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Christian Positive Psychology

CHRISTIAN PSYCHOLOGY

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Mark Yarhouse, Psy.D.
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AACC President: Tim Clinton

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CHRISTIAN PSYCHOLOGY

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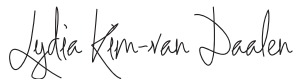
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Lydia Kim-van Daalen
Managing Editor,
Christian Psychology

Imperfectible: Why Positive Psychology Needs Original Sin¹

Charles H. Hackney

Briercrest College and Seminary

Philosophical anthropologies undergirding psychological descriptions of the human condition carry the potential for undesirable consequences, even if those consequences are unintended. I argue here that the positive psychology movement is characterized by an unbalanced anthropological optimism, and that this optimism carries the potential for harsh judgmentalism toward those who do not adequately flourish. Drawing from the basic literature in positive psychology, I show that the dominant ideology on display is one in which the possibility of innate badness is downplayed or entirely rejected, while innate goodness is upheld as fact. Drawing from the applied literature in positive psychology, I show that interventions designed to facilitate flourishing place an undue burden on the individual by downplaying environmental factors, and promoting the idea that anyone can flourish if they simply try hard enough. I further argue that a Christian view of human nature, seeing humans both as created fundamentally good, and as fallen and inherently bad, provides a needed corrective to the unbalanced optimism seen in the positive psychology literature. A Christian positive psychologist will anticipate chronic failure to live up to any ideal, will assume that flourishing requires considerable external assistance beyond the teaching of mental skills, and will live in awareness of solidarity with the broken and the transgressor, resulting in a more humane treatment of the insufficiently-virtuous.

Keywords: positive psychology, Christian psychology, human nature, optimism, sin

In this article, I will argue that the positive psychology movement is characterized by an unbalanced optimism in our presuppositions regarding human nature, and that this optimism carries the potential for harsh judgmentalism toward those who do not adequately flourish. I will further argue that a Christian view of human nature provides a needed corrective to this unbalanced optimism.

Positive Psychology and Its Critics

The positive psychology movement began in 1998, with Martin Seligman's tenure as President of the American Psychological Association. In his presidential address (Seligman, 1999), he argues that the field of psychology has become unbalanced, with most of our attention being directed toward the study and treatment of mental illness. Little space has remained for the study of life lived *well*, and we should bring psychology to a place of greater balance by including "the study of the conditions and processes that contribute to the flourishing and optimal functioning of people, groups, and institutions" (Gable & Haidt, 2005, p. 103) in our attempts to understand and influence the human condition. Since its inception, the positive psychology movement has shown itself to be one of contemporary psychology's great success stories, with the introduction of master's degrees (e.g., at the University of Pennsylvania) and doctoral programs

(e.g., at Claremont Graduate University) in positive psychology, research journals such as the *Journal of Positive Psychology*, and major venues of application such as the Positive Education Program at Geelong Grammar School (Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich, & Linkins, 2009) and the Comprehensive Soldier Fitness Program (Curnum, Matthews, & Seligman, 2011).

Positive psychology has also attracted its share of criticism. Much of this criticism has targeted the (often tacit) philosophical assumptions about humanity that guide major positive psychologists. Louise Sundararajan (2005) focuses on the claim, made by prominent positive psychologists, that we can study the good life while maintaining a pretense of neutrality regarding the good life. Woolfork and Wasserman (2005) consider it hypocritical even to label this form of psychology "positive" while claiming value neutrality. Christopher and Hickinbottom (2008) argue that positive psychologists have tacitly assumed Western individualism, with its "autonomous, bounded masterful self" (p. 568) and emphasis on subjective satisfaction, to be a universal and objective description of flourishing. Kristjánsson (2010) calls into question positive psychology's self-professed "Aristotelian" credentials (see Seligman, 2002; Jørgensen & Nafstad, 2004), as well as the reliance on individualistic assumptions and claims to value-neutrality.

In my earlier work, I have criticized Seligman for his attempts to employ neo-Aristotelian concepts such as *eudaimonia* and the virtues, but without a *telos*, or desired goal, for human cultivation (Hackney, 2007). As described by Alasdair MacIntyre (1984), the eudaimonist approach involves a description of humanity's current "untutored" state, a vision of the ideal form of human life, and an investigation of ways and means of moving from the current state toward the ideal state. By refusing to prescribe a teleological ideal, Seligman is attempting to be two-thirds of an Aristotelian, and this carries with it numerous conceptual problems. Here, I will continue my critical examination of the positive psychology movement by emphasizing the connections between conceptual problems and problematic practical outcomes. I will begin by drawing the reader's attention to a previous case, within moral philosophy, that shares certain key features with the modern positive psychology movement.

Optimism Can Lead to Judgmentalism

Like positive psychologists, the 4th-Century BC neo-Confucian philosopher Mencius was interested in human flourishing. Mencius is noted for his optimistic stance on basic human nature. He claimed that, since human nature is essentially good, growth in virtue will follow when one supplies the proper environmental conditions and removes environmental impediments, as illustrated in his story of a forest that is rendered a wasteland through mishandling (Mencius, 1960). The nature of the forest is to grow and thrive, so when we do not see the forest thriving, it is due to overharvesting and allowing cattle to trample young shoots, not to any inherent fault in the forest itself. Using Arthur Waley's (1939) translation of Mencius, "If rightly tended, no creature but thrives" (p. 85).

Unlike trees, however, some people fail to develop virtue, even when rightly tended. Mencius' handling of the insufficiently-virtuous is strikingly unsympathetic. He describes them as "cruel to themselves" (Mencius, 1960, p. 102) and in the end, "he is able to say only that such people are not worth the trouble to talk with because they lack respect for themselves or confidence in themselves" (Yearley, 1990, p. 93). Scholars of Mencian thought (e.g., Yearley, 1990) connect his harsh attitude toward those who fail to flourish to his optimistic stance toward basic human nature. If all one needs to flourish is the proper environmental conditions, and these environmental conditions are supplied, but the individual does not flourish, then the problem is that the individual in question is refusing to "get with the program."

I will argue here that much of applied positive psychology is vulnerable to the same problem as Mencius' moral philosophy. Some critics of the positive psychology movement have pointed to its potential for the unintended fostering of a callous and judg-

mental attitude toward those who do not adopt the prescribed mindset, what Barbara Held (2002) calls the "tyranny of the positive attitude." This tyranny, like the judgmentalism of Mencius, is grounded in an excessively-optimistic view of basic human nature, and this optimism can be seen in the writings of prominent members of the positive psychology movement. When leading scholars in positive psychology see human nature as fundamentally good, requiring only the proper tending to flourish, then those who apply positive psychology in practical settings will be tempted to draw the same conclusion as Mencius when presented with individuals who fail to live up to their expectations.

I will further argue that a Christian view of human nature, seeing humans both as created fundamentally good and as fallen and inherently corrupt, provides a needed corrective to the unbalanced optimism seen in some positive psychology. A Christian positive psychologist will therefore anticipate chronic failure to live up to any ideal, and will also live in an awareness of solidarity with the broken and the transgressor, resulting in a more humane treatment of the insufficiently-virtuous.

Philosophy Has Consequences

Philosophy has consequences. Steven Pinker (2002), for example, has criticized the so-called "blank slate," the philosophical notion that human nature has no predetermined form. This notion creates a portrayal of human life as infinitely-malleable. One problematic consequence of this that Pinker targets is the message directed to parents, by psychologists, that they bear almost total responsibility for their children's personality, mental health, and even intelligence. This places a tremendous burden on parents, with tremendous emotional consequences. As Pinker (2002) puts it: "The theory that parents can mold their children like clay has inflicted childrearing regimes on parents that are unnatural and sometimes cruel. It has distorted the choices faced by mothers as they try to balance their lives, and multiplied the anguish of parents whose children haven't turned out the way they hoped" (p. x). One particularly extreme example of this "blank slate" assumption within psychology is John Watson's (1928) book *Psychological Care of Infant and Child*, in which he dismisses genetic factors in child development as negligible, and argues that parents are almost 100% responsible for the way in which their children turn out. The burden that he places on contemporary parents is explicit, and his condemnation equally explicit. Watson accuses parents of universal incompetence, and dedicates his book: "To the first mother who brings up a happy child" (because apparently no-one yet has accomplished this).

For another example of problematic outcomes

flowing from philosophical assumptions, Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development is strongly influenced by his reading of such philosophers as Plato, Kant, and Rawls (Kohlberg, 1981), leading to a theory that emphasizes rationality and justice. One consequence of this historical and philosophical lineage is, according to Carol Gilligan (1982), not only a devaluation of the alternative Ethic of Care, but also a description of women as generally morally retarded due to, as Kohlberg (1984) explains it, lack of education and employment opportunities that would allow them to develop to a man's level.

Human Nature in Positive Psychology

As positive psychology is more of an "umbrella term" covering a diverse set of psychologists, rather than being a unified "school" of psychology, it is unsurprising that a review of the positive psychology literature reveals mixed messages about human nature. In addition, the overwhelming majority of positive psychology books and articles make no explicit statement about human nature at all. That being said, there are certain recurring themes when positive psychologists do discuss human nature, themes which speak to an unbalanced optimism in the anthropological presuppositions guiding the field.

The first commonly-encountered message is the more common and the more realistic. In this message, human nature is complex, with both good and bad aspects. If positive psychologists seem to be overly optimistic, it is only because mainstream psychology has been so thoroughly dominated by negativity that a strong positive message is needed to restore balance to the field. Sheldon and King (2001) argue that "psychologists should focus more attention on the positive aspects of human nature" (p. 217) rather than *only* examining the worst in people. Peterson and Park (2003) say that what they call "business-as-usual psychology," with its focus on the problems with humanity, is both important and necessary, and that an "evenhanded" positive psychologist would endorse a sophisticated view of humans as both good and bad. In his *Happiness Hypothesis*, Jonathan Haidt (2006) sees human nature as marked by internal struggles between (among other things) self-interest and sociality, with each carrying the potential for health or harm. Brown and Holt (2011) see the future of positive psychology to be an integration of our understanding of the darker and brighter sides of humanity into a coherent whole.

This balanced view of human nature is commendable, but it is encountered alongside views of human nature that veer more sharply toward the purely optimistic. This set of messages frames the "positive" and "negative" views of human nature as antagonistic rather than complementary, with the "negative" side portrayed as inferior. Seligman, in *Authentic*

Happiness (Seligman, 2002), caricatures pessimistic anthropologies as "the rotten-to-the-core dogma" (p. x), blames their existence on the unfortunate survival of the religious doctrine of original sin in the modern world, makes the bold claim that "there is not a shred of evidence that strength and virtue are derived from negative motivation" (p. xi), and declares that "if there is any doctrine this book seeks to overthrow, it is this one" (p. x). Ellen Berscheid (2003) blames psychology's emphasis on the negative on "popular assumptions" that human nature is "teeming with innate malignancies toward other humans" (p. 44), and argues that positive psychology's ability to understand humans depends on a willingness to jettison pessimistic views of human nature and embrace "the *fact* that, far from being born predisposed to be hostile toward other humans it appears that we are innately inclined to form strong, enduring, and harmonious attachments with others of the species" (p. 45, emphasis mine). Similarly, Dacher Keltner's contribution to the *Handbook of Positive Psychology* (Snyder & Lopez, 2005) includes a dismissal of pessimistic psychological theories as "just assumptions about human nature," and a claim that "positive psychology offers an alternative, *scientific* approach to human nature" (Snyder et al., 2005, p. 763, emphasis mine). Gable and Haidt (2005) present the same message, saying that "despite the philosophical, historical, and theoretical underpinnings that led to the current imbalance in psychology, we believe that there is little empirical justification for our predominantly negative view of human nature and the human condition" (p. 107). The consistent message here is that pessimism is the result of unscientific assumptions and premodern dogmas, while optimism comes from embracing modern scientific facts.

These strongly-optimistic psychologists do not wish to ignore the reality of dysfunction and evil, so where does the "badness" of humanity come from? Linley and Joseph (2004) articulate three possible views of human nature: that we are fully bad, that we are a mixture of bad and good, and that we are fully good. They dismiss the fully-bad view merely by citing *Authentic Happiness* as an authoritative description of what positive psychologists believe. The balanced view is then rejected by locating all evil "within the absence of facilitative social-environmental conditions, rather than as an inherent aspect of human nature *per se*" (Linley & Joseph, 2004, p. 718).

As an example of this rejection by positive psychologists of innate evil in favor of an environmental account, this view was evident during a debate between the creators of self-determination theory, which has strong connections to positive psychology (Sheldon & Ryan, 2011), and terror management theory. Pyszczynski, Greenberg, and Solomon (2000) praised self-determination theory's positive vision

of the human condition, but argued that undesirable phenomena such as prejudice and aggression are endemic to the human psyche, rather than the result of unsatisfied needs. Pyszczynski, Greenberg, and Solomon called for a balanced approach; a dialectical partnership between terror management theory (which excels at describing humanity's dark side) and self-determination theory (which excels at describing humanity's potential for growth and well-being). Ryan and Deci (2000), however, rejected the partnership, claiming that self-determination theory can fully account for the "darker sides of human behavior" in terms of "the undermining, alienating, and pathogenic effects of need thwarting contexts" (p. 319).

Three Examples of Positive Psychology in Practice

This view of a basically-good human nature that only requires the proper environmental conditions to flourish parallels Mencius' view of person-formation. If humans have an innate tendency to flourish given the proper conditions, then the key to flourishing is to provide the proper conditions. "If rightly tended, no creature but thrives." One important difference between Mencius and positive psychology is the question of what constitutes right tending. Mencius' formula for thriving was political; if rulers are sagacious, they will institute policies that provide the proper environmental conditions, and the people will flourish. The formula for thriving put forward by positive psychologists, however, has been guided by their more-individualistic presuppositions (Christopher & Hickinbottom, 2008; Kristjánsson, 2010), focusing on interventions that empower individuals to flourish, while deemphasizing efforts to reform environmental factors.

Examples of this can be seen in the recently-launched Comprehensive Soldier Fitness Program, which applies positive psychology to the U.S. Army (Casey, 2011). The Comprehensive Soldier Fitness Program is described as an example of "the relevance of contemporary psychological science to social issues at the macro level" (Cornum, Matthews, & Seligman, 2011, p. 8). However, the specific interventions developed to foster the flourishing of military personnel are entirely directed at the transformation of individuals through assessment and training, rather than any transformation of military policies, organizational structure, procedures, or cultural norms. As Becker and Marecek (2008) observe: "Positive psychologists conceive of flourishing as something determined by individual choice and attained by private, self-focused effort" (p. 1777). "Rightly tending" in this view involves the facilitation of that self-focused effort. When Seligman and colleagues (2009) describe a school-wide application of positive psychology, they explicitly endorse this individualistic approach by contrasting the general improvement in social conditions

over the past fifty years with the rise in depression over the same time span. They describe this as if it refutes the views of "those who believe that well-being comes from the environment" (p. 294), and use this apparent paradox to justify passing over reforms to the school system itself and focusing instead on teaching resilience skills to individual students.

As described earlier, Mencius' optimism ironically produced harsh judgmentalism directed at individuals. Does the applied positive psychology literature similarly put the burden on the individual to "get with the program" and thrive when provided the proper tending? Three examples will be considered.

Many churches have used the book *Living Your Strengths* (Winseman, Clifton, & Liesveld, 2003), based on the Gallup Organization's "Clifton StrengthsFinder" assessment tool, as a way to help congregants select ministries that are well-suited to them, identify methods for spiritual growth, and discover God's calling for their lives. Readers' top five strengths are identified and described, and they are given tips for ministries (It was suggested that I organize my church's library), career (I was encouraged to find a job with a religious organization), spiritual growth (A trip to Israel was recommended for me), and team-building (Apparently I need to partner with someone who can translate my ideas into concrete action). This approach is described by the authors as grounded in positive psychology research, and the connections between positive psychology and the Gallup Organization are detailed. The authors describe a "strengths-based congregation" as one in which individuals' talents are identified, and they are helped to find a ministry that is suited to them. Possible church-related troubles such as discomfort with particular ministry activities, lack of joy and satisfaction, failure of ministries, and boredom when studying the Bible, are explained as the result of individuals either not properly applying their strengths, or making the bigger mistake of attempting to correct their weaknesses.²

Shawn Achor's (2010) book is entitled *The Happiness Advantage: The Seven Principles of Positive Psychology that Fuel Success and Performance at Work*. Mr. Achor is the co-founder of the Institute of Applied Positive Research and one of the designers of Harvard's famous "Happiness Course." In *The Happiness Advantage*, happiness, defined as "a positive mood in the present and a positive outlook for the future" (p. 39), is said to fuel workplace achievement, increase efficiency and productivity, boost motivation, and increase creativity. The methods advocated by Achor have little to do with altering workplace conditions, and everything to do with placing the burden of responsibility on the individual employee. Seven "proven patterns" that foster happiness are prescribed (p. 17-18): (1) retraining our brains for positivity,

(2) changing our mindsets, (3) learning to look for opportunities, (4) coping with failure, (5) focusing on small goals first, (6) learning to make “small energy adjustments,” and (7) investing in our friends and families. Whether the problem is the high-stress atmosphere of Harvard University or the 2008 economic collapse, the solution is to teach individuals to apply the tools of positive psychology to themselves. This emphasis on the individual is so strong that Achor boasts that “even in the midst of their heavy workloads and the tyranny of impossible expectations, these hard-driving individuals were able to use the Happiness Advantage to reduce stress and achieve more in their academic and professional lives” (p. 22). And what if an employee remains unhappy at being faced with heavy workloads and the tyranny of impossible expectations? Achor states that “the competitive edge is available to *all who put in the effort*” (p. 31, emphasis mine). The answer is simple: if a worker is unhappy (and therefore unproductive and inefficient), it is because that worker has not put in the effort.

I would be remiss if I did not address Martin Seligman’s own contributions to the literature. In his recent book *Flourish*, Seligman (2011) begins with a nuanced view. He rejects the idea (which he ties to behaviourism) that changing the environment will cure all human unhappiness, and argues that large parts of our tendencies toward negative emotion are biologically-grounded. However, he then claims that positive psychological interventions can empower individuals to break through their set range of depression or anxiety or anger. He describes the gratitude visit, and promises the reader that “you will be happier and less depressed one month from now” (p. 31). If the reader has difficulty with the “what-went-well exercise,” Seligman promises success within six months if the reader will just “stick with it” (p. 34). “The real leverage you have for more achievement,” Seligman writes, “is more effort... The best news is that effort is very malleable. How much time you devote to a task comes from conscious choice—from free will” (p. 125). What saves *Flourish* from some of the criticism that I direct toward some other books is the relative modesty of Seligman’s definition of success. He describes applied positive psychology as teaching “the skills of well-being—of how to have *more* positive emotion, *more* meaning, *better* relationships, and *more* positive accomplishment” (Seligman, 2011, p. 63, emphases mine). Any improvement at all then counts as success.

I did examine other books on applied positive psychology for this project, but did not include them, because they did not address the possibility of failure at all (which itself supports my position).

Judgmentalism Toward the Insufficiently-Positive

If one accepts the idea that humans require only the

proper tending to flourish, failure to flourish cannot be blamed on those who have provided the proper tending. This creates the possibility of condemnation being directed toward those individuals who do not “get with the program.” Those who are still “negative” should have tried harder.

I do not argue here that the positive psychology movement is itself responsible for creating an atmosphere of judgmentalism against the insufficiently-positive. Rather, this atmosphere was already pervasive in North American society, and my argument is that positive psychology is vulnerable to becoming one more manifestation of it. Barbara Held (2002) briefly traces this emphasis on maintaining a positive attitude back to the American Revolution, and includes Alexis de Tocqueville’s mid-19th-Century analysis of American democracy. In that analysis, de Tocqueville (2000) connects the democratic belief in equality with a belief in the “Indefinite Perfectibility of Man,” along with a warning that this carries the potential for unrealistic optimism. In 1952, Norman Vincent Peale told children that “anyone who desires it, who wills, and who learns and applies the right formula may become a happy person” (p. 49), and that “people are defeated in life not because of lack of ability, but for lack of wholeheartedness. They do not wholeheartedly expect to succeed” (p. 86). In a particularly strong example of directing moral condemnation against the insufficiently-happy, radio talk-show host Dennis Prager announced on his website that “happiness is much more than a personal pursuit, it’s a moral obligation” (Prager, 2007), complete with a claim that unhappiness is a driving force behind communism, terrorism, and Nazis.

Currently, the bias against the negative can be powerfully seen in the corporate world, in which motivational speakers and coaches serve as the “ministers of the secular gospel of positive thinking, preaching that the one true sin is failing to believe in yourself” (McLemee, 2007), often with positive psychology invoked to lend scientific credibility to their pronouncements. One such “minister” is the successful business coach and motivational speaker J. P. Maroney, author of the provocatively-titled e-book *Negative People Suck!* (Maroney, 2011), in which he laments that one negative comment “can completely destroy and undermine everything” (p. 9), and encourages his readers to consider those who complain as being “like a virus” (p. 17) that should be immediately removed from one’s life. Individuals are encouraged to sever long-term relationships if the other person is insufficiently-positive. Managers are encouraged to fire “negative” employees. “Avoid them at all cost,” he says, “trust me, you’re better off without them” (p. 13). Rather than recognize the potential benefits of pessimism, Maroney upholds the standard American norm of optimism and moralizes against pessimists. As Julie

Norem (2001) explains it, “Everyone knows that ‘Real Americans’ are extraverted, upbeat, and optimistic. Because we count on others to adhere to these norms, pessimism violates our expectations” (p. 159) and those who fail to maintain an upbeat attitude are seen as transgressors. We are again reminded of Mencius, who dismissed those who refused to thrive as “not worth the trouble to talk with” (Yearley, 1990, p. 93).

Another popular area of application for positive psychology has been in health psychology, with numerous studies demonstrating connections between variables such as dispositional optimism and physical health outcomes (e.g., Rasmussen, Scheier, & Greenhouse, 2009). Lisa Aspinwall and Richard Tedeschi (2010) comment on what they called “the principal danger of popular versions of positive psychology” (p. 10): the sad potential for positive psychological research to fuel the tyranny of the positive attitude by blaming patients who fail to cure themselves through positive thinking. Watson, Homewood, Haviland, and Bliss (2005) published the results of a ten-year follow-up study of the relationship between psychological response and survival among breast cancer patients. The researchers found that what they called “fighting spirit” did not convey any significant survival advantage. Watson and colleagues expressed relief over this finding, noting that “it may help to remove any continuing feelings of guilt or sense of blame for breast cancer relapse from those women who worry because they cannot always maintain a fighting spirit or a positive attitude” (p. 1713).

Imperfectible Humans

My message for Christians in positive psychology is to resist this excessively optimistic anthropology, and frame our approach in a biblically-informed worldview (Hackney, 2007). In this approach, humans are described as neither entirely good, nor entirely evil, nor morally neutral, but as a dialectic of both tremendous goodness and tremendous evil (Entwistle & Moroney, 2011). In Stanley Grenz’s (1994) words, “We are a mixture of good and evil, of godly beauty and diabolical hideousness, of unlimited potential and of tragic failure. In theological terms, we are God’s good handiwork, but we have fallen into sin” (p. 181). One consequence of this view is that the Fall explains “why humans can conceive of aesthetic ideals but not create them, can long for a perfect world but not fashion one, can hope for genuine love but seldom express or experience it, can remember and anticipate Paradise yet sense it eluding us” (Ellens, 1989, p. 41). When Berscheid (2003) describes a fundamental conflict between seeing humans as either “teeming with innate malignancies toward other humans” or seeing humans as “eager to love other humans and to be loved by them” (p. 44), a Christian would respond that the reality is not “either-or,” it is “both-and.” The anthro-

logical optimist is correct to say that we are born with innate goodness and a disposition toward growth and thriving, which are often thwarted by malignant environmental conditions (another result of the Fall). But the anthropological pessimist is also correct to say that we are (post-Fall) born with innate badness and a disposition toward disintegrity and failure, even in the presence of nutritive environmental conditions.

This situation is endemic to the human condition. The doctrine of “original sin” is the claim that humans are, from birth, characterized by “attitudes, orientations, propensities and tendencies which are contrary to God’s law, incompatible with his holiness, and found in all people, in all areas of their lives” (Blocher, 1997, p.18). We are predisposed both to fall short of the harmony (*shalom*) that God established for the flourishing and wholeness of creation, and to resist divine restoration of harmony (Plantinga, 1995), leaving us chronically mis-oriented in our motivations and prone to failure in our attempts to attain moral goals (Delkeskamp-Hayes, 2007). We are “estranged from God in all our powers, indisposed to do what is right in God’s sight, and deeply inclined to do what is wrong” (Shuster, 2004, p.160), and we are incapable of eliminating this tendency under our own power.

Our fallenness has psychological consequences. The brokenness and incompleteness that characterizes the human condition results in deficits in our cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions (Yarhouse, 2005). Further, the broken self can never save itself, and a broken self cannot be saved by another broken self, even if that other broken self is a trained therapist (Watson, Morris, Loy, & Hamrick, 2007), leading some Christian psychologists to call for a greater emphasis on God’s grace in the therapeutic process (Sisemore et al., 2011).

What does this theological anthropology mean specifically for positive psychology? Ideas about human nature will profoundly influence theories of how flourishing is to be achieved. To return again to neo-Confucian thought, the optimism of Mencius is often contrasted with the more pessimistic philosophy of his successor Xunzi. Xunzi believed that human nature is basically bad, that is, destructively short-sighted and selfish. In his analysis of the moral philosophies of Xunzi and Augustine, Aaron Stalnaker (2006) describes the implications of a belief in human fallenness: “it is inadequate to focus only on ‘prosocial’ human impulses without careful attention to what might be called the ‘antisocial’ side of humans... For beings like us, the cultivation of virtue requires the restraint and redirection of certain impulses, as well as the cultivation of others” (p. 20). The adoption of this perspective by positive psychologists would involve developing theories and practices of flourishing that emphasize identifying and combatting human evil, in addition to cultivating character strengths and

virtues (Hackney, 2010) as essential elements of a life well-lived.

Another implication that Stalnaker (2006) points out is that both Augustine and Xunzi are pessimistic about the degree to which flourishing is available to all who want it. Xunzi believed that “sagehood” can be achieved only by a tiny number of people, and only after years of intense struggle, while Augustine believed that “no one will be free of uncertainty and internal conflict until the resurrection” (p. 257). Augustine’s view is carried through into the recent work of Ellen Charry (2010), who says that “only death ends the lifelong struggle to sustain a blessed life” (p. 55) making “authentic happiness” an eschatological concept. “Although actualizing ourselves in God and advancing creation for his enjoyment of its flourishing is our perfect end in this life, the tragic character of human life means that such growth can never be more than fitful... Enjoying God in the beauty of holiness is possible in this life, but it cannot be complete. Happiness can only be perfected when we are no longer able to fall short of loving as we would” (Charry, 2010, p. 276). We can be relatively happy and do well in this life, but incompletely, and even this-worldly happiness is tainted unless there is hope beyond this life. Lapsley’s (2012) examination of the way in which the Old Testament (specifically Isaiah) presents The Good Life includes both this-worldly (secure home life, stable community, good food) and other-worldly (hope for a positive future after death) elements. Not everyone will be able to enjoy all such elements, due both to one’s own sinfulness and to events outside one’s control (unhealthy relationships with parents, injustice in the community, economic deprivation, etc). What Aristotle chalked up to the “moral luck” needed to enjoy The Good Life, the authors of the Old Testament attribute to gifts from God (MacDonald, 2012).

Further, the anthropological pessimist will see flourishing in this life as only possible through the intervention of an outside power.³ For Augustine (Stalnaker, 2006), for Aquinas (Yearley, 1990), and in current Christian thought on sanctification (Gundry, 1987), the process of closing the gap between what we are and what we should be must be thought of as just as much a work of the Holy Spirit as a work of responsible human participation. In my recent article on sanctification and positive psychology (Hackney, 2010), I explore some of the implications of this dual truth for positive psychologists. Titus (2012) discusses the inseparability of grace from effort from a Thomistic perspective, emphasizing the development of virtuous dispositions, supported and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Scholarship such as this has the potential to undo some of the downsides that come with telling people that happiness is theirs for the taking, if only they will put in the effort (with the implication that, if they are not sufficiently happy, it is only due to

lack of effort).

The doctrine of original sin, as Miroslav Volf (1996) points out, is antagonistic to the optimistic belief in unlimited progress that is characteristic of our age, which may be why it continues to strike many critics as unacceptably pessimistic. There is, however, a great benefit in believing that humanity contains an ineliminable (pre-eschaton) brokenness. That benefit is that believing humans to be incapable of perfection under our own power creates an anticipation of chronic failure to live up to the ideal. While the anticipation of chronic failure might not sound very much like a benefit, it carries with it a message of freedom. As Walter Wink (1992) puts it, “the doctrine of the Fall frees us from delusions about the perfectibility of ourselves and our institutions and from the diabolical belief that we are responsible for everything that happens” (p. 71). This freedom does not make us passive, we still employ whatever means are available to us, including applied positive psychology, to improve the human condition. What it does do is create a modesty in our expectations, which Wink considers an “enormous relief” from the anxiety that accompanies “dreams of perfection” (p. 72). In his *Systematic Theology*, Wolfhart Pannenberg (1994) points to the “antimoralistic function” of the doctrine of the universality of sin. Universal fallenness frees us from self-destructive feelings of false guilt, and requires us to accept solidarity with evildoers, rather than dismiss them.

These conceptual claims have been borne out in empirical research concerning the effects of sin-related beliefs. Orthodox beliefs about sin and grace have been found to be associated with increased social sensitivity and less depression (Watson, Morris, & Hood, 1988a), less hopelessness (Watson, Morris, & Hood, 1988b), less anxiety (Watson, Morris, & Hood, 1988c), and greater empathy (Watson, Morris, & Hood, 1989). Watson, Morris, Loy, Hamrick, and Grizzle (2007) specifically targeted the antimoralistic function of orthodox Christian teachings about sin by including a “Perfectionism Avoidance” subscale in their Beliefs about Sin Scales. Participants’ beliefs that the doctrine of sin frees them from delusions of perfectibility were positively associated with belief in the importance of self-improvement, and positively associated with self-esteem, but negatively associated with narcissism and depression.

Returning to our considerations of the application of positive psychology to the workplace and to cancer patients, a belief in imperfectibility goes a long way toward avoiding the tyranny and unwarranted guilt that can accompany excessive anthropological optimism. Adding a distinctively-Christian voice to the ongoing psychological discussion regarding human flourishing makes that discussion richer, more sophisticated, and also more humane.

Charles H. Hackney, Ph.D., received his Ph.D. in Social/Personality Psychology in 2003 from the State University of New York at Albany. He currently serves as Chair of the Psychology Department at Briarcrest College and Seminary, where his areas of research specialization include terror management theory, the psychology of religion, the positive psychology movement, and the psychology of the martial arts. He is the author of the book *Martial Virtues* (Tuttle, 2010), and co-host of the recently-launched *Book of Nature Podcast*. He can be contacted at chackney@briarcrest.ca.

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Notes

¹ An earlier version of this manuscript was presented at the Biennial Conference of the Society for Christian Psychology, October 20, 2012, Virginia Beach, VA.

² The most central element missing from this approach to church growth and spiritual formation is God. According to *Living Your Strengths*, the early Church grew and succeeded because the first-century Christians were enthusiastic, authentic, and maximized their talents.

³ It should be pointed out that our finitude and reliance upon God for our flourishing are not in themselves results of the Fall, but essential aspects of our created nature. My primary meaning here is to emphasize Christianity's anti-Pelagian stance on the possibility of saving ourselves from our "wrongness" through self-directed effort.

Commentaries on Charles H. Hackney's "Imperfectible"

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 Charles H. Hackney's "Imperfectible."

Optimism versus Pessimism: a False Choice

Ellen T. Charry

Princeton Theological Seminary

The argument of Charles Hackney's essay is that positive psychology sets up harshly high standards for human flourishing by placing all the responsibility on the one seeking it rather than depending on God as Christianity commends. Guidance and practice in cultivating a variety of character strengths and virtues to improve personal functioning and enable one to navigate the world better seems to be Pelagian from Hackney's theological perspective, although he does not use that word. Hackney's concern is that on the secular view, if one fails to flourish (however flourishing be determined), one has only oneself to blame. In essence, the criticism of this new school of psychology is that it is pastorally cruel and that Christianity, with its insistence on the inevitably fallen and corrupt vision of every human person, is more humane. Although not stated in so many words, the author's assumption seems to be that God is responsible for flourishing if it happens, so that the individual need not make any effort on his or her own behalf.

On the face of it, it is rather odd to claim that teaching people perhaps even from an early age, that they are evil, bad and helpless is humane rather than psychologically dangerous. Such a self-concept can cultivate despair, even self-hatred as a trope of life as the rhetoric of Christian spirituality sometimes has. Somehow the idea that one is to feel bad about oneself and consider oneself to be helpless is deemed to be more encouraging than teaching people that they can improve their lives if they tend themselves well. Hackney poses a false choice, since there is a grain of truth in both positions, if not taken to the extremes as he does. Everyone has strengths and weaknesses, and tending one's life in a self-reflective and morally attuned way will aim at maximizing strengths and recognizing weaknesses in order to moderate them. Perhaps more to the point, from a theologian's perspective this is not a fair reading of the Christian theological tradition stemming from Augustine. More on that below.

While it may be appropriate to suggest that

positive psychology might be enriched by recognizing how experiences of failure, recognizing one's limits, and appreciating the power of negative emotions can strengthen one toward a flourishing life, Hackney's radical binary, either optimism about human nature (psychology) or pessimism about it (Hackney's rendition of Augustinianism), is a blunt instrument. Few psychologists will be able to "hear" the criticism stated so starkly while like-minded evangelicals will not be stimulated to think carefully about the possible negative implications of the doctrine of sin to which positive psychology objects.

On the face of it, this is a strange argument and the unnuanced terms in which it is put forward only compound the awkwardness of this overly stark differentiation between optimism and pessimism about human nature. Indeed a concept of "human nature" as an abstraction that applies to all human beings, does not really exist in secular psychology. Yet human nature is assumed to be simplistically categorizable as either all good, both good and bad, or all bad. In fact, the very notion of attempting to categorize all persons in such essentialist terms is fraught with difficulty. Hackney helpfully refers to environmental factors that surely contribute to well-being that positive psychology fails to appreciate, but he might have discussed specifics; how genetics, temperament, individual variation, gender, social stability, familial arrangements, parenting styles, education, cultural, economic and class factors, health, wealth and safety interact in enabling people to navigate life well or badly would be helpful.

Instead we have an essentialized notion of "optimism" encouraged by positive psychology pitted against Augustinian "pessimism" based on the Western doctrine of sin as he reads it. The essay notes positions that pose a balanced characterization that honors both views, although when initially presented (p. 7) it does not embrace this as the Christian position that Hackney prefers. Yet, by the end of the essay, that turns out to be precisely the strength of the Christian position, agilely balanced between created goodness and fallen brokenness from which there seems to be no repair. Even within that more balanced position there is no discussion of how "goodness" and "badness" are to be

managed within a person's life.

The choice offered is between “do it yourself happiness” that perhaps offers overly optimistic results and a rather undeveloped view of virtue—although for some reason eudaimonism is eschewed—powered by the Holy Spirit. It is a false choice. Interestingly, the essay lacks a discussion of the role of Christ in enabling godly and emotionally healthy living. That could be the middle way that the tradition, even in its more hyperbolic moments, wants to find between original justice and fallenness.

Hackney comes by the unremitting essentialism here honestly. It is characteristic of Western Christian theological psychology more generally that derives from a flattening out of Augustine's debate with Pelagius about freedom of the will to do good apart from divine grace. While Augustine won the argument in principle, in reality the situation has been far more complex. An argument against it, and this holds for Hackney's position as well, is that denying the value of human effort—in this case learning skills and cultivating attitudes that enable us to function better—is that it relieves people of moral responsibility for their own lives. If we are no more than helpless victims of our badness why should anyone attempt to live a morally good life?

In fact, the mature Augustinian position that Hackney wants to forward is more nuanced than he lets on. Sin, for Augustine, is loving badly, either the wrong things (our own honor, for example) or the right things too much (material well-being) or too little (God). He posits the brilliant notion of the divided self, echoing Romans 7. Failure to live up to the best that is in us is a tragic flaw affecting everyone. In general, his position is that we are bad lovers of good things and good lovers of bad things, not that our loves are bad in and of themselves. The basic idea underlying Augustine's position is that after the fall we love badly; it is not that we cannot be or do good but that our attempts to please God by being or doing good do not earn divine favor. Divine grace is needed to recover the ability to love well. It is a free gift that the sacraments and Christian nurture help us to use adroitly for our own well-being and that of others. The Christian journey is about schooling the self to love well by loving God first and modeling all lesser loves on that strength. Learning to love well is a skill that Augustine believed Christians can develop when guided by grace and instructed by the Church.

An interesting point missing from the article is that many of the character strengths and virtues that positive psychology now commends and seeks to cultivate through various exercises are deeply embedded in Christian moral thought: Wisdom (prudence), perseverance, honesty, love, generosity, compassion, forgiveness, mercy, humility, modesty, hope, gratitude, awe, and faith all come from classical Western philoso-

phy and theology {Peterson, 2004 #3566}.

The author is making an important criticism of positive psychology with which I am sympathetic. This young field, struggling to be seen as scientific, has not made room for the constructive power of negative emotions and experiences as **additional** resources for cultivating a constructive direction for one's own well-being and that of others. It would enable the argument to be better heard if Hackney were to admit that the position against which he argues is an understandable, if overstated, corrective to some uses of the Christian doctrine of sin that have been applied recklessly, rendering Christianity pastorally harmful to sensitive Christians who have been taught that they are invariably evil, naturally bad, self-seeking, powerless to do good and whatever other terms have been used to preach a distortion of Augustine's insight that human love is often twisted and that we are divided against ourselves in dealing with it to our own detriment and that of others. In a word, the retort to positive psychology would be strengthened by taking a self-critical rather than a polemical approach to the important philosophical questions at hand, for that would render the interchange between theology and positive psychology both realistic and helpful.

Ellen T. Charry is the Margaret W. Harmon professor of theology at Princeton Theological Seminary. Her primary research interests are in the Christian life with special attention to the conversation between theology and psychology on human flourishing and in interfaith dialogue among Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Her theological commentary on Psalms 1-50, *Sighs and Songs of Israel* will be released October 2015 from Brazos Press. She can be contacted at: Ellen Charry, Dep. of theology, Princeton Theological Seminary, P.O. Box 821, Princeton, NJ 08542, or at ellen.charry@ptsem.edu.

Why a Positive Psychology of Gratitude Needs Original Sin

Robert A. Emmons

University of California, Davis

“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 1:21, New International Version)

Occasionally concepts that are central to the Christian faith are embraced more widely. Gratitude is one of those. Regardless of one's worldview, faith tradition, or philosophical leaning, gratitude is much admired. A smattering of quotes reveals the power and potential of this virtue: “Whatever you are in search of—peace of mind, prosperity, health, love—it is waiting for you if only you are willing to receive it

with an open and grateful heart" (Breathnach, 1995). Elsewhere the same author refers to gratitude as "the most passionate transformative force in the cosmos" (p. 2). Another popular treatment of the topic refers to it as "one of the most empowering, healing, dynamic instruments of consciousness vital to demonstrating the life experiences one desires" (Richelieu, 1996). Lock and key metaphors are especially common; gratitude has been referred to as "the key that opens all doors" that which "unlocks the fullness of life," and the "key to abundance, prosperity, and fulfillment" (Emmons & Hill, 2001, Hay, 1996). The potential and promise revealed in these quotes runs the risk of sliding loosely into a conceptualization of gratitude which is uncritical and naively construed. Hackney's arguments, when applied to the positive psychology of gratitude, provide a welcome corrective to the Pollyannish bias that prevails in the current gratitude revival that appears to be growing in this nation (Greater Good Science Center, 2014).

On the one hand, the science of gratitude has revealed that this virtue is foundational to well-being and mental health throughout the life span. From childhood to old age, accumulating evidence documents the wide array of psychological, physical, and relational benefits associated with gratitude. In the past few years, there has been a tremendous increase in the accumulation of scientific evidence showing the contribution of gratitude to psychological and social well-being. Clinical trials indicate that the practice of gratitude can have dramatic and lasting positive effects in a person's life. It can lower blood pressure, improve immune function, promote happiness and well-being, and spur acts of helpfulness, generosity, and cooperation. Additionally, gratitude reduces lifetime risk for depression, anxiety, and substance abuse disorders (Emmons, 2007, 2013; Emmons & McCullough, 2008)

On the other hand, simply focusing on gratitude's benefits downplays both the reality of and the perils of ingratitude and other obstacles that prevent gratitude from flourishing. A focus on fanning the flames of graced gratitude tells only half the story. We must also be aware of the forces that encourage disgraced ingratitude, as Paul's epigraph in Roman's that I opened with alludes. A grateful approach to life is neither automatic nor inevitable. Gratitude requires thinking about the other and acknowledging one's dependence on the other. From the perspective of original sin, it is simply more natural to think about oneself and miss the mark when it comes to giving credit to others for all the good we experience. All too often we wish to maintain an illusion of independence. We want to take sole credit for our success. We live in a nation where everyone is on the pursuit of happiness. Each individual has his or her own path this journey takes. For some, the search begins in books; for others it comes through service. And perhaps the most popular form of seeking happi-

ness is through the accumulation of "things." Materialism, though, is bought at a cost. A society that feels entitled to what it receives does not adequately express gratitude. Seen through the lens of buying and selling, relationships as well as things are viewed as disposable, and gratitude cannot survive this materialistic onslaught. The lack of gratitude is contagious, and is passed from one generation to the next. Ingratitude is both the failure to acknowledge receipt of a favor and refusing to return or repay the favor. Just as gratitude is the queen of the virtues, ingratitude is the king of the vices. People who are incapable of or unwilling to acknowledge benefits that others have conferred upon them are highly scorned in most traditional conceptions of human social life.

Given its magnetic appeal, it is a wonder that gratitude might be rejected. Yet it is. If we fail to choose it, by default we choose ingratitude. Millions make this choice every day. Why? Provision, whether supernatural or natural, becomes so commonplace that it is easily taken for granted. We believe the universe owes us a living. We do not want to be beholden. Losing sight of protection, favors, benefits and blessings renders a person spiritually and morally bankrupt. In the words of our 16th President: "We have grown in numbers, wealth and power as no other nation ever has grown; but we have forgotten God! We have forgotten the gracious Hand which preserved us in peace, and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us; and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own" ("Proclamation Apportioning," 2014)

Disgraced Ingratitude

Perhaps the most famous instance of ingratitude in history is found in the New Testament gospel of Luke. Jesus heals ten lepers of their physical disease and, in so doing, of their social stigma. Pronounced cleansed of their contagious condition and no longer social outcasts, they get their old lives back. Yet only one returned to express thanksgiving for being healed. When only one came back thankful, Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner? Rise and go; your faith has made you well." Biblical scholars agree that by "faith" what Jesus really meant was *thankfulness*, as in "your *gratitude* has made you well." The parable reminds us of just how common ingratitude is, how easy it is to take blessings for granted, and how gratitude is dependent upon unmerited favors.

Were the others ungrateful? Perhaps they were just forgetful. After all, having received back their dignity, they were no doubt in a hurry to return to their families and old lives. Contemporary research, though, paints a more complicated picture of ingratitude.

People who are ungrateful tend to be characterized by an excessive sense of self-importance, arrogance, vanity, and an unquenchable need for admiration and approval. Narcissists reject the ties that bind people in relationships of reciprocity. They expect special favors and feel no need to pay back or pay forward. Given this constellation of characteristics, being grateful in any meaningful way is beyond the capacity of most narcissists. Without empathy, they cannot appreciate an altruistic gift because they cannot identify with the mental state of the gift-giver. Narcissism is a spiritual blindness; it is a refusal to acknowledge that one has been the recipient of benefits freely bestowed by others. A preoccupation with the self can cause us to forget our benefits and our benefactors, or to feel that we are owed things from others and therefore have no reason to feel thankful. Ignatius Loyola wrote that ingratitude is a forgetting of the graces, benefits, and blessings received, and as such it is the cause, beginning, and origin of all evils and sins. Gratitude is grace, ingratitude is disgrace.

At the core of narcissism is entitlement. This attitude says, “life owes me something” or “people owe me something” or “I deserve this.” In all its manifestations, a preoccupation with the self can cause us to forget our benefits and our benefactors or to feel that we are owed things from others and therefore have no reason to feel thankful. Entitlement and self-absorption are massive impediments to gratitude. You will certainly not feel grateful when you do receive what you think you have coming, because after all, you have it coming. Counting blessings will be ineffective because grievances will always outnumber gifts.

Were narcissistic entitlement a condition that afflicted only a small percentage of humankind, then there would be little cause for concern. Indeed, psychiatrists estimate that only one percent of the general population meets the clinical criteria for narcissistic disorders. However, narcissistic characteristics are found in all individuals in varying degrees. Early childhood is marked by egocentrism, the inability to take another’s perspective. This preoccupation with one’s own internal world is a normal stage of human development. Over time, most of us evolve out of this restricted perceptual lens. However, those who continue to see the world primarily from the inside out slide down the slope from ordinary egocentrism to entitled narcissism, a condition definitely at odds with God’s plan for human beings as articulated so clearly by Hackney.

The Truest Approach to Life

Is there an antidote to ingratitude? Gratitude is often prescribed as the remedy for the exaggerated sense of entitlement that marks narcissistic entitlement. But what enables gratitude in the first place?

Gratitude is born of humility, for it acknowledges

the giftedness of the creation and the benevolence of the Creator. This recognition gives birth to acts marked by attention and responsibility. Ingratitude, on the other hand, is marked by hubris, which denies the gift, and this always leads to inattention, irresponsibility, and abuse (Emmons, 2010; Mitchell, 2011). In gratitude and humility we turn to realities outside of ourselves. We become aware of our limitations and our need to rely on others. In gratitude and humility, we acknowledge the myth of self-sufficiency. We look upward and outward to the sources that sustain us. Becoming aware of realities greater than ourselves shields us from the illusion of being self-made, being here on this planet by right—expecting everything and owing nothing. The humble person says that life is a gift to be grateful for, not a right to be claimed. Humility ushers in a grateful response to life.

Humility is profoundly countercultural. It does not come easily or naturally, particularly in a culture that values self-aggrandizement. It requires the sustained focus on others rather than self, or as the Jewish proverb states, humility is limiting oneself to an appropriate space while leaving room for others. Thinking about oneself is natural; humility is unnatural. Perhaps this is why gratitude is counterintuitive. It goes against our natural inclinations. We want to take credit for the good that we encounter. This self-serving bias is the adult derivative of childhood egocentricity.

Reigning in entitlement and embracing gratitude and humility is spiritually and psychologically liberating. Formation in gratitude requires recognizing that life owes me nothing and all the goods I have are gifts. It is not a getting of what we are entitled to. Recognizing that everything good in life is ultimately a gift is a fundamental truth of reality and it is humility that makes that recognition possible. The humble person says, “How can I not be filled with overflowing gratitude for all the good in my life that I have done nothing to merit?” The realization that everything is a gift is freeing, and freedom is the very foundation upon which gratitude is based. True gifts are freely given and require no response. Jesus was free to withhold the gift of healing, and he did not demand that the other nine who were healed return to express gratitude. The one who did return exercised his freedom as well.

Gratitude Frees Us from Ourselves

Whether we call them sin or not, the obstacles that derail us from gratitude necessitate strategies to overcome them. Initially, this requires considerable discipline. So this is the paradox of gratitude: while the evidence is clear that cultivating gratitude, in our life and in our attitude to life, makes us happier and healthier people, more attuned to the flow of blessings in our lives, it is still difficult. Practicing gratitude is easier said than done. I have written extensively about gratitude journaling and other practices designed to cultivate grateful

thinking (Emmons, 2007, 2013).

I recently compared the effectiveness of a gratitude app (the "gratitude tree") with the gratitude letter and visit exercise (Emmons, 2014). In this experiment, 414 students were given choice of using a gratitude app for 7 days or writing 3 different letters to people whom they had never properly taken the time to thank. Following the practice, they answered questions related to ease, enjoyment, and the effectiveness of the two different methods. Although the app was perceived as easier and more enjoyable, writing the letter caused participants to think more about others, made them realize how dependent they were on others, and led them to want to give back more to others than did those who used the app. The letter, in other words, produced the outward focus that gratitude requires, whereas engaging with the gratitude tree app did not. This seems consistent with the belief that trying to be grateful by intentionally engaging in a gratitude-based activity may backfire. A preoccupation with our performance can actually hinder our performance (Tchividjian, 2013). By making it all about ourselves, the focus is on how we are doing. But gratitude, by its very nature, is an external focus. Gratitude is an apprehension of receiving a gift or benefit from a source external to the self. Self-focused attention prevents proper perspective that results in gratitude. In the cultivation of gratitude, we would do well to keep in mind that a focus on our lives as Christians is less likely to be effective than a focus on the life of Christ and what he accomplished for us, fixing our eyes on the author and perfecter of our faith. Growing in gratitude is less a matter of going out and getting what we don't have, than it is living in the reality of what has been there all along, the sheer giftedness of life itself, God providing for us that which we could never do for ourselves.

Gratitude is fundamental to the spiritual life because it is in gratitude that we become aware of our limitations and our need to rely on others and our Creator. In gratitude, we acknowledge the myth of self-sufficiency. In gratitude we replace our innate badness with the innate goodness of others and God. We look outward and upward to the sources that sustain us and make us whole. Becoming aware of realities greater than ourselves shields us from the illusion of being self-made, being here on this planet by right, expecting everything and owing nothing. The thankful person says that life is a gift to be grateful for, not a right to be claimed. This realization ushers in a grateful response to life. Gratitude is therefore the truest approach to life. We are receptive beings, dependent on the help of others, on their gifts and their kindness. As such, we are called to gratitude. If we choose to ignore this basic truth, we steer ourselves off course.

Modern psychology has placed great emphasis upon individual autonomy and self-sufficiency, and with respect to gratitude, overemphasized its virtues

and ignored the vices that make it so challenging to accomplish. Gratitude requires, however, that we affirm our dependency on others and recognize that we need to receive the grace of God and others that we cannot provide for ourselves. Until this dependence is acknowledged, gratitude remains a potentiality at best, and we are unable to capitalize on its promises and potential.

Robert A. Emmons, Ph.D. is Professor of Psychology at the University of California, Davis where he has taught since 1988. He is the author of nearly 175 original publications in peer reviewed journals or chapters and has written or edited five books, including *The Psychology of Ultimate Concerns*, *The Psychology of Gratitude*, *Thanks! How Practicing Gratitude Can Make You Happier* and his newest *Gratitude Works! A Twenty-One Day Program for Creating Emotional Prosperity*. Dr. Emmons is founding editor and editor-in-chief of *The Journal of Positive Psychology*. His research focuses on the psychology of gratitude and thankfulness in both adults and youth, and how they are related to human flourishing. His interests also include the psychology and spirituality of grace as it relates to human flourishing. Correspondence concerning this comment should be addressed to Robert A. Emmons, Department of Psychology, University of California, One Shields Avenue, Davis, CA 95616. Email: raemmons@ucdavis.edu.

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Philosophical Anthropology and Positive Emotion

Dr. Christopher Kaczor
Princeton University

Charles Hackney's article raises important questions about philosophical anthropology as well as the individualistic emphasis of positive psychology on cultivating positive emotion. This paper briefly addresses both topics.

Hackney is almost certainly right that philosophical anthropology undergirds psychological descriptions as well as prescriptions. Every psychology, at least implicitly, presupposes a view of human nature. An unbalanced optimism about human nature, just as much as a one-sided pessimism, will inevitably distort the truth of the human person and undermine any adequate attempt to improve the human condition via psychological interventions.

To put the question in the terms used by Hackney, are human beings innately good or inherently bad? Hackney cites, apparently with approval, Stanley Grenz's words, "We are a mixture of good and evil, of godly beauty and diabolical hideousness, of unlimited potential and of tragic failure." While it is true that human beings have a nature that is mixed—not entirely evil and not entirely good—Grenz's demonization and angelization of human beings obscures their reality. Even the worst of human beings do not have diabolical hideousness. No man is a devil both because we lack the intelligence of a fallen angel and because we have the potential, unlike angels, to repent and to backslide. Nor do human beings have "unlimited potential." Our bodies severely limit us. We must eat and sleep to survive, and this limits our minds to what human powers of reasoning can accomplish in limited waking hours. We are neither as good as angels nor as bad as demons, but we are a mixture of both human good and human evil.

Let me briefly outline one view of the nature of the human person which attempts to take this dual nature into account. Human beings are innately good in certain respects. Philosophically, human beings are good, first of all, because they exist and secondly be-

cause they exist as creatures with a nature (unlike plants and animals) whose flourishing is found in the free choice of the good and intellectual understanding of the truth. Human beings have minds which naturally seek the truth. The human will always chooses what appears in some respect to be good: good intrinsically, good instrumentally as useful, or at least pleasant. The human will never choose evil as evil for the sake of evil. No one freely chooses to eat thumb nail tacks. Human beings have radical capacities for understanding and free choice which—even if not exercised—transcend all other known bodily organisms. From a theological perspective, human beings are innately good because they are made by a loving God whose creation reflects Divine Wisdom and Goodness. All human beings are invited by God to a loving relationship with him, and all human beings are worthy of our respect in some basic sense. From a Christian perspective, the teachings and the actions of Jesus reflect a deep divine love for all human beings, including those who might seem, from a human perspective, to be the most unlovable such as the tax collector, the prostitute, the leper, the adulterer, and the ethnic outcast (the Samaritan). Whatever is loved by God is good.

In other respects, human beings are innately bad, lacking due perfection. From a philosophical perspective, no human being is born with what is needed for human flourishing. Unlike horses which can run shortly after birth, human infants are helpless. Full human flourishing requires virtue, and acquiring virtue involves years of difficult training aimed at producing good character so that we enjoy what should be enjoyed and are pained at what should give pain. A person acquires virtues by repeatedly doing virtuous acts. Unfortunately, to hit the golden mean of the virtuous act involves practical wisdom, and no one is born with this wisdom which is acquired (if at all) only with years of experience. Human beings need courage, but every young child is afraid of a dark room and must develop fortitude. Human beings need temperance in order to enjoy bodily pleasures in a reasonable way, but most people can truthfully say with Oscar Wilde, "I can resist anything but temptation" or with St. Paul, "I do not do what I want, but I do what I hate." Theologically considered, human beings need God's grace to become adopted children of God. For anyone with a sensitive conscience, sin is a reality which cannot be denied. Those who think that they have no sin within them are deluded at best, and mostly likely culpably self-deceived. From a Christian perspective, the reason why Christ is the central figure of human history is that every single human being who has ever lived, all who live now, and all who will ever live cannot be saved and find ultimate happiness save by the work of Christ. Since the fall, the human condition is marked by malice, disordered desire, weakness of the will, and darkening of the intellect (Aquinas, 1948). We are not,

therefore, innately good having all that we need from birth in order to flourish.

How would this view of human nature relate to positive psychology? For the most part, positive psychology is compatible with this mixed view of human nature. It does not deny any of the positive aspects (though of course it does not affirm but is simply silent about aspects of it, like the love of Jesus for all people). Likewise, positive psychology does not deny the negative aspects of this view of human nature (though it does not affirm, but is simply silent about aspects of it, like the necessity of Christ for salvation).

Hackney's thesis that excessive optimism can lead to judgmentalism is insightful. If human nature is so good that all human beings need to flourish in the right environment, then those who do not "get with the program" may be harshly judged. In addition, those who fail to flourish and have an overly optimistic view of human nature might begin to despair, thinking, "What is wrong with me?" Interestingly, Hackney does not provide evidence from the writings of positive psychologists that they are judgmental towards those who do not flourish. If there is such evidence, it would be good to cite it.

Positive Emotion and Individualism

Hackney shows wisdom in the worry about an excessively individualistic focus in positive psychology. In this field, happiness is often defined, at least in part, in terms of an individual subjectively experiencing positive emotion. Where does this account leave the human community? Isn't this focus too narrow and individualistic?

Hackney's concern might be re-expressed in the following way: we misunderstand the true meaning of happiness if we define it individualistically in terms of private emotion. Christians hold that the decisive goal of life is not simply to experience positive emotions as an individual, but rather to have ultimate unity with God which involves the proper relationship of the individual to the community. The obligation to love God and neighbor remains for Christians regardless of how they might be feeling at a particular time, and it is this obligation to love (and not our individual fleeting emotions) which should concern us as Christians.

It is certainly correct that the ultimate goal of the Christian life is love of God and neighbor and not the cultivation of individual positive emotion. However, while our actions as loving or not loving have transcendent importance regardless of our passing emotions, emotions and feelings play an important part in the moral life. Not all wrongdoing against others, but much of it, arises from strong negative emotions. When we are sad, angry, or anxious, we are more likely to be short tempered, lacking in patience, and self-indulgent to anesthetize our pain. In a chapter entitled "What the Hell: How Feeling Bad Leads to Giving

In" in her book, *The Willpower Instinct*, Kelly McGonigal (2012) notes that when we experience negative emotions, we are often prompted to alleviate these emotions which can lead us to acting against what serves the community. Insofar as reasonably possible, Christians have a moral responsibility to avoid putting themselves in situations leading to wrongdoing. We should avoid the near occasions of sin. Often negative emotions lead us to doing wrong, so our moral responsibilities should include a concern to foster positive emotion and dampen negative emotion. Positive psychology can aid Christians precisely by increasing individual positive emotions, thereby making less likely unloving actions prompted by these emotions.

Positive psychologists assert that positive emotions characteristically draw individuals outwards towards connecting and contributing to others in the community. In her 'broaden and build' theory of positive emotion, Barbara Fredrickson argues that when we are experiencing joy, amusement, gratefulness, and contentment, we are more open to the world and more likely to build relationships with others (Fredrickson 2009). In her book, *The Happiness Project*, Gretchen Rubin says that, "studies show that happier people are more likely to help other people. They are more interested in social problems. They do more volunteer work and contribute more to charity" (2009, p.215). Usually, positive emotions do not set in opposition to the well-being of others. Usually, positive emotions prompt us to reach out to others and help us to be our best selves for others.

Furthermore, Christian love of neighbor leads to a concern about our individual emotions for the sake of others. Everyone prefers to experience positive emotions rather than negative emotions. Even as we transmit contagious diseases, so too through emotional contagion, we transmit positive or negative emotions that influence people around us (Hatfield, 1993). If we are "down," those around us are more likely to also experience negative emotion. If we want to bring "up" those around us, a great place to start is to make ourselves experience positive emotion. No saint is a grump. Imagine a woman ladling French onion soup to the homeless teenage boy. She is more holy if she serves the soup with a bright smile rather than with a dutiful grimace chiseled on pursed lips. He needs not just healthy food, but good cheer.

An individual's emotions matter for another reason. Christians have a duty to care for their own health because the body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, given to us for the sake of service. Emotions matter ethically because of the duty to take care of bodily health which can be damaged by chronic negative emotions. Since, as mentioned before, our individual emotions influence the emotions of others, our emotions negatively or positively influence the health of others in our community. Sonja Lyubomirsky writes, "An avalanche of studies

has shown that happy moods lead people to be more productive, more likeable, more active, more healthy, more friendly, more helpful, more resilient, and more creative” (Lyubomirsky, 2008, p.265) Research ties individual positive emotion with positive outcomes not just for one individual person but for all those in contact with the person.

Finally, individual emotions matter for the community because emotion distorts or enhances the individual’s thinking and decision making which invariably influences the community. Angry people in a ‘fight or flight’ mode cannot think as clearly as cheerful people. Since we need practical wisdom in order to act well for the community, to cultivate positive emotion is part of pursuing a virtuous life. Barbara Fredrickson writes:

The tightly controlled laboratory experiments ... convincingly reveal that the scope of your awareness changes dramatically over time, depending on your current emotional state. Your awareness narrows with negative emotions and broadens with positive ones. It is when feeling good, then, that you’re best equipped to see holistically and come up with creative and practical solutions to the problems you and others are facing. Your wisdom, then, ebbs and flows just as your emotions do. Let’s face it, you’re just not able to access and integrate all the knowledge and experience you’ve gained over the years. Think back to when you’ve made your most unwise choices, and odds are you’ll uncover images of yourself during particularly strained times—stressed beyond your limits, overwhelmed, in pain, wholly alone, or otherwise adrift from the moorings of your most-cherished values. By opening the doors of perception, positive emotions provide you with the much-needed space to recognize disparate points of view and weigh your various options for action (Fredrickson, 2013, p.82).

Cultivating positive emotions makes wise decision making more likely, which aids not just the individual but all others who are influenced by the individual’s decision.

The founder of the Jesuit order and the author of the *Spiritual Exercises*, St. Ignatius Loyola (1992), advised those seeking his advice to make decisions and changes out of a spirit of consolation, rather than desolation. The person experiencing consolation has a joyful, optimistic, hopeful, happy spirit. The person experiencing desolation feels downtrodden, anxious, burdened, and sad. Ignatius recommended that those experiencing desolation not make any significant life-decisions or major changes. By contrast, he thought we make wiser decisions for ourselves and for others in our community enlightened by a spirit of consolation. So, our emotional life matters even if we focus primarily on the Christian duty to love our neighbor.

Hackney’s article raises other important questions that cannot be explored in the brief space allotted. But we can be grateful to him for highlighting connections and concerns about the relationship of positive psychology and Christian belief.

Christopher Kaczor (rhymes with razor) is William E. Simon Visiting Fellow in Religion and Public Life in the James Madison Program at Princeton University. He graduated from the Honors Program of Boston College and earned a Ph.D. four years later from the University of Notre Dame. His most recent books include *The Gospel of Happiness*, a forthcoming work on the relationship of positive psychology and Christian practice and *Thomas Aquinas on the Cardinal Virtues*. He can be contacted at: Christopher Kaczor, William E. Simon Visiting Fellow in Religion and Public Life, James Madison Program, Bobst Hall 208, Princeton University, 83 Prospect Ave, Princeton, NJ 08540, or at kaczor@princeton.edu, crkaczor@aol.com, or at <http://scholar.princeton.edu/christopherkaczor>.

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Why Positive Psychology Needs Virtue: A Constructive Response to Hackney

James S. Spiegel
Taylor University

The positive psychology movement has been a welcome perspective in a field that for too long focused excessively on the negative pole of human behavior. It is a

paradigm that promises significant practical benefits for individuals and institutions seeking not just to avoid dysfunction and unhealthy psychological patterns but to achieve full-orbed human flourishing. In this sense, positive psychology has been a much-needed corrective to an imbalanced field. Like every paradigm, however, the positive psychology movement suffers from imbalance of its own, as the ideals its proponents envision for us are sometimes unrealistic and, therapeutically speaking, may even be counter-productive, as failure to achieve lofty practical goals can lead to discouragement in struggling clients and judgmentalism by others exasperated by their persistent failure.

Hackney's Case for a Realistic Philosophical Anthropology

In his "Imperfectible: Why Positive Psychology Needs Original Sin," Charles Hackney helpfully makes this critique with a special accent on the importance of the theological concept of original sin. Hackney notes several influential works that endorse or apply positive psychology, including *Living Your Strengths* (Winseman, et al, 2003), Achor's *The Happiness Advantage* (2010), and Seligman's *Flourish* (2011), as well as practical initiatives such as the Comprehensive Soldier Fitness Program (Casey, 2011).

He notes how, with such strong ambitions for psychological health and human flourishing, there comes a greater potential for disappointment with those who fall short and fail to flourish. This, says Hackney, "creates the possibility of condemnation being directed toward those individuals who do not 'get with the program.' Those who are still 'negative' should have tried harder" (p. 9). So he worries that "positive psychology is vulnerable to becoming one more manifestation of . . . an atmosphere of judgmentalism against the insufficiently positive" (p. 9). This worry seems to be confirmed in what Hackney calls a bias against negative judgments themselves, evident in such works as Maroney's *Negative People Suck!* (2011).

The antidote, Hackney suggests, lies in maintaining an accurate philosophical anthropology. Thus, he says, "my message for Christians in positive psychology is to resist this excessively optimistic anthropology and frame our approach in a biblically-informed worldview" (p. 10). Specifically, Hackney tells us that we must keep the doctrine of original sin front and center, as this will ensure we remember that "not everyone will be able to enjoy all . . . elements [of human flourishing], due both to one's own sinfulness and to events outside one's control" (p. 11). A firm grasp of the reality of original sin serves as a healthy corrective to inordinately high expectations and aims in the therapeutic context. There is "a great benefit in believing that humanity contains an ineliminable (pre-eschaton) brokenness. That benefit is that believing humans to be incapable of perfection under our own power cre-

ates an anticipation of chronic failure to live up to the ideal" (p. 11). Hackney admits that this hardly sounds like a benefit. But he urges that this realism about the human condition leads to more modest therapeutic expectations, thereby bringing a sense of freedom. In turn, this has psychological benefits, as evidenced by empirical research related to the correlations between sin-related beliefs and such things as increased empathy and reduced anxiety and depression (see Watson, Morris, & Hood, 1988a, 1988b, 1988c, 1989). The irony here is obvious. Hackney is suggesting that as we adjust our philosophical anthropology downward and, concomitantly lower our therapeutic expectations, we will actually increase the likelihood of achieving the very traits celebrated by positive psychology and better enable clients to make progress in the quest for a flourishing life.

Perhaps the balanced view we seek is something like what we find in Scripture with its tandem emphases on original sin and positive character traits. For, lest we forget, there is a place for emphasizing personal autonomy and responsibility, even (especially?) for those who suffer from chronic failure. There is also a crucial place for assessing (or judging, though never in a condemning way) someone as simply failing to "get with the program." Not all negative judgments, even of the moral variety, are condemnations. Surely Hackney will grant this. After all, in critiquing the positive psychology imbalance and endorsing a proper place for original sin in our thinking about all of this, is he himself not telling his readers to get with the (correct) program (of proper theological understanding and integration)?

There is an equal but opposite danger here. It is the possibility that in so emphasizing original sin, we license ourselves to moral failure or complacency. Accordingly, I think Hackney's call to remember and apply a biblical anthropology to positive psychology practice needs supplementation from another biblical idea, specifically one related to Christian moral psychology which might also be useful in correcting the imbalance within the positive psychology movement, though in a different way.

Keeping the Virtues in View

Hackney's emphasis on original sin is aimed at keeping the aims of positive psychology realistic. This is essentially a recommendation to supplement the positive strategies and goals of human flourishing with a biblical anthropology. This is surely correct so far as it goes. However, it is not enough simply to *add* this missing element to achieve a complete Christian therapeutic approach. We must also attend to *how* the *positive* psychological traits are conceived and endorsed. Here, too, there must be balance and realism. And here, again, Scripture provides the right compass for a balanced and realistic vision. For there we find not only

a strong theme of original sin but also rich descriptions and narrative portraits of the virtues—positive character traits or, to use the Pauline New Testament metaphor, “fruit of the Spirit.” In one passage, the apostle Paul juxtaposes a list of such virtues with their vicious counterparts:

[W]alk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. (Gal. 5:16-23)

There are many potential benefits of developing a positive psychology with these traits in mind. For one thing, they provide much needed specificity when it comes to moral ideals and goals for behavioral improvement. In isolating particular positive character traits, we clarify what it means to be happy and to flourish. Thinking about these specific ideals may also help us to highlight, by contrast, just where a person needs moral improvement. For while I may be gentle, kind, peaceful, and loving, I might struggle with laziness and lack self-control. Becoming conversant in the virtues will help the counselor or therapist to properly categorize and understand her clients’ needs and, in turn, help the client gain a better understanding of her own moral-spiritual struggles and goals.

Secondly, a virtue-oriented approach preserves a substantive moral content in therapy and counseling without burdening the client with heavy-handed rules of conduct or abstract moral principles. Being character-based, and thus best explained and illustrated in narrative form, the virtues are inherently more appealing and motivating. Few of us are effectively inspired to live better by being told to abide by moral principles. However philosophically or theologically profound, these usually come off as stale platitudes. But we all do find certain character sketches compelling, whether describing moral heroes (e.g., Mother Teresa and Martin Luther King, Jr.), perseverance through handicaps (e.g., Beethoven and Helen Keller) or triumph after repeated failures (e.g., Winston Churchill). Such narratives are always portraits of virtues. And the practical advantage for the therapist is that for any given virtue, real-life stories are abundantly

available to illustrate and inspire.

Thirdly, close attention to the virtues reminds us that moral growth is gradual. This is because the virtues are not gestalt traits but rather come in degrees. A person is not merely patient or impatient, courageous or cowardly, just or unjust (notwithstanding how ordinary discourse might tempt us to think). Rather, a person is *more or less* patient, courageous, or just. Accordingly, as we use virtues as goals in a therapeutic context, we may make adjustments in the direction of modesty or loftiness as the client’s situation and maturity level warrants. In any case, a counselor or therapist may encourage her clients to *greater* patience, courage, or self-control. When thus framed, it is reasonable to believe that everyone is capable of success, as presumably everyone may improve in any moral category, however slightly. And minor progress may inspire hope for major progress. Taking an explicitly virtue-oriented approach in a context of anthropological realism ensures that there will always be more work to be done for all of us, and in that sense it is as humbling as it is inspiring. One can never finally “arrive” at a fully virtuous condition, as we all have weak areas just as we all have moral strengths. And even where we are strong, we may become yet stronger.

Explicit attention to the virtues in a therapeutic context does not contradict Hackney’s plea to keep original sin in view. In fact, it just might reinforce this concern. Many virtues are properly understood and applied in light of basic human moral corruption. Our tendencies to be self-indulgent, impatient, and stingy, for example, are all traceable to original sin and the innate tendencies toward selfishness and pride that it spawns. So to consciously aim toward the appropriate virtues of self-control, patience, and generosity is necessarily to keep in mind original sin and the realistic limits it creates.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I share Hackney’s concerns and deeply appreciate: (1) his overarching concern that the quest for human flourishing be realistic and balanced, (2) his admonishment of Christian positive psychologists for their failure to maintain such realism and balance, and (3) his exhortation to address these problems by intentionally grounding one’s therapeutic approach in a biblical anthropology that duly recognizes the inveterate problem of original sin. But I believe that Hackney’s wise corrective may be helpfully augmented through careful attention to the Christian virtues.

Dr. Spiegel received his PhD from Michigan State University and is Professor of Philosophy of Religion at Taylor University. He has published widely, mainly on issues pertaining to ethics and philosophy of religion and is the author of *The Love of Wisdom* and *How to be Good in a World Gone Bad*. He can be contacted at:

James Spiegel, 236 W. Reade Avenue, Taylor University, Upland, IN 46989. Email: jmspiegel@taylor.edu.

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Cultural Critiques in Psychology: Shall Theology lead the Way?

Louise Sundararajan
Regional Forensic Unit, Rochester, NY

It is about time that we examine positive psychology from within its own cultural background—the Judeo-Christian tradition. I believe theology is in a better position than psychology to analyze positive psychology against the backdrop of the history of Western thought. Unfortunately, in Hackney's (2014) critique of positive psychology, theology seemed to have followed the lead of psychology, reiterating what critics in psychology already said about positive psychology, namely that by promoting the positive, positive psychology also hard-

ens its judgment against the negative (Held, 2002). To elaborate on the theme of judgmentalism, Hackney used two arguments-- one concerns the Confucian philosopher Mencius; the other based on Christian theology.

The argument concerning Mencius is not convincing. It is incomprehensible to me how coming from a religious tradition known for its horrific portrayal of the Last Judgment complete with hail storms and hell fire for the sinners, any Christian writer should call it "harsh" judgment when Mencius said that the insufficiently virtuous "are not worth the trouble to talk with" (cited in Hackney, 2014, p. 6). The logic behind Hackney's argument seems to be this: Mencius shared in common with positive psychology a denial of original sin, hence what is true of one is true of the other. Unfortunately, there is a world's difference between the two schools of thought. Mencius and Confucians in general focus not on *thriving* so much as on *striving* for human-kindness (*ren*), a goal that one does not stop striving for till death (Hwang, 2012; Sundararajan, in press). But then again, Hackney is not to blame—he is simply doing cross-cultural psychology, where non-Western cultures are routinely treated as the antithesis of the West (Sundararajan & Raina, 2015). Thus Hackney moved un-problematically between two sets of antithesis to Christianity-- positive psychology and Mencian thought—the former set of thesis and antithesis is justified, because Christianity and positive psychology both belong to the same cultural and historical tradition; the latter set is unjustified because Christianity and Confucianism are not two sides of the same cultural-historical coin. I will not go into details on the Chinese traditional views, but refer the reader to some relevant papers on the emphasis of Mencius on negative emotions, not optimism (Sundararajan, 2014a), and on the difference in optimism between Christianity and Chinese traditions (Averill & Sundararajan, 2005).

The second, theological, argument against the judgment issue in positive psychology shows promise. In the following pages, I examine the dialectic nature of desire in Christian mysticism (Sundararajan & Kim, 2014) to elaborate further the points made by Hackney.

A good place to start is the other end of the happiness pendulum—depression. The Western notions of depression characterized by guilt and hopelessness can best be understood in the context of the SEEKING systems (Panksepp, 1998), which constitute the appetitive motivational system that regulates foraging, exploration, investigation, curiosity, interest, expectancy, and seeking of meaning. Arousal of this system leads to eager anticipation, intense interest, engaged curiosity. . . . in a word, desire. The potential magnitude and intensity of desire is best demonstrated by the self-stimulating lab animals which, in order to stimulate the reward circuits, will continue to press

the lever till they drop dead. While addicts can readily identify with this experience, Christian mystics have waxed eloquently about desire since St. Augustine. My brief review of Christian mystics in the following pages is based on Casey (1988).

The definition of desire in the Christian tradition as “an all-consuming appetite which knows no satiation and never leads to a sense of having indulged too much” (Casey, 1988, p. 69) explains well the condition from lab rats to angels. Speaking of the joy of the angels in heaven, Gregory of Nyssa asked, “how it is that the desire for the vision of God co-exists with such repletion, and how such repletion co-exists with desire.” And he answered the question himself: “The angels both see God and yet desire to see him; they thirst to catch sight of him yet they do catch sight of him. . . . since even though they experience repletion, yet they still desire” (70, Note 22). This intimate connection between desire and the SEEKING systems has been implicitly recognized by the Benedictine tradition, in which the desire for God is linked with “the idea of seeking God” (p. 81).

From the Christian mystics we may derive one important insight into the nature of desire, namely that it consists of the dialectics of pleasure and pain, as St. Bernard points out: “In so far as presence is experienced as a source of pleasure, so it must be expected that being deprived of this presence will cause pain. . . . The more ardently you desire something, the more keenly you experience its absence” (p. 71). Thus Casey (1988) avers that “To the extent that one seems to be attaining the object of one’s pursuit, love and joy are experienced; where such attainment is blocked, fear and sadness intervene” (p. 109). This formulation is consistent with contemporary understanding of the SEEKING system, otherwise known as the approach system. For instance Carver (2004) proposes to consider approach-related affects as a function of doing well versus doing poorly, and has found empirical support for his prediction that when failure to obtain the incentive is assured, feelings of sadness, depression, despondency, dejection, grief, and hopelessness will follow suit. Likewise Snyder, Cheavens, and Michael (2005) propose that emotions “reflect the person’s perceived success (positive emotions) or lack of success (negative emotions) in goal pursuit activities” (p. 114).

One important implication of desire as dialectic is that a down-side is to be expected. As Casey (1988) points out, religious conversion is not a “mere moment of enthusiasm and spiritual exaltation,” but also “contrition or compunction, and the recognition . . . of sin” (p. 300). Thus St. Bernard’s plea to God to “grant me . . . to be totally destitute and to fail completely on my own resources” (p. 300). Bernard wrote about his own spell of depression: “I became more and more listless and filled with weariness. . . . I was sad and almost in despair” (p. 305). One important ingredient of the

negative affect associated with goal pursuits is guilt and painful reflections of the self—a cluster of emotions referred to in medieval Christianity as compunction. Compunction is defined by Casey (1988) as a “sense of grief for personal transgressions,” and “pain and suffering occasioned by being separated from the object of one’s love and desire . . . because one is so far removed from the Kingdom” (p. 120). Thus in compunction one “stands vulnerable before the evidence of his own fragility . . . it is the sobering estimation of the unlikelihood of achieving a particular goal unless great changes are made . . .” (p. 121).

Another implication of the dialectics of desire is the importance given to alternation. So far as Bernard is concerned, “the primary character of human spiritual life” is not its stability, but “its alternation—its tendency to wobble from one extreme to the other” (p. 251). Thus in the theology of St. Bernard the predominately negative experience of sin is pitted against an affective, faith-inspired hope. Bernard recommended “happier recollections of the divine bounty” to counter-balance sorrow, lest one should “perish through despair” (p. 306). The pain of compunction is compensated for by “a hope for expectation of a felicitous outcome. Who would willingly embrace such suffering unless there were a reasonable assurance that it would be worthwhile?” (p. 127). Thus “compunction becomes simultaneously an avowal of inadequacy and a fervent desire for the coming of the Kingdom” (p. 122).

Marsella (1980) and others have noted a major difference in depression between East and West—in oriental cultures somatic complaints and feelings of weakness loom large; in occidental cultures, guilt, despair, hopelessness, loss of purpose, and feelings of inadequacy and unworthiness. Consistent with Hackney’s (2014) observation of the necessary balance between grace and judgment, or hope and despair, the unmitigated hopelessness of the depressives in the contemporary West may be understood in terms of a loss of the dialectics of desire, where life is reduced to a dichotomous choice between either hopelessness or “optimism” as touted by positive psychology, rather than a dialectic of both as can be vouchsafed by a more dynamic understanding of hope in Christianity (see Averill & Sundararajan, 2005).

This brief analysis of the structure of desire in Christianity serves to reiterate the points I wish to make about theology taking the lead in psychology. In contrast to the universalist claims of cross-cultural psychology, I argue that particularism is more conducive to in-depth understanding of cultures. More specifically, I endorse the theology of Di Noia (1995) who argues for the nonexclusive particularity of salvation in Jesus Christ. What Di Noia says about interreligious dialogue applies to the challenges that face both cross-cultural psychology as well as multiculturalism (Sundararajan, 2014b) today:

The great challenge facing present-day Christian theology of religions and interreligious conversation is to avoid minimizing the distinctive features of the major religious traditions through a well-intentioned universalism. (Di Noia, 1995, p. 28)

A rabbi once said to Di Noia, "Jesus Christ is the answer to a question I have never asked" (1995, p. 26). The realization that different cultural traditions are answers to different questions will bring a new dawn to cross cultural psychology. Taking psychology to this next step of more in-depth appreciation of non-Western cultures, theology will have to lead the way.

Louise Sundararajan received her Ph.D. in History of Religions from Harvard University, and her Ed.D. in Counseling Psychology from Boston University. She chairs the Task Force on Indigenous Psychology, which has over a hundred members from around the globe. She is recipient of the Abraham Maslow Award for 2014, from Division 32 of APA. She is a Fellow of APA, and also a member of the Board of Directors for the International Society for Research on Emotions. She has published extensively on topics related to culture and emotions. She can be contacted at: Louise Sundararajan, 691 French Road, Rochester, NY 14618, or at louiselu@frontiernet.net.

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Positive Psychology and Original Sin: A Christian Psychology Response

Siang-Yang Tan
Fuller Theological Seminary

Charles Hackney has written a very helpful and thoughtful article from a Christian perspective on why positive psychology needs original sin, focusing on the imperfectible in human beings (Hackney, 2014). Overall, Hackney has made his case well. The doctrine of original sin and the imperfectibility of human nature without the outside help of God's grace and Christ's salvation, and the power of the Holy Spirit, are much needed correctives to the overly positive view of human nature that positive psychology tends to assume. I have earlier made similar comments in critiquing positive psychology from a biblical perspective or Christian psychology viewpoint (Tan, 2006):

"Since we are all created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26, 27) we all have some positive virtues and character strengths that reflect that image, although it has been badly marred (but not totally eradicated) through sin. God has also given us spiritual gifts that empower us to serve him and build each other up, for his glory (see 1 Cor. 12, Rom. 12, Eph. 4, 1 Pet. 4). Paul encourages us to think on what is biblically positive: whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent or praiseworthy (Phil. 4:8).

"However, secular positive psychology can end

up being too positive, by focusing too much on happiness, even if it is authentic happiness, and not enough on the darker side of human nature: our fallenness or sinful nature (Rom. 3:23; see also Jer. 17:9). We all, as sinners, have a real need for repentance, redemption, and transformation through Jesus Christ (Rom. 6:23) and the power of the Holy Spirit who can truly make us more like Jesus.... The Holy Spirit is the one who produces the fruit of the Spirit in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal. 5:22, 23). The list of six virtues and 24 character strengths from positive psychology come close to this nine-fold fruit of the Holy Spirit who alone can produce such deep and eternal fruit. A danger in secular positive psychology is therefore to try to be good and positive and happy, to have a meaningful and well-lived life with optimal functioning and flourishing, without God at the center of such a life. The truly blessed or happy life (Matt. 5) is after all the abundant and eternal life that is found in Jesus Christ (John 10:10). Positive psychology, however, does list temperance and transcendence (including religiousness) among the 6 virtues classified.” (p. 72).

I therefore concluded:

“A more biblical approach to positive psychology, to the truly blessed life in Christ, must therefore also focus on painful processes and experiences such as brokenness, repentance, and surrender—on positive sadness (or godly sorrow as in 2 Cor. 7:9, 10) and not only on positive happiness!” (Tan, 2006, p. 73).

More recently, I have also addressed resilience and post-traumatic growth (see Tan, 2013) as well as self-care and beyond (see Tan & Castillo, 2014) from a biblical perspective that emphasizes sanctified suffering, reflecting more of a Christian psychology that is biblically grounded. Here is an excerpt:

“However, a biblical or Christian perspective on suffering goes beyond affirming and emphasizing its potential benefits and blessings. Benefit-finding is not the ultimate meaning or end of human suffering. A deeper biblical view on suffering will also focus on knowing God and sharing in the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings (Phil. 3:10) in union and communion with him. Concrete benefits and blessings may not be apparent or clear, but God is doing his deeper work of grace in our hearts and lives through redemptive and sanctified suffering, and in so doing reveals his greater glory in and through us...A biblical perspective on suffering must eventually be Christ-centered and cross-centered, but requiring also the power of his

resurrection (Phil. 3:10) and the help of the Holy Spirit as the Divine Comforter and Counselor (Jn. 14:16-17).” (Tan, 2013, p. 363).

I have also emphasized the need to go beyond self-care to “God-care” for us, and “we-care” or “community care” in the body of Christ for one another (see Tan & Castillo, 2014, p. 93). I therefore agree with Hackney that we need to go beyond individualistic self-effort to achieve flourishing; we need God and his grace, including the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, as well as one another in community in the body of Christ. And the end result is not always happiness or positive emotion or flourishing. It may include sadness and sanctified suffering, even persecution and martyrdom at times. But true joy in Christ is always there at the end, and oftentimes in the process of sanctification or becoming more like Christ. A biblical perspective on sanctification and posttraumatic growth will therefore “emphasize the outcomes of brokenness, humility, and deeper Christlikeness, rather than greater strength and self-confidence. It will focus on God’s strength or power being made perfect in our weakness (2 Cor. 12: 9-10), and how weakness is the way or key in the Christian life (Packer, 2013) and not self-sufficiency that can lead to pride.” (Tan, 2013, p. 362).

While I deeply appreciate and generally agree with Hackney (2014), there are a few clarifications I would also like to make with regard to some of his assertions. First, he summarizes secular positive psychology with broad strokes, and may not be fully accurate or fair in characterizing positive psychology as being entirely optimistic about human nature and how an individual can flourish simply by self-effort. For example the six virtues and 24 character strengths initially classified and described by Peterson and Seligman (2004) do include the virtues of *humanity* (kindness, love, social intelligence), *justice* (fairness, leadership, teamwork), *temperance* (forgiveness, modesty, prudence, self-regulation), and *transcendence* (appreciation of beauty and excellence, gratitude, hope, humor, religiousness). This list therefore includes several virtues and character strengths that actually emphasize the need for teamwork and socially intelligent relationships, as well as religiousness or religious faith, and forgiveness and modesty or humility (which has received much attention recently), and also kindness, love, gratitude, hope, and humor.

Secondly, Hackney’s concern about the potential of an overly optimistic positive psychology falling into harsh judgmentalism toward those who struggle and do not adequately flourish may be overstated. It is a danger but not always true in fact. Secular positive psychology also does focus on the softer virtues or character strengths such as religiousness, forgiveness, modesty or humility, gratitude, hope, and humor, with teamwork and kindness and love. An increasing

number of Christian scholars and researchers are also involved in positive psychology as a field, and they are making an impact in influencing secular positive psychology for the better. However, I still agree with his view that there is a danger or potential of harsh judgmentalism, or at least, some judgmentalism toward those who may not be flourishing as much or as well because of the tendency of positive psychology to have an overly positive view of human nature.

Finally, while Hackney has focused on the philosophical and theological issues with secular positive psychology's unbalanced anthropological optimism, and rightfully and clearly pointed out why positive psychology needs the doctrine of original sin because of the imperfectible nature of human beings, there are other weaknesses and problems with secular positive psychology from a more scientific and empirical perspective that he did not cover. For example, more recently, Fredrickson and Losada's (2005) widely cited and now well-known critical positivity ratios (ratios of positive affect to negative affect) of 2.9013 as a critical minimum for well-being or flourishing to occur, and 11.6346 as a critical maximum at which flourishing disintegrates, have been severely critiqued for lacking any empirical evidence (Nickerson, 2014). Fredrickson and Losada have also had their claim that a mathematical model drawn from nonlinear dynamics (the Lorenz equations from fluid dynamics) provided theoretical support for such critical positivity ratios debunked by Brown, Sokal, and Friedman (2013), with the result that Fredrickson and Losada (2013) subsequently withdrew their nonlinear dynamics model. Although Fredrickson (2013) still tried to reaffirm some support for positivity ratios based on empirical studies, Nickerson (2014) and Brown, Sokal, and Friedman (2014a, 2014b) have refuted this. Space does not permit me to go into details of this huge controversy and debunking of what was a widely cited and accepted "fact" in secular positive psychology regarding the critical positivity ratio of 2.9 (or 3) for the occurrence of flourishing. Suffice it to cite the following excerpt from Brown, Sokal, and Friedman (2014a) on positive psychology and romantic scientism:

"Even the bookstores are replete with literally dozens of popular treatments of positive psychology that present the critical positivity ratio of 2.9013 (or 2.9, or 3) as a major scientific finding, when it is nothing of the sort. That the sin is now romantic scientism rather than pure romanticism is not, in our view, a great advance.

"Fredrickson and Losada's (2005) article was the subject of over 350 scholarly citations before our critique (Brown et al., 2013) appeared, and its principal 'conclusions' have been featured in many lectures and public presentations by senior members of the positive psychology research commu-

nity, although its deficiencies ought to have been visible to anyone with a modest grasp of mathematics and a little curiosity. Unfortunately... we have no way of knowing whether the fact that it took so long for these deficiencies to be recognized was due to an unwarranted degree of optimism about the reliability of the peer-review process, a reluctance to make waves in the face of powerful interests, a general lack of critical thinking within positive psychology, or some other factor. We hope that our revelation of the problems with the critical positivity ratio ultimately demonstrates the success of science as a self-correcting endeavor; however, we would have greatly preferred it if our work had not been necessary in the first place." (p. 637).

Positive psychology, therefore, needs to be more careful and cautious, and can be critiqued from philosophical, theological, biblical, and scientific and empirical perspectives. I have tried to provide a Christian psychology response to Hackney's (2015) important article, which takes into consideration all of these perspectives.

Siang-Yang Tan, Ph.D. (McGill University) is Professor of Psychology at the Graduate School of Psychology, Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, CA, and Senior Pastor of First Evangelical Church Glendale in Glendale, CA. He has published numerous articles and 13 books, the latest of which is *Counseling and Psychotherapy: A Christian Perspective* (Baker Academic, 2011). He can be contacted at: Siang-Yang Tan, Ph.D., Graduate School of Psychology, Fuller Theological Seminary, 180 N. Oakland Avenue, Pasadena, CA 91101, or at siangyangtan@fuller.edu.

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Positive Psychology and the Atomization of Society

P. J. Watson

University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

In *A Secular Age*, Charles Taylor (2007) defines “social imaginaries” as processes within social life in which individuals “imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations which are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images which underlie these expectations” (p. 171). These “deeper normative notions and images” define the social rationalities that guide communal life, and life in an increasingly globalized world means that all persons invariably inhabit an increasingly large array of social rationalities. This unavoidable condition is as true of those who inhabit Christian social imaginaries as of all others who must daily meet the demands of diverse religious, work, social, leisure, market, political, educational, and other social imaginaries.

Charles Hackney usefully illustrates the challenge. The social rationality reflected in positive psychology becomes prominent within the wider culture and has a potential to negatively affect church life. Relative to traditional understandings of original sin, positive psychology presents an impossibly optimistic depiction of human nature, and the impossibility of achieving the ideal of this deeper normative notion can promote judgmentalism. When framed within a Christian social rationality, this argument is insightful and important. Questions, nevertheless, arise when the perspective broadens beyond a Christian social imaginary. Important limitations in these arguments might then become evident.

Perspective within Positive Psychology

One possible limitation is that these arguments may

fail to fully appreciate the social rationality of positive psychology. Implicit in this concern about “harsh judgmentalism” is an assumption that positive psychology lacks resources internal to its own rationality for addressing the problem. This clearly is not the case. Against judgmentalism directed toward others, positive psychology recommends forgiveness (e.g., Hojjat, & Ayotte, 2013). Against judgmentalism directed toward the self, positive psychology promotes self-compassion (e.g., Neff, Rude, & Kirkpatrick, 2007). Christian concerns about judgmentalism can, therefore, be dismissed with a response framed wholly within the social rationality of positive psychology. Positive psychology simply has not been fully applied.

When evaluated within a Christian social imaginary, one implication of this counterargument is that Hackney has perhaps underestimated the irrational optimism of positive psychology. The problem is not so much that positive psychology can promote “judgmentalism,” but rather that it is so optimistic about the self that it can inhibit any meaningful judgment at all. For a self to develop, it presumably requires “deeper normative notions and images” that allow it to experience guilt when it fails to achieve its ideal. Taken to extremes, forgiveness and self-compassion could interfere with the self-actualization that this guilt makes possible.

Three points of clarification are important here. First, a Christian social rationality presumably could and indeed should embrace both forgiveness and self-compassion. Again, problems arise to the extent that these processes are “taken to extremes.” Second, identification of the issue of judgment as a potential problem in no way serves as a global indictment against positive psychology. Positive psychology has made and will continue to make enormously beneficial contributions to a more balanced psychology of human nature. Third and most importantly, however, the issue of judgment suggests the possibility that any fully adequate Christian response to positive psychology will require an appreciation of the broader sociological context to which the popularity of positive psychology can be conceptualized as a response (see e.g., Watson, 2014).

Perspective across Social Imaginaries

In developing his arguments, Hackney points toward the 19th Century French social theorist Alexis de Tocqueville and his concern that the democratic emphasis on equality promotes an irrational belief in the perfectibility of humanity. More broadly, Tocqueville worried that the instability of French democracy meant that democracies in general have an internal contradiction that guarantees their failure (see e.g., Siedentop, 1994). The possibility that appeared to him was that democracy promotes equality, equality leads to individualism, and individualism necessarily devolves into selfish egotism. The result is a disintegrating society atomized

into a mass of selfish individuals who fail to ensure the common good. Such chaos justifies an often heavy handed central state administration of daily life, and this oppression then leads to a new democratic revolution that starts the process all over again. Tocqueville came to America to further evaluate this worry, and numerous lines of evidence helped him reject his pessimistic assessment of democracy. Among many other things, the Americans participated in associations that promoted the common good, and religion operated as a kind of cultural glue that helped hold everything together (see e.g., Tocqueville, 1980).

But much has happened since Tocqueville's visit to America. The atomization of society is increasingly obvious and powerful (e.g., Putnam, 2000). This process presumably is due not just to democracy but also to all kinds of additional sociological influences such as globalization, geographical mobility, family instability, increasing numbers of people who choose not to marry, occupational insecurity, virtual communities, isolating entertainment activities like television, reduced numbers of children per family, and the decline of religion, to mention only a few.

A useful symbol of this atomization of modern social life may appear in the Japanese concept of *muen shakai*, which literally means "the no relationship society" (Taylor, 2012). People increasingly live their lives alone with minimal relationships with others. Mathew Taylor describes a paradigmatic manifestation of this society in Japan as "*muen shi* (solitary death), in which people died unnoticed, their bodies undiscovered for days or weeks or longer, and no known family or acquaintances to claim the remains, take care of personal effects, or handle the funeral or internment" (p. 1). *Tokushu seisou gyousha* or "special cleaning people" emerged as a new occupation to take care of the final details of such solitary lives. Taylor suggests that "something like *muen shakai* – whatever new terminology evolves to describe it – will come to permeate more and more of society" (p. 1).

One possible appeal of positive psychology is that it represents an attractive coping response to this growing atomization. People increasingly are thrown back upon themselves and must travel through the incommensurable and sometimes incompatible "deeper normative notions and images" that describe the social imaginaries through which they must navigate their daily lives. The one integrating constant in this context is their own personal experience, and a pluralistic and increasingly atomized culture may encourage the embrace of an idealized vision of the self as the *telos* of a personalized system of ethics that supplies guidance in how to live.

The essentially Tocquevillian analysis of Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, and Tipton (1985) supplies a famous example. These sociologists present the case study of a nurse named Sheila who "liberated herself

from an oppressively conformist early family life" (p. 235). She created her own faith called Sheilaism: "I believe in God. I'm not a religious fanatic. I can't remember the last time I went to church. My faith has carried me a long way. It's Sheilaism. Just my own little voice" (p. 221). She explains the tenets of her faith in God and in herself as follows, "It's just try to love yourself and be gentle with yourself. You know, I guess, take care of each other. I think He would want us to take care of each other" (pp. 221). In other words, Sheilaism has the potential for both self-compassion and forgiveness. Bellah et al. offer a revealing description of the positive psychological *telos* of this atomized personal religion which occurred when Sheila took over the care of a dying woman, "Sheila had the experience that 'if she looked in the mirror' she 'would see Jesus Christ'" (p. 235).

At a general level, Bellah et al. conclude that "'Sheilaism' somehow seems a perfectly natural expression of current American life" (p. 221). Sheilaism, in other words, reflects a broader "me-ism." But no judgmentalism should be directed toward Sheila or any other "me" that must cope with the daunting difficulties of modern social life. Me-ism is the logical consequence of an atomized society that continuously throws individuals back upon themselves and demands that they negotiate the challenges of an increasingly diverse array of incommensurable social imaginaries. An idealized vision of one's own self supplies a *telos* that helps guide individuals through these challenges. Positive psychology can be conceptualized as a socially constructed rationality that helps strengthen that *telos*. Within a Christian social imaginary, however, the deep concern about positive psychology used in this manner is its potential to move us all toward *muen shakai*, and *muen shakai* seems wholly inadequate as a sociological dynamic that will help us solve problems not just within our self, but also within our communities.

Conclusion

At the broadest level, Charles Hackney identifies positive psychology as a challenge to life within the Christian community. The arguments that he makes within a Christian social imaginary are insightful and important. Christians must surely agree that positive psychology is too optimistic about human nature and that this optimism has a potential to promote a destructive judgmentalism.

At the same time, however, positive psychology may have deeper implications that are even more important for Christians to explore. In an increasingly atomized society, positive psychology may buttress understandable attempts of individuals to use an idealized vision of their own self as the *telos* of their own personalized system of ethics. But the Christian assumption must be that positive psychology is too optimistic about the self because original sin means that the

self can never save itself from itself. Life requires not me-ism, but rather Christ-ism. Me-ism helps us love ourselves. Christ-ism encourages us to love ourselves and to love literally everyone else, even our enemies for whom we must pray.

The further Christian assumption will be that none of us will fully reach the *telos* that is Christ. Our constant tendency will be to fail in our love for ourselves and especially for others. Call that sin. But our hope is that we can hold ourselves accountable to the love of Christ-ism through appropriate judgments but not judgmentalism, turn ourselves back toward our *telos*, and receive an embrace of forgiveness. Call that grace. Within a Christian social imaginary, it is this dialectic between sin and grace that will rescue us all from tendencies toward atomization within the self and within society.

P. J. Watson is U. C. Foundation Professor of Psychology at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. His principal research interest are the Psychology of Religion more generally and Christian Psychology more particularly. He can be contacted at: P. J. Watson, Psychology/Department #2803, 350 Holt Hall – 615 McCallie Avenue, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, Chattanooga, TN 37403, or at paul-watson@utc.edu.

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Imperfectible: Reply to Commentaries

Charles H. Hackney

Briercrest College and Seminary

The article “Imperfectible: Why positive psychology needs original sin” is the latest step in my ongoing project of bringing Christian thought (philosophical and theological) on flourishing in dialogue with the positive psychology movement, hopefully moving toward a more robust and coherent understanding of what it means for a human to live well. My approach has primarily been shaped by the work of Alasdair MacIntyre (1984), whose neo-Aristotelian virtue ethic describes the good life in eudaimonic terms, with the highly-functioning person growing into greater realization of the human *telos*. This approach can be summarized as the examination of ways and means that one may move from one’s “untutored” state (what MacIntyre called “human-nature-as-it-happens-to-be”) toward a developmental goal (“human-nature-as-it-could-be-if-it-realized-its-*telos*”).

In my earlier work (Hackney, 2007) I focused my attention on the *telos*. A Christian positive psychology would describe the goal of flourishing as the cultivation of Christlikeness, better enabling us to bring glory to God, marking us (Christian positive psychologists) out as distinct from our secular colleagues, who will have different ideas about ideal human functioning. Later (Hackney, 2010a), I examined eudaimonic growth in connection with ideas about sanctification. A Christian positive psychology would describe the process of flourishing as both the outcome of human effort and a work of the Holy Spirit, marking us out again as distinct from our secular colleagues, who do not tend to consider the Holy Spirit as an active agent in psychological growth. In this latest article, I turn my attention to untutored human nature, focusing specifically on the innate goodness or badness of humanity, as this question profoundly shapes psychological theorizing and practice (consider the pessimism of Freud versus the optimism of Rogers). A Christian positive psychology would describe basic human nature as both created good and fallen into evil. I argue that this too would mark us out as distinct from our secular colleagues in positive psychology, who have, I believe, a tendency toward unbalanced optimism in their basic anthropological presuppositions.

I am thankful for my colleagues who took the time to read and consider my ideas, and provide feedback in the form of commentaries. Although the disagreements are where the action is, I am heartened

by the measure of support for my position that I see here. I take that to mean that perhaps I am on to something.

A False False Choice

Ellen Charry’s historical-theological treatment of happiness (Charry, 2010) has strongly influenced my own view of flourishing, including my claim that authentic happiness is eschatological. Dr. Charry was not favorably impressed, though, with what she saw as a false choice that I have imposed on Christian psychologists. She describes that forced choice as being between a strong secular optimism and a strong (and not properly developed) Augustinian pessimism. She describes this approach as “odd,” “blunt,” “strange,” and “unnuanced.” A better approach, she argues, would be a more nuanced and fully-developed theological anthropology that finds the middle way between original justice and fallenness.

Had Dr. Charry given my original article a more thorough reading, she may have found that our positions are not as far apart as she thinks. Put simply, I propose no “radical binary” between optimism and pessimism. In fact, I specifically reject that binary in my original article, placing myself instead in the “both-and” camp rather than the “either-or” camp when it comes to human goodness/badness: “The anthropological optimist is correct to say that we are born with innate goodness... But the anthropological pessimist is also correct to say that we are (post-Fall) born with innate badness” (p. 10). Further, Charry describes my position as “denying the value of human effort,” thus relieving people of moral responsibility. This is odd, given my statement that flourishing “must be thought of as just as much a work of the Holy Spirit as a work of responsible human participation” and that grace and effort are inseparable (p. 11). I discussed this dual truth in more detail in an earlier article (Hackney, 2010a).

Finally, Charry describes the idea that humans are “evil, bad, and helpless” as “psychologically dangerous” (p. 15), creating the potential for people to be led toward despair and self-hatred, making an emphasis on sin “pastorally harmful.” This position is reminiscent of Albert Ellis’ (1960) argument that the concept of sin leads to a sense of inescapable self-blame and worthlessness (though he later repented

of this position; see Ellis, 2000). This criticism is at odds with empirical research findings, cited in my original article. A robust view of one's sinfulness is in fact associated with less depression (Watson, Morris, & Hood, 1988a), hopelessness (Watson, Morris, & Hood, 1988b), and anxiety (Watson, Morris, & Hood, 1988c), and with greater empathy (Watson, Morris, & Hood, 1989) and self-esteem (Watson, Morris, Loy, Hamrick, & Grizzle, 2007). Believing oneself to be "only a sinner, saved by grace" is, apparently, quite healthful.

I am Grateful for Robert Emmons

Robert Emmons' work on gratitude is one of the keystones of positive psychology, providing empirical support for the claim that positive interventions can be both effective and beneficial (e.g., Emmons & McCollough, 2003). The benefits of gratitude have been broadly acknowledged by positive psychologists, with gratitude forming a key component of positive psychotherapy (Seligman, Rashid, & Parks, 2006) and meriting its own chapter in the *CSV (Character Strengths and Virtues)*, Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

While Peterson and Seligman argue in the *CSV* that gratitude is inherent to human nature (p. 557) as an emotional component of primate reciprocal altruism, Emmons claims that human nature also contains inherent obstacles to gratitude, obstacles that must be striven against and overcome. This fits well with my "both-and" position on the goodness/badness of human nature, and the necessity of combatting against the self as a vital part of living well. When Prudentius wrote his allegorical poem *Psychomachia* in the early fifth century, he painted the verbal picture of an epic battle (with plenty of blood and guts) between humanity's vices and the virtues that defeat them. This theme of virtue conquering vice carries on into modern virtue ethics, including Iris Murdoch's (1970) classic claim that morality is about developing techniques for the defeat of "the fat relentless ego" (p. 52), and Philippa Foot's (1978) description of virtues as corrective in nature. Such inner conflict is not often found in the positive psychological literature, despite the strong connections between positive psychology and virtue ethics (Jørgensen & Nafstad, 2004). Possible exceptions include Julie Exline's work on humility (e.g., Exline & Hill, 2012) and Wayment & Bauer's work on quieting one's ego (e.g., Wayment, Bauer, & Sylaska, 2014). As Emmons reminds us, gratitude is "unnatural" and requires discipline, but when cultivated, can serve as an antidote to self-absorption.

In Defense of Saint Grumpy

Christopher Kaczor (thank you for the pronunciation assistance) finds much to agree with in my article, primarily as it pertains to anthropological optimism/pessimism. He balances the view that we are innately

good creatures and beloved of God with the view that we are innately bad creatures that lack what is needed for flourishing and are "marked by malice, disordered desire, weakness of will, and darkening of the intellect" (p. 20).

Kaczor appreciates my point about the potential judgmentalism of unbalanced optimism, but wishes that I had cited evidence of positive psychologists being judgmental toward those who do not "get with the program" and flourish. It is true that my cited examples included a talk-show host and a corporate coach, rather than Martin Seligman and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. However, my point here might be better described as an application of the law of unintended consequences (or perhaps as some kind of "trickle-down" effect), rather than a direct accusation against specific positive psychologists. As Aspinwall and Tedeschi (2010) put it, the possibility of fostering guilt among cancer patients is a consequence of "popular versions of positive psychology" (p. 10) rather than a consequence of top-notch positive psychological scholarship. My contention is that scholars who overemphasize people's ability to save themselves through self-directed effort, and either deny or silently pass over the possibility of chronic failure (and here I did point specific fingers and cite sources), contribute to an atmosphere in which individuals are expected to flourish on command. This is not a new criticism of the positive psychology movement, as Bohart and Greening's (2001) response to Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi's (2000) article introducing positive psychology included the possibility that the psychology-reading laity "could misuse [Seligman's learned optimism research] to blame the victim for not having the proper optimistic attitude to achieve self-improvement in the face of massive social oppression or injustice" (p. 81). Barbara Held (2002) framed her warning about positive psychology's potential downside in similar terms, presenting the possibility of enthusiastic supporters of positive psychology becoming tyrannical in their expectations for others to have a positive attitude. So, like them, I do not anticipate Martin Seligman coming out any time soon with a book describing pessimists as being like a virus that should be purged, but I am not surprised that J. P. Moroney (2011) did exactly that.

Dr. Kaczor dedicated a portion of his response to the power of positive psychology to help people cultivate positive emotions, and reduce negative emotions, in the name of greater morality and love of our neighbors. We have, he argues, a moral responsibility to strive for a positive mood. This responsibility is grounded in a number of reasons, including the facts that happy people tend to think and act in a more prosocial manner, unhappy people tend to think and act in a more antisocial manner, and our emotions (positive or negative) are transmitted to those

around us. “No saint is a grump” says Kaczor (p. 21), claiming that a smiling volunteer at a soup kitchen is more holy than a sourpuss volunteer at a soup kitchen. While there is evidence to support Kaczor’s position regarding the desirable correlates of cheerfulness, it is in fact more complicated than that. When done properly, pessimism can be healthy (Norem & Chang, 2002), sad people can be more considerate than happy people (Forgas, 1999) and are less prone to biased judgment (Forgas, 2014), anger can be a force for justice (Hess, 2014), and complaining can be the best response in adverse circumstances (Kowalski, 2002). Further, forcing our hypothetical grim-faced soup-slinger to make herself be a cheerful soup-slinger could be harmful to her (Chu, 2002). So let’s take it easy on the grumps.

Needs More Virtue

The idea, mentioned above, of the virtues as corrective, finds further support in James Spiegel’s comments. Dr. Spiegel appreciated my concerns about grounding positive psychology in a realistically-balanced, biblically-informed anthropology, and believes that the project of developing a Christian positive psychology would benefit from a heavy emphasis on the Christian virtues. This approach would provide us with insight into the way in which positive characteristics are developed, and would produce the benefits of greater specificity, a stock of inspirational virtuous exemplars, and a reminder that flourishing is a gradual process.

I can only respond to Dr. Spiegel’s ideas with resounding agreement. In my work on positive psychology and the martial arts (Hackney, 2010b), I follow precisely the pattern Spiegel outlines, including a cast of virtuous martial exemplars. In one of my earlier articles on a Christian approach to positive psychology (Hackney, 2007), I discuss how Christian thought on curiosity as a virtue (and sometimes vice) illustrates the differences in perspective between ourselves and our secular peers, and later (Hackney, 2010a), I focus on a Christian virtue (penitence) not typically seen as a virtue by our secular peers in positive psychology. It would be a great advance in the project of a Christian positive psychology to produce a more fully fleshed-out treatment of the psychology of the Christian virtues, and I hope to see such a project in the future.

Christian and Confucian Cultural Critiques

Louise Sundararajan has provided criticism of the positive psychology movement from Buddhist (Sundararajan, 2005a) and Confucian (Sundararajan, 2005b) perspectives, demonstrating the necessity of seeing the positive psychology movement as grounded in Western notions of the good life. Any claims made by positive psychologists to have constructed a univer-

sal, perspective-free, description of human flourishing should be met with extreme incredulity, given the power of moral presuppositions and moral communities to shape virtue theories, including even scientific virtue theories (Tjeltveit, 2003). In her commentary, Sundararajan illustrates the importance of such culture-specific considerations by examining dialectics within Western ideas about desire, and their relevance for understanding culturally-particular experiences of depression.

Dr. Sundararajan believes that I have mishandled Mencius, blithely disregarding the critical differences between Confucian and Seligmanic schools of thought, and lumping the two together based on their shared denial of original sin. She describes my logic as being: “Mencius shared in common with positive psychology a denial of original sin, hence what is true of one is true of the other” (p. 25). Had I restricted myself to comparing positive psychology and Christianity, I would have been on better footing. The possibility exists that I was not sufficiently clear in my original article. It was never my intention to base my argument on a conflation of Mencian thought and positive psychology. Rather, what I drew from comparative religious scholarship on the topic (Stalnaker, 2006; Yearley, 1990) was what I took to be an interesting parallel, based not on comparing Mencius and Christianity, but on comparing Mencius and Xunzi (both belonging to the same cultural-historical tradition). Mencius’ view of human nature was more optimistic than Xunzi’s, and Mencius’ greater optimism led (according to Yearley) to a reaction to those who do not flourish that was more judgmental than Xunzi’s. In what I saw as a parallel relationship, within a different cultural-historical tradition, mainstream positive psychology’s view of human nature is more optimistic than Christianity’s, and mainstream positive psychology’s greater optimism leads (according to me, and certain other critics of positive psychology) to a reaction to those who do not flourish that is more judgmental than Christianity’s.

I am in full agreement with Sundararajan that cultural particularity must be honored when discussing the good life. In one of her articles (Sundararajan, 2005b), she compares attempts to create cross-culturally universal “recipes of the good life” to the use of chemical analysis to mass-produce generic wine. At a certain level, it may technically be wine, but who would want to drink it?

A Christian Psychology Response to a Christian Psychology Proposal

Siang-Yang Tan and I are in general agreement about my primary message. However, Dr. Tan says that I may have overstated my case a bit (always a possibility). Positive psychology contains resources that counteract the emphasis on self-directed effort by pointing

us toward relationships, community, and religion. The movement also emphasizes positive characteristics such as forgiveness and kindness, further mitigating the possibility of judgmentalism. This point was also made by P. J. Watson in his commentary, pointing out that a mainstream positive psychologist could reply to my concerns by claiming that the cure for judgmental positive psychology is more positive psychology.

I am open to this. As I said, positive psychology is a heterogeneous rather than monolithic movement, and my criticisms of positive psychology are criticisms of general trends and potentialities. Not all positive psychologists hold to an unrealistically optimistic anthropology, and so not all positive psychologists will be inclined to think that flourishing is “available to all who put in the effort” (Achor, 2010, p. 31), with the accompanying risk of ungentle treatment of the unhappy. I would be pleased to see the movement shift in such a way that humans are seen, and dealt with, in ways that more closely approximate a biblically-informed positive psychology.

Atomized to Death

P. J. Watson connects the optimism and individualism of positive psychology to the growing atomization of modern social life. As we are living in an age that exalts the self (Twenge, 2006) and promotes isolation, a positive psychology that teaches “me-ists” that the self has the power to save itself, and become its ideal self, has an understandable appeal. But while the end that is promised is happiness, what is delivered is the lonely life of *muen shakai* and the lonely death of *muen shi*.

While my inner pessimist wishes to agree with Dr. Watson (my inner pessimist has had such an influence on this particular set of articles that he may have to be upgraded to a status other than “inner”), I do hope that the situation is not quite that bad. As Siang-Yang Tan pointed out, the possibility exists that some facets of positive psychology may militate against optimism-fueled judgmentalism. It also may be that some facets of positive psychology could militate against individualism-fueled social dissolution. The late great Christopher Peterson repeatedly told us that the most important message of positive psychology is that “other people matter” (Peterson, 2013, p. 127), and the January 2000 issue of *American Psychologist* (the one that introduced most of us to the positive psychology movement) included David Myers’ review of research showing interpersonal relationships to be a powerful predictor of happiness (Myers, 2000). So we may at least hope that positive psychologists (both Christian and non-Christian) could serve as a voice speaking against *muen shakai*, telling our solitary friends that they would be happier if they got out of the house and joined a bowling league (and yes, that is a reference to Putnam, 2000).

Thank you again to my interlocutors. Call me if you are ever in Saskatchewan.

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Open-mindedness and Christian Flourishing

James S. Spiegel

Taylor University

Although open-mindedness is generally considered to be an intellectual virtue, few have attempted thorough analyses of this character trait. Discussion of open-mindedness is rarer still among Christian scholars. Here I explore this virtue from a Christian perspective using William Hare's general account of open-mindedness as a willingness to reconsider one's views, and I apply Hare's three requirements of open-mindedness: (1) the sincere pursuit of truth, (2) an intellectually fallibilist outlook, and (3) the desire for free expression of thought. This part of my discussion focuses on what I call propositional open-mindedness. But I distinguish this form of the virtue from what I call personal open-mindedness, which regards a willingness to consider revising one's evaluations, moral or otherwise, of other people. I explore what it means to display such personal open-mindedness as a Christian. In so doing, I consider how personal open-mindedness is practically beneficial, biblically endorsed, and contributes to the Christian's flourishing intellectually, morally and socially.

Keywords: virtue, open-mindedness, intellectual humility, fallibilism, propositional open-mindedness, personal open-mindedness

Among the virtues, one character trait that has received much less attention than it deserves is open-mindedness. Positive psychologists recognize it as a character strength that contributes to human flourishing (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Lambie, 2014). And virtue epistemologists frequently include it in their lists of intellectual virtues, but few have attempted a thorough analysis of the virtue. This is unfortunate, because open-mindedness is relevant to the moral life generally and not merely intellectual pursuits. In this paper I will explore what it means to be open-minded and why this is virtuous. Furthermore, I will inquire into what it means to be an open-minded Christian, and how this virtue contributes to a flourishing Christian life, both in the intellectual domain and in our personal relationships.

ACCOUNTS OF OPEN-MINDEDNESS

There is some debate among scholars on exactly what it means to be open-minded. Some maintain that a non-committal attitude is essential to the virtue. Thus, Peter Gardner says, "to be open-minded about an issue is to have entertained thoughts about the issue but not to be committed to or to hold a particular view about it" (Gardner, 1993, p. 39). So, for Gardner, to be open-minded is to lack firm conviction on an issue. For example, says Gardner, "I am open-minded . . . about whether soft drugs should be legalized, about whether Britain should become a republic, and about whether the salmon season in England should be extended. I have thought about these things, I have even listened to some of the arguments about them, but I

have no views, certainly no firm views, for or against" (Ibid.).

So, for Gardner, a requirement for open-mindedness is the lack of belief commitment. But there are problems with such a view. First, it seems to be at odds with ordinary ways of thinking about education. If students are to avoid firm convictions, then it's difficult to see how we can make sense of discovery in learning. Aren't teachers supposed to provide insights and understanding for their students? To discover truth or to gain understanding is to arrive at a new *conviction*, to gain a new *belief*. Gardner's account of open-mindedness seems to suggest that educators should rather aim to turn all of their students into Pyrrhonic skeptics. Of course, skepticism is an appropriate attitude toward many issues. But surely we don't want our students to avoid belief commitments about basic facts of history and science, much less regarding issues like the ethics of slavery, rape or genocide.

Gardner's non-committal view of open-mindedness is problematic for another reason. It can't account for many common usages of the term, such as when someone says, "I believe a perpetual motion machine is impossible. But I'm open to being proven wrong" or "She thinks that route to Cincinnati is slower than the one I proposed, but she's keeping an open mind." These and similar ordinary expressions reveal that open-mindedness is actually consistent with having a strong belief on an issue.

So if open-mindedness is consistent with belief commitment, then how are we to conceive of this

virtue? William Hare proposes that “To be open-minded is...to be critically receptive to alternative possibilities, to be willing to think again despite having formulated a view, and to be concerned to defuse any factors that constrain one’s thinking in predetermined ways” (Hare, 2003, pp. 4-5). (Hare acknowledges that he borrows the phrase from Bertrand Russell who first characterized open-mindedness as “critical receptiveness.” [Russell, 1950]). So Hare asserts, “the test of open-mindedness is...whether or not we are prepared to entertain doubts about our views” (Hare, 1987, p. 99).

Notice that Hare’s account of open-mindedness makes sense of ordinary expressions which suggest the possible co-existence of belief commitment and openness to alternative views. So while the closed-minded person won’t consider the possibility that her view is false, as Hare puts it, “the open-minded person is ready to entertain an unusual point of view, to admit that an unwelcome conclusion indeed follows, and to concede that a position presently held needs to be revised” (Hare, 2005, p. 1). Hare’s account also resists the other extreme, which confuses open-mindedness with relativism. “To regard all claims as embodying their own truth,” Hare explains, “amounts to giving up on the idea of truth altogether, making open-minded inquiry pointless” (Hare, 2009, p. 39).

I believe Hare’s account of open-mindedness is essentially correct, and much, though not all, of the following discussion will proceed on this assumption. I want to explore how the virtue of open-mindedness contributes to Christian flourishing. That is, I want to consider how being open-minded enhances or improves one’s life as a Christian, both as an individual and in relationship to others. But before I turn to this analysis, I want to make a few more observations, specifically regarding the significance and the requirements of open-mindedness. Here, again, I will draw upon Hare’s work, though I should emphasize that on most of these points he does not disagree with many writers on the topic.

So why is open-mindedness a valuable intellectual characteristic? Hare cites several reasons, including the following (Hare, 2006). First, open-mindedness is necessary for the acquisition of knowledge. Many discoveries challenge established beliefs, and a closed-minded person will be incapable of surrendering these convictions in favor of another view. Having an open mind enables a person to locate and eliminate false beliefs and arrive at warranted conclusions. Second, an open mind encourages and preserves respectful communication, even when dealing with controversial and divisive issues. Thus, open-mindedness fosters genuine tolerance, in the sense of mutual honoring of one another’s right to hold incorrect views, even when these views appear to be primitive, immoral, or dangerous. Third, open-mindedness is a crucial peda-

gogical tool. The teacher who exemplifies this virtue fosters it in her students. If she is willing to seriously consider new ideas, then those whom she teaches will be more likely to express their own thoughts, however unique or unpopular, and they will be more ready to consider others’ perspectives as well. So for the educator, open-mindedness is not just another intellectual virtue. Rather, it is fundamental to a successful quest for and transmission of knowledge.

These might all be points that we can agree upon. Open-mindedness is a significant intellectual virtue. However, while virtues are easy to affirm in theory, they are often difficult to put into practice. So what does it take to actually have an open mind? What attitudes or actions are necessary in order to cultivate this virtue? Here, again, Hare makes some interesting proposals, and I want to highlight what I regard as the three most significant among these. One important requirement for open-mindedness, according to Hare, is “a general epistemological outlook of fallibilism, a recognition that we are sometimes mistaken” (Hare, 2009, p. 38). He suggests that such an attitude is essentially intellectual humility. It would seem that this virtue invites an open-minded attitude, as the more convinced I am of my general fallibility as a knower, the more likely I am to recognize that this or that particular belief might be false, however obvious it might seem to me now. So let us call this prerequisite for open-mindedness the Fallibilist Outlook requirement.

Secondly, Hare says that open-mindedness calls for “a presumption in favor of tolerance and the free expression of ideas in society” and thus “respect for open discussion and debate” (p. 39). Note that, unlike the other individually-oriented prerequisites Hare describes, this attitude is *community-oriented*. Presumably, the idea is that the desire for free expression and open debate in one’s society will expose one to the widest range of ideas and views, thus maximizing one’s chances to advance in understanding. This might also be seen as a proper desire on the part of the open-minded person because such would reflect the fact that open-mindedness is a generally esteemed quality in one’s community, which will contribute to a social environment that is most conducive to advancing in knowledge and understanding. Let us call this prerequisite for open-mindedness the Free Expression requirement.

Finally, and most fundamentally, Hare says that open-mindedness demands a “sincere commitment to the pursuit of truth, without which a concern for evidence and argument and a readiness to revise one’s opinion serves no meaningful purpose” (p. 38). Let’s call this the Truth Pursuit requirement. I say it is more fundamental than the other two because the others seem to presuppose that the pursuit of—not to mention the reality of—truth is a precondition for open-mindedness. After all, to confess one’s fallibility as a

knower is to recognize that one has sometimes *missed* the truth and that this is a significant thing. And the primary rationale for free expression is that this gives a person, as well as entire communities, the best chance at *finding* truth.¹

So what exactly does it mean to sincerely pursue truth? Hare tells us that this commitment is manifest in a “serious consideration of alternative ideas and proposed solutions unless there is already good reason to believe that they have no merit” (p. 37). Okay, but now how do we know when we have good reasons for thinking certain ideas “have no merit”? Here Hare appeals to the standard of “best evidence,” noting that our “epistemic dependence inevitably means we must turn to the experts for a great deal of our knowledge” (p. 39). Hare provides some illustrative examples, including bizarre conspiracy theories and outmoded or “crank” scientific claims. But then, we might further ask, when is it appropriate to challenge the “experts”? As history shows, the “experts” have often turned out to be wrong. And as for the “best evidence,” this too has often turned out to be misleading.

Even Hare’s examples, which appear to be easy marks, deserve some push back. Exactly *which* conspiracy theories should be rejected out of hand? After all, many conspiracy theories, from the Chicago mafia to Watergate, have turned out to be true. So where do we draw the line between those we should dismiss and those we should not rule out or even take very seriously? As for scientific claims, some theories that initially seemed like quackery are now widely embraced, and vice versa. While phrenology and physiognomy are surely misguided, even morally repugnant, paradigms, these were widely accepted for a time, while the claims of Copernicus and Einstein were not accepted at first and were even reviled by many. So, again, *which* scientific claims are to be regarded as ones that “have no merit”? And how are we to employ Hare’s criterion of “best evidence”? These are difficult questions that reveal a certain epistemological messiness that besets attempts to work out a rigorous notion of open-mindedness generally and the Truth Pursuit requirement in particular. But for all of these problems, I think we can still make some headway with regard to the present topic, which is the project of asking how the virtue of open-mindedness contributes to Christian flourishing.

CHRISTIAN OPEN-MINDEDNESS

With some helpful conceptual tools in hand, let’s now consider what it means to be an open-minded *Christian*. In doing so, I want to apply our understanding of open-mindedness more broadly than is usually done by writers on the subject. Typically, scholars, such as the ones reviewed above, focus their discussions of this virtue on propositional truth claims. This is natural, since paradigm cases of open-mindedness concern a

person’s attitudes toward the truth-value of propositions. But there is another sense in which one may be open-minded which involves attitudes towards *persons* as opposed to propositions. So, in what follows, I want to consider this neglected form of the virtue of open-mindedness as well as propositional open-mindedness.

Propositional Open-mindedness

The main question I would like to address related to Christian propositional open-mindedness is normative in nature: When should Christians be open-minded toward particular views? Otherwise put, regarding what sorts of issues should Christians display an open mind? But before addressing this question, I want to deal with another matter, which concerns the general benefits of this virtue for the Christian. That is, why is it good, generally speaking, for Christians to be open-minded? It is not uncommon to hear people complain about this virtue as though it were a vice. Thus goes the humorous maxim: “Don’t be so open-minded that your brain falls out.” Presumably, this idiom expresses dismay over intellectual gullibility, the vice at one extreme of open-mindedness, opposite that of dogmatic closed-mindedness. But if the Christian succeeds in achieving the golden mean of open-mindedness, avoiding both gullibility and dogma, how does this contribute to her good and the flourishing of the community of which she is a part?

Several benefits come to mind, all of which enjoy biblical endorsement. First, open-mindedness is crucial for moral-theological discovery and, in turn, the reinforcement and refinement of faith. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus addresses, among other things, the matter of discernment, and in this context he says, “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened” (Mt. 7:7-8). This seems to be an exhortation to open-mindedness, since to sincerely search for the truth, as by asking, seeking, or, metaphorically, knocking, is a tacit admission that one does not have it yet or, at least, that one is willing to revise or reconsider one’s present views. And this is what it means to have an open mind. If Jesus is correct in saying that those who so inquire for understanding are eventually rewarded, then one significant benefit of this virtue is actual attainment of theological truth, a better understanding of God and how he wants us to live. And this, in turn, reinforces faith and further motivates the quest for theological understanding. Thus, a virtuous cycle of learning and faith augmentation ensues, as the more one learns about God, the greater will be one’s faith, and vice versa. Perhaps this is why the Apostle Paul’s prayer for the early church was for growth in spiritual insight and understanding (cf. Phil. 1:9; Col. 1:9;

Col. 2:2), because he knew that such understanding, while not fully exhausting the meaning of faith, is the better part of it. One cannot trust what one does not understand.

A closely related benefit of open-mindedness for the Christian is how it functions to increase one's moral discernment, otherwise known as wisdom. The whole biblical concept of seeking understanding is oriented toward right living—wisdom not in the sense of *sophia* (speculative understanding) but *phronesis* (practical moral insight). The oft-repeated biblical injunction is to seek *phronesis*, with the promise that its earnest pursuit will be rewarded with discovery, the actual attainment of wisdom and a better, more satisfying life. In fact, this appears to be one of the highest aims, biblically speaking. A proverb tells us to “get wisdom...though it cost all you have” (Pr. 4:7). And when God told king Solomon to ask for whatever he wanted, the Lord was pleased when the king asked for wisdom—so much so that he not only met this request but also gave Solomon wealth, honor, and a long life (1 Kings 3:5-14). Solomon's wisdom was a product of his open-minded pursuit of moral truth. He asked, sought, and “knocked,” and he received in abundance.

A third benefit of open-mindedness is the practical behavioral outworking of the discernment it fosters. As a person becomes wiser, assuming she is morally serious, her conduct will improve. Socrates maintained that to know the good is to do it—that understanding what is right necessarily results in right action. Even those of us who believe in the reality of moral weakness (which Socrates apparently denied) and the capacity of base desires to overwhelm moral conviction and even good intentions will grant that having true moral beliefs vastly improves one's prospects in the moral life. To know the good at least helps one in the mission to do it. Thus, this passage in Proverbs:

Blessed are those who find wisdom, those who gain understanding, for she is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold. She is more precious than rubies; nothing you desire can compare with her. Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. Her ways are pleasant ways, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her; those who hold her fast will be blessed (Pr. 3:13-18).

This passage follows a section extolling the particular benefits of wisdom, including safety and protection and the avoidance of seduction, perversity, and disaster. Such goods not only constitute blessings for the individual but also contribute to the flourishing of one's community.

All of this is well and good and not particularly controversial. Propositional open-mindedness is beneficial and endorsed by Scripture. But this general

fact begs a more pressing question: Just how open-minded should a Christian be? This attribute comes in degrees, after all. To answer this question, let's apply Hare's three requirements of open-mindedness highlighted earlier: (1) sincere pursuit of truth, (2) the fallibilist outlook, and (3) the desire for free expression of thought.

A Christian Pursuit of Truth

We will recall that Hare's conception of sincere pursuit of truth entails the serious consideration of alternative ideas and, furthermore, that such openness must be qualified according to the “best evidence” and deference to the judgments of “experts.” We noted that these qualifications are themselves open to critical review, but they seem to be reasonable general guidelines. So what would these standards entail with regard to Christian open-mindedness? Would this require the Christian to seriously entertain even philosophical and theological claims that fundamentally undermine her theological commitments, such as the claim that there is no God or that Jesus of Nazareth did not rise from the dead? After all, the “experts” on the God question—if that is a proper descriptor of leading scholars in philosophy of religion—are divided on the God question. And many “expert” biblical scholars deny the physical resurrection of Jesus. So should the Christian be willing to seriously consider atheism and the possibility that Jesus never rose? And are Christians who refuse to do so therefore viciously closed-minded? Let us call this view that Christians have such an intellectual duty of openness to atheism and a naturalistic view of the resurrection the “Duty of Openness to Naturalism” (or DON) approach.

Even granting Hare's somewhat vague standards for sincerely pursuing truth, the DON approach is misguided. There are at least two problems here. First, this is but one, albeit coherent, application of Hare's criteria. Another consistent approach would be to question the “expertise” of those scholars who are either atheists or reject the resurrection, but not just because they do not hold the Christian views on these issues (which would be question-begging) but because they themselves fail to abide by Hare's other criterion concerning the *best evidence*. While it is rationally prudent to defer to experts where they all agree on an issue, some higher court of rational appeal is necessary in order to guide us when they are divided. Suppose, then, that a given Christian has carefully looked into the evidence for God and the resurrection of Jesus, and she concludes that the evidence in fact overwhelmingly supports theism and the resurrection. Then doesn't she have good grounds to side with those experts who share her opinion? And wouldn't she then be justified in ceasing to seriously consider atheism and a naturalistic view of the resurrection? Wouldn't such an approach still be consistent with a sincere pursuit of

truth? I don't see why not.²

A second problem with the DON approach regards Hare's criteria, which we are now in a better position to critique, precisely because this application reveals their limits. While Hare's proposed qualifications of best evidence and expert opinion are good as far as they go, we have no reason to believe they are exhaustive or jointly sufficient qualifiers. Perhaps some others should be considered as well. And in the context of religious belief and the prospect of believing in a personal God, it seems to me that another potentially good reason for foreclosing in favor of theistic belief would be religious experience or direct personal acquaintance with God. Supposing a believer had such an encounter with the divine, then it would seem silly, even psychologically unhealthy for her to attempt to force herself to seriously consider the possibility of atheism, which would be tantamount to denying that she had such an experience. The skeptic will complain, of course, that this assumes the believer's *interpretation* of her experience is correct. But the theist might retort, as many do, that her experience, being direct, really involved no interpretation, at least in so far as it was an experience of God (which is not to deny that there may be many aspects of the experience that are interpretive, such as her sense of God's attributes, intentions, instructions, etc.).³

So if Christian pursuit of truth is consistent with foreclosure on the truth of theism and the resurrection of Jesus, what are we to say about various other theological beliefs? If the believer is sincerely pursuing truth, must she seriously consider alternative views about divine omniscience and providence? The atonement? The doctrine of hell? Views of Scripture? After all, Christian theological experts disagree about these issues, so much so that whole sub-traditions and church denominations are formed on the basis of specific positions on such issues. So should the Christian seriously entertain alternative views on such secondary theological issues? I think so, for several reasons. First, regarding God's existence and the resurrection of Christ, as well as a few other doctrines, including the Trinity and divine incarnation, there has been strong and broad church consensus, as reflected in the classic creeds of the Christian faith. In contrast to these creedal points, each of the above-mentioned secondary issues has seen continuous debate and division. Relative to the global church, these are intramural theological disputes. Presumably this is due to the differing degrees of evidential support for these doctrines. Not even the most firmly convinced Christian on any of these secondary issues would hold that the evidential support for her view on, say, divine attributes, the atonement, hell, or her view of Scripture is as strong as it is for theism or Christ's resurrection. This is probably why the classic creeds, while emphatically affirming such things as God's existence, the Trinity, and the

divinity and resurrection of Jesus, implicitly allow for latitude when it comes to secondary doctrines regarding divine attributes, the atonement, hell, Scripture, and other issues they do not address.

There is a further reason for recommending serious consideration of alternative views on secondary theological issues. This regards a key difference in the relevance of personal experience when it comes to the evidential justification of such beliefs as compared to beliefs about primary, creedal theological beliefs. As just noted, a believer's personal experience may figure in as reasonable grounds for cognitive foreclosure in favor of theism or the divinity and resurrection of Christ. (Reports of experiences of direct acquaintance with God or the person of Christ are common.) But views on such doctrines as divine omniscience, the atonement, hell, or Scripture are not the sorts of beliefs that could so easily draw their warrant from religious experience. It is hard to imagine what would have to characterize such an experience in order to provide justificatory grounds for a particular view on any of these issues, apart from, say, hearing the voice of God. But supposing you did hear a voice that uttered the words "The penal substitutionary view is correct" or "You need to reconsider biblical inerrancy," you probably wouldn't be inclined to think it was the voice of God anyway. More likely, you'd think you were getting loopy from too much grading or you were suffering the psychological mal-effects of some Dickensian undigested bit of beef.

So I'm inclined to think the Christian has an intellectual duty to seriously consider alternative views on secondary theological issues and that this is quite consistent with even the most stalwart commitment to all of the classical creedal points of the faith. But now this raises a further question: Does this preclude conscious submission to theological authorities within one's denominational sub-tradition, particularly among church leaders? I don't think so, at least given a reasonably relaxed notion of "submission" in this context. In most sub-traditions and local churches views on these issues are recognized for what they are—secondary rather than primary. And it is understood that even among church leaders—elders, deacons and even pastors—views sometimes change and that when they do the expectation or requirement is that the church leader must report this change of conviction to his or her fellow church leaders. Depending on how significant the doctrinal change, this may or may not result in a need to resign from his or her leadership role, but nothing more than this. Note that "submission" in such cases does not entail avoidance of changing one's views but rather (1) reporting one's change of doctrinal opinion and, if applicable, (2) abdicating one's leadership role in the church.

Thus, commitment to a particular theological tradition does seem reasonable, so long as it is construed

in a looser sense than would be applied to those beliefs affirmed in the classic creeds and about which there is global, historic consensus, thus reflecting uniformity or strongly prevailing theological opinion down through Christian history. In other words, one's commitment to a particular Christian theological tradition will not be as strong as her commitment to the creedal points or what is sometimes called the Great Tradition. Commitment to a sub-tradition may be reasonably strong, but not so strong as to preclude a willingness to consider alternative theological ideas that are at odds with that tradition. The open-minded Christian will be critically receptive to all new theological beliefs that do not transgress the creedal points or, in any case, what can be reasonably construed to be the defining or essential propositions of Christianity.

A Christian Fallibilist Outlook

Turning now to the second requirement for open-mindedness, what are we to make of the fallibilist outlook from a Christian perspective? Is this appropriate for the Christian? And, if so, what are the implications of this for the Christian life?

As Hare suggests, the fallibilist epistemic perspective is closely associated with intellectual humility, and this is a virtue that is especially befitting the Christian, again for several reasons. For starters, Christians are called to have an attitude of humility. Nowhere is this virtue extolled more strongly than in Philippians 2:5-11, where the Apostle Paul exhorts his readers to "have the same mindset as Christ" insofar as he "humbled himself" (vs. 5, 8). If Paul's exhortation applies just as readily to the cognitive domain as to the moral realm, then it would appear that the Christian should indeed maintain a fallibilist outlook.

There is a further practical consideration that recommends this epistemic attitude, and that is the fact that earnest, devout Christians disagree about all sorts of theological issues. This means, of course, that most, perhaps all, devout Christians are mistaken on some important, albeit non-creedal, theological doctrine or other. If we consider the matter from a strictly statistical standpoint, other things being equal, any given Christian's theological views are as likely to be mistaken as those of a fellow Christian with whom she disagrees. We scholars might demur at this suggestion, though, because we are so much better studied, if not in theology then at least in our own academic fields, which surely makes us more rational overall and, thus, more reliable judges of theological matters! The problem with this line of thinking, of course, is that there is as much theological disagreement among scholars as there is in the church generally. Rigorous academic training does not guarantee convergence on theological verities, though it surely enhances our capacity for identifying, articulating, and framing our disagreements, which in turn enhances our mutual under-

standing. The knowledge that even the most earnest, devout, and even scholarly Christians are nonetheless mistaken on some important theological points should engender a strong sense of intellectual humility.

A third factor relevant to the fallibilist outlook both recommends this attitude and potentially explains at least some intramural theological disagreements among Christians, namely the noetic effects of sin. Like every other aspect of human nature, our minds are impacted by the Fall, and the symptoms are as varied as they are devastating. The doctrine of the noetic effects of sin has explanatory power regarding some of our disagreements because we are all susceptible to self-deception, which gives rise to rationalization, minimalization, and other moral-psychological maladies that compromise the cognitive processes of belief formation.⁴ These dynamics are as insidious as they are because it is their occurrence in us that renders them difficult, if not sometimes impossible, for us to detect. And I say that the reality of sin's noetic effects recommends a fallibilist outlook because such an attitude provides an intellectual bulwark—though not, of course, a cure or guaranteed protection—against such noetic pitfalls. A contributing factor in many cases of self-deception appears to be the vice of pride and a resistance to admitting that one is mistaken. A recognition of one's fallibility is a healthy antidote to this vice and thus a safeguard against self-deception and all of its cognitive complications. Of course, pride is sometimes difficult to distinguish from, and is often accompanied by, non-moral emotional dynamics such as fear and insecurity. And since a fallibilist outlook itself seems to require a certain amount of emotional security, the challenge to develop this attitude can be considerable. Be that as it may, the fallibilist outlook, or intellectual humility more generally, does seem particularly appropriate for the Christian.

It is noteworthy here that human epistemic fallibility highlights the significance of the notion of a divine revelation that is *infallible*. If Scripture can be trusted in regards to all that it teaches, then as Christians we at least have the benefit of this as a touchstone in all of our debates. And our belief in the absolute trustworthiness of Scripture is consistent with the recognition that our interpretations are prone to error. That is, while the inspiration of Scripture was a divine activity, biblical hermeneutics is a human enterprise. The open-minded Christian will keep this in mind.

A Christian Desire for Free Expression

Thus far we have seen how the Truth Pursuit and Fallibilist Outlook requirements of open-mindedness dovetail very naturally with a Christian perspective. So let's consider the third requirement, which is the desire for open dialogue, debate, and the free expression of ideas. The first thing to note is that this desire can apply to a variety of social contexts, from the broadest

civil context to specific contexts that include educational, workplace, and church communities, among others. I will assume—contentious as this might be in some circles—that Christians properly desire free expression of ideas in society at large. To oppose this would be self-defeating from a Christian point of view, given that we have a message to proclaim to the world, however that proclamation is understood or best to be made. Note also that the value here concerns not free expression *simpliciter*, which would thus include perverse visible and tangible “expressions” that have little to no ideational content. Rather, the aim is free expression of *ideas*—propositions, truth claims, values, conceptual schemes, etc. So Christian endorsement of free expression does not imply favor for the legal and open distribution of, say, pornography, ultra-violent, or otherwise degrading creative works.

Assuming, then, that Christians should favor open dialogue and debate throughout society, there remains the more challenging question regarding the propriety of free expression of ideas within believing communities, such as Christian churches, schools, and scholarly societies. How much, if at all, should the Christian desire freedom of expression in these contexts? Should she take the same attitude toward expression of ideas in her local Christian community as she does in society at large? Or should she prefer that such inquiry and dialogue be limited by the doctrinal parameters that define theological orthodoxy?

Perhaps one’s answer to this question will turn on whether one is willing to see others potentially persuaded by certain points of view that are problematic for some reason, such as wayward theological views (e.g., unitarianism, deism, a naturalistic view of the resurrection, etc.) or wayward moral views (e.g., sexual immorality, racism, etc.). Historically, leaders within Christian communities, particularly local church or denominational contexts, have been careful to safeguard their identities by carefully stating their theological commitments and stipulating that leaders within those bodies subscribe to these standards (or to a critical core of doctrines among them), while the standards for non-leader members are less restrictive. In other cases, such as Christian scholarly societies, the doctrinal standards for leaders and non-leader members are often identical, though these standards are typically less restrictive, sometimes merely requiring that members be willing to self-identify as Christians.

So community context and one’s place in the community appear to be crucial factors when considering to what degree free expression of ideas is desirable. But now let us focus on that Christian context concerning which there has been the most controversy, historically speaking—the global church community or Christians generally speaking. It seems to be this broad context that people have in mind when they say things like, “Doctrine X is not an option for Chris-

tians” or “It is inappropriate for Christians to believe X.” Such statements might suggest that not only is it problematic to believe X but that any local Christian community—whether a church, school, or scholarly society—would be misguided in encouraging Christians to seriously consider or dialogue about the view in question.

Here the worry obviously concerns heresy and the danger that heretical beliefs pose to individual Christians as well as entire Christian communities. Historically, the church has struggled with heresy in many ways—not just in combating heretical doctrines and disciplining heretics but also in agreeing upon criteria for what counts as heresy.⁵ Christians have also differed over the relevancy of particular doctrinal convictions to a believer’s ultimate salvation. I can’t go into these issues here but we are safe to assume that heresy is indeed something the Christian should try to avoid. So to whatever extent the Christian should favor the free expression of ideas, her attitude about this will be informed by her views on such issues regarding heresy and its relevance to salvation.

It is because of this connection between belief and salvation that Christians are often so concerned to monitor and even censure certain beliefs such as by discouraging free and open dialogue about certain issues. Sometimes this approach is criticized by critics of Christianity as oppressive or irrationally narrow. And surely sometimes this is the case, depending on the issue that is censored. But if the belief in question really is at the core of Christian theology, the acceptance of which really is partly determinative of salvation (e.g., the personhood of God or the resurrection of Christ), then such censure is neither irrational nor even necessarily oppressive, if by so doing church leaders can effectively protect the souls of fellow Christians. The question, though, is whether proscribing open expression and dialogue really is the best, or even a good, way of preventing believers from abandoning essential Christian theological beliefs. If Christian orthodoxy really enjoys the strongest evidential warrant, perhaps it is best for Christian leaders to allow or even encourage completely free and open expression of ideas, including those that fundamentally challenge orthodoxy.

The question posed in this section was this: How open-minded ought Christians to be? Our answer, in sum, appears to be that the Christian should be very open-minded in the Harean sense of the term. That is, she will be committed to a sincere pursuit of truth. She will be intellectually humble in the sense that she maintains a fallibilist epistemic outlook. And she will desire free expression of ideas, both in broader society and, if to a somewhat limited degree, local Christian communities.

PERSONAL OPEN-MINDEDNESS

Our discussion of Christian open-mindedness to this

point has pertained just to beliefs or attitudes toward propositional truth claims. But the virtue of open-mindedness also comes into play in the context of our *attitude towards people*. Just as we are more or less inclined to affirm the truth of a particular view, we are also more or less inclined to affirm the goodness of another person. And just as we might be more or less willing to consider alternative views on an issue, we may be more or less willing to consider revising our evaluations, moral or otherwise, of other people. Suppose, for example, I have a colleague, Joe, who has offended me mildly, such as by interrupting me during meetings or speaking to me with a condescending tone. On the basis of these interactions I have formed an impression of him as a rude and even somewhat arrogant person. But then suppose that another colleague mentions that Joe's wife has cancer and that for this reason Joe has been irritable and out of sorts lately. This realization should prompt me to revise my attitude toward Joe such that I reevaluate my character assessment and regard his brusqueness as an understandable symptom of his emotional stress and not a reliable index to his moral character. Put in terms of attribution theory in psychology, my former *dispositional* attribution has been displaced by a *situational* attribution.

This willingness to revise one's attitude toward others is what I am calling personal open-mindedness. Now this might be a form of open-mindedness that is distinct from propositional open-mindedness or it might just be a unique species of propositional open-mindedness. If the latter, then all personal open-mindedness could be analyzed in terms of propositions or beliefs about propositions. This is an interesting question but not one that I will address here. For our present purposes, we need only recognize that personal open-mindedness is a genuine attribute. Furthermore, I think it is safe to assume that personal open-mindedness is a morally relevant characteristic and perhaps a bona fide virtue.

Positive and Negative Personal Open-Mindedness

So, I am suggesting, the willingness to revise one's potentially mistaken impressions of someone is personal open-mindedness. But there appear to be other forms of personal open-mindedness that don't quite fit this scenario—situations where one's assessment is accurate and so not in need of change but where the *person* one is assessing *is* subject to change. So, to tweak the illustration, suppose my impression of Joe is actually on the mark. He is indeed a rude and somewhat arrogant person. Am I open to the possibility that in time, perhaps over the course of many years, Joe could morally change for the better, eventually becoming polite and humble? Now this might be highly unlikely given the inveterate nature of Joe's vices. But since people do sometimes undergo significant moral changes, whether

for the better or worse, an openness to this possibility in such cases seems to be a virtue. As such, personal open-mindedness could be said to be an application of the biblical injunction to "hope all things" (1 Cor. 13:7).

Despite popular dogmas to the contrary, people do change—at least as *individuals*, if not the entire human race.⁶ So my attitudes toward people's moral conditions should reflect this fact. And, again, personal open-mindedness implies a willingness to recognize people's changes for the better or worse. Personal open-mindedness, then, should have both a positive and negative orientation. Positive personal open-mindedness seems to relate to the virtue of hope but is not identical to it, since hope has essentially to do with confidence in the eventual fact of ultimate good change, as opposed to a mere openness to the possibility. In this sense, the virtue of hope, especially as applied to individual people, is a much stronger attitude or disposition. As for negative personal open-mindedness, or the willingness to consider that a person might change for the worse, this seems akin to something like wariness, chariness or guardedness. But, again, negative personal open-mindedness is not as strong an attitude as these characteristics suggest, for openness to negative change is not actual suspicion or distrust, as is evident in the guarded or wary person.

What is Required for Personal Open-mindedness

So personal open-mindedness is somewhat, but not entirely, analogous to (other forms of) propositional open-mindedness. It is a willingness to reconsider or revise one's views or attitudes towards a person, either because of one's own susceptibility to error or the other person's potential for moral change. As with propositional open-mindedness, Hare's prerequisites seem to apply, though in a somewhat different way. To be personally open-minded surely one must pursue truth and be interested in open discussion and dialogue, specifically regarding relevant facts about people so that one's assessments are more likely to be true. But because the relevant assessments involve persons rather than propositions, additional limiting conditions apply, such as discretion, tact, and a good sense of the socially appropriate. In some instances, such virtues will dictate that one reserve one's moral assessment of another person. And in other cases, where personal assessments are forced—such as in job interviews, recommendation letters, or intimate interpersonal conflicts—discretion will dictate the utmost restraint and privacy in sharing one's assessment, while tact will require delicacy or diplomacy in articulating one's assessment. All of this is very tricky, as we all know, which is indicative of the fact that personal open-mindedness is a more demanding, because multi-dimensional, virtue. Persons, after all, are not propositions. And although some beliefs and truth claims, such as those regarding religion, poli-

tics, and ethics, can be somewhat personal, nothing is more personal, and potentially offensive, than a moral assessment of someone.

As for the prerequisite of intellectual humility, this too is critical for personal open-mindedness. A sense of one's own epistemic fallibility is important, obviously, to sustain the willingness to be proven wrong and change one's mind about another person. But such humility is also crucial for practical reasons. As just noted, there can be certain risks in assessing people, particularly when sharing one's assessments with others. If it is important to keep in mind one's fallibility when considering doctrinal matters, then it is all the more so when making personal assessments, especially of a moral nature, because of potential emotional, relational, and even legal perils. An attitude of intellectual humility fosters the discretion and restraint that are so critical when making personal evaluations in professional contexts. Such care can prevent unnecessary conflicts, not to mention gossip and slander.

Biblical Recommendations of Personal Open-Mindedness

Earlier I explained why Christians should be propositionally open-minded. But why is personal open-mindedness (in particular) appropriate for the Christian? I believe there are some clear biblical endorsements of this virtue. One of these is the Golden Rule, the notion that we should treat others as we would like to be treated (cf. Mt. 7:12; Lk. 6:31). One need only reflect on this question: Would I like other people to be personally open-minded toward me? When it might appear that I am guilty of some wrongful act or moral vice, would I prefer that others seriously consider an alternative interpretation? Would I prefer that others consider some possible *situational* attribution as opposed to the negative *dispositional* attribution that the circumstances might tempt them toward? Of course, the answer to each of these questions is yes. We *all* want to be given the benefit of the doubt, to have our words and actions interpreted in the most sympathetic light. So the Golden Rule dictates that we intentionally adopt such an approach toward everyone else. In other words, we have a biblical moral duty to be personally open-minded with regard to the possibility of mistaken impressions.

The Golden Rule also applies to personal open-mindedness regarding the possibility of moral change. Frances Howard-Snyder has noted that "a distinctive feature of our self-love is that we regard ourselves as considerably *more malleable* than we regard others. . . . Because we regard our own future as open to change and development, we regard ourselves as possibly wonderful, and hope that others will see that in us" (Howard-Snyder, 1999, p. 389). So if, as the Golden Rule enjoins us, we love others as we love ourselves, then we have a moral duty to regard others as equally

morally malleable, that is, subject to significant moral improvement. And this, again, is tantamount to personal open-mindedness.

So the Golden Rule strongly endorses an open-minded attitude toward persons. Another biblical recommendation of this virtue is to be found in the model of Jesus Christ, who eschewed moral condemnation, which is essentially foreclosure against the possibility of moral redemption and a denial of moral malleability. However, it is important to notice that while Jesus does condemn condemning judgments, he does not condemn *all* moral judgments. In fact, Jesus makes hundreds of moral judgments in the Gospels, in the sense of moral discernments. And he instructs us to do the same while avoiding the pitfall of condemnation. Jesus' nuanced approach is played out in several scenes in the Gospels, perhaps nowhere more poignantly than in his interaction with the woman caught in adultery in John 8. After challenging and dismissing her accusers he asks her, "Has no one condemned you?" When she says no, Jesus declares, "Then neither do I condemn you . . . Go now and leave your life of sin" (John 8:10-11). Jesus' two statements tersely combine discerning moral judgment with an affirmation of the woman's moral malleability. So Jesus displays personal open-mindedness, even to those who seem to be the least likely candidates for moral redemption, such as prostitutes and tax collectors. In fact, it was this open-minded attitude that made him such a scandal. And if today we follow Jesus' example in consistently displaying an open mind, we might be scandalous too.

Such controversy we can live with, of course, if it is a consequence of doing the right thing. But is it always right to be personally open-minded to others' moral change for the better? One might object that it is in fact sometimes psychologically unhealthy or practically unwise to be so. Consider a woman who has been chronically abused by her husband. Isn't it ill advised for her to believe that he can change? After all, this attitude will prompt her to remain with him and thus make her vulnerable to yet more abuse. In this case, and we can imagine many others, it seems that personal open-mindedness effectively amounts to a masochism. What do we say to this? I do think this is a legitimate concern, but I would point out this objection takes too narrow a view on what it means to affirm the moral malleability of others. For the woman to flee physical danger by leaving her husband's presence is consistent with a genuine openness to the possibility that he might change for the better, just as my leaving town to flee a hurricane is consistent with my openness to the possibility that the storm will not cause severe damage to my property. Courses of action are based on probabilities, not certainties. Just as genuine propositional openness only calls for possibility, not probability, of truth, so does genuine

personal openness in this case call only for a recognition of the possibility, not likelihood, that the husband will change for the better. And while the likelihood remains remote, it might be most prudent to pursue physical safety and hope for change, as it were, from a distance.

The Benefits of Personal Open-Mindedness

So personal open-mindedness is a virtue generally and the sort of character trait that Christians, in particular, have a duty to display in their dealings with others. Now what are the practical benefits of being open-minded towards people? I believe there are many, and I would stress that these benefits are not merely practical in nature but are also morally significant, as should be self-evident as I discuss them.

First, personal open-mindedness improves one's prospects for properly understanding the significance of human freedom as well as the reality of divine redemptive intervention. To believe that humans are free is to affirm that our moral fates are not sealed, that we have the capacity to make choices that can lead us down a significantly different moral path than the one we are currently on. And to believe in divine redemptive intervention is to affirm that God is willing and able to impact people's minds such that they develop better interests and motives, culminating in better life choices. Belief in others' moral malleability reinforces these perspectives on both human and divine roles in human moral redemption.

Secondly, an open-minded attitude towards people provides a safeguard against condemnation and the vices of grudge and cynicism. As was just noted, a condemning judgment of someone is essentially a foreclosure against the possibility of their moral redemption. To hold a grudge against a person is to live in a perpetual state of condemning judgment toward them, implicitly asserting that their sins are unforgivable. And to be cynical towards people is to maintain that real moral change for the better is impossible. Personal open-mindedness militates against all of these attitudes, holding out the possibility for real moral change in the life of any human being, no matter how chronic their vices might be.

Closely related to this is a third benefit of personal open-mindedness, namely that it fosters a psychological context conducive to the practice of forgiveness. It is easier to forgive a person when you believe their repentance is genuine and potentially permanent or, if they have yet to repent, that they eventually will repent and repudiate the very vices that have harmed the victim. To forgive is to forswear or surrender condemnation of someone. And the same acknowledgement of others' moral malleability that serves to prevent condemnation, grudge and cynicism also enables one to repent of these attitudes when they have already formed in oneself.

The previous two noted benefits are premised on the notion of positive personal open-mindedness. But the negative pole of this attitude is also beneficial. For one thing, it guards a person from devastation when people change significantly for the worse. To know that people are negatively, as well as positively, morally malleable makes one a realist about the possibility of disappointment in people but also keeps this in perspective, because of the possibility of redemption. Furthermore, this same attitude will inspire a person to be attentive to danger signs in friends who begin to make bad life choices. As Aristotle would say, a string of bad choices creates a bad habit, and a bad habit, when indulged long enough, hardens into a bad character. So the personally open-minded person will be more likely to lovingly warn a friend when wayward behaviors become apparent.

These are just some of the benefits of personal open-mindedness, all of which are critical to the moral life—the prevention of vice, the encouragement of virtue, and the strengthening of friendship. These observations, combined with biblical endorsement of this attribute, make for a powerful case for the claim that the Christian should strive to be personally open-minded.

CONCLUSION

I hope it is clear from the foregoing discussion that open-mindedness, at least as conceived from the perspective of William Hare's account, is not only a morally relevant intellectual virtue but is especially important for Christians to nurture in themselves and promote in their communities. It is a characteristic that, in both its propositional and personal forms, is practically beneficial, biblically endorsed, and evident in the lives of Christian exemplars. To be generally open-minded, with some qualifications, contributes to the Christian's flourishing intellectually, morally, and socially.

James S. Spiegel received his Ph.D. in philosophy in 1993 from Michigan State University in East Lansing, Michigan. He is currently Professor of Philosophy and Religion at Taylor University in Upland, IN. His research primarily concerns issues in ethics and philosophy of religion. He is the author of *Hypocrisy: Moral Fraud and Other Vices* (Baker, 1999), *How to Be Good in a World Gone Bad* (Kregel, 2004), and *The Making of an Atheist* (Moody, 2010). Kindly send any correspondence concerning this article to: Department of Philosophy, Taylor University, 236 West Reade Ave., Upland, IN 46989; or jmspiegel@taylor.edu.

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Notes

¹ Here we may recall John Stuart Mill's classic four-fold defense of freedom of expression, each argument of which was premised on the central aim of discovering truth. Mill's arguments were, in summary, as follows: (1) to silence an opinion assumes one's (or a government's) infallibility regarding judgments of truth, (2) many false opinions contain at least some partial truth, (3) truth is better understood through contest, and (4) true views lose their vitality when they become dogmas (Mill, 1956, pp. 19-67).

² It might be added that the DON approach is historically myopic. As for the truth of theism, while many philosophers of religion today are atheistic or agnostic, the strong majority of philosophers down through history have been theists, including most of the greatest philosophers in history—Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, Descartes, Locke, Berkeley, Kant, and Hegel. Certainly, there have been atheists as well, including Democritus, Hobbes, Hume, and Nietzsche. But over the course of twenty-five centuries their view consistently represented the minority report among philosophical “experts.” So while we might not be able to claim theism as a clear consensus, it has been the prevailing opinion among Western philosophers down through history.

³ Another route of response here would be to note that this same complicating factor regarding interpretation also plagues Hare's other two criteria for truth pursuit, since one might also question one's interpretation of the best evidence and expert opinion. So if the problem of interpretation doesn't undermine the reasonableness of using these criteria, there is no reason to dismiss the personal experience as a qualifier for that reason.

⁴ For some excellent studies on self-deception, see H. Fingarette (1969), M. R. Haight (1980), D. Pears (1984), M. W. Martin (1985) and B. P. McLaughlin and A. O. Rorty (1988). And for a treatment of the subject from a Christian perspective, see G. A. Ten Elshof (2009).

⁵ For a good philosophical analysis of the concept of heresy and how the term should be defined, see E. Stump (1999).

⁶ The fact that the human population as a whole is not improving can blind us to the fact that on an individual level many, if not most, of us do experience significant moral growth over the course of a lifetime. In this sense, there is reason for even the most cynical person regarding human nature to be nonetheless very optimistic about the moral productivity of our lives in this world. John Hick effectively made this point when he said, “Man is in the process of becoming the perfected being whom God is seeking to create . . . Because this is a pilgrimage within the life of each individual, rather than a racial evolution, the progressive fulfillment of God's purpose does not entail any corresponding progressive improvement in the moral state of the world” (Hick, 1966, p. 292).

Sexuality: On Being Human and Promoting Social Justice

Peter J. Gentry

The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Based on a biblical definition of the soul, the image of God, and social justice, various options in human sexuality are considered and evaluated. Expressions of sexuality not corresponding to biblical standards are found to be dehumanising and contrary to social justice.

Keywords: soul, image, sexuality, humanness, social justice

This brief essay considers the main thesis of the book, *Kingdom through Covenant*, and the relation of that thesis to human sexuality (Gentry & Wellum, 2012). Understanding human sexuality entails grasping, first of all, what it means to be human and second, what is the purpose and role of human sexuality.

Being Human

As a foundation we shall start with a definition of “being human” within the context of a Christian worldview, that is, a worldview derived from Christian Scripture, the Old and New Testaments. The biblical teaching on creation determines our understanding of being human. For it is in the creation narratives that we understand, first, the nature of the soul according to the Bible, and second, the differences between humans and all creatures made by the creator God that are not human.

What is the Soul?

The fundamental text (Waltke, 1976) describing the soul is Gen. 2:7 which states,

“And Yahweh God formed / shaped the man out of dust from the ground, and he breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul (*nepeš hayyā*).”

This text provides a description of the creation of humans that complements the text in Genesis 1:26-28. It consists of just three short sentences. The first sentence informs us that in part humans are made out of ‘dust’ (Hebrew *āpār*, i.e. ‘loose earth’ or ‘soil’) from the ‘earth’ or ‘ground’ (*’ādāmā*) and personally fashioned by God as an artisan or potter would make an earthenware vessel. “Forming’ or ‘shaping’, as Gordon Wenham notes (1987, 59), is an artistic and inventive activity that requires planning and skill (cf. Is. 44:9-10). One of the components of human beings, then, is the earth or soil. We can see this statement

corroborated by the fact that humans ingest the earth or soil to live. Gen. 3:17 confirms this actually stating that we eat the ground (the 3rd feminine singular suffix on the verb has the ‘ground’ (*’ādāmā*), a feminine noun as its referent). What, in fact, we eat are plants, which are derived from the ground and later on (Gen. 9:2-3) we eat animals which in turn eat plants. Thus, we ingest the soil indirectly. Indeed, Gen. 3:19 repeats the statement that *’ādām* (humankind) was taken from the *’ādāmā* (‘ground’) a synonym in this verse for *’āpār*, (‘dust’, ‘loose soil’). Not only is the statement in Gen. 2:7a confirmed by the fact that we ingest the ground or soil, but it is also confirmed by the fact that upon death the body returns to dust. This is clearly stated in Gen. 3:19, but is open to observation and can easily be confirmed apart from Scripture. This material or physical component of humans is typically referred to in Hebrew by the term *bāšār*, (i.e. ‘flesh’ or ‘body’) and in Greek by *σῶμα* (‘body’).

The second sentence in the text “and he blew into his nostrils the breath of life,” reveals that man’s origin is not only from the earth, but also from heaven. The noun phrase “the breath of life” can be analysed as an exegetical genitive (Waltke & O’Connor, 1990, § 9.5.3c) indicating that breath is that which is characteristic of life. When the breath is gone, the animal or human is considered to be dead—without life. Hans Walter Wolff concluded the same thing: “For Old Testament man, life is essentially manifested in the breath.” (1974, 59)

The breath (*nəšāmā*), also referred to as the wind or spirit (Hebrew *rūāh*, Greek *πνεῦμα*) speaks of the immaterial component of human beings. Several other texts in the Old Testament clearly indicate that the life of humans, manifested by their breathing, comes from the spirit of God. For example, Job, whose words were approved by the Lord (Job 42:7), said:

“as long as my breath (*nəšāmā*) is in me, and the spirit (*rūāh*) of God is in my nostrils” (Job 27:3, ESV)

Elihu, an Israelite, spoke in the same vein:

“If he should set his heart to it and gather to himself his spirit (*rūāh*) and his breath (*nəšāmā*), all flesh would perish together, and man would return to dust (*‘āpār*).” (Job 34:14–15, ESV)

Almost identical to the statement of Elihu are the words of the Preacher, affirmed as truth (Ecc. 12:10):

“and the dust (*‘āpār*) returns to the earth (*‘ereṣ*) as it was, and the spirit (*rūāh*) returns to God who gave it.” (Ecc. 12:7, ESV)

The prophet Isaiah, who based much of his instruction upon creation doctrine, also affirmed this truth:

“Thus says God, the LORD, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath (*nəšāmā*) to the people on it and spirit (*rūāh*) to those who walk in it.” (Is. 42:5, ESV)

We can see, then, that ‘breath’ (*nəšāmā*) and ‘spirit’ (*rūāh*) are essentially interchangeable and synonymous in describing the immaterial aspect of humanity. The term ‘breath’ is a bit more earthy than ‘spirit’ and more suitable to the picture painted in a narrative portraying God as an artisan skilfully at work in the creation of man. Moses is careful in Genesis 1–2 to avoid making statements that would lead to considering humans in idolatrous terms. In addition, as Anthony Thiselton warns, *rūāh* denoting “Spirit of God” must not be confused with *rūāh* when the term denotes the human spirit (Thiselton, 2013, 6–8). The Old Testament can speak of “the spirits of all flesh” (Num. 16:22), or of the “breath of every human being” (Job 12:10). Yet by contrast, the forty-two instances of the Spirit in the book of Ezekiel emphasise that the Spirit of God is creative, dynamic, and transcendent.

The final sentence in Gen. 2:7, “and the man became a living soul,” shows that the result of the union of “clods of earth” with the “breath of life” is called a living *nepeš* in Hebrew and has traditionally been translated by the English word soul. It is extremely important to grasp the syntax in Hebrew. The *lamed* preposition indicates that the *nepeš* is the goal or result of bringing the dust and the spirit together. The soul is a *tertium quid* (a third something) that is neither dust nor wind. Thus although one may say that they have a soul, it is more accurate to say that they are a soul. I have a soul because I am a soul. The soul is a way of referring to my being as a whole. The soul is the unique bringing together of the material and the immaterial. Indeed, the dividing point between the two is a mystery that may well be impossible for

us to penetrate (Heb. 4:12). Even the best research in science today cannot differentiate between the brain and the mind. And although the term *nepeš* is used in a great many ways in the Old Testament, it is clear that this basic text is not specifying the soul as an aspect or component of a human being, but denotes the body animated with the life of God as a whole.

The definition of a human being cannot end with just a description of the soul since all that has been said so far about human beings is also said about all animals in the Old Testament. First, their bodies, like the bodies of human beings, are also derived from the earth or soil according to Gen. 1:24, “let the earth bring forth living creatures according to its kind.” Second, animals like humans also derive their life from the spirit of God. For example, Ps. 104:30, speaking of the animals says this: “When you send forth your Spirit, they [the animals] are created, and you renew the face of the ground” (ESV). The Preacher also notes similarities between animals and humans in their bodies and their spirits:

“I said in my heart with regard to the children of man that God is testing them that they may see that they themselves are but beasts. For what happens to the children of man and what happens to the beasts is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and man has no advantage over the beasts, for all is vanity. All go to one place. All are from the dust, and to dust all return. Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of the beast goes down into the earth?” (Ecc. 3:18–21, ESV)

Both animals and humans come from the dust and return to the dust; both animals and humans have the same breath or spirit in them. Other texts affirm that animal life comes from the wind or spirit of God (Gen. 6:17; 7:15, 22). Third, animals are also called “living souls” in Scripture. Gen. 1:24 was just cited in reference to the animals: “let the earth bring living creatures according to its kind.” The expression “living creatures” is rendering *nepeš hayyā* in the Hebrew Text. It is normal in English translations of the Bible for *nepeš hayyā* to be rendered by the expression “living creatures” in this verse as well as in Gen. 2:19, but the biblical text employs the same expression as it does for humans everywhere (cf. 1:30). From the biblical evidence, then, both animals and humans have souls, or to be more precise, are souls. They are living beings, the result of material and immaterial substance combined mysteriously by God into a unitary whole.

Personhood / The Divine Image

What then is (are) the difference(s) between humans and animals, if any difference exists at all? According to the biblical text, the only differences between humans and animals are that (1) humans are persons and (2)

that humans have been *made as the divine image*.

How is personhood defined? Generally psychologists define persons as beings that display emotions, mind, and will. In the Old Testament, the term “heart” conveys these three things in one word.

In Hebrew, the word “heart” refers to the core of who you are, the centre of each person. It refers, in particular, to the place where we feel, where we think, and where we make decisions and plans, i.e., emotions, mind, and will. This can be easily seen from the following illustrative passages:

- **Feelings**

“A glad heart makes a cheerful face, but by sorrow of heart the spirit is crushed.” (Prov. 15:13, ESV)

“A joyful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.” (Prov. 17:22, ESV)

When these proverbs refer to a “glad heart” or a “joyful heart” they are clearly referring to one’s emotions and feelings in terms of a healthy psyche.

- **Reasoning**

“But to this day the LORD has not given you a heart to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear.” (Deut. 29:4, ESV)

“Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.” (Is. 6:10, ESV)

In both Deut. 29:4 and Is. 6:10, one understands with the heart; surely then what is being referred to is what we normally call the mind. This is the place where we reason and think and understand.

- **Will**

“The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps.” (Prov. 16:9, ESV)

“May he grant you your heart’s desire and fulfill all your plans!” (Ps. 20:4, ESV)

Prov. 16:9 and Ps. 20:4 show that the “heart” makes plans and has desires; it is the place where we make decisions. Concerning the Hebrew word “heart,” H. W. Wolff says:

“In by far the greatest number of cases it is intellectual, rational functions that are ascribed to the heart—i.e. precisely what we ascribe to the head and, more exactly, to the brain; cf. I Sam. 25.37. . . . We must guard against the false impression that biblical man is determined more by feeling than by reason.” (Wolff, 1974, 46-47)

According to Wolff, the Hebrew word “heart” refers to the mind in approximately 400 out of 814 passages speaking of the human heart.

We should note, then, that the biblical language differs markedly from our own in the Western world. For us, the heart is associated with emotions, feelings, love, and esp. Valentine’s Day. Conversely, for the Bible, the heart is the centre of our being where we reason and think and make decisions and plans. Today we can speak of people who cannot bridge the eighteen inch gap between the head and the heart. The ancient Hebrews knew no such gap. The heart is the centre of one’s being and the place where emotions, mind, and will operate in harmony and union. Thus the heart is the key term in the Old Testament for identifying personhood.

Note, however, of 853 instances in the Hebrew Text, the term “heart” is not applied to animals. Fabry states:

“The notion of an animal’s *leb* is largely unknown to the OT. According to Job 41:16(24), the *leb* of Leviathan is hard as stone. The reference is to his belly, which is impervious to spears, swords, and arrows (v. 18[26]). The *leb* of a lion is a metaphor for his courage. (2 Sam. 17:10) The Aramaic occurrences in Daniel likewise are not anatomically specific: Nebuchadnezzar is punished by being given a *lebāb hēwā*, a ‘bestial nature’ (Dan. 4:13[16]; cf. 5:21); conversely, the apocalyptic lion is given a *lebāb ’ēnās* a ‘human nature.’” (Dan. 7:4) (Fabry, 2003, 412)

Hans W. Wolff concluded much the same in his exhaustive research on the anthropology of the Old Testament:

“... in contrast to the other main concepts, it [the heart] is almost exclusively applied to man. Where *bāsār* refers to animal flesh in more than a third of all its instances, *leb(āb)* [heart] is only applied to animals five times and four of these are in a comparison with the human heart (II Sam. 17.10; Hos. 7.11; Dan. 4.13; 5.21); only once does it refer exclusively to animals.” (Job 41.24) (Wolff, 1974, 40)

We can conclude from these data that humans are endowed with personhood, while animals are not.

A clear definition of the divine image can be given by summarising the careful and painstaking study of Gen. 1:26-28 in *Kingdom through Covenant* (Gentry & Wellum, 2012, Chapter 6). According to the cultural setting and linguistic data of the ancient Near East in the Fourteenth Century B.C., how would the first readers of Genesis would have understood the text? The term likeness communicates that humans were

created to have a covenant relationship with their creator God and the term image communicates that they were created to have a covenant relationship with the earth and the creatures in it. The former relationship is pictured in terms of obedient sonship and the latter relationship is pictured in terms of servant kingship. On the one hand we are to relate to our creator as children responding with obedience and trust to a Father who gives good instructions, leadership, love and provisions for his family. On the other hand, as we spend time getting to know our Father, we represent his rule in the creation through humble service and wise stewardship. This view is corroborated from the cultural setting and linguistic data of the ancient Near East and more importantly, is supported by later texts in Scripture. Although image and likeness are synonyms, each carries a meaning that differs slightly from the other. In Egypt, by 1600 BC, the king was called the image of God because he was the son of God (Dion, 1985). We ought to assume a meaning in Scripture similar to that of the culture surrounding Israel unless the Bible clearly distinguishes its meaning from the culture. Thus image is linked with kingship that rules for God as his son. The term likeness is employed in the ancient culture, e.g. of the relationship of a king to his god, i.e. how his behaviour reflects the character of the god that he worships (Garr, 2003a). Likeness is also linked with generation of life and sonship in Gen. 5:3.

When the Hebrew text states literally that *God made humans in his image yet according to his likeness*, the preposition 'in' emphasises proximity while the preposition 'according to' indicates something similar, yet distinct and separate (Garr, 2003b, 95; Jenni, 1992). Thus man represents the rule of God in the world as the image, but in the matter of creating life and sonship, is only similar and not identical in the representation of his Father's image.

Moreover, the fact that the creation of humans as the divine image refers to the result and not the process clearly shows that the divine image cannot be conceived of in merely functional terms, but speaks of human essence or ontology. In computer language, we are talking about hardware and not software. We are hard-wired, as it were, to have covenantal relationships, with God on the one hand and with the creation on the other. Our ruling for God is a result of being made as the divine image and not the image itself. A merely functional definition of the divine image falls short of adequately accounting for the biblical data. The definition of the divine image proposed in here is functional, relational, and structural.

The meaning expected from the cultural and linguistic setting is strongly supported by Gen 5:3, Ps. 8, Luke 3:38 as well as Eph. 4:24 and Col. 3:10 (Gentry & Wellum, 2012, 195-197, 201-202, Ortlund, 2014).

Humans image the being of God because the biblical teaching—particularly in the New Testament—is

that within the being of the one and only God we can distinguish different persons: Father, Son and Spirit. While the biblical data do not specify the relationship between Father and Son within the being of God as a covenant, nonetheless the description of this relationship does entail using precisely the same terms or words characteristic of covenant relationships: it is a relationship of obedience and trust, of faithful love and loyalty, and of social justice (justice and righteousness). Just as there are different types of covenants: parity agreements and non-parity agreements, we may note that most of the covenants in the biblical text are non-parity agreements: they are between persons who are greater and lesser in authority and whose functional roles are different. In this way they mirror the fact that the Father and the Son are equal in being but have different functional roles and are greater and lesser in authority. It is only in a relationship where we can speak of a greater and lesser in terms of roles that we can talk of obedience and trust: *hesed* and *'emet*. Both Muslim and Christian can affirm that God is great, but only the Christian can affirm that God is love: love requires relationships and without a Trinity, love cannot be defined apart from the creator-creature relationship. This leaves us with an extremely imperfect definition of love.

It is important to recognise that the biblical teaching does not support a theory of the supremacy of humans ipso facto. When one compares the human species with other animal species, our senses of hearing, smell, sight, taste, or touch are not necessarily better or superior. We do not seem by our physiognomy well designed to conquer others and survive. Our skin is not very tough and we have no sharp claws or terrible teeth. Scientists may attribute the supremacy of the human race to our minds, but this is inadequate.

It is the creation of humans as persons and as the divine image that gives humans a role as ruler over the earth. And this, in fact, is a gracious gift from God. Moreover it entails a rule of the creation by humans that calls for humble servanthood and wise stewardship of the creation. As Phil. 2 demonstrates, Jesus came to show that the kingship of God is completely opposite to the self-serving aggrandisement of kingship displayed throughout human history, beginning in the ancient Near East. The biblical instruction on the creation of humans as the divine image does not demonstrate the natural supremacy of humans but rather a graciously God-given dignity: we are hardwired for covenant relationships with our creator and with the creation.

Finally, we must note that the *imago dei* and personhood are vitally interconnected. Only persons enter and experience and fulfil covenant relationships. In the Bible, covenants are only made with persons not with animals and animals are not capable of covenant relationships.

Diminishing or Increasing the Divine Image

Since the creation of humans as the divine image entails covenant relationships—with God on the one hand and the creation on the other—and since faithfulness and loyal love are at the heart of covenant relationships, the divine image may be diminished or it may be increased. This can be observed and understood from the use of Prov. 3:1-4 in the New Testament.

First, consider the meaning of Prov. 3:1-4 in the context in which we find this text:

“My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart, for they will prolong your life many years and bring you peace and prosperity. Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man.” (NIV)

In the Book of Proverbs the king and queen of Israel are giving instruction to bring up and raise their son and they subsequently write down this instruction for the benefit of every father and mother in the covenant community. After the introduction (1:1-7), the book commences with the “Father’s Praise of Wisdom”—a collection of 10 serious talks from father to son arranged to form an argument in favour of wisdom. Prov. 3:1-20 constitutes the Third Homily or Address from father to son. In contrast to the First Homily which warns against grabbing the good life by cheating and by violence, the Third Homily describes the right pathway to the good life: a right relationship to Yahweh. Verses 1-4 of Chapter 3 contain the introduction to the homily and these verses speak of a right relationship to our parents.

Since verses 1-12 are structured so that the odd verses are commands and the even verses are promises, the introduction constitutes two commands—each command followed by a promise—as the father calls on the son to hear the parental teaching.

Verse 1 presents the first command: the child must preserve the parental teaching. The father calls his teaching ‘instruction’ (*tôrâ*) and ‘commands’ (*mišwâ*), the same words in Hebrew used for the covenant or law given by Moses at Sinai. Therefore the parental teaching is as authoritative and as important as the covenant instruction and stipulations given through Moses, because it is based on the Holy Scriptures.

Two verbs are employed to communicate the command in verse 1. The first is “Do not forget” (my instruction). In the Hebrew language, there are two words for ‘forget’. One entails a mental lapse, i.e. absent-mindedness, and the other entails a moral lapse. The ‘forgetting’ here involves a moral lapse. This can be illustrated from Deut. 8:11-14. In Deuteronomy, Moses warns the people that when they enter the land

and have good houses, crops, and flocks and herds and have conquered their enemies, they may ‘forget’ the Lord. That is, they may be tempted to be self-sufficient and say, “Who needs the Lord?” This is forgetting God. It may be, then, that the child may later do well and become self-confident and may abandon the parental teaching. The second verb is ‘preserve’. This same word is used in Is. 5:2 of guarding a vineyard from a watchtower so that birds or other predators may not steal the vintage. We must expect that the parental teaching will be attacked from without by society.

In verse 2, the promise of a long life for following the parental teaching is based squarely on the Ten Commandments (see Ex. 20:12).

The second command in the introduction is in Prov. 3:3 and is a call to the child to maintain a right relationship to the parent. The father says, “Let kindness and faithfulness never leave you.” In Hebrew, this entails the pair of words *hesed* and *’emet*. Neither of these words has an easy equivalent in English; together they form the notion of faithful loyal love shown in the context of a covenant relationship. In Ex. 34:6 we see that this pair of words describes the heart of the being and character of God and forms the basis of his relations with his people in the covenant. In Josh. 2:14 the same pair of words speak of a covenant and pact of human friendship formed between the spies and Rahab, a prostitute in Jericho. The use of these words, then, demonstrates that a child is assumed to have covenant relationship and responsibilities toward his or her parents. The implication is that the motivation children have for obeying their parents is loyalty and not duress.

The call to the child to maintain a right relationship to their parent is also spelled out by two commands and the second is the double imperative “Bind them ... write them.” The sequence ‘bind’ and ‘write’ is also found in Proverbs 1:9, 6:21, and 7:3 and harkens back to Deuteronomy 6:8-9 and 11:18-20. In all cases except Prov 3:3 the object of these two verbs is the commands given by Moses. In Prov 3:3, however, the third person plural pronoun “them” refers to *hesed* and *’emet*, i.e. faithful loyal love. “Kindness and faithfulness” speak of the character or manner of the child’s obedience. They speak of the quality or way of performing our covenant responsibilities as children. Thus, in essence, Prov. 3:4 is equivalent to the parallel passages, but instead of emphasising obedience to the parents’ commands per se it stresses the character of that obedience. Just as wives in 1 Peter 3:3-6 demonstrate beauty not by cosmetics, hairstyle, and jewelry, but rather through character and humility, so the beauty of children lies in their obedience to their parents. Sons and daughters must internalise the home teachings and thus maintain a right relationship to their parents. Throughout the entire Bible, from begin-

ning to end, from Genesis to Revelation there is only one command for children: obey your parents. Lev. 19:3 is no exception since the command to observe the Sabbath is subordinated to the command to obey one's parents.

In the biblical texts, *hesed* and *'emet*, justice and righteousness are summaries of the requirements and stipulations in the covenant relationship, just as they are summaries of the character of the being of God himself.

The promise attached to the second command is "you will find favour and good insight in the eyes of God and man." In the context, "to acquire favour before God and humans" means that both God and others recognise that the child is developing behaviour and conduct that demonstrates *hesed* and *'emet* in covenantal relationships. This statement is nothing more and nothing less than another way of describing the divine image. The divine image consists of a covenant relationship with God on the one hand and with other creatures on the other, in other words, reputation for skilful relationships and getting along with both God and fellow humans.

Now in Luke 2:52 the author notes that Jesus *advanced* in wisdom and stature and favour with God and man. This evaluation of Jesus' early life is based squarely on Prov. 4:4 with the word stature added from 1 Sam. 2:26. In essence Luke is saying that Jesus increased in the divine image. It is clear, then, from these observations that the display of the divine image by a particular person can either be developed and increased or decreased and reduced, because the covenant loyalty and relationship can either deepen or lessen as our covenant obligations are fulfilled or not fulfilled through the exigencies of life. Every one may have the divine image, but one can decrease or increase in the demonstration of this day by day.

We should envision diminishing or increasing the divine image in two ways. First there are no doubt developmental stages which psychologists would want to classify, categorise, and describe. Second, just as chronological growth does not always bring developmental maturity, so disorders and deviance can result in diminishing appropriate growth or failing to reach a certain developmental stage.

It is not necessary to detail here appropriate developmental stages or growth in terms of increasing the divine image. From a theological viewpoint, this is the biblical teaching on sanctification: how, as Paul says, we become conformed to the image of the Son of God (Rom.8:29) who is the divine image (Col. 1:15). It may be necessary, however, to demonstrate briefly that this development begins in the womb.

Ps. 51:5-6 is a text that addresses specifically the issue of the divine image in the life of an unborn baby:

"Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. Behold, you de-

light in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart." (ESV)

Note in particular the words "inward being" in v. 6a and "secret heart" in v. 6b. Most commentators and English translations seem to understand here the inner person which is hidden from other people. Perhaps this is due to connecting this verse with the next where David asks for cleansing from his sin and we normally associate the cleansing of guilt with our inner person. This interpretation is not probable, due to the literary structure and the lexical meaning of the words.

According to the literary structure, first David acknowledges his crime, and then traces his moral weakness back to conception. In the following stanza, he asks for pardon and then power over moral weakness. Notice how the two-part confession is matched by the two-part prayer. This shows that v. 6 is clearly connected to v. 5, and not v. 7. The context is the problem of moral weakness traced back to his life within the womb.

The terms in Hebrew for "inward being" and "secret heart" are *tuhôt* and *sātum* respectively. Neither one of these terms is used anywhere else in the Old

Outline of Psalm 51

A. Plea for Help	1-2
B. Plight of Sin	3-6
1. The Deed	3-4
2. Moral Impotence Causing the Deed	5-6
C. Prayer for Pardon and Perseverance	7-12
1. Pardon for Actual Deed	7-9
2. Power over Moral Impotence	10-12
D. Request to Worship the Lord	13-17
E. Postscript	18-19

Testament for the inner person. Instead the normal words for the inner person are 'heart' (*lēb*) or 'inwards' (*qereb*). The first term, *tuhôt*, only occurs in Ps. 51:6 and Job 38:36. The noun comes from a root meaning to cover or smear over. The passage in Job is difficult, but surely has nothing to do with the inner being of a human. The second term, *sātum*, is a passive participle (i.e. verbal adjective) from a verb meaning to close or shut up. The "smeared over place" and the "closed up place" are better construed as references to the human womb. The literary structure connects v. 6 to v. 5, not to v. 7 and therefore requires that these words refer to the human womb.

In Ps. 51:5-6, then, David traces his moral weakness back to conception and affirms that even in the human womb God is seeking faithfulness or truth as well as wisdom. The categories of faithfulness and wisdom clearly speak of issues relating to the divine image. This text proves that the unborn already bear

the divine image. Even a baby in the womb can demonstrate character in relationship to its mother.

In our broken and fallen world we are also aware of cases of chronological growth without appropriate developmental stages or maturity.

The Divine Image and Sexuality

Down through the centuries, indeed from the start, God has sought to establish covenant relationships with humanity in general and also with particular individuals and nations. Why does he do this? The answer is that he does this because this is who he is in himself (Gentry & Wellum, 2102, 655).

The Bible teaches that God is a tri-unity: there is only one Supreme Being, and yet within the being of this one god we can speak of three distinct persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And the relationship of Father to Son and Son to Father, in the communion of the Holy Spirit is a relationship of devoted love, faithfulness, obedience, and trust. There is complete faithfulness and loyalty; there is truth and trust—all the characteristics of a covenant relationship. God wants to have precisely this kind of relationship with us because that is who he is in himself. We should remember that the biblical teaching concerning the being and nature of God is not a mathematical puzzle which we have to overcome in order to be considered orthodox, but rather conversely, it is only when we begin our thinking with this teaching that we can understand who we are and how we relate to our world. As Colin Gunton has said, “It is as if one had to establish one’s Christian orthodoxy by facing a series of mathematical and logical difficulties rather than by glorying in the being of a God whose reality as a communion of persons is the basis of a rational universe in which personal life may take shape” (Gunton, 1991, 31-32).

Since we are made as the image of this God, i.e. to mirror this God, we ourselves are hard-wired in the deepest part of our beings to exist in covenant relationships, not only vertically in our relationship with the creator God, but horizontally with all his creatures—including other humans. God has established certain covenant communities in which we are designed to live and function. The first one we experience is the family. [All human beings come from one man and one woman.] Another that we can experience is marriage (defined as one man and one woman in a relationship dissolved only by death—why this is so we shall see later). And if a person becomes a follower of Jesus Christ, they become part of a third covenant community, the people of the new creation / new humanity. Note that the present humanity is committed to destroying itself and that the only humanity to outlast the present age is that of the New Humanity (in Jesus Christ, the first Man in the New Creation).

Sex is an appetite given to us by the creator God and, in fact, is specifically tied to one covenant com-

munity—that of marriage. It is an appetite like hunger and thirst, but is not to be awakened until the right time (see Song of Sol., 8). Most significantly, the sexual union between a man and a woman is designated in the Bible and the Ancient Near East as the single requisite covenant-ratifying (and -renewing) oath sign for the covenant of marriage.

Detailed evidence from Scripture for viewing marriage as a covenant and for viewing the sexual union with consent (i.e. both parental, in the case of dependent daughters, and mutual) as a marriage-constituting act is provided by G. Hugenberger (1994, 240-277). The *mōhar*, was not a bride price but a betrothal present, and does not relate to marriage per se, but to betrothal and gaining the consent of the parents. As to the sexual union, Gen. 29:21, “then Jacob said to Laban, ‘Give me my wife that I may go in to her, for my time is completed’ ” is a clear example showing that *copula carnalis* is not just a characteristic feature of marriage but rather the decisive expression of the end of betrothal and as such consummates the marriage (Hugenberger, 1994, Chapter 7). Moreover the Hebrew verb “to know” is frequently used of this marriage-constituting act: “and Adam knew his wife ... (Gen. 4:1). In Hos. 2:22 [ET 20], the verb ‘know’ is used of the covenant between Yahweh and his people: “I will betroth you to me in faithfulness; and you shall know Yahweh.”

We now need to look at alternative arrangements which are advocated and loudly proclaimed today and see not only how they fall short, but why they also bring death and destruction resulting in an experience that both dehumanises and violates social justice. The following discussions of different kinds of sexual behaviour are intended to be brief and far from exhaustive. Discussion is limited to the connection of deviant behaviours with the notion that sex is the sign of a covenant relationship.

Using the gift of sex brings pleasure. Nonetheless, from the biblical definition, sex is designed to enable us to give to the other person in a one-man-one-woman-covenant-of-marriage-relationship. Both masturbation and pornography are forms of self-stimulation that cheat the person doing this from experiencing the redemptive side of sex in giving oneself in a covenant relationship. The practice of exciting oneself cannot work as a sign of a covenant relationship. The person is confessing a lie. In the end, this lie cheapens sex and does not bring real satisfaction. William Struthers has demonstrated that pornography actually rewires the male brain and deprives the person who engages in it of finding real intimacy in a marriage relationship (Struthers, 2009).

Current movies portray people having sex in all sorts of ways. It may be a man and a woman who are married in conventional terms, and one partner engages in sexual intercourse outside of the marriage.

Since sex is exclusive and integral to the marriage relationship, extra-marital sex clearly violates the covenant. Although Hollywood has no appreciation of biblical teaching, when they portray adultery, the partner who is wronged is always shown as crying out in pain. This response shows that being human requires covenant faithfulness as the biblical teaching makes plain. We are hard-wired for relationships that entail faithfulness and love. Thus even Hollywood acknowledges adultery as a violation. Since the biblical teaching connects sex with covenant, lack of faithfulness and loyalty results in a dehumanizing experience. And this dehumanizing experience is fully explored by the film industry. Moreover, in the biblical literature, word-pairs like *hesed* and *'emet*, or justice and righteousness are used to summarise all the instructions in the covenant as social justice (Gentry & Wellum, 2012, Chapter 15). Therefore failure to correlate sex and covenant loyalty constitutes social injustice.

It could also be that a couple who are married attempt to introduce a third person into the sexual experience such as is portrayed in the movie *Garden of Eden* based upon the book by E. Hemingway. This fails the biblical norm, however, because polygamous and polyamorous relationships obscure the covenant as an agreement between two parties. There is no way to engage in sex fully with three people at the same time. And when two of the three are sexually engaged, one of the three is left out in some way. In other words, if sex is tied to complete devotion and loyalty in a covenant relationship, it logically demands only one of each of the opposite sex.

Why shouldn't a human have sex with an animal? Especially if it brings pleasure? For example, a woman could have sex with a dog or a horse. This is not only attested in ancient documents more than two to three thousand years old (Hittite Laws, 187-188, 199; Strabo, *Geography*, 17.1.19), it is also portrayed on the internet today. First, since animals are not persons, such a relationship cannot be personal. Second, since animals are not made as the image of God, they cannot enter into covenant relationships. Important here is the text in Gen. 2:18-20 which describes the exercise of the first man in naming the animals. As he analysed the character of each he did not find any that corresponded to him (*kěnegdô*). Among other things this must refer to the fact that the distinction between animals and humans lies in the capacity for covenant relationship (i.e. the divine image), since they are identical as souls. Dogs have been given an instinct that makes them seek a master. Dogs can be disciplined to be obedient and faithful, but this is not the same as covenant-keeping. Many consider their dogs their best friend. But a covenant relationship is only possible between image-bearers. So those who engage in these acts are following a path that is dehumanizing.

What about homosexuality? Is it possible for

a monogamous homosexual couple to enter into a covenant since they are both image-bearers? Although both bear the image of God, it is impossible for their homosexual union to mirror the being of God. Within the being of God we see a Father and a Son, two who are not the same in authority and functional roles. This is why obedience and trust is possible within the being of God. If there are two beings who are the same, there is no a priori place for obedience or trust. It is interesting to note that in every homosexual relationship that I have observed, one of the two parties feel they must imitate the opposite sex. Within their own being they sense that a covenant relationship requires a greater and a lesser party so that obedience and trust are possible. This shows that this relationship is a lie, contravenes the reality of being human, and is dehumanizing. It is a lie because a covenant relationship that mirrors the being of God cannot be between two the same. It also shows why these relationships, at least in the Graeco-Roman world, were between older men and younger men and not between equals. Even hearts and minds far away from the Bible reach out for the truth of what it is to be human—a truth buried deep within their souls by the creator. We also see this truth in the fact that homosexuals are not content to practice their behaviour in private but in fact wish to wring from the rest of society approval for their lifestyle. This is prime evidence of a guilty conscience—their own soul cries out from within that they have pursued actions and attitudes contrary to the way we are hardwired.

In spite of an apparent concern for social justice, homosexuals are chief among those promoting social injustice, because at the heart of the community in which they live they fail to establish a covenant relationship that mirrors the being of the creator God. This, of course, assumes that they have the same partner for life—a situation that is extremely rare. The reality is that men and women are different, and that relating to the opposite sex is redemptive. That is, it brings you out of yourself. You have to give up your own interests in a way that two males or two females can never experience. And so, on another level, they fail to develop a covenant relationship, a truly human relationship.

This essay, of course, assumes the biblical teaching as axiomatic. If one begins from merely a human point of view and seeks to understand the trinity, it is like trying to solve an impossible mathematical puzzle. If, however, one begins from the biblical teaching about the trinity, only then can one explain all the phenomena in the creation / world satisfactorily. The perspective adopted here is also limited. The approach in ancient Hebrew literature is to take up a topic and develop it from a particular perspective. The author then stops and takes up the same theme again from another point of view. This pattern is holographic and is pursued

recursively at both the macro and micro levels. One begins a conversation on a topic and then closes that conversation down and begins another. Taken together, both conversations are like the left and right speakers of a stereo sound system: each differs slightly, and together they produce 3D Dolby Surround Sound or a 3D holographic image. Thus, in order to develop a full-orbed discussion on the biblical instruction concerning marriage even from the Creation Account, one has to recognise that Gen. 1:1-2:3 and 2:4-3:24 constitute left and right speakers. One has to hear them both to experience the fullness of Surround Sound, a figure of speech for full-orbed understanding. Here we have emphasised only the covenantal aspect of marriage and ignored the divine purpose of reproduction.

In conclusion, a definition of humanity and sexuality derived from Gen. 1 and 2 show that practices apart from a one-man-one-woman-covenant-of-marriage-relationship result in experiences that dehumanise and acts of social injustice: the people practising them are decreasing and diminishing the divine image.

Peter J. Gentry is Professor of Old Testament Interpretation at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Prior to this, he served on the faculty of Toronto Baptist Seminary and Bible College for fifteen years and taught at the University of Toronto, Heritage Theological Seminary, and Tyndale Theological Seminary. The author of many articles, Dr. Gentry is currently editing Ecclesiastes and Proverbs for the Göttingen Septuagint Series, is co-author of *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Crossway, 2012), and he provides leadership for the Hexapla Institute. Kindly send any correspondence concerning this article to: Peter J. Gentry, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2825 Lexington Road, Louisville, KY USA 40280; or email: pgency@sbts.edu.

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Note

Hos. 2:20 says “And I shall make for them [i.e. Israel] a covenant in that day with the wild animals, and with the birds of the sky, and with the ‘crawlers on the ground’ and bow and sword and war I shall break from the land and I shall make them to lie down in safety.” Hebrew literature is repetitive and recursive. Statements in one section are to be balanced against discussion of the same topic at an earlier or later point. As Hos. 4:3 clarifies, the animals suffer because Israel has broken her covenant with God (Romans 8:20). In the New Covenant, however, Yahweh, will renew and restore the covenant relationship and the animals will thrive as a result. The “covenant with the animals,” then, is the creation or new creation covenant in which blessing for the animals is *mediated* by an Adamic figure. In Isaiah 28:15 “the covenant with death” is a metaphor for the alliance with Egypt which provides no help against the Assyrian. There is no place in the Bible where covenants are made directly with animals or between them. They are not personal and only persons are capable of covenant relationships.

Reconciling the Roles of Automatic and Controlled Cognition in Behavioral Control

C. Eric Jones
Regent University

Leading contemporary social psychology theorists and researchers claim automatic thought processes control most or all of human action. Controlled or deliberate thought is characterized as relatively useless. This paper reviews the empirical evidence of automatic and controlled thinking and presents a more complementary integration of the two processes. This synthetic view is then used to address questions of facilitation and implementation of individual level change. Contrary to the current dominant views within social psychology, it is suggested that intentional change resulting from controlled thought is possible.

Keywords: agency, automaticity, controlled cognition, behavioral control, social cognition, sanctification

Within psychology it is axiomatic that research should inform practice and practice should follow research. Ample research on cognitive control of behavior can inform the efforts of Christians desiring to become more Christ like and Christian counselors and life coaches desiring to help others in the same pursuit. At the heart of the person wanting to change or the counselor facilitating the change is the implicit understanding that the person can change and that the intentional efforts of the person play a significant role in that change. A problem arises, however, when the research suggests we are not capable of the intentional change described above. Rather, current research reports people respond to stimuli unconsciously, do not deliberately recognize options, and do not consciously make and implement those choices as a Christian view would describe an intentional agent does.

If it is important for practice to be informed by research, then it is imperative to know what the research says about our desired Christian practices. As with any topic where conflicting views arise between a Christian perspective and secular empirical psychology, allowing Christianity to determine what one should do and allowing the research to describe how the processes should work is critical. Otherwise there is the risk that one of two extremes directs the process. First, the secular research is uncritically accepted and, in this case, an opposing worldview changes the Christian view of agency and how Christians understand their actions. Or second, the secular view is disregarded because the opposing worldview makes us uncomfortable, resulting in a lack of understanding of cognitive processes associated with agency and a corresponding inability to more deeply understand the

processes associated with intentional behavior. In this essay I hope to avoid either extreme and find a way to interpret the current research so that it can be used as a light to our path of developing intentionally directed behavior.

The Pursuit of the Christian Life

The Christian life is a fundamentally corporate life (Grenz, 1994). Believers are drawn into the relationship Jesus has with the Father through the uniting work of the Holy Spirit, becoming the body of Christ. The community of believers of which each of us is a part, provides the context for every aspect of our lives. Against this backdrop we consider human agency, defined as the ability to choose or decide to act in goal-directed ways. More specifically, we may understand Christian human agency as the ability through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit to choose or decide to act in goal-directed ways that are consistent with God's eternal purposes. Evidence of the need for intentional behavioral control on the part of humans is provided as early as the Garden of Eden when God directs Adam to obey by not partaking of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:16-17). According to a Christian narrative more broadly, agency is a critical component for establishing and maintaining our communal context (Grenz, 1994). For communities to thrive, participants must exhibit all sorts of virtuous behavior, related to or dependent upon self-control.

Therefore, in a certain sense the Christian walk can be described as one of self-control. Scripture points out the need for self-control (Gal. 5:23, 2 Pet. 1:6) and the problems associated with a lack of self-

control (1 Cor. 7:5, 2 Tim. 3:3). By properly exhibiting self-control at the individual level we contribute to a healthy social system within which others may thrive. Our positive behavioral contributions not only benefit others, but by facilitating the healthy social system within which we live we experience reciprocal benefits from the system to which we contribute.

Clearly Christians in community have mandates and choices before them concerning self-control and based on Scripture they should recognize the consequences of those choices for others and for their selves. At this point it may seem odd to question whether or not we can consciously decide to exert self-control, or any other act of agency given the consequential nature of doing so. Yet cognitive researchers do just that. In fact, characterizing what they do as questioning our ability to exert agency is being generous. Numerous influential researchers flatly reject the idea humans exert agency in the truest sense of being an agent, that is, conscious intent leading to action (Bargh, 1997; Bargh, 2005; Bargh & Williams, 2006; Berkowitz & Devine, 1995; Churchland, 1986; Ferguson & Bargh, 2004; Gazzaniga, 1998; Gilbert & Gill, 2000; Wegner, 2002; Wegner, 2005; Wegner & Bargh, 1998; Wilson, 2002; Wilson & Stone, 1985). It is important to note that although automatic thinking occurs more frequently and controls many more processes than does deliberate thinking, the research review will show that deliberate thought is still significant in control of the self and deliberate thought even plays vital roles in many automatic processes. A familiar example helps to clarify the issues at hand.

In the film *Chariots of Fire*, the main character Eric Liddell states, "I believe God made me for a purpose, but he also made me fast. And when I run I feel his pleasure." The film chronicles Liddell's storied journey to the Olympics where he refused to run in the 100 meters event on Sunday only to run in the 400 meters, win the gold medal and set a world record. Throughout this film Liddell is in pursuit of the goal of winning in the Olympics. However, he is also in pursuit of a more prized goal, serving his Creator. The culmination of the tension between the two goals during the Olympics requires Liddell to consider carefully the consequences of his future actions, to reflect on his choices, make a well-reasoned decision and implement his decision. In order to navigate through numerous options and to remain faithful to his chosen goals Liddell needed to exhibit agentic action.

Just like Eric Liddell, we all have goals. Some goals are thoughtfully generated and some are adopted without careful, conscious processing. Not only are there different ways in which we develop goals, but goals are also pursued more automatically at some times and more deliberately at other times. The example above provides several actions seeming to require deep, deliberate thought, such as deciding not to

run the 100 meter event, and other actions seeming to rely on more automatic thought processes, such as the actual running of the 400 meter event in which Eric likely did not deliberately think about the placing of one leg in front of the other. The predicament is that on the one hand we infer from Christianity the need to consciously exert human agency and on the other hand cognitive psychologists, social psychologists and neuroscientists increasingly deny the ability or need of humans to consciously exert agency. Therefore, the guiding question for this whole discussion becomes, can conscious thought be used to enact goal-directed behavior? And more specifically within a Christian context, can conscious thought be used to form the kind of individual necessary for God's intended community?

Epistemic Sources

If it is true that knowing the nature of the object to be known should determine the method by which we know it (Torrance, 1965), then psychology, or a study of the person, should use all possible means to understand humans in all their complexity. One such argument from the Christian Psychology perspective (Johnson, 2007; Roberts & Watson, 2010) has used the term transdisciplinary to describe the effort needed to adequately describe the person. From this view, describing and explaining the person is not limited to modern psychology with its emphasis on empirical evidence. A transdisciplinary study of the person is constructed using the academic building blocks of quantitative research, qualitative research, philosophy, theology, anthropology, art, history, literature and spirituality, etc. because a full understanding of humans lies outside the boundaries of any particular discipline (Johnson, 2011).

Therefore, a discussion of human agency and conscious thought is best developed using a transdisciplinary approach and there exists no shortage of material within the various academic disciplines to contribute to this effort. However, the value of a transdisciplinary approach is only as pronounced as the quality of the various informational building blocks. Therefore, the point of this paper is to look at the mixed messages from modern empirical psychology (one of the building blocks) concerning agency and consciousness, primarily from social psychology, but also from cognitive psychology. In order to construct an accurate picture of human agency it is important to accurately understand the message of the social cognition data before the process of incorporating the message with other forms of knowledge such as theology.

The question concerning the research portion of this paper is, what does empirical psychology have to offer to the discussion of human agency from a Christian perspective? Social psychology and cognitive

research over the past thirty years has uncovered much concerning conscious and unconscious information processing. Rather than seeing these processes in a complementary fashion as was previously the norm, a number of notable psychologists (e.g., Bargh, 2005; Wegner, 2005; Wilson, 2002) have used data from studies investigating unconscious or automatic control to argue for its supremacy over conscious, deliberate processing of information. These messages have been consistent for the last twenty five years and have become orthodoxy within the field. Other notable psychologists (e.g., Kihlstrom, 2009; Baumeister, 2008; Bandura, 2000; Carlson, 1997) have recently pushed back in an attempt to keep conscious processing an important feature of human cognitive control.

This debate aside for the moment, people not expert in the cognitive or social psychological literature generally regard conscious processing of information as more closely related to agency than unconscious processing of information. That is, if I choose a bright red shirt on a rainy day because my umbrella is red and I have unconsciously associated the color red with a rainy day, then most would say I did not exert agency. On the other hand, if I choose a bright red shirt on a rainy day because I consciously want to brighten things up in my dark office, then most would say I exerted agency. Clearly a significant discrepancy exists between the lay and expert understandings of controlled/automatic thought.

Therefore this paper will examine the empirical evidence for and against the need for conscious thought and review the empirical evidence for automatic thought being fully sufficient to direct our lives before extending the discussion to the roles of conscious and unconscious thought in agentic action within the context of the pursuit of the Christian life. Psychological science cannot tell us what we should have as a goal for life, but it can inform us as to the functioning of human thought and behavior (Jones & Johnson, 2012; Ratzsch, 2000). While reviewing the evidence from the psychological literature, the real question for Christians is can we exert and maintain agency to pursue Christ-like relationships with God and others? Now we return to psychological theory and research to help us understand the workings of agency, and then return to the bigger picture of using that functioning to pursue our goal of life.

AUTOMATICITY

Overview

The American Psychologist published a special 1999 issue entitled “Behavior – It’s Involuntary” describing the idea of automaticity as a “fundamental breakthrough”. In short, the issue revealed how automaticity research can explain most of our thoughts and actions being executed while we are on auto pilot. We simply do not recognize how much of what we do is

outside of our awareness. An automatic process can be defined as one that is triggered directly by stimuli in the environment, not initiated by conscious choice, and runs through to completion such that consciousness is not involved at any stage of the process (Bargh, 1984).

Earlier in the cognitive revolution and in social psychology specifically, Nisbett and Wilson (1977) argued we may be aware of the contents of our minds, but not the processes used to generate the contents. Note how this idea was taken to the extreme by the statement, “Mindlessness may indeed be the most common mode of social interaction” (Langer, Blank, & Chanowitz, 1978, p. 641). As automaticity research has expanded over the last two decades the views of some of the foremost researchers have become increasingly unbalanced, in my opinion. John Bargh is perhaps the most well-known and his quote is fairly representative of the group who believes in the clear dominance of unconscious automaticity over conscious control, “Bloodied but unbowed, I gamely concede that the commentators did push me back from a position of 100% automaticity – but only to an Ivory soap bar degree of purity in my beliefs about the degree of automaticity in our psychological reactions from moment to moment” (Bargh, 1997, p. 246). In a similar vein Wegner (2002) views conscious will as an illusion, Wilson (2002) suggests conscious processing may be maladaptive, and in his popular press book based on cognitive research Gladwell (2005) advances the virtues of thinking without thinking. Kihlstrom (2004, 2009) has argued against these researchers and what he calls the automaticity juggernaut, but he is not part of the majority position in cognitive and social psychology. Certainly most of our human cognition falls into the automatic category. What is in dispute is whether or not unconscious thought can provide complete or nearly complete control of the person without deliberate thought. The obvious question here is, on what evidence do Bargh and others base their views of automaticity?

Automaticity Research Review

A true critique of automaticity thought and behavior research would require a book length treatment. Due to space constraints a relatively few, strategically selected articles are cited in order to more efficiently present my argument conceptually concerning the relative importance of the roles of conscious and unconscious information processing in the control of behavior. For a more thorough review and critique of this material please see overviews by Kihlstrom (2008) and Baumeister, Masicampo and Vohs (2011).

In the last two decades it has been fashionable to not only question the utility of conscious thought guiding behavior, but to replace it completely with automatic thought. The works of Bargh, Wegner and

Dijksterhuis are excellent examples of the growing acceptance of automaticity's reach in our lives. However, countering the landslide of automaticity is possible first by reviewing a few works touting automaticity and showing automaticity is not functioning alone and then noting other studies explicitly showing the efficacy of conscious processing.

Automaticity and Deliberate Thought

Automatic processing is generally considered to be a response to stimuli whereas conscious processing is considered to be an effortful selection among existing options followed by intentional implementation. On the other hand, is automaticity as automatic as it seems? Consider one of the simplest examples of automatic processing, the tip-of-the-tongue effect (Brown & McNeill, 1966). I ask you to name the band George Michael was in before he became a solo act. You wrestle momentarily and then give up, or so you think. In actuality you have consciously stopped processing the request, but you are still unconsciously processing it. This is why you are not completely surprised when two hours later you recall the band was Wham! This is a wonderful example of automaticity indeed. However, if the focus is broadened to the beginning of the example it becomes obvious conscious processing began the entire enterprise. Without the thoughtful, but unsuccessful, attempt at first, there would have been no successful automatic effort later.

If a more balanced view of the role and importance of automaticity is accurate, how do we include the concept of automaticity in a discussion of agency without distorting either Christianity's contribution or cognitive psychology's contribution to the discussion? Investigating how automatic processes function allows us to incorporate conscious control and therefore develop an understanding of the roles of both types of control such that they are consistent with a Christian view of agency. A program of research on implementation intention provides an example for how conscious and automatic processes work together and can fit in a complementary manner within a Christian framework of human agency.

Conceptually an implementation intention means once a goal is chosen one can tie the initiation of goal oriented action to a specific cue in a situation so that when the situational cue is encountered the goal oriented action is initiated. Suppose you want to begin reading a social cognition journal article every evening, a worthy goal to be sure. Rather than merely making a generic mental note, your probability of success will increase if you employ an implementation intention for the goal. You might decide to begin reading your article every evening when the anchor on the local news says good night. Since you have an existing habit of watching the news every night you ensure you will encounter the cue. Once the cue is

encountered you do not need to decide to take action as you have already chosen your course of action; it only needs to be initiated and repeatedly practiced until the habit is established or automatized. Obviously goal commitment and other factors can influence the effectiveness of implementation intentions, but a number of studies show the general efficacy of the construct given its automatic nature.

The appeal of implementation intentions for those preferring a balanced view of the conscious/automatic control of behavior and thoughts is apparent. Although the goal oriented behavior is cued by an environmental stimulus and therefore automatically initiated, the goal itself and the way in which it is cued is deliberately decided. This view opens the door to collaboration between the two types of control and shows how we can contribute to the direction of even our automatic behavior and thoughts.

Development of Automaticity

Another avenue to collaboration between conscious/automatic control of behavior and thoughts is through the development of certain automatic processes. Processes become automatic through repetition or practice. Automatic processes are defined by Wegner and Bargh (1998, p. 459) as mental habits, "patterns that become the deep grooves into which behavior falls when not consciously attended." Bargh (1990) describes the process beginning with the pairing of deliberate thought and certain contexts in order to achieve a goal. As the deliberate thought and circumstances are continually paired and the goal is continually achieved, an association between the deliberate thought and circumstances develops. As the frequency of the pairing increases so does the strength of the association and eventually the deliberate thought is not necessary at the time the goal-related behavior is activated, assuming the correct circumstances. That is, even though the conscious thought does not occur when the goal-related behavior is automatically activated, the behavior is always the result of etiologically dependent conscious thought. So it seems mental habits can be consciously and intentionally chosen and developed.

This means that to the degree conscious thought was ever involved in the formation of automatic thought, deliberate thought was necessary for the development of automaticity and necessary for there to be an automatic process to be triggered. Carlson (1997) presents a complementary argument when he discusses the role of conscious control in the development of routines. Any automatically controlled behavior, such as any good habits one may possess, therefore would not exist without the earlier contributions of deliberate thought. This developmental nature of automaticity means that caution must be exercised when interpretations of automaticity research

state conscious thought was not necessary, even in an implicit or indirect manner, for the observed automatic phenomenon.

Automaticity Relative to Conscious Effects

In addition to the empirical findings is the not so obvious personal bias of researchers that influences the depiction of automaticity. Social researchers seldom investigate both deliberate and automatic processing at once and certainly do not compare the relative effects of the two types of processing since they assume the superiority of automaticity over deliberate processing of information. Cognitive researchers have attempted to extricate the effects of the two as they assume that the two processes work together in task performance. One of the few social psychology studies investigated both effects on a trait-rating task (Uleman, Blader, & Todorov, 2005) and showed conscious processing was the relatively stronger form of information processing. These data do not support the representation deliberate thought is only an afterthought or that it is overwhelmed by superior automatic processes.

Bargh and others have proposed automatic processes are primary and pervade our thoughts and actions, conscious control is an illusion, and most of our conscious thought is merely to provide post hoc explanations for what we do. They suggest we use conscious thought to explain why things happen, but not so much to direct our thoughts and behavior. Haidt (2006) makes a similar point in his work on moral psychology. Haidt proposes that judgments are made by an automatic and affectively informed process and a consciously created narrative follows to support the automatically produced stance. These sorts of statements may be uncomfortable for some if the data support them. However, for these statements to be empirically true, we must see pervasive automaticity effects with little or no variation from the properties of automaticity.

Counter to the automaticity argument, current data suggest deviation from the properties of automaticity. For example, Anderson (1992) has found automaticity effects only when a cue is presented in a specific goal state. Automatic processes do not always proceed in a ballistic manner (Kihlstrom, 2008). And, Logan (2002) has shown mental set is necessary for automaticity. Even Bargh concedes unintentional processes consume attentional resources and some tasks he describes as more or less automatic (Bargh & Williams, 2006). In addition, controversy surrounds the failure to replicate several classic automaticity studies calling into question the findings and any interpretations on which they are based (Moors & DeHouwer, 2006). This controversy further weakens the foundation of the automaticity supremacy argument. However, evidence exists beyond this controversy and

the automaticity studies already cited.

Conscious Thought Effects

In terms of mental practice, Grouios (1992) found mental practice beneficial for acquiring skills rather than for maintaining them. This fits the developmental path of automaticity where consciousness is for acquisition and then fades as the behavior is automatized. Mental practice has also been shown to be beneficial in the performance of multiple sports (Kosslyn & Moulton, 2009), the playing of musical instruments (Theiler & Lippman, 1995) and in the pursuit of consuming less food (Morewedge, Huh & Vosgerau, 2009).

In a study with participants intentionally communicating about their relationships with each other versus those not communicating about their relationships to each other, the communicators were significantly more likely to still be dating three months later (Slatcher & Pennebaker, 2006). Research on reasoning and problem solving suggests that conscious processing is necessary for logical reasoning and unconscious processing can be seriously deficient, especially under cognitive load conditions (DeWall, 2008; De Neys, 2006). Wegner (2002) has suggested that creativity is enhanced by unconscious processing, but studies performed by Baumeister, Schmeichel, DeWall and Vohs (2007) provided evidence that conscious processing actually bolstered creativity and cognitive load reduced performance, further suggesting the positive effects of conscious processing.

Beauregard (2007) has provided a sweeping review of neuroimaging evidence (functional magnetic resonance imaging [fMRI], positron emission tomography [PET], & single photon emission computed tomography [SPECT]) supporting the case that intentional thought plays a critical role in neurological regulation and change seen in psychotherapy and emotional self-regulation. For example, Ochsner, Bunge, Gross, and Gabrieli (2002) instructed participants to either be aware of or reinterpret feelings associated with neutral and negative pictures. Data from this fMRI study suggests that intentional reappraisal of stimuli affects the functioning of brain regions associated with emotional significance and responses. Additional studies provided evidence of self-regulation of sadness in adults, sadness in children and in sexual arousal (e.g., Beauregard, Lévesque & Paquette, 2004; Lévesque, Eugene, Joannette, Paquette, Mensour, Beaudoin, Leroux, Bourgouin, & Beauregard, 2003; Lévesque, Joannette, Mensour, Beaudoin, Leroux, Bourgouin, & Beauregard, 2004). In terms of psychotherapy, Schwartz, Stoessel, Baxter, Martin and Phelps (1996) showed evidence that PET scans after ten weeks of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) demonstrated a significant reduction in brain activity related to obsessive-compulsive disorder

(OCD) compared to scans before CBT treatment. Other notable studies further validated that the intentional and mindful components of psychotherapy can result in brain activity changes associated with panic disorders, depression, and phobias (Goldapple, Segal, Garson, Lau, Bieling, Kennedy, & Mayberg, 2004; Martin, Martin, Richardson & Royall, 2001; Paquette, Lévesque, Mensour, Leroux, Beaudoin, Bourgouin, & Bearegard, 2003; Prasko, Horacek, Zalesky, Kopecek, Novak, Paskova, Skrdlantova, Belohlavek & Hoschl, 2004). This fascinating review article closes by stating “the findings of the studies examined here suggest that mental processes/events do exert a causal influence on brain plasticity and the various levels of brain functioning. Indeed, by changing our mind we are changing our brain” (Bearegard, 2007).

Numerous other studies could be cited to demonstrate the efficacy of conscious thought across a variety of thought and behavior (for a more extensive review of the relevant social psychology literature please see Kihlstrom, 2008; Baumeister, Masicampo and Vohs, 2011; Corr, 2010). However, from this small sampling it should be clear conscious processing is useful at least some of the time for some people. In fact, Baumeister, Masicampo and Vohs (2011, pg. 20) go further stating that “the evidence for conscious causation of behavior is profound, extensive, adaptive, multifaceted and empirically strong”. They also note that the literature review suggests that “conscious thought is for facilitating social life and culture rather than for direct control of action” (pg. 21). I agree, in that their view fits current data and the theory behind the development of automaticity. Further, the summarization of the strengths and weaknesses of deliberate and automatic thought is much more nuanced than those making sweeping generalizations about the superiority of automaticity and therefore also more complementary with a Christian view of automatic and controlled thought.

Automaticity Research Conclusion

Even though the social cognition literature is characterized by some of the field’s most prominent researchers as automatic, passive, and unintentional, it would be an error to say this is an accurate depiction of the area or that even if it is a generally accurate depiction of what many people do some of the time, it does not mean people cannot act in ways differing from this characterization. More accurately we can say social cognition reflects the use and need of both automatic and deliberate processing of information and control of thoughts and behaviors.

DELIBERATE/INTENTIONAL THOUGHT

Automaticity of thought and behavior is pervasive, but it is not all important, as some level and/or type of deliberate thought is frequently needed to realize the

achievements attributed to automaticity acting alone. Deliberate thought processes contribute significantly to what we do and think and these contributions can be seen even at different points of the automatic processes associated with goal pursuit. First, we see intentional thought can be activated as we choose a goal. This action may be more likely with more important goals. In terms of self-regulatory processes, we see deliberate thought possibly exercised at multiple points along the pursuit of a particular goal. If we recognize we are not on track to realize a goal we may need to effortfully think through options and deliberately choose the option we have decided will get us back on track. A reliance on solely automatic thinking cannot successfully redirect our behavior, it can only involuntarily perform highly practiced and overlearned acts. In fact, Penfield (1975) copiously noted the insufficiencies of automaticity alone within the population of those suffering petit mal seizures. He found that a pianist could continue to play a well-learned piece through a seizure, but could not alter or stop the automated behavior. Therefore, intentional thought is required as we realize that rather than staying on track to achieve a previously selected goal, we would prefer to switch to the pursuit of a different, related goal or perhaps stop the pursuit of the goal completely. Last, we may regularly experience unwanted automatic thoughts or behaviors and deliberately take action to replace them with more beneficial automatic thoughts or behaviors.

Beyond automatic processes, deliberate thought can contribute significantly in areas many of us mostly leave to chance, such as relationships. Given that relationships are at the highest level of importance for Christians, it is odd how willing we are to be unintentional about who we develop relationships with, who we spend time with, and therefore who influences us in so many areas of our lives. Considering much of our social cognition is strongly socially influenced, perhaps the single most important thing we can do to maintain our ability to exercise our agency and to successfully reach our goals is to choose relationships with people who desire to live lives consistent with our own pursuits. By making intentional relationship choices we can increase the probability that we have social support for those things we know we need to do and social pressure away from things we know we should not do (that is, things that do not facilitate the realization of our life goal). Because we are social creatures, we will be socially influenced. So why not be intentional about who is doing the influencing?

CONCLUSION - THE DELIBERATE UNCONSCIOUS

Social science cannot tell us what we should pursue, but it can inform us concerning ways to achieve our goals once selected. On the other hand, our Christian

call can be what we use to deliberately define and choose our goals, especially our long-term goals for life. Perhaps our biggest goal is to pursue our own contribution to God's intended community. Clearly Christianity may provide guidance in the pursuit of this goal. However, psychology provides different and complementary guidance. Descriptions and explanations of numerous cognitive factors, of which we are to varying degrees unaware, are immense helps. Our intentional efforts can and should be made more efficient by recognizing the proper functions of automatic and controlled thinking.

The beneficial nature of this recognition is apparent when we identify the Christian life as one of progressively realized control and yet that of which we are unaware, we cannot control. As Christians, we increasingly gain awareness of many issues in our lives that affect our relationship with God and others. We may not deal with those many issues as effectively as we like, but we likely deal with them better after the Holy Spirit reveals them than before they are revealed. If at least part of this after-revelation difference in effectiveness is awareness and therefore engagement of those issues, then awareness may in general facilitate effectively dealing with other areas of needed growth. In addition to awareness of processes and outcomes of social cognition, social science can also contribute to ways of directing those processes and outcomes once they are known. Much of our discussions of implementation intentions exemplified how to understand unaware processes and outcomes and how to initiate change once intention defined those alterations. Research delineating the complementary relationship between automatic and deliberate behavioral control may also be useful to act on once we become aware of those processes.

In the end we see the full body of psychological research supports a view of conscious, intentional behavioral control. Far from automaticity always being in the driver's seat, research on the development of automaticity and implementation intentions suggest that automaticity can do and does the bidding of deliberate thought. Perhaps the work of the Christian counselor and the intentional sanctification efforts of the Christian are not in vain after all. For the reality is, our intentional efforts benefit our personal growth and development. And, as we exercise our agency toward intentional personal development, we contribute to the development of our social system, the community God desires for us.

C. Eric Jones is Associate Professor of Psychology at Regent University and holds a Ph.D. in experimental social psychology. Dr. Jones' work centers on using a Christian understanding of human nature and the empirical findings of psychology to accurately define human social behavior. His specific areas of interest

are the self, social influence and the social virtues of positive psychology. Dr. Jones is board member of the Society for Christian Psychology (www.christianpsych.org). He enjoys reading about the interplay of Christianity and psychology, spiritual development, and Christian higher education. Kindly send any correspondence concerning this article to: C. Eric Jones, Regent University, Robertson Hall 324, 1000 Regent University Drive, Virginia Beach, VA 23464; or mail: ejones@regent.edu

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Review of Worthington, Jr., Johnson, Hook and Aten (2013)

Evidence-based Practices for Christian Counseling and Psychotherapy

Featured Reviews

Worthington, E. L., Johnson, E. L., Hook, J. N. and Aten, J. D., Eds. (2013). *Evidence-based Practices for Christian Counseling and Psychotherapy*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic. 390 pp.

Reviewed by **Stephen P. Greggo**, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, IL

Evidence-based Practices for Christian Counseling and Psychotherapy is a wide-reaching, multi-author work (26 contributors) that defines the state of the art for delivery of Christian evidence-based practice (EBP) (Worthington, Johnson, Hook & Aten, 2013). This is essentially a set of literature reviews on investigations that modify known therapies into Christian-accommodated treatments. The project represents a joint venture between InterVarsity Press (IVP) and the Christian Association for Psychological Studies (CAPS), a membership organization of mental health professionals, educators, researchers, and pastors. This effort is a prime example of the aim of this publishing partnership. The goal is to promote explorations into the relationship between Christianity and the behavioral sciences.

A surefire way to ignite heat into any conversation amongst mental health professionals (MHPs) is to raise the topic of EBP or the implementation of best-practice treatment protocols. For decades, the field of counseling and psychotherapy has strived to emulate the prevailing trend in medicine. Quality of care improves when treatment guidelines, established by the critical appraisal of research evidence, are applied to clinical decisions (APA Presidential Task Force, 2006). A formal definition of this research-to-practice sequence reveals the source of the controversy. "Evidence-based practice in psychology (EBPP) is the integration of the best available research with clinical expertise in the context of patient characteristics, culture and preferences" (APA Presidential Task Force, 2006, p. 273). EBP is a large scale, organizational movement to enrich the quality of treatment that patients receive through the application of advancements in science. Clinicians are directed to apply in the field what the laboratory determines to be empirically-grounded techniques. EBP cuts across assessment, case conceptualization, the therapeutic alliance, and inter-

vention. There is general consensus that psychotherapy needs to increase reliability in the delivery of care. The tension MHPs experience revolves around priorities and authority in regards to what constitutes the key factor in achieving a valid approach (efficacy). Which of the 'three-legs' in the EBPP definition should carry the most weight: research evidence, clinician expertise, or patient characteristics? The debate can come to blows when financial reimbursement is tied to the use of an EBP. Is it practically feasible or ethically justifiable for an external reviewer to determine what defines the preferred approach based upon abstract research evidence? Should this decision override the clinical expertise of the responsible therapist who is sitting in direct communication with a unique client?

The controversy thickens further when faith-based clinicians enter the conversation. The call for exclusive dependence on 'evidence' is a direct challenge to MHPs who have longstanding routines and prized techniques. These time-honored tactics may rest on theological convictions, biblically-based beliefs, lifestyle conventions, or extensive clinical anecdotal observations. Those who harbor deep convictions about what constitutes a 'Christian' approach will invest considerable effort to determine how to promote healing, health, human flourishing and spiritual growth. There is intentionality to adopt approaches that promote change that emerge from Scripture (special revelation), theological doctrine (tradition), and redemptive praxis (i.e. Biblical study and meditation, engaging in worship, participation in liturgy, personal and corporate prayer, etc.). Such interventions may not have an empirical base that can be located anywhere in a peer-reviewed journal. MHPs who partner with Christian clients to deliver quality care must respond to the rising pressure to draw heavily upon EBP.

The Society of Clinical Psychology (APA, Division 12) maintains an alphabetized list of almost 89 different standardized EBP treatments. There are links to the necessary information to learn about each potential selection (<http://www.psychologicaltreatments.org/>). Presenting concerns cover a broad range of diagnostic conditions from panic to insomnia to obsessive-compulsive to borderline personality. Immediately located at the top of each reference page is a classification statement (i.e. strong, moderate, controversial, etc.). This

plainly reveals the breadth and quality of the research evidence to date that backs the technique. These ratings are based upon generally accepted criteria that separate well-established from probably efficacious or promising treatments (Chambless & Klonsky, 2013). Research displays the efficacy of these treatments (i.e. how a technique produces favorable outcomes under strict research conditions). Clinical practice takes these into the field to display effectiveness (i.e. how treatments work when utilized in real settings and in the lives of actual patients). This surfaces the critical question for treatment planning: *when the evidence points to a superior method, how can clinicians justify bypassing this option?*

Scrutinize this list of EBP options and a striking omission will be obvious. This will be evident to the MHP with Christian convictions and clients who openly request treatment that furthers their journey of faith. There are no EBPs identified that reference Christian beliefs or faith-enhancing features. This is where *Evidence-based Practices for Christian Counseling and Psychotherapy* steps in to fill the void. It provides a respectable compendium of treatment alternatives with Christian accommodations that adequately address the quality improvement agenda articulated by the EBP movement within the professional mental health community.

There is a word of praise that is proper to express at the outset. The remarkable accomplishment of this book does not rest entirely on gathering this wealth of information into one resource. Here is what is splendid to observe and worth pausing to acknowledge. Christians in the mental health field have been diligent, active and productive over decades to document ways that quality care can be delivered using methods coherent with Christianity. This is, in part, a credit to the fellowship and academic forum of CAPS. This book could only be attempted because a legitimate base of research was available. Most definitely there is much more to investigate; a point made repeatedly in this work chapter by chapter. Still, there are foundational findings already in position that speak to Christian themes and interventions. This is a tremendous boost to the helping efforts of those who do counseling under the heading of Christian and who wish to participate in the progression of the mental health profession along the pathway of EBPs to improve respectability, consistency and efficacy. This is not so much a commendation for this text as it is an expression of gratitude to the Lord for numerous, dedicated professionals, such as those who have co-authored these very chapters (e.g. Worthington, Stanley, Parrott, DiBlasio, Ripley, Tan & Edwards, etc.). Many defied the secular trend in research and resistance to religion/spirituality in academic journals to penetrate the field with pioneering studies. These now stand to demonstrate that Christian-accommodated therapy is not to be dismissed, discredited, or ignored.

Evidence-based Practice: Topics and Coverage

The editors launch the book by outlining the importance of the task, explaining methodologies, and identifying important terms. For example, the randomized clinical trial (RCT) is defined (i.e. clients randomly assigned to treatments) and an explanation is given for why it's the gold standard for intervention evaluation. Five audiences for the book are targeted: counselors/therapists (i.e. practitioners who routinely engage clients are informed about evidence and treatment options); clinical researchers (i.e. those who conduct efficacy research can readily identify existing programs and researchers); students (i.e. these research reviews display features of how to build credible evidence while providing an overview of best practice methods); teachers (i.e. here is comprehensive and up-to-date coverage of empirical research on Christian accommodated treatments); and educated lay people (i.e. those looking for care for themselves or others have a guide that identifies what is known about efficacy).

The first section (Part One) addresses general therapeutic factors such as evidence-based relationships and the quality of the therapeutic alliance (R. Scott Stegman, Sarah L. Kelly and T. Mark Harwood), evidence for the benefits of lay counseling (Siang-Yang Tan) and implementation of timeless Christian devotional meditations (Fernando Garzon). The chapter on therapist variables is exceptionally useful, due in part to the extensive research data available. It is handy to have such a review so succinctly presented for Christian counselors.

The second section (Part Two) covers three approaches for use in individual therapy. A broad overview of how cognitive therapy for depression can be adjusted for Christian clients leads off the section (David J. Jennings II, Don E. Davis, Joshua N. Hook, and Everett L. Worthington Jr.). This material is imperative to clinicians given the number of clients who seek treatment for this mental health concern. Treatment plans for depression should definitively employ EBP alternatives given the overwhelming efficacy data. Children and adolescents with trauma experience and symptoms can receive the advantage of CBT with Christian modifications (Donald R. Walker, Heather Lewis Quagliana, Morgan Wilkinson and Dana Frederick). The more research elusive approaches of psychodynamic and process-experiential therapies are given a fine overview in light of the evidence for successful implementation (Keith J. Edwards and Edward B. Davis). This chapter offers a feature worth noting. It begins with a forthright recognition of the worldview discrepancies between these depth psychotherapies and traditional Christian theology (e.g. autonomy vs dependency on God; self-determination vs the Holy Spirit; personal fulfillment vs Christian service). The purpose of the chapter is not to put these conflicts to rest. Nevertheless, it is useful to probe the supportive evidence with these matters

articulated frankly and forthrightly. Worldview clashes are important to name and face.

The third section (Part three) surveys six separate marriage, family, and group therapies that have a suitable level of research to warrant use. Given the burden on therapists to deliver results to turn the tide of marital and family upheaval, it is prudent for counselors to take note of these prime opportunities to initiate change. In marital therapy, presenting complaints (e.g. lack of relational intimacy, ongoing conflict, boundary violations and infidelity) are such that time is always too limited and the consequences of treatment failure can be life altering. Thus, the treatments listed represent a solid collection of first round applications. The “saving your marriage before it starts” model (SYMBIS) is a long-standing and researched program for pre-marriage counseling (Les Parrott and Leslie Parrott). The “Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP)” is a premier example of an EBP and it has a well-established Christian version (C. Gary Barnes and Scott Stanley). Given the weight that ministries place on the marriage covenant for a lifetime, these prevention strategies for preservation deserve attention. A systematic communication training sequence that qualifies as a promising EBP to increase the presence of hope in struggling or surviving marriages is found in the Hope-focused Couples Approach (Jennifer Ripley, Vickey L. Maclin, Joshua N. Hook and Everett L. Worthington Jr.). The comparison between its standard secular format and the Christian version is particularly useful to highlight the advantage of a faith-altered treatment. A couple’s counseling approach that teases out painful defenses while promoting grace-trust bonds is described in conjunction with its available evidence (James N. Sells). A forgiveness exploration for couples is detailed and the initial research conducted is presented (Frederick A. DiBlasio). This chapter includes a unique feature because constructs in the model were subjected to a Scriptural review. The revelation-based critique, built into the discussion of supportive evidence, is an exemplary feature that could easily have been extended to other chapters. Finally, group work around a stepwise forgiveness realization sequence is described along with its strong research (Julia E. M. Kidwell and Nathaniel G. Wade). This level of evidence is not easily achieved and the long-term progression to reach this endorsement of its credibility is worth considering. This displays how other approaches might follow suit by using cooperative research teams and transparent protocols.

There is a chapter that pulls together a comprehensive analysis of the 12 modalities depicted. This chapter and the one that follows on conducting clinical outcome studies could be designated as a ‘must read’ for researchers such as those heading towards a dissertation. The conclusion may be that in total, the research underlying most Christian-accommodative models is weak while the secular counterparts are well-established. This

is not in the least discouraging. Rather it is a realistic appraisal that displays why clinic-research partnerships are so needed in the decades to come. The summary chart (pp. 296-302) is an excellent tool for seeing the scope of the research for each approach side-by-side.

Commendations and Challenge

The commendations for this collection of EBPs with promise for Christian clinicians and clients are readily apparent. First, as this book compiles empirical evidence it seamlessly grants attention along the way to how research is approached, conducted, evaluated, and applied. As such, it has solid possibilities as a text in seminars where mental health professionals grapple with research themes and questions. This may also be useful for those who are not bound to complete a dissertation or who will never actually conduct a research project. In a field that increasingly looks to research to improve outcomes and decide critical questions, practitioners need proficiency to recognize its activities, benefits, and limitations. Second, this text does not waiver on ethical practice. It makes abundantly evident that accommodated approaches are not intended to impose, manipulate, or influence clients who have not made an explicit request for faith-enhancing services. Third, the chapters introduce each EBP approach and offer ample references to track down the procedures. The majority of chapters provide sufficient detail about the model of interest to make clinicians familiar with its typical flow into client care. Fourth, this text is assessable. It is a reference to have on hand for those MHPs writing treatment plans anticipating prospective, concurrent, or retrospective review. Fifth, this serves as a basis for possible future jointly authored projects (i.e. comprehensive handbooks or focused treatment manuals) or cooperative research enterprises.

One surprising omission does raise a notable challenge. There is no extended consideration of the Scriptural criteria that one might use to establish a qualified Christian accommodation. This leaves the explanation for what is ‘Christian’ undefined. Further, how much adjustment is required to alter standard treatment into an approach that is characteristically Christian, that is, theologically and biblically sound? The concluding chapter does raise the question regarding the need to describe how Christians within diverse traditions will further implement these approaches. Thus, as this book draws to a close, its final chapter raises crucial points that highlight ways to identify unique Christian traditions, convictions, and constructs (e.g. centrality of God, human fallenness, moral law, redemption, the body of Christ, suffering and the future). “Presumably, the efficacy and effectiveness of Christian psychotherapy would be enhanced the more saturated the treatment is with psychotherapy-relevant Christian content and practice” (Johnson, Worthington, Hook & Aten, 2013, p. 332). This is a useful observation, offered directly in

the text itself. Yet, this appears at the finish line and not at the starting gate. Would there not be considerable value in having a uniform reflection on each approach, chapter by chapter, in light of Christian themes such as these? For comparison, early ventures into EBPs established empirical benchmarks to separate the strong from the promising or controversial. A corresponding challenge would be to establish relevant Scriptural, theological and formational categories that signify degrees of accommodation and set standards for original Christian therapeutic ventures.

For transparency, this reviewer will acknowledge multiple ties that may reduce my objectivity. This writer served on the Board of CAPS. Further, I am honored to name a number of the contributing authors as colleagues and friends. I have a professional relationship with its IVP editor. Please consider what can be gained from this review with these admissions in mind.

In conclusion, evidence-based practice is how quality care will continue to be defined in the mental health arena. This book thus makes a meaningful contribution to the clinical efforts of those with Christian worldview beliefs and commitments by establishing a foundation of reasonable evidence.

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Gingrich, H. D. (2013). *Restoring the Shattered Self: A Christian Counselor's Guide to Complex Trauma*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity. 235 pp.

Reviewed by **Jonathan Badgett**, Living Faith Christian Church, Farmingdale, NY

Christian counselors working with survivors of severe, chronic sexual and psychological trauma well know the

myriad challenges that accompany such work. Among the many hurdles—both therapeutic and personal—facing the counselor, we note the frustrating paucity of publications that maintain a strong confessional commitment to the gospel of Jesus Christ while interacting with empirically proven clinical theories and models. For this reason it brought me no small amount of gratification when in a recent conversation with a fellow counselor I was able to recommend Heather Davediuk Gingrich's *Restoring the Shattered Self: A Christian Counselor's Guide to Complex Trauma*. Gingrich, a clinical psychologist (Ph.D.) and associate professor of counseling at Denver Theological Seminary, has assembled a well-sourced manual for the treatment of Complex Traumatic Stress Disorders (CTSD). Indeed, she skillfully weaves the threads of contemporary empirical and clinical science along the warp of a thoroughly Christian worldview. The result is a significant and welcome contribution to the field.

As the author notes, the scientific knowledge base relating to complex trauma and its associated psychopathologies continues to expand at a rapid pace. Yet, despite the recent and remarkable growth within the field, consensus regarding the theoretical and therapeutic frameworks for CTS disorders remains largely inchoate. Referencing the extant literature Gingrich presents her own theoretical framework for the etiology of CTSDs. Drawing in varying degrees on the principles of object relations psychology, Putnam's theory of Discrete Behavioral States (DBS), and the more recent findings from the field of interpersonal neurobiology, she demonstrates how severe, chronic trauma suffered in early childhood can lead to a complex array of neurological and psychosocial pathologies. More often than not, these psychopathologies continue into adulthood. Dissociation—"God's gift to the traumatized child" (p. 39)—Gingrich defines as a psychological defense mechanism whereby victims are shielded, in some sense, from the full horrors of severe trauma. She offers several assessments for pathological dissociation in adults in terms of the criteria listed in *DSM-IV-TR* (amnesia, depersonalization, derealization, identity confusion, and identity alteration). Nevertheless, she evidently prefers the BASK model of dissociation, which separates the various components of subjective experience into behavior (B), affect (A), sensation (S) and cognitive knowledge (K). Within her chapters on treatment modalities the author notes at length the conceptual and clinical benefits of the BASK model.

When it comes to the treatment of CTSD, Gingrich advocates the now-common three-phase approach developed by Judith Herman in the early 1990s. Broadly speaking, the primary emphasis of the therapeutic relationship in Phase I is fostering the safety and stabilization of the counselee. During Phase II counselors assist survivors to uncover and work through dissociated memories of trauma and abuse. These experiences

must be allowed to inhere in the individual's present awareness and subjective sense of self in order heal the traumatized parts of the soul. Due to the complexity and difficulty intrinsic to this process Gingrich notes that progress is often recursive, requiring numerous returns to Phase I work should a loss of stability occur. Once traumatic memories have been fully integrated—a process that can take years depending on the length and severity of the trauma—individuals can begin to learn in Phase III how to live coherent, functional lives no longer as victims but as survivors of the trauma they have now, in a much fuller sense, overcome.

Gingrich's theoretical and treatment models rely heavily on secular empirical research and her own clinical experience with CTSD clients. Nevertheless, a third pillar of her model is, clearly, her own evangelical Christian faith. In support of this observation I mention several indicators. Perhaps most significant is Gingrich's assertion that Christ must be the center of any healing intervention: "It is not enough to be a Christian who counsels," she argues (p. 189). Less clear is how Gingrich pursues a more rigorous Christocentric agenda in session. She does encourage counselors to listen for the promptings of God's Spirit whom she believes guides the healing process. Beyond this, she also advocates the potential psychotherapeutic benefits of Christian spirituality through spiritual disciplines, such as Bible reading, healing prayer, and local church involvement, as resources to supplement healing work done in session (p. 178). According to Gingrich, it is ultimately God's work—more than the training and ability of counselors—that facilitates a favorable therapeutic outcome.

Gingrich's disciplinary integration—her rejection of the philosophical presuppositions of modern psychology and pursuit of a thoroughgoing Christian paradigm for soul care—is often quite strong. There are, however, a few dissonant notes. Her use of Scripture, for instance, is often aphoristic and pictorial rather than exegetical or theological. In one example of this tendency Gingrich compares a traumatized child deprived of healthy attachments to the man in Jesus' parable (Mat.

7:26) who, by ignoring the Lord's teaching, built his house on sand (p. 41). Though her intention is certainly innocent enough—both individuals will eventually prove ill-equipped to handle the vicissitudes of life—Gingrich nonetheless misapplies the text. She effectively reduces Jesus' teaching to an illustration of her point. A second, more serious fault can be seen in her conflation of the methods of Carl Rogers with those of Jesus for expressing empathy and building rapport (pp. 64-66). Generally, her approval of person-centered interventions (p. 125) reflects a degree of theological confusion, if not naïveté.

One final dissonance sounds in Gingrich's discussion of treatment outcomes for CTSD individuals. Early on she determines that awareness and integration of experience states into "a unified, continuous whole" are essential for "healthy functioning" (p. 37). Indeed, she implies that Christian counselors, more than their secular counterparts, ought to recognize integration as an aspect of the "abundant life" promised by Jesus in John 10:10 (p. 23). Nevertheless, when it comes to working with more severe psychopathologies like Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID), Gingrich appears to shift the goal posts when she states, "full integration is actually *not* the goal," but rather "a more functional, coherent person" (p. 167, italics in original). As she points out, counselees with DID can come to fear the prospect of integrating their dissociated identities for any number of reasons. To be sure, counselors will have little choice but to respect their client's desire to remain divided and discontinuous. Nevertheless, Gingrich's strong negation of full integration as a treatment outcome for DID individuals may borrow more from secular theory than from her stated belief in the healing power of God.

In spite of these few concerns, *Restoring the Shattered Self* merits serious attention for its principled, evangelical engagement with complex trauma. Gingrich has provided a welcome resource to Christian counselors treating CTSD. May it spur on others whose love for Christ guides their soul care work with the broken and hurting in our midst.

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

