

With contributions by

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John H. Coe  
& Todd W. Hall



# Psychology & Christianity

FIVE VIEWS

EDITED BY **Eric L. Johnson**



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SECOND EDITION

EDITED BY Eric L. Johnson

WITH CONTRIBUTIONS BY David G. Myers,  
Stanton L. Jones, Robert C. Roberts & P. J. Watson,  
John H. Coe & Todd W. Hall, David Powlison

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To Malcolm Jeeves, Gary Collins, John Carter,  
Bruce Narramore, C. Stephen Evans, David Benner,  
Jay Adams, Wayne Mack and Larry Crabb:

Forerunners.



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## Preface to the Second Edition

It is widely acknowledged that factions in American culture have been embroiled over the past four decades in a conceptual and political battle grounded in different views of morality, values, epistemology and the role of religion in public life, a “culture war” of great importance to evangelicals (Hunter, 1991). Less well known are the similar battles waged *within* the evangelical community, one of which concerns the relation of psychology and Christianity.

What has led to this particular conflict? There are at least two factors. For one, modern psychology has become enormously influential in our culture and on the American church. And two, since its founding 130 years ago, modern psychology has been largely devoid of reference to religiousness, and often it has been downright hostile to religion, a stance that has only recently shown signs of softening. In the face of these dynamics, Christians have taken different positions regarding the extent to which they should have anything to do with modern psychology—some embracing it wholeheartedly, others rejecting it just as vigorously and many falling somewhere between. Few opportunities have arisen for Christians to dialogue publicly about these differences, about the value of psychology in general for Christians, and about the problems involved in psychological study and counseling practice for people of faith.

This book is one such opportunity, and it has been a pleasure to work on this dialogue. I wish to thank heartily the seven contributors. I have long felt a professional debt to all of them for their contributions on these matters, and I add to that a personal debt for their efforts in this project.

This second edition is distinguished from the first by the move of Stan-

ton Jones from coeditor of the earlier edition to the representative of the integration position, with the result that I am now the sole editor of the book you now hold. Further, another view has been added to the dialogue: transformational psychology. This model had its roots in the integration tradition, but over the past twenty years, for reasons that will be explained, the various proponents of this view are advancing what amounts to a novel and distinct Christian way of thinking about psychology that must now be taken seriously.

Finally, I'd like to thank Sarah Tennant for helping with the indexes, and I want to express my appreciation for the staff at InterVarsity Press, especially Andy Le Peau and Joel Scandrett, for their guidance and support throughout the different stages of this project.

I think it would be fitting to dedicate a book such as this to some of the notable forerunners who contributed to and, in some cases, helped to establish the five positions found in this book: Malcolm Jeeves (levels of explanation); Gary Collins, John Carter and Bruce Narramore (integration); C. Stephen Evans (Christian psychology); David Benner (transformational psychology); Jay Adams and Wayne Mack (biblical counseling); and Larry Crabb (who over his career has contributed to three of the positions in this book: integration, Christian psychology and transformational psychology).

# A Brief History of Christians in Psychology

*Eric L. Johnson*

FOLLOWERS OF GOD HAVE ALWAYS BEEN interested in his creation. After citing the stars in the heavens, the bestowal of rain, the growth of vegetation and the feeding of wild animals, the psalmist cries out, “How many are your works, O LORD! / In wisdom you made them all; / the earth is full of your creatures” (Ps 104:24). But of all the things in creation, of greatest interest to most of us is our own nature, for we are fascinated with the wonder of ourselves. As John Calvin wrote, a human being is a microcosm of the universe, “a rare example of God’s power, goodness, and wisdom, and contains within . . . enough miracles to occupy our minds” (1559/1960, p. 54). It is not surprising then to learn that Christian thinkers over the centuries have thought deeply about psychological matters, long before modern psychology arose.

Yet Christian interest in psychology has exploded over the last fifty years. Countless books have been written by Christians that describe our personalities, our boundaries, our dysfunctional development, our relationships and their problems, how our children should be raised, and so on. However, in the midst of this explosion has been an intellectual crisis that the church has been wrestling with for even longer: over the previous 140 years, a complex and rich body of knowledge and practice has proliferated, which has understood and treated human beings in some ways that vary considerably from Christian perspectives on human life. Since this modern psychology is largely secular, there is considerable disagreement about how much the theories and findings of this type of psychology

should influence, be absorbed into and even transform the way Christians think about human beings. Some Christians have embraced modern psychology's findings and theories with uncritical enthusiasm, naively trusting that its texts are a perfect reflection of human reality. Others have argued that *any* appropriation of modern psychology is "psychoheresy," since it necessarily poisons the Christians who imbibe it (Bobgan & Bobgan, 1987). This book will examine neither extreme but will consider the vast territory between them—specifically five well-thought-through views from evangelicals who offer a fairly comprehensive representation of the ways that most Christians (including nonevangelicals) understand psychology and counseling in our day.

Before summarizing the five approaches themselves, I would like to trace the historical and intellectual background for the present debate.

## **CHRISTIANITY AND SCIENCE**

We ought to begin by noting that Christians have commonly understood that the natural order is the work of a wise Creator who continues to providentially guide it, and that it, therefore, possesses an intrinsic rationality and orderliness that can be investigated. Discovering evidence of this design brings God glory, thus its continued investigation is warranted (Hooykaas, 1972; McGrath, 2001; Stark, 2003). Indeed, it was mostly Christians in the West who founded the scientific revolution, and the main contributors to the early developments in the natural sciences—astronomy, physics, chemistry and biology—were Christians of various stripes, including Roger Bacon, Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo, Francis Bacon, Newton, Boyle, Pascal, Descartes, Ray, Linnaeus and Gassendi. Throughout the history of Christianity, science has been seen, fundamentally, as a gift of God.

## **CHRISTIANITY AND PSYCHOLOGY**

According to most introductory textbooks in psychology, psychopathology and counseling (and even some history of psychology texts), the founding of psychology occurred in the mid- to late-1800s. As we will see, though, that was the founding of *modern* psychology. A little more investigation reveals that there was a tremendous amount of reflection, writing, counseling, psychological theorizing and even some research

going on during previous centuries (Brett, 1912; Klein, 1970; Leahey, 2003; Watson & Evans, 1991). Unquestionably, the form of this older psychology was different in many respects from the empirically and statistically oriented psychology of the past hundred years. In contrast, this older psychology relied much more on the philosophical and theological reflections of Christian thinkers and ministers. Nonetheless, this was genuine psychological work and it pervades the history of Christianity (and all the major religions; see Olson, 2002; Thomas, 2001), even if most of it was characterized by less of the complexity evident in modern psychology.

The first sophisticated psychologies in the West were developed by Greek philosopher-therapists like Plato, Aristotle and Epicurus. They attempted to describe human nature, including its fundamental ills and its reparation, on the basis of personal experience and rigorous reflection in light of prior thought (Nussbaum, 1994; Watson & Evans, 1991). These thinkers explored topics like the composition and “inner” structure of human beings—memory, reason, sensation, appetite, motivation, virtues and vices, and various ideals of human maturation. The Old and New Testaments themselves contain material of great psychological import, and in the case of Paul, we might say with Brett (1912), a strongly religious “protopsycho-logy.” However, in contrast to the more rigorous writing of contemporary science, the reflections in the Bible belong to the category of “folk psychology” or “lay psychology,” since they do not constitute a systematic and comprehensive exploration of human nature generated for the purpose of contributing to human knowledge (Fletcher, 1995; Thomas, 2001). Nevertheless, because Christians believe the Bible to be specially inspired by God (2 Tim 3:16), revealing matters of essential importance, Christians have usually accorded the Bible’s teachings on human nature with a unique authority regarding how to think about psychological matters.

After the New Testament era, the Bible and the intellectual contributions of the Greeks both contributed to the psychological theorizing of Christians for the next fourteen hundred years. With only a limited grasp of the value of empirical study, the major teachers and writers of the early church and medieval periods were convinced that Scripture and rigorous reflection on it provided the surest route to psychological knowledge. Not surprisingly, then, the best psychological work by Christians was the result

of biblical and philosophical reflection on human experience.

Though largely concerned with matters of faith and life, people like the desert fathers—Tertullian, Athanasius, Cassian, Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory the Great—wrote with often penetrating insight into the nature of the soul and soul healing. However, Augustine, with his massive intellect, is widely recognized as the first great Christian “psychologist” (see Watson & Evans, 1991). Steeped in the Scriptures and the thought of the earlier church fathers, Augustine’s understanding of human beings was also flavored by the philosophical tradition inspired by Plato. Nevertheless, his work on love, sin, grace, memory, mental illumination, wisdom, volition and the experience of time provides a wealth of psychological insight and suggestions for further investigations.

Strongly influenced by Augustine but much more systematic (and, therefore, more directly helpful for developing psychological theory) was Thomas Aquinas (Watson & Evans, 1991). This meticulous thinker devoted his life to relating the Christian faith to the thought of another brilliant but mostly nonreligious philosopher, Aristotle. Aquinas unified the best of the Augustinian and Aristotelian traditions and produced an influential body of psychological thought, covering the appetites, the will, habits, the virtues and vices, the emotions, memory, and the intellect.

It is worth underlining that the two greatest intellectual lights of the church’s first fifteen hundred years, Augustine and Aquinas, drew heavily in their theological and psychological work on the philosophical traditions of the two greatest (non-Christian) Greek philosophers—Plato and Aristotle respectively. And the distinct approaches of Augustine and Aquinas contributed to genuine differences in thought and orientation, though these differences have sometimes been exaggerated (MacIntyre, 1990). In a very real sense, the works of both represent an “integration” of Christian and non-Christian psychology, though Aquinas was engaged in such integration more self-consciously than Augustine, who was more explicitly working out the differences between Christian and pagan thought (between the “City of God” and the “City of Humanity”).

Many Christians in the Middle Ages in addition to Aquinas wrote on psychological and soul-care topics, including Bernard of Clairvaux, Symeon the New Theologian, Gregory Palamas, Anselm, Bonaventure, Duns Scotus, Walter Hilton, Julian of Norwich, William of Ockham and

Thomas á Kempis. The more philosophically inclined writers typically focused on concerns like the structure of the soul and knowledge, whereas the more spiritually inclined focused on the love and experience of God and spiritual development. The latter was the special focus of the monasteries and the priests, and the healing of souls was understood to be central to the mission of the church—long before modern psychotherapy came on the scene (McNeill, 1951; Oden, 1989).

The Renaissance, Reformation and Counter-Reformation released a new psychological curiosity in the church. For example, Reformers like Luther and Calvin reflected deeply on sin, grace, knowledge, faith and the nature of the Christian life, and Catholics like Teresa of Ávila, John of the Cross and Ignatius of Loyola described spiritual development with unparalleled clarity. However, similar to much of the work of earlier Christians, the main focus of this quasi-psychological writing was more pastoral than scientific: the cure and upbuilding of the Christian soul. It was, according to Charry (1997), *aretegenic*, directed toward the shaping of one's moral and spiritual character and the enhancement of the believer's relationship with God, and in some cases, it addressed what would be considered "therapeutic" concerns today (such as the resolution of severe "melancholy").

In the Reformation traditions this pastoral psychology reached its zenith in the Puritan, Pietist and evangelical movements. Writers like Richard Baxter, John Owen, George Herbert, William Law, John Gerhardt, John Wesley, Jonathan Edwards and John Newton developed sophisticated and nuanced understandings of psychospiritual problems—like sin, melancholy, assurance and spiritual desertions—and how to promote spiritual healing and development in Christ.

In addition, Christian philosophers after the Middle Ages continued to reason carefully about human nature in works of great psychological significance, including such luminaries as René Descartes, Giovanni Vico, John Locke, Bishop George Berkeley, Thomas Reid, Bishop Joseph Butler, Gottfried Leibniz and Blaise Pascal—some of these are recognized as figures who influenced the later founding of modern psychology.

Possibly the most significant Christian psychology author since the Middle Ages was Søren Kierkegaard, who used the word *psychology* to describe some of his works, and who wrote some profound psychological works. Over the course of a decade, he brilliantly described (in sometimes

deliberately unsettling ways) the nature of personhood, sin, anxiety and despair, the unconscious (before Freud was even born!), subjectivity, and human and spiritual development from a deeply Christian perspective. Kierkegaard is, as well, the only Christian thinker who can be considered a father to a major, modern approach to psychological theory and therapy—existential psychology (though he would have vigorously rejected its secular agenda).

So if we define psychology broadly as a rigorous inquiry into human nature and how to treat its problems and advance its well-being, Christians have been thinking and practicing psychology for centuries. Believing that God had revealed the most important truths about human beings in the Bible, they learned there that God created the world and that human beings were specially created in his image. But they also learned that something was terribly wrong with human beings—they were sinners and needed to be rescued from their plight, for which they bore responsibility. Because humans were created in God's image, they were endowed with reason, so they could apprehend truth in the Bible and in the created order. In the Bible, they found God's norms for human beings and his design for the flourishing of human life through the salvation obtained through faith in Christ on the basis of his life, death and resurrection. Using this worldview, Christians were able to contribute novel and significant psychological insights in such areas as the nature of human reason, sensation, memory, attention, the appetites, the emotions, volition, the unconscious and the experience of time. In addition, Christians developed hypotheses about moral, spiritual and character development; the role of God and grace in human and spiritual development; the nature and impact of sin; techniques for overcoming sin and brokenness (the spiritual disciplines, as well as herbal remedies and common-sense helps); the psychology of religion; the relation of free will and determinism; biological and social origins of psychopathology; body-soul relations; and even some of the bases for scientific research. Thus, Christians had a broad and rich tradition of understanding human beings and treating their problems long before modern psychology came on the scene.

## **LATE MODERNISM AND THE “NEW PSYCHOLOGY”**

Modernism is generally considered to be a worldview or framework of

Western thought that arose in the 1600s, advanced considerably in the 1800s and became dominant in the West during the twentieth century. To some extent, it was a reaction to the religious conflicts that had dominated Christian Europe since the Reformation, reaching a sad denouement in the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648). Modernism's main assumptions include the following:

1. Special revelation and tradition can no longer be regarded as ultimate authorities, because appeals to such sources obviously can not resolve the serious religious-intellectual (and societal) conflicts confronting Europe.
2. Human knowledge must be based on a more sure foundation, and that foundation is presumed to be located in human reason especially but also in human consciousness and experience—basically all aspects of the individual self.
3. The goal of human knowledge is universal understanding, obtained by objective means that all interested parties can use, thus privileging no one perspective and granting a fundamental epistemological equality to all.
4. The natural sciences are held up as the model for human understanding, since they demonstrate the power of human reason and observation (experience) to yield universal knowledge. The natural sciences are characterized by the combination of careful empirical investigation with the application of mathematics (one of reason's most powerful tools), which can yield formulas that correspond to causal relations in the world, as demonstrated magisterially in Isaac Newton's *Principia Mathematica*.

Modernism can be broken down roughly into two periods. The philosophers Descartes, Locke and later Kant (among others) were primary contributors to *early* modernism, which was distinguished by philosophical explorations based on the above assumptions, as well as on continuing adherence to some measure of religious faith, usually Christian (Hume would be the main exception).

However, by the middle of the 1800s, *late* modernism was developing as a result of four new, largely interrelated, intellectual trends. The most significant for our purposes was the widespread secularization that began to appear in the West during this period. As with any complex and controver-

sial concept, understandings of secularism differ. According to theistic philosopher Charles Taylor (2007), there are three facets: (1) the exclusion of religious discourse from the public square, including government and science; (2) the reduction in religious belief and practice; and (3) the increased viability of other worldview options. Smith (2003) argues that secularization has been nothing short of a revolution, promoted by an avid, growing intellectual elite, who perceived current Christian attitudes and beliefs as regressive (i.e., characterized by censorship, moral repression, and anti-evolution and anti-intellectualist sentiments). It was also fostered by many cultural and psychological factors, like the theory of evolution, positivism, common-sense realism, a new economic power-class, changing academic standards, and anti-Catholicism and division among Protestant leaders.

As a result of such dynamics, explicitly religious speech, values and norms were gradually evacuated from public discourse and relegated to religious institutions and the private sphere. This process is by no means complete, and is still being contested, particularly in the southeastern United States. However, by most accounts, the revolution has been over for many decades (with a few “faith-based” qualifications) in the centers of intellectual and therapeutic power in the West—that is, in its educational, government, medical, social welfare, mental health and media institutions (Marsden, 1994; Smith, 2003; Taylor, 2007).

Evidence that the revolution is over abounds. For over a century, the majority of the West’s most influential authors, thinkers, scientists and celebrities have not been religious, and of those who have been, their religion has generally not been public. On the contrary, many of the shapers of Western culture over the past hundred years have publicly disparaged traditional religious perspectives (e.g., Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, H. G. Wells, John Dewey, Bertrand Russell, Jean-Paul Sartre, Michel Foucault, Richard Rorty, Daniel Dennett and Richard Dawkins). Perhaps the most telling example of this revolution is the shift of European and American institutions of higher learning, which have so markedly moved from their Judeo-Christian origins to secular sensibilities. Institution by institution, colleges and universities have shed their original commitments to glorifying Christ and proclaiming the Christian gospel to embrace a secularized definition of mission and identity (Marsden, 1994; Smith, 2003).

Doubtless, some secondary benefits have accrued in Western culture

that we take for granted today, which occurred as a result of secularism's loosening of religious cultural restrictions. For example, secularism helped put an end to the violent religious conflicts among Christians that characterized the 1600s (but which are still found in Muslim regions of the world); it made possible a common educational system; it allowed people of different faith communities (Christian, Jewish, agnostic) to socialize, work together, learn from each other, and focus in their common cultural pursuits on those beliefs that most people hold in common, rather than on those that divide; and most important for the church, it helps Christians distinguish merely cultural Christianity from the genuine article. Indeed, some argue that such benefits are internal to Christianity itself (Stark, 2003).

Secularization by itself, however, could not have had the influence it did, had it not been joined in the minds of many to another very significant cultural development: the application of natural science methods to the study of human beings and the treatment of their problems. Careful observation, the use of mathematics and often the experimental manipulation of variables had proven successful in previous centuries in astronomy, physics, chemistry and biology. In the late 1800s and early 1900s these methods began to be applied to the study of society, human consciousness and behavior, economics and business, and education—and with notable results. The glue that brought and has kept secularism and natural science methods together is the philosophy of science and knowledge known as *positivism*.

In three successive waves, Auguste Comte (1798-1857), Ernst Mach (1838-1916), and the logical positivists, Carnap, Schlick, Ayers, etc. (in the first half of the twentieth century), composed increasingly sophisticated versions of the view that “positive” knowledge was only that which could be verified by empirical research. As a result, the methods of natural science were believed to provide the only legitimate means for obtaining knowledge. According to such criteria, ethical and metaphysical claims (regarding the nature of human beings and God) are not knowledge; they are just opinions that have no place in science. The “new psychology” in America was based on this model of science (e.g., James, 1890; Thorndike, 1905; Watson, 1913; for discussion see Danziger, 1979; Klein, 1970; Leahy, 2003; Toulmin & Leary, 1992), and it was taken to its logical extreme in behaviorism, which dominated modern psychology from 1930 to 1960, when most research psychologists concentrated on animal research and

carefully controlled studies of environmental stimuli and the behavior they elicited. Human consciousness and thought were largely ignored.

In time, positivism was thoroughly discredited by philosophers of science (Kuhn, 1962; Suppe, 1977). In the 1960s, as part of a “cognitive revolution,” modern psychology began a partial correction and pulled away from the radical positivism of behaviorism and returned to the study of mental phenomena. However, it has never repudiated the overall framework of positivism, so it still works broadly within what could be called a neopositivist paradigm.<sup>1</sup>

Late modernism was also shaped pervasively by the theory of evolution. Darwin’s *Origin of the Species*, published in 1859, was immediately welcomed by the growing numbers of secular intellectuals who needed a naturalistic “origin story”—a modernist metanarrative—that was based on empirical research rather than revelation and that was believed to allow humans to explain their existence without reference to a Creator. Evolutionary theory’s seeming optimism about the inevitable improvability of humankind was easily joined to the sense of progress fostered by the scientific and industrial revolutions. With regard to psychology, evolution legitimated the study of animals that have features in common with humans in their nervous systems and learning capacities. This led to the subdiscipline of comparative psychology, and it eventually contributed many notable findings in neuropsychology, childhood development and learning.<sup>2</sup>

Finally, whereas confidence in human reason was unparalleled in the first two centuries of the modern era, reaching a climax in the Enlighten-

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<sup>1</sup>There are signs, however, that the positivist foundation is beginning to crack. The positive psychology movement, the work of leaders like Bandura (2001) and others (Baer, Kaufman & Baumeister, 2008; Martin, Sugarman & Thompson, 2003) on human and moral agency, and a renewed openness to spirituality and religion demonstrate a growing willingness within to question some of positivism’s basic assumptions.

<sup>2</sup>Given Christianity’s high view of human beings as images of God, it is unlikely that Christians would have invested so heavily in this kind of research on their own, without the impetus of another worldview. Yet comparative psychology research has yielded important and fascinating findings. In retrospect, it must be said that there is nothing in Christianity per se that is inconsistent with the study of animal psychology to enable us to understand ourselves better. Humans are undeniably a kind of animal, and God is certainly entitled to use the same basic neurological template for other animals, as he used in the design of humans. Good Christians disagree about the compatibility of evolution with Christianity, yet most Christians recognize that some evolution occurs throughout the biological world. At the same time, most Christians also admit that *naturalistic* evolution—a mindless process shaped merely by natural selection and genetic mutation, without *any* involvement by God—is antithetical to the Christian faith.

ment (the late 1700s), such exuberance was checked in the Romantic movement, which led to a more substantial critique that came to typify late modernism. As a result of the questions put to reason by Marx, Nietzsche and Freud (as well as Kierkegaard), it became a truism that reason itself can be deceived, so its deliverances could not be unquestioningly trusted. They had to be critiqued—but by what or whom? Late modernism really had nowhere else to turn except to reason. So, while the limits of reason were at least being acknowledged, late modernism had nothing to offer in its place. This realization eventually contributed to the relativism of post-modernism, which came later in the twentieth century.

Throughout the 1800s, late modernism grew in cultural influence, at the same time that the new psychology was being established. Beginning in the early- to mid-1800s, European studies on the nervous system and sensory experience demonstrated that aspects of human subjectivity could be objectively studied and measured. The discovery that lawful relationships exist between stimuli in the world and our experience of them proved that natural science methods could be usefully applied to the internal world of human beings. Wilhelm Wundt, a professor of physiological psychology at the University of Leipzig, is considered the father of modern psychology. In 1879 he was the first to set up an explicit psychology laboratory for the purpose of studying immediate human experience—a move that is commonly accepted as modern psychology's birth. In 1881 he established a journal to publish the results of its research, and he founded the first graduate program with this orientation. Most simply, Wundt was the first to demarcate psychology as a distinct, empirical discipline, staffed by its own specialists (Danziger, 1979). Wundt's influence was enormous, and similar laboratories and programs soon sprung up throughout Europe and the United States. As the impetus to turn psychology into a natural science grew across the West, biblical study and philosophical reflection were systematically excluded as sources of knowledge about human nature, in favor of the empirical investigation of the structures and processes of the senses, mind, memory and behavior (Toulmin & Leary, 1992). So different in method from what went before, this seemed to many to be the founding of an entirely new discipline.

The establishment of this experimental discipline in America occurred

relatively quickly with William James as its American forerunner. He became a physiology professor at Harvard in 1872 and taught “Relations Between Psychology and Physiology” in 1875. G. Stanley Hall was America’s first professor of psychology, appointed at Johns Hopkins in 1884. G. T. Ladd (1887) surveyed the available research on the nervous system and sensory experience in *Elements of Physiological Psychology*. In 1889, *The American Journal of Psychology* was begun by Hall, which was the first journal in English dedicated to this new approach to psychology. Soon after, James (1890) completed his classic, masterfully written overview of the state of the field, *Principles of Psychology*. The American Psychological Association was founded in 1892, and by 1900, psychology departments had been founded at a number of major universities. Modern psychology was well on its way to laying claim to having “the monopoly of psychological truth” (Danziger, 1979, p. 28).

Along with the growth of positivist research on human beings, others were attempting to address psychological problems according to the same assumptions. In marked contrast to the historical care of souls that Christians and Jews had been doing for centuries, psychotherapy and counseling began to be done without reference to God or supernatural intervention, and training programs were created with academic standards comparable to those in the sciences. The development of clinical psychology and advances in psychiatry helped to fill the void left by religious communities that were, by and large, abandoning their historic calling to care for and cure the soul.

Freudian psychoanalysis, in particular, offered a somewhat disturbing but nonetheless profound model for treating mental problems, and it was quickly embraced by some American psychologists, psychiatrists and, even more, by the culture at large, because of its apparent sophistication, alleged empirical basis and alluring examination of the mysterious unconscious. Though increasingly criticized in coming decades, psychoanalysis was seen at the time as generally consistent with the new psychology, because it shared most of its assumptions.

The new psychology promised to offer a better basis for understanding human life and the improvement of humankind—without religion—so it is no surprise that many of its early leaders were raised in the Christian or Jewish faiths and came later to reject, at least, orthodox versions of these

faiths (a process termed *deconversion*; Barbour, 1994).<sup>3</sup> The only place in modern psychology that religion was permitted was as an object of study, in the psychology of religion. Living in a culture still largely religious, some secular psychologists sought to study religion as if it were a merely natural phenomenon, supposedly without assuming any stance toward the phenomenon itself. As a result, many studies of religious behavior and phenomena were published around the turn of the century, the most influential being *The Varieties of Religious Experience* by William James (1903). But this was at best a last gasp of religiousness among modern psychologists; the tide was clearly turning against belief in the metaphysical and supernatural. As a result, as the first generation of American psychologists died out, few of the next generation were drawn to study religious experience, and the field virtually dried up for well over a half century.

Modern psychology quickly proved its value by amassing a substantial body of research and theory within a few decades, regarding topics that had never been so carefully examined: human sensation and perception, brain-mind relations, memory, emotions, unconscious motives, behavioral conditioning, intelligence, personality, and mental problems—and by providing a secular way to treat such problems. American universities embraced the new psychology. As a result, within a couple of generations, it became the only officially sanctioned version of psychology in universities in the West, providing an alternative framework to theism for understanding human beings, and this new psychology promised a truly scientific cure for humanity's problems, in which all open-minded, modern Americans could hope.<sup>4</sup>

Today, over 140 years after the founding of modern psychology, the application of natural-science methods to the study of human beings has increased our understanding of human beings enormously.<sup>5</sup> And given our

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<sup>3</sup>This trajectory can be documented in the lives of G. Stanley Hall, John Dewey, William James, Joseph Jastrow, James Rowland Angell, James Mark Baldwin, J. B. Watson, William McDougall, B. F. Skinner, Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow, as well as Europeans like Freud, Jung and Piaget.

<sup>4</sup>As John B. Watson both inticed and prophesied, "I am trying to dangle a stimulus in front of you, a verbal stimulus which, if acted upon, will gradually change this universe. For the universe will change if you bring up your children . . . in behavioristic freedom. . . . Will not these children in turn, with their better ways of living and thinking, replace us as society and in turn bring up their children in a still more scientific way, until the world finally becomes a place fit for human habitation" (Watson, 1930, p. 304).

<sup>5</sup>At the same time, critics have rightly recognized the limitations of using methods derived from

faith in the Creator of human beings, Christians should in principle rejoice over all knowledge about humans derived from any legitimate source. Yet, as we saw above, the church also has its own long, rich tradition of psychological theorizing and practice, a tradition that existed long before the birth of modern psychology. This has led to the oft-cited observation that “psychology has a long past but a short history” (e.g., Danziger, 1979). Much of that “long past,” of course, belongs to Christianity; whereas the “short history” belongs to late modernism. The challenge for the church has been that modern psychology has always consisted of more than just objective descriptions of the facts; it is both a contributor to and a beneficiary of the secular revolution that has taken over the intellectual leadership of the West (Johnson, 2007; Smith, 2003). The collision of these two traditions has created the intellectual crisis that is at the heart of this book.

## **THE CHURCH’S INTELLECTUAL CRISIS ABOUT PSYCHOLOGY**

For over thirty years, the renowned contemporary philosopher of ethics Alasdair MacIntyre (1984, 1989, 1990) has engaged in a massive exposition of the conflicts that have arisen in the modern era among Western philosophies of ethics. In the process of his discussions, he has reflected deeply about what happens when intellectual traditions collide. MacIntyre says that “traditions, when vital, embody continuities of conflict” (1984, p. 222). They consist of the ongoing disagreements that occur among the members of their “community”—thoughtful adherents spread across the

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the study of the natural world (physics, chemistry, biology) to study human beings, given that humans possess unique psychological features not found in the natural world (e.g., the experience of self-awareness, freedom, morality, values, religiosity) (Martin, Sugarman & Thompson, 2003; Van Leeuwen, 1982, 1985; Varela & Shear, 1999). Though some unique features of human life have been observed and measured (e.g., in the positive psychology movement), critics have argued that natural-science methods inevitably lead to a truncated body of psychological research, since they cannot “detect” that which is most distinctive about human beings (reality from the “inside”). As a result, alternative methods have been advocated to augment natural-science research (e.g., phenomenological study, participant observation, discourse analysis, narrative psychology), methods that attempt to take into account the subjective perspective and self-understanding of the person(s) being studied. Though these methods are becoming more widely used (e.g., feminist and postmodern researchers are particularly open to them), mainstream psychologists continue to favor natural-science approaches. Christians, of course, have a stake in such issues since we assume that adult humans are persons: self-aware, responsible, relatively free and moral beings, and therefore, not mere mechanisms or computing organisms (Van Leeuwen, 1982, 1985).

generations of its life. He defines a living tradition as a “historically extended, socially embodied argument, an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute that tradition” (1984, p. 222). The “goods” in dispute include a tradition’s beliefs, standards and practices.

The *beliefs* that may distinguish one tradition from another include worldview beliefs, as well as the nature of human beings and how to understand them (e.g., beliefs about human origins, their metaphysical composition, humanity’s optimal or mature state and how to facilitate its development, psychopathology and how to address it, as well as beliefs about the legitimate sources of knowledge). A tradition’s *standards* refer to criteria that are used to evaluate soundness in belief and practice, maturity, and wisdom. Finally, a tradition’s distinctive *practices* (for our purposes) have to do with the means of obtaining valid and useful information regarding human beings (e.g., biblical, theological, spiritual, philosophical, empirical, scientific, experiential, moral), as well as the promotion of proper human development and the remediation of psychopathology.

There are many different kinds of traditions: craft, artistic, intellectual and religious, just to name a few, and each can be composed of various subtraditions as well. Living traditions are characterized by conflict, because its members are constantly raising questions about its goods. Dead traditions either have no living adherents or those they have simply recite the sayings of its past, without questions. In his exposition, MacIntyre slyly implies that a *living* intellectual tradition possesses searching, inquisitive minds who lead it into better, more comprehensive understanding by way of working through disputes. Given such an assumption, one of the most stimulating events in a tradition’s history can be its encounters with other traditions, traditions which have strengths that reveal the weaknesses in the earlier tradition. Discerning adherents can then take advantage of this critical interaction and make use of the strengths of the “new” rival tradition to enrich their own. At the same time—and here is where things get challenging and controversial—such explorations (practices, themselves needing critical evaluation) run the danger of diluting the tradition’s distinctiveness. Too much borrowing from an alien tradition can lead to the disintegration of one’s own tradition and sometimes even to its disappearance. Consequently, the value of such encounters has to be gauged by whether it leads to an outcome essential for a tradition’s well-

being: its renewal and reinvigoration by a fresh, contemporary reinvestment and rearticulation of its own resources.

Encounters between traditions are complicated by the fact that members of the traditions are differentially trained. Some may be schooled only in the goods of their own tradition, whereas others may be trained primarily in the rival tradition. MacIntyre considers the persons best equipped to contribute to the debate between two rival traditions to be those trained in the discourse of both. Such individuals “are inhabitants of boundary situations, generally incurring the suspicion and misunderstanding of members of both of the contending parties” (1990, p. 114), since those well educated in only one tradition can only interpret the work of the other in terms of their own tradition’s discourse and its goods—the beliefs, standards and practices they already understand and know to be authoritative—making communication (and even trust) difficult between those who are differentially trained. Indeed, those who use only “one language” simply lack enough background knowledge to be able to really understand the potentials and pitfalls of the debate.

MacIntyre’s analysis also addresses what constitutes a *crisis* for a tradition. This occurs when tradition A encounters rival tradition B that has such compelling beliefs, standards and practices that those of tradition A are called into serious question. MacIntyre (1989, 1990) says that tradition A resolves such a crisis by the construction of a narrative of the encounter, which includes the following elements: the basic rationality and legitimacy of tradition A; an acknowledgment of its weaknesses revealed by its rival and how it has adequately addressed them and revised itself accordingly; and the exposure of the (more) significant weaknesses that remain unresolved in tradition B, resulting in an account that shows the compelling superiority of the revised tradition A to its rival.

MacIntyre repeatedly makes the point that the biggest obstacle to traditions engaging in mutual, beneficial interaction is the fact that each tradition’s beliefs, standards and practices are the means by which an adherent evaluates another tradition, so the very means for determining rational superiority and weakness are themselves part of the debate. Therefore, traditions sometimes discount and ignore each other, and typically only engage in dialogue when they are forced to, either of social necessity or perhaps because of moral and intellectual integrity.

Our focus in this book, of course, is on two traditions interested in the nature of human beings and how to promote their well-being—two historically extended and socially embodied communities of inquiry and therapy—the Christian and the (late) modern. As noted above, Christianity has its own substantial psychological and soul-care tradition, beginning in the Bible and continuing for the next two millennia, with many permutations over the generations, and consisting of many psychological and soul-care subtraditions (Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant). The new psychology also constitutes a tradition, though of course it is much younger. However, its shorter history is more than compensated for by its vast output and the broad range of topics that it has addressed (and it too is made up of subtraditions—known as psychoanalytic, behavioral, cognitive and so on).

Furthermore, this book concerns the intellectual (and soul-care) crisis that the Christian community was thrown into since modern psychology rose to preeminence—a very serious crisis indeed. Think about it. Which of the two communities exercise the most influence in our culture at large (in its universities, scholarly media, and mental health and therapy institutions), and which has the greater influence on the other? To state the obvious, it has been largely one-directional: the Christian community has had very little explicit, constructive influence on the contemporary psychological scene, and what influence it has had was accomplished by playing according to the rules of late modernism and not by being explicitly Christian. By contrast, the modern psychological community has had an enormous influence on the Christian community, within the latter's counseling centers and colleges and universities, some of its books, and even within its churches.

Why did this crisis occur? As suggested above, modern psychology has amassed a stunning set of empirical findings regarding human beings and developed many psychological theories of great complexity, using novel empirical methods to discover aspects of human nature never before known, and so never discussed in the Christian tradition. Furthermore, this "new tradition" has developed a dazzling array of systems and techniques for improving human psychological well-being, far outstripping in scientific complexity the work of the Christian tradition. Today we live in a science-oriented culture, and modern psychology has been more scien-

tific than any of its predecessors and worldview alternatives. In addition, modern psychology has simply made what the majority of (mostly modernist) intellectuals today consider to be a compelling case: that its version of human beings is simply better than those that went before it—more accurate, more comprehensive and less distorted. All of this has contributed to a crisis in the church.

Is Christianity a living or dead tradition of psychology and therapy? There is evidence, some of it included in this book, that it is very much alive! However, it seems that it took quite a while for Christians to recognize the intellectual crisis that was occurring. We turn next to consider some of the early attempts by Christians to respond to the crisis.

### **RESPONSES OF CHRISTIANS TO THE “NEW PSYCHOLOGY”**

A few Christians actually contributed to the founding of modern psychology. Decades prior, there were some phrenologists who were Christians (Vande Kemp, 1998).<sup>6</sup> Franz Brentano was a devout, if controversial Christian (a former Catholic priest), whose “Act psychology” made a significant impact on European psychology of the day (Watson & Evans, 1991), and who was shaped significantly by his training in Catholic (and Aristotelian) thought. The pious scholar-president of Princeton, James McCosh, published works on cognition and emotion that, though still heavily influenced by philosophy, took seriously the role of physiology in the mind (see Maier, 2005).<sup>7</sup>

However, among the leaders of the new psychology in America, those who maintained a Protestant religious faith tended to be of a more liberal

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<sup>6</sup>Originating in the 1800s, phrenology was a simplistic “faculty neuropsychology” that nonetheless contributed to modern neuropsychology. Containing both truth and error, it traced the supposedly corresponding regions of the personality, brain and cranium.

<sup>7</sup>Spilka (1987) has suggested that the openness of McCosh to the latest physiological research may have been fostered by his acceptance of Common Sense Realism (an influential epistemology endorsed by many of the preeminent evangelical scholars and administrators of the 1800s; Marsden, 1994; Noll, 1994). This philosophy, originated by the eighteenth-century Christian philosopher Thomas Reid, justified confidence in human abilities to know truths regarding the natural order. These abilities, it was believed, were universally bestowed by the Creator on all persons; hence its proponents saw science as an ally to theology by providing evidence of God’s design (Spilka, 1987). So this philosophy encouraged Christians to trust the contemporary research and theorizing of scientists, whether Christian or not, without, at the same time, questioning the underlying modernist assumptions that were implicitly guiding the work (Marsden, 1994).



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