

Psychology and Christianity

Senior Secondary Activities #1

1. Introduction to Psychology

A. Who was the ancient goddess “Psyche” and what were her attributes? Find some paintings of her on the net.

B. *Our discipline's view of people as being, as some have quipped, "a larger rat or a slower computer" (Van Leeuwen, 1985, p. 64) may well contribute to the modern tendency to shirk from accepting responsibility for one's actions. Similarly, the human proclivity toward self-indulgence may only be buttressed by a field that views the basic nature of its subjects as being controlled by their desire for pleasure and by their selfish genes.*

(Delany and Goldsmith 2002)

What is the Christian psychologist's view of people?

Romans 3:9-26

How does the Bible direct behaviour in terms of self-indulgence?

Galatians 5:16-26

C. *Since man is constantly trying to explore the mind in human behaviour, it seems logical to the Christian that his source of knowledge can best come through an understanding of the One who created the mind of mankind, as well as looking at the textbook He has written on the mind and human behaviour. The most authoritative textbook on the subject of human behaviour is the Bible. The Bible is not a textbook on psychology; rather it is a text on God and His relationship to mankind, whom He has created. However, in the context there is much stated in the Bible on human behaviour, and where the Bible speaks on the subject of psychology it speaks with final authority.*

(Stoll 2008)

Why would many psychologists dismiss this comment of Dr Stoll?

Romans 8:5-11

Romans 12:1-2

1 Cor 2:16

Hebrews 8:10

Psalms 139

D. *We are healed as we allow the Holy Spirit to take away all of our own methods of dealing with life.*

Jesus does not ask us to manage our lives. Rather He asks us to take His hand, and let Him guide us to where He chooses. The urges we need to be rid of are the very urges that whisper in our ears, "You must take care of yourself."

As we abandon our own method forgetting through life, and let God use our lives in His own way, we also discover that we can approach others much more openly and honestly. We are free to love people for who they are, not selfishly for what they can do for us. (Crabb 1997)

Can a cherry picking of psychological theories provide a Christian with a robust way of dealing with the challenges and disappointments of life? Will a Christianised psychology provide the framework you want to help you navigate your way through life?

Matthew 10:38

Mark 10:21

Mark 8:34

Proverbs 5-10

E.



Skinner's basic view of man is revealed by his citing favourably a remark that "whereas the traditional view [of the nature of man] supports Hamlet's exclamation, 'How like a god!' Pavlov, the behavioural scientist, emphasized, 'How like a dog!'" (1971, p. 192). Man might be a more complex machine than a dog, but in Skinner's view is a machine nonetheless (Delany and Goldsmith 2002)

The equations of mathematics allow us to calculate only quantities, and the instruments of the laboratory to measure only quantities. Empirical science doesn't reduce to numbers what it is like to be in love, or enjoy a tune on your ipod, to smell perfume or marvel at a favourite painting. These personal and subjective experiences are like the areas of faith and not easily quantified. But they are nevertheless real.

How does psychology that is based on materialism explain these unmeasurable things?

Romans 8:35-39

Psalm 89

F. B F Skinner is giant on the development map of our discipline. At what points would a Christian psychologist disagree with the viewpoint that underlies behaviourism?

Gen 1:26-27

G. Skinner would say that there is no absolute good or evil in the cosmos. We call things “good” because they are associated with pleasant and positive experiences and “evil” what we are conditioned to associate with negative experiences. Illicit drug use would be evil, but abortion good by this reckoning. Morals are a social construct. Our genetic urges make men promiscuous and wanting to spread their DNA to a variety of partners. Social convention reigns this in.

How do Christians see good and evil?

Luke 11:33-36

John 1:5

John 3:19-21

Ephesians 5:8

1 John 1:5-7

Galatians 5:19-26

Exodus 20

Matthew 5:17-47

John 15:10

Romans 5:12-19

H. Are humans, as mechanistic psychologists claim,

a) the mere product of genetics and environmental conditioning?

b) a part of the cosmic machine without free will?

Explain your answer fully.

2 Cor 3:7

Gal 5:1

Joshua 24:15

I. How is there a logical inconsistency between the human subjects of experiments being seen by the psychologist as determined in their choices by genes and conditioning and so rat like, and the psychologist running the lab experiments as being free and rational and beyond such limits?

Matthew 10:29-31

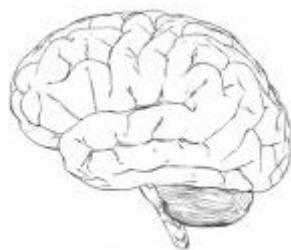
Acts 10:34

Psalm 139

J. *Jer. 17:9, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and mortally sick! Who can understand his own heart and mind?"*

What does the bible mean when it talks about “the heart” and what does the above quote mean for us studying psychology?

K. Psychology based on empirical science has no place for God, sin, redemption or morality based on absolutes. It is based on presuppositions that don't naturally fit the Christian worldview. So why study psychology?



2. Research Methods

A. Similarly, we would explicitly want to encourage research that makes explicit the relevant assumptions about human nature derived from the Christian view of man. Given the same God authored the special revelation of Scripture and created in his own image the people psychologist study, conceptual models derived from Scriptural assumptions about human nature should have an inherent advantage in terms to their fit to behaviour relative to those that are not based on this solid foundation.

(Delany and Goldsmith 2002)

Comment on their endorsement of research in psychology by Christians.

Romans 1:18-23; 2:7-13

3. Pro-social and anti-social behaviour

A. Some psychologists see altruism as being motivated by subtle selfish factors; the altruistic person is rewarded by “feel good” sensations, feels righteous as a result and so is conditioned to do such actions. Everything a human does is determined by the selfish genes and conditioning that rewards. What is your response to this?

B. All religions but Christianity are built on pleasing a deity or gods by good works and gifts to the gods. What is the Biblical view on altruism?

C. Just as God looks past what is bad in my flesh to what He is creating in my spirit, so I must learn to look at other people and find the good that God is working on in them.

Respond to this pro-social Christian approach to living in community.

Luke 20:45-47

Luke 18: 10-14

Matthew 7:1-5

4. Group influences on individual behaviour

What were the peer influences that Jesus had to respond to?

Mark 2:23-25; 3:1-6

The Milgram and Stanford prison experiment demonstrated that educated people respond in immoral ways to directives from people in power. What does the Bible say about obeying those in legitimate authority? (Acts 5:29)

5. Development of Individual Behaviour

A. What does the bible say about self esteem? Respond to the comment below.

Self-actualization (Maslow et al) is generally held to be our prime goal of life, and being true to one's real inner self an imperative. But self-esteem in the Word is portrayed more as a byproduct of good character and worthwhile achievement in Kingdom terms.

Romans 6:1-7
Galatians 2:20

B. Perception seems to be the passive processing of stimuli by the senses. The eye would seem to be no more than a camera.

*We must never believe a lie
When we look with and not through the eye*

*To see a world in a grain of sand
And a heaven in a wild flower,
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand
And eternity in an hour.*

William Blake

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder

How do these poetical words and proverb inform us about our deeper understanding of perception?

C. Piaget had views on moral development, stage one was *Premoral judgment*.

What interest do Christians have in the psychology of moral development?

D. *The third set of emotions that we are plagued with is that of the depression-guilt-
psychic pain syndrome. It is interesting to note that the majority of people that occupy
hospital beds are there not because of physical illness, but because of emotional,
mental and psychological problems. If as human beings we could be rid of these,
there would be plenty of beds in all hospitals today. It is an abiding sorrow that
bothers every individual. For the non-Christian, it is an unconsciousness sense of
guilt, though that person may not acknowledge or recognize it. For the Christian it
may be unconfessed sin which therefore leads to depression and guilt feelings.*
(Stoll 2008)

How do empirical- evidence- only psychologists explain such powerful guilt if
there is no absolute morality?

E. *The most serious problem that plagues Christians is that of the "old" and "new"
natures. The two are diametrically opposed to each other, and every Christian has the
two within himself. Paul certainly set forth the conflict quite clearly in Romans 7:11-
25 wherein he noted "the good which I would I do not, but the evil which I would not,
that I do." It then calls for a constant and consistent application to daily living of the
integration of the traits of life to the center, which is Christ. Only when this takes
place can the latent power of the personality be combined with the power of God to
produce a productive usefulness in the Christian life.*

(Stoll 2008)

Does this view of the clash of old and new natures seem right in your personal
experience? Is there any theory of psychology that seems to agree with this
understanding? Why do we so often choose selfish responses than ones that
benefit others and build for the long term rather than immediate gratification?

6. Normality and Abnormality

A. *One may ask from a psychological point of view: What is normal? The answer is,
no one knows what is normal. Not even the psychologists who are searching for
normalcy know, because none of them are normal. Just because the majority of
people do a certain in one way or the other does not constitute that which is normal.
Only God knows what is normal, and there has been only one normal person that ever
appeared on the face of the earth, and that was the Lord Jesus Christ. He was the
incarnation of God Himself in human manifestation. This is why Paul said, "For to
me to live is Christ." Phil. 1:12*

(Stoll 2008)

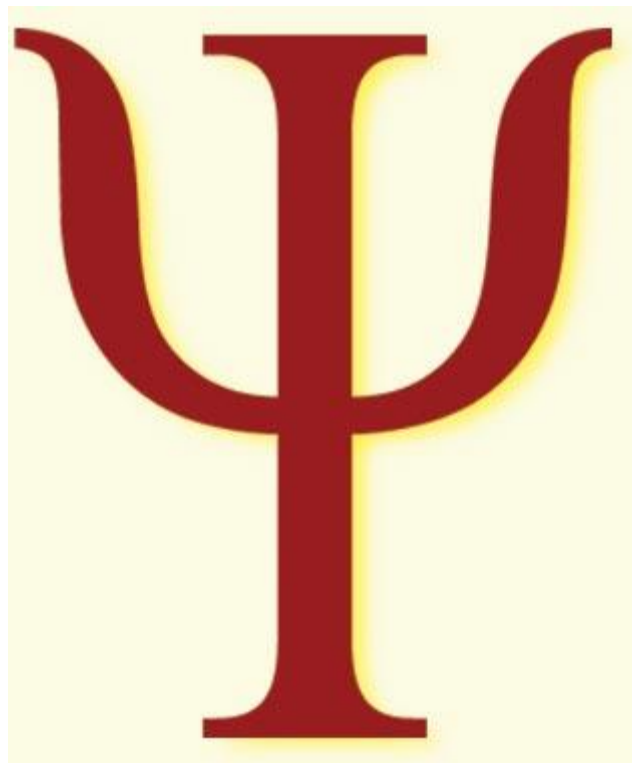
How does this definition compare with the ones in your textbook? What are
the key differences?

B. How does religious commitment affect mental health? Use the internet to research the documented benefits of faith in God and the impact it has on suicide, drug abuse, juvenile delinquency, divorce, depression, longevity, blood pressure and stress. Record your findings.

C. According to survey results published in the *American Journal of Psychiatry*, a growing number of religious psychiatrists actively promote new approaches to psychotherapy based on conventional religious commitment (Galanter, Larson and Rubenstone, 1991).

The survey, which polled psychiatrists who were members of the Christian Medical and Dental Society, found that these psychiatrists believed that prayer and the Bible could be used effectively to help patients deal with grief reactions, suicidal intent, sociopathy and alcoholism.

However, acute manic episodes or acute schizophrenic episodes were believed to be best dealt with by psychotropic medication. (NIHR 2002)



References:

Crabb, L.(1997). *Connecting*. Nashville: Word Publishing

Delaney, H. D. and Goldsmith, T.E. (2002). Psychology and Christian Theism
At <http://www.leaderu.com/>

National Institute For Healthcare Research, NIFHR ,(2002) . The Forgotten Factor at
<http://www.leaderu.com/>

Skinner, B. F. (1971). *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*. New York: Bantam Books.

Stoll, J. H. (2008). The Bible and Psychology at <http://www.leaderu.com/>

Van Leeuwen, M. S. (1982). *The sorcerer's apprentice: A Christian looks at the changing face of psychology*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

Van Leeuwen, M. S. (1985). *The person in psychology: A contemporary Christian appraisal*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Wright, R. (1994). The moral animal: *The new science of evolutionary psychology*. New York: Pantheon Books.