solely with natural events and causes, and God’s activity is not functionally relevant. At the same time, he considers his hat of faith a better fit for his religious life where God is relevant and participates. This context-specific superiority is not surprising. The problem is that the hats and the contexts of the lab and church, as well as many other contexts are framed by the same subjectivity/objectivity dualism that also frames methods, theories, disciplines, and worldviews, and inevitably hierarchically arranges the hats and contexts themselves (Clark, 1993).

Worldview Superiority
It should go without saying that objectivity is generally seen as superior to subjectivity in modern psychological science. Yet, just to make the point, we have examined...
one key indicator of this characteristic, which is the many research method texts psychologists use to educate and train their psychology students (Slife, Reber, & Faulconer, 2012). Across the board, these texts teach students that objectivity is superior to subjectivity, and many texts regularly and explicitly associate objectivity with science and subjectivity with faith. Evans & Rooney (2010), for example, assert that claims of revelation, such as Noah's claim that God commanded him to build an ark, are personal experiences and "the problem with personal experience is that it is personal and subjective. There is no way for others to make it objective" (p. 4). Gravetter & Forzano (2012) add that the problem with "the method of faith" as "a variant of the method of authority" is that it "could represent subjective, personal opinion rather than true expert knowledge" (p. 8). Faith, then, like other "non-scientific methods of acquiring knowledge" (p. 16) is an "uncritical technique" (p. 10) that "tends to rely on subjective evidence" (p. 25), and as a result lacks the objectivity of the scientific method, which is "structured so that the researcher's biases and beliefs do not influence the outcome of the study" (p. 24).

The message of psychology's research texts and the discipline they represent is clear: faith is subjective and uncritical and as a result is subject to bias and error. Science is objective and critical and as a result is relatively uninfluenced by bias and is relatively free from error. The implication of this hierarchical arrangement is not only that objectivity is superior to subjectivity but also that, consistent with a Comtean positivism, science is superior to faith.

This means that contexts of science and faith, like their methods, theories, and worldviews, are arranged hierarchically with more objective contexts ranked more highly than subjective contexts. Thus, although the professor friend's hat of faith may be superior to his hat of psychological science within religious contexts, these contexts themselves are on the subjective side of the spectrum and as a result are ultimately inferior to psychology contexts. Recall the different language Helminiak (2010) uses to describe theism and psychology. Theism consists of "metaphysical speculation" (p.49), "collective superstition" (p.50), and "personal belief" (p. 50), all very subjective descriptions. Psychology, on the other hand, is "reliable, valid" (p. 50), and "evidence-based" (p. 47), all very objective descriptions. In this sense the compartments of faith and psychology may be separate but they are not equal. Instead, faith is relegated to the small and usually private realm of "personal belief" (p. 47, 50, 56), "personal conception" (p. 55), "personal opinions" (p. 57), "personal faith" (p. 58), and "personal piety" (p. 62 67), while psychology enjoys a large very public role as a credible social science based on "shared evidentiary criteria" (p. 51), "shared correct understandings" (p. 66), and "scientific openness" (p. 56).

It may be that Helminiak's (2010) "intent is not to demean theist belief" (p. 50), but it is also the case that he rejects "the claim that theism enjoys a reliable, valid religious or spiritual source of knowledge on a par with that of science" (p. 50). For him and the critics of a theistic approach to psychology he represents, theism and naturalism are not just separable worldviews; theism is more subjective and personal and is therefore inferior to more objective, public naturalistic science.

The superiority of objectivity to subjectivity further implies that objectivity should inform subjectivity. If, for example, natural scientists claim to have objectively discovered a law of nature that operates as a regularity in the world, like the law of gravity, then that law is not only true for the natural scientists. It is also true for theists, as it is true for adherents of other worldviews as well. Similarly, if psychologists claim to have objectively discovered psychological laws that govern human behavior, then those laws apply not only to adherents of the psychological view but to all people, including theists. Because the objectively discovered laws are true for all people, including theists, then theists must accommodate the physical and psychological laws into their worldview. Historically, this accommodation has led to a reformulation of many theists' understanding of God's relationship to the world (i.e., theology).

As many theists accommodated the Western privileging of naturalistic concepts discovered through objective science into their theologies, they redefined many theistic beliefs and practices in ways that were adapted to scientists' truth claims regarding the natural world. Miracles, for example, are now defined by many people of faith in terms that relate God's activity to laws of nature (e.g., supernatural), such as God suspending or violating the laws of nature (Helminiak, 2010; Gorsch, 2002; Bishop, 1993). Such definitions of miracles are not originally theistic. Actually, the conception of laws of nature used in these definitions is a fairly recent invention of the scientific revolution attributed to early scientists like Galileo and Francis Bacon (Hannam, 2011; Swartz, 2003). However, once physical law became an objective, scientific truth this significant accommodation in theistic conceptualizations of miracles was virtually required, as were many other adaptations in theists' theologies, beliefs, and practices.

In noting these accommodations it could appear as if the conventional, separability frame of (or line of demarcation between) science and religion is being violated. In the terms of the APA (2007) resolution, one could argue that psychologists are violating their ethics because they too are "arbitrating matters of faith and theology" (p. 2) with their naturalistic reconceptualizations of religious beliefs and phenomena. When evolutionary psychologists assert that religion is a naturally occurring byproduct of adaptive cognitive mechanisms (Atran & Henrich, 2010; Looy, 2005), when God image researchers refer to God as an "imaginary figure"
(Cassinba, Granqvist, Costantini, & Gatto, 2008, p. 1760) and an “individual construction” (Granqvist, Ivarsson, Broberg, & Hagekull, 2007, p. 598), or when psychology researchers describe faith as blind with definitions like “the acceptance of the truth of a statement without questions or needing proof” (Heiman, 1999, p. 7), they seem to be explaining, or explaining away, theist’s beliefs and experiences.

Should not the theist cry foul when these conceptual renovations occur and remind psychologists of the separability frame to which they are formally committed? The short answer from the perspective of the conventional frame is “no.” Each of these reconceptualizations of theistic ideas or practices is warranted for the conventionalist because the methods of naturalism are presumed to be neutral and therefore their findings can pass into the theistic realm without consequence or prejudice. In other words, theism is not accommodating a naturalistic ideology. It is accommodating objectivities, truths that have been discovered by scientific psychologists whose method only incidentally (given its relative objectivity) operates from within a naturalistic framework.

Theism, on the other hand, is conventionally understood to be severely biased and subjective, even dogmatic and fragmented (Alcock, 2009, Hibberd, 2012). In Helminiak’s (2010) words, a theistic approach to psychology is “personal belief, popular piety, and collective superstition” (p. 50). Moreover, it “threatens to subvert the whole enterprise of evidence-based research and scholarship” (p. 50). In short, it is so thoroughly subjective that it has no place in an empirical, evidence-based, and objective psychology (p. 67). In the end a theistic approach to psychology boils down to the peddling of wholly subjective, personal religious beliefs as if they constituted “a reasoned theology” (p. 67), or worse, a “validated science” (p. 67). To its critics, it is subjectivity par excellence, passing itself off as objective science, and its insinuation into science must be strongly resisted to forestall the grand deception that would eventuate.

Moreover, theists have no methodological position that parallels that of the naturalist. Unlike naturalism whose adherents often claim they can somehow divorce their methods from their worldview, the worldview and methods of theism are considered inseparable (Geisler, 2011). Therefore, theistic methods cannot be neutral with regard to other worldviews and theism’s “truths” cannot be true for naturalism or universally applied because they do not evidence the objectivity obtained through a relatively neutral set of methods; they are only “personal beliefs” (Helminiak, 2010, p. 65). Thus, in the conventional frame, the influence between naturalism and theism can only work in one direction, from naturalism to theism, and not the other way around. The prospect of theistic “truths” entering the psychological field (a naturalistic discipline) is not only viewed with suspicion, it is altogether forbidden. It can only be construed as an insinuation of the worst form of opinion and dogma into an evidence-based and neutral scientific discipline, a “Trojan horse” (Helminiak, 2010, p. 57) or “Pandora’s Box” (Alcock, 2009, p. 82), which would create “nonproductive chaos” (p. 82), muddy the clear waters of science, and replace truth with personal opinion (Hibberd, 2009, 2012; Helminiak, 2012).

This unidirectional influence of naturalism on theism implies that the worldview of theism is ultimately inferior to the worldview of naturalism, but only because the worldview of naturalism employs objective scientific methods that are capable of producing evidence-based knowledge and the worldview of theism relies on subjective metaphysical speculation that can only produce personal opinion. The contexts of faith that remain outside the reach of naturalism at any point in time are only those ever-shrinking contexts where science has not yet uncovered truth that would require faith’s accommodation to it. From the conventional perspective this is not a form of scientific expansionism, where disciplines representing the naturalistic worldview try to take over the traditional domain of disciplines representing the theistic worldview (cf. Stenmark, 2004). That would be boldfaced scientism. No, for the conventionalist, the culture of naturalism is not taking over the culture of theism in some version of ideological imperialism at all. It is merely the objective truth, which happens to be discovered using the methods of the natural sciences that is expanding and requiring the accommodation of people of faith.

Methodological Naturalism

The conception of methodological naturalism is a straightforward extension of this dualistic logic—the closer to method, the closer to objectivity. Much as naturalism is considered less subjective and thus less biased and value-laden than theism, the method side of naturalism is itself considered less subjective, biased, and value-laden than its metaphysical or philosophical side (Forrest, 2000). Philosophy and metaphysics, along with theism and theology, are associated with “soft” and subjective content, whereas the scientific method is viewed as almost without content, engaging solely in objective observation and rational description. As Bishop (2009) explains, methodological naturalism is “focused on uncovering physical facts and regularities,” whereas metaphysical naturalism “makes a substantive commitment to a picture of what really exists” (p. 108). For this reason, methodological naturalism is considered more a behavioral activity than a conceptual position, whereas metaphysical naturalism is viewed as a deeply value-laden position.

The dualistic features of separability and superiority also apply. First, methodological naturalism is considered to be completely separate from metaphysical naturalism; the former is essentially not dependent on the latter. As Bishop (2009) views it, each position is...
separate from the other historically, and neither position implies or involves the other conceptually. If anything, Bishop is concerned that too many commentators are “blurring the distinction between methodological and metaphysical naturalism” (p. 109). Second, methodological naturalism is clearly superior to metaphysical naturalism. Methodological naturalism presupposes only “common sense,” such as the existence of the world (p. 109), whereas metaphysical naturalism is a highly value-laden form of philosophical speculation, involving a host of questionable assumptions (Griffin, 2000; Slife, 2004; Willard, 2000). Again, from the perspective of the modern dualist, the common sense of uncovering facts and regularities is superior to the subjectivity of metaphysical speculation.

**Worldview relations: An alternative frame**

If we believed this dualistic framing of naturalism and theism was correct, we would join with Helminiak (2010) and others in condemning a theistic approach to psychology as a dangerous threat to the “evidence-based research and scholarship” (p. 50) that naturalistic psychological science has achieved. However, there is good reason, as we will show, to question the accuracy of this conventional frame. Indeed, many who work within the philosophy of science are doubtful of the objectivity of naturalism, the neutrality of its methods, and its complete compatibility with theism and other worldviews (Bernstein, 1983; Griffin, 2000; Plantinga, 2011; Richardson, 2009; Taylor 1971; Willard, 2000). Closely following their work on the topic we offer an alternative frame for understanding the relationship between the worldviews of naturalism and theism, as inspired by the hermeneutic tradition.

This alternative frame draws upon the work of hermeneutic philosophers, such as Martin Heidegger (1962), Hans Gadamer (1997), and Paul Ricoeur (1981), who conceptualized our being in the world non-dualistically. A hermeneutic non-dualism does not distinguish objects as they exist in themselves (objectivity) from representations of objects in the mind (subjectivity). A hermeneutic non-dualism does not conceive of the world as objects in the conventional self-contained sense at all. It conceives of them as meanings (Slife & Christensen, in press). From the perspective of hermeneutics, naturalism is not the natural, or even a compendium of the natural. It is a framework of meanings “in the Heideggerian sense” (Slife & Reber, 2009a, p. 67), just as theism is a framework of meanings and not God per se. We say “in the Heideggerian sense” to distinguish the conventional, dualistic notion of meaning, which is a distinctly subjective entity, from the hermeneutic conception, which understands meaning as constituted by both subjectivity and objectivity in an interpreted reality that is not merely subjective speculation about an objective world out there (Gadamer, 1997).

From the hermeneutic perspective we live with and through the world, not as subjects over against objects, but as participants in a world of co-constituted meanings where ontological distinctions between subjects and objects are not experienced and consequently a subjectivity/objectivity dualism does not arise (Heidegger, 1962). Without this dualism to separate and arrange worldviews, disciplines, methods, and theories, as we will see, the conventional notion of worldview separability collapses. Worldviews are understood as integral parts of meaningful wholes, implying that full meaning is not possible for anything, including worldviews, without some relation to the whole. We also intend to describe how this alternate view implies that worldviews like naturalism and theism are not arranged hierarchically by a subjectivity/objectivity dualism. They are distinctly different meanings that are nevertheless highly related to each other and are neither mostly subjective nor mostly objective.

**Worldview Interdependence**

We believe the hermeneutic notion of worldview interdependence provides a more accurate interpretation of the historical relationship between naturalism and theism than the separability feature of the conventional view. It is already well known that many of the scholars of the Middle Ages and of the scientific revolution were deeply religious, and it was often their theistic convictions that fueled their curiosity about the natural world (Nelson, 2005). Hannam (2011) shows in careful detail that theistic beliefs prompted scientists of the Middle Ages to entertain questions that reached beyond the limits of Aristotelian rationality and led to the development of alternative methods, like the empirical method. The work of these early scientists set an important foundation for the experimentation practiced in the scientific revolution and offered a complement to the methods of reason and revelation that were useful in studying the supernatural world.

There are many more ways in which naturalism and theism participate in a relationship in which the questions, limitations, and concepts of each worldview have played an important role in the development of the questions, limitations, and concepts of the other (Brooke, 1991; Griffin, 2004; Stenmark, 2004). Whether the relationship has been marked more by conflict or harmony at any given time, these two worldviews have always informed and shaped one another, through both their relational similarities and their relational differences. Even the demarcation issue in science, as we described earlier, depends vitally on non-science to define it. In this same way, the meaning of naturalism and the meaning of theism have and will continue to inform and define one another.

The hermeneutic perspective also implies that psychology and faith traditions are not fully separable, despite the APAs (2007) call for distinct knowledge.
domains. We have already shown that faith traditions have been influenced by psychological science and have accommodated many of its findings. But accommodation is only one form of influence. Psychologists too have been influenced by traditions of faith, though typically at an implicit level. The topics that psychologists in the psychology of religion address, for example, are saturated by meanings that come from faith traditions and are not easily separated out from the naturalistic meanings psychologists adopt (Slife & Reber, 2012).

The psychological construct of forgiveness, for example, is a concept rife with religious meaning. For many faith traditions, forgiveness requires a change or transformation of heart that is facilitated by God in which vengeful, angry feelings are replaced with feelings of goodwill and love through God’s grace (Rye, et al., 2000). Psychological definitions also often entail letting go of hate and replacing vengeful feelings with positive emotions toward the offender, albeit without the assistance of God (e.g., Wade, Bailey, Shaffer, 2005). This similarity between the religious and psychological definitions of forgiveness is not merely coincidental. The religious definition of forgiveness has a long history in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam and it has contributed to the way psychologists and the people they study conceptualize forgiveness (Rye, et al., 2000). Psychologists may offer a secular definition of forgiveness that is similar to that of religion or is intentionally opposed to it, but they cannot pretend that they are unaware of the religious conception of forgiveness as they construct their own.

Practices like replacing negative feelings with positive feelings toward an offender, then, are less likely to be naturally occurring features of forgiveness that psychologists have simply empirically observed. They have become inculcated into our way of life by our religious history so that we now take them for granted as necessary conditions of any type of forgiveness, including a secular form. One wonders whether psychology researchers would even study forgiveness if the religious conception of forgiveness did not exist. Would it be assumed to emerge, however consciously or unconsciously, from within the worldview itself and not from the relationship between the different worldviews? This is strikingly dissimilar from the experience of early scientists like Francis Bacon and Isaac Newton for whom many of the questions they examined scientifically arose in their study of scripture and who brought new interpretations to bear on verses of scripture in light of the results of their scientific research (Hannam, 2011; Nelson, 2005). For them there was a book of nature and a book of faith, but those books, though different, mutually informed one another and required one another, not only for a full understanding of truth, but for a full understanding of each other (Dixon, 2008).

The intricate relationship of theism and naturalism should not be taken to mean that they are not substantially different. Too often, as Charles Taylor (1999) has pointed out, people confound similarity and relationship as if things must be similar in order to be related, just as people often confound difference and independence (Bell, 1998). We warn against either tendency here. Theism and naturalism are very different worldviews and they are in an interdependent relationship. Indeed, we would hold that it is partly because they are so different that they are and have been so historically and currently related. This conception of relationship is itself a key difference between the conventional framing of worldviews advocated by many critics of a theistic approach to psychology and the alternative frame we are describing.

Worldview Difference
When worldviews are understood to be different frameworks for meanings and not different labels for objects, they cannot be differentiated in their objectivity. All involve ideas, and as such involve unproven assumptions, value-laden beliefs, etc. (Naugle, 2002). To make a meaningful contribution, each worldview must share in a valid interpretation of the phenomenon with “valid” in this case meaning that the interpretation includes those meanings constituting the worldview.
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and those meanings of the phenomenon or event being studied (cf. Warnke, 1994). Consider prayer from this hermeneutic perspective. Prayer is a meaningful activity, implying there are many and varied meanings that constitute prayer, which stem from a long and rich tradition of prayer across many faiths and from the current practice of prayer by many people. The many and varied meanings that constitute prayer (e.g., prayer as petition, prayer as praise, prayer as thanksgiving; Foster, 1992) constitute a horizon of meaning, just as do the many meanings that constitute naturalism (e.g., lawfulness, empiricism, measurement) and the many meanings that constitute theism (e.g., God’s care and concern for the world, God’s sustaining activity in the world, God’s mercy).

The integration of naturalistic meanings with meanings of prayer constitutes an interpretation of prayer that illuminates some meanings like frequency of prayer, changes in cognition and attitude that accompany prayer, and the effects of prayer on behavior (e.g., Fincham, Lambert & Beach, 2010). The integration of theistic meanings with meanings of prayer constitutes a different interpretation that discloses such meanings as the glorification of God, direction and guidance from the Holy Spirit, or receiving blessings from God (e.g., Slife & Reber, 2012). Though quite different, both interpretations could be valid and neither interpretation is necessarily superior to the other, even in science, because both draw from the full range of meanings that are appropriate to prayer, even though they do so in their particular way. On the other hand, an interpretation that prayer has a heavy mass or tastes sour would not be appropriate to the meanings of prayer. In this hermeneutic sense, there are valid and invalid interpretations of phenomena and events. Valid interpretations illuminate or disclose particular meanings of the phenomenon, whereas invalid interpretations do not (Warnke, 1994).

Given this alternative framing of worldviews, it would be inappropriate to differentiate naturalism from theism by claiming that naturalism is devoid of unproven, taken-on-faith assumptions, values, and interpretations, or that it is free of the influence of such things. On the contrary, naturalism, like theism, is made up of meanings “all the way down” (Held, 2007, p. 283). Interestingly, many philosophers of science have arrived at a very similar conclusion through their work, the primary focus of which is “to question assumptions that scientists take for granted” (Okasha, 2002, p. 12). The work of such noted philosophers of science as Thomas Kuhn, Karl Popper, Paul Feyerabend, Michael Polanyi, and others does not just raise “technical uncertainties in current philosophy of science” (p. 50) as Helminiak (2010) describes it. Their work shows that naturalism, Leahey’s (1991) central dogma of science, is a worldview, which is “an entire . . . outlook” that is made up of “a constellation of shared assumptions, beliefs, and values that unite a . . . community” (Okasha, 2002, p. 81), many of which are implicit and have been incorporated into the worldview over a long period of time (Bernstein, 1983).

Outlooks, assumptions, beliefs, and values are meanings, and meanings, by definition, cannot be observationally studied. The printed words in a Harry Potter book can be observed, but the meaning of the words—the relationship among the words—cannot be observed. Meanings can be experienced, to be sure, but they do not fall on one’s retinas. The worldviews of naturalism and theism, in this sense, are not observable, nor are the assumptions that inform each worldview. Indeed, the scientific doctrine of observability—that only the observable is knowable—is itself unobservable. In this sense, any presumption (e.g., Alcock, 2009) that the first premises that inform naturalism have somehow passed an empirical test that the first premises of theism have failed is, in principle, deeply problematic. Both worldviews are in the position described by Okasha (2002), who concludes that, “since nothing can explain itself, it follows that at least some [fundamental] laws and principles will themselves remain unexplained” (p. 54). At the level of their first premises, naturalists and theists are no more or less objective. They each accept the first premise of their respective worldviews as true without the empirical validation that would supposedly provide evidence of greater objectivity. One might even say that first premises are “leaps of faith.”

If there is no evidence that the premises of naturalism are inherently more objective than the premises of theism or that the subjectivity/objectivity dualism of naturalism ought to be used, however implicitly, to frame these worldviews in the first place, then the claims that naturalism is more objective or neutral, or even scientific, than theism are problematic. On the contrary, naturalism, like theism, is a particular way of looking at the world that is guided by systems of assumptions, values, and meanings that say at least as much about the adherents of the worldview as they do the objects of the world. In this sense an assumption like lawfulness, a key meaning of the naturalistic worldview, is an interpretation that combines unproven, taken-on-faith assumptions of the naturalistic worldview (e.g., uniformity of nature and inductivism, Hume, 1739/2011) with a meaning that is appropriate to many events and phenomena of the world—regularity. The law of gravity, for example, is not directly empirically observed. It is interpretively inferred by adherents of the naturalistic worldview who presuppose the uniformity of nature and a deterministic universe and apply these non-empirically derived assumptions to the consistency with which objects can be observed to fall at a mathematically predictable speed.

Similarly, in psychology the connection or relationship between observable behaviors (e.g., hugs and kisses) and the unobservable phenomenon they are
supposed to demonstrate (e.g., love) does not fall on the retina of the psychologist conducting the research any more than love itself does. Consequently, both the unobservable emotion and its unobservable connection to the observable behaviors has to be inferred (Slife, Reber, and Lefevor, 2012), which again, logical though the connection may seem to be, opens the door to the subjectivity and bias that concerns adherents of the conventional frame. None of this means that concepts like love and gravity cannot be useful or productive interpretations in a number of important ways. On the contrary, gravity and other inferred natural laws (i.e., meanings) have played a significant role in the development of new technologies and tools, but these products say nothing of the objective reality of the laws themselves. Moreover, concepts like “useful” and “productive” are also meanings, understood in terms derived from the same naturalistic worldview and are capable of the same biases as the laws themselves. Ultimately, evidence that a worldview has many adherents, has withstood criticism for a long period of time, or has produced impressive benefits to human beings, as in the case of technology, is not the same thing as evidence that the worldview is objective or that it is more objective than other worldviews. Yet, these are often the evidences offered when criticisms of the naturalistic worldview’s claims to objectivity are made (e.g., Forrest, 2000; Schaferman, 1997).

If naturalism, like theism, is a worldview grounded in a number of untested assumptions, human values, and shared meanings, then what should we make of its unilateral influence on theism? If it is not more objective or less subjective than theism, should its scientific findings pass easily into the theistic realm without issue? Must theists acknowledge these so-called findings and accommodate them? The problem with the superiority feature of the conventional view is not that naturalism has an influence on theism or even that it has a greater influence on theism at any given time. From a hermeneutic perspective, influence is inevitable among worldviews. The problem is the unidirectionality of the influence and the pretense of objectivity (superiority) that supports it. This pretense implies that the influence does not stem from a belief system, but rather from some unbiased description of the world that theists are compelled to acknowledge. The consequence of this pretense is that the untested assumptions and values of both worldviews are not being taken into account in understanding the influence of one worldview on the other.

If the untested assumptions of a worldview are not taken into account, that worldview could actually be more prone to dogmatism than worldviews like theism whose untested assumptions are acknowledged and well known. One of the properties of naturalism, as we have shown, is that it obscures its own untested presuppositions (Alcock, 2009; Rea, 2007). Its values and assumptions are “the way of science” or axiomatic. Recognizing this property, the well-known philosopher of science, Sir Karl Popper (2002) anticipated naturalism’s propensity toward dogmatism in The Logic of Scientific Discovery, when he wrote:

I reject the naturalistic view: It is uncritical. Its upholders fail to notice that whenever they believe to have discovered a fact, they have only proposed a convention. Hence the convention is liable to turn into a dogma. This criticism of the naturalistic view applies not only to its criterion of meaning, but also to its idea of science, and consequently to its idea of empirical method (p. 52-53).

Thus, it is the pretense of factuality or truth at the level of research findings, method, and theory—the naturalist’s unawareness of their a priori assumptions—that puts the naturalistic view at risk of dogmatism. Such a pretense does not occur in the alternative relation of worldviews we have described, because the objectivity/subjectivity dualism that gives rise to concepts like objective facts and neutral truths is not assumed. There is no pretense of a superior, self-contained worldview that informs all others. Instead, all worldviews are interdependent, varied frameworks of meaning that participate in different interpretations (i.e., integration of meanings) of the phenomena studied while also mutually constituting each other.

This interdependence of meanings also implies the interdependence of methodological and metaphysical naturalism. Recall (above) that some scholars sharply distinguish the two as if the methodological conception is not a conception at all. It is, by their rendering, merely the “uncovering” of “physical facts and regularities” (Bishop, 2009, p. 108), more an objective activity than a subjective meaning. To be fair, this distinction is also borne of the philosophical convention that separates epistemology and method from ontology and metaphysics. A hermeneutic understanding, however, does not sharply distinguish these meanings, and yes, casts even methodological activities as meanings that are themselves undergirded with assumptions, values, and biases (Gadamer, 1997).

What this implies is that even method activities are themselves borne of metaphysical assumptions. These activities may not be the metaphysic, and thus are somewhat distinguishable from it, but this distinction in no way prevents the person engaging in the activities from making important and even strong assumptions about the world in which the method is presumed to be successful (Slife, Reber, & Lefevor, 2012). Why else would methodological naturalists restrict themselves to natural events? This restriction is not arrived at randomly or revealed to us through “common sense” (Bishop, 2009, p. 109) because even common sense is contextual and cultural (Slife, Starks, & Primosch, in press). It is, instead, borne of a view of the world in which supernatural events, and perhaps the religious
“methods” that might reveal them, are somehow unimportant to the natural methods and events of interest. Methodological naturalists have to presume a world, in other words, in which supernatural events are not sufficiently important to the natural that they need to be taken into account in fully understanding the world (Schaferman, 1997).

Not a Relativism
We recognize that this alternative frame is unfamiliar to many psychologists and critics of a theistic approach to psychology who work within the conventional frame and conceptualize worldviews, methods, theories, and disciplines according to subjectivity/objectivity dualism. Given this dualistic lens, we understand why the alternative we describe raises concerns about relativism, such as those expressed by our exemplar critic Helminiak (2010). Speaking of those advocating a theistic approach to psychology, Helminiak wrote, “they do not believe in objective truth. At this point aren’t they relativists?” (p. 66). This is a common misconception of the hermeneutic view we have discussed (Bernstein, 1983; Warnke, 1994). The misconception occurs because the dualism of subjectivity and objectivity is assumed, which means any questioning of the objectivity of truth can only leave us with subjectivity (Greiffenhagen & Sharrock, 2008). It is not so much relativism, then, but the threat of subjectivism that is feared. This is the reason Helminiak asserts that “the claim that theism enjoys a reliable, valid religious or spiritual source of knowledge on a par with that of science . . . threatens to subvert the whole enterprise of evidence-based research and scholarship” (p. 50). The dualism of naturalism and theism makes the latter, in principle, subjective and therefore an ungrounded set of ideas—the “nonproductive chaos” that Alcock (2009, p. 82) rightly abhors.

However, this argument is wholly misguided. There is no subjectivism to fear in the alternative frame of worldview relations we have described because the dualism of subjectivity and objectivity is not assumed in the first place (Greiffenhagen & Sharrock, 2008). Instead, meanings are assumed, which, in a hermeneutic framework, are not ungrounded ideas (Gadamer, 1997; Warnke, 1994). Meanings do not refer to the contents of the mind of the interpreter or to the objects in themselves. Instead, they are mutually constituted by the interpreter, interpretive context, and the thing interpreted (Heidegger, 1962). In terms familiar to the dualist, they are inextricably interpreted realities—subjective objectivities or objective subjectivities—with neither the “subjective” nor the “objective” aspects of these meanings separable from one another (Slife, Reber, & Faulconer, 2012).

In this sense, scientific study is a fusion of the things scientists study and the scientists themselves, both of which are inextricably related. This notion of inextricable relation or mutual constitution is not foreign to the natural sciences. On the contrary, it is one of the key lessons of modern science; the observed and observer cannot be ontologically separated (e.g., relativity theory, quantum theory, Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle, etc.). The inextricable relation of interpreter and interpreted that co-constitute scientific findings do not make the resulting meaning purely subjective, as the conventionalist fears. On the contrary, the relationship grounds the meaning. A full explication of this grounding of meaning in a nondualistic framework is beyond the scope of this paper. For such an explication we refer the reader to our own work elsewhere (Slife, 2004; Slife, Reber, & Faulconer, 2012; Slife & Richardson, in press) and to the work of other philosophers of science and psychologists working within the hermeneutic tradition (e.g., Bernstein, 1983; Fishman, 1999; Messer, Sass & Woolfolk, 1988; Packer & Addison, 1989; Richardson, Fowers, & Guignon, 1999).

Implications
We close with a key implication of the alternative framework for worldview relations: a hermeneutic framework for worldview relations makes those conceptions once considered more objective actually less objective, and those considered more subjective, less subjective. Naturalism, in this sense, is not as “objective” as its adherents purport and, therefore, naturalists must be more mindful of their biases. This mindfulness is particularly important if they are to avoid the dogmatism that critics of a theistic approach to psychology seem to find so repugnant (Helminiak, 2010; Alcock, 2009; Hibberd, 2012). Being aware of biases is particularly important for adherents of the naturalistic worldview for whom there is a tendency, as we have discussed, to see biases in other worldviews but not in their own. One reason for this tendency is that the naturalistic worldview is taken to be more objective than all other worldviews and methodological naturalism is assumed to be neutral with regard to other methods. A related reason for this tendency is that biases are assumed to be bad because they adulterate objectivity with subjectivity and sully the knowledge claims of the discipline. Consequently, biases are to be eliminated or at least significantly reduced and controlled to get to the objective truth of the world, and where they cannot be reduced and controlled they are often, as we have shown, simply denied.

The acclaimed hermeneuticist, Hans Georg Gadamer, has described this conventionalist view of bias elsewhere as “the prejudice against prejudice” (Gadamer, 1997; p. 273; Slife & Reber, 2009b; Slife, Reber, & Lefevor, 2012). By this he means that philosophical presuppositions, like the subjectivity/objectivity dualism that informs the naturalistic worldview as well as the conventional framing of the relation of worldviews, bias scientists against what they perceive to be subjective biases. Thus, critics of a theistic approach to psychology
are biased against the theistic worldview because they see theism as subjectivity, and they fear the damage to the presumed objectivity of science that would result if theism were allowed to participate in psychological science. They are also biased against any biases in their own naturalistic worldview, which leads them to downplay the philosophy of science literature that exposes the biases of naturalism (Helminiak, 2010). The prejudice against prejudice also leads them to treat the untested presuppositions of the naturalistic worldview as if they have passed an empirical test that the presuppositions of other worldviews, like theism, have failed (Alcock, 2009). Despite their efforts and denial, naturalistic psychologists have not escaped biases, including especially their bias against biases.

The other side of this implication is that conceptions previously considered to be “subjective” are less so than conventionally assumed. From the alternative perspective of worldview relations, the dualism of objectivity and subjectivity is not assumed so biases are not viewed as necessarily dangerous subjectivities that threaten valid knowledge. Instead, biases are meanings that are particular to a given worldview and can potentially illuminate features of a phenomenon that the meanings of other worldviews may not illuminate. In this sense, biases are indispensable to the interpretive process (Gadamer, 1997).

The focus in this case is not to eliminate or reduce biases and it certainly is not to cover them over or deny them. The focus is to know the biases of the worldview as fully as possible so we can understand how the meanings of a worldview can reveal certain aspects of a phenomenon while concealing others. By knowing and monitoring the activity of our biases we can know, at least to some degree, the opportunities and limitations of a naturalistic method or theory, just as we can know the opportunities and limitations of a theistic method or theory. We can examine the extent to which the meanings of different worldviews are helpful in advancing knowledge and can preserve and discard theories and methods accordingly.

This implies that theism is not as subjective (to use the terminology of the dualist again) as has been presupposed by its critics, many psychologists, and even some theists. It is not merely “personal belief, popular piety, and collective superstition,” (Helminiak, 2010, p. 50), at least not any more than naturalism is. Like naturalism, theism is a fusion of the values, assumptions, and meanings of the adherents of the worldview and the meanings of the phenomena, activities, and events they study. This integration of meanings might illuminate knowledge of a phenomenon that other worldviews may conceal or ignore (just as theism itself conceals or ignores certain understandings of phenomena). In this way, theism could have more of what the dualist would describe as objective value, meaning that it might have something important to say about our world and may genuinely contribute to knowledge advancement. If this is true, then theism could advance psychologists’ understanding of the psychological phenomenon of interest, generate new theories, and lead to the development of new methods (Slife, Reber, & Lefevor, 2012). Is there evidence to support this possibility? We believe there is preliminary evidence for this possibility, some of which has come from our own research.

We have recently published reviews of this theistic research (Slife, Reber, & Lefevor, 2012) as well as models of empirical theistic investigation (Reber, Slife, & Downs, 2012) to demonstrate how this research can be and is being done. We refer the reader to these models for the full details of these studies, but we note here that a theistic worldview was used to guide scientific inquiry into two phenomena of import to psychologists: god image and prejudice. Our results illuminated important aspects of these two phenomena that studies guided by a naturalistic worldview have thus far overlooked or concealed. It is also apparent that these findings are not “nonfalsifiable claims” (Helminiak, 2010, p. 66) grounded in “a sheer assertion of religious faith” (p. 65). These studies can be replicated, the methods and instruments critically evaluated, and the findings tested. We have already begun several more studies that do exactly that, including neuroscience paradigms. Thus, we see no in principle reason that scientific inquiry, guided by a theistic worldview, cannot advance psychological knowledge.

Although theistic premises guided our investigation into these two phenomena, we did operate within the narrower view of science that methodological naturalism prescribes. Thus, we followed the traditional scientific method research protocol that is typically used in naturalistic studies of god image and prejudice. We acknowledge that in some cases traditional scientific methods can be used in research guided by a theistic worldview. As we have discussed elsewhere, even a method that was not designed to fit a particular worldview can at times be usefully applied to research questions guided by that worldview; just as a hammer can sometimes be used in a pinch to pound screws (Reber, Slife, & Sanders, 2012; Slife & Reber, 2009b). This is where the claims of methodological naturalists make some sense to us (e.g., Bishop, 2009). These naturalists, however, should also acknowledge the limitations of naturally guided methods to investigate certain topics, including many theistic topics, as we have discussed elsewhere (Reber, 2000; Reber, 2006a; Reber, Slife, & Sanders, 2012; Slife & Reber, 2009b; Slife & Reber, 2012; Slife, Reber, & Lefevor, 2012).

Such limitations raise the question of how to handle research topics that lie beyond a given set of methods (e.g., logical positivism, methodological naturalism)? How can they be conceptualized, examined, and given an opportunity to compete in the marketplace of ideas? In response to these questions, we have
suggested that the discipline broaden its definition of science to mean the systematic investigation of ideas, with systematic investigation referring not only to the methodological procedures of each method but more importantly to the different philosophies that implicitly inform and guide the methods (Reber, Slife, & Sanders, 2012; Slife & Reber, 2009b; see also Johnson, 2007). In other words, this kind of systematic investigation can proceed in many different, potentially illuminating ways, all of which can be examined as to their appropriateness to the meanings that constitute the phenomenon and their contribution to psychologists’ understanding of the phenomenon. Those worldviews, epistemologies, and methods that do not advance knowledge of the phenomenon, and this would include theism, would not bear disciplinary fruit, and would eventually be eliminated.

This alternative, pluralistic conception of science illustrates a key difference between a hermeneutic framework for worldviews and the subjectivism of our conventionally-minded critics. A proper pluralism is not an “anything goes” relativism (Mootz, 2010, p. 273; Warnke, 1994). The worldviews that guide methodologies must establish a track record of knowledge advancement in the discipline if they are to remain in the marketplace of ideas. Their methods must illuminate appropriate meanings of a phenomenon of importance to psychology in order to remain relevant.

A pluralistic psychology also requires a comprehensive knowledge of the relationship among worldviews, with relationship understood as encompassing not only similarities but also differences (Reber, Slife, & Sanders, 2012). Worldviews would maintain and value their differences without the pretense of separability and superiority that marks the conventional view. In this sense, proponents of a theistic approach to psychology do not necessarily have an interest in taking over the discipline, as Helminiak’s (2010) “Trojan Horse” analogy implies. This fear is a leftover from the dualist perspective where “subjective” worldviews are considered more strident and dogmatic. As we have described, naturalists can be equally strident and dogmatic. Our position, instead, implies more of a disciplinary pluralism of worldviews without the pretense of separability and superiority that marks the conventional view. In this sense, would ignore relationships that are needed for a full understanding of its very identity, not to mention the very real contribution of a naturalistic approach to psychology.

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References


Notes

1 We recognize that there have been times (e.g., the Middle Ages) when the direction of influence worked primarily in the other direction, when theistic “truths” were taken to be the Truth and the concepts of other worldviews, including naturalism, had to accommodate theistic truths.

2 This problem of the non-empirical demonstrability of the relationship between the phenomenon of interest and its supposed manifestation was identified centuries ago, by David Hume (1777/2007), in his analysis of the relationship between cause and effect, which cannot be observed but only inferred from a certain set of conditions that suggest a possible causal relationship (see Slife & Williams, 1995, pp. 98-100 for a review of Hume’s argument and its problematic implications for psychological research).
Dialogue on Christian Psychology: Commentaries

Commentaries on Jeff Reber & Brent Slife’s “Theistic Psychology and the Relation of Worldview: A Reply to the Critics”

Each issue of Christian Psychology begins with a discussion article followed by open peer commentaries that examine the arguments of that paper. The goal is to promote edifying dialogues on issues of interest to the Christian psychological community. The commentaries below respond to Jeff Reber & Brent Slife’s “Theistic Psychology and the Relation of Worldview: A Reply to the Critics”

Definitions and Conversations
Joanna Collicutt
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This paper suffers at the outset from a lack of a clear definition of its central concern: theistic psychology. It seems likely that the authors are referring to a psychology that can accommodate (an) intentional divine agent(s) as a proximal cause of human behaviour, either instead of or in addition to ‘blind’ stochastic processes. If so, they don’t really spell out in what way or in what sense the divine agent(s) might act. Is the divine an external stimulus to which human beings respond? Or an intrapsychic force? Or a cognitive module – a kind of psychological analogue to the largely discredited neuroscientific notion of a ‘God spot’? Or is the divine conceived as a *deus ex machina* who manipulates intrapsychic activity perhaps via the action of subatomic particles that form part of human brain chemistry, perhaps through the subconscious, as suggested by several psychologists of religion, including William James and Carl Jung?

The paper neither engages with the question of definition nor the subsequent questions that a definition might invite. What it does do is firstly to position theistic accounts of the world as in opposition to natural accounts, and thus appears to rule out all the above hypotheses. Theistic psychology is presented as something that invokes the ‘transcendent’ and ‘supernatural’. Again, neither of these terms is defined, but it is made clear that their essential characteristic is being ‘not natural’.

The authors claim that the adoption of a dualist position, in which theistic psychology is set against or apart from natural science comes not from them, but from the modernist context in which psychology arose, developed, and continues to be studied, practised, and taught. In particular, they cite Helminiak’s (2010) critique of theistic psychology and psychotherapy as an example and expression of this modernist context. His critique characterises theistic psychology as subjective, departing from a positivist philosophical framework, and thus unscientific, indicating that his view of ‘mainstream’ scientific psychology is that it is objective and based on a positivist world view. This account of scientific psychology as exclusively objective and positivist is unrecognisable to me (a British academic psychologist of religion and clinical psychologist). It fails to take into account the phenomenological, social constructionist, and hermeneutic approaches within the discipline of academic psychology, and the burgeoning qualitative methodologies that are becoming increasing prominent in postgraduate research projects and published research papers.

The depiction of psychology as a positivist enterprise in which behaviourism dominates can only claim to be accurate in relation to the USA in the 1960s and 70s. It doesn’t do justice to the current field across the world. Indeed behaviourism never had the dominant position on mainland Europe even when it was at its heights in the USA. There hermeneutic approaches flourished and continue to do so.

More generally, the contemporary natural sciences are not obviously influenced by positivism (and the degree to which they ever were is highly contested.) They show a general tendency to talk of ‘consensus reality’ rather than ‘objective truths’ indicative of critical rather than naïve realism, and the provisional nature of scientific constructs is well recognised. The philosophical critique that formed the basis of the deconstruction of positivism was at its height in the third decade of the twentieth century. For instance Popper’s ‘Logic of scientific discovery’ was first published in 1959, a fact not evident in this paper, as the authors cite a 2002 edition of the work.

The authors refer to a second dualism: that between the world of the scientific academic psychologist and the world of faith or pastoral psychology. Anecdotal examples are presented to illustrate the idea that academic scientific psychology is not open to the influence of faith traditions. This point seems to me unfounded: the positive psychology movement has drawn heavily on...
faith traditions in its explorations of the place of virtue and meaning in living the good life, and in its detailed consideration of the psychology of wisdom, post traumatic growth, gratitude, and compassion. If anything, the problem lies in the other direction. There is in many circles a kind of ‘theological reductionism’, influenced by the echoes of Barthian neo-orthodoxy, which actively resists and refutes natural scientific accounts of areas that are thought to fall more properly under the domain of revealed truth. I come across this repeatedly as a teacher in a seminary, and in church communities from the reformed tradition.

Having presented a very strong dualistic account of the relationship between natural scientific and theistic approaches to human behaviour, the authors move on to offer the hermeneutic alternative of ‘worldview interdependence’ that they believe to be potentially more fruitful. Indeed they go further, stating their belief that it is a ‘more accurate interpretation of the historical relationship between them.’ They do not offer any evidence for this claim of ‘accuracy’, which is itself a notion that seems somewhat out of place in the context of a hermeneutic framework.

Their point is that natural and theistic perspectives on human mental life and behaviour might be seen as complementary. This seems a reasonable (rather than ‘accurate’) claim. However, it is hardly new. It has been articulated in various guises by many who work at the interface of theology and psychology – for instance Fraser Watts and by philosophers interested in emergent properties, most notably Nancy Murphy’s account of ‘non-reductive physicalism’.

Complementary dialogical approaches of this sort that acknowledge a degree of overlap in the phenomena addressed are not at odds with the APA’s 2007 statement on the relationship between psychology and faith. This statement acknowledges the reality that several worldviews may be brought to bear on a particular field of interest, but prohibits a reductionist stance by any acting as an arbiter among the others; it does not rule out dialogue. In this way it rules out the position of a creationist or a Richard Dawkins but does not rule out a conversation between, or on occasion an integration of a theological and scientific account of the world.

The nature of such a conversation is crucial. As these authors point out, each approach has a responsibility to attend to its barely conscious and often unstated epistemological assumptions and socio-political values and objectives. Where two approaches are in significant tension with each other the aspiration to integration or harmonisation will be inappropriate. Here the notion of ‘critical friend’ may be useful. After all we see this in science in the wave and particle models of light, and we find it in the Judaeo-Christian scriptures with the tensions between the four evangelists, the apostles Peter and Paul, the Law and the Spirit, and the divine agenda of mercy and justice. To paraphrase Psalm 85: Science and faith are met together; psychology and religion have kissed each other.

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References


The Varieties of Scientific Experience

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Jeffrey Reber and Brent Slife have written an extremely thoughtful, provocative, and important rejoinder to those who would wish to keep theistic commitments outside the gates of psychology. “For the thoroughgoing theist,” they write, “divine involvement is a present, ongoing, and difference-making activity. However, if divine activity truly makes a difference in the world, then excluding it, as the naturalist does, is problematic for a complete and comprehensive science” (p. 6). Notice what is being said in this introductory formulation of the problem: if divine activity truly makes a difference in the world, then insofar as psychology remains steadfastly committed to naturalism, it cannot help but remains incomplete – indeed, one might add, insufficiently scientific. There is a flip side to this formulation as well: the path to becoming sufficiently scientific must (from Reber and Slife’s perspective) include the divine. The idea is a radical one, to be sure. Is it a plausible one?

I should note from the start that, although I do not see myself as an advocate for theistic psychology, I am
sympathetic to Reber and Slife’s basic line of argument in this piece. In some of my own recent work, I too have sought to expand the boundaries of psychological science in a manner not unrelated to the current project (e.g., Freeman 2004, 2012, 2013). Along with Reber and Slife, I believe there is no “neutral” reason for posit ing naturalism as the default assumption of modern psychology. Also like Reber and Slife, I believe there is considerable slippage between the putatively “agnostic” position of methodological naturalism and the stronger stance of metaphysical naturalism. Put simply, the for mer is generally adopted because the latter is generally believed, whether knowingly or unknowingly. Finally, for now, I share Reber and Slife’s claim that theism and naturalism are not to be understood as “hierarchically arranged conceptions” (p. 6) corresponding to sub jectivity and objectivity respectively, but differentiable hermeneutic lenses for accommodating the profusion of phenomena we (cautiously) call “reality.” The notion that naturalism is somehow more objective, neutral, and assumption-free than theism is indeed questionable. In fact, what seems to have happened is that naturalism has become naturalized, its ostensibly objective status being largely a function of its epistemic “obviousness” – to those for whom it is obvious.

Is there any significant difference between the structure of assumptions operative in naturalism and the structure of assumptions operative in theism? Is there any reason to posit the former as somehow being more adequate to reality than theism? No, there is not. But – and it is an important but – if in fact “divine” activity is to be subsumed under the rubric of science rather than merely being treated as a competing and ul timately incommensurable worldview, then there ought to be good and compelling reasons for claiming it so.

If Reber and Slife’s main goal is to “decouple” science and naturalism and thus to include within the scope of science phenomena that (may) lie outside the boundar ies of the “natural,” at least as customarily conceived, I absolutely endorse it. The reason – or at least my reason – is that there appear to exist phenomena that defy the naturalist stranglehold, that is, phenomena that simply cannot or cannot readily be contained within a purely naturalistic framework. Taking this line of thinking one step farther, I would also argue that some of the phenomena being referred to here – certain forms of mystical experience, for instance – lend themselves more readily to a supra-naturalistic account than a naturalistic one. (Given the connotations of the term “supernatu ral,” I prefer the more descriptive “supra” designation.) In saying so, I realize, I am in fact positing something about the primacy of the proverbial “things themselves” – recognizing, of course, that these very things, far from being wholly untouched by any and all assumptions, remain hermeneutically bound to them. I cannot see any other way.

Does this make me a “realist” of sorts? I suppose it does. But not, I hope, a (too) naïve one. (Reber and Slife may well differ about this.) In any case, and to return to the larger issue at hand, Reber and Slife, rightly in my view, want to think beyond the (seemingly) benign “non-overlapping magisteria” perspective put forth by Gould (1997, 2002) and others. This is the “conventional view,” and, on their account, it is this very conventionality that needs to be cast into question. For one, it reeks of dualistic thinking of an untenable sort. For another, it ultimately amounts to a kind of relativism that Reber and Slife want to eschew. There is a further problem as well – namely, and again, that oftentimes “non-overlappingness” (so to speak) entails positing “worldview superiority” of one sort or another – which, in academic psychology, assumes the form of considering naturalism a better, more objective perspective than theism (and any other non-naturalistic “ism” that might be brought to bear on the psychologi cal world). Now, given the conventional rules of the scientific game, as they are currently conceptualized in academic psychology, naturalism is a more appropriate perspective. And so, if one were to argue (cogently) that the relationship between naturalism and psycho logical science is unassailable, there would be little more to say. But these rules, Reber and Slife assert, are themselves the product of an ideology – one, in fact, that is so thoroughgoing as to be rendered blind to its own subterranean assumptions and commitments. “For the conventionalist,” therefore, “the culture of naturalism is not taking over the culture of theism in some version of ideological imperialism at all. It is merely the objective truth, which happens to be discovered using the methods of the natural sciences that is expanding and requiring the accommodation of people of faith” (p. 10).

Thus far, it would appear that the main purpose of Reber and Slife’s article is to expose naturalism’s assumptions and commitments for what they patently are. This is the critical – one might say “negative” – dimension of their article. But what else do they want to do in the piece, and how far do they want to go? Is there a positive project at work?

There surely is, and it has to do with reframing the very terms of the controversy at hand. According to Slife and Reber, “the hermeneutic notion of worldview interdependence provides a more accurate interpretation of the historical relationship between naturalism and theism than the separability feature of the conventional view” (p. 11). Indeed,

Whether the relationship has been marked more by conflict or harmony at any given time, these two worldviews have always informed and shaped one another, through both their relational similarities and their relational differences. Even the demarcation issue in science . . . depends vitally on non-science to define it. In the same way, the meaning of naturalism and the meaning of theism have and will continue to inform (sic) and define
As Reber and Slife go on to note, “Our sense of ourselves and our psychology is already deeply influenced by naturalistic and theistic meanings which are in turn deeply influenced by each other, so much so that it is impossible to separate them into two distinct domains” (p. 12). Appearances notwithstanding, then, there is a good deal more conceptual “seepage” between naturalism and theism than is generally assumed, and, as suggested earlier, what flies under the banner of unadulterated naturalism may be permeated, even if unknowingly, by the very theism it imagines it has surpassed.

We are moving forward, to be sure. Reber and Slife are offering more than a back-at-you rejoinder to their separatist, naturalistically imperialistic critics; they are offering a way beyond the current impasse by presenting an alternative frame, one that would both avow the differences between naturalism and theism and recognize their profound interdependence. “Okay,” their critics (or at least some of them) might say. “We buy the historical account and are willing to concede that these two worldviews have a deeper, more longstanding and thoroughgoing connection than our own present-centric commitments might show. Overlapping, rather than non-overlapping, magisteria. Thank you for helping us see this.” (And now back to work.) Can this measure of historical and philosophical self-consciousness be all Reber and Slife are seeking? Doubtful. I therefore ask again: What else are they aiming for? The bottom line for now, in any case: “At the level of their first premises, naturalists and theists are no more or less objective. They each accept the first premise of their respective worldviews as true without the empirical validation that would supposedly provide evidence of greater objectivity” (p. 13). As for where this leaves naturalism, it, “like theism, is a particular way of looking at the world that is guided by systems of assumptions, values, and meanings that say at least as much about the adherents of the worldview as they do the objects of the world” (p. 13).

This seems true enough. But what about the objects of the world? Even if we reframe the subject/object relationship in hermeneutical terms, and I agree we should, there still remains a phenomenon that exists outside the perimeter of the (observing, interpreting, meaning-making) person. Surely these phenomena constrain the interpretations given. But how much? Strictly speaking, one can never say. But it is vitally important, I believe, to keep such constraints in mind – particularly when trying to discern which worldviews, of the ones available, are most called for. Now, it could be argued that this idea of being “called for” bespeaks exactly that form of subject/object thinking that Reber and Slife want to leave behind. But unless we preserve some such notion, the selection of worldview becomes either arbitrary or a matter of ideologically-driven prejudice. I say this, I should hasten to add, neither in the name of naturalism nor of theism but rather in the name of (dare I say) truth – understood here in the (broadly) Heideggerian sense of aletheia, “unconcealment” (e.g., 1971). I can take a purely naturalistic perspective to the issue of forgiveness (to take Reber and Slife’s example). But this perspective may well fail to adequately disclose the phenomenon at hand. If I am a diehard naturalist, I will continue to do whatever I can to shoehorn this recalcitrant phenomenon into my worldview. What else could I possibly do? But if I am hermeneutically open to the possibility that this worldview may not suffice, I may move on to a better one.

Is it really plausible for the committed naturalist to suspend his or her naturalistic commitments and truly entertain the possibility that some other worldview – perhaps even a theistic one – is a more adequate lens for understanding what’s going on in some given case? I believe it is. William James did this very thing in The Varieties of Religious Experience (1982), when, after moving through just about every conceivable naturalistic hypothesis, he entertains the possibility that the “higher energies” that appeared to be operative in certain forms of religious experience might actually be so operative. As James avows,

I can, of course, put myself into the sectarian scientist’s attitude, and imagine vividly that the whole world of sensations and of scientific laws and objects may be all. But whenever I do this, I hear that inward monitor of which W.K. Clifford once wrote, whispering the word ‘bosh!’ Humbug is humbug, even though it bear the scientific name, and the total expression of human experience, as I view it objectively, invincibly urges me beyond the narrow ‘scientific’ bounds. (p. 519).

Much is being said in this wonderful, classically Jamesian, passage. For one, James is reminding us that scientists can be every bit as “sectarian” in their attitude as those more explicitly sectarian in outlook. Some of what masquerades as “objectivity” may therefore be function of their own limited imaginations, which mistakes “the world of sensations and of scientific laws and objects” for the whole of reality (see especially Heidegger, 1977). But there is still more in this passage. For what James is also suggesting is that some of what “bears the scientific name” really isn’t scientific at all but merely a shrunken image of it. By moving beyond the “narrow ‘scientific’ bounds” – which is to say, by moving beyond the prescribed view of science, dogmatically upheld by its sectarian defenders, he can begin to practice a version of science truly worthy of the name.

Would Reber and Slife be with me in this reading? Put another way, would they concur with the idea that the sectarian naturalism James is referring to might actually be inadequate to the phenomena at hand and that theism might be a better bet? I don’t know. Possibly not: even if implicitly, James is drawing on the idea
of superiority here. I tend to do so as well. But it is emphatically not the kind of totalizing superiority Reber and Slife had considered. Rather, it is an interpretively- and contextually-bound superiority, founded in and grounded by the claims of experience (Freeman, 2013). Perhaps they would find this perspective acceptable.

According to Reber and Slife,

The problem with the superiority feature of the conventional view is not that naturalism has an influence on theism or even that it has a greater influence on theism at any given time. From a hermeneutic perspective, influence is inevitable among worldviews. The problem is the unidirectionality of the influence and the pretense of objectivity (superiority) that supports it. This pretense implies that the influence does not stem from a belief system, but rather from some unbiased description of the world that theists are compelled to acknowledge. (p. 14)

What I take this to mean is 1) that “superiority” can be bi-directional, 2) that it is not a superiority for all time but, as above, is contextually-specific, and 3) that the very positing of such superiority is dependent upon some reference to the particular phenomena being considered – acknowledging, once again, that these phenomena are always already suffused with the prejudices one inevitably brings to them. “In this sense,” indeed, “scientific study is a fusion of the things scientists study and the scientists themselves, both of which are inextricably related” (p. 15). Having recognized this, it is also the case that scientists themselves must be ready and willing to be displaced by the things they study. This means that no single worldview can achieve the upper hand a priori. It also means that any and all attempts to do so must be proclaimed unscientific through and through.

This perspective will likely be deemed objectionable in its own right by some, for not only does it seek to decouple science and naturalism, it has the audacity to maintain that “true science,” as it might be called, must be so radically open as to allow for the possibility that what I earlier referred to as the (ostensibly) “supranatural” might have its say. Why might this be important? As I have suggested elsewhere (e.g., Freeman, 2004, 2013, 2014), it is important because it opens up new ways of thinking about the human condition, ways that might lead us to consider features of human experience belied by naturalism — including some of those features frequently deemed central to spiritual and religious life. There is thus more at stake than ideology critique or the fashioning of a new, more hermeneutically sensitive way of framing the relationship between naturalism and theism. What is ultimately at stake is our very understanding of who we are and what kind(s) of science will help us achieve it.

In some ways, it would have been easier for Reber and Slife to bring theism into the psychological picture without trying to keep it under the umbrella of science. That would have allowed their critics essentially to say, “Fine. You do your thing; we’ll do ours. We’ll see who gets the grants.” But Reber and Slife are after bigger game in this piece, their ultimate aim being nothing less than to transform the rules of the scientific game — at least as it’s currently being played. They have even commenced their own “theistic research,” their argument being that there is “no in principle reason that scientific inquiry, guided by a theistic worldview, cannot advance psychological knowledge.” As they note, in carrying out some of this research, they have continued to work “within the narrower view of science that methodological naturalism prescribes” (p. 16). This makes good sense on some level. But as they have told us on several occasions, it is but a short and slippery step from methodological to metaphysical naturalism. This suggests that the methodological rules need to be transformed too, moved in a direction less fully dictated by the so-called demands of empirical science, as traditionally conceived. More to the point still, it suggests that the primacy of the methodological be thought anew. It is not only science and naturalism that need to be decoupled, therefore, but science and method — if by method we are referring to that ever-burgeoning arsenal of research techniques so prized and privileged in contemporary academic psychology. This need not mean working against method (e.g., Feyerabend, 1978), only understanding its limits and situating it in its proper place. There is indeed a time and a place for just about anything. The challenge is to discern what goes where when. Surefire directions are not forthcoming. All we can do is listen, carefully and caringly, to the claims of experience, following their lead wherever they may go.

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References

Theism, Truth, Subjectivity & Psychology
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I have struggled with the positions that Reber, Slife, and their colleagues have been taking on the role of theism in psychology (Slife & Reber, 2009; Slife, Reber, & Faulconer, 2012; Slife, Reber, & Lefevor, 2012). I am a theist and a Christian psychologist and much appreciate the suggestion that theism is relevant to the discipline of psychology in such an explicit manner. Yet the specific case they make for theistic psychology rests upon certain premises and perspectives towards which I am not as favorably disposed. It is also unclear to me exactly what they would want a theistic psychology to look like once fully developed. Before proceeding to a direct response to what I take to be current version of their argument, let me begin with a digression.

My doctoral research, done at a secular university, was in the psychology of religious coping with the Jewish psychologist, Kenneth Pargament. While I would have considered our methodology in those years to be that of methodological naturalism, my conceptualization of the research did not presuppose metaphysical naturalism. We had numerous discussions in the research team about what would be the case if God directly influenced the aspects of human functioning we were exploring. We included measures that assessed the degree to which the individuals we were studying thought this was the case.

The challenge for such research was not only how to design a methodology that was not excluding a priori the possibility of the truth of the religious beliefs, including the existence of God, but also determining just what it would mean for God to act in a way that would be discernable to human observers. Unless one has a conception of divine action that sees such action as lawfully predictable and yet discontinuous from the normal operation of the universe, one would not expect any measured impact from such acts to show up as a systematic effect. This is the issue that is troubling theologically about the divine intercession studies. While God does miracles, God is not a miracle vending machine that can be predicted to deliver such interventions in a mechanistic linear way in response to our petitions: prayers placed in the intercession slot-miracles dispensed to order. Thus, divine miracles that represent a departure from His ordinary mediated activity through natural processes would show up, to the extent that they have an observable impact, in the error variance of any predictive model. To expect otherwise seemed to me more akin to the worldview of magick than Biblical theism. God is not controllable by our intercessions in a linear, predictable manner the way animistic forces might be susceptible to ritualistic chants or practices on that worldview’s conception.

I remained convinced, based on my own Christian theism, that if God was working in some direct manner with people then such interventions would likely leave footprints in the sensible world. As an evangelical theist, I did not believe God, His salvific and providential activity, or the experience of the Holy Spirit in a person’s life was limited to an ethereal gnostic realm that was observable only to those who were of the initiated elite.

I was also aware that bias could blind us to truth and lead us to divergent perceptions of the world. That point seemed to be readily acknowledged by my secular psychology faculty who taught us about Kuhn and the sociology of science. These faculty appeared firmly disabused of any idea that psychological science, or the natural sciences for that matter, could be bias free. Yet clearly they felt that, at least for some kinds of questions about human functioning, the methods of psychology were superior to those from the humanities and religious studies.

We were assigned Darwin’s (1873) Origin of the Species in our second doctoral methodology seminar. After discussing Darwin’s view of evolution we were introduced to Donald Campbell’s (1974, 1974b) evolutionary epistemology. The benefit of that approach is that it did not require bias free perspectives or pristine objective truth guaranteeing methodologies. Rather, the evolving investigative activities of psychology were seen as an advance over those of religious anthropologies, at
least about the kind of questions psychology was asking, because they allowed our beliefs to be more “determined by the data” than did pre-scientific and religious methodologies.

I also attempted to point out the problem of truth in evolutionary epistemology along the line of thinking now formally advanced by Plantinga in his *evolutionary argument against naturalism* (1993, 2000; Plantinga & Tooley, 2008). If there are selective evolutionary pressures on our beliefs systems, I saw no reason for them to be disposed towards verisimilitude because there is little reason to suppose that veracity of beliefs and functional advantage are linked. A naturalistic evolutionary epistemology could give us some confidence that we might have increasing pragmatic advantage for our beliefs, but I could not see how they would give us any assurance of progressively more truthful beliefs.

The professor argued that religious anthropologies had very little progress because they trafficked in ideas and approaches that were too “underdetermined by the data” to be sensitive to selective evolutionary pressure. This account, while a bit more subtle than the conventional view outlined by the Slife and Reber (this issue), shares many of its features. It clearly viewed contemporary psychological science as a superior way to come to truth about what the field identifies as the psychological than religion.

The last thing I expected as a Christian taking a methodology seminar was such a direct engagement in worldview apologetics. While there is much in evolutionary psychology that I like, such as its deemphasis on a priori methods as a royal demarcation principle for science, I challenged the professors’ account along three lines. I suggested that there was actually much more consensus about at least some basic aspects of human functioning in theism than His account suggested. Yes, there were different schools but so are there in contemporary psychology. Next I questioned whether the famous divides in religion might be more due to biases obscuring the abductive force of the data than due to religious beliefs being more underdetermined by the data than those in modern psychology. People typically invest a great deal of ultimacy in their religious convictions and would this not make it hard for them to simply go where discrepant data takes them? Here I was thinking about the picture in Romans 1 of some being blinded to reality because of their spiritual circumstance.

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Since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. (Romans 1:19-21 NIV)
erate to relativism because the hermeneutic tradition has in some way dispensed with the problem of relativism.

5. Conclusion: Since naturalism is not superior or more objective, an explicitly theistic approach to psychology is as warranted as a naturalistic approach.

I will be reacting to this understanding of the argument advanced by Reber and Slife (this issue). Of course, if this is not a fair assessment of their basic argument at any germane point, I trust that they will point that out in due course. Let me start by stating that I largely agree with premise 1. While there have been famous exceptions to psychology’s default commitment to naturalism, I do believe it has been the primary worldview currency of the discipline.

The claim that naturalism should not be privileged in psychology

I find premise number two to be largely correct. Most psychologists probably believe, along with the self-described brights of the new atheists, that science is an inherently superior knowing approach to religion and, to the extent it is a science, psychology is as well. Yet it does not follow from this bias that psychological science presupposes bias free or even neutral objective knowledge while characterizing religion as a domain of mere subjective belief. This appears to be to claiming too much despite the supportive examples in Helminiak’s work cited by the authors.

The unavoidability of bias in psychological research has been a clear emphasis in psychology’s own self-understanding, particularly in its research methodology literature, for decades. From Hawthorne, Pygmalion, and Halo effects to standard history and systems texts that bemoan the male Euro-centrism of much of contemporary psychology’s first century when Even the Rats Were White, psychologists have admitted the prevailing influence of biases and perspectives from many sources (Gillepsie, 1991; Guthrie, 2003; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). This was in large measure why my methodology professor in my doctoral program was drawn to evolutionary epistemology. It presented a picture of science that was fully cognizant of bias and many other non-rational factors that impact the beliefs and scientific activities of psychologists but that he thought still left room for truth and progress.

Despite admitting the role played by these non-cognitive factors in scientific belief formation, it does not follow that objectivity as a regulative ideal, even if an unattainable one, should be abandoned or that just any approach to human belief has an equally appropriate claim on a scientific discipline. Reber and Slife’s case may be stronger here if they did not characterize psychology as having a self-understanding reflecting almost exclusively the naïve objectivism of scientism. Scientific disciplines can have plausible rationales for employing demarcation principles even while admitting the unavoidability of bias. The context of justification is more demanding than the context of discovery in the sciences, retaining as proper elements for discipline a more delimited range than those considered during discovery: namely, those that survive the discipline’s justification processes (Reichenbach, 1938).

Reber and Slife (this issue) appear to share an understanding of objectivity, subjectivity and relativism with Richard Bernstein’s (1983) hermeneutic tradition. Bernstein’s influential text, combining aspects of Anglo-American analytic, neo-pragmatism, and Continental philosophy, argued that the hermeneutic tradition allows us to transcend the false subject-object dichotomies of Cartesian modernism. Bernstein exhibits the common post-modern motif of characterizing Descartes as a font of all sorts of modernist philosophical sins. He offers us a Heidegger/Gadamer/Rorty inspired alternative to Cartesian foibles: meanings are inescapable and all attempts to understand the world are inherently interpretative. Subject/object dichotomies are illusory by products of an objectifying view of being that is false. Since there is no valid way to separate the realm of the subjective from the objective, with all facticity arising because of our historical situatedness within pre-existing horizons, then any claim to arbitrate between different interpretations of the world based on an appeal to facts becomes a kind of imperialistic imposition of one horizon upon another. Given such a frame to human understanding, naturalistic science has no legitimate basis to claim a hegemony in knowledge and therefore other interpretative paradigms cannot be excluded from dialogue by any knowing community carte blanche.

One might naturally be concerned that such a dismissal of objective knowledge as the regulative ideal for human understanding would leave us with nothing but competing narrations about the world, adrift in a post-modern relativistic sea. However, Bernstein’s (1983) thesis was that objectivity, subjectivism, and relativism are all artefacts of the Cartesian dichotomization of the objective and the subjective and once this dichotomy is transcended these distinctions become irrelevant. We are to stop worrying about relativism not such much because the hermeneutic tradition has proven it false, but because we have gone through a kind of philosophical therapy that helps us no longer be concerned about it. We need not worry about the objective truth of our claims about the world, psychological or otherwise, because we such truth is fictional by-product of a passé view. Instead, we are to pursue expanded horizons that create new interpretative possibilities that have practical values or our being in the world.

Reber and Slife devote considerable time to applying this Bernstein motif to the objectivist claim that naturalism is the appropriate worldview for psychology and that theism is improper because of its subjectivity. As the author’s claim, “A hermeneutic non-dualism
does not distinguish objects as they exist in themselves (objectivity) from representations of objects in the mind (subjectivity)” (p. 11). If the subjective-objective distinction is transcended then what is left of the naturalistic objectivist’s dismissals of theism as a suitable worldview for psychology?

Assuming Bernstein (1983) and this strand of hermeneutical perspectives are correct (whatever “correctness” might mean on such an account), we would have no non-arbitrary basis to deny theistic psychology or metaphysics in contemporary psychology. Unfortunately, theists are given a seat at such a table only by denying all those seated there any claim to a true voice as the price of the seating (Groothuis, 2000). This admission price is too high. While Reber and Slife correctly strive against the shackles that naturalism places on theism, Plantinga (2013) sees “creative anti-realism” as an equally dangerous challenge for Christian theism. He notes …creative anti-realism, with its accompanying entourage of relativism and anticommitment, is a dominating force in the humanities. Contemporary philosophy, for example, is overrun with varieties of relativism and anti-realism. One widely popular version of relativism is Richard Rorty’s notion that truth is what my peers will let me get away with saying (p. 14).

My concern is that the defence of theism in psychology by Reber and Slife appears to be taking this creative anti-realist trajectory as its major support. As Plantinga (2013) has noted “Perennial naturalism and creative anti-realism are related in an interesting manner: the first vastly underestimates the place of human beings in the universe, and the second vastly overestimates it” (n.p.). Christianity has most commonly asserted the absolute truth of its vision of the world and the Reber and Slife proposal appear at odds with this conventional Christian view (Groothuis, 2000).

Even if it were not for these theologically motivated issues with the particular approach taken to defend their case, there is another source of concern. Bernstein’s analysis has not itself achieved an uncontroversial status within philosophy except among a segment of the discipline (Matusitz & Kramer, 2011). It is influential in a significant strand of philosophical hermeneutics but has not been without serious criticism even in that domain (Margolis, 1985; Norris, 1997). Further among Gadamerian scholars, there are those who point out the hasty representation of the “non-realist” approach to hermeneutics as a de facto absolute of the hermeneutic landscape is not warranted. Wachterhauser (2003) states “unfortunately, there is a tendency both inside and outside hermeneutically oriented philosophies to ignore these differences and assume simply that all those who insist on the inescapable nature of interpretation have the same thing in mind” (p. 54). He argues for a realist understanding of Gadamer’s hermeneutic.

It is beyond the scope of this brief response to provide a further analysis of the merits of this conception of objectivity and subjectivity or the degree to which Bernstein’s literary and then pragmatic “turns” succeed in transcending these “dichotomies” without falling prey to relativism. The hermeneutic turn has not won the day in the philosophical community, the way the epistemic turn did leading into the Enlightenment. It is even far less taken as apodictic in the social sciences among whom Slife and Reber are attempting to win a place for theism. The authors are resting this rather large part of their case on a contested philosophical position that has not yet effectively jettisoned alternative epistemological or metaphysical paradigms in psychology. This strikes me as a risky and unnecessary endeavour.

My own investigations of the Gadamerian tradition finds helpful resources there but only if interpreted within a realist trajectory that still leaves open progress and a telos of absolute truth as regulative ideal for knowledge because such a perspective gives humble deference to the mind and nature of God (Hathaway, 2002; Kuennning, 1997; Wachterhauser, 1994). The ontological reality of God leaves no room for the ontological dismissal of the subject-object distinction of the Bernstein variety. God’s understanding of the world is not merely an “interpretation”: it is absolute facticity. To deny a subject-object distinction in such a context is to deny the distinction between the creature and creator. Once we grant that absolute knowledge exists albeit fully only the mind of God then the question becomes whether human knowledge can ever move closer to it. While the finite cannot contain the infinite, as the theologians have long claimed, God can providentially structure the human mind so that real knowledge is possible even within a hermeneutic model of understanding. The hermeneutic circle may be ubiquitous for humans but it does not have to be vicious (Nash, 1982; Wachterhauser, 2003).

Methodical naturalism & question begging
This brings me to my last point of tension with the case made by our authors. Their treatment of methodological naturalism needs further development. My own reading of 19th century psychology suggests that the turn to methodological naturalism happened in large part because the pioneers of the “new psychology” were looking for consensus generating mechanisms that would allow them to address at least some of the questions in philosophical and moral psychology more effectively than the longstanding approaches that had come from the humanities (Dewey, 1884; Kirkpatrick, 1893). This not only led to the attempt to emulate the objective methods of the natural sciences but also lead to demarcation of the field around those questions that could be answered through the resulting investigatory methods. The experimental tradition and radical behaviorism are perhaps the clearest forms of these disciplinary impulses.
Subsequent generations of psychologists became increasingly trained primarily in the newly delimited discipline and its attendant investigatory methods. This perhaps not surprisingly led some in psychology to mistake the discipline’s naturalistic method for its metaphysic (Robinson, 1995). We have also allowed our methodological approaches to shape and limit our discipline proactively. But as Leplin (1997) has argued, science has never been restricted by its methodology for long. When intriguing new theories arise that cannot be tested using existing methodologies scientists invent new methods to do so. Einstein’s theory of general relativity turned Newton on his head in 1915 but it took over 4 decades before any precise empirical tests of the theory could be offered. The methodology had to be invented in response to the theory. Still, the tests that were eventually developed had sufficient continuity with other methods and theoretical-mathematical models in physics to allow for the evidence to be compelling to those whom may have otherwise championed Newton’s classical vision. If the only test of the new paradigm is one that would not have evidential force to a person outside of the new paradigm, then the test would be incapable of vindicating the new theory except among those already biased towards it.

This I think is the impulse behind methodological naturalism. We agree, tacitly or explicitly, to ask questions in ways that our methods can answer. To a certain extent this requires us to delimit the questions we ask across our operative worldviews and biases in psychology (e.g., transpersonal, biogenic, cognitive, analytic, humanistic, etc.). I would suggest that the Reber and Slife’s efforts at demonstrating the value of theistic contributions to psychology using standard research methodologies from the field in fact illustrate this shared dialogical commitment to a common core consensus fostering space despite their Bernsteinian ontology providing little basis doing so.

We may well believe or even know as individuals or subgroups additional things about human functioning in the areas of our concern but we limit our efforts as a discipline to what we can intersubjectively demonstrate. Any approach that would abandon consensus generating efforts under the claim that we are so theory or paradigm laden in our observations that all data are perspectively delimited would be implicitly abandoning the pursuit of psychology as a general human discipline. A methodology which is only demonstrative if one assumes the paradigm it is intended to evidence at the outset is an exercise in questing begging.

Towards an alternative case for theism in psychology
Let me suggest an alternative strategy for theism in psychology that avoids the question begging alternative implied by the Heidegger via Bernstein inspired rejection of subjective-objective dualities.

1. Psychology inappropriately privileges meta-

2. Any worldview or perspective is a proper source for psychological theory building in the discipline of psychology provided the community of psychological scholars who may not share these perspectives can develop a way to evaluate truth supportive or disconfirming implications of those perspectives. Theism offers a number of such concepts that imply testable predictions that should be detectable within existing psychological methods.

3. Because worldviews tend to synthesize and interpret large domains of shared human experience that overlap with that experienced by adherents of other worldviews, they often have different ways of explaining and predicting similar experiential patterns. While worldview derived testable hypotheses may guide psychology in some new directions, such as exploring the clinical utility of forgiveness or the impact of “grace” in human relationships, the resulting lines of inquiry may not influence the overall worldview in psychology in any precipitous manner. The data from such studies can often be reinterpreted in ways that are congruent for multiple worldviews. Therefore, cultivating testable ideas to inform psychology from theism does not mean simpliciter adoption of theism as the undergirding worldview for psychology will result. Nor must we argue for such a worldview shift before advancing theism derived contributions in psychology.

4. Conclusion: Testable ideas derived from theism are appropriate contributions to the discipline of psychology.

5. Subdisciplinary Corollary: If theistic explanatory models and predictions can be pursued in a manner consistent with non-question begging consensus generating approaches in the discipline of psychology, a theistic subdiscipline in psychology is warranted.

6. Disciplinary Corollary: If over time theism provides a more productive set of testable predictions and explanatory frameworks for psychology than alternative paradigms, theistic psychology should appropriately become a favored paradigm for the discipline.

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References

Christian Psychology in Dialogue with Theistic Psychology
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I have been very excited about Reber and Slife’s work on theistic psychology (TP) ever since I first encountered it about five years ago. I am persuaded that, from a Christian psychology standpoint, TP offers a conceptual breakthrough of enormous significance to Christians in the fields of psychology and psychotherapy. How could I not be supportive? Christian psychology, after
all, is simply one kind of TP. As a result, my fundamental response to theistic psychology and to this essay is overwhelmingly positive. However, the dialogical format of Christian Psychology provides me an opportunity to think through issues that can help Christian psychology make the best use of TP and perhaps could help enhance the contribution that TP can make both to Christian psychology and mainstream psychology, in the future.

As postmodernists have argued, humans have a tendency to be totalizing in their understanding of reality, resulting in other approaches to understanding being rejected as false. Christianity, of course, was a prime example of such totalizing ever since it became the culturally dominant worldview in the West after Constantine, and there continue to be plenty of Christian examples of that tendency out and about. That is undoubtedly due to the Christian belief that Christianity is universally true, an assumption basic to its orthodox variations. However, the canonical faith of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures also knew itself to be counter-cultural, sectarian, and necessarily subversive to the established order, because of its doctrine of original sin and sin’s noetic (and carditive) effects, and because of its role as a medium of divine revelation. This means that while believing the Christian worldview to be the true one, Christianity has, over the centuries, also increasingly recognized that it must co-exist with other worldviews and that Christians must work respectfully with other worldview adherents in common cultural tasks. Foremost among the reasons for this growing non-totalizing flexibility is its, not always well-understood, assumptions that images of God must be believed in God freely and must not be—indeed, cannot be—coerced into true faith. As a result, canonical Christianity functions within a paradoxical space: embracing a faith with universal aims revealed by the one Triune, Creator God who should be shared with others dialogically, that is, respectfully and lovingly. Moreover, an ongoing self-critical reflexivity would seem to be intrinsic to a religion that is based on the martyrdom of its founder who was killed by that religion’s most devoted followers.

So canonical Christianity affirms that Christ is the Truth while living in repentance of its own sinful tendency to totalize. Maintaining such a complex stance is always easier when Christianity exists as a minority intellectual community. One of its challenges in the present is to point out the totalizing agenda of late modernism without sounding like it is just due to sour grapes, that is, to Christianity’s loss of cultural hegemony to late modernism.

Paramount to this task is helping late modernists recognize their own coercive discourse and practice requirements currently imposed upon all participants in the public square, which, by virtue of its majority status and totalizing tendency, it has “taken over.” To be fair, its stance has been difficult to recognize as a problem, because of late modernism’s minimalist metaphysics, allied as it is with naturalism and neo-positivism, as well as its own significant “legitimization” advantages. Modernism seems so legitimate, because it seems to be the hallmark of universality and fairness. What could be more fair than requiring that all intellectuals only make reference to natural objects using methods and in ways that can be agreed upon by all “objective, interested parties” (meaning, those without a very elaborate metaphysics beyond belief in the natural order and in the possibility of understanding it)? While humans may not all be able to agree about the nature of everything (metaphysics), surely they should be able to agree about the appearance of the natural order and the proper methods for determining that. As a result, late modernism also comes across as reasonable and humble.

Nonetheless, postmodernists and other minority intellectual communities like the Christian know that there is more to the story than this. For one thing, its success has been due, at least in part, to the fact that it is simply easier to achieve consensus regarding natural objects than supernatural. At the same time, as many philosophers (Goetz & Taliaffero, 2008; Nagel, 2012; Craig & Moreland, 2003) have begun pointing out, pure naturalism is no more necessarily true than any other worldview system—we all (unfortunately?) live in a world in which the most trivial matters are the easiest to prove and the most significant and momentous the most difficult. Hence, modernism too needs to learn to repent of its own totalizing agenda. The question is, can any system learn such reasonableness and true humility while still being in the majority?

Theistic psychology (TP), in my opinion, is the best current attempt to successfully mount an intellectual challenge to the hegemony of modern psychology. Christians in the field, therefore, ought to be thrilled about the (admittedly limited) hearing that it has begun to receive. So, as I indicated in my first paragraph, rather than simply express my enthusiasm for TP, I will use the rest of my response to raise some questions about TP in order to help refine it.

An early sign of problems to come is a fuzziness with regard to what a worldview is. No definition is offered at the beginning, and much that follows builds on the original vagueness. This lack of clarity, in turn, obscures some of the valid points being made in the authors’ analyses of “Worldview Dualism” and “Worldview Interdependence.” The goals of these analyses are, first, to criticize what they call the “conventional” (majority) approach in contemporary psychology to the relation between naturalism and theism in psychology, that sharply distinguishes them and favors naturalism; and, second, to argue, on the contrary, that these worldviews are actually closely interrelated and mutually influential. In support of the first goal, they reject the following conventional assumption: “Separability is the idea that theism and naturalism constitute
radically different worldviews that can be understood and exist apart from one another” (p. 7). This plank in their platform is mystifying to me, however, because this “conventional” idea seems self-evidently true and is affirmed by most Christians writing on the subject of contemporary worldviews (e.g., Sire, 2009)! If any worldviews are fundamentally incompatible and even incommensurable, surely theism and naturalism fit the bill. Their overall agenda here is valid—to criticize the conventional preferential treatment given the worldview of naturalism over theism—however, the road taken to get there entails an increased ambiguity in how worldviews have been commonly understood by Christians who work in the area.

For example, one noted author defines a worldview as a subset of one’s beliefs that lie at the core of one’s total set of beliefs (see Nash, 1992). I would further define a worldview, somewhat literally, as the subset of one’s beliefs that constitutes one’s basic vision of the way the world is, that plays a normative and legitimizing role in relation to the rest of one’s beliefs, and that, because of its importance, can also contribute substantially to one’s identity. Beliefs exist in individuals (and communities) in a hierarchy of value and influence. Some beliefs are more core to their identities and lives as human persons (e.g., humans are nothing more than evolved animals; God is the greatest Good), and other beliefs are more peripheral (A Ford is a good car). Worldview beliefs are among the most important beliefs humans have because of their normative, legitimizing role with respect to their other beliefs. Unfortunately, because of finitude and sin, humans are likely not able to be perfectly logically consistent in all their beliefs, though some talented and highly motivated people presumably are pretty consistent. A well-functioning worldview, one might argue, is one the beliefs of which are well-articulated and have been used rather rigorously to assess as thoroughly as possible the validity and coherence of one’s entire set of beliefs.

As a result, worldviews are not just distinguishable and separable; major, well-developed ones are by and large incommensurable and fundamentally incompatible. Consequently, the relation between markedly different ones—like naturalism and theism—are more antagonistic than interdependent; their interaction approximating more an evangelistic encounter, that seeks an either-or conversion, than a conversational encounter, where mutual influence occurs naturally. When seeking to demonstrate “worldview interdependence,” Reber & Slife seem actually to be referring to “perspectives” or “attitudes,” rather than “worldviews,” as commonly understood. For example, on p. 12 they mention “distinct domains” or “contexts” of “faith” or “practices of faith,” on the one hand, and “science” and “work done in the lab,” on the other, and suggest the adjectives “theistic” and “naturalistic” can be validly applied accordingly. But these are spheres of human activity and thought, not worldviews. As proof, the worldviews of Christian theism and naturalism can both embrace “science” and “work done in the lab.” Within such spheres, there can certainly be interdependence, and noting this interdependence would have served their purposes quite well, without making what seems to be a false claim that naturalistic and theistic worldviews are interdependent. (Similarly, see the discussion on research on prayer from a “naturalistic” interpretation and a “theistic” interpretation, on p. 13.)

While it is true, sociohistorically, that the worldviews of naturalism and theism have had a great deal of influence on one another over the last few hundred years (though it has largely been one-directional, as the authors point out), Is cannot prove Ought, so that such a historical fact does not mean such influence is necessarily a good thing for either worldview. On the contrary, because of their incommensurability, such influence may be seen as fundamentally destructive to the receiving worldview, particularly when pursued self-consciously. So, from the standpoint of committed worldview adherents, worldview interdependence would seem to be an epistemological vice. Yet the way Reber & Slife use the phrase “worldview interdependence” seems to imply much more than mere sociohistorical impact on each other, but rather that they are somehow necessarily reliant upon each other. Using such phraseology does not do justice to the normative and regulative role worldviews actually play at the core of one’s belief system and in the formation of communal and individual identity. At best, the influence of an alien worldview on a particular worldview tradition should be “provocative,” for example, pointing to aspects of reality and interrelationships previously underappreciated in the tradition, but interpreted from the standpoint of the original tradition. Thorough worldview interdependence is called syncretism in religious studies, and unchecked it will lead over time to the dissolution of the receiving worldview community.

I suspect that their intention in this section is to reassure the naturalist reader that they are not theistic “fanatics,” and that they can appreciate that naturalism has value. Moreover, I recognize that Reber & Slife conclude the essay with a discussion of “Worldview Difference,” where the earlier theme is somewhat qualified. Nevertheless, I think that arguing in favor of worldview interdependence in a naturalist-dominant culture is at least short-sighted and potentially self-destructive.

Another question I have has to do with the authors’ basic reliance on what they call “a hermeneutic non-dualism,” derived from Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricoeur, which “does not distinguish objects as they exist in themselves (objectivity) from representations of objects in the mind (subjectivity).” The “world,” according to this view, does not consist of “objects” but of “meanings.” As a result, “naturalism,” they say, is a “framework of meanings in the Heideggerian sense.” (p. 11)
One of the merits of a hermeneutic approach is precisely its undermining of the hard subject-object dualism that has so compromised modern thought, including modern psychology. And I am just as concerned as the authors with the way that that dualism has served to marginalize values, ethics, religion, and spirituality in the modern era. However, when fighting against dualisms one must always beware of the corollary danger of reacting so strongly to one side of the spectrum—in this case, hard subject-object dualism (and, we should probably add, objectivism) that one unwittingly takes a position on the opposite side—in this case, leading to an “idealistic” or “subjectivist” or “postmodern” epistemology—at least to some extent—that is excessively “unified” (the One is “Being-in-the-World”), and that therefore has difficulty doing justice to the universal, “common sense,” soft subject-object distinction, accepted even by young children, and grounded in the ontological difference between a thinking subject and the object about which he or she is thinking. According to the neo-Piagetian, Robert Kegan (1982), human development is a series of increasingly complex objectivizations, one of the more complex being the ability to think and talk about systems of thoughts, for example, worldviews. But in such discourse, worldviews are still (immaterial) objects of thought.

Theists are right to reject the one-sided objectivism of modern psychology, but there is no reason to also reject the intentional, subject-object structure of human consciousness—as well as, presumably, the divine consciousness—and “common sense” notions like “objectivity” and “subjectivity.” We can use such concepts without being seduced by them. I would like to see TP get the widest, fairest hearing possible. However, by linking TP with a more subjectivist, (albeit moderate) postmodern epistemology Reber & Slife risk alarming those situated on the “objectivist” side of the spectrum, and thus make conversation with them more difficult than necessary.

In contrast to a post-Heideggerian epistemological framework, theistic psychologists might consider basing their work more substantially on classic Christian theistic, realist epistemology, as found for example in the works of Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas, Pascal, Edwards, Kierkegaard, and more recently, Plantinga, Alston, and Wolterstorff, among others. In addition, a few Christian theologians—Cornelius Van Til (1972), Poythress (2001), and Frame (1987)—have developed models of complex reasoning, focusing on “limiting concepts,” or titled “symphonic theology” or “perspectivalism,” respectively. They base their models on the nature of the ontological Trinity, whose essence is paradoxical—one God in Three Persons—who is absolute subjectivity and absolute objectivity simultaneously, and therefore the ground of both. The latter Christian epistemological models resemble empirically-validated postformal (or dialectical or metasystemic) models of understanding (Basseches, 1984; Kegan, 1982; Richards & Commons, 1984), that are likewise characterized by vigorously embracing both sides of a conceptual dialectic or paradox (like objectivity-subjectivity).

Finally, I think TP proponents will need to consider carefully exactly what kind of role TP will be able to play in the field of psychology for the long-term. Personally, I am skeptical about the extent to which TP can itself have a substantial impact on the field, because it is essentially a conceptual abstraction. The noun theism and the adjective theistic are labels that are applied to a set of entities and not to any particular entity itself. There are not very many adherents of “theism in general;” rather, most theists are adherents of specific theisms: Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Mormonism, and so on. This, at least in part, explains why TP avoids making specific claims regarding the nature of God, or other theological matters with psychological import, like sin and redemption, or based its arguments on any particular theistic community’s view of things. This is inevitable, given that theism is a generic label of a class of particular theisms. Consequently, the scope of the TP project would seem to have some intrinsic limits that need to be appreciated, if its greatest potential to impact the field is to be realized. I would argue that its usefulness will likely be more rhetorical, theoretical, and organizational, than empirical, existential, and practical.

First, TP’s value presently is primarily critical and conceptual, raising questions at the worldview level, exposing the totalizing claims of modern psychology, challenging the hold that naturalism currently has on the field, and ultimately advocating that the field of psychology, in its quest to study all human beings, become open to taking into account the worldviews of all human beings in their research. If successful, this would lead, hopefully, to contemporary psychology’s replacement of the quest for universal knowledge about human beings that all humans can affirm with an acceptance that the human sciences are necessarily pluralist—at least, to some extent, in those areas of psychology where worldview makes a significant difference (e.g., motivation, psychopathology, psychotherapy, positive psychology). At the same time, I recognize that TP is able to do some important kinds of research at the generic conceptual level of “theism,” just like psychology of religion is able to, and I look forward to the result of such studies.

In the future, however, I think TP’s most substantive impact on the field will be measured best by the extent to which individual theistic worldview communities develop their own specific versions of psychology (research, theory-building, and practice)—a Christian psychology, an Islamic psychology, a Mormon psychology, and so on—based on theistic psychologists working explicitly within their own particular theistic framework. Then, as these particular TPs develop, TP would serve as the general category under which all particular TPs are organized. TP would then provide a forum...
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References

What’s in a Name? Theology, science and theistic psychology
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The relationship between theology and psychology has been an issue of conversation for many years. Most recently, proposals for a theistic psychology have provided a focus for this debate, provoking a strong response from authors like Daniel Helminiak (e.g., 2010). In this issue, Jeff Reber and Brent Slife offer a critique of Helminiak’s work by responding to the perceived naturalism and dualism in his worldview. In this article I will examine the worldview issue from a slightly different perspective to see if a rejection of theistic psychology is warranted.

A key aspect of describing worldview is to understand the logico-structural integration in the system, or “the ways in which the assumptions of a world-view are interrelated” and the effects of these relationships (Kearney, 1984, p. 52). In the two papers under discussion, a fundamental point of difference revolves around assumptions about the nature of science and theology as well as their relationship. In particular, Helminiak argues that there needs to be a relationship of separation between the two concepts lest we threaten the “underpinnings of Western civilization” (p. 50), a very strong claim. His position seems to be similar to the old “two books” philosophy of Francis Bacon (2001, p. 220).

This article will look at his claim in a couple of ways. First, we will attempt to understand what Helminiak means by the terms “theology” and “science” to see if this supports his claim of separation. Second, we will look at a specific statement he makes about the relationship between theological and scientific points of view to see if it provides persuasive support for his rejection of theistic psychology.

The meaning of “theology”
Although a clear understanding of what is meant by theology is essential to his discussion, Helminiak nowhere defines the term, apparently assuming that its meaning is obvious. Perhaps he is assuming a typical meaning for the term as found in Western thought. In
the classical period, theology was “the discussion of God or the gods,” including “reasonable thinking about the abstract and non-corporeal aspects of divine entities.” Christian writers typically expanded the definition to include “the study of the will, nature, and attributes of the God of revelation” as well as God’s “works in the world, including creation, redemption, sanctification, and the human duties and responses to his will” (von Stuckrad, 2009, pp. 392-393). From at least the 17th century on the Western definition of theology has been further broadened to include things like practical theology, “the academic study of Christian actions” (Maddox, 1991, p. 160), which could include the study of things related to pastoral ministry, the life of the Church, and the involvement of Christians in the world.

If this is Helminiak’s understanding of theology, then it is clear that some versions of theistic psychology would “cross the line” into theology as they include ideas about divine action. However, it is also crucial to note that according to this definition, “scientific” fields like psychology of religion are constantly involved in doing theology since they conduct scientific studies on areas within the “magisterium” of theology. Many psychological studies exist on issues in (1) pastoral ministry, like the relationship between clergy and mental health professionals; (2) church life, as in the effects of congregational support on members; and (3) involvement, such as the relationship between church membership and volunteer service. Thus, a definition of theology as it is broadly understood today offers no clear separation between theological inquiry and some modern accepted scientific practices.

Perhaps Helminiak would reject this traditional definition of theology as too broad, and argue that we should seek a more particularist definition. Others would agree. For instance, Louth (2007) points out that Orthodox writers would general reject a definition of theology that is simply “writing about God” and insist on a system of thought that is (1) faithful to the Ecumenical Councils of the Christian Church, (2) has a central place for the incarnation, sacrifice and resurrection of God in Jesus Christ, and (3) acknowledges that apophatic limits of any statement we might make about God. Such a system would be thoroughly Trinitarian in nature. However, according to these standards, theistic psychology is not theological because it contains an understanding of God that is too thin. In this framework, theism is simply a philosophical or metaphysical position such as Stoicism or reductive naturalism. Thus from this point of view a theistic psychology remains safely outside the “magisterium” of theology.

The problems here suggest that Helminiak’s critique fails in two important ways. First, he does not articulate an understanding of theology that could support his claims of separation. Second, the radical ways in which the boundary between theology and science change as we alter the definition of “theology” suggest that there is no transcendentally-given distinction between theology and science. This is not too surprising given the fact that both fields share areas of interest such as the nature of the human person and how we can best care for others in need. Some writers like Bernard Lonergan (a favorite of Helminiak) also make the point that science and theology rely on similar processes of insight, providing another potentially interesting link (Budenholzer, 1984).

The meaning of “science”
Surprisingly, the Helminiak article analyzed by Reber and Slife also contains no definition of science, and a perusal of other works by the author does not reveal a consistent view of what he means by the term. At least two visions of science appear in his writings: a broader conceptualization and a stricter positivist view. In his broader understanding, science is “any methodological pursuit of understanding--usually described in terms of empirical observation, hypothesis, and verification--that results in an explanatory account, open to further expansion and coherent with other realms of knowledge” (1996a, p. 2). Theistic psychologists would clearly argue that if properly executed their approach qualifies as science according to these standards. It allows for proposing explanatory hypotheses, testing them empirically and co-ordinating these results with findings not only in psychology, but also in theology and the humanities.

If this broad definition does not support his argument against theistic psychology, perhaps he really means to advance some other understanding of science. There are indications of this in other places where he advocates for a “positivist viewpoint” of science (1996b, pp. 33-34). Positivism would fit well with what he articulates as a goal for his proposed science of spirituality: “the exposition of the necessary and sufficient causal conditions to account for a phenomenon such that the accounting articulates a general ‘law’ relevant to every instance of the phenomenon ... a single explanation that accurately applies to diverse instances of spirituality” (Helminiak, 2006, p. 203). However, a positivist and reductive naturalist view of science such as this carries with it severe problems. First, positivism has been thoroughly discredited as a philosophy of science, and scholars have been unable to articulate a coherent, consistent view of reductive naturalism (Nelson, 2009, pp. 63-65; Rea, 2002). Second, traditional positivism would reject Helminiak’s own project of establishing a science of spirituality based on consciousness, as they would argue that information about the contents of consciousness is not positively verifiable (cf. e.g., Schlick, 1949). Once again, the plausible definitions do not support Helminiak’s position.

The science-theology relationship
Another way of attempting to evaluate Helminiak’s argument is to see what he thinks is a responsible
boundary between psychology and “God talk” or theology, and what his reasons are for his position. This is an issue of practical importance, as talk about religious issues with patients are often important in the treatment of mental illness (cf. e.g., Fallot, 2001). In addition, psychologists considering issues like the presence of evil in human life may be led to consider solutions beyond naturalism or humanism that involve God (Lonergan, 1992, pp. 746-751). A full analysis of the lengthy essay by Helminiak (2010) is beyond the scope of this paper, but it is clear that his critique also fails when it attempts to directly provide warrants for separation. For instance, at one point the author makes the argument that a “claim that theism enjoys a reliable, valid religious or spiritual source of knowledge on a par with that of science” must be rejected because it “threatens to subvert the whole enterprise of evidence-based research and scholarship” (p. 50). This contamination hypothesis is problematic because (1) it is a philosophical statement offered without support, and (2) one of his arguments for rejection of theistic psychology is that it contains supposedly unsupported philosophical statements. At the least, the author needs to provide a rationale for why philosophical statements may be admitted in certain circumstances but not in others.

Conclusions
It is clear that the negative project advanced by Helminiak in the article fails for a number of reasons. He does not articulate concepts of theology and science that can be critiqued and defended. Furthermore, many reasonable definitions of theology and science that he might adopt do not support his separation argument, or carry with them problems of their own.

The failure of Helminiak’s critique does not necessarily mean that we should adopt a theistic psychology. It is conceivable that robust arguments might be mounted against it, or that better ways of addressing the concerns motivating the development of theistic psychology might be found. However, it is also quite possible that theistic psychology could co-exist with positivist approaches, and that each could be allowed to demonstrate their merits as either progressive or degenerative research programs (Lakatos, 1978). Certainly this would be in keeping with a deep respect for multiple approaches to inquiry (cf. e.g., Lonergan, 1992) and the potential that these have to advance human insight and understanding.

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References

A Consideration of Ways to Defend Theistic Psychology, including that of Reber and Slife
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The avowed aim of Professors Reber’s and Slife’s paper under discussion here is to respond to the claims in
Professor Helminiak's paper “Theistic Psychology and Psychotherapy'; A Theological and Scientific Critique' (Helminiak, 2010). Reber and Slife (hereafter R&S) are, of course, supporters of theistic psychology, whereas Helminiak is a critic. Helminiak's paper itself is not especially targeted at the work of R&S, although they are mentioned in it, but there is evidently a movement in favour of theistic psychology and R&S are answering the criticisms on behalf of that movement. Their paper is long, and contains many claims and arguments, and any response to it must be highly selective. What I shall try to do is to formulate what seems to me to be the main content of their reply and to engage with some issues that are raised.

One feature of R&S's paper that makes discussion of it difficult, for me at least, is that it fails to explain or make clear what theistic psychology is. They simply assume that that is already known to the reader. They cite near the end papers they have written in which the approach is developed, but I have been unable to read them. So I shall rely on the description given by Helminiak of what it is they have in mind. He characterises their general approach in these words. ‘Building on the religious beliefs that (a) God exists, (b) humans are created by God, (c) humans are in immediate communication with God, and (d) God regularly and miraculously intervenes in worldly affairs, especially prevailed upon by believers …, those theorists explicitly call for a psychological treatment of spirituality centred on theism. Indeed, they presume that God is so essential to and so palpably active in human affairs that … any account of human nature and human psychology must include a divine variable and specify a process of communication with God’ (Helminiak, 2010, p. 51). This conveys in a clear way the type of hypothesis that theistic psychologists are proposing. However, this description, by Helminiak, fails to fill out what must be another central feature of theistic psychology. For we need to know what sort of evidence R&S think is available to support their type of theory. One might put this by saying that we need to be given a sense of the supporting 'method' as they see it, as well as the content of the hypotheses in their research programme. We need to know this because, without some explanation of it, there is no evident reason to take their research programme seriously.

I want to begin by asking what alternative strategies there are for those like R&S who wish to defend theistic psychology.

There is one, very simple, strategy that fits something they say towards the end of their paper. They report that they have published papers recently in which, as they put it, they 'operate within the narrower views of science that methodological naturalism prescribes.' (Reber and Slife, this issue, p. 32). Now, I take this to be saying that there is, according to them, a method of supporting specific theories in their research programme which conforms to the established methods of standard psychology. Clearly, there is nothing stopping anyone proposing and supporting a new psychological hypothesis. It would then be for the practitioners of the discipline to determine whether the support ‘holds water’. One possible reaction then by R&S to their critics might simply have been to write a persuasive piece of science. Of course, someone taking this line need have no quarrel at all with the methods of contemporary science.

However, although R&S have made such a response they evidently do not think it is all they need to do, or at least, it is not all they want to do. A second strategy, building on the first would be to attempt to anticipate criticisms from within the discipline of their research papers and to answer them. Again, this strategy involves no opposition to the methods of current science, but simply attempts to defend their own approach against criticisms which they can foresee. I think that it is clear that R&S are not simply doing this either.

A possible third strategy, given that their stimulus is Helminiak, would be to try to refute the points that he makes against their general approach. This would be very much an ad hominem defence. Now, it seems to me that although there are elements of this strategy in their paper we cannot really understand it as such a response, both because they fail to engage with many of the important points that he makes, and they also include general arguments which are not directly related to Helminiak's points. As an example of the former gap, between pages 58 and 65 of his very interesting discussion Helminiak argues that it is simply false to say that the Christian tradition is committed to thinking that God is regularly intervening in mundane human affairs and thought, and he points out that the nature of God's relation to the spatio-temporal world is a topic of massive speculation in philosophical theology. If correct, this creates serious doubts about the dominant picture in R&S's argument of two leading traditions in western thought – theism as they understand it and naturalism. There seems to be no such two-sided contrast. Of course Helminiak might be wrong, or it might not matter that he is right, but, as far as I can see, R&S simply fail to address this significant point.

In fact, it seems to me, R&S's response to critics such as Helminiak is to propose a highly general philosophical argument, which seeks in some way to validate theistic psychology by drawing on what they think of as the consequences of the hermeneutic tradition, according to which 'our being in the world should be conceptualized non-dualistically' (Reber and Slife, this issue, p. 18). In outline their argument is:

1. Critics of theistic psychology are committed to a conception of the relation between the two main world views of naturalism and theism.  
2. This conception of the relation between the world views is mistaken. Therefore; C the criticisms of theistic psychology are mistaken.
Now, if we accept claims 1 and 2 then the conclusion C seems well supported. The criticisms of theistic psychology would be mistaken if they presuppose a mistaken view about the two main world views.

I want to focus attention initially on the second premise in this overall argument. To evaluate it we need to be clear about two things. The first is what the conception is that it is claimed the critics are committed to. The second is what reason is being offered to suppose that conception is mistaken. Once we are clear about those two things we can try to work out whether any mistake has been demonstrated in the conception.

The conception that is being targeted seems to be this; there are two dominant world views. The first is Naturalism (hereafter N) which claims that ‘only natural events really matter, whether for theory, research or practice’. (Reber and Slife, this issue, p. 4). The second viewpoint is Theism (T) which says that ‘divine involvement is a present, ongoing, and difference-making activity.’ (Reber and Slife, this issue, p. 5) According to the conception N and T are separable conceptions, and they can be ranked on the basis of comparing them in respect of objectivity and subjectivity, the outcome being that N is objective and T subjective.

This seems to be how R&S describe the two viewpoints, but it is hard not to feel that talk of two viewpoints is a bit misleading. The reason is that there seems to be a third meta-viewpoint in the picture, which is the one comparing the other two viewpoints. Internal to the third viewpoint is the claim that N and T are separable and that N is more objective than T. Do R&S think that what I am calling the third meta-viewpoint is simply N filled out? On the face of it the meta-viewpoint is not identical to N, since N is not a thesis about viewpoints at all. It is a thesis about ‘what matters to theory’. So, I feel somewhat confused right at the beginning about the structure of the frameworks.

Let us leave this puzzle aside and try to say why R&S reject the view of N and T that their critics are committed to. The answer emerges later. They endorse what they call the hermeneutic view, deriving from Heidegger and Gadamer. What is this view? According to R&S the hermeneutic view ‘does not distinguish objects as they exist in themselves (objectively) from representations of objects in the mind (subjectivity).’ Rather, it conceives of them [ie objects] ‘as meanings’. It follows, according to R&S, that without the ‘dualism of subjects and objects’ the ‘conventional view of worldview separability collapses’. Further different viewpoints cannot be ‘arranged hierarchically’ (quotations from Reber and Slife, this issue, pp. 18-19).

Obviously the hermeneutic view that R&S endorse raises a vast number of questions. I want to raise just a few of them here.

1. As far as I can see in R&S’s paper no reasons are offered to accept the hermeneutic view. They report it as the view they accept, but why someone not already convinced of it should endorse it is not explained.

2. Although the hermeneutic view has serious backers it is, I find, very hard to make much sense of it. Central to it is (or seems to be) the claim that there is no distinction between objects as they are in themselves and how subjects represent them. But such a distinction or contrast seems both fundamental to how we think of the world and not something we have any option to reject. Thus, the moon seems to be an object in space which exists quite independently of human conceptions of it, and which has a character independent of our thought about it. I seem quite able to separate the object that is the moon from thought about it. Moreover, this contrast seems basic to how we think about truth. We think of a claim about the moon as true if that independent object, the moon, is the way it is claimed to be. We cannot uproot the distinction between object and thought. These contrasts seem to be ones the hermeneutic view rejects but which count as simply obvious to us.

3. One theme in the account is that the ‘conventional notion of worldview separability collapses’ (Reber and Slife, this issue, p. 19). What do R&S mean by separability of world views? Is separability of world view the idea that one can hold one without holding the other? If that is what it means then since some people accept N without T and some accept T without N it cannot be denied that they are separable, and the hermeneutic view surely cannot deny that they are separable in that sense. That condition for comparing them, it seems to me, cannot be queried. If they mean that there is some conceptual link between the views then something along those lines may be right. But what is the conceptual link? It seems that N employs the concept of the natural realm and that concept is also employed in the elucidation of the central claim in T that there is a god, namely that god is something which is supernatural. So there is conceptual sharing between the views. However, this form of connexion seems not to have any significant implications. It needs adding too that when R&S support the inseparability thesis they often mention historical links between religion and science. For example, they say that religious beliefs prompted scientists in the Middle Ages (Reber and Slife, this issue, p. 19). This is no doubt true, but it simply amounts to there having been influence between science and religion, and no more amounts to support for an inseparability thesis.
than the fact that tobacco has influenced disease shows we cannot separate tobacco from disease.

4. It seems to be part of R&S’s view that if in accordance with the hermeneutic view we abandon the distinction between ‘objectivity and subjectivity’ we thereby abandon any idea that one viewpoint can be ranked as superior to another. For them the important application of this idea is that the N-view cannot be ranked as superior to the T-view. But how far are they prepared to hold this consequence? In particular, do they hold that the hermeneutic view itself is not superior to the anti-hermeneutic view? This question seems difficult for them. If they think that the hermeneutic view is superior to its denial then the hermeneutic view cannot imply the no-superiority thesis. If they hold that it does imply the no-superiority view they must abandon their idea that the hermeneutic view is correct as compared to its denial, and then they lose the implications it generates for them.

5. One final thought is this. Suppose we accept the hermeneutic view and conclude that viewpoints (whatever they are exactly) cannot be ranked, that still leaves practitioners within a discipline with the task of settling the appropriate methodology for their activity. For example, someone whose trade is building bridges still needs to have a view on how to decide how it should be built. Questions of this sort are inescapable once one is engaged in such a task. Now, no general philosophical view can reveal that all methods are equally good. No bridge builder could suppose that asking the Delphic oracle what type of steel to use is a good method. But this means, I suggest, that no philosophical argument can really show that there are not good as opposed to bad, superior as opposed to inferior, methods for a science to adopt. This means, that no general philosophical argument can really show that there are not good as opposed to bad, superior as opposed to inferior, methods for a science to adopt. This means, that no general philosophical argument can really show that there are not good as opposed to bad, superior as opposed to inferior, methods for a science to adopt. This means, that no general philosophical argument can really show that there are not good as opposed to bad, superior as opposed to inferior, methods for a science to adopt. This means, that no general philosophical argument can really show that there are not good as opposed to bad, superior as opposed to inferior, methods for a science to adopt. This means, that no general philosophical argument can really show that there are not good as opposed to bad, superior as opposed to inferior, methods for a science to adopt. This means, that no general philosophical argument can really show that there are not good as opposed to bad, superior as opposed to inferior, methods for a science to adopt.

My proposal, then, is that this leaves R&S with two possible options to defend theistic psychology. The first is the first one I gave above, of supporting particular psychological theories which they count as theistic along the lines that psychologists will find acceptable. The second is to uproot the received methodologies of current psychology showing why they are bad given the concerns and understanding of method that the discipline of psychology has. In resorting to a highly speculative philosophical argument R&S seem to have chosen a route that does not bear on the methodological issues that should concern them.

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Reference

Note
1 I am very grateful to Arthur Schipper for discussion which has influenced my conception of these issues.

Religion versus Science—The Current Dilemma: A Reply to the “Reply to the Critics” of the “Theistic Psychologists”
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I reply again to the “theistic psychologists,” puzzled that they ignore my, their “exemplar critics,” substantive criticism. First, I note new but ultimately incoherent themes in their ongoing speculation. Second, I focus the key issue: their undefined insistence on routine divine intervention and an idiosyncratic notion of creation. Third, for reasons of theoretical incoherence and verbal ambiguity, I fault their central argument, a contrived opposition between “naturalism” and “theism” as a supposed parallel to “objectivity” and “subjectivity.” Fourth, I criticize their use of “hermeneutical theory” to cover over differences between incompatible worldviews, noting that the theory itself is wanting in criteria for adjudicating conflicting constructions of meaning. To clarify my position throughout and to make a positive contribution, I intimate an alternative approach, based on the thought of Bernard Lonergan, for the integration of theology and science. Finally, I offer broad observations, faulting the oxymoronic and pre-scientifically conceived project of “theistic psychology” in whatever version and calling, instead, for a genuine psychological effort toward a non-theistic (not atheistic) psychology of spirituality.

Keywords: faith, reason; spirituality, naturalistic; Lonerg-
I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute again (see Helminiak, 2001, 2010; Helminiak, Hoffan, & Dodson, 2012) to the discussion about psychology and theism and to offer a critique of the latest theory of the “theistic psychologists” (Reber & Slife, this issue; see also Slife, Reber, & Lefevor, 2012), a small, highly coordinated and industrious group, centered at Brigham Young University (BYU). Other groups also have concerns about relating theology and science (Collins, 1983; Eck, 1996; Hill & Kauffmann, 1996; Jones, 2006; Vande Kemp, 1996; Wood, 1995), but their approaches differ; so the name “theistic psychologists” applies to no one category. The claim of Richards and Bergin (2005) of BYU, that their “theistic personality theory” (p. 112) is “a multidimensional, ecumenical psychology, not a specific theology” (p. 116) is unsustainable. On the key issue, “not only is theistic-psychology’s [divine] interventionism not generic; it is also not mainstream” (Helminiak, 2010, p. 65). Nonetheless, since Reber, Slife, and their colleagues are the main focus of this paper, by their self-appropriated name, “theistic psychologists,” I will mean that group unless I specify otherwise. I respond in detail because they name me as their “exemplar critic” (Reber & Slife, this issue, p. 6.2) and describe me as “representative of what [they] call the conventional view of the relationship between psychology and theism” (p. 5.2)—although they badly misrepresent my position. Happily, I find new ideas in this evolving theory, and I, first, highlight those ideas as I understand them. Then I focus the essential feature of that theory, routine divine intervention, and its similarities and contrasts within Western theism; I deconstruct Reber and Slife’s (this issue) pivotal argument about a dualism of naturalism and theism, a supposed parallel to objectivity and subjectivity; and I clarify and delimit their appeal to hermeneutical theory. In conclusion, I contextualize this discussion within an array of denominational differences, focusing on Mormonism, and within the historical changes catalyzed by the scientific revolution.

New Ideas from the “Theistic Psychologists”

Six Points of Novelty

First, weaving together religious beliefs, the “bible” of the movement fabricated a “philosophical” position to ground “theistic psychology” and called it “scientific theism” (Richards & Bergin, 2005, pp. 97-102, 314-329). Now Reber and Slife (this issue) invoke an independent and well-established approach, “the hermeneutic view” (p. 15.1), to ground and integrate their agenda within standard psychology of religion. More on this attempt below.

Second, Reber and Slife (this issue) have softened the claim about conflict between science and religion. Relying on accurate historical report, they now ac-

knowledge it was medieval Christian culture that actually “led to the development of alternative methods, like the empirical method” (p. 11.2). Similarly, they now call the “war” (Bartz, 2009, p. 72; Richards & Bergin, 2005, pp. 32-39) between religion and science only a “strongly disputed traditional story” and a “supposed conflict,” “however untrue” (Reber & Slife, this issue, p. 9.1; see Helminiak, 2010, pp. 55-56; Helminiak, Hoffman, & Dodson, 2012, p. 187-188). The historical facts speak for themselves.

Third, the theistic psychologists now outright also allow that naturalism, i.e., standard scientific method and practice, can make valid contributions. They admit “the very real contribution of a naturalistic approach to psychology” (p. 17.1) so that in some ways “the claims of methodological naturalists make some sense” (p. 16.2). I emphasize the admission that making sense, reasonableness, now also counts—although one must ask against what criteria “making sense” is judged. As if following the criterion of Jesus, “You will know them by their fruits” (Matthew 7:20), the theistic psychologists credit “evidence” (pp. 13.2, 16.2), “disciplinary fruit,” and “a track record of knowledge advancement” (p. 17.1). Following standard scientific method and especially Bernard Lonergan’s (1957/1992, 1972, 1980/1990) cogntional theory, I take relevant evidence as an essential facet of all human knowledge. On target, then, and no longer exalting “revelation” as an incontrovertible source of knowledge (Reber, 2006b; Richards and Bergin 2005, p. 318; Slife and Richards, 2001; Slife and Whoolery, 2006), the theistic psychologists validate human intellect, as well. In seeming contradiction, however, still resisting the unavoidable conclusion, as documented in the comments about the law of gravity below, Reber and Slife (this issue, pp. 13.2-14.1) disallow that these three named evidentiary indicators increase scientific credibility (or “objectivity,” in their ambiguous terminology: see below). In any case, the validity of scientific claims and those of religion now appears to be more evenly assessed. Indeed, the theistic psychologists allow that, also “biased” like science, “theism itself conceals or ignores certain understandings of phenomena” (p. 16.1).

Fourth, in the same vein, there also occurs the explicit and most welcome statement that “naturalists... are not necessarily anti-God or anti-theist per se” (Slife, Reber, & Lefevor, 2012, p. 220). Science is no longer that nefarious “naturalistic-atheistic worldview” (Richard & Bergin, 2005, p 19). Nonetheless, only those who agree with the theistic psychologists are still said to adhere to “strong” or “thoroughgoing” theism; others are only “weak” theists (Slife, Reber, & Lefevor, 2012, p. 220). This disparaging distinction perdures since Slife and Melling (2006, p. 282) crafted it to defend their version of theism before their sympathetic Evangelical colleagues who did not, however, insist as forcefully on routine, divine interventions (e.g., Jones, 2006; Tan, 2006).
Fifth, it is now recognized that “in some cases traditional scientific methods can be used in research guided by a theistic worldview” (Reber & Slife, this issue, p. 16.2). Therewith, the theistic psychologists finally (see Helminiak, 2010, pp. 62-65) specify a valid, potential contribution of theism to naturalist research. Namely, sometimes ideas that derive from distant perspectives, for example, religious belief or speculation—but because these hold no monopoly in this regard, one must also add novels, science fiction, a good vacation, or stories and analogies, e.g., Daniel Dennett’s (1991) “intuition pumps” (pp. 282, 440)—can raise questions, suggest hypotheses, and provoke research for hardcore science. Helminiak (1998, pp. 105-107) already elaborated such a contribution of “the theist viewpoint” to the natural and human sciences.

Sixth and finally, the theistic psychologists no longer insist so forcefully on different kinds of truths, each with its proprietary criteria, i.e., religious versus scientific, as Reber (2006a, p. 273; see Helminiak, 2010, p. 66) did emphatically, for example. Their theory now envisages a horizon of meaning in which different “worldviews” could contribute to “a complete and comprehensive science” (p. 6.1)—that is, presumably, one correct understanding, one truth. In terms of “Four viewpoints on the Human,” Helminiak (1986a, 1987a) elaborated such a comprehensive science in extensive detail, including theology and “theotics” (which regards specifically Christian belief, untouched in the present discussion, about human deification in Christ through the Holy Spirit), all under the category of science (Helminiak, 1982, 1987b, 1996a, 1996b, 1998, 2011).

Preliminary Observations about the Novelties

Applying Lonergan’s (1957/1992) notion of “higher viewpoints” (pp. 37-43; 1980/1990, pp. 54-55; see Helminiak, 2011, pp. 9-13), such an enterprise of integrated comprehensive science is certainly possible. The strategy of the theistic psychologists, however, is unclear and seems unworkable. In confusing elaboration, still advocating the incoherent “methodological pluralism” of “scientific theism” (Richards & Bergin, 2005, pp. 101-102, 324-329; see Helminiak, 2010, pp. 66-68), Reber and Slife’s (this issue) supposed integrative vision comprises “a disciplinary pluralism of worldviews and philosophies, including epistemologies and ontologies” (p. 17.1). Granted, these technical terms are bandied about with ever shifting meaning in agnostic postmodern academic discussion. But, honestly, how could there ever be more than one valid ontology and, perforce, more than one reality? Besides, alongside “naturalism,” the theistic psychologists continue to emphasize enigmatic, never explicated, presumably particularistic “religious methods” (pp. 14.2-15.1; the curious quotation marks attempt, perhaps, to respond to the criticism of Helminiak, 2010, p. 53, that religion is not an academic discipline with methods for generating knowledge), “theistic methods,” “theistic ‘truths’” (Reber & Slife, this issue, p. 10.1, again with curious quotation marks that may belie point six above), a “theistic approach,” and “a theistic method or theory” (p. 16.1). In the theistic psychologists’ elaboration of their own position, the contrast between naturalism and theism, that touchstone of theistic psychology, stands undiminished. This perduing insistence on theistic epistemic uniqueness suggests that Reber and Slife (this issue) never even articulate an integration, let alone achieve one.

That “disciplinary pluralism of worldviews and philosophies” (p. 17.1) implies that no coherent intellectual integration could even be possible. Despite verbal insistence on integrated, comprehensive knowledge, the theistic psychologists’ continued insistence on “worldview difference” and “different frameworks for meanings”—“Theism and naturalism are very different worldviews” (p. 12.2)—precludes the supposed integration. Why so? Because “different frameworks of meaning” entail different understandings, which implicate different ontologies, which posit different realities. We seem still to be left with two competing understandings, not only of methodological approaches, but also of different universes. This outcome vitiated the revised theory of the theistic psychologists, but this outcome is unavoidable. If, according to hermeneutical theory, which is valid in this regard, human reality is constituted by meaning (see Lonergan, 1972, pp. 78, 356), different worldviews entail different meanings and, perforce, different realities. Of course, I am using the term meaning in the sense of pure, cognitive content, that which is understood, not in the more prevalent amorphous sense of personal import or significance, what something “means” or how it “matters” to you or me (see Lonergan, 1957/1992, pp. 316-317, 320-323). (More on hermeneutical theory below)

So, in the end, despite the verbal rejection of a dualism of “worldviews, theism and naturalism” (p. 6.1), which is the backbone of Reber and Slife’s “Reply to the Critics,” this very dualism continues to control the theory of the theistic psychologists. Emerging from the shelter of infallible revealed “truths” and tentatively accepting also the validity of naturalistic “truths,” the theistic psychologists entangle themselves in the postmodern malaise that despairs of any truth (Cahoon, 2010, p. 47). They attempt to newly resolve their dilemma by buying into a postmodern theory of reality, hermeneutical theory; and this theory’s very lack of criteria for the correctness of competing worldviews allows them ambivalently to affirm naturalistic, reasoned, and evidence-based conclusions while still holding firmly to blatantly incompatible revelation, “theistic methods,” and a rather peculiar understanding of theism (see below). That this arrangement is “meaningful” to them (it carries personal import) does not assure that the “meanings” involved (cognitive content) are compatible. Their theoretical dualism perdues.
To exemplify my argument, I challenge Reber and Slife’s (this issue) contention: “When worldviews are understood to be different frameworks for meaning and not different labels for objects, they cannot be differentiated in their objectivity” (p. 12.1). I reject this contention for the reasons just elaborated and also because of the consistent ambiguity—operative even in this quotation—in Reber and Slife’s use of objectivity. Note that if “objectivity” refers to “objects,” material bodies lying “out there” in the world, Reber and Slife betray their insistence on meaning (not matter) as determinative of human realities. If, then, “objectivity” refers to the individuality of realities reasonably affirmed as distinct from one another—“this is not that”—Reber and Slife suggest that there are no such distinctions, so human reality must be one undifferentiated mush. If, yet again, “objectivity” means “correctness,” they deny the possibility of determining it, and they take refuge in that denial. Thus, they cloak their religious beliefs—still in conflict with science—in invulnerability: They deem indeterminable whether revealed beliefs and scientific findings bespeak what is true or false, real or merely supposed, or material or spiritual.

Ignoring an Alternative Approach
In contrast, I believe that, following Lonergan (1972) and accepting long-standing Western argument about God, I have achieved a genuine scholarly and personal integration of psychology and theology via spirituality (Helminiak, 1998, 2011). Over decades I have worked through these issues, distinguishing the spiritual from the divine and grounding human spirituality on an inherent, self-transcending dimension of the mind, the “human spirit.” I carry the personal pain, know the social disdain, and suffer the ecclesiastical penalties associated with transcending cherished religious oversimplifications; but at least I am at peace with myself. Unlike the unfortunate “theistic” professor who uncomfortably wears two hats (Reber & Slife, this issue, pp. 8.2, 12.1), I now comfortably wear many hats and easily change from one to another, as appropriate, because they all cover my one head, my one mind, whose reasoned understanding holds together many perspectives and viewpoints (not “worldviews”) on one reality (see Lonergan, 1972, pp. 257-260, 302-320, on differentiations of consciousness). Despite the hat, in every task, my awareness of God’s presence and care regularly abides with me, as does my gratitude for divine graciousness. But for me, without particularistic interventions “God helps those who help themselves.” I understand God to providentially guide the universe toward a final good end by creating and sustaining an overall order, an intelligible system, within which lawful functioning reigns, novelties emerge, freedom has its limits, and deviations, even evil, can go only so far before the system springs back, as it were, to its equilibrated unfolding: “God controls each event because he controls all, and he controls all because he alone is the cause of the order of the universe on which every event depends” (Lonergan, 1957/1992, p. 668). With ongoing effort, this order can be understood; such is the task of science. This order may not be what we would prefer because it unfolds probabilistically through large numbers over long times and it entails painful losses and seemingly prodigal wastefulness, and sometimes we count ourselves and our loved ones among what was seemingly wasted. But believing in an ultimately wise and gracious God, we trust God’s universe, nonetheless. We do not expect extraordinary interventions to save us from its inherent processes. Rather, in faith, we suffer “the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune” as we make what contribution we can. So I reject the presumptuous judgment that my personally costly God-trusting beliefs are only a “soft theism”; and knowing the pain of the struggle of faith, I genuinely feel for the professor whose “hard theism” makes him uncomfortable wearing many hats in a twenty-first century world.

The theistic psychologists have consistently ignored my positive suggestions as well as my substantive criticisms. Giving no specific attention to Helminiak (2001) or Helminiak, Hoffman, and Dodson (2012), Reber and Slife’s (this issue) “reply” to my work cites 137 words, many two or three times, 75 from one paragraph (Helminiak, 2010, p. 50), out of a 10,500-word article. Most citations are adjectives or short phrases extracted only to be verbally disclaimed or to be used to fabricate a dualism of naturalism versus theism and to reject my insistence that human knowledge is necessarily evidence-based. Three of the citations are “adjusted” without notification to fit a desired point. Context hardly matters. Reber and Slife (this issue, p. 15.1) fail to report, for example, that my accusation of relativism follows this quotation from Richards and Bergin (2005): All science and research is “culture-bound, rooted in unproven assumptions” and “the criteria for judging results [in all areas, including religion and science] are personal” (p. 105; see Helminiak, 2010, p. 66); yet Reber and Slife’s (this issue) latest theoretical attempt in free-wheeling hermeneutic meaning-making rests on this very contention. Their ellipsis in that most-cited paragraph omits “divine revelation, inspiration, and intuition,” the supposed religious sources of knowledge, which they seem now reluctant to name up front and which I criticized (Helminiak, 2010, pp. 63-65). In no way, then, do I accept their article as a reply to my criticism. They have never engaged my arguments but only forced some of my words into pre-fabricated categories and dismissed them.

The Distinguishing Feature of the Theistic Psychologists
All those advances evince an increased nuance in the position of the theistic psychologists and make it more viable. Nonetheless, a relentless agenda and a style of
selective scholarship perdure and vitiate those advances, even as my criticisms above already indicated. The controlling idea of the psychology of religion of the theistic psychologists is an intervening or “involved” God. In the first place, this idea is vague, fuzzy, never clearly explicated. In the second place, even when clarified, this idea is incompatible with any version of science.

The Meaning of Divine Involvement
In the first place, then, the point of insistence on an involved God is unclear. “For the thoroughgoing theist, divine involvement is a present, ongoing, and difference-making activity”; it “makes a difference in the world,” “a meaningful difference” (Reber & Slife, this issue, p. 6.1); it is “functionally relevant” (p. 8.2); it regards matters that are “facilitated by God” and that do not occur “without the assistance of God” (p. 12.1). But what exactly does this insistence mean?

A range of traditional theories. In question is the nature of God’s involvement with the world, traditionally phrased, the Creator with creation. Long-standing philosophical and theological analyses elaborated this involvement and developed an array of positions. Historian of science Lawrence Principe (2006, lecture four) usefully summarized them as follows. Supernaturalism recognizes no natural causes but holds that God directly or immediately effects whatever is or occurs. Because in every occurrence only divine will matters, this opinion precludes any human understanding of cosmic functioning. Virtually no one holds this opinion. Yet it seems to be the vaguely described position of the theistic psychologists centered at BYU. On the opposite extreme, deistic naturalism holds that, like a clock maker, God set the universe in motion and left it to its own devices apart from any ongoing divine involvement. Deism arose in the wake of Newtonian science, which envisaged a fully mechanistic universe; but in light of late-nineteenth-century and twentieth-century scientific advances, deism has no appeal because it leaves no room for statistical probabilities, quantum physics, or chaos theory, for example. Nonetheless, Reber & Slife (this issue, p. 13.1) continue to attribute deism to natural and, especially, social scientists and to “soft” theists. These theorists seem to be aware of only two extremes: Yes, God is involved, or No, God is not. But other options exist. Occasionalism, like supernaturalism, also holds that God directly effects everything that happens (on every “occasion”) in the universe; but making a kind of covenant, God agreed to act with consistency. Thus, to the good, some version of “scientific” explanation could be based on the discovered consistencies. To the bad, however, one never knows when those consistencies might be broken, so no true science could result, and even the motivation to seek understanding gets thwarted. Moreover, responsibility falls directly on God for every eventuality. If a child gets burned or if lightning destroys a home, the deed was only God’s, for fire does not burn or lightning strike by nature, but only by divine decree. These uncomfortable implications foster the magical and superstitious thinking typical of popular religion, and they focus the risk of blasphemous attribution to God of, perhaps, purely natural events; so medieval thinkers generally rejected occasionalism. However, Evangelical Christians are likely to embrace it. For example, Richard Gorsuch (2002) holds that the “laws of science” or “natural laws” “show God’s habitual, consistent way of acting” and “identify how God continually and steadfastly operates time after time” (p. 1834). Note that in this formulation the direct agent is always God, not nature. Finally, providential naturalism holds that God created the universe and built natural processes into it, that God sustains the universe and its processes in existence, and that God (the primary cause) acts to allow the natural processes (secondary causes) to function are they are wont. Within a longstanding tradition of relating science and theology, reason and faith, nature and grace—“Vatican I teaches that there can be no true contradiction between faith and reason because the source of both is God and God cannot engage in self-denial nor can truth contradict truth” (Wood, 1995)—Roman Catholicism generally advocates providential naturalism. Thus, Pope John Paul II (1996) easily endorsed the latest theories of evolution. Nonetheless, following Pius XII in an incoherent occasionalist tack, he continued to insist that “the spiritual soul is created directly [or immediately: without mediating secondary causes] by God (animas enim a Deo immedi atre crearei catholica fides non retinere inbet)” (§ 5).

Among medieval thinkers—Jews, Christians, and Muslims—and for theoretical, not doctrinal, reasons; providential naturalism was already the most favored opinion. It remains today the most viable theory for reconciling science and theism, and it is the position I advocate. Trusting that human investigation can discover nature’s divinely created processes, this position both supports genuine science and affirms an involved Creator-God. However, the explanatory power of providential naturalism depends on a full understanding of creation whereas naïve believers tend to restrict creation to an easily imagined, once-and-for-all, past divine act, as deism did. In its fullness, the doctrine of creation includes three aspects: creation, conservation, and concurrence—God sets realities in being, God sustains them in their existence, and God acts with them so that they can function according to their natures and, thus, produce new realities, new existences (Thomas Aquinas, 1961 version, I q. 9 a. 2, q. 105 a. 5; see also Helminiak 1987b, ch. 5; 2010, pp. 59-62; Lonergan, 1971). Existence, to be or not to be, is the defining issue regarding God as Creator; and since created existence remains ever contingent—that is, it cannot account for itself—created realities ever continue to depend on God’s conservation and concurrence.

The confusing theory of the theistic psychologists. Now,
using metaphors, rather than the traditional technical terminology, Slife, Reber, and Lefevor (2012) acknowledge that divine relationship: “God may be relevant for some naturalists in the sense of creation (deism) or in the sense of some supernatural world (dualism), or even in the sense of an invisible hand that merely upholds and sustains the laws of nature” (p. 219, emphasis added). Curiously, Reber and Slife (this issue) acknowledge only the first two of these possibilities, describing the second as “a dualism that limits God’s involvement to a corner of the universe” and overlooking God’s upholding and sustaining the laws of nature (p. 6.1). I take the upholding and sustaining to mean conservation and concurrence. Evidently, then, to “merely” sustain the world and its workings does not constitute activity truly worthy of God because, Slife, Reber, and Lefevor (2012) continue, “God cannot, however, be actively involved (in a difference-making way)” (p. 219). That God makes things exist and function, rather than not exist at all, this effect they take as making no difference at all. Moreover, in confusing contrast, Slife, Reber, and Lefevor approvingly cite Alvin Plantinga to this effect: “God is already and always intimately acting in nature which depends from moment to moment…upon divine activity” (p. 220). At least as I easily read this quotation, Christian philosopher Plantinga simply repeats the traditional Western theology of conservation and concurrence according to which God must be unceasingly and ubiquitously active in our universe.

However, this understanding seems insufficient for the theistic psychologists. What more do they require to affirm that God makes a difference? One lonely clue comes from their objection to “naturalistic” science: It cannot let God be involved after the act of creation (ever conceived only deistically)—“at least not in any unlawful manner” (Slife, Reber, & Lefevor, 2012, p. 219, emphasis added). Evidently, for God to be involved in the world in a difference-making way, in even a universe that we know to be ever unfolding from the Big Bang until now, God must act in a manner that suspends or contravenes the God-given laws of nature. In traditional theological terminology, then, only miracles, strictly defined, count as divine activity for “thoroughgoing theism.” Indeed, only insistence on routine, “unlawful” interventions makes sense of the theistic psychologists’ central thesis that oversight of God’s activity leaves science with unexplained events (Richards & Bergin, 2005, pp. 19, 45; Slife & Richards, 2001, pp. 197-198). Direct spoken statements confirm this claim about miracles (Helminiak, 2010, p. 64), but I have seen no forthright or lucid admission in print. Moreover, the theistic psychologists prefer the term involvement, not intervention, since intervention suggests activity coming from without whereas God is immanent. Still, the standard theological notion of “miracle” is an extraordinary divine intervention (Cross, 1958; Merriam-Webster’s, 2005, miracle, q.v.), and the unlawfulfulness on which Slife, Reber, and Lefevor (2012) insist justifies this term. It suggests that the divine action regards something outside of, apart from, or beyond the standard laws of nature. The contrast is with natural processes, not with any supposed spatial location of God. I use the term intervention in this standard sense.

**THE central issue.** This difficult point must be clear and affirmed, regardless of how bizarre or imaginative it rings: The controlling notion of the theistic psychologists relevant to psychology is the affirmation of routine, extraordinary, supernatural, miraculous, divine interventions. Such is the added contribution to science that theism supposedly provides—as if God were a puppeteer pulling strings to manipulate the universe and as if that puppeteer needed to be taken into explicit account to explain the course of cosmogenesis, evolution, and human history. Granted, such is, indeed, the understanding that young children first have about God, and such remains much of the rhetoric of popular religion (Fowler, 1981); but these facts are no reason for theorists to take such picture-thinking literally. Nonetheless, except for the providential naturalists, to varying degrees theistic psychologists do take this notion literally, and those from BYU even deprecate any belief in God—“soft theism”—that does not include such belief in routine miracles, strictly defined.

**Misunderstandings about the nature of science.** Of course, one never knows how the theistic psychologists would define miracle, if at all. While Slife, Reber, and Lefevor (2012) insist that “strong” theism entails divine effects unconstrained by the lawfulness of natural processes, in direct opposition Reber and Slife (this issue) object to understanding miracles as “God[’s] suspending or violating the laws of nature” (p. 9.2). Such an understanding, they object, is an imposition of a naturalistic worldview on their theism. Yet they provide no other discussion on miracles (for some, see Helminiak, 1987b, pp. 130-135) or divine involvement. I suspect they mean to hold that there absolutely are no laws of nature—pure “supernaturalism” set in opposition to lawful naturalism. Then they would need no notion of miracle. Then, too, of course, their thoroughgoing supernaturalism would preclude any notion of science, as noted above. The differences in this perduring dualism are irreconcilable.

Besides, their rhetoric (or actual belief?) also objects to the naturalistic supposition that “the law of gravity…is not only true for the natural scientist. It is also true for theists, as it is true for adherents of other worldviews as well” (Reber & Slife, this issue, p. 9.2). The law of gravity is an affront to their theism! However, in contrast, the theistic psychologists maintain, the concept of gravity can be “useful” or “productive.” Still, for these theists this admitted fact does not constitute “evidence” that the science is any more “objective” (I think they mean “correct”) than any other opinion (p. 14.1). Here, now, evidence and track record seem no
longer to count, and we are asked to be equally receptive to any and all speculative suggestions.

Granted, science is an ongoing enterprise. We do not yet have a unified field theory, and gravity is the anomalous field. But today's science does not claim ever to have the definitive, final, and complete truth. Early modern science did entertain that claim, and with outdated notions Reber and Slife (this issue) would hold science to that passé thinking—"logical positivism" (p. 16.2), now unanimously and completely discredited (Goldman, 2006; Kasser, 2006), and a "doctrine of observability, that only the observable is knowable" (Reber & Slife, this issue, p. 13.2; also pp. 7.2, 13.2-14.1), on which these theorists harp. But along with gravity and magnetism, quarks and leptons simply cannot be seen. They are the conclusions of argument—meanings, not palpable "objects" (pp. 11.1-2, 12.2, 13.2-14.1, 15.1) or "bodies" (Lonergan, 1957/1992, pp. 275-27)—that must be affirmed to reasonably account for the available evidence. Moreover, no psychological phenomena are observable in themselves, and psychology exists. In every case of claimed knowledge, the rule of evidence does hold sway—but not necessarily a rule of sensate observation. Evidence comes in many kinds—Lonergan’s (1957/1992) "data of consciousness" in addition to the "data of the senses" (p. 299; also pp. 95, 260, 358; 1972, pp. 8-9, 201-202; see also James, 1902/1961, pp. 59-63) and the constraints of logical argument, for example. The theistic psychologists seem oblivious to these century-old developments.

Science is into its second life. Aware of the inherent limitations of inductive method, twentieth-century science never claims to prove anything. Rather, it accumulates evidence to confirm hypotheses as increasingly probable. But despite the stunning "track record of knowledge advancement" (Reber & Slife, this issue, p. 17.1) by modern science, the theistic psychologists reject "naturalistic" principles because they are "unproven" (p. 13.2, emphasis added). Yes, but they are hardly "untested" (p. 14.1)!

What we know as "gravity" and its regularities—even as we refine our understanding of it—is not likely to fall out of the human picture. If the theistic psychologists find this fact an imposition on their "worldview," we must be free to wonder what seeming defensiveness drives their agenda and what they actually believe about God, miracles, or anything else.

The Singularity of Miracles versus the Generality of Science

In the second place, given its essence—belief in routine, miraculous, divine interventions—"strong theism" is by definition incompatible with science of whatever kind. By the axiom, inherent in human intelligence, that similar are similarly understood (Lonergan, 1957/1992, pp. 61-62, 312-314), science seeks understanding that applies across individual instances. Thus, science discerns and formulates consistencies, regularities, laws. Explicitly and by definition, it does not pertain in the case of singular realities or events. But by definition, miracles are such unique occurrences. Therefore, they fall outside the realm of scientific explanation, a particular kind of intellectual endeavor, and the theistic psychologists’ insistence on God’s unlawful involvement in the universe absolutely and definitively precludes any reconciliation of this notion of theism with science.

Even if God routinely and regularly performs miracles, unique and extraordinary occurrences; as singular, they could not be regularized, not even by a supposed science open to the study of miracles. At best, they could be catalogued and their frequency, tallied. If, however, the miracles came so routinely and consistently as to constitute some pattern, then they could be regularized, discerned in some way as lawful. But in this case they would no longer be categorized as miracles, and these occurrences would also become quite amenable to human explanation or science. They would entail patterns of some peculiar kind of phenomenon—such as the birth of new stars, the evolution of new species, the synthesis of new plastics. In these cases the "miracles" would be making a discernible but consistent difference in our world and would, perforce, become the subject matter of standard science.

Is there another alternative? Should we, perhaps, realize that everything about us is "miraculous," the marvelous gift of God, which it surely is? Well, the three-faceted doctrine of creation already covers this case and leads believers to praise God for the wonder of our world. But if all is miracle, what meaning does the word retain? And what term should we then use to name those possibly extraordinary occurrences that do fall outside the consistencies of nature? In calling everything miraculous—in common enough, but overly enthusiastic, uncritical piety—would we not be writing off genuine miracles and, thus, actually impoverishing our understanding of God’s power? Or in calling nothing miraculous but, rather, calling every historical occurrence a direct and particularistic manipulation by God (supernaturalism), would we not—in the face of divine whim, or call it “providence”—be writing off the possibility of any understanding of things and, thus, actually deeming human intelligence unreliable and useless? Obviously and once again, at stake here is a badly conceived either-or case of faith versus reason. I repeat, this case allows no reconciliation.

What is the theistic psychologists’ understanding of miracle or God’s difference-making involvement? What is the intended difference? They do not refer to occasional miracles—scientifically, usually medically, inexplicable occurrences—such as those that Roman Catholicism still requires for the canonization of a saint. Instead, they repeatedly refer to some never specified but seemingly secular knowledge that religion and "strong theism" produce (e.g., Reber & Slife, this issue, pp. 8.1, 16.1-2, 17.1)—perhaps the pathologi-
The Supposed Dualism of Naturalism versus Theism

Reber and Slife (this issue) make a somewhat new attempt at integrating psychology and theology—or in their ever shifting terminology, “science and religion,” “naturalism and theism” (pp. 9.1, 10.1), “science and faith” (p. 9.1), or “the natural sciences” and “the humanities” (p. 7.1). They advance this integration by softening their former opinion that too easily pitted science against religion in a competitive dualism, and they construe their former opinion as the still prevail-

Leveling the Field by Clarification or by Obfuscation

I suggest that two approaches could be used to achieve this “leveling” (Reber & Slife, this issue, abstract). One would be to advance theology to a state of a precisely defined, highly critical, fully integrated, and explicitly methodical discipline that, in its own realm, would be the equal of contemporary science. This is the positive contribution that Lonergan (1972) offered in Method in Theology and I, in Religion and the Human Sciences (Helminiak, 1998). This tack respects the power of human intelligence and the importance of human reasonableness, or, in a word, the indispensability of human “authenticity” (Lonergan, 1972, pp. 20, 52, 79-80, 104, 110, 121-122, 252, 265). This tack allows that all areas of human experience can eventually be treated technically, scientifically, while recognizing that the human sciences are far more challenging than the natural sciences and that science is not practice, theology is not religion, ideas are not reality, and theory is not living—although good theory is mightily helpful for good living. It is with such thoughts in mind that I criticize the loose conceptualization, shifting terminology, and narrow perspectives of the theistic psychologists. A robust theory is available. Nonetheless, to be fair, I know no one today, apart from the Lonerganians, who believes that such rigorous scholarship, correct understanding, and science-like opinion are possible in the human sciences. Still, the uninformed status quo does not merit acquiescence.

The other approach moves in the opposite direction to level the field. Instead of making theology more critical and scientific, it deflates science to make it more like popular religious discourse. Then metaphors, imagery, and merely suggestive language reign; and the conclusions of science are said to be no more valid or true to reality than are the symbols of religion—even though, for example, the mass of the electron can be measured accurately to the twelfth decimal place, and though, for example, the mass of the electron can be measured accurately to the twelfth decimal place, and even though, for example, the mass of the electron can be measured accurately to the twelfth decimal place, and even though, for example, the mass of the electron can be measured accurately to the twelfth decimal place, and even though, for example, the mass of the electron can be measured accurately to the twelfth decimal place, and even though, for example, the mass of the electron can be measured accurately to the twelfth decimal place, and even though, for example, the mass of the electron can be measured accurately to the twelfth decimal place, and even though, for example, the mass of the electron can be measured accurately to the twelfth decimal place, and even though, for example, the mass of the electron can be measured accurately to the twelfth decimal place, and even though, for example, the mass of the electron can be measured accurately to the twelfth decimal place, and even though, for example, the mass of the electron can be measured accurately to the twelfth decimal place.
Yet all human formulation is said to be merely allusive or inferential; no precise formulation or firm statements of opinion or truth are acknowledged. This tack depreciates human intelligence and, in postmodern malaise, despairs of any firm criticism of proposed ideas or grasp of accurate knowledge. This is the tack on which Ian Barbour (1974) embarked and which Stanton Jones (1994) delineated. It is also the tack that Reber and Slife (this issue) take in their own way: to make “those conceptions once considered more objective actually less objective, and those considered more subjective, less subjective” (p. 15.2).

It is instructive to recall that Jones (2006) objects to the project of the theistic psychologists of BYU because they do not adequately represent his own theological opinions. Evidently, even those who hold that in all arenas language can only be symbolic or suggestive still insist on differences of opinion and argue for the correctness, superiority, or validity of their own opinion over others. They proffer evidence, they suggest interpretations, they assess the adequacy of the interpretations against the evidence—that is to say, they “reason”; they engage the three “levels” or functions of consciousness—experience, understanding, and judgment—that Lonergan (1957/1992, pp. 299-300; 1972, p. 9) determined structure human knowing. Being human beings, they can do no other when engaging serious discourse. They are bound by “the native spontaneities and inevitabilities of our consciousness” (p. 18); they are constrained by “transcendental method” (pp. 13-20), that way of knowing that is built into the human mind. It is the fundamental method that informs all others and, running through them all, affords coherence to all human knowing. Thus, said popularly and summarily, when even theistic psychologists quibble among themselves, reason must carry the day; mere insistence on personal opinion is vacuous. The obscurantist tactics of Jones and the BYU theistic psychologists and current postmodern agnosticism, relativism, and even nihilism (Cahoone, 2010) must eventually fall in self-contradiction because their advocates must at least implicitly use reason to explicitly question, impugn, delimit, or even outright reject reason—hence, the ever shifting inconsistencies in the position of the BYU theistic psychologists. Their proffering a purportedly correct opinion and their deliberately chosen obfuscation invalidate each other. Their position collapses in incoherence.

Pervasive Ambiguities: Neutrality
More pointed considerations lead to the same conclusion about the most recent offering of Reber and Slife (this issue). Their pivotal terms are subjectivity and objectivity. Supposedly, “Subjectivity represent[s] things as they are known in the mind and objectivity refer[s] to that which can be known about the thing in itself” (p. 6.2). Both definitions involve knowing, and the implication seems to be a contrast between what is mistakenly known (“known in the mind”) and what is accurately known (“known about the thing in itself”). So, supposedly, as Reber and Slife repeatedly note, subjectivity implies being “biased and value-laden” (pp. 10.2; also p. 7.1), “charged with value” (p. 7.1). Thus, subjective is taken to mean incorrect, skewed, untrue. In contrast, objectivity refers to what is “neutral” (p. 7.2), “unbiased” (p. 7.1), or, at least, less influenced by “biases” such as “personal and cultural values, assumptions, and interpretations” (p. 6.2). Then, simply put, in some sense objectivity implies correctness; and subjectivity, incorrectness.

However, the usage of these theistic psychologists is multiply and fatally ambiguous. First, in passing I note that Reber and Slife’s labored concern about intellectual neutrality (pp. 7.1-2, 10.1, 10.2, 11.1, 13.2, 14.2, 15.2) still entangles three meanings highlighted early on by Helminiak (2001, pp. 242-243), namely, neutral as consensual, neutral as completely non-judgmental, or neutral as lawful and applying equally to all. Their theistic agenda seems to prevent them from acknowledging the third of these meanings; they reject “laws of nature.”

Subjective as Value-laden
Second, the theistic psychologists understand subjectivity/objectivity in terms of differing values. But values pertain to ethics while correctness or cognitive trustworthiness pertains to epistemology. Of course, the two are interactive (Helminiak, 2008b, pp. 143-144), but they still need to be differentiated, not uncritically lumped together. To wit, by subjectivity versus objectivity, these theorists may mean simply value-laden versus value-free. If so, this point should be stated as such. Then a fallacy would be evident immediately: No value-free human enterprise exists. Science, religion, politics, education, human relationships, all are value-laden; and science and psychology have been addressing this fact in their respective fields for decades (Beutler, 1981; Beutler & Bergan, 1991; Ellis, 1980; Kelly, 2005; Lacey, 1999; Machamer & Wolters, 2004; Reichenbach, 1938; Streeter, 1958; Tjeltveit, 1986, 1996). Thus, this meaning of subjective-objective fall out, for in principle no true contrast exists, only differing values, which, when sorted out, could be adjudicated. The theistic psychologists spotlight this fact of “value-ladenness,” but this fact still says nothing directly about correct or incorrect knowing, which is at issue in science versus religion: Some values might be worth supporting.

Subjective as Incorrect
Third, subjectivity versus objectivity could mean biased versus unbiased, this time retaining a clear epistemological focus. Then the pair would mean incorrect versus correct. This is one meaning of Reber and Slife’s (this issue) proposed dualism: Religion or theism is said to be incorrect whereas science is said to be correct. With this clarification, other clarifications emerge with the ques-
tion. Correct about what? Are we to assume that science and religion address the same issues? Not at all. Science is a specifically intellectual enterprise, delimited as the quest for reasonable explanation by appeal to relevant evidence, whereas religion—in contrast to theology, the intellectual agency of religion—is quite a mixed bag.

**Distinct areas of religious concern.** Within religion I have distinguished the inconsequentials, the indispensables, and the indeterminables (Helminiak, 2007/2013, pp. 319-324). In passing I note that these distinctions pertain mightily to Reber and Slife's (this issue, pp. 7.2-8.2) shifting criticism of the 2007 resolution of the American Psychological Association on religion and prejudice.

The inconsequentials comprise customs, traditions, and culture-bound practices, requirements, and taboos. There is no inherent correctness or error about them. Is Friday, Saturday, Sunday, or no day the correct day of worship? Is pork to be eaten or not, wine and coffee to be drunk or not? Are women to cover their heads or not, men, to wear beards or not? The inconsequentials could be changed or dropped without serious consequences. Understandably, however, religious folk tend to hold traditions most dear, and their differentiation from genuine ethical matters is often difficult and contentious (e.g., Helminiak, 2008b). Nonetheless, they are extraneous to the present discussion. Politics, statecraft, or community building probably best name the agencies to which they pertain.

The indispensables regard requirements for wholesome and healthy living in the world of time and space. Most practically, they are ethical prescriptions apart from which life cannot prosper: Do not kill; do not cheat or steal; respect legitimate authority; do unto others...; and so on. Good ethics depends on solid knowledge, of course. Although the indispensables are most frequently associated with religion and attributed to God (and rightly so, in a derivative sense, not a direct one: Helminiak, 1998, pp. 117-118; 2007/2013, pp. 72-81, 246-258), these requirements are crucial matters of basic human concern. They are not religious per se; they are not theological; they are not other-worldly. They depend solely on discernible consequences in this world; and as for the hereafter, the presumption is that the afterlife depends on the quality of one's living in this world (Matthew 25: 31-46; Luke 10:29-37). The proper arena of the indispensables is the public marketplace. Religious opinions enjoy no privileged status. As opinions, they are equal to the opinions of any others, to be adjudicated in the public arena on the basis of benefit and harm, as best as can be honestly and collaboratively determined in good will. Changing scientific understanding, e.g., regarding earth science or human sexuality, will require rethinking and updating the indispensables. The need is to get them right for the sake of peaceful consensus in a global community (Helminiak, 2008b, ch. 8). As ethical, not immediately epistemo-

logical, and as human, not theological, the indispensables are also extraneous to the present discussion. And herewith I have revoked from religious oversight what I suspect are the real concerns, the only ones with practical implications, of the theistic psychologists.

Finally, the indeterminables are “other-worldly” matters, that is, generally, the doctrines of the various religions, usually attributed to claimed revelation. Sometime these are called “metaphysical” or “supernatural,” but I avoid these popularly used terms, which have specifiable and relevant technical meanings. The indeterminables are so to the extent that they have no discernible this-worldly effects and make no discernible difference. Hence, they allow for no adjudication; they can be neither proved nor disproved. A prime example would be the existence of God: Apart from miracles (see above), whether one affirms the existence of God or not, the world is here, the universe unfolds, and life goes on. As Jesus said, God lets the rain fall and the sun shine on the just and unjust alike (Matthew 5:45). In this regard (epistemological, not ethical), reverence for God is irrelevant: It is the indispensables that specify how to live together in this world. Other examples of indeterminables would be the various religious beliefs: God is one (Judaism, Christianity, Islam), the one God is Three Persons (Christianity), the Three Persons and a host of others are separate gods (Hinduism, Mormonism); life begins with birth (Judaism, Christianity, Islam), we preexist our earthly lives (Hinduism, Buddhism, Mormonism); after death we face eternal reward or punishment before God in another realm (Christianity, Islam), we will return to relive this life until we get it right (Hinduism, Buddhism), we may become gods ourselves and inherit our own planets to govern (Mormonism); and so on. These matters are ultimately indeterminable—not only because we lack discernible evidence regarding them but also because the claimed revelations obviously differ. They cannot all be correct, if any is. This now commonly known discrepancy among competing claims to infallible revelation constitutes the postmodern challenge to any claim to revelation. Any possible adjudication would depend on some meta-agency. The obvious candidate is human reasoning, and its application constitutes theology. It is surely able to show some beliefs to be more reasonable than others—just as in the case of scientific hypotheses, by the way. These indeterminables, only they are in question in the present discussion, namely, only other-worldly cognitive claims based on religious authority. The inconsequentials and the indispensables have already been accounted for. To the point here, the indeterminables have no place in psychology. Its concern is this-worldly wellbeing, specified by the indispensables.

**The irrelevance and relevance of theology.** Now the point of the theistic psychologists comes clear, and now the debate also finds easy resolution. Their point and objection will be that I have written off belief in God
as irrelevant to psychology. Yes, exactly so. By differentiating which areas of investigation pertain to which disciplines, I have argued that theology (not the mixed bag of religion) and psychology deal with different dimensions of one and the same reality, so they are not directly in conversation with each other.

However, I have not said religion is irrelevant. I do not deny the possibility of miracles, the one relevant issue. Still, I believe they occur rarely, if at all.

Moreover, as is clear from the present exchange—and unfortunate and disruptive, as well—differences in other-worldly beliefs often have implications for this-worldly matters. But as strictly indeterminable, other-worldly beliefs have no right whatsoever to impose on this-worldly living. Resolution of this-worldly matters depends on marketplace determination of the indispensables wherein religion, especially in a pluralistic society, can have no privileged voice. Our world would be much better off if self-assured religious believers learned this lesson and argued their case on the strength of the evidence, not on the strength of their beliefs.

Additionally, I do insist on an explicit realm of competence for theology. For a complete account of things, for a comprehensive science, theology is necessary (Helminiak, 1987b, pp. 96, 101; 1998, pp. 103-104; 2011). The reasonable question about existence is real—Why is there something, rather than nothing? What accounts for the existence of the things that the natural and human sciences struggle to understand? A reasonable question deserves a reasonable answer. Following classical Western theism, I have articulated an answer above: God the Creator. This answer coheres with those of the other sciences by addressing a dimension of reality that they do not and, thus, by opening a broader horizon of meaning within which all human understanding can stand: Human existence has divine implications. If the competence of theology is specified as a specialized cognitive contribution to comprehensive understanding, theology fits hand in glove with the other sciences. It explains how it is that there is anything here at all, and the other sciences explain the structures, mechanisms, processes, and triggers of the things that we find here. As the early Western scientists Kepler and Newton explicitly held, they were finally coming to understand the world that God had created. They found no conflict to their theist faith in the discoveries of their science, and they found no reason to factor God into their equations to make their science accurate. They understood theology and science to make different but complementary contributions to a comprehensive understanding of human experience.

If such an understanding is viable, the discussion in this paper is not really about the relationship of psychology and theism, reason and faith, or science and religion. It is about different sets of religious beliefs, different claims to infallible revelation, and different theologies, and they are hardly all compatible and hardly equally acceptable. Attention to this third controlling ambiguity in Reber and Slife (this issue) shows that the correctness or incorrectness at stake here regards religious beliefs, not psychology—but the always presumed and ever protected correctness of religious beliefs is the very privilege the theistic psychologists of BYU want to claim a priori. Or, perhaps, they are not concerned about correctness at all, but only personal meaningfulness: If my belief is meaningful to me, if it makes me feel secure, then everybody else must respect it. Here we have the epitome of postmodern agnosticism, and here we have the blatant confounding of meaning as personal importance and meaning as cognitive content.

Subjective as Pertaining to a Human Subject
Yet a fourth ambiguity inheres in Reber and Slife’s (this issue) usage. For them, if objectivity somehow implies correctness and subjectivity implies incorrectness, it remains that both regard human knowing, what is “known in the mind” or “known about the thing in itself” (p. 6.2, emphasis added). But knowing occurs only in a human mind; knowing is the act of a human subject, the one who does the knowing. Therefore, unavoidably, all knowing is subjective—because and in the sense that it is the achievement of a human subject. Thus, the proposed opposition between subjective and objective confounds the knower (a subject) with the quality of this knower’s generated knowledge (correct or incorrect). This ambiguous usage, tainting all subjectivity, implies that within the realm of subjectivity, that is, human consciousness, no accurate knowing can ever occur, so pure relativism would reign unassailably. This difference between subjective as human and subjective as wrong is crucial. Reber and Slife dismiss the difference between subjectivity and objectivity, but they must rest their positive hermeneutical offering on an appeal to subjectivity, for in hermeneutical theory subjectivity specifically regards the knowing subject and human conscious experience. Contrariwise, in their ambiguous usage, without warrant this same “subjectivity” implies error and bias—as if no one could ever be right.

Therefore, on four counts, Reber and Slife’s contrived dualism of subjectivity versus objectivity collapses under a jumble of its own ambivalence and incoherence. Besides, a still further and perverse question remains: Argued presumably as valid or, at least, as worthy of consideration, how does their own position stand up as subjective or objective? Or is the matter not worth considering? In any case, when the issues are sorted out, no problem remains; science and theology go hand in hand.

Subjectivity in Lonergan and in Hermeneutical Theory
That notion that subjective means biased provides an incisive segue into discussion of hermeneutical theory. Reber and Slife (this issue) variably discuss bias in terms
of subjectivity-versus-objectivity (abstract, pp. 7.1, 10.1, 10.2, 14.1, 15.2-16.1), “values, assumptions, and interpretations” (p. 6.2, 14.2, 15.2), “metaphysical claims” and “scientific methods” (p. 7.2), “faith” (p. 12.2), “beliefs” (p. 11.2) and “a belief system” (p. 14.1), “error” or “bad[ness]” (pp. 9.1, 15.2), “value-laden[ness]” (p. 10.2), scientific “laws” as “useful and productive” (p. 14.1), and “prejudice” (pp. 15.2-16.1). The predominant implication is that bias is subjective and negative although the matter remains ambiguous: Bias is bad in the article’s criticism of naturalism, but bias and prejudice turn out to be something welcome in the article’s treatment of hermeneutical theory. So their use of the term bias and the even more explicitly negative term prejudice is confounding, and the specter of relativism lurks behind their whole exposition.

Oversight of Perspectivism
Lonergan (1972, pp. 214-220) points out the important difference between perspectivism and relativism. Perspectives pertain to the unavoidable limitations and individual differences that condition all human knowing. Since no two of us stand at exactly the same place and time, our standpoints necessarily constrain our experience, our understanding, and our knowing. This set of circumstances is hardly a liability. As two heads are said to be better than one, so, too, multiple input from various contributors on one and the same topic can lead to an enriched and increasingly accurate understanding of it. Perspectives afford valid “takes” on reality. They are not biases or prejudices in the negative sense—skewed report, preconception, disregard of facts—that Reber and Slife (this issue) usually imply by bias. These theorists’ oversight of the difference between enriching perspectives and distorting biases—and also thoroughgoing relativism or postmodern agnosticism—again impugs their core argument that would pit subjectivism against objectivism and theism against naturalism.

The Subject as Authentic or Inauthentic
As an act of a subject, all knowing is subjective; but as subjective, knowing can be accurate or inaccurate. The limitations of perspectivism necessitate no inadequacy in knowing, and Reber and Slife’s (this issue) linking bias and prejudice to subjectivity is a red herring: Multiply ambiguous, their argument distracts from the real question about the accuracy of knowledge claims. The telling formulation is not that of objectivity versus subjectivity, but of authentic subjectivity versus inauthentic subjectivity, of attentiveness, intelligence, reasonableness, and responsibility versus the lack thereof (Lonergan, 1972, pp. 20, 53, 55, 231, 302). Then, quite simply, “Genuine objectivity is the fruit of authentic subjectivity” (p. 292); or in a popular and succinct example, it takes an honest person to arrive at the truth. And the bugaboo of an undefined “dualism” vanishes because the knowing, both subjective and objective, pertains to the same knowledge and the same knower and to neither without the other.

In their hermeneutical model, Reber and Slife (this issue) ignore the issue of accuracy in knowing. To treat it, they would need a thorough-going analysis of human subjectivity or consciousness, which Lonergan seems to have provided (Helminiak, in press; McCarthy, 1997; Webb, 1988) and I have been intimating. Without it, Reber and Slife and hermeneutical theory, as well, can give no accounting of how differing “worldviews” (which are not mere differing perspectives) constitute “integral parts of meaningful wholes [sic]” or what brings about those worldviews’ “relation to the [one] whole” (p. 11.2). Said otherwise, their overarching canopy of meaning covers many worldviews, but it includes no mechanism for adjudicating the correctness and compatibility of those worldviews, so no integration could ever result. Candidates for that adjudicative mechanism have been suggested: dialogue, whose criteria would still need to be specified (e.g., Habermas, 1981), dialectic (Helminiak, 1998, pp. 172-180; Lonergan, 1972, ch. 10), or, unworkably, some overarching religious “Truth” accepted a priori. But, while intimidating the latter, Reber and Slife (this issue) name none of them; rather, they deny the need for any adjudication. So the dualism, the conflict of science and religion, remains—concealed by a “hermeneutic view,” covered over in conceptually incompatible but univocally named “meaningfulness.”

Stranded in the First Moment of Knowing: Understanding without Judgment
I elaborate this crucial point through attention to this summary statement of Reber and Slife’s (this issue): “There is no subjectivism to fear in the alternative frame of worldview relations we have described [i.e., their hermeneutic view] because the dualism of subjectivity and objectivity is not assumed in the first place” (p. 15.1).

Since hermeneutics refers to how experience is interpreted and meaning generated, here subjectivity clearly refers to the agency of a human subject. Most peculiar, then, is dismissal of a difference between subjectivity and objectivity. If subjectivity refers to the knowing subject, objectivity must refer to what the subject knows, to what is non-subject. In saying so, in no way do I presume, as in the supposed “conventional view,” that the known, the “object,” is material stuff lying out there, separate from the subject, confronting the subject, available only to sensate observation. I speak of human knowing, not animal perception. Human knowing knows being, not bodies (Lonergan, 1957/1992, pp. 275-27), and being is specified by verified meaning (pp. 372-398), not by this-against-that encounter.

At one moment in its process, yes, human knowing does entail an identity of the knower and the known. In the moment of insight, the subject-object distinction is transcended. In one sense, it falls out. As the Scholastic
axiom had it, *Intellec tus in actu fit intellectum in actu*: In the moment of actual understanding, the intellect becomes the understood (Thomas Aquinas, 1961 version, 1a, q. 55, a. 1, ad 2 and q. 87, a. 1, ad 3. See also 1a, q. 14, a. 2, c and q. 85, a. 2, ad 1; Helminia k, 1996a, pp. 62-65; Lonergan, 1967). That is, humans know by intellectual identity with the known, not by perceptual confrontation with it. In the Aristotelian and Thomist categories, humans know when the “form” (essence, intelligibility) of the understood “informs” the intellect. Then the intelligibility of the understood and the intelligibility grasped in the intellect is one and the same. If not, the thing has not been understood. This identity in the known and the knower is what it means to know something. The understanding in the subject is none other than the understanding that pertains to the understood. Herein is an explication of that elusive “hermeneutic non-dualism” (Reber & Slife, this issue, p. 11.1), and thus far, hermeneutical theory accurately portrays the human knowing process.

However, at this point the hermeneutical analysis stops. Yet human knowing entails another step beyond the intelligent generation of meaning. For valid knowing, the reasonableness of a human judgment is still required. It assesses the generated meaning against the initial “intellect-priming” data: Does the proposed interpretation do justice to the evidence? To answer this question—namely, with a judgment, a necessarily reflective act—a distinction between the knowing subject and the known object must now apply: “I know that is a maple.” If, as Reber and Slife present the matter, the “dualism of subjectivity and objectivity is not assumed in the first place” and this “first place” is the end of the story, then, ludicrously, I am the tree. This oversimplification, to ignore the role of judgment, debilitates Reber and Slife’s rendition of knowing—consistent with equally oversimplified hermeneutical theory, still bogged down in the idealism inherited from Emmanuel Kant (Cahoone, 2010; Lonergan, 1957/1992, pp. 364-366), which cannot account for the knowledge of things in themselves, but only for our sensate and perceptual experience of things and the personal meaning we make of it. Thus, Reber and Slife’s “integration” of theism and science is a web of ungrounded speculation; it’s all ideas. The question of correctness, validity, truth—reality plays no part in it.

The Telltale Need for a New Term
Ongoing terminological ambiguity debilitates Reber and Slife’s presentation. The ambiguity takes subjectivity in the two senses already differentiated: subjective as human and subjective as skewed or erroneous. Implicitly acknowledging the ambiguity, blatantly disruptive at this point in Reber and Slife’s presentation, for the first time they introduce a new term *subjectivism* (in the quotation still under analysis, in its prior paragraph, and later on p. 17.1). It is needed to specify “bias” and “prejudice” as error and, thus, to clarify the ambiguity. Nonetheless, the ambiguity persists, as is obvious in that quotation and its context where *subjectivism* and *subjectivity* still bleed into each other.

My point? Without an adequate cognitional theory, the hermeneutical view only seems to solve Reber and Slife’s problem of conflict between science and religion because, concerned only with everyday or “commonsense” (Lonergan, 1957/1992, pp. 196-204) experience, not with the rigorous pursuit of correct understanding that constitutes science, hermeneutical theory leaves untouched the question of truth, of comprehensive science, of one coherent view. Hermeneutical theory deals only with the personal process by which you, I, and the other make whatever meaning—personal importance—we can of our being in the world. Appeal to hermeneutical theory solves the problem by dodging it. This theory never considers the accuracy of differing worldviews and, thus, leaves human cognition, religion, and science in postmodern agnosticism.

Science as Ungrounded Ideas
The same conclusion follows from Reber and Slife’s “broadened” definition of science: “the systematic investigation of ideas” (p. 17.1). Whereas science is the pursuit of reasonable explanation grounded in relevant evidence, evidence does not feature in their understanding of science. Their broadened definition vitiates science. They eliminate the breakthrough that produced the scientific revolution—the need for appeal to evidence. Their science is all ideas, the idealism of modern and bankrupt postmodern philosophy (Cahoone, 2010), an untethered swirl of creative speculation for which anything “interesting”—or “revealed”?—goes.

My sense is that this amorphous outcome is congenial to the theistic psychologists. As long as an imagined canopy of meaningfulness can cover multiple worldviews and even contradictions seem not to matter (because “objective” and “subjective,” in whatever meaning, are irrelevant), they achieve the goal of making religious claims invulnerable to any criticism whatsoever. Indeed, they explicitly claim such invulnerability via an *a priori* insistence on immunity to criticism for any revealed beliefs (Reber, 2006a; Richards & Bergin, 2005, pp. 112; Slife & Richards, 2001, p. 195). They attempt to justify this insistence—“Certain theological issues are closed because they are the foundation of other beliefs” (pp. 194-195)—via a persistent misapplication of Gödel’s theorem to first principles, already flagged twice (Helminiak, 2001, pp. 243-244; 2010, p. 54). But psychotics inhabit their idiosyncratic worlds of meaning, coherent to their personal satisfaction, and we recognize such cases as mental disorder. In a real but less blatant case, the hermeneutic emphasis on meaning does not yet, either, touch the question of truth and reality apart from their relativist specification in personal living in disparate cultural enclaves. We all live
in meaningful worlds of some kind or other, but not all meanings are correct, and not all personally constructed meaningful worlds are realistic. The tensions in our global society highlight this fact.

Argument by Appeal to Decontextualized Phrases
To bolster their argument, the theistic psychologists appeal literally to Hans Georg Gadamer’s (1997/1960) objection to “prejudice against prejudice” (Reber and Slife, this issue, p. 15.2)—a hyperbolic, rhetorical phrase (see Richardson, Fowers, & Guignon, 1999, pp. 228-230). I find that this merely “verbal scholarship”—as also in the case of quotations from Plantinga and from me—this “cherry picking” of seemingly useful phrases is disingenuous. In the context of their argument, this quotation suffers from the same ambiguity as does their own talk of “bias.” But Gadamer’s position was hardly an excuse for erroneous thinking, a dismissal of the need for accuracy, or a legitimization of epistemological agnosticism, as Reber and Slife’s citation construes it in effect. As with Alasdair McIntyre’s (1984), Gadamer’s understanding of truth presumes inquiry within a tradition. Traditions generally include mechanisms for adjustment and self-correction, and their guiding end is to get things right, not merely to comfortably sustain an inherited or “revealed” worldview.

Therefore, Reber and Slife’s appeal to hermeneutical theory to overcome the supposed dualism of naturalism and theism founders on multiple ambiguities, and it ultimately fails for want of an adequate “cognitive theory” and “epistemology” (Lonergan, 1972, p. 25). Obscured throughout by this still other ambiguity, their new effort focuses on “meaning” as personal import, but it completely ignores the traditional religious, philosophical, and human concern about “meaning” as cognitive content and, especially, as accurate explanation and truth. Their hermeneutical solution serves merely to cloak the inconsistency between religious claims and scientific findings—all “meanings,” to be sure, but still set in oppositional dualism.

Concluding Observations
I have argued that Reber and Slife’s (this issue) version of theistic psychology is incoherent on multiple fronts. It retains—indeed, it depends upon—the artificial opposition of competing “worldviews,” theism and naturalism, which it simplistically attributes to its critics as “the conventional view.” Differing threefold ambiguities in each of the terms neutrality, objectivity, and subjectivity and twofold ambiguity in the term meaning undermine their proposed philosophical foundation for overcoming that dualism. A theory incapable of dealing with correct truth claims, “the hermeneutic view,” far from overcoming the dualism by disallowing any significance to subjectivity and objectivity, merely shields the dualism from critical assessment. Besides, the pivotal issue, God’s relationship to the universe, is confusedly construed as a supernaturality, which, one-sidedly attributing all causal explanation to immediate divine “involvement,” ipso facto precludes the critical thinking and rational analyses of any naturalistic explanation. The theism and science of this theory stand on contradictory presuppositions: The uncritical blind faith of its theism and the critical evidence-based reasoning of science can never be reconciled.

In an absolute sense, however, theism and science are not irreconcilable. The theism of the psychologists from BYU appears to be burdened with particular idiosyncrasies. Whether intended or not, whether noticed or not, Mormon beliefs seem to determine those theorists’ notions about God and creation. Most obviously, unlike other Western religions, Mormonism is polytheistic—so no one point of universal coherence, one God, is ever conceived. Mormonism holds that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, along with many others, are all separate gods. This consideration might explain Reber and Slife’s (this issue) non-Western and self-serving definition of theism as “the worldview that a God (or Gods) is actively and currently engaged…” (p. 6.1, emphasis added). Except for the Holy Spirit, these gods are also all embodied; they are not pure spirit; so these ultimate, these gods, could never transcend in comprehensive unity the spatiotemporal array of material reality. Moreover, matter is eternal; it is not created in time by God. Humans are eternal, too. “Creation,” then, means only that “Heavenly Father” constantly and directly manages and manipulates the already-existing material world for the benefit of the humans who have chosen to take on bodies and, if males, work toward becoming gods themselves (God the Father, 2013; McKeever, 2013; Mormonism, 2013; Smith, 2013). This peculiar notion of creation explains, as pondered above, what difference-making divine involvement could possibly mean if it is not a reference to miracles as commonly understood. These peculiarities of Mormonism, which completely lacks any philosophical or theological critical tradition, arguably account for the peculiarities of the theistic psychology from BYU and precipitate anomalies and inconsistencies in the face of standard Western monotheism. By the same token, much of this effort of Reber, Slife, and their colleagues becomes irrelevant to other discussion about integrating their belief and science because significantly different notions of “God” are in play.

Still, other approaches have their anomalies, too. As noted, Evangelical Christianity tends toward occasionalism. It, at least, allows for expected regularities in divine action and, thus, supports some notion of law-like explanation. But, as I have argued elsewhere (Helminiak, 1998, pp. 30-50), the Integration project of biblical-literalist Christians is also unachievable. It, too, in the end, pits unswerving blind faith against scientific conclusions. Roman Catholicism’s acceptance
of providential naturalism offers the best hope for the reconciliation of religion and science, but even Catholicism retains strands of occasionalist thinking.

Being privileged and humbled in understanding Lonergan’s Method in Theology, I am convinced that the pervasive inability to let go of virtually magic notions of divine providence is a left-over from a pre-scientific era. To insist that the earth is only 6,000 years old or to oppose sexual diversity and the law of gravity for “revealed” reasons is outrageously unacceptable in the twenty-first century. Yet the mass delusion of naïvely pious religion sustains these notions—all in a supposed effort to protect the ulti-macy of God and, more likely, to protect the emotional security of the believers. In contrast, theologically refined notions of God and creation require no defensiveness of theist faith. Those outdated ideas derived only from attempts to express faith in God via the “science” of their day, so the science is incidental to the faith, and the science can be updated without denying the faith. But this sorting-out of the issues requires the very strategies of contemporary thinking and science that the religious people are, in principle, often unwilling to embrace. A deadlock results.

The one glaringly valid, but misconstrued, concern of theistic psychology is the lack of spiritual sensitivity in contemporary culture and its social sciences (Helminiak, 2013). Thus, with only some exaggeration, Richards and Bergin (2005) wrote, “It [scientific naturalism] denies or trivializes much of what is most important and distinctive about human beings, including mind, consciousness, agency, morality, responsibility, love, relationships, creativity, intuition, meaning, purpose, and faith in God” (p. 45). However, apart perhaps from the final item (see Pargament, 1997), these indispensable matters are not theological; they are human and spiritual. A crucial confounding issue in this discussion is the inability of many theists to distinguish between the spiritual and the divine (Helminiak, 1982, 1987b, 1996a, 2006, 2008a), so—despite the example of Buddhism—they must insist on belief in God to have genuine spirituality. Slife and Richards (2001) are braven in this insistence (Helminiak, 2001). This inability is part and parcel of that same reluctance to embrace the complex and differentiated thinking that, on many fronts, the scientific revolution and now globalization have thrust upon us. Simply said, outdated simplistic religion is struggling to survive in a highly sophisticated culture. Both are the worse for it. Spirituality used to be the domain of religion, but in the West always in terms of theism. So now, when secular society naturally has no spiritual sensitivity and having it supposedly still requires believing in (one among the many available and blatantly conflicting notions of) God, spiritual concerns per se have no home, and that list of indispensable spiritual matters goes ignored. In the extreme, the current pluralistic religious situation requires that only unthinking people can be spiritual if spiritual means theist, and thinking spiritual people must reject belief in God (certainly in many religious forms) as sectarian fantasy.

Following Lonergan (1957/1992, 1972), I have been proposing a sophisticated methodological solution to this dilemma (e.g., Helminiak, 1996a, 1998, 2008c). However, the solution is not a matter of somehow inserting “God” into psychology and science. The notion of “theistic psychology” is an oxymoron, and the project, a well-intentioned but misguided enterprise. The solution is, rather, a matter of a consciousness-based psychology of spirituality supplemented, as desired, with good theology. It remains to be seen how long popular religion can go on ignoring the current culture shift and how long theorists, too, will go on basing their theories on popular religion.

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**Note**

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This reply addresses several themes that cut across the seven comments on our article, *Theistic Psychology and the Relation of Worldviews: A Reply to the Critics*. Our response to these themes is organized according to three major topics that were covered in the original article: 1) the purpose of the paper, 2) worldview separability versus worldview interdependence, and 3) worldview superiority. Within each topic we organize the very different and often inconsistent comments according to the relational assumptions they represent (e.g., weak vs. strong relationality) and we show how different relational commitments either support a number of subtle prejudices against a theistic approach to psychology or allow for a fruitful dialog and fair test of its capacity to advance psychological knowledge.

Keywords: weak relationality, strong relationality, blind prejudices, grounded meanings

In our initial article we stated how much we value dialog concerning the prospect of a theistic approach to psychology. In that spirit, we are pleased to have received seven responses to our article that have pressed us to think more carefully and deeply about several key issues at play in the development of this burgeoning approach to psychology. We apologize at the outset for not responding directly to all the questions and challenges of each comment in detail. The comments are too broadly scattered and our space is too limited for a more complete response. As we will describe in the conclusion, we see this broad variation of responses, the lack of their unanimity, and even inconsistencies across the replies as indicative of an important theme addressed in our initial paper.

We have organized our response to the comments according to several themes that refer back to three major topics that framed our initial article: 1) the purpose of our paper, 2) worldview separability versus worldview interdependence, and 3) worldview superiority. Our treatment of some of the themes within these three topics is written in the form of a direct response to one or two commentators. Other themes are treated more like general comments on the replies taken as a whole.

**Purpose of the Paper**

In the introduction to our original article we made the stated purpose of our paper clear, which was to respond to critics of a theistic approach to psychology by examining the taken-for-granted or conventional view of the relationship of the worldviews of naturalism and theism. We also made it clear that our article would counter this conventional frame with a relational frame in which naturalism and theism are not separable or hierarchical, but interdependent and on a level playing field. Given this alternative framing of relationship, we argued that there are no grounds for the exclusion of a theistic approach from the discipline. On the contrary, this alternative framing of worldviews allows for a theistic approach to psychology to be given the chance to succeed or fail, just like any other theory, in its efforts to advance disciplinary knowledge.

We were struck by the different tacks the commentators took with regard to our purpose. Some, like Freeman, Johnson, and Hathaway seemed to take our purpose seriously and genuinely considered its feasibility in a number of interesting ways. Others didn’t seem to address our argument at all. Nelson, for example, wrote more directly to our exemplar critic’s purposes than to ours. Helminiak did not address our purpose either, but rather continued to reinforce many of the same arguments he has articulated in the past and provide additional illustrations, we believe, of many of the assumptions of the conventional view. Finally, Collicutt and Snowdon seemed dissatisfied with our purpose and appeared to have desired a different purpose for our article.

We focus on Collicutt and Snowdon here because they most directly questioned our purpose and did so in a way that may be indicative of the kinds of biases against a theistic approach to psychology that are taken for granted by adherents of the conventional view. Both Collicutt and Snowdon felt that our paper lacked a definition of theistic approach to psychology and because of that they found it “difficult” (Snowdon, p. 38) to discuss the purpose of our paper. In the first section here we show how we did define both theism and a theistic approach to psychology, even though we...
may not have defined these conceptions to their liking, which is the focus of the next section wherein we question whether Collicutt and Snowdon’s expectations for a definition of theism and a theistic approach to psychology are reasonable and naturalistic.

**Did We Define a Theistic Approach to Psychology?**
Within the first few pages of our initial article we dedicated a full paragraph to our definition of theism. Stating this definition as clearly as possible and referencing the work of Ian Barbour (1997) to show that our definition is not an idiosyncratic one, we defined theism as “the worldview that a God (or Gods) is actively and currently involved with and makes a meaningful difference in the practical world” (Reber & Slife, p. 6). We then distinguished theism from deism and dualism to show how theism differs from philosophical and theological conceptualizations of divinity in which God is not actively and currently involved in the world. Our theistic definition of a participatory, difference-making God is reiterated in several subsequent passages of the paper.

We then clarified or “operationalized” this definition when we discussed our god attachment research. In the review of that research we showed how a theistic worldview generates unique hypotheses that can be investigated using the scientific method. We also discussed how a theistic approach to psychology may require a broadening of psychologists’ conceptualization of science to include a variety of methods that may usefully illuminate appropriate meanings of the phenomena being investigated. In these ways we explicated our definition of a theistic approach to psychology, and did so with some detail. Additionally, in the event that readers wanted more details about our definition, we cited no fewer than 12 published articles that also define theism and describe a theistic approach to psychology.

The majority of the commentators gave no indication that they found our definitions of theism and a theistic approach lacking. On the contrary, Freeman quotes our definition of theism and then, clearly understanding its meaning, suggests one of its major implications for psychology, which is that “if divine activity truly makes a difference in the world, then insofar as psychology remains steadfastly committed to naturalism, it cannot help but remain incomplete – indeed, one might add, insufficiently *scientific*” (p. 22). Though Freeman is not an advocate of theistic psychology, he clearly understands our definition of it and its radical implications for contemporary scientific psychology. Hathaway, Johnson, and Nelson also show no signs of confusion regarding our definition of theism and a theistic approach to psychology. Even Helminiak, our exemplar critic recognizes that our definition of theism assumes “routine divine intervention” (p. 40). He interprets the meanings of each of these three terms in a conventional naturalistic sense, as we will show later on, but he does understand that for theists god is involved in the world in an ongoing way.

**What did Collicutt and Snowdon Expect?**
In Collicutt’s opening paragraph she asserts that our paper lacked a clear definition of a theistic approach to psychology. Two sentences later, she gives a clue about what kind of definition she would find acceptable, and it is one in which we “spell out in what way or in what sense the divine agent(s) might act” (p. 21). In other words, she wants an explication of the mechanism of God’s action in the world, what she calls “the proximal cause of behavior” (ibid). Specifically, she wants to know if we would explain God and the mechanism of his action in terms of an “external stimulus,” an “in-trapsychic force,” a “cognitive module,” or the “action of subatomic particles that form part of human brain chemistry” (ibid). As is the case with many social scientists (e.g., Elster, 1989; Hedstrom & Yikoski, 2010; Machamer, Darden, & Craver, 2000), it appears that Collicutt expected a definition that at least proposes a naturalistic causal mechanism through which divinity acts in the world. We want to ask two questions of this expectation here: Is it reasonable and is it naturalistic?

**Is this expectation reasonable?** We might first ask, is it a reasonable expectation of any psychological theory? Psychology is rife with theories that fail to specify causal mechanisms (Gantt, Melling, & Reber, 2012; Gantt, Reber, & Hyde, 2013), and this has been the case for a long time. Indeed, since Descartes first mistakenly proposed the pineal gland as the location of interaction between mind and body in the 16th Century, philosophers and then psychologists have failed to identify a mechanism that explains the relationship between bodily processes like the firing of neurons and mental activities like thinking. Similarly, from the time of Darwin up to evolutionary psychology today, the cognitive mechanisms that are inherited from our ancestors, coded into our genes, and manifested in our behaviors have yet to be “spelled out” (Collicutt, p. 21). In truth, few psychologists can spell out how the constructs of their theories “might act” (ibid), which is why psychologists designate psychological *theories* as theories, not facts.

Yet, although the specific mechanisms that explain many important psychological phenomena have eluded psychologists for centuries it has not stymied the advancement of psychological knowledge. The theories of neuropsychology, for instance, have served the discipline quite well despite the absence of a specified mechanism that explains how brain activity and mental processes interact. Skinner’s behaviorism made significant advances in the field of learning and he explicitly refused to speculate about the specific mechanisms that might explain operant conditioning (Rychlak, 1981). Similarly, the program of theistic psychological research that we have initiated has already contributed
to the advancement of psychological knowledge in two areas of psychological research—God attachment and implicit attitudes—and has done so without a specified mechanism of God’s action.

If, as our research has shown (e.g., Reber, Slife, & Downs, 2012), a theistic approach to psychology can advance disciplinary knowledge without specifying a mechanism of action involved, just as other psychological theories do, is Collicutt justified in holding our definition hostage until the ransom of a specified naturalistic mechanism of God’s action in the world is paid? And, would she treat any psychological theory, including naturalistic psychological theories in this same manner? If not, then we would assert that her expectation of a theistic approach to psychology is not reasonable. We also remind Collicutt that theistic approaches to psychology are still in their infancy. Is it reasonable to expect a burgeoning theory to propose a mechanism of action when more mature theories, which have been allowed much more time and space to develop still have not nailed down the specific mechanisms that inform their definitions?

Is this expectation naturalistic? Is it reasonable to expect a theistic approach to psychology to specify naturalistic, causal mechanisms in the first place? The coupling of mechanism with psychological explanation is a naturalistic accommodation put in place early in psychology’s history with the adoption of the scientific method (Gantt, Melling, & Reber, 2012). Expecting advocates of a theistic approach to psychology to define their approach in terms of naturalistic causal mechanisms would force the accommodation we discussed in our initial paper and would ultimately undermine the basic theistic premise guiding the approach, especially if, as several commentators agreed, naturalism and theism are incompatible if not incommensurable worldviews. Such an expectation certainly is not reasonable from the perspective of the theistic psychologist. Instead, it is indicative of an implicit prejudice against theism that is inherent in the conventional framing of naturalism and theism that we described in the initial article and that Collicutt appears to represent in her comment (Slife & Reber, 2009).

Snowdon chose to adopt the naturalistic understanding of theism that is used by our exemplar critic, Daniel Helminiak, in his 2010 Zygon article (Helminiak, 2010). Despite our significant and obvious disagreements on the topic of theism, Snowdon (this issue) takes Helminiak’s definition as an indication of “what it is [we] have in mind” (p. 38). Whether Snowdon agrees with our argument that Helminiak frames the worldviews of naturalism and theism conventionally or not, he cannot expect us to accept Helminiak’s definition of theism as representative of a theistic approach to psychology as we understand it, when it is precisely his conventional worldview definition that we are challenging in our article. We can only speculate about the reasons why Snowdon ignored our definition in favor of Helminiak’s definition, but it does cause us to wonder if he preferred Helminiak’s definition because it is accommodated to naturalism (e.g., Helminiak (2010) refers to God as a “divine variable” (p. 51)). Whether Snowdon was biased in this way or not, we do believe that by following Helminiak’s definition of theism he got off on the wrong foot and worked only within the conventional framing of worldviews that we criticize. In other words, we were disappointed that Snowdon ultimately did not address our argument, but instead reinforced, without acknowledgment, the conventional view.

Worldview Separability vs. Worldview Interdependence

In our initial paper we defined worldview as a “constellation of shared assumptions, beliefs, and values that unite a . . . community” (Okasha, 2002, p. 81). We then contrasted the conventional treatment of worldviews as being separate and self-contained with a relational conception of worldviews as different meanings that mutually constitute each other. In support of the conventional assumption of separation and self-containment, we referenced Gould’s (1997) non-overlapping magisteria principle and we quoted Barbour’s (1997) statement that for advocates of the independence view, “there are two jurisdictions and each party must keep off the other’s turf. Each must tend to its own business and not meddle in the affairs of the other” (p. 84). We then quoted the APA council of representatives’ (2007) resolution on religion and religious prejudice, which echoes Gould and Barbour almost exactly and clearly illustrates psychology’s public commitment to this separability view.

As we will show in the Inconsistencies in the Comments section below, some commentators disagreed with this characterization of the conventional view, while others completely supported it. We provide an understanding of these inconsistencies across commentators by discussing two major ways of conceptualizing relationship in psychology. We also show how one of these conceptualizations, known as weak relationality, underlies the separability assumption of the conventional view and informs several of the comments. Then, in the Blind Prejudice section we discuss the implications of the weak relational conception that informs the separability assumption of the conventional view on psychologists’ efforts to avoid prejudice between naturalism and theism.

Inconsistencies in the Comments

The replies to our article with regard to the separability assumption of the conventional view were wildly differing. For example, Collicutt refers to the APA resolution, as well as our quotes from Gould and Barbour, as “anecdotal examples” (p. 21) and asserts that our claim that the conventional view advocates worldview sepa-
rability is “unfounded” (ibid). Johnson, on the other hand, states unequivocally that, “this ‘conventional’ idea seems self-evidently true” (p. 33), adding that “if any worldviews are fundamentally incompatible and even incommensurable surely naturalism and theism fit the bill” (ibid). Freeman echoes Johnson’s argument that the “non-overlapping magisteria’ perspective put forth by Gould (1997, 2002) and others . . . is the ‘conventional view’” (p. 23), and also argues that an alternative understanding of the relationship of these two worldviews and a reconceptualization of science is needed.

Like Freeman and Johnson, but contrary to Collicutt, Nelson affirms the separability assumption of the conventional view and uses Helminiak’s (2010) article to illustrate the point. He then criticizes the separability assumption in a manner similar to ours and Freeman’s. Nelson’s position is also directly opposed to Johnson’s view of fundamental incompatibility and incommensurability, as illustrated by Nelson’s statement that “there is no transcendently-given distinction between theology and science” (p. 36). Helminiak takes a similar position to Johnson, asserting that naturalism and theism are “incompatible worldviews” (p. 40). For his part, Snowden, again seemingly dissatisfied with our explication of conventional worldview separability, despite other commentators showing a clear understanding of it, asks for further clarification of our position on separability.

Understanding the Inconsistencies. The differing replies to our assertion that the conventional view takes naturalism and theism to be separable, independent worldviews are dizzying, but they are not wholly surprising to us. On the contrary, the responses clearly represent two different perspectives on relationship that characterize the discipline (Reber & Osbeck, 2005). Slife and Wiggins (2009) have described these two major approaches to relationship. The first approach, weak relationality, is the more mainstream psychological perspective of the two. Those who assume weak relationality, view worldviews as being self-contained first and then interacting with other worldviews. Describing this weaker form of relationship between the disciplines of theology and psychology specifically, Shults (2003) uses the term ab extra relationality. In ab extra relationality one “begins with the disciplines as separate, and then tries to work out the relation between them” (p. 50).

Strong or ontological relationality, by contrast, assumes that worldviews “are first relationships—already and always related to one another” (Slife & Wiggins, 2009, p. 18). Shults (2003) uses the term ab intra relationality to describe a strong relationship of disciplines. Ab intra relationality “operates out of a prior awareness of the tensive bipolar relational unity of the disciplines that hermeneutically precedes the description of disciplines as separate poles” (p. 50). For the strong relationist, then, “disciplinary identities are dialectically related and so mediated (even if negatively) by their embeddedness in a broader relationality” (ibid). This means that disciplines “can be fully explained only by accounting for their being-in-relation” (p. 51).

In our initial paper, we did not use the terms weak and strong relationality. However, we clearly indicated that the conventional frame of the relationship between theism and naturalism treats the worldviews as if they are self-contained. Our definition of worldview separability provides a good example of Shults’ (2003) ab extra relationality: “Separability is the idea that theism and naturalism constitute radically different worldviews that can be understood and exist apart from one another” (Reber & Slife, p. 7). We also made it clear that our alternative framing of worldviews assumes a strong relationality, as indicated by the following quotation: “Whether the relationship has been marked more by conflict or harmony at any given time, these two worldviews have always informed and shaped one another, through both their relational similarities and their relational differences” (p. 11). In both cases, we then described the implications of each conception of relationship, with separability and superiority following from a weak relationality and interdependence and difference following from a strong relational approach.

We are strong relationists and we see the relationship between naturalism and theism as one of difference and interdependence, not self-containment and hierarchy.

Clarifying the Commenters’ Assumptions: Weak vs. Strong Relationality

With this background understanding in place, we can now organize the replies according to their weak or strong approach to relationships, and we can examine the different implications that follow from each relational approach.

Weak relationality. Collicutt appears to argue against the conventional assumption of worldview separability on the basis of there being “a degree of overlap in the phenomena addressed” (p. 22) by faith traditions and psychology. However the overlap she describes is only topical, meaning that “several world views may be brought to bear on a particular field of interest” (ibid), but she makes no mention of the worldviews having any bearing on one another, which was the argument we made in our article. In this sense, the “complementary dialogical approaches” (ibid) Collicutt references are ways of relating worldviews that are taken to be separate and self-contained first, and are then brought into relation by virtue of their shared interest in a phenomenon (ab extra relationship). A strong relationist, on the other hand, sees the worldviews as always and already in relation (ab intra relationship). Thus, as we stated in our original article, naturalism and theism are “interdependent, varied frameworks of meaning that participate in different interpretations (i.e., integration of meanings) of the phenomena studied while also mutually constituting each other” (Reber & Slife, p. 14; italics added).
Like Collicutt, Johnson does not view the worldviews of naturalism and theism as being mutually constitutive. On the contrary, he adamantly opposes this strong relational approach. With his assertion that naturalism and theism are “fundamentally incompatible and even incommensurable” (p. 33), as well as “antagonistic” (ibid) worldviews, he reflects the weak relational position that the two worldviews are independent and self-contained and are not, therefore, “somehow necessarily reliant upon each other” (ibid). For Johnson, necessary reliance would imply a violation of the boundary that separates the two worldviews and preserves their unique core identities. Such a violation would be “potentially self-destructive” (ibid), argues Johnson, because it would “lead over time to the dissolution of the receiving worldview community” (ibid). In this sense, interdependence is like the concept of co-dependency in interpersonal relationships, where an individual’s core identity becomes “necessarily reliant” on others’ perceptions and treatment of the person, and the original integrity of the self is lost. Thus, for Johnson and others who view relationship in this ab extra way, a worldview that depends to any extent on other worldviews for any of the core features that constitute its identity as a worldview, is not a worldview at all.

Johnson’s weakly relational understanding of worldview interdependence is echoed by Helminiaik’s (2010) “Trojan horse” (p. 57) and Alcock’s (2009) “Pandora’s box” (p.82) analogies that we addressed in our initial article. These metaphors conjure up notions of invasion, infection, and the destruction or dissolution of the receiving worldview that Johnson fears. Nelson uses the term “contamination hypothesis” (p. 37) to describe this weakly relational concern in the terms of an allopathic model of health. It is weakly relational because it presumes that worldviews, like physical bodies are first self-contained and uninfluenced by external agents. Then, “alien worldviews” (Johnson, p. 33) come along and, like a bacteria or virus, threaten to penetrate into the boundary of the worldview and damage or destroy it.

From this ab extra point of view, worldview communities have to take preventative action to protect themselves from contamination, which is one reason why drawing a strong line of demarcation between naturalism and theism is so important to adherents of the conventional view. Keeping naturalists and theists on their own side of the line is supposed to protect naturalism and theism from contaminating each other. This is why the passages from the APA resolution (2007) we quoted in our initial article are in a “Resolution on Religious, Religion-Based and/or Religion-Derived Prejudice” (p. 1). From this weak relational perspective, faith traditions and psychology can only avoid prejudice if they respect the profound differences between their worldviews and if each worldview does not meddle in the affairs of the other worldview. Otherwise, contamination will inevitably breed prejudice.

Strong relationality. Freeman and Nelson appear to understand the relation of naturalism and theism as one in which the worldviews inevitably have and will continue to mutually influence each other in many significant ways. In Freeman’s words, “there is a good deal more conceptual ‘seepage’ between naturalism and theism than is generally assumed, and . . . what flies under the banner of unalutered naturalism may be permeated, even if unknowingly, by the very theism it imagines it has surpassed” (p. 24). Later on, he remarks on the “profound interdependence” (ibid) of naturalism and theism and refers to them as “overlapping magisteria” (ibid) in direct contrast to Gould’s (1997) non-overlapping magisteria conception.

Similarly, Nelson asserts that science and theology “share areas of interest such as the nature of the human person and how we can best care for others in need” (p. 36). He also notes that “a key aspect of describing worldview is to understand the logico-structural integration in the system, or ‘the ways in which the assumptions of a world-view are interrelated’ (p. 35). Neither Freeman nor Nelson describe interdependence as being either avoidable or destructive. On the contrary, as Freeman points out, their profound interdependence allows for their comparison in determining which worldview “is a more adequate lens for understanding what’s going on in some given case” (p. 24), a point we will revisit later.

Blind Prejudice

In our initial article, we discussed several problems with psychology’s efforts to reduce prejudice by keeping the worldviews separate, including compartmentalization and worldview superiority. Because several of the replies continue to press for worldview separability, we will flesh out our issues with this weakly relational feature of the conventional view more fully here. Our general concern is that the fear of contamination and prejudice that fuels the weakly relational separability assumption may blind advocates of the conventional view to the many ways in which the worldviews are in relationship and exert influence upon each other. As we described it in our article, for those who assume worldview separability (i.e., weak relationality):

The influence of these worldviews on each other will take place outside the compartmentalizing psychologist’s awareness, leading him or her to believe that the insights, issues, and interpretations that arise in one context have nothing to do with the other. They are assumed to emerge, however consciously or unconsciously, from within the worldview itself and not from the relationship between the different worldviews (p. 12).

In the three sections that follow we discuss three manifestations of this blindness that we observed in several
replies to our article: 1) the myth of neutrality, 2) the denial of the dialectic, and 3) the invisibility of accommodation.

The myth of neutrality. We have addressed the potential blindness to violations of the separability assumption in previous publications under the heading of “the myth of neutrality” (e.g., Reber, Slife, & Saunders, 2011; Slife, Reber, & Lefevor, 2012). The myth, in this case, is manifested by psychologists believing that they honor the demarcation between psychology and faith because they only present the objective evidence gained from their scientific psychological research; evidence that is supposedly neutral with regard to theism or any other worldview. In our article in this issue, and in other publications, we have cited numerous examples of unsupported assertions about faith traditions and their beliefs, including off-hand references to God as “an imaginary figure” (Cassibba, Granqvist, Costantini, & Gatto, 2008, p. 1760) and an “individual construction” (Granqvist, Ivarsson, Broberg, & Hagekull, 2007, p. 598). Given the seeming invasiveness of these assertions into the very core of theistic belief, we were surprised to find virtually no response to this major point of our paper in the comments. At the very least, we expected those advocating a weak relationality with its attendant fears of contamination and prejudice to find these invasive, unidirectional practices unacceptable. Yet, as we will see, Helminiak and Johnson expressed no concerns about these practices.

In Helminiak’s case, this lack of concern is not surprising given his conceptualization of science as “reasoned and evidence-based” (p. 47) and theism (as he interprets our definition of it) as being based on “bald and blind assertions of faith” (ibid). He has already concluded that a theistic approach to psychology “as an intellectual enterprise . . . is a bust” (p. ibid), so what concern could there possibly be with the assertions of scientific psychologists about it? Johnson does express concerns with the “totalizing tendency” (p. 32) of late modernism, just as he acknowledges totalizing tendencies in Christianity, but he does not express any concerns about threats of worldview contamination as long as the worldviews are understood to have no reliance upon each other. Thus, while there may be a “hegemony of modern psychology” (ibid) in the academic marketplace of ideas, this hegemony does not affect the worldview of Christianity itself. Christianity may be relegated to a minority status in the marketplace of ideas, but for Johnson, its core beliefs and assumptions are not affected by the dominance of modernism. In this sense, either Christianity is protected from the unsupported assertions of psychological science that appear to threaten its core beliefs because it is self-contained and not interdependent with naturalism or other worldviews in any way, or these assertions can have no deleterious effect on the theistic worldview because they are neutral with regard to faith.

Our own research challenges both of these assumptions. We have found that active Christian students and psychologists with more training and education in psychology express significantly greater negative implicit attitudes toward faith than students with little or no training and education in the discipline (Reber, Slife, & Downs, 2012). This research suggests that the unsupported assertions of psychologists regarding faith traditions and their beliefs are not neutral and the worldview of the theist is not uninfluenced. Rather, these assertions can influence the implicit attitudes of students and psychologists of faith and may even impact their core beliefs.

Thus, as we have argued, worldview separability and neutrality cannot be achieved because the worldviews of naturalism and theism are strongly related, and, as we will show in the next section, do rely on each other to some extent for their very identities. Consequently, it is not the “violations” of separability that concern us. We fully expect mutual influence given the interdependence of the worldviews involved. Our concerns are the pretense of separability and the myth of neutrality expressed by psychologists and some of our commentators, which together can lead to a hierarchical framing of worldviews, prejudice against theism, and a naturalistic dogmatism that is unacknowledged.

Denying the dialectic. The weakly relational assumption of separability that supports the conventional worldview can also blind adherents of that view to the ways in which differences and even incompatibilities dialectically constitute a relationship between worldviews. As advocates of this dialectic relationality, we do not and did not (in our original article) take issue with Johnson’s assertion that theism and naturalism are incompatible, incommensurable, and at times even antagonistic. We also agree with Helminiak that these two worldviews conceptualize reality very differently and we recognize that a number of naturalistic and Christian scholars share Johnson and Helminiak’s concern with any claims of interdependence or reliance between the worldviews. However, we do take issue with the assumption that incompatibility, incommensurability, antagonism, and difference signify the absence of relationship between worldviews. Bernstein (1983), in studying the work of Kuhn, has carefully addressed this weak relational assumption. He argues that incompatibility and incommensurability do not connote separation, but imply fundamental relatedness. Incompatibility and incommensurability are only possible in comparison. From Bernstein’s perspective, only “incomparability” denotes atomistic separability and theism and naturalism are not incommensurable.

One example of their comparability is manifested by the definition of naturalism, which explicitly “denies that an object or event has supernatural significance” (Merriam-Webster, 2014). In this sense, naturalism is defined in terms of theism. How could it be more
related? In other words, the denial of theism in the definition of naturalism does not make theism unrelated to naturalism, according to Bernstein (1983), because one has to understand theism in order to understand naturalism. Admittedly this relationship is not one of similarity, but the lack of similarity relationships doesn’t preclude other types of relationships. Were it not for the theistic worldview (among others) and its claims of “supernatural significance” there would be nothing for naturalists to deny. There would be no distinction between a natural and supernatural realm and no demarcation of what should be included and excluded from a naturalistic field of study. For this reason, naturalism depends upon theism for its very existence. The bounds of naturalism are in part defined by theism, showing that naturalism is comparable to and yes, to some extent, reliant upon theism.

Theism’s reliance on naturalism is the harder case to make because theism seems to have an earlier chronological starting point in history. How could theism rely on naturalism for its being as a worldview when the naturalistic worldview wasn’t initially present to participate in the relationship? Our response to this issue is that from the perspective of dialectic relationality, that which is opposite or other than a given worldview is implied by the given worldview. That is, if theism is based on the “conviction that God is active, personal, and—above all—present to us” (Loyola Press, 2014, line 2), then, it is impossible not to be simultaneously aware of the opposite possibility, that God could be passive, impersonal, and absent from us. In this sense, theism may not have been related to naturalism at the time of its inception, but naturalism and all other worldviews that conceive of a world in which God is not actively present are implied by the possibility of theism’s antithesis. Moreover, as we will discuss next, once naturalism did emerge as a worldview and opposed itself to theism, theists have had to contend with naturalistic assumptions and assertions about theism in a number of significant ways.

Invisible accommodation. A third illustration of the blindness that can ensue from the conventional assumption of worldview separability stems from the one-way accommodation we described in our paper. There we discussed how many theists now accept the definition of many of their key concerns that include naturalist terms and assumptions. We used miracles as an illustration of this accommodation, noting that many theists today would accept a definition of at least one type of miracle as God suspending or violating natural laws. The subject of miracles is a key focus of Helminiak’s critique of our original article and theistic psychology generally. We address miracles here, both to respond to Helminiak and to show a good example of the accommodation we discussed in our article, as well as the invisibility of accommodation’s violation of the assumption of worldview separability.

In his reply, Helminiak defines miracles as “an extraordinary divine intervention” (p. 45) and then interprets each term of the definition within a naturalistic frame. For him, “extraordinary” means “something outside of, apart from, or beyond the standard laws of nature” (ibid). “Divine” connotes that which is “other worldly” (p. 49) or “supernatural” (ibid) and “intervention” is contrasted with “natural processes” (p. 45) and therefore is taken to be “unlawful” (ibid), meaning that miraculous intervention violates or suspends the laws of nature (see also Helminiak, 2010). Helminiak states that his definition of miracles and each of these three terms that constitute it conform to the “standard sense” (ibid) in which miracles are understood.

Perhaps his meanings are standard for naturalists and for a naturally understood theism, but as we argued in our initial paper, these meanings “are not originally theistic” (p. 9). Indeed, they are not the only meanings available to theists and they certainly are not the most important meanings. Theists would agree that miracles are extraordinary divine interventions and they are fully aware of the meaning of miracles that Helminiak describes. That awareness is an inevitable consequence of the dialectic relationship of theism and naturalism we have described. The meanings of miracle available to theists have been altered and expanded or contracted in that relationship. However, theists can and also do understand other more important meanings beyond the singular definition Helminiak gives. Indeed, as we will now illustrate, it is possible to contrast each of Helminiak’s definitional terms with theistic alternatives to show his (hidden) naturalistic understanding of theism.

For example, for the Christian theist, God’s miracles can be understood as “extraordinary”, not because they are outside or above natural laws, but because it is extraordinary for a God who is exalted on high to care about and enter into a redemptive relationship with fallen and sinful creatures, like ourselves. An expression of this meaning of “extraordinary” is manifest by the Psalmist’s query, “What is man that thou art mindful of him?” (Psalm 8:4). For such theists, the very fact that a God cares about human beings is a miracle. On this point, as Kierkegaard (1991) has so ably described, the voluntary abasement of Christ is particularly apropos. Indeed, a God condescending to our level and allowing himself to be subjected to the vicissitudes of human life, including temptation, suffering, and martyrdom, all because he loves us, constitutes Christianity’s most “extraordinary” miracle.

As for the meaning of the term “divine,” theists typically do not frame their understanding of God in terms of the supernatural over against the natural, but rather as the holy over against the unholy, the pure versus the impure, and the exalted above the fallen (Brichto, 1998). “Intervention” too has a non-naturalistic meaning for theists in regard to this kind of
A miracle is not an abnormal or unnatural occurrence presupposing the normality of nature, but a redeeming reinstatement of the normality of the world and life through the new dominion of God, which stands antithetically against the kingdom of this world. Miracles are not part of a supernatural order which intrudes upon an absolutized "natural" order of things, thereupon creating a tension between miracles and nature. They reveal the kingdom of God in opposition to the devil and his dominion....This is why the miraculous power of the kingdom is not directed contra naturam but contra peccatum and against the horrible consequences of sin" (p. 211).

We find it interesting that Helminiak never showed any consideration of the possibility that it was this most important of theistic conceptions of miracle that we addressed in our initial article. In his writing, it would appear that there is only one framework for understanding miracles and other theistic phenomena, and that is a conventional framework that is accommodated to naturalism. While we recognize this framework's influence on one possible conceptualization of miracles, and we are aware that many theists conceptualize certain kinds of miracles in this way, it is not the only conceptualization available. In fact, as Berkouwer (1952) points out, it is not the most important conceptualization for theists at all, for whom fallenness and sin, not natural laws, frame their understanding of a world in which God's redemptive intervention takes place and makes the most meaningful difference.

Helminiak's omission of prominent theistic conceptualizations of theistic experiences as important as the miracles of forgiveness, redemption, and grace is indicative of the implicit prejudice toward theism that pervades the discipline (Slife & Reber, 2009). It also indicates the need for a theistic approach to psychology in which research is guided by a theistic worldview that is genuinely open to all the experiences and meanings that pertain to faith. We believe it is precisely because theism and naturalism are comparable in their dialectic relationship that these prejudices and accommodations can be identified and taken into account. On the other hand, if theism and naturalism were seen as separate, incomparable magisteria we would miss the ways in which they have affected each other, changed meanings, and added new definitions. Like Helminiak, we might also fail to appreciate their uniquenesses, which are often only illuminated by the light of their relational contrasts.

**Worldview Superiority**

One of the main arguments we explicated in our initial article was that the worldviews of naturalism and theism are related hierarchically by the conventional psychologist, with naturalism in the ascendant position due to its presumed greater objectivity, and theism in the descendant position because it is viewed by the conventionalist as being riddled with the subjective biases of personal opinion and metaphysical speculation. Several themes of worldview superiority emerged in the comments that warrant brief discussion here. First, we address the theme of positivism, which some commentators view as a part of psychology's history and others see as alive and well in its present. Then, we discuss our focus on meaning, noting that some commentators continue to frame meaning within the subjectivity/objectivity dualism we challenged in our article. Finally, we respond to a theme raised in several comments, which questions whether there might be a kind of superiority at play in the alternative framing of worldviews that we described in our original article.

**Positivism**

As with previously discussed themes, our commentators range across a variety of responses to our assertion that a kind of positivism based on the assumption of subjectivity/objectivity dualism informs a hierarchical arrangement of the worldviews of naturalism and theism. Collicutt, for example, denies the pervasiveness of this superiority feature of the conventional view by arguing that the positivism that embraced this objective/subjective dualistic superiority in psychology was unique to “the USA in the 1960s and 70s” (p. 21), and a focus on this limited manifestation of positivistic superiority “doesn’t do justice to the current field across the world” (ibid). Similarly, Helminiak asserts that logical positivism is “now unanimously and completely discredited” (p. 46) by scientists.

Like Collicutt and Helminiak, Nelson, who has written extensively on positivism in psychology (e.g.,
Nelson, 2009), acknowledges the “destruction of positivism” (Nelson, 2009, p. 63) in the philosophy of science literature in the mid to late 20th century, citing works by Popper and Kuhn as examples in his comment. The problem is, as he has deftly pointed out in his psychology of religion text, psychologists underestimate “positivism’s persistence in psychology and its effects” (p. 65). Examples of its persistent effects include: “1) unreflective adoption of philosophical positions, 2) physics envy and the limitation of method, 3) narrowing of topics, 4) narrowing of theoretical approaches, 5) distorted perspective on current and new theories, and 6) a negative attitude toward religion” (p. 66).

Interestingly, in Nelson’s reply to our article he quotes Helminiak advocating a “positivist viewpoint of science” (p. 36) in his writing. Nelson also notes that “positivism would fit well with what [Helminiak] articulates as a goal for his proposed science of spirituality” (ibid). This would suggest that the persistence of positivism in psychology may be sufficiently subtle that even psychologists who acknowledge that it has been discredited in the philosophy of science may still be susceptible to its influence within their own discipline. Nelson’s arguments suggest that both Collicutt and Helminiak may underestimate the strong, enduring grip this once-dominant philosophy still holds on the minds of many American psychologists, including, perhaps, at least one of the primary critics of a theistic approach to psychology.

Several other commentators support Nelson’s argument that positivism persists in psychology. For example, Freeman states that, academic psychology considers “naturalism a better, more objective perspective than theism (and any other non-naturalistic ‘ism’ that might be brought to bear on the psychological world)” (p. 23). He suggests that this is so because “naturalism has become naturalized, its ostensibly objective status being largely a function of its epistemic ‘obviousness’—to those for whom it is obvious” (ibid). Johnson states that “modernism’s minimalist metaphysics” is “allied. . . with naturalism and neo-positivism” (p. 32) and adds that “hard subject-object dualism. . . has so compromised modern thought, including modern psychology” (p. 34). Hathaway makes the same basic point, asserting that “most psychologists probably believe, along with the self-described brights of the new atheists, that science is an inherently superior knowing approach to religion and, to the extent that psychology is a science, it is as well” (p. 28).

Hathaway’s comment on positivism is particularly interesting, because later on in his paper he uses the popular logical positivist distinction between the context of discovery and the context of justification in his discussion of the place of theism in psychology. In that section, Hathaway allows for theism, and any other worldview, to inform psychology, but he then compartmentalizes its influence by adding that “any idea source should be valid in what Reichenbach (1938) has called the context of discovery” (p. 27). The context of justification, on the other hand, “is more demanding than the context of discovery in the sciences” (p. 28) for Hathaway and can therefore employ demarcation principles and retain only those “disciplinary elements that survive the discipline’s justificatory processes” (ibid). Though Reichenbach (1938) did not view objectivity and subjectivity as opposites, he does seek to “distinguish the subjective and the objective part of science” (The three tasks of epistemology, para. 17) and to “suppress the traces of subjective motivations from which [scientific expositions] started” (para. 8) in the justificatory stage. He accomplishes this by separating the more subjective context of discovery from the more objective context of justification.

Whether Hathaway intends to do the same thing or not, his use of these two contexts, his references to Reichenbach’s (1938) writings on the subject, and his assertion that theism is an appropriate idea source for the context of discovery with no mention of its appropriateness to the context of justification, make it appear as if the subjectivity/objectivity dualism we discuss in our article is at play in Hathaway’s comment. It seems that for him the worldview of naturalism has a place in the justification phase of science, but theism might be outside the “delimited range” (p. 28) of disciplinary elements in the justification arena. This suggests not only a separation of the worldviews of naturalism and theism but also their hierarchical organization according to the positivist subjectivity/objectivity dualism we describe in our article and that Reichenbach clearly manifests in the text Hathaway cited.

**Meaning**

Another manifestation of worldview superiority that we addressed in our article is the conventional tendency to view approaches to psychology that emphasize meaning (e.g., theistic approaches) as being more subjective than approaches that emphasize objects (e.g., naturalistic approaches). We countered this tendency with an alternative framing of worldviews that is not based on the subjectivity/objectivity dualism that supports the positivism, which as we have just described, persists in psychology. The alternative we discuss takes the position that worldviews are constellations of meanings that are “integral parts of meaningful wholes” (p. 11) that are strongly related to each other and are “neither mostly subjective nor mostly objective” (ibid). We also explained that a hermeneutic framing of worldviews is not the same as a pure subjectivism, where meanings are seemingly conjured out of thin air. Instead, meanings are grounded and “mutually constituted by the interpreter, interpretive context, and the thing interpreted” (p. 15). Because they are grounded in this hermeneutic realism (Slife & Christensen, 2013) interpretations of phenomena and events can be adjudicated as to their
ability to illuminate and disclose important aspects of the phenomena. Interpretations that are valid in this sense, including theistic interpretations, can contribute to the advancement of knowledge in the discipline.

Despite this alternative framing of worldviews, a number of commentators framed their response to our discussion of meaning conventionally. Freeman asks, for example:

But what about the objects of the world? Even if we reframe the subject/object relationship in hermeneutical terms, and I agree we should, there still remains a phenomenon that exists outside the perimeter of the (observing, interpreting, meaning-making) person. Surely these phenomena constrain the interpretations given (p. 24).

Hathaway too is concerned that our hermeneutic alternative has a “creative anti-realist trajectory as its major support” (p. 29), which doesn’t resolve the problem of relativism but encourages us to:

Stop worrying about relativism not so much because the hermeneutic tradition has proven it false, but because we have gone through a kind of philosophical therapy that helps us no longer be concerned about it. We need not worry about the truth of our claims about the world, psychological or otherwise, because we can never get that anyways” (p. 28).

For his part, Johnson fears that in rejecting the objectivity/subjectivity dualism we may “unwittingly take a position on the opposite side—in this case, leading to an ‘idealist’ or ‘subjectivist’ or ‘postmodern’ epistemology—at least to some extent” (p. 34). Helminiak allows for two conceptualizations of meaning—“pure cognitive content” (p. 42) and “personal import or significance” (ibid)—and then, using terms like “free-wheeling hermeneutic meaning-making” (p. 43), “personal meaningfulness” (p. 50), and “a web of ungrounded speculation” (p. 52) places our approach to meaning squarely within the personal import category, noting that “the question of correctness, validity, truth—reality plays no part in it” (ibid).

We are somewhat puzzled by these comments because we addressed both the realism and the correctness of the hermeneutic alternative in our initial paper. We clearly described the difference between valid and invalid interpretations within a hermeneutic frame and used several examples to illustrate how psychological knowledge can be advanced using a meaning-based approach. We acknowledged, for example, that frequency and duration of prayer are real and valid meanings of that phenomenon that naturalistic psychology has studied effectively in a number of ways. We also suggested that there are theistic interpretations of prayer that are real and correct and could be studied to further our understanding of this important phenomenon. Finally, we noted that there are meanings that cannot be correctly applied to prayer, like how it tastes or its mass. We reiterated these same points several times in the latter part of our paper, using examples like forgiveness and miracles, our research on attitudes toward faith and God attachment, and even common interpretations of things like rocks to clarify the point.

We are sympathetic to our commentators’ fear that a detachment of meaning from the objects that constrain that meaning would lead to an idealist or subjectivist ideology and a rampant relativism. However, this clearly is not the position we advocate. From the perspective of hermeneutic realism, we would agree with Freeman that “phenomena constrain the interpretations given” (p. 24) by psychologists. Indeed, we assert that these constraints help psychologists determine what a valid or invalid interpretation is. A theistic approach to psychology examines the ways in which an active, engaged God constrains the meanings of prayer, forgiveness, and experiences of God, and other activities, events, and experiences. Because theistic psychologists take account of this important theistic constraint on the meanings of these events and experiences, they ensure that the meanings are not “free-wheeling” (Helminiak, p. 43) or “ungrounded speculations” (p. 52). Instead, they maintain their grounding in context, which entails the constraints of God along with the many important constraints that naturalistic psychologists have studied.

Our own god attachment research is a good example of precisely this “constraint” approach. In it we take the constraints of childhood experiences with parents (a naturalistic research focus) as well as the constraints of the participants’ personal experiences of God (a theistic research focus) as constituent meanings in the whole of God attachment. These constraints are not arbitrary. They are important, if not necessary parts of the meaning whole. They also are not phenomena that “exist outside the perimeter of the person” (Freeman, p. 24). The person experiences their parents and God and reports those experiences to the psychological researcher. Whether the report is accurate to the experience at the time it occurred or to the reality of the “objects” involved (i.e., parents, God) is the concern of a subjectivity/objectivity dualist that cannot be fully resolved. But this is true of all psychological research that relies on self-reports. Researchers never have direct access to or control over all of the phenomena that constrain the meaning of an experience or event.

Perhaps, this is Freeman’s point: The meaning of an experience or event will always overflow our current interpretations of it because there are constraints upon that meaning that are not and maybe even cannot be directly studied and understood. If so, we are in agreement with Freeman’s point, but again, this is not a concern of a hermeneutic realism. A hermeneutic realism takes for granted that interpretations are reductions of meaning that do not and cannot capture all of the possible meanings involved. This is precisely why
we advocate a theistic approach to psychology that can illuminate meanings that a naturalistic psychology cannot. However, this is not a retreat on truth, as Hathaway suggests, or the relativism that concerns Helminiak. The meanings that are disclosed in naturalistic and theistic research do help to advance psychological knowledge. We have found, for example, that a person’s childhood experiences with parents and their personal experiences of God are both important, independent predictors of God attachment that account for a larger percentage of the variance in god attachment together than either one can do alone.

Hermeneutic Superiority?
In light of our discussion on meaning, we can better understand Snowdon’s questions about whether we are claiming the superiority of our hermeneutic approach to the conventional view or whether we are trying to take a “no-superiority view” (p. 40). In response to Snowdon we would first state that we agree with Johnson’s comment that although claims of superiority might be inevitable, they do not have to be unreflective and dogmatic. Johnson acknowledges a “totalizing tendency” (p. 32) in human beings, but he argues through the example of Christianity’s history that it is possible to become more aware of our own tendencies toward coercive discourse and develop a “growing non-totalizing flexibility” (p. 32) in its place. As we argued in our initial paper, we think the adherents of any worldview can and should reflect upon the untested presuppositions that inform their worldview, recognize the biases that ensue, and evaluate the implications of those biases on the relationship of that worldview to other worldviews. Thus, along with Johnson, we do not see the inevitability of superiority claims as necessarily entailing dogmatism about those claims. There are different ways to claim superiority, including tentative, reflective ways that Snowdon may not have considered when he raised this question.

The second point we would make about our perspective on superiority is that we do not advocate an abstract, once and for all worldview superiority. On the contrary, we believe the “non-totalizing flexibility” (p. 32) Johnson advocates is achieved only if worldviews and the phenomena they address are examined within the contexts in which they are situated. Indeed, as we argued throughout the initial article, the superiority of a given worldview in addressing any psychological phenomenon, hinges upon its ability to illuminate the constrained meaning of that phenomenon and advance psychological knowledge about it. Freeman summarized our position on this second point quite clearly, which is:

1) that ‘superiority’ can be bi-directional, 2) that it is not a superiority for all time but, as above, is contextually-specific, and 3) that the very positing of such superiority is dependent upon some reference to the particular phenomena being considered – acknowledging, once again, that these phenomena are always already suffused with the prejudices one inevitably brings to them (p. 25).

Thus, we reply to Snowdon’s question about whether we might accept a “no-superiority view” (p. 40) with a strong rejection of the abstract superiority view he is suggesting and a clear acceptance of a contextual superiority view, as outlined by Freeman and described in our initial article.

We believe a theistic approach to psychology may be superior to a naturalistic approach in illuminating certain features of some psychological phenomena, while a naturalistic approach may be superior in illuminating other features. Indeed, we think they can also be superior in illuminating aspects of the other worldview that are concealed from its own view. However, we will only know the extent to which a theistic or naturalistic approach is superior in this contextual sense if we allow both approaches the space and time to test their theories and critically examine their relationship to each other. Similarly, we will only know the strengths of critical hermeneutic realism as an alternative frame to the conventional view if we take a critically reflective, contextual approach to it. We did not introduce this hermeneutic frame as a dogmatic, abstract truth, but as one possible alternative to the conventional view. This alternative, like any view, needs ongoing critical reflection and careful examination of its assumptions and its implications for the relationship between a theistic approach to psychology and a naturalistic approach.

We see the articles in this issue as a crucial step in that reflective, relational evaluation.

Conclusion
We wrote our paper for this special issue to clear some conceptual space so that a fruitful and fair dialog about the prospect of a theistic approach to psychology could take place. This entailed removing some of the modernist debris that continues to occupy that conceptual space, such as the residues of positivism and the subjectivity/objectivity dualism that pervade psychology and facilitate the separation and hierarchical arrangement of worldviews. While we were pleased that several of the comments responded to our paper at that level of analysis, we were concerned that others wanted us to address other more advanced issues and themes that can only be addressed once the parameters of the dialog are adjusted to allow for an alternative framework of worldview relations to the conventional view. Without that adjustment, advocates of a theistic approach to psychology will have to answer to challenges and questions that are premature, if not unfairly biased toward the naturalistic worldview. A theistic approach to psychology will never get a fair hearing and the potential contributions of this approach to the advancement of psychological knowledge will never be realized.
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References


Notes

1 As a first step, Melling (2013) has organized a tentative taxonomy of several possible mechanisms of God’s action, as culled from theology, philosophy, and the natural sciences.

2 Given the readership of this journal, we thought it also apropos to use primarily Christian examples, bearing in mind that other major monotheistic religions have analogous scriptures and commentaries on the same topic.
Mother Teresa and Carl Jung: Reflections on the Experience of God

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The religious experiences of Mother Teresa as described in her posthumous spiritual autobiography are examined from a Jungian perspective. Her religious experiences are compared and contrasted with those of Jung, especially as related to the experience of the internality or externality of God. Mother Teresa experienced God as an external presence that spoke to her, Jung saw God as an internally located "psychic reality."

Keywords: spirituality, Mother Teresa, Jung, religion, visionary experiences

Mother Teresa, perhaps with John Paul II and the Dalai Lama, is one of the central religious figures of our time. Deeply spiritual and unquestionably and devoutly Catholic, Mother Teresa transcended religious and cultural barriers; her dignity and holiness are recognized throughout the world.

We have a unique window into the inner religious life of Mother Teresa through the private letters that she wrote to her confessors. They describe a woman of profound faith who spent much of her life in deep sadness, feeling separated from the God she so profoundly loved. She attempted to destroy these letters, demanded that her confessors return them to her. In their wisdom, her confessors recognized that her letters belonged not to her but to all of mankind. They leave a trail of faith and torment, a unique window into the inner life of a woman of profound faith (Mother Teresa, 2007).

Can Jungian theory help us understand the religious experiences of Mother Teresa? Jung described that he rarely dealt with individuals who were truly religious, and particularly with very few Catholics (Jung, 1967d, p. 334). Most of his patients were searchers, trying to find a path back to meaning and faith that had been lost to them. They were mostly individuals who no longer had faith; only a small minority was Catholic. Can Jung's profound insights shed light on the experiences of someone truly faithful?

To understand the religious experiences of Mother Teresa, we must begin before the beginning with the New Testament story from John’s Gospel about the “woman at the well.” Jesus was passing through a region near Galilee in Samaria. There he stopped at the sacred mountain site of Jacob’s well. A Samaritan woman was drawing water and he asked her for a drink. She reminded him that as Jew he should not be asking a Samaritan woman, considered ritually impure by the Jews, for a drink. He answers, “If only you recognized God’s gift and who it is that is asking you for a drink, you would have asked him instead and he would have given you living water” (John 4:10 New American Bible: St. Joseph Edition). The two banter about flowing and living water and Jesus insists that “whoever drinks the water I give him will never be thirsty; no, the water I give shall become a fountain within him” (John 4:14). Without chastising her, Jesus speaks to her about her adulterity. She is stunned and says, “Sir, I can see you are a prophet” (John 4:28). She leaves her water jar a changed woman, telling the people in her town, “Come and see someone who told me everything I ever did!” (Mother Teresa, 2007, p.15).

A sacred mountain, thirst, living water that quenches thirst eternally, a fountain within, secret sin and the perspicacity that sees hidden sin, confronts and accepts it. Those are the key elements of the story. The only other time in the Bible Christ was thirsty was when he was dying on the Cross and soldiers gave him vinegar to drink. This story was sacred to Therese of Lisieux, who kept it at her bedside. Because of the influence she felt from Therese of Lisieux, Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu chose the name Teresa when she became a nun.

Agnes, now named Teresa, received several spiritual calls. The first call was to dedicate her life fully to Jesus, to “drink the chalice to the last drop” (Mother Teresa, 2007, p. 29). Then she was called to serve the poorest of the poor. “It was on this day on the train to Darjeeling that I received the ‘call within a call’ to satiate the thirst of Jesus by serving him in the poorest of the poor” (Mother Teresa, 2007, p. 40). The mission of the Sisters of Charity to this day is “to satiate the thirst of Jesus Christ on the Cross for Love and Souls.” She wrote, “Jesus is God, His Love, His thirst is infinite. Our aim is to quench this infinite thirst…” (Mother Teresa, 2007, p. 41).
That same day Mother Teresa began to receive, in the words of her confessor, a series of “interior locutions.” Locutions are supernatural words, manifestations of God’s thoughts. She referred to this locution as “The Voice,” and heard it almost daily for over a year. She and this voice carried on an intimate and regular exchange. He addressed her as “My own spouse” or “my own little one.” She replied “my own Jesus.” He revealed his inmost thoughts to her; his love, his pain, his thirst. Their conversations were regular, joyful, intimate, and even practical as Jesus advised her over details for the establishment of the Sisters of Charity (Mother Teresa, 2007, pp. 44-45).

Then as suddenly as the locutions appeared, indeed, at the moment of the final triumph of the establishment of the new religious order, they disappeared. Decades of despair and spiritual “dryness” followed. “Pray ... for me ... that Our Lord may show Himself - for there is such a terrible darkness within, as if everything was dead” (Mother Teresa, 2007, p. 149). “If my suffering satiates your thirst - here I am Lord, with joy I accept all to the end of life ...” (Mother Teresa, 2007, p. 164). Despite her despair, our simple medical categories do not fit; she was not depressed. By any external measure she was cheerful and productive, to all around her she was a joy and an inspiration.

Decades later, in 1987, God spoke to her again, indirectly. While she was at a retreat, the priest from Rome who ran the retreat and knew nothing of Mother Teresa’s private life and pain received a message from God. He writes, “While I was saying Morning Prayer silently with my office book, I suddenly had a thought insinuated in my head – as if someone had spoken, silently with my office book, I suddenly had a thought – I didn’t hear it with my ears. But it seemed quite clear: ‘Tell Mother Teresa I thirst.’” Thrice the message was repeated, finally more as a command. Finally he handwrote a note to Mother Teresa, starting ‘you may think I am crazy” but then telling her the story. Mother Teresa found him and talked to him, asking only “What else did he say?” – nothing; and “what did he mean?” – I don’t know (Mother Teresa, 2007, p. 311).

Mother Teresa’s awe inspiring story leaves us with many questions. Why did God speak to her? Why did God stop? What is the full meaning of the thirst metaphor? For our purposes, what does the story of her life and experience of God teach us from a Jungian perspective?

Teresa was a devout Catholic. God was out there, he related to her as a person. The locution was his voice. The voice was very “real,” in the most matter of fact and everyday sense. For the Jungian, the voice would have been seen as real, but “psychically real.” For Mother Teresa, perhaps that distinction would have seemed strange, even incomprehensible.

Critics of Jung have suggested that he, despite his deep interest in religious matters and sensitivity to spiritual issues and his own protestations, articulates a psychological theory that is in fact, protestations notwithstanding, covertly reductionistic. Much in Jung’s writing justifies this reading. Jung’s understanding of God is clearly different than Mother Teresa’s. For Jung, God is within. He acknowledges that he is criticized as Gnostic, he writes of the essential “identity of God and man, either in the form of an a priori identity or of a goal to be attained” (Jung, 1967c, p. 5) He talks of what he supposed was the traditional religious view; namely, that God is outside of man, as a prejudice. Mother Teresa, a devout Catholic, likely would have none of such a view of God. Jung acknowledges the realistic danger of viewing “Christ within,” asserting that the Church instead insists on identification with the historical Christ whom “we have seen, heard, and touched with our hands” (Jung, 1967e, p. 293). According to Jung, the Church suppressed Gnosticism because of its dangers to a primitive consciousness that might identify too closely with the God within (Jung, 1967e, p. 293).

Religious views of the relationship between God and man are actually much more complex than Jung allows. Church Fathers like Augustine spoke poignantly of the intimacy of God in his transcendence. Jung argues against a straw man of God set apart from His creation, not Augustine’s God, who is “more inward than my most inward part” (Augustine, 1991, p.43).

Jung describes a progression of religious development, from the “primitive” mind that projects onto God natural forces that are misunderstood to the more traditionally religious like Mother Teresa, finally culminating in the highest form of development where God is understood to be a psychological phenomenon that is “within” rather than “without” (Jung, 1967a, p. 309). In this schema, Mother Teresa would be at a lower level than the religious and New Age dabblers so common in modern society. Very psychologically minded, such individuals might perhaps sample Hindu and Buddhist religious practices like yoga and meditation, feel the presence of a spirit guide that they have borrowed from Native American religion, recall past lives, and attend a non-sectarian mega-church on Sunday. But for such “advanced” individuals, religion is a arguably hobby that has little impact on their petulant, materialistic and self-centered lives; whereas for Mother Teresa religion really mattered. She could sacrifice her life to God because God was “real.”

Jung, of course, would never have identified himself with New Age religiosity, and had a profound respect for the power and sanctity of traditional religious experience. Yet his exclusive insistence on the internal and psychological experience of the spiritual can readily devolve into those former types of beliefs.

From Jung’s identification of God and man, it is a small step to a reductionistic stance. “Gods are personalizations of unconscious contents, for they reveal themselves to us through the unconscious activity of the psyche” (Jung, 1967b, p. 163). Yet again, “What is the
difference between a real illusion and a healing religious experience? It is merely a difference of words” (Jung, 1967c, p. 105). Here, Jung lapses into a curious and rather simplistic pragmatism. “No one can know what the ultimate things are. We must therefore take them as we experience them. And if such experience helps make life healthier, more beautiful … you may safely say: ‘This was by the grace of God’” (Jung, 1967c, p. 105).

When God is internal and psychological the playing field is flatter; it is difficult to discern God from what is simply a product of the imagination.

Then there is Jung’s repeated annoyance at those who struggled with the concept of “psychic truth.” “I am always coming up against the misunderstanding that a psychological treatment or explanation reduces God to ‘nothing but psychology.’ It is not a question of God at all, but of man’s idea of God” (Jung, 1967b, p. 163). His frustration seems defensive, as if he knew that he was repeatedly asked the question because something was lacking in his answer. Can you really believe in something that is not real, but just “psychically real?” Does a psychological formulation of a religious experience necessarily reduce and trivialize it? Jung would say no, but did he really mean it?

Philip Rieff (1987), in The Triumph of the Therapeutic, describes the reductionistic and antireligious elements of Jung’s “psychological religiosity.” In Rieff’s words, Jung in fact creates a meta-religion, revealed privately to himself alone, which he translates into a psychotherapy. “It is a meta-religion aiming at something beyond the criteria of true and false, or even good and evil. The ideal character type produced by it is neither mystic nor ascetic, but therapeutic – a person assessing even his own myth in terms of how much it contributes to his personal sense of well-being” (Rieff, 1987, pp. 113-114). Religious experience is internal, creeds are irrelevant, God speaks to each of us as he will. “Truth is a highly personal matter; better, then, name it more accurately: ‘psychic truth’” (Rieff, 1987, p. 137).

In Symbols of Transformation, Jung parenthetically offers the interesting story of the pious Abbé Oegger, borrowed from Anatole France (Jung, 1956, p. 30). Abbé Oegger obsessively mused on the story of Judas, wondering if Judas could truly be damned if he was a necessary instrument of God’s salvation. He prayed for a sign, and one night during prayer felt a tap on his shoulder that he took as a sign that Judas was saved. He was resolved to preach a Gospel of God’s unending mercy. But his conversion was short-lived and trivial; he had a different sense; they came from outside the ego but from the greater Self. As evidenced by his actions and the effect of the visions on his life they were real; he clearly believed in them, though he saw them as “psychically real” as opposed to Mother Teresa, who saw her experiences with God as real in the everyday sense. The experiences changed Jung’s life. Responding to the inner call, he left his post at the university. For three years he could not read or do any academic work. This visionary period concluded with a dream about a tree in the center of great light. Through this dream he came to understand that the self is the principle and archetype of orientation and meaning. Jung in his own life answers our questions about whether something that is viewed psychologically can remain powerful and numinous with a resounding ‘yes’. Like the woman at the well, he encounters a living stream, but a fiery one, “I hit upon this stream of lava, and the heart of its fires reshaped my life” (Jung, 1965, p.199).

Though for both the calls were very real, the answers were very different. Mother Teresa answers in the world, carries out God’s instructions to the letter in the face of lengthy delays and obstacles, builds an influential religious order and changes many lives through her acts of charity. Jung’s answer is inward, “Therefore my first response was to probe the depths of my own psyche” (Jung, 1965, p. 176).

The inwardness of Jung’s response can be troubling to the truly religious; it carries dangers, as Jung acknowledges, of inflation of the self. Mother Teresa’s response is of pure faith, “I will refuse him nothing.” Or, as in the example cited above, when the priest experienced God telling him to give Mother Teresa a message, she did not ask the many questions we might if looking inward, like why, why now, why you, what
did he mean, but rather, “What else did he say?” Mary’s response to the Annunciation is this purest example of this response of faith, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord.”

Teresa’s answer has its own dangers, her confessors and her superiors help her distinguish whether her call is a true one. The stability of her call, its constancy over time and through hardship, testifies to its divine origin. And Mother Teresa was a very special kind of saint; and a very modern one. She wasn’t some psychologically simple throwback to medieval times, who accepted her call without reservation or reflection. The bulk of her posthumous autobiography is concerned not with her call, but with the absence of a call, with decades of despair, darkness, thirst and spiritual dryness. “Our Lord thought it better for me to be in the tunnel – so He is gone again … Please ask Our Lady to keep me close to herself that I may not miss the way in the darkness.” Again,

“Lord, my God who am I that You should forsake me? … You have thrown me away as unwanted - unloved. I call, I cling, I want – and there is no One to answer – no One on Whom I can cling – no, No One. – Alone. The darkness is so dark - and I am alone. … So many unanswered questions live within me – I am afraid to uncover them – because of the blasphemy” (Mother Teresa, 2007, pp. 187-188). “What are You doing my God to one so small” (Mother Teresa, 2007, p. 196).

Perhaps part of the blasphemy is the Gnostic, Job-like concern that God is doing evil to one so small and lowly. Of her work she never doubts, like Jung she knows it is not hers, “it is His, not mine.” Late in life she comes to a certain dark peace, and comes to love the darkness she feels, and writes less and less of it. Knowing late in life that she will be suggested for canonization (the Catholic process of acknowledging sainthood) she writes, “If I ever become a saint – I will surely be one of ‘darkness.’ I will continually be absent from heaven – to light the light of those in darkness on earth” (Mother Teresa, 2007, p. 1). That is a very modern saint that understands the human condition in our era where the absence of faith is so keenly experienced.

Let us return again and finally to the image of the woman at the well. She needs Jesus; he has living water that will quench her thirst forever. Yet Jesus needs her; as she points out, he has no bucket, no rope, and the well is deep. They are at the site of Jacob’s well; where God in the past quenched the thirst of the one nearest and dearest to him, Jacob, the Father of his people. Figuratively, Jesus renews this well, makes it come alive again. With the Gnostic themes that are uniquely Johannine, Jesus calls the Samaritan woman to an internal worship. John calls forth the heretical idea that God can be worshipped within. “Believe me, woman, an hour is coming when you will when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.

… Authentic worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth …” (John 4:23). Christ, as reported by John, describes a kind of spiritual evolution; from the mountain to the Temple to the Spirit and Truth within.

The danger of placing the other totally within, risks the trivialization and personalization that Rieff (1987) describes. Jung scholars have struggled with this within/without conundrum. Ulanov (2000) offers a creative solution, suggesting that what is within is the God-image, not God. The God-image is that part of the psyche that communicates with God, a kind of one-way cell phone connection to heaven. That way we can keep God inside, but let him be outside as well. As Ulanov (2000) acknowledges, Jung himself might not have made that distinction.

Let us compare the response of Mother Teresa’s religious superiors and confessors to her visionary experiences to what we might imagine, in a thought experiment, to have been Jung’s. Imagine Jung meets Mother Teresa and she describes her religious experiences. He is fascinated, respectful. He acknowledges the numinous power of her vision. It is important and “psychically true” for her. He is like an intent tourist or anthropologist visiting a Greek Temple or Gothic cathedral. He is awestruck, fascinated; but he doesn’t really believe. Or more precisely, he believes that the God-image spoke that way to Teresa as part of her individuation, but might speak in a totally different way to him, and the two are not related in any way.

Mother Teresa’s confessors, in contrast, tried to judge if her visions were true in the ordinary sense. They bade her wait, to be sure that they were consistent over time and were not a temporary product of her imagination like the vision of Abbé Oegger. They examined if the visions were consistent with church teachings and the experiences of devout and respected individuals that preceded her. Then they believed, in the ordinary sense. The experience within was validated by what we know or think we know of the without.

On their most fundamental level the differences between a Jungian understanding of Mother Teresa’s experiences and a traditional Church view is a philosophical one. Jung concept of psychic reality eliminates any serious consideration of ontological issues. Epistemologically, Jung is in a lonely group of what we might call radical psychological empiricists. For Jung, we can only know what the psyche experiences. Unlike traditional empiricists, however, he includes in that category a whole range of phenomena that traditional empiricists would be loath to include because they are private and “subjective” – dreams, visions, active imagination. The Catholic Church, with its ancient traditions relatively untouched by modernism, disavows the skeptical empiricism embedded in Jungian theory. The Church insists on the ontological reality of God, and believes with certainty that we can come to know God’s will through faith and reason, enlightened by revelation and
tradition. These two philosophical stances are perhaps irreconcilable. We all struggle to know God, we all wait for his call, or like Mother Teresa, for his return. We all try to recognize the true call, and wonder how to answer it. The love of the divine that Mother Teresa and Jung share may, in the end, transcend their philosophical differences.

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**References**
Suicide and abortion rates in 26 European Christian countries were correlated with each other and with three happiness-related national variables. As expected, suicide rates and abortion rates correlated positively, and both correlated negatively with measures of happiness. It was maintained that both suicide and abortion are manifestations of Viktor Frankl’s concept of “existential vacuum” in the context of Christianity. A serendipitous finding was that national happiness correlated inversely with male but not with female suicide rate.

Keywords: abortion, suicide, Christianity, existential vacuum

The primary purpose of the present research was to correlate abortion rates and suicide rates in 26 European Christian countries. In both, there is the extinguishing of human life. Neither is thought of as a joyous occasion. There are laws that impose limits on and sometimes completely forbid both of these activities. Neither is ordinarily carried out in a public place, and ordinarily only one to a few persons is involved. Both can be precipitated by stressful circumstances. More relevant to the present study is that Christian religions have traditionally regarded both suicide and abortion as wrong. Although Europe is arguably more secular and most Europeans tend to attend church less regularly than in the United States, it appears reasonable to assume that they are aware to some degree of the teachings of their religious roots. Indeed, one could argue that European culture as a whole is underwritten in a complex and sophisticated way by the Judaeo-Christian tradition, and its pervasive if sometimes tacit influence is inescapable. The rich cultural heritage of the European countries reflects their past history of church and state being more intertwined than they are now. Even in the officially atheistic Soviet Union, there was Russian pride in the beautiful onion-domed Russian orthodox churches. London’s Westminster Abbey is both a major center of the Anglican religion and the major center of royal family functions, which are now primarily ceremonial.

A common issue in both abortion and suicide is that of depression. Research has demonstrated a high rate of depression in women who have had an abortion (Fergusson, Horwood, & Ridder, 2006; Pedersen, 2008). Although any possible cause-and-effect relationship may be unclear (Aavitsland, 2009), this is a matter with no immediate relevance to our research rationale. National level of depression is of greater concern in the present study. The relationship between depression and suicide is almost common knowledge. Virtually all clinically oriented books on suicide give depression as a major causal factor (e.g., Hawton & van Heeringen, 2000; Hendin, 1995; Berman, Jobes, & Silverman, 2006; Lester, 1992; Stillion & McDowell, 1996).

Angelo (2007) discussed the depression that parents feel when a premature infant dies or when a child is lost by miscarriage. She contended, however, that the emotional trauma is even worse with procured abortion. She maintained that:

“The death of a child by procured abortion is by far the most traumatic loss to grieve. The death is violent and untimely, the body is dismembered. For these parents there are no remains, no child to hold, no pictures to keep, no religious service, no grave to visit. Mothers and fathers of aborted children suffer their feelings of emptiness, grief, loss, and guilt in solitude—often not acknowledging them even to each other. Society offers them no validation for their overwhelming feelings (p. 49).”

Angelo’s vivid description of the negative emotions is compelling. She does not, however, provide research evidence. Such evidence regarding the relationship between abortion and depression does exist, but often the research design does not permit definitive inferences regarding abortion causing depression, depression causing abortion, or both being related to various other psychological and/or social variables. Nevertheless, the
positive association of depression and abortion is compelling. In 1992 an entire issue of *Journal of Social Issues* was devoted to abortion. Wilmoth (2002) concluded that there is no disagreement that some women experience post-abortion depression. Subsequent research supports such an inference. In one study, post-abortion depression was found in 34.3% of women who had surgical abortion and 22.8% in women who had medical abortion (Yilmaz, Kanat-Pektas, Kilic, & Gurlerman, 2010). Pederson (2008) reported that women who had an abortion in their 20’s were more likely to be depressed than control women. Fergusson, Horwood, and Riddel (2006) found that women with a history of abortion were more likely than control women to have mental health problems, including depression, anxiety, suicidal behavior, and substance abuse. These differences remained when controlling for confounding variables.

Although there were no studies directly correlating abortion and suicide rates located in the literature, the study of Pavolic (2004) is potentially relevant. He conceptualized both abortion and suicide rates as “premature deaths.” The purpose of his study was to compare suicide and homicide rates in Croatia with those in Hungary and Italy. The abortion rate was highest in Hungary, followed by Slovenia, Italy, and Croatia. Both the male and female suicide rates were highest in Hungary, followed by Slovenia, Croatia, and Italy. The authors, however, did not comment on this “incidental” finding.

Subjective well-being and two related concepts (happiness and life satisfaction) were reviewed by Inglehart, Foa, Peterson, and Welzel (2008). Happiness appears to be partly genetically determined (Lykken & Tellegen, 1996; Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005). Indeed, it has been suggested by some authors that happiness is biologically determined and fluctuates at a set point as a function of life events (Headey & Wearing, 1989; Larsen, 2000; Williams & Thompson, 1993). More relevant to the present study is research that has compared happiness-related variables between countries (Inglehart, 1990). Although per capita income is, in general, positively associated with reported happiness, some countries such as those in Latin America have higher happiness than would be expected on the basis of income. Other countries, such as the formerly Communist countries, have lower happiness than expected on the basis of income (Haller & Hadler, 2004). In fact, the Eastern European countries have a lower level of happiness than poor countries such as the Philippines and those in sub-Saharan Africa (Diener & Oishi, 2000). Inglehart et al. reported research showing that from 1981 to 2007 happiness rose in 45 of 52 countries. The authors maintained that happiness does not have a fixed set point. They claim, however, that economic development, democratization, and greater social tolerance have increased the extent to which people perceive that they have free choice.

Veenhoven (2005) provides a very broad historical, philosophical, sociological, and psychological perspective on happiness at a cultural level. He pointed to the positive view that modern society has a higher standard of living, with fewer dying of accidents and epidemics, and fewer social ills. The negative view includes the complaints that society is drifting away from human nature and could include such scholars as Karl Marx (1867), Emile Durkheim (2006), and Sigmund Freud (1930). Veenhoven presents data showing that years lived happily and healthily decreased during the agricultural period but became the highest and are still rising during the industrial era. Five years later Veenhoven (2010) continued to express the opinion that life is getting better, people are becoming happier, and people are living longer. He contended that modern society fits the innate human need for self-actualization, gives us more opportunity to choose, and promotes more self-understanding.

Veenhoven (2009) contended that there is no inherent conflict between the individual and society. He maintains that, to the contrary, the well-being of nations is a function of the well-being of individuals in nations. Veenhoven provided evidence to support the inference that years of happy life are related to the position of the nation in the world, the functioning of public institutions, national productivity, and the stability of the system. He maintained that modern society fits human nature fairly well and that happy citizens make a better society. He maintains that the well-being of citizens is positively associated with political stability, economic competitiveness, higher energy consumption, area per capita, life expectancy, government effectiveness, technological achievement, and voice and accountability. Well-being is inversely related to civil war, corruption, and government regulation.

Veenhoven (1993) argued that happiness is not an immutable trait. He acknowledges that there are modest genetic factors and personality and mental health factors influencing happiness. However, he presented evidence to show that happiness changes with unfavorable life events such as illness, disability, death of a loved one, or divorce. Societies change over time in average happiness and change is related to the conditions in those societies.

Diener, Suh, Lucas and Smith (1999) conducted a review on subjective well-being in the individual. Personality factors are relevant, and there is some genetic determination. There also appears to be an interaction between personality and environmental circumstances. Demographics and background factors associated with greater subjective well-being are higher income, good health, religious belief, religious activity, being married, job satisfaction, years of education, and higher intelligence. The literature provides a mixed picture on which sex has higher subjective well-being.
In contrast with research focusing positively on happiness, Viktor Frankl (1965, 1967, 1968), a Jewish psychiatrist who spent three years in a Nazi concentration camp, coined the term “existential vacuum” to refer to the void resulting from lack of meaning in life that could be experienced in various ways such as boredom, or frustration, or apathy, or distraction such as intense need to make money to temporarily block out the emptiness. Frankl maintained that “will-to-meaning” is uniquely human in that animals are not concerned with meaning. His “logotherapy”, practiced both in and after the concentration camp, is intended to increase will-to-meaning. This technique differs from traditional psychotherapy in its stress on meaning and purpose in life, and the conditions under which these are threatened. Within this framework, it would appear to follow that since both suicide and abortion are sinful from the Christian point of view and a repudiation of the goodness of life from the existential point of view, then both abortion and suicide would be likely to be associated with an existential vacuum.

Europe appeared to be an appropriate continent to investigate this since, within the Christian family, it has Catholic, Protestant, and Eastern Orthodox traditions. North America has only three countries, and it is possibly less religiously diverse. The continent and the country of Australia present a similar limited opportunity for analysis. South America traditionally has all Catholic countries. The Philippines is the only Christian (Catholic) country in Asia.

European societies are complex, pluralistic, and multi-faith. Freedom of religion exists in European countries as it does in the United States and Canada. The past history of church and state being intertwined enriched the cultures and is probably more visible in Europe. Even in the officially atheistic Soviet Union, the beautiful onion-domed Russian Orthodox churches continue to be part of the Russian culture. Westminster Abby in London is a center for both the Anglican religion and the Royal Family even though the latter now has a primarily symbolic function.

This research is in the context of the predominant Christian religions in Europe and their official positions that are opposed to abortion and suicide. Catholicism is the predominant religion in Belgium, Croatia, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia. Lutheranism is the predominant religion in Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Norway, and Sweden. The Eastern Orthodox religion is predominant in Belarus, Bulgaria, Romania, Russia, and the Ukraine. In Germany and Switzerland, there is no predominant religion. Germany is 33% Catholic and 34% Protestant, primarily Lutheran. Switzerland is 42% Catholic and 38% Protestant, primarily Calvinist and Lutheran. It is here parenthetically noted that denominational differences are not a focus of the present research.

The following are the hypotheses:

1. Abortion rate and suicide rate will correlate positively with each other.
2. Abortion rate will correlate negatively with Subjective Well-being and Life Satisfaction and Happiness ratings.
3. Suicide rate will correlate negatively with Subjective Well-being and Life Satisfaction and Happiness ratings.

Method

Suicide rates in suicides per 100,000 people per year in Europe were obtained from the World Health Organization (Wikipedia, 2008). Abortion rates were obtained from the United Nations World Abortion Policies (1999). The subjective well-being, happiness, and life satisfaction indices were obtained from Appendix A of Inglehart et al. (2008). The latest year was employed. Latest years ranged from 1999 to 2006.

The Inglehart et al. (2008) “Value Survey” has been used in interviews in scores of countries with an average sample size of 1400 respondents. Two variables were assessed. One was life satisfaction for which the respondents were asked how satisfied they were with their life as a whole and was scored from 1 (not at all satisfied) to 10 (very satisfied). The other variable was happiness, for which the respondents were given four choices: very happy (= 1), rather happy (= 2), not very happy (= 3), and not at all happy (= 4). It should be borne in mind that a higher happiness score means lower happiness. With such a scoring procedure, the Happiness measure is logically a measure of unhappiness. The scoring is therefore reversed in the present study. For a composite measure of subjective well-being, equal weight was given to life satisfaction and happiness (Subjective well-being = life satisfaction + 2.5 x happiness). The maximum possible score is 7.5. The Inglehart et al. study was longitudinal in which surveys were conducted at least up to 10 years apart. The present study used the most current years since they were presumably most relevant to the current circumstances. It is recognized that this resulted in the most recent year not always being the same. Methodological limitations, however, ordinarily attenuate rather than inflate correlations; so, the pattern of correlations in the present study was deemed to be meaningful.

Results

Table 1 contains for the 26 European Christian countries the means for abortion rate, male and female suicide rates, total suicide rate, Subject Well-Being, Happiness, and Life Satisfaction. It should be remembered that a lower happiness score indicates greater happiness. For the correlations contained in Table 2, the happiness scoring was reversed, however, so that high scores now signal high happiness in a more intuitive way.
Table 1
Abortion rates, suicide rates, and collective psychological scores in 26 European countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Abortions</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Subject Well-being</th>
<th>Happiness*</th>
<th>Life Satisfaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lithuania</td>
<td>34.4</td>
<td>70.1</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>40.2</td>
<td>-.23</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td>5.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belarus</td>
<td>67.5</td>
<td>63.3</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>35.1</td>
<td>-.93</td>
<td>2.31</td>
<td>4.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>68.5</td>
<td>61.6</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>34.3</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>2.24</td>
<td>6.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>34.7</td>
<td>44.9</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>27.7</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>5.69</td>
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<tr>
<td>Slovenia</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>37.9</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>2.18</td>
<td>2.03</td>
<td>7.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td>44.1</td>
<td>42.9</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>-.70</td>
<td>2.39</td>
<td>5.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>43.0</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
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<td>31.2</td>
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<td>-.77</td>
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<td>5.22</td>
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<tr>
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<td>35.5</td>
<td>7.3</td>
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<td>2.30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
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<td>31.7</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>20.3</td>
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<td>1.79</td>
<td>7.84</td>
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<tr>
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<td>30.2</td>
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<td>19.6</td>
<td>---</td>
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<td>---</td>
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<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>18.0</td>
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<td>1.75</td>
<td>6.91</td>
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<td>Switzerland</td>
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<td>11.4</td>
<td>3.91</td>
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<td>5.2</td>
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<td>1.75</td>
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<td>5.7</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td>2.04</td>
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</tr>
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<td>13.6</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>4.24</td>
<td>1.61</td>
<td>8.24</td>
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<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>19.7</td>
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<td>3.6</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>2.26</td>
<td>6.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>1.61</td>
<td>7.74</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td>51.3</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>-.77</td>
<td>2.40</td>
<td>5.22</td>
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<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
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<td>19.7</td>
<td>6.6</td>
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<td>2.68</td>
<td>1.91</td>
<td>7.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
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<td>21.5</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>-.33</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>5.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
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<td>15.8</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>7.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>4.12</td>
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<td>8.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>1.95</td>
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<tr>
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<td>11.4</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>6.89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The lower the score, the greater the happiness.
Table 2 displays the correlation coefficients of the happiness-related variables with the abortion and suicide rates. It is apparent that all of the well-being variables yielded fairly high correlations in the predicted direction with abortion. The happiness-related variables were essentially unrelated to female suicide rates but yielded moderate magnitude correlations for male suicide rates. For the correlations contained in Table 2, the Happiness scoring was reversed.

Table 2
Correlation of happiness-related variables with abortion and suicide rates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Abortion</th>
<th>Suicide</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>Females</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjective Well-being</td>
<td>-0.77***</td>
<td>-0.58**</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happiness</td>
<td>-0.77***</td>
<td>-0.48**</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life Satisfaction</td>
<td>-0.74***</td>
<td>-0.64***</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05          **p < .01          ***p < .001

Discussion
This discussion is in the context of the research purposes and findings. As hypothesized, national suicide rates and national abortion rates in European Christian countries were positively correlated. And these rates were inversely related to measures of satisfaction in life. Implications for Christianity are discussed.

The highest correlations were unquestionably between suicide rate and Subjective Well-Being, Happiness, and Life Satisfaction, which we subsume under the more general concept of “happiness-related variables.” Cause-and-effect relationships cannot be inferred with any degree of certainty. It is possible that the guilt and sorrow from human deaths permeates the psychological health of a society. Another possibility is that unhappiness leads to abortion (and to suicide, as well). In both abortion and suicide, life is regarded as not sufficiently worthwhile to preserve it. It is conceivable that there could be a vicious circle in which life-killing behavior and existential vacuum feed each other.

The correlations of societal happiness measures with abortion and suicide rates could be viewed as consistent with the position that these rates are associated with existential vacuum. Although Frankl frequently used the word “spiritual,” he apparently used it in a broad sense. He acknowledged the support that religion gives but he does not appear to espouse any particular religious doctrine. It would appear that he implied that the concepts of well-to-meaning and existential vacuum and his logotherapy are applicable to both the atheist and the practitioner of a monotheistic religion. It is here suggested that for some Christians existential vacuum may be associated with more distress than the non-believer because the Christian may have lost faith in God and hope for some sort of favorable life after death.

The zero-order correlations of female suicide rate with happiness-related variables were not expected. The substantial correlations with male but not female suicide rate are difficult to understand and confident generalizations are not warranted. Nevertheless, this could be related to the fact that an almost universal phenomenon is that females tend to score higher on the Templar (1970) Death Anxiety Scale (Templer et al., 2006). If males generally have a lower reported death anxiety, it would appear this greater societal-generated stress would be needed to push them above the suicide threshold. Previous literature provides support for such a perspective. Male suicide rates are more sensitive to economic downturns than female rates (Platt, 1992). Male suicides are more associated with holiday periods than are female suicide rates (Phillips & Wils, 1987).

A final integrative concept is that contained in Noys’ (2005) book, The Culture of Death. Noys rejects the contention of some that death is a taboo topic in modern Western society. He maintains that the media frequently cover the topic of death to an overwhelming extent. He referred to such occurrences as the millions who died in World War I, the encephalitis epidemic after that war that killed even more people, the Holocaust, the genocides in Cambodia and Rwanda, and the AIDS epidemic. In his chapter on bioethics, he lamented the growing power of doctors and dilemmas associated with new technological developments in medicine. The disagreement about the distinction between ordinary life support and extraordinary life support illustrates the complexity of the issues. The relevance of the culture of death to Christianity is that, although religions and religious leaders state their positions on abortion and suicide, decisions are made by a multitude of persons and institutions and forces that often overpower Christian positions. Doctors, hospital administrations, economic considerations, social values, and political influences have considerable power. The bottom line is that religion is only one of various factors that have impact on life and death decisions. The power of Christian religions and leaders varies from place to place, from time to time, and from circumstances to circumstances.
Conclusion
As predicted, European abortion rates and suicide rates were positively correlated with each other. The prediction was made on the basis of common elements. Both have been traditionally regarded as morally wrong by Christianity, are associated with depression, and may be not joyous occasions. As predicted, abortion and suicide rates were inversely related to three measures of happiness. It is here maintained that suicide and abortion are manifestations of the ultimate of existential vacuum. The present authors suggest, in an admittedly speculative fashion, that a vicious circle may exist in which existential vacuum may be an important background cause of suicide and abortion and which may intensify the existential vacuum.

The negative correlations of the happiness-related variables with abortion and suicide suggest that abortion and suicide rates could be viewed as barometers of the psychological health of a nation. More relevant to the present study is our suggestion that these two rates are barometers of the health of a nation’s Christianity. The association of abortion and suicide in Christian countries can be viewed as analogous to the field of medicine in which people in poor health ordinarily have more than one problem, e.g., e.g., kidney and cardiovascular disease.

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References


Christian Psychology: Book Reviews

Review of Smith (2012)

Naturalism and Our Knowledge of Reality: Testing Religious Truth-claims

Featured Review


Reviewed by Jason McMartin, Associate Professor of Theology, Rosemead School of Psychology and Talbot School of Theology, Biola University. He may be contacted at: jason.mcmartin@biola.edu

In recent decades, Christians and other thinkers have begun to chip away at the dominance of the naturalistic worldview within the Western academy. Given the prevalence of naturalism’s pernicious effects within the social sciences, laying bare its problematic assumptions is an important task for the development of Christian psychology. (“Naturalism” is here being used broadly as ontological physicalism: the affirmation that everything that exists is composed of physical stuff.) Scott Smith’s recent book, Naturalism and our Knowledge of Reality: Testing Religious Truth Claims, contributes to the ongoing assault against naturalism. Although other philosophers have developed arguments against the plausibility of naturalistic accounts of knowledge, Smith covers new ground by thoroughly evaluating several naturalistic models of knowledge acquisition. One way he illustrates their deficiencies is by considering the process of healing in therapeutic relationships.

As sometimes happens, Smith’s publisher has given the book a subtitle and has placed it in a series that may mislead potential readers concerning the content and aims of the book. Although the arguments advanced by Smith in the book are applicable to religious and moral knowledge, which he explores in the final chapter, most of the book shows the faults of various naturalist epistemologies. This means that the book is both broader and narrower than its subtitle might imply. Smith’s arguments concern the whole range of epistemological issues, and thus have applicability to every discipline, including religion and the social sciences. At the same time, the issues he treats are technical to semi-technical issues in epistemology and philosophy of mind. The book is primarily concerned with the intersection between epistemology and ontology of knowledge. Although some philosophy of religion appears in the final chapter, the book is not primarily oriented around religious issues. One result of this misdirection is that the broader philosophic audience who would benefit from the book will likely be missed.

For those who possess the requisite background, Smith’s discussion is very clear. The book would make an excellent supplementary text for upper level undergraduate or graduate courses in epistemology, for instance. However, Smith takes for granted many terms, concepts, and debates in the analytic epistemology literature. Those without the necessary background would still benefit by touching on select aspects of Smith’s work. In giving an overview of the content of the book, I’ll suggest two complementary strategies to make good use of the material by anyone approaching the book.

The first reading strategy covers the development of the argument of the book from beginning to end. Although the book appears to be arranged as discrete chapter long engagements with distinct thinkers or views, a dialectical thread runs throughout. For this reason, readers who wish to bypass the technical philosophical discussions may read the beginnings and particularly the ends of each of the chapters to trace the overall argument woven throughout the book.

The main argument of the book is that naturalism does not have adequate ontological resources to explain how we are able to have knowledge of the world as it is. Since we do know many things about the world, naturalism must be an inadequate worldview. Better explanations for our ability to know should be sought elsewhere; unsurprisingly, Smith suggests theism as a more plausible candidate.

Among the facets of our knowledge of the world that need explanation by naturalists is the regular and reliable match between our conscious experiences and the objects of the world. That match needs a causal connection. Further, our mental states have intentionality; that is, our beliefs and other kinds of mental states are of or about their objects and are directed toward them. We form concepts about the objects of experience and we check those concepts with their objects to discern their accuracy. Some of these components, such as a causal story and reliability, are easier to accommodate in a naturalist ontology. Intentionality, on the other
hand, seems to pose a greater problem. It is difficult to see how physical properties could ever be of or about anything. Likewise, concept acquisition and evaluation do not fit well with physicalist causal stories concerning the production of beliefs.

The first two chapters set up these components of knowledge needing attention from naturalists. Like other naturalists, D.M. Armstrong’s view surveyed in chapter one contends that perception is the result of a causal chain, perhaps traversing from the object through the relevant neural pathways and then into my consciousness. However, given that I can experience perceptions such as hallucinations that have not originated in an object, but are still caused, the causal chain theory of perception will not be able to explain how it is the case that we are able to distinguish between veridical and non-veridical instances by further investigation. A causal connection is necessary, therefore, but not sufficient for knowledge of the external world.

According to naturalists, the fundamental components of the world are physical. Usually, for them, mental states are then taken to be conceptualizations of brain states. Neural outputs are taken as experiences of external objects, even though the entirety of the process is physical. Chapter two on the views of Dretske, Tye, and Lycan considers two additional facets for which naturalist epistemologies must account given these parameters: 1) the means by which we form concepts in the first place and 2) the means by which we correct our concepts, e.g., introspection, which allows us to compare the concepts we have with their objects.

The trajectory toward seeing our conscious experiences as the conceptualization of physical states of the brain takes another step in the views of Searle, surveyed in chapter three. However, if all of our observations are relative to a conceptual scheme, it would seem that the naturalistic affirmation that everything is composed of physical stuff is undercut or not compelling. In chapter four, Smith contends that Papineau’s theory suffers from the same problem. If experiences are conceptualizations of brain states, then we do not have unmediated access to the objects of our experience. Making our conscious experiences conceptualizations of brain states puts us at some remove from reality even while perhaps intending to preserve our connection to it. Other thinkers Smith surveys are even more willing to dismiss our mental lives as illusory (Dennett – chp. 5) or as eliminable (the Churchlands – chp. 6) rather than bothering to take our consciousness seriously.

In various ways, many of the views surveyed in chapters two through seven fall prey to the objection discussed in chapter two and rehearsed in relation to the varying naturalist positions: if our mental lives are merely the conceptualization of our brain states, then we will not have the ability to form concepts or to compare our concepts with their objects. Worse still, all of the concepts favored by naturalists and used to bolster naturalism, such as “reliability,” “reductive materialism,” “everything is physical,” do not find a rational basis given the ontological commitments of naturalism. Those concepts cannot be formed, nor can they be compared with their objects, given a naturalist ontology.

A distinct, yet complementary, strategy for some readers would be to focus their attention on chapters eight, nine, and ten. A large section of chapter eight concerns two strategies naturalists might employ to avoid the problems that Smith has raised. The second of those approaches is simply to accept that we do not have access to the world as it is. Instead, all of our assertions about or perceptions of the world are conceptualizations or conceptualizations that cannot be compared with their objects for the sake of checking their accuracy. Smith notes that this is a move similar to that made by many postmodernists concerning knowledge. He gives thorough consideration to Nancy Murphy who embraces a kind of interpretation-universalism along with certain tenets of naturalism. Smith examines Murphy’s epistemological holism and its inspiration in MacIntyre, her philosophy of language, and her ontology. Ultimately, Smith contends, this view cannot deliver on all that it promises. For instance, if we are unable to know reality as it is, then we are also unable to compare rival views of the world and rationally adjudicate between them.

Smith does not use a purely negative critique of naturalism’s failed epistemology; in chapter nine, he develops a model for our ability to know reality using the ideas of Edmund Husserl particularly as those were developed by Dallas Willard. This theory dodges the problems besetting the various naturalistic alternatives considered in the earlier parts of the book. One implication of this ontology of knowledge is that the knowers cannot be merely physical (194); some kind of anthropological dualism provides a better explanation for our knowledge.

The final chapter carries through the implications of the previous chapters by contending that forms of methodological naturalism, such as scientism or empiricism, cannot be supported by a naturalistic ontology. “Having knowledge of reality requires the very kinds of entities that philosophical naturalism cannot admit into its ontology. Thus, it is utterly fruitless to tie science, or any other discipline or practice, to ontological naturalism” (200). Since we can and do gain knowledge of the world through empirical means, and since ontological naturalism cannot provide an adequate explanation of that truth, a different explanation must be sought. Smith suggests that an explanation that better accounts for the facts is that we have been designed to experience correspondence between our minds and the world.

Once the restriction of knowledge to science is shown to be untenable, additional domains such as religion and morality may be thought to provide knowledge. Smith shows how these two domains fit with his
Christian Psychology

A welcoming aspect of Smith's argument against naturalistic accounts of knowledge is the positive value that he shows that our knowledge has. Given the scope and quality of knowledge we may gain, Smith contends that the one who designed our ability to know reality “made us in such ways that go far beyond our mere needs to survive, but also thrive” (204). To illustrate that our knowing capacities have been designed for flourishing, Smith considers the kind of knowledge that is necessary for meaningful personal relationships, which is certainly an essential component for human flourishing (228-230).

Of particular importance for the development of Christian psychology, Smith uses examples explicitly related to the social sciences. Most poignantly, Smith uses his own experience of being helped by therapy to illustrate the inability to naturalism to ground the possibility of self-knowledge properly (229-230). Since naturalism struggles with accounting for the intentionality of awareness, it seems to preclude being able to pay attention to states of ourselves such as thoughts, desires, and emotions. If we cannot access our experiences and emotions directly, we will be unable to correct our conceptualizations of them through a healing process (47-48). Yet, these things are crucial for health and wholeness, and for healing in therapeutic relationships.

Both theoretically and practically, naturalism fails to account for the ordinary things we take ourselves to know and for our epistemic abilities. Certainly a naturalist may persist, and may make adjustments to the theory. Dennett, for example, contends that our conscious awareness is an illusion. It is difficult to see how one could live that view consistently, let alone flourish under such a counterintuitive restriction. Knowledge is much better than the naturalist can say!


Reviewed by Michael A. Strating, Master's Student in Adult Clinical Psychology, University of Windsor, ON, Canada. He may be contacted at: stratin@uwindsor.ca

How does my faith relate to and influence my daily work? This question is especially important for those of us who have been called to serve in helping professions. In working with deeply personal and spiritually-relevant content, counseling at all levels (be it lay or professional, Christian or non-Christian) is unavoidably and greatly influenced and directed by foundational worldview beliefs and assumptions (Richards, Rector, & Tjeltveit, 1999). So, the question remains, how do our Christian beliefs and theologies translate into our practice as counselors and how can we do this more effectively? These are the essential questions Holeman seeks to address in her book, *Theology for Better Counseling*.

Overview & Summary

Why is theology important in counseling? This is the first issue that Holeman addresses in the opening chapter. Clients often raise religiously explicit or implicit themes when addressing concerns in therapy (e.g., *What is the meaning of suffering? Who is God and how does He relate to me?*). Furthermore, when clients are faced with distressing life events they may be challenged to reconcile long-standing beliefs with contradictory life experiences (i.e. *theological disequilibrium*; p. 11) which may become areas of clinical focus. As such, theology is not only relevant and applicable, but can also be very valuable and informative in directing therapy. In light of concerns that therapists typically receive little (if any) formal training in theology and even less in its incorporation into clinical practice, Holeman, therefore, challenges therapists to be “as well-formed theologically as [they are] clinically”, especially since they are often left to work this out largely on their own. The remaining bulk of the chapter is then dedicated to outlining Holeman’s own theological commitments, surveying the current state of theological integration in Christian education programs, and introducing theology and theological reflection in terms of what it is, its role, and its purposes and prerequisites.

Chapter two outlines a theoretical framework, describing elements of theologically reflective counseling: what it looks like and what to look for. After a brief overview of the history of integration, Holeman describes ways therapists can prepare themselves to be theologically reflective counselors and how this plays into the process of therapy. A four-component model of counseling process – applicable across therapeutic modalities and specific theological propositions – is presented which involves: 1) attending to theological echoes, 2) addressing salient theological themes, 3) aligning areas of life to be more theologically congruent, and 4) attaining a deeper Christian character. After further elaboration on each of these components, themes that arise repeatedly throughout the remainder of the book related to hermeneutical and ethical considerations are introduced and addressed. Together, these first two chapters form the essential theoretical backbone for the remainder of the book.

Drawing from Wesleyan theology, psychological research, and clinical experience, Holeman dedicates the remaining five chapters of *Theology for Better Counseling* to the application of this framework using specific theological themes and ideas. Chapters focus on the following themes: the Trinity and common factors (Chapter
3), personal holiness and responsible living (Chapter 4), social holiness and social justice (Chapter 5), the atonement and forgiveness (Chapter 6), and eschatology and Christian hope (Chapter 7). Each chapter moves systematically from theological and theoretical foundations to general clinical implications that are interwoven with concrete applications to therapy using sample case illustrations.

**Personal Reflections for Christian Psychology**

I was particularly impressed with Holeman's skilful incorporation and use of a wide variety of resources throughout the book. Page after page she seamlessly integrates biblical text, significant theological and scientific references, and practical clinical examples. Supplemental notes are sprinkled throughout each chapter directing readers to useful resources for further reading and discussion. Chapter three is an excellent example of how she does this by bringing biblical and theological reflections on the nature of the Trinity together with empirical research on therapeutic common-factors to shape our understanding of counseling and the counseling relationship. The main thesis in this chapter is that how we relate to clients should resemble the holy love exhibited within and between the Persons of the Trinity. This has implications for counseling in, for example, how we define “self” not as autonomous and independent, but as “persons-in-relation” (p. 66); seeing ourselves as contributors and participants in relations that are marked by integrity, collaboration, and concern for others. There are significant elements of overlap with current scientific research on the therapeutic alliance and other common factors which provide additional avenues of investigation into new ways of understanding and working with clients. Throughout the chapter Holeman refers to a client named Cynthia, a particularly difficult client whom she came to see “as a child of God and a person of worth” (p. 63), in order to demonstrate how these principles have influenced her clinical work.

I think it is clear by now that this book is deeply practical, focused on the translation of theory (especially biblical theology) into practice. Although Holeman openly and frequently draws from Wesleyan theology in her approach, the emphasis is not on specific theological content and convictions per se, but rather on demonstrating how to put particular beliefs into action clinically. Furthermore, at times, she also points out ways in which her theological commitments may differ from those of other perspectives (e.g. Calvinists) and invites the reader to consider the subsequent implications for clinical practice. In this way, Holeman not only presents a conceptual framework for bringing theology into counseling, but she also presents herself as an example of how to do this actively, inviting the reader to do the same regardless of theoretical orientation (both theologically and clinically).

That being said, this book does not offer a comprehensive and systematic theological discourse on what the Bible teaches about counseling and how to counsel effectively. What it does offer, though, is an excellent model demonstrating the “how” of integration and what integration might look like in therapy. Many books on the topic of integrating psychology and Christianity focus on differences in theoretical approaches to integration, but what is often less clear are potential similarities and differences in ways in which two approaches actually appear in the therapy session itself (e.g. Are there techniques that A uses or uses differently that B does not and vice versa? What differences are there from the client’s perspective? etc.). By elaborating on the general meta-model using specific concepts and case illustrations, Holeman offers clues as to what theologically reflective counseling could look like in practice.

One recurring concept that I found particularly interesting and useful was W. Paul Jones’ “theological worlds”. This concept is introduced in Chapter 2 and provides a simple framework for characterizing and understanding how people conceptualize their “sense of self and spiritual need” (p. 49) in relation to their place in the world and experiences of personal dilemmas. This framework can allow for a better understanding of how the client sees the world and to orient therapists to helpful and harmful therapeutic directions. In Chapter 7 (p. 151), for example, Holeman identifies the fugitive (one of the five “theological worlds”) as particularly receptive to themes of forgiveness, repentance, and reconciliation since they see themselves as flawed, broken, powerless, and “wrecked with guilt” (p. 55). When the therapist recognizes this, it becomes clear that drawing the client into a better understanding of God’s forgiveness is a better course of action than emphasizing God’s justice and the need for spiritual transformation and holiness. Conversely, just the opposite may be true in the case of the fighter (p. 125). This is an excellent example of integration showing how a theologically-derived insight can directly inform counseling practice.

Having read *Theology for Better Counseling* I am left with two minor concerns. The first is that the book largely focuses on the relevance of theology in working with Christian clients, but little is said about working with non-Christian clients. Though there is undoubtedly more openness to bringing theology into therapy with Christian clients, I am curious as to the extent that theologically reflective counseling offers something of benefit for non-Christian clients as well. Holeman does provide some hints along the way and I think the notion of explicit and implicit theology likely plays a significant role in this regard. At several points she emphasizes that the key to theologically reflective counseling is not only about what we know (explicitly), but that this knowledge should also shape who we are (implicitly) and so, even without explicit theological discussion, we can (and should) always be reflections of
God’s love in our work with clients, be they Christian or not (p. 26). However, discussion of implications for counseling non-Christian clients seem to go little deeper than this and, as such, further elaboration in this area would have been appreciated.

My second area of concern is that the word “better” in _Theology for Better Counseling_ is left largely assumed or implied and any evidence that theologically reflective counseling is indeed better counseling is not explicitly addressed in the text. As a psychologist-in-training, I am curious as to whether or not theologically reflective counseling is indeed effective and whether or not it is equally effective across therapeutic orientations and various client factors such as religiosity and presenting problem(s). Furthermore, the introduction of common factors in the discussion may actually unintentionally undermine the importance of theologically reflective counseling since it highlights the relatively small proportion of client change attributed to elements of specific therapeutic theory and technique. Is theologically reflective counseling more than just another one of the many “delivery systems through which common factors work” (p. 70) and, if it is, what makes it unique (i.e. better)? That being said, I do suspect that there is merit to this approach and although theologically reflective counseling is unlikely to be a candidate for a thorough and systematic randomized-controlled study at some point in the near future, it is nevertheless an interesting question for future consideration.

In summary, as an aspiring psychologist with no formal training in theology, I found this book to be very useful. While knowledge of theology is important in itself, it also needs to shape who we are and what we do as Christians. This can be particularly challenging when therapists have little training in theology or its application in counseling. _Theology for Better Counseling_ not only calls us to think and counsel in theologically rich ways, but also shows us how we might begin to do this within the therapy room. This book is easy to read and provides an excellent outline of what it means to counsel Christianly. I expect that this will be a helpful resource for both students and experienced practitioners alike, regardless of prior formal training in theology, who are looking for practical ways of bringing theology into counseling.

**References**

**Invitation:** Readers of _Christian Psychology_ are invited to submit reviews of books that they have found stimulating and that fit into the discussion of Christian Psychology. Please contact the book review editor to explore this possibility. The book review editor of _Christian Psychology_ is Lydia Kim-van Daalen. Her email address is lydiakim.vd@gmail.com
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