



RECLAIMING THE  
CHRISTIAN INTELLECTUAL TRADITION

# PSYCHOLOGY

A STUDENT'S

GUIDE

Stanton L. Jones

Series Editor: David S. Dockery

“This book takes you on a wild ride as it surveys topics including genetics, free will, positive psychology, and the psychology of religion within an evangelical Christian framework. Fascinated, I read this in one sitting. It is a wonderful, summative, yet critical introduction to thinking Christianly about psychology.”

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# **PSYCHOLOGY** A STUDENT'S GUIDE

Stanton L. Jones

*Psychology: A Student's Guide*

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To Emily, Canon, Brady, Aaron, and Brian; five wonderful people whose addition to our family—by marriage as our new children or by birth as our grandchildren—has expanded the scope of our joy and our experience of love. Thank you.



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# SERIES PREFACE

## RECLAIMING THE CHRISTIAN INTELLECTUAL TRADITION

The Reclaiming the Christian Intellectual Tradition series is designed to provide an overview of the distinctive way the church has read the Bible, formulated doctrine, provided education, and engaged the culture. The contributors to this series all agree that personal faith and genuine Christian piety are essential for the life of Christ followers and for the church. These contributors also believe that helping others recognize the importance of serious thinking about God, Scripture, and the world needs a renewed emphasis at this time in order that the truth claims of the Christian faith can be passed along from one generation to the next. The study guides in this series will enable us to see afresh how the Christian faith shapes how we live, how we think, how we write books, how we govern society, and how we relate to one another in our churches and social structures. The richness of the Christian intellectual tradition provides guidance for the complex challenges that believers face in this world.

This series is particularly designed for Christian students and others associated with college and university campuses, including faculty, staff, trustees, and other various constituents. The contributors to the series will explore how the Bible has been interpreted in the history of the church, as well as how theology has been formulated. They will ask: How does the Christian faith influence our understanding of culture, literature, philosophy, government, beauty, art, or work? How does the Christian intellectual tradition help us understand truth? How does the Christian intellectual tradition shape our approach to education? We believe that this series is not only timely but that it meets an important need, because the

secular culture in which we now find ourselves is, at best, indifferent to the Christian faith, and the Christian world—at least in its more popular forms—tends to be confused about the beliefs, heritage, and tradition associated with the Christian faith.

At the heart of this work is the challenge to prepare a generation of Christians to think Christianly, to engage the academy and the culture, and to serve church and society. We believe that both the breadth and the depth of the Christian intellectual tradition need to be reclaimed, revitalized, renewed, and revived for us to carry forward this work. These study guides will seek to provide a framework to help introduce students to the great tradition of Christian thinking, seeking to highlight its importance for understanding the world, its significance for serving both church and society, and its application for Christian thinking and learning. The series is a starting point for exploring important ideas and issues such as truth, meaning, beauty, and justice.

We trust that the series will help introduce readers to the apostles, church fathers, Reformers, philosophers, theologians, historians, and a wide variety of other significant thinkers. In addition to well-known leaders such as Clement, Origen, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, and Jonathan Edwards, readers will be pointed to William Wilberforce, G. K. Chesterton, T. S. Eliot, Dorothy Sayers, C. S. Lewis, Johann Sebastian Bach, Isaac Newton, Johannes Kepler, George Washington Carver, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, Michael Polanyi, Henry Luke Orombi, and many others. In doing so, we hope to introduce those who throughout history have demonstrated that it is indeed possible to be serious about the life of the mind while simultaneously being deeply committed Christians. These efforts to strengthen serious Christian thinking and scholarship will not be limited to the study of theology, scriptural interpretation, or philosophy, even though these areas provide the framework for understanding the Christian faith for all other areas of exploration. In order for us to reclaim and

advance the Christian intellectual tradition, we must have some understanding of the tradition itself. The volumes in this series seek to explore this tradition and its application for our twenty-first-century world. Each volume contains a glossary, study questions, and a list of resources for further study, which we trust will provide helpful guidance for our readers.

I am deeply grateful to the series editorial committee: Timothy George, John Woodbridge, Michael Wilkins, Niel Nielson, Philip Ryken, and Hunter Baker. Each of these colleagues joins me in thanking our various contributors for their fine work. We all express our appreciation to Justin Taylor, Jill Carter, Allan Fisher, Lane Dennis, and the Crossway team for their enthusiastic support for the project. We offer the project with the hope that students will be helped, faculty and Christian leaders will be encouraged, institutions will be strengthened, churches will be built up, and, ultimately, that God will be glorified.

*Soli Deo Gloria*  
David S. Dockery  
Series Editor

# INTRODUCTION

In the Bible, the prophets and apostles ask various forms of the question, What is a human being? (e.g., Job 7:17; 15:14; Ps. 144:3; Heb. 2:6). “Who are we? What are we? What are we supposed to be doing? Who are we in relation to everything else?”<sup>1</sup> They do not leave the question unanswered but give concise, general answers describing human beings as created in God’s image and in relationship to the one true God. Do we need more than that?

You have picked up this book because you are interested in the field of psychology and seek a general understanding of *how Christians should approach this field*. I commend you for this interest but warn you that the answers are complex, first because the contemporary discipline of psychology has been conceptualized and pursued from a fundamental commitment to turning *away* from answers from theology and religious traditions in favor of the findings from supposedly objective, neutral scientific methods. As we shall see, careful thought and contemporary scholarship challenge the supposed objectivity and neutrality of this approach (chapter 1). Further, many psychologists manifest disinterest or even antagonism toward religion, especially toward institutionalized, traditional religious faith (i.e., Christianity; see chapter 6); these attitudes show in their work.

The answers are also complex because, while careful biblical study gives us many rich perspectives on human existence, human growth, and ministry to those in distress, the guidance offered is often more skeletal and abstract than we might want. For instance, you’ll discover in chapter 2 that the most fundamental truth about

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<sup>1</sup> Marc Cortez, *Embodied Souls, Ensouled Bodies: An Exercise in Christological Anthropology and Its Significance for the Mind/Body Debate* (New York: T & T Clark, 2008), 1.

human existence—that we are made in the very image of God—has been the subject of theological dispute since the earliest days of the church. This truth is *simultaneously* fundamental and indispensable but also terribly complex and vague.

Finally, the answers are complex because psychology is so diverse. The discipline spans from neuroscientific studies of single neurons in simple organisms on the one hand, to the measurement of cultural attitudes about religion and their impact upon individuals, families, and organizations. The applied facets of the discipline range from studies of animal learning to behavior modification of the profoundly developmentally disabled, to problem-oriented psychotherapy with individuals and groups, to organizational and social interventions to foster enhanced functioning. Such complexity befuddles the formulation of any simple understanding of how faith and psychology relate.

The field of psychology should be approached by Christians with enthusiasm for all it offers from the vast cornucopia of research probing the nature of human existence. At the same time, the field of psychology should be approached by the Christian with caution because much of the field needs to be reinterpreted or challenged on the basis of fundamental Christian convictions. We should approach psychology *critically*, teasing out aspects incompatible with Christian faith, challenging key concepts and rethinking them on the basis of scriptural truth. But we also should approach psychology *constructively*, seeking to make positive use of its best theory and research and striving to synthesize this into a system congruent with Christian conviction to advance the scientific quest.

It is this two-part dynamic of critical and constructive Christian engagement with the field that I regard as the “integration of psychology and Christian faith.”<sup>2</sup> I will expand on this definition

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<sup>2</sup>Stanton L. Jones, “A Constructive Relationship for Religion with the Science and Profession of Psychology: Perhaps the Boldest Model Yet,” *American Psychologist* 49 (1994): 184–99; Stanton L. Jones and Richard Butman, *Modern Psychotherapies: A Comprehensive Christian Appraisal*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2011); Stanton Jones, “An Integration View,” in *Psychology and Christianity: Five Views*, 2nd ed., ed. Eric L. Johnson (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2010), 101–28.

of *integration* in the second chapter. It is my hope to model such Christian engagement in this brief work. But first, in chapter 1 I place psychology in context of the great intellectual tradition of the West. Psychology's fit within this intellectual history can be hard to discern for the student new to the field, in part because of psychology's pervasive penetration into popular culture: psychological thinking seems almost second nature; it is in the air we breathe and the water we drink. In chapter 2 I outline the fundamentals of biblical perspectives on human beings and elaborate a bit on the task of the integration of psychology and Christianity.

Because a review of and response to the entire field of psychology would be quite impossible in a brief book such as this, I present to the reader four case studies from representative facets of the field. Together, these allow us to engage some of the most challenging and fundamental questions about how Christian faith relates to the field, hopefully equipping us with a basic understanding of how to responsibly engage psychology as thoughtful Christians.

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## PSYCHOLOGY IN ITS INTELLECTUAL CONTEXT

Some who trace the history of the field of psychology suggest that the discipline leapt into existence in Europe as a scientific splinter from the field of philosophy initiated by professor of philosophy Wilhelm Wundt. Wundt—as the story goes—put aside the increasingly fruitless speculations of philosophy about the human person and decided instead to do what scientists must do: build a foundation of sure knowledge by focusing on “the data.”

### SCIENCE, PSYCHOLOGY, AND THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION UNITED

In reality, psychology did not simply leap into existence in the late nineteenth century. Psychology, as more thorough histories document,<sup>1</sup> has been around in some form since the dawn of human self-reflection and intellectual inquiry. Our understandings of the human condition as well as of the world around us have always drawn upon “data” of some sort, with that data interpreted through human reason operating in the context of a set of presumed understandings that have shaped and guided that inquiry.

Here, I want to pay particular attention to the “presumed understandings that have shaped and guided” inquiry. Specifically, I want to outline how psychology has developed in the context of Christian reflection and more recently in a Western intellectual

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<sup>1</sup>E.g., Daniel Robinson, *An Intellectual History of Psychology*, rev. ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1976).

tradition in which Christian and other religious perspectives have been pushed aside.

The most rigorous ancient outlines of human psychology are attributable to Plato, Aristotle, and other great ancient Greek thinkers, who explored human motivation and reason, the purposes and shape of human community, the form of optimal character, and the nature of human dysfunctions. Concurrent with but independent from the development of Greek thought, the Hebrews developed their own religious and intellectual traditions in the context of a dizzying array of ancient Near Eastern cultures, resulting—by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and the self-revelation of God the Father—in the Old Testament.

While the Old Testament contains little that looks like psychology by today's standards, it is nevertheless true that there is much "psychological" material there, particularly fundamental understandings of the nature of what it means to be a human being. The Old Testament depicts the first human beings—despite being "very good" (Gen. 1:31)—as succumbing to sin and reaping the full consequences for themselves and all their ancestors. Old Testament passages speak of emotions, motivations, beliefs, character and virtue, social institutions, and many facets of the human condition. Wisdom Literature such as Proverbs offers concrete guidance for proper human development, for parenting, for the development of moral character, for shaping social relationships, and other topics. The moral laws of Exodus and Deuteronomy provide a backdrop of God's intent for human action that help us understand what it means to be human. While this may fall short of constituting an academic discipline, the Old Testament does offer rich teaching about what it means to be a human being.

The first book in this study guide series explores the rise and evolution of the Christian intellectual movement.<sup>2</sup> Grounded in

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<sup>2</sup>David Dockery and Timothy George, *The Great Tradition of Christian Thinking: A Student's Guide, Reclaiming the Christian Intellectual Tradition* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012).

God's truth as revealed in the Old Testament, the expanding early church first received a new set of God's revelations from the earthly ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ and then further instruction from the inspired writings of the apostles—the New Testament. Then as the church grew explosively throughout the Roman world and other areas, problems arose in key theological areas.

Many of the growing number of Gentile converts were blessed with thorough preparation in the great intellectual traditions of the Greco-Roman world and used this intellectual preparation in service of Christ. The early Christian church did *not* take a stance of rejection toward secular knowledge but rather sought to purify and properly use secular thought in service of Christ. Early Christian thinkers used the work of Plato, Aristotle, and others as tools in their theological and practical endeavors, with these resources interpreted in light of the teachings of the Scriptures. Dockery and George note that the “third century saw the rise of schools, intertwined with classical learning, science, philosophy, and centers of art. The Christian intellectual tradition shaped by serious biblical interpretation began to develop and mature in the Schools of Alexandria [Egypt] and Antioch.”<sup>3</sup>

Thus began the great Christian intellectual tradition, including science more broadly and specifically Christian psychological inquiry. Sophisticated forms of psychological thought emerged in the early church as pastors, bishops, theologians, and others struggled to understand how to best guide the formation of Christian character, heal the wounds of the broken and struggling among their flocks, and offer the best pastoral guidance in all circumstances. Augustine (fifth century) developed sophisticated reflections on human psychology grounded in the Scriptures and “flavored by the philosophical tradition inspired by Plato.”<sup>4</sup> Pope Gregory the Great (sixth century) developed a sophisticated pastoral psychology con-

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 31.

<sup>4</sup>Eric L. Johnson, “A Brief History of Christians in Psychology,” *Psychology and Christianity: Five Views*, 2nd ed., ed. Eric L. Johnson (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2010), 12.

taining a kind of personality theory that was to guide pastoral care in the Western church for centuries to come.<sup>5</sup>

The difficult period between the decline of the Roman Empire and the rise of the European Renaissance has long been labeled as the “Dark Ages” by secular chroniclers of intellectual history, some of whom claim that the Christian tradition suppressed the advance of scientific/secular knowledge until progress reemerged in the Renaissance as a result of the rediscovery in the West of the work of Aristotle. Many historians now dispute this interpretation as wrong on at least three fronts.

First, it is clear that much intellectual work worthy of respect was going on during this period. Second, the collapse of the Roman Empire and the cultural turmoil that ensued made profound intellectual progress challenging; that the medieval Church succeeded in preserving much of ancient human knowledge was quite remarkable. Third, the characterization of the Renaissance as an intellectual step forward is exaggerated. Much of Renaissance thought was intertwined with magic, spiritism, superstition, alchemy, and ignorance. For instance, astrology reemerged and flourished during the Renaissance because Aristotelian cosmology made astrology a respectable part of *natural* science; this cosmology assumed that the celestial spheres exerted influences on daily life through “the *natural* forces that link heaven and earth.”<sup>6</sup>

Still, it is true that there were gaps in intellectual progress during the Dark Ages compared to the advances of the Scientific Revolution that followed. One fundamental problem of the period was the reliance of the Catholic Church (until the thirteenth century) on a synthesis of Christian theology with Platonic philosophy. There were limitations to the kinds of intellectual progress that could be made based on Platonic thought, which helps to

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<sup>5</sup>Thomas Oden, *Care of Souls in the Classic Tradition* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984).

<sup>6</sup>David Lindberg, *The Beginnings of Western Science: The European Scientific Tradition in Philosophical, Religious, and Institutional Context, 600 B.C. to A.D. 1450* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 102, emphasis original.

explain the explosive impact of what transpired in the thirteenth century.

## THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTION

The writings of Aristotle had been lost in the European West but were well preserved and utilized in the expanding Islamic world. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Christian, Jewish, and Islamic scholars in Spain collaborated in exploring Aristotle's thought, resulting in challenges to Platonic thought. A new synthesis of Christian theology with the thought of Aristotle began to emerge, particularly in Paris. Thomas Aquinas, perhaps one of the most brilliant intellects ever, used the thought of Aristotle to forge new reflections in theology, philosophy, and all of human knowledge, including insight on the nature of human psychology, and their applications to pastoral care. The resulting synthesis is often called Thomistic or Scholastic philosophy and theology.

It is common to attribute the foundations of modern science to Aristotle's renewed influence in the thirteenth century, but this is simplistic and misguided. In contrast to the sweeping deductions of Plato, Aristotle did use induction, reasoning from bits of "data" upward toward generalizations. But there is no such thing as pure induction; Aristotle's philosophical approach to the physical cosmos and psychology built on many a priori assumptions, including many that were false. Aquinas was cautious in his use of Aristotle, but for several generations after, Aquinas's disciples were aggressive and undiscerning in their embrace of Aristotle.

And then something happened that set important foundations for the Scientific Revolution. Because of the excessive promotion of the philosophy of Aristotle over Christian theology by some of the intellectual descendants of Aquinas, others arose within the pre-Reformation church and began to challenge these assumptions. For example, the bishop of Paris issued a series of *condemnations* of

such views. For instance, Aristotle had proposed that it was impossible for a void, a true vacuum, to exist. By Aristotle's pre-Christian understanding, even a god could not make a vacuum; it was simply impossible. Some Christian thinkers followed Aristotle and argued that God could not make a void; God's power was limited by Aristotle's presumed *necessary truths*.

"Aristotle had attempted to describe the world not simply as it is, but as it must be. In 1277 [the bishop of Paris] declared, in opposition to Aristotle, that the world is whatever its omnipotent Creator chose to make it."<sup>7</sup> The significance of this cannot be understated. Such an assertion of *contingency* serves to limit assertions that the physical world, or human character, *must* be a certain way because of the dictates of human reason.<sup>8</sup> Rather, the mind-set that emerges is that things could be constituted any number of ways by God's contingent and free will, and thus we actually need to investigate physical (or human) reality to see how things really are rather than use merely rational deduction. This mind-set is part of *an excellent foundation for the advance of science*.

In fact, a number of other Christian principles proved to be fruitful in solidifying the foundation for the developing scientific revolution of the following centuries, by (1) providing a theological and biblical foundation for seeing physical reality as good and thus worthy of study; (2) motivating the search for universal laws by understanding the physical world as the creation of a rational lawgiver who made the world to reflect his rational mind; and (3) providing personal motives for scientists, such as improving the world to bring glory to God or helping to provide rational evidence for God's existence.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 239.

<sup>8</sup>As in, "The characteristics of the natural world are contingent upon the creational will of God."

<sup>9</sup>John H. Brooke, *Science and Religion* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991); see also Colin Russell, *Cross-Currents: Interactions Between Science and Faith* (Leicester, UK: InterVarsity, 1985).

## WARFARE BETWEEN SCIENCE AND RELIGION: REAL AND IMAGINED

What we understand today as modern science began to emerge in the centuries that followed, thanks to the foundations laid by theological developments in the Catholic Church and in the emerging Protestant Reformation that began in the fifteenth century. Much of the emerging scientific inquiry and development (broadly conceived, and psychology more narrowly) was integrally intertwined with and fostered by Christian theological reflection, and many great scientists were devout Christians.

But, frankly, this was not the story I grew up hearing about the relationship between science and religion. In many places in Western culture today, religion and science are portrayed as antagonists. Many secular, anti-religious scholars have asserted that religion has always stood for dogmatic certainty, superstition, and authoritarian control, while science is on an open-minded, noble quest for truth, and thus that the two forces have been locked in conflict since the emergence of modern science. This “standard account” was systematized in the English-speaking world toward the end of the nineteenth century—at the high-water mark of the intellectual movement called the Enlightenment—by the work of two ardent proponents.

John William Draper authored the highly influential diatribe *History of the Conflict Between Religion and Science* (1874), which has stayed in print for fourteen decades. Draper claimed that the Roman Church had perpetually displayed “a bitter and mortal animosity” toward science and fostered brutal persecution of scientists and other nonconformists. Draper even claims, wrongly, that the church had declared that “all knowledge is to be found in the Scriptures” and constitutes “all that he [God] intended us to know.”<sup>10</sup> This account suggests that the church attempted to maintain a stranglehold on thought to perpetuate its control in

<sup>10</sup>Lindberg, *Beginnings of Western Science*, 19.

society. This control began to weaken when the Renaissance inspired human inquiry unfettered by a constricting dominance by Christian theology. Then scientists like Galileo<sup>11</sup> and philosophers like Descartes launched an intellectual revolution, insisting on the primacy and power of rationality and the rejection of tradition and superstition. The secret to the pursuit of truth, in this understanding, was method: the scientific method guaranteed (or at the very least radically enhanced) the procurement of true knowledge. Similarly, Andrew Dickson White's *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom* (1896; also still in print) painted an almost identical picture of all-out warfare between science and religion.

As a result of these works and others like them, many today are prone to believe in the warfare between science and religion. For example, the prestigious National Academy of Sciences issued a terse resolution in 1981 stating, "Religion and science are separate and *mutually exclusive realms of human thought* whose presentation in the same context leads to misunderstanding of both scientific theory and religious belief."<sup>12</sup> Instead of scientific and theological reasoning being understood as seamlessly interwoven and mutually supportive, the Enlightenment *dis-integrated* what had previously been a seamless and mutually supportive relationship. Deep wedges were driven between Christian reflection and science in general. It is these movements and their repercussions that have created the need today for integration, the intentional bringing together of Christian reflection and secular scholarship.

But for the possibility of integration to be intellectually defensible, we need a deeper understanding of the Enlightenment.

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<sup>11</sup>Galileo is often presented as the scientific antithesis to religious belief. He was, in fact, a devout Christian and had quite articulate views about the trustworthiness of Scripture and its compatibility with truth from the natural world. For a brief presentation on this, see Mark Noll, *Jesus Christ and the Life of the Mind* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 102–5.

<sup>12</sup>*Science and Creationism: A View from the National Academy of Sciences* (Washington, DC: National Academy of Sciences, 1984), emphasis added.

## A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT

In Draper's and White's account, the Enlightenment established that science is a purely rational pursuit of facts, and religion is about irrationality. Stephen Toulmin criticizes this "Standard Account,"<sup>13</sup> suggesting a different and better narrative of the rise of the Enlightenment and the warfare account.

Toulmin suggests that the Enlightenment exploded in Europe because the continent was wracked with war for over a century. An economic depression and devastating weather conditions resulted in widespread hunger; massive unemployment created a huge pool of mercenaries to fuel constant warfare. Much of this warfare was, at least on the surface, religious in nature: Catholics against various types of Protestants, and Protestants against Protestants; neighbors killed neighbors in the name of Christianity. This insanity fueled in some intellectuals a deeply rooted conviction that *religion* was the enemy of concord and understanding. These intellectuals desired to find some foundation for human knowledge other than religion.

There was a preliminary phase of the Enlightenment, a humanist phase of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries that was fundamentally Christian and manifested sincere religious devotion as typified by Montaigne, Erasmus, Rabelais, and Shakespeare. But according to Toulmin, the second and more secular phase of the Enlightenment overwhelmed the first and was typified by Descartes. The first Christian humanistic phase sought modest understanding, but the second phase reached for timeless theoretical certainty. And it was presumed that to reach such perfect truth, one had to rely upon human reason *rather than and separate from the teachings and authority of religion*.

The philosophy of René Descartes is often summed up by his

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<sup>13</sup>Stephen Toulmin, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

famous statement, “I think, therefore I am.” Descartes’s method was the method of doubt, of setting aside all assumptions and religious teachings to reach for that which was indisputable and noninferential.<sup>14</sup> Everything could be doubted except the reality that *if* I can doubt and think, I must exist. Descartes believed he had found the absolute foundation for secure, indisputable human knowledge and from there built upwards. Other philosophers crucial to the developing Enlightenment such as John Locke and David Hume joined Descartes in *placing the knowing self, the person as an isolated, reasoning being, at the foundation of knowledge.*

It is vital to note the isolation or alienation of religious faith, belief, and truth from the task of the pursuit of knowledge. The definition of the Enlightenment by Immanuel Kant in 1784 is telling:

*Enlightenment is the human being’s emergence from his self-incurred minority.* Minority is the inability to make use of one’s own understanding without direction from another. This minority *is self-incurred* when its cause lies not in lack of understanding but in lack of resolution and courage to use it without direction from another. *Sapere aude!* (dare to be wise!) Have courage to make use of your *own* understanding! is thus the motto of enlightenment.<sup>15</sup>

From under whose direction, tutelage, or oversight does the enlightened individual need to emerge? For most Enlightenment thinkers, it was religious doctrine and authority. Repudiation of religious authority in favor of the unencumbered *reason of the individual* was integral to the Enlightenment project.

If the individual was to become a reliable source of knowledge,

<sup>14</sup>Indisputable: indubitable or beyond doubt; noninferential: something that is directly known and not inferred from other knowledge.

<sup>15</sup>Immanuel Kant, “What Is Enlightenment?,” *Practical Philosophy*, trans. and ed. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), <http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/ethics/kant/enlightenment.htm> (emphasis original). Note that the term *minority* means in this context the human being’s immaturity or apprenticeship.

the right method was crucial. The Scientific Revolution became the prototype of what it meant to gather data in objective and uncorrupted form. Scientific knowledge of the physical universe through physics became the model of the proper pursuit of *all* knowledge. Scientific methods, it was presumed, were timeless and eternal, unencumbered by historical particularities, and the result of their application would be universally true knowledge.

Two additional developments had particular relevance to modern psychology. The first was the concept of the mechanical universe. Ironically, in its original form, the concept of a mechanical universe was proposed in the physical sciences in support and defense of traditional Christianity, specifically as an antidote to the magical universe of the Renaissance. Its most persuasive defender was the devoutly Christian chemist Robert Boyle, who believed the universe “behaved according to rules that God had freely chosen.”<sup>16</sup> The laws of nature themselves were seen by Boyle as God-designed and an expression of divine sovereignty, activity, and wisdom. Later, though, the mechanical universe proved compatible with the absentee god of the deists and the nonexistent God of the atheists. It is “a great irony [that the] philosophy of nature that, during the seventeenth century, was upheld as the most protective of a sense of the sacred in nature was that very one that, in later social contexts, was most easily reinterpreted to support a subversive and secular creed.”<sup>17</sup>

The second key mid-nineteenth-century development was Darwin’s theory of evolution. In terms of the development of psychology, the most crucial implication of Darwin’s theory of evolution was the blurring of the bright line between human and nonhuman life. Under the influence of Christian understandings, human uniqueness in distinction from the animals had been emphasized (and, as we shall see, perhaps in some ways overemphasized).

<sup>16</sup> Brooke, *Science and Religion*, 132; this is the contingency discussed earlier.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

Darwin's theory broke down the bifurcation between human and nonhuman, opening up the possibility of the application to humans of principles derived from the study of animals (both physiologically and behaviorally).

In summary, we have emphasized five key elements of the Enlightenment:

- 1) The search through human reason alone for foundational truths that are indisputable and noninferential (thus creating a gulf between fact and opinion).
- 2) The rejection of religious tradition and authority as sources of sure knowledge, with reason becoming the locus and arbiter of knowledge (thus creating a vast gulf between reason and faith, fact and value).
- 3) Confidence in scientific methods to produce certain knowledge and the presumption that true knowledge will be ahistorical and universal (thus creating a vast gulf between knowledge by revelation and that coming by reason).
- 4) The triumph of a mechanistic conception of the cosmos (thus making God an extraneous variable unnecessary to the life of the mind).
- 5) The breakdown of any hard distinctions between human and nonhuman life (thus moving the human being from looking through the microscope to being the object of observation under the microscope).

### **PSYCHOLOGY: CHILD OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT**

It is no coincidence that psychology as a science emerged at what could be regarded as the pinnacle of the Scientific Revolution and after the intellectual triumph of the Enlightenment; this is the intellectual context that has given us the field of psychology as we have it today. Psychology is commonly defined as the scientific study

of mind, brain, and behavior, with “scientific study” presumed to exclude any appropriation of religious ideas as useful for understanding persons.

Introductory psychology textbooks commonly emphasize the empirical methods of study used in the field, the importance of accumulated evidence in making judgments, the applicability of findings in the animal kingdom for understanding human psychological characteristics, and the importance of neurological and genetic influences on human behavior. One subtle but important perspective offered throughout the field is the importance of analyzing all mental and behavioral phenomena in terms of their *function*; it is vital, it is argued, to analyze human phenomena in terms of their contribution to adaptation to the environment (survival) and to genetic propagation. Such a strategy is directly related to a Darwinian understanding of life, as Darwin emphasized natural selection of characteristics that served functional purposes.

In contrast to the cluster of presuppositions fostered by the Enlightenment, I suggest re-centering our thinking on Christian understandings of the human person and of the cosmos. Under such Christian understandings, a robust science is still possible, and so is productive conversation and engagement with secular scientific findings. Further, Christian perspectives open up new questions and new possibilities that are compelling. For instance, there is nothing intrinsically wrong and much to commend about analyzing human behavior in terms of its function. To quote C. S. Lewis, “The first qualification for judging any piece of workmanship from a corkscrew to a cathedral is to know *what* it is—what it was intended to do and how it is meant to be used.”<sup>18</sup> But should we assume that survival and propagation are the key functions for understanding the purposes for which any human thought or behavior exists? To anticipate later arguments, I suggest that there is no need for Christians to deny the importance of survival and

<sup>18</sup>C. S. Lewis, *A Preface to Paradise Lost* (London: Oxford University Press, 1942), 1, emphasis original.

genetic propagation, but we will be led astray by the assumption that these are our *primary or only* purposes in existence.

## AFTER THE ENLIGHTENMENT

Before moving forward, it is important to acknowledge that the Enlightenment (also called “Modernism”) has lost some of its dominance in secular intellectual circles. The seeds for its decline were embedded there from the start. The core problem goes back to Descartes’s pursuit of indisputable and noninferential knowledge. Simply put, there is no such knowledge. “The first step back from a commitment to [Enlightenment] rationalism is to acknowledge that we can never fully *decontextualize* philosophy or science. When we deal with intellectual or practical problems, we can never totally clean the slate, and start from scratch, as Descartes demands.”<sup>19</sup>

It is commonly acknowledged among philosophers today that there is no such thing as pure, objective perception; rather, “all seeing is *seeing as . . .*” Everything we see is linked to other assumptions and perceptions that we have as human beings. Everything we know is part of a web of belief. As a result, any human assertion can be disputed; there is no such thing as indisputable human knowledge.

Some would take this to the extreme of relativism, but this is not a necessary step. Many are “critical realists” who recognize that humans can still know truly even if we have to take into account certain aspects of subjectivity and perspective in our human knowing.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, these weaknesses in the Enlightenment project have opened possibilities for thinking Christianly about psychology. There is broad recognition that instead of indisputable facts, the results of psychological study are instead facts as understood from a particular perspective. One clear and concise expression of

<sup>19</sup> Toulmin, *Cosmopolis*, 82.

<sup>20</sup> See Stanton L. Jones, “A Constructive Relationship for Religion with the Science and Profession of Psychology: Perhaps the Boldest Model Yet,” *American Psychologist* 49 (1994).

this comes from respected psychologist of religion Ralph Hood, who has stated that any scientific “method is at least an implicit epistemology [a way of knowing], and any epistemology assumes at least an implicit ontology [an understanding of what is]. Simply put, how we seek to know assumes what we believe to be real.”<sup>21</sup>

Thus, when presented with findings in the field of psychology, as in all areas of human inquiry, we owe appropriate deference to the findings as presented, but we also have room to ask whether the scientist has grounded her research in the best understanding of reality as it is and used the best way of knowing that reality in her research. This is particularly true given the complexity of what we study in the field of psychology. Human behavior and thought are unbelievably complex. When we gather data in this field, we focus in on a very limited part of our experience and exclude untold realms of other potential data. Thus, “psychologists may be likened to fishermen throwing their lines into an unexplored lake. What fish they catch depends upon the nature of the hook and of the bait used. It seems clear that a wise psychologist would bring with him a variety of hooks and bait, and try to be aware of his own limitations as a fisherman.”<sup>22</sup>

It is this kind of wisdom that we seek as Christian thinkers in psychology: the wisdom to start with the right understandings—biblical understandings—as we approach the phenomena of human existence, the wisdom to seek the right methods for acquiring more detailed knowledge about the human condition, and the wisdom to engage respectfully and thoughtfully but assertively as we attempt to learn from the field of psychology.

In taking this approach, we are challenging and revising each of the five key elements of the Enlightenment presented earlier:

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<sup>21</sup> Ralph Hood Jr., “Methodological Diversity in the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality,” in *APA Handbook of Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality*, 2 vols., ed. Kenneth Pargament (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2013), 1:79.

<sup>22</sup> Peter A. Bertocci, cited in Kenneth Pargament et al., “Envisioning an Integrative Paradigm for the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality,” *APA Handbook*, 1:7.

- 1) We see the religious search for truth and the rational/scientific search for truth as complementary and intertwined and acknowledge that all knowing is grounded in some sort of faith.
- 2) We accept religious tradition and authority as a source of sure knowledge of certain kinds.
- 3) We evidence confidence tempered by humility in our celebration of religious truth and in truth discovered by scientific methods.
- 4) We celebrate the rationality of an ordered universe that can be studied even as God sustains it, guides it, and intervenes in it.
- 5) We acknowledge the creatureliness and physicality of human life, with many characteristics shared with subhuman creatures, even as humans are more than their physical bodies.



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