

Psychology and Christianity

Senior Secondary School, VCE activities #2

Name.....Date.....

1. Deception is a valid technique that doctors and psychologists often use. A patient is told to get a prescription and that the drugs will make the person well. The tablets are mild aspirin or something very benign. This is ethical for it is unobtrusive medicine and it gets good results.

Respond to this line of argument by agreeing or disagreeing.

2. Neuro psychologist, Richard Davidson, of the University of Wisconsin, who scans the brains of both Zen monks and yogis in his lab, found in a study of mere novices that:

"An eight-week course in compassion meditation, in which volunteers focus on the wish that all beings be free from suffering, shifted brain activity from the right prefrontal cortex to the left, a pattern associated with a greater sense of well-being." Sharon Begley, "What the Beatles Gave Science," from Newsweek, Nov. 19, 2007, p. 59

This shows that spirituality is just a brain function and no appeal to the supernatural is required. Respond to this assertion.

3. If God does in fact exist, it is only through our brains that we can experience Him - through our auditory centers to hear his voice, through our visual centers to see his image, through our cognitive centers to understand Him (Newberg 37).

As long as our brains are arranged the way they are, as long as our minds are capable of sensing this deeper reality, spirituality will continue to shape the human experience, and God, however we define that majestic, mysterious concept, will not go away (Newberg 172).

Newberg set out to demonstrate that "mystical experience is biologically, observably, and scientifically real" and he has succeeded in doing so. Although his research cannot prove whether or not God exists, it does lay to rest the long-held misconception that spiritual experience is the result of either emotional distress, delusion, or a pathological state (Newberg 100). He asserts that spirituality is the product of "sound, healthy minds coherently reacting to perceptions that in neurobiological terms are absolutely real" (Newberg 100). His research has also been important in demonstrating that the neurobiology of spiritual experience is virtually identical, regardless of

theological subjectivity. This uniformity leads us to believe that spiritual experience may have a biological function. Perhaps the lowered blood pressure and superior mental health associated with religious people indicate that the brain's mechanism to allow for religious experience was selected for to improve the survival of man.

Newberg, Andrew & d'Aquili, Eugene (2001) *Why God Won't Go Away: Brain Science and the Biology of Belief*. New York: Ballantine Books.

How does Newberg argue from his research that religion is healthy and those religious are favoured by natural selection?

4. My health had been bad for many years and I had been told in 2000 that I had probably about 6 months to live. But that stretched on and on, until the spring of 2002 when I fell into a coma from which they never expected me to awake. Daily, even hourly reports were grim. But I did wake up after a little over a month, and gradually regained some strength, enough to walk around in an apartment, to a car, in a grocery, but my health never fully normalized. I went to church, had a healthy prayer life, but devoted little time to anything other than being extremely ill. Again it was the 6 months left routine, over and over. I stayed in bed from Christmas of 2003 until the 2nd of May 2004, all that while, feeling so bad I almost wished I had died either when they first started saying I would, or at least while I had been in the coma. But on the 2nd of May, I was taken to the hospital and before I remember even being talked to in the ER, I fell into another coma.

This time my health was even worse during the coma, if that was possible. Hourly, or more frequently, my parents were being told that this was the last moment of my life. Over and over, on and on, I was on this death watch until I woke up at the end of May 2004. When I woke up I couldn't move anything. And comas have some pretty weird affects on your brain too. But I spent 3 months in a nursing home, and at the very end of that period, I had finally learned to sit up so I got a wheelchair and I went home.

<http://www.bakersonwheels.com>

What is a coma? What role does the ANS play in a coma? Minge could have been turned off life support in the ICU, when is it justified to turn off a patient? It is ever justified?

Refer to the website and explain how the chef's life developed.

www.beaconmedia.com.au

5. The Australian Aboriginal story telling technique helped transmission of vital information across generations. How has the Bible as a metanarrative done the same? What techniques were used to record scripture before Moses committed his books to text?

How can techniques for enhancing memory be used to assist Christians in memorization of scripture? Refer to visual imagery, elaborative maintenance rehearsal, self referencing, and use of cues.

6. Aversion therapy is a technique used to change the behaviour of people including criminals. In Clockwork Orange the criminal, Alex is turned into a shell of a person to stop his tendency to violence.

What is the importance of beneficence and the Christian ethic in regulation of the use of aversion therapy?

7. Behaviour modification involves a series of well defined steps to change a person's behaviour.

Could a Christian use this technique to improve their effectiveness as a believer? Why/ why not?

8. How is it that stress causes diseases like ulcers or dysfunctional responses like constant fatigue and insomnia?

How would a stress management program devised by a Christian psychologist differ from one who is not a professional with faith?