

CHAPTER 6

Psychology of Religion

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The psychology of religion is the application of the theories and methods of psychology to understanding religion. In principle, psychologists of religion can practice their discipline without the consent of adherents and without regard to their own beliefs. But this straightforward account in fact simplifies the situation. The very terms “psychology” and “religion” have often meant different things to psychologists of religion. Some approaches to psychology, such as the depth psychological ones, can be characterized as primarily subjective and interpretive. Other approaches, especially those from mainstream scientific psychology, are more nearly objective and empirical. The differing presuppositions and methods of these approaches yield different kinds of data and understanding about religion. From the earliest days there have been attempts to combine subjective with objective approaches in order to enrich each, but it seems improbable that psychology of religion will ever operate with a single, unified body of theory and method. In referring to the “psychology of religion,” one therefore must specify which psychology is involved.

Of religion, a similar caution is necessary. Most of the early studies in psychology of religion generalized from the case of modern Protestant Christianity in Europe and North America. It is debatable whether findings about this tradition apply to traditions that are other than Protestant, Christian, Western, or modern. The term “religion” applies to hundreds, even thousands, of traditions. Recent work in the field has become more sensitive to the diversity among religious traditions, to the differing sets of cultural beliefs and behaviors in which these traditions are found, and indeed to the difficulty of defining satisfactorily the term “religion” itself. There have also been attempts to differentiate between “religion” and “spirituality.”

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In addition to the complexities of the terms psychology and religion, the relationship between the fields designated by these terms is also less than straightforward. The phrase “psychology of religion” suggests a one-way relationship, with psychology as the *method* of study and religion as the *object* of study. In practice, however, the relationship between psychology and religion has often been more reciprocal, with religion explicitly or implicitly asserting its viewpoint alongside or even against that of psychology. One must be alert to the presence of this reciprocity in understanding the psychology of religion.

In this chapter the early contexts and origins of psychology of religion, in particular the early flowering of the discipline in the United States between about 1880 and 1930, will first be discussed. Then depth psychological approaches to religion, focusing on the theories of Freud and Jung but also looking at some later contributions, will be considered. Next, the more objective, empirical approaches that stem from mainstream scientific psychology will be reviewed. Finally, some of the ways in which religion and psychology have stood in a more reciprocal relationship will be examined.

The Beginnings of Psychology of Religion

In late nineteenth-century Europe and America the success and professionalization of science, together with the rise of secular educational, welfare, and legal institutions, led to the lessening importance of traditional religion both as a social force and as a source of intellectually satisfying explanations of human nature and the world. Previously, religious phenomena had been studied almost exclusively from a committed Christian perspective. Now there emerged attempts to account for these phenomena in purely naturalistic terms and to consider non-Christian religions as well as Christianity. Out of these developments there arose several new disciplines, including the history of religion, or comparative religion. Concurrently, there developed naturalistic rather than theological attempts to account for the human mind. On the one hand mental states were correlated with, even reduced to, physiological states, giving rise to the discipline of psychophysiology. On the other hand a possible unconscious dimension of the human mind was ever more considered, giving rise to the early depth psychologies. The simultaneous appearance of these scientific approaches toward the study of religious phenomena and the human mind made it inevitable that there would also emerge attempts to study scientifically the states of mind specifically associated with religion. It is largely from this confluence of factors that the discipline of psychology of religion arose (see Heisig 1989, 57–58).

Yet this new discipline was not merely concerned with the disinterested application of scientific methods to generate naturalistic knowledge about religion. Many of those involved in the discipline in the early days also had specific agendas – pro-religious or anti-religious – and sought to enlist psychology either to reframe religion in a form that would be acceptable to modern, scientific sensibilities or to disprove it once and for all. Both the multiple origins of psychology of religion and the contrasting motivations of its practitioners have continued to influence the field.

A number of distinctive but interconnected traditions of psychological work on religion appeared at roughly the same time. One tradition, in the German-speaking world, included the work of above all Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) and Carl Gustav Jung (1875–1961). Another, in the French-speaking world, included the work of Pierre Janet (1859–1947) and Théodore Flournoy (1854–1920). However, the most decisive tradition for the early identity of the field was the Anglo-American one, which included the work of G. Stanley Hall (1846–1924), James Leuba (1868–1946), Edwin Starbuck (1866–1947), James Pratt (1875–1944), and above all William James (1842–1910) (see Wulff 1997, 21–48).

Hall, Leuba, and Starbuck

The first landmark event in the psychology of religion was the publication in 1902 of William James' *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1937 [1902]), based on the Gifford Lectures that he had delivered at the University of Edinburgh in 1901 and 1902. But James was not the first major American researcher of the field. A claim to that distinction could be made for G. Stanley Hall. Hall was trained in theology but later turned to psychology, studying with the German psychologist Wilhelm Wundt (1832–1920) in Leipzig and with James at Harvard. Against the trend of his time he promoted experimental over philosophical methods in psychology and pioneered the empirical study of individual religious experience. His main focus was on religious development and in particular on conversion, which he viewed as a phenomenon occurring primarily in adolescence. Although he emphasized the biological basis of religious experience and, no less naturalistically, attempted to recast the meaning of religion in psychological terms, he did so in a spirit of deep commitment to the Christian tradition. At the same time the function or main beneficial effect of religion was for him social adjustment. Hall's influence came variously from his own research and publications; from his position as President of Clark University, where he established what became known as the "Clark School of Religious Psychology"; from his founding of *The American Journal of Religious Psychology and Education* (1904–1911); from his introduction of psychoanalysis to the United States through the invitation of Freud and Jung to a conference at Clark University in 1909; and from the inspiration and guidance he provided to his students, notably, James Leuba and Edwin Starbuck (see Wulff 1997, 49–62).

James Leuba was born in Switzerland but emigrated to the United States. Under Hall's direction he used a combination of questionnaires and personal interviews to conduct the first academic study of the psychology of conversion as well as a study of religious beliefs among scientists and psychologists. He found that the belief in God among scientists declined with the knowledge that they had about matter, society, and mind; with their peer-rated eminence; and with the recentness of their response to his questionnaire (see Wulff 1997, 209), all of which could be taken to indicate that advance in science leads to a decline in religiosity. Leuba's approach was empiricist, reductive, and anti-religious. He held that mystical experiences were not qualitatively

different from ordinary or pathological psychological experiences. And he even prefigured Freud in emphasizing the importance of sexual impulses and symbols in religion. Leuba published prolifically and became the recognized leader of the psychology and religion movement that emerged in the United States in the early decades of the twentieth century (see Beit-Hallahmi 1974, 85).

Edwin Starbuck studied under James at Harvard and under Hall at Clark University, where he remained. It was Starbuck who first used the phrase “psychology of religion,” as the title of a book published in 1899. In his book he reported the results of his questionnaire studies of conversion and of the less extreme development of religious beliefs, which he termed “gradual growth.” His approach involved collecting large bodies of data and quantifying them to reveal general trends. By this means he demonstrated the correlation of conversion with the onset of puberty. Unlike Leuba, he maintained a positive attitude toward religion. His work is now judged to have been theoretically naïve, and his continuing claim to fame is that his data on conversion provided one of the principal sources used by James (see Beit-Hallahmi 1974, 85–87; Wulff 1997, 26–27).

James and Pratt

Although William James was an influence on Hall, Leuba, and Starbuck, his own principal work in the psychology of religion, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, was written only after the three of them had already made significant contributions to the field. James had a broad education in the arts, philosophy, and science. He began his academic career by teaching physical psychology at Harvard after the manner of Wundt. Later he shifted to philosophy, though he remained largely concerned with psychological topics. He took a naturalistic view of religious phenomena but carefully avoided reductionism, viewing religion as something universal and not in itself abnormal. He believed that all religions point to a transcendent world that influences this world (see James 1937 [1902], 498–509). In anticipation of the emerging depth psychological approaches to religion, he located the origin of the sense of transcendence that characterizes religious experience in a subliminal consciousness, a part of the mind not directly accessible to intentional observation (see James 1937 [1902], 501–503).

Rather than attempting to make statistical generalizations based on quantitative data, as had Leuba and Starbuck, James offered systematic descriptive accounts of unique cases in which he combined considerations from scientific empiricism with introspective analysis. His focus was on personal religious experience, which he considered to be the heart of religion. He defined religion, with acknowledged arbitrariness, as “the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine” (James 1937 [1902], 31–32). Not himself prone to these experiences, James presented and analyzed numerous personal documents variously collected from religious literature, from Starbuck’s questionnaire surveys, and from friends and acquaintances.

Although he shared the Protestant bias of many of the early American researchers into religion, James was sensitive to the great variety of ways, some of them contradictory, in which religion can manifest itself. He developed a rudimentary typology, in which he distinguished between the religion of the "healthy-minded" and the religion of the "sick soul." Healthy mindedness is "the tendency which looks on all things and sees that they are good" (James 1937 [1902], 86). James also referred to persons of this optimistic disposition as the "once-born," since their happy contentment with the way the world is does not lead them to seek to be reborn into any other world or state of awareness. "Sick souls," by contrast, are those persuaded that "the evil aspects of our life are of its very essence, and that the world's meaning most comes home to us when we lay them most to heart" (James 1937 [1902], 128). Sick souls wish to be redeemed from this world and to be reborn into a spiritual reality or awareness. They are therefore "twice-born." Like Hall, Leuba, and Starbuck, James directed a considerable amount of attention to conversion experiences (see James 1937 [1902], 186–253). Unlike Hall and his students, he also gave close consideration to saintliness and to mystical experiences, the four principal characteristics of which he identified as ineffability, noetic quality, transience, and passivity (see James 1937 [1902], 370–420).

James made two kinds of judgments about religious phenomena: "existential judgments," which concern the origin and history of the phenomena, and "spiritual judgments," which concern the significance and meaning of the phenomena. In the *Varieties* he was especially concerned with a spiritual judgment concerning the "fruits" of religion for life – in particular, like Hall, the effectiveness of religion in promoting social adaptation. He also argued overall for the likely truth of religious experience.

James' work on religion has been criticized for its neglect of institutional and historical factors, for its overestimation of the role of feeling, for its inclusion of pathological cases, and for its appeal to unknowable subconscious processes (see Wulff 1997, 499–503). Among James' critics was his student and friend the philosopher James Pratt, whose work *The Religious Consciousness* (1920) gained a prestige within the field second only to that of the *Varieties*. Pratt rejected his teacher's pragmatic approach to religion in favor of a critical realist approach, according to which the truth or falsehood of religious claims can be evaluated in terms of their cogency in accounting for reality rather than in terms of their consequences for behavior and health. Like James, Pratt was sympathetic to religion, and his work is similarly descriptive. Unlike James, Pratt focused on ordinary rather than exceptional religiosity, on gradual "moral" conversion rather than sudden highly emotional conversion, and on mild rather than extreme religious experiences. Pratt also contributed to widening awareness of Eastern religions, about which he had considerable knowledge (see Wulff 1997, 505–523).

The work in the US of Hall, Leuba, Starbuck, James, and Pratt, as well as that of others such as George Coe (1862–1951) and Edward Ames (1870–1958), has been taken to constitute a distinctive psychological movement that arose around 1880 and declined around 1930 (see Beit-Hallahmi 1974). Among the reasons suggested for the decline of the movement are its lack of independence from theology and from the philosophy of religion; its lack of a comprehensive theory; its poor methods of data collection; the existence of conflicts within both researchers and subjects because of

their personal investments in religion; the focus of the developing social sciences on phenomena more amenable to “objective” study; the rise of behaviorism within academic psychology; and the perceived greater promise of psychoanalytic approaches to religious phenomena (see Beit-Hallahmi 1974, 87–88).

Depth Psychological Approaches

Concurrent with these developments in the United States was the emergence in Europe of psychological theories that emphasized the importance of the unconscious mind. Drawing their insights mainly from the clinical consulting room, depth psychologies provided richly articulated theories of the structure and dynamics of a part of the mind that is normally inaccessible to consciousness but that nevertheless influences human experience, belief, and behavior. Depth psychologists emphasized the role of instincts and of early childhood experiences in the formation of this hidden part of the mind. Most notable among these approaches were Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalysis and Carl Gustav Jung’s analytical psychology. Each of these psychologists applied his theory extensively to religious phenomena but arrived at strikingly different conclusions.

Janet and Flournoy

Again, however, these two most famous figures in their field were not necessarily the first. The French psychologist Pierre Janet (1859–1947), who coined the term “subconscious” and developed a theory of psychological dissociation, was concerned with religious phenomena throughout his career. He wrote about the genesis and function of the idea of God, which he considered to be the core of religion. He studied such experiences as conversion, ecstasy, and spirit possession, especially in the case of one exceptional patient, “Madeleine.” Predicting the demise of religion, he recommended scientific psychotherapy as a secular alternative. Janet was a significant influence on both Freud and Jung, even if not fully credited by either, and also on Leuba (see Heisig 1987, 60; Wulff 1997, 38).

Another important figure was the Swiss philosopher and psychologist Théodore Flournoy. A friend of James and later of Jung, Flournoy switched from the study of theology to the study of medicine. He believed that for some persons it was necessary to liberate themselves from religious dogma in order to experience an authentic inner religious life. This position, together with some of the principles he maintained for doing psychology of religion, found resonance with Jung and with many subsequent workers in this field. For instance, Flournoy emphasized the importance of excluding one’s own presuppositions about the reality of the supposed objects of religion (the “Principle of the Exclusion of the Transcendent”), although he recognized the appropriateness of observing people’s feelings about these supposed objects. His own writings exemplify the possibility of providing nonreductionistic depth psychological understanding of exceptional religious experience, as in his case study of the modern mystic Cécile Vé (see Wulff 1997, 41–43).

Freud

Freud was raised and educated in Vienna and spent all but the last year of his life there. Unable to obtain a research position as a neurologist, he took up the practice of psychiatry and, in collaboration with the Viennese physician Joseph Breuer, became interested in hysterical patients. Freud concluded that the symptoms of these patients stemmed not from physiological factors but from emotional, specifically sexual, traumas suffered in infancy or early childhood. Later he rejected this position for the view that not actual experiences but sexual fantasies are responsible for the symptoms. Above all, Freud maintained that the male child's wish to have sex with his mother conflicts with his fear that he will consequently be punished by castration by his possessive father. The child both adores the father, on whom he depends so much, and feels murderously competitive with him. Freud termed this unconscious fantasy the "Oedipus complex." It was Jung, not Freud, who coined the term "Electra complex" for the female version of the complex, in which the girl wishes to have sex with her father and is envious of her mother.

With varying degrees of success the Oedipus complex may be "resolved" through the child's identification with his father – or, in the girl's case, mother. Failure to resolve the complex was, in Freud's view, the prime cause of neurosis. The main task of psychoanalysis is to cure neurosis by providing an understanding of the complex. The unacceptable incestuous and murderous wishes that compose this fantasy are prevented from entering consciousness by powerful defense mechanisms. Therefore the unconscious has to be approached obliquely through a combination of techniques, which include free association, the interpretation of dreams, and the re-enactment of childhood fantasies in a transference relationship with an analyst (see Wulff 1997, 258–276).

Freud wrote five main works that provide psychoanalytic perspectives on religion: "Obsessive Actions and Religious Practices" (1990b); *Totem and Taboo* (1990c); *The Future of an Illusion* (1991b); *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1991a); and *Moses and Monotheism* (1990a). His method involved generalizing from individual cases to the psyche of all humans and from clinical observations to cultural manifestations, including religion. For his knowledge of religion he relied primarily on anthropological texts, supplemented by introspective insights and a good measure of historical speculation. His approach was decidedly interpretive rather than empirical.

Among the topics that Freud discussed are religious behavior in the form of ritual and sacrifice; religious experience in the form of mysticism and the "oceanic feeling"; and religious belief in the form of taboos, God images, and general religious aspirations. Governing all his discussions was the view that religious phenomena originate from the human psyche and are the projection onto God and the world of infantile sexuality and intra-familial conflicts, most often the Oedipus complex. For instance, he compared religious rituals with the obsessive and compulsive behavior of neurotics – behavior aimed at the repression of instinctual impulses. He concluded that religion itself is a "universal obsessional neurosis" (Freud 1990b, 40). Alternatively, he derived religious needs from "the infant's helplessness and the longing for the father aroused by it" (Freud 1991a, 260). God images were the projection of idealized images of the

omniscient and omnipotent father experienced in childhood (see Freud 1991b, 199). By contrast, the mystic's "oceanic feeling" of unbounded unity was a projection of yet earlier primary narcissism – an infantile condition in which libido is not yet oriented toward real objects in the outer world but is directed inward toward the ego (see Freud 1991a, 251–260). Elsewhere the appeal of sacrifice in religion stemmed from its offering release from the guilt of patricide, both as fantasized within the dynamics of the Oedipal situation and as a "deed" actually committed in pre-history, when the dominant father of a primal horde was murdered and eaten by his envious sons. The guilty memory of this deed, Freud asserted, has been transmitted by heredity to all subsequent humans (see Freud 1990c, 159–224).

Freud acknowledged that religion has played an important role in the development of civilization through helping persons come to terms with both the outer forces of nature and the internal forces of instinctual life. Above all, religion has helped persons to repress anti-social incestuous and aggressive desires. But these benefits have been obtained at the cost of guilt and neurosis (see Freud 1990b) or, as he elsewhere claimed, of living in a state of illusion, where religious phenomena have been valued because they have been wished for, not because they have been demonstrated to be real. In fact, religion has the effect of keeping persons in a state of child-like dependence, in which they are unable to face reality. For Freud, a maturer attitude would be the scientific one, in which one accepts reality for what it is and in which one consciously restrains anti-social desires because it is necessary to do so for the maintenance of civilization. Suppression replaces repression. Freud therefore welcomed the decline of religion as a sign of humanity's advance toward adulthood (see Freud 1991b, 179–241).

Freud's psychology of religion has been vigorously criticized. In both *Totem and Taboo* and *Moses and Monotheism* he relied on what would now be considered dubious anthropological and historical speculations – for example, about the universality of totemism and about the life of Moses. He adopted as a basic assumption Lamarck's now discredited notion of the inheritance of acquired characteristics, such as the guilt that the sons felt in the primal parricide. He focused on a narrow selection of religious phenomena and failed to do justice to the complexity and multi-dimensionality of religion. His claim that God images stem primarily from longing for an omnipotent father has been contradicted by the many empirical studies which have demonstrated the greater role played by the mother in the formation of God images. Again, while there are undoubtedly strong parallels between the compulsive behavior of neurotics and the performance of religious rituals, the inference that religious rituals may simply be a widespread and culturally sanctioned instance of neurotic actions has been challenged by empirical data which show that engagement in religious rituals often correlates positively with sound mental health (see Palmer 1997, 60–81; Wulff 1997, 309–318).

In spite of these limitations and errors, Freud's theory has remained immensely influential. It provides a coherent and detailed psychological account of religion that addresses not only conscious dynamics but also unconscious ones such as projection, sublimation, and displacement. It provides a means of understanding the rich content of religious symbols, myths, and rituals. Some of Freud's suggestions have received a

measure of empirical support – for instance, that of the influence of early relationships on the way a person conceives of God. Even in his own day, Freud's own negative evaluation of religion was deemed separable from his psychoanalytic method, and pastors and theologians, especially Freud's friend Oskar Pfister, were among those who used his insights to offer a positive view of religion.

Jung

Jung, the son of a Protestant pastor, was raised and educated in Basel, Switzerland, and spent all of his working life in or near Zurich. He trained as a psychiatrist and worked for nine years at Zurich's prestigious Burghölzli Mental Hospital before devoting himself exclusively to his private practice. Between 1906 and 1913 he allied himself with Freud and was prominent in the development of the psychoanalytic movement. But various theoretical and personal differences between Freud and Jung led to their acrimonious separation. Important among the theoretical differences were their views on religion (see Wulff 1997, 414–423).

After splitting with Freud, Jung more fully developed his own distinctive psychology. Where Freud emphasized a repressed unconscious and universal complexes stemming from instinctual conflicts, Jung emphasized a "collective unconscious" and universal "archetypes" as inherited forms of psychic functioning. Where Freud was mostly concerned with the causes and effects of psychic phenomena, Jung attended equally to their purpose, or teleology. He postulated that psychic development was governed by an autonomous archetypal process ("individuation") that aimed at integration rather than division between the unconscious and the conscious aspects of the psyche and at the realization of a unifying centre of the personality (the "self") (see Jung 1969, 3–105). Where for Freud symbols were disguised references to purely instinctual processes, for Jung they were the best possible expressions of unknowable processes that were as much nonmaterial, or spiritual, as bodily. Jung's method of interpreting symbols included a process of "amplification," which involves finding mythic, historical, and cultural parallels to the symbolic images at hand. Religious imagery from diverse traditions provided one of the richest sources of these parallels (see Jung 1969; Wulff 1997, 423–434).

Jung's principal writings on religious topics are gathered in *Psychology and Religion: West and East* (1969), one of the volumes of his *Collected Works*. His psychology of religion, like Freud's, consists largely of a straightforward application of his general psychology, though Jung was much more explicitly influenced by religion in the development of his general psychology. Also like Freud, Jung based his insights on generalizations from a small number of clinical cases, together with wide-ranging but unsystematic textual research and bold speculation. Unlike Freud but like Flournoy, Jung aimed to withhold judgment about the truth of religious beliefs and devoted his attention to religious phenomena as they presented themselves as psychological facts (see Jung 1969, 5–6).

Jung's main focus in his psychology of religion was on spontaneous experiences – in particular, on dreams and fantasies that seemed charged with a special quality of

heightened emotionality (“numinosity”) (see Jung 1969, 5–105). He did also discuss formal beliefs and practices – for example, the dogma of the Trinity and the rite of the Mass – but for him these beliefs and practices either stemmed from or bore on individual experience (see Jung 1969, 107–200, 201–296). Like Freud, Jung located the origin of religious phenomena in the unconscious psyche. For Jung, however, the unconscious consisted not only of personal contents but even more of collectively inherited archetypes. Key here is the archetype of God, which Jung sometimes presented as virtually equivalent to the unconscious, hence to the totality of archetypes, but at other times characterized as the central, highest archetype, which orders the other archetypes (see Jung 1969, 81, 468–469).

Although the human psyche is thus imprinted with an archetype of God, that archetype, like any other, can never be known directly but only through its diverse expressions as archetypal imagery, all of which will be colored by personal and cultural associations. While there is a single archetype of God – whatever its status vis-à-vis the other archetypes – we can never know the full meaning of this archetype but can gain only an approximate understanding of it from its manifestations in Yahweh, Brahman, Tao, the Absolute, Zeus, Krishna, and so on, all with their attendant imagery and range of interpretations. For Jung, images of the archetype of the self were functionally indistinguishable from images of the archetype of God. Hence Jung’s process of individuation leads to realization of “the God within” (see Jung 1969, 58).

For Jung, antithetically to Freud, the presence of religiosity was not usually a sign of neurosis. On the contrary, the *absence* of religiosity, especially in the second half of life, could be a prime *cause* of neurosis. Jung even declared that the recovery of the religious dimension of experience was precisely what was required by many of his older patients (see Jung 1969, 334). Religion for Jung also had a social significance. It could provide the individual with a source of authority strong enough to counterbalance the forces, particularly totalitarian forces, that tend toward de-individualization, or “mass-mindedness.”

Some critics of Jung’s psychology of religion have targeted his psychology *per se*. For instance, the existence of a collective unconscious and of universal archetypes has been considered implausible and untestable. Also criticized has been Jung’s analysis of religious traditions, which he sometimes seems to present as but instances of his psychological concepts, as in his equation of the Hindu concept of Atman-Brahman with his understanding of the self (see Parsons 2001, 235). Above all, and in spite of his positive attitude toward religion, Jung has frequently been accused of reducing religion to psychology, principally because of his insistence that psyche is the only immediately experienced reality (see Palmer 1997, 166–196). Nevertheless Jung’s attempts to apply his psychology to religion have been immensely influential, both in the illuminating perspectives that they have provided on religious symbols, myths, and rituals and in the impetus that they have given to comparativist dialogues, to humanistic and transpersonal psychology, and to various formulations of psychology *as* religion.

Unlike the early US researchers, both Freud and Jung provided rich theories of religion. Their theories shared many premises, such as the origin of religious phenomena in the unconscious mind, the fundamental role of projection, and the need to interpret religious content symbolically. But these shared premises were mixed with other

assumptions about which they radically disagreed, with the result that their overall evaluations of the role of religion in psychic life are almost antipodal.

Other psychoanalytic contributions: Winnicott, Kohut, Erikson

Where Freud considered religious phenomena to be projections of the Oedipus complex and in particular of an omnipotent father, some later psychoanalysts attached greater importance to the pre-Oedipal stages of development. Central here are the infant's libidinous relationship to its primary caregiver, usually its mother, and also its libidinous relationship to its own self in a state before it is aware of its separation from others – the state of "primary narcissism." Consideration of these pre-Oedipal phases has allowed Freudian psychoanalytic theory to account for a wider range of religious phenomena, especially for the extent to which maternal and self-oriented relationships, and not merely paternal relationships, may contribute to religious imagery (see Wulff 1997, 320–370).

One influential development for the psychology of religion has been the theory of the English pediatrician Donald Winnicott (1896–1971). Winnicott was concerned with the processes by which the infant emerges into the social world. An important role, he believed, is performed by an "intermediate area" of experience, neither wholly inner and imaginary nor wholly outer and real. It is the area, epitomized by play, in which a child can practice make believe and experiment safely with new and creative ways of relating to the world. It is also typically the location of a child's "transitional object," such as a teddy bear or piece of blanket, that helps ease the child away from its fantasy of omnipotence (the belief that it can make things happen merely by thinking) toward acceptance of objective reality. The intermediate area is a realm of "illusion," but of illusion understood as something necessary and positive for healthy and creative living, not as delusion. Winnicott suggested that this intermediate area remains of relevance in adult life and is the location of culture and religion since these, too, are "transitional phenomena" that help throughout life to bridge inner and outer realities. He thus agreed with Freud that religion is, in some sense, illusion but removed the pejorative connotation of this characterization. Later writers, such as Paul Pruyser, W. W. Meissner, and Ana-Maria Rizzuto, have applied Winnicott's theories to religion much more extensively than he himself did (see Wulff 1997, 339–346; Capps 2001, 205–240).

In classical Freudian theory the persistence of narcissism into adulthood was almost invariably considered pathological. Indeed, the condition was usually considered untreatable by means of psychoanalysis because the narcissistic personality, incapable as it is of establishing relations with external objects, is unable to enter into a transference relationship with the analyst. However, the Chicago psychoanalyst Heinz Kohut (1913–1981) proposed that, in addition to the classical developmental pathway that leads from narcissism to object-relatedness, or relating to other persons, there is a pathway that leads from primitive narcissism to mature narcissism. Mature narcissism involves the transference of libido from the self to self-transcending ideals and is characterized by qualities such as creativity, empathic understanding, humor, and wisdom. Although Kohut, like Winnicott, was not himself directly concerned with religion, many

subsequent researchers have found value in his insights, especially for understanding forms of religion in which the emphasis is not on obedience to or communion or union with a numinous object (God) but on self-realization, as in Zen Buddhism and contemporary “self-spirituality” (see Wulff 1997, 346–361; Capps 2001, 241–304).

Another influential development in psychoanalytic theory was Erik Erikson’s (1902–1994) model of psychosocial development. Erikson postulated an eight-stage life cycle, each stage of which represents a crisis in human relationships that generates virtues and vices, affects later stages, and is evinced in religious behavior. This encompassing stage model bears comparison with religious world views. Erikson believed that religious attitudes largely have their origin in the mother/child relationship, but he did not thereby consider religious attitudes immature. On the contrary, he considered that the religious life can be psychologically healthy and even necessary for growth into full psychological and social maturity (see Wulff 1997, 37–413; Capps 2001, 121–203). Erikson applied his theories to the biographies of two major religious thinkers, Martin Luther and Mohandas Gandhi (see Erikson 1958, 1969).

The theories of Winnicott, Kohut, and Erikson may seem closer to Jung than to Freud in the positive view of religion that they foster. Still, all of these post-Freudian thinkers remained firmly grounded in Freud’s naturalistic view of the origins of religion. By contrast, Jung, while eschewing metaphysical assertion, still kept the door open to the possible reality of a divine source for religious phenomena (see Wulff 1997, 637–668).

Empirical Approaches

Although depth psychologists such as Freud and Jung insisted that their methods were empirical because of their basis in careful observation, most academic psychologists would maintain that an empirical approach to psychology requires not just observation but also experimentation, measurement, repeatability, and prediction. It is in this stronger sense that empiricism is understood here. But this kind of empiricism has its limitations and has often been criticized for its inability to yield data that illuminate the deeper issues of religion. This inability may have partly contributed to the early ascendancy of the explanatorily richer depth psychological theories of religion. Still, from around 1950, there has been a progressive resurgence of interest in empirical approaches to the psychology of religion. Much of it seeks methods capable of yielding data that are empirically sound yet nontrivial.

Empirical psychology of religion has almost always been undertaken from within departments of psychology since researchers in departments of religious studies rarely have the necessary scientific training or resources. But departments of psychology have largely been dominated by behaviorist approaches that are suspicious of religion, and this suspicion has both inhibited work and colored the work that has been done. Nevertheless, psychology of religion has gradually gained recognition as a subdiscipline within psychology, and various psychological methodologies have been adapted to the task of gaining understanding of religion. These methodologies have so far mostly been either experimental or correlational, both of them aimed at obtaining quantitative data (see Gorsuch 1988; Emmons and Paloutzian 2003).

Methodology

The ideal in experimental investigations is to have sufficient control over the variables involved to be able to establish clear causal connections between them. Because of the highly subjective and complex nature of most religious phenomena, this ideal is often difficult to realize. Nevertheless, in laboratories and other highly controllable environments there have been investigations of the physiological states of meditating or praying subjects as well as observations of subjects in whom religious experiences have been induced by the use of drugs, sensory deprivation, hypnosis, and other techniques (see Beit-Hallahmi and Argyle 1997, 85–89). There have also been some successful field experiments, such as John Darley and Daniel Batson's "Good Samaritan" experiment. Here students who had just read the parable of the Good Samaritan were sent on an errand and en route encountered someone in need of help. It was found that the students who had recently been exposed to the parable were no more likely to offer help than a control group of students who had not been. At the same time whether or not the students had been told to hurry on their errand did make a difference (see Batson and Ventis 1982, 291–292).

One way of getting around the limitations of laboratory experiments and other attempts artificially to recreate the conditions in which religious phenomena occur has been to make use of real-life circumstances in what have been called "quasi-experiments." For example, researchers can develop hypotheses about what will happen among the members of a religious group if a prophecy due for fulfillment on a specified date is not fulfilled. When the date passes, the researchers can observe the behaviour of the group members and thereby test their hypotheses (see Festinger, Riecken, and Schachter 1956).

Because of the difficulty of establishing definite causal connections between religious phenomena and the various biological, personal, social, cultural, and other factors with which they may be associated, the empirical psychology of religion makes great use of correlational studies. These studies test whether variables within a complex situation – for example, peer-rated eminence within a field of science and belief in a God who answers prayer – are found to occur together with a frequency that is statistically significant. The data for the statistical analyses involved in correlational studies are mostly acquired through questionnaires and surveys (see Hood et al. 1996, 38–39).

A major impetus to the resurgence of psychology of religion was given by the work of the Harvard psychologist Gordon Allport (1897–1967), author of the influential book *The Individual and his Religion* (1950). An authority in personality and social psychology, Allport, like James, was sensitive to the diversity and complexity of religious phenomena and advocated what he called "idiographic" research methods, which focus on individual case studies. But he was also strongly committed to rigorous scientific techniques aimed at establishing general laws – techniques that he called "nomothetic" methods – and in his own studies tended to employ these (see Wulff 1997, 584–585). Allport was particularly concerned to differentiate between more and less mature forms of religiousness (see Wulff 1997, 586–589). Partly in order to explore this distinction, he and some colleagues developed questionnaire scales to quantify the religious trends of a personality. The most influential of these is the Religious Orientation Scale, which

measures the extent to which a person's faith is extrinsic (valued because useful to the self's personal and social interests) or intrinsic (valued in itself and superordinate to the self's other interests). Allport associated intrinsic faith with greater religious maturity (see Wulff 1997, 231–237, 593–594). An alternative scale to this is Batson's Religious Life Inventory, designed some years later. This scale includes measures of religiousness not only as a means and as an end, as did Allport's scale, but also as a quest, involving qualities not discernible from Allport's scale, such as complexity, doubt, and tentativeness (see Batson and Ventis 1982, 137–170). The informativeness of these scales, and of others like them, has been disputed, but they continue to be widely used.

Other methods used in empirical psychology of religion include the structured interview and projective techniques. But these methods introduce a much greater subjective element. Even when the interview is tightly structured according to a predetermined list of questions, there is an inevitable interplay between the interviewer and the interviewee that may affect the responses in ways that are difficult to monitor or control (see Spilka 2001, 39). Similarly, projective techniques, such as asking children to draw pictures of God and then analyzing what thoughts and feelings they have projected into their picture, allow room for the researcher's subjectivity to influence the selection, organization, and interpretation of the data obtained (see Spilka 2001, 38).

Religious phenomena

Empirical studies in the psychology of religion have attempted to gain understanding of the whole range of religious phenomena. Among the many forms of religious behavior studied are participation in group worship, prayer, reading of Scriptures, use of religious language, sacrifice, making of donations to support religious activities, keeping of dietary laws, healing, and choosing of religion as a career. These phenomena are on the whole relatively easy to observe and measure, and they seem to provide a good indication of religious motivation and commitment, though caution is obviously needed in handling the self-reports by which so many of the data about religious behavior are obtained (see Spilka 2001, 35).

Much work has also been done on religious beliefs, especially by means of questionnaires and interviews. Almost every facet of religious belief has been addressed, not least the fundamental question of belief in God. Studies have attempted to ascertain how many persons believe in God in specific communities, what they believe about God, how they have acquired their beliefs, how and why their beliefs may change, and how the incidence and nature of belief in God vary according to nationality, gender, social class, personality, profession, and age group (see Beit-Hallahmi and Argyle 1997, 97–185).

Although religious experience, as the most private and least easily verbalized dimension of religion, might seem the least amenable to empirical investigation, considerable work has been done in this area, much of it through, again, the use of questionnaires. The range of religious experiences reported is extremely diverse and includes conversion, mysticism, visions, voices, healing, near-death experiences, states of peace, awe, enlightenment, timelessness, love, remorse, forgiveness, and release from the fear of death (see Hood et al. 1996, 185–188).

Origins of religion

Another issue that empirical studies have addressed is the possible psychological origin of religion. Various hypotheses have been proposed, locating the origin of religion in neural factors, cognitive needs and styles, adjustment to anxiety, fear of death, effects of early childhood, various kinds of projection, and sexual motivation (see Beit-Hallahmi and Argyle 1997, 11–24; Hood et al. 1996, 12–23). The most strongly supported hypotheses would seem to be the projection hypotheses (see Beit-Hallahmi and Argyle 1997, 255). The projection can take various forms. Religious phenomena can be the projection of individual factors, such as early relations with caregivers, or of social factors, such as the way a society is organized. Religious phenomena can either directly parallel these individual and social phenomena or stand in a compensatory or disguised relation to them (see Beit-Hallahmi and Argyle 1997, 19–20). But there is also compelling evidence for the role of social learning in the origin and maintenance of religious attitudes (see Beit-Hallahmi and Argyle 1997, 24–25), as well as growing interest in the perspectives of evolutionary psychology (see Kirkpatrick 2005).

Effects of religion

Considerable empirical research has focused on the psychological effects of religion, which may differ from the ends implied by the hypothesized origin of religion. The effects include, at the individual level, how religion contributes to people's happiness, physical and mental health, moral and sexual behavior, and attitudes toward death (see Beit-Hallahmi and Argyle 1997, 184–207). At a social level researchers have studied the effects of religion on fertility, divorce, crime and deviance, work and achievement, prejudice and ethnocentrism, political involvement, and social integration or exclusion. Among the findings are that religious involvement, especially intrinsic religious involvement, generally does correlate positively with happiness, optimism, the tendency to work harder, the ability to cope with stress, diminished fear of death, greater marital stability, lower crime rates, and more charitable work. Yet religious involvement surprisingly does not seem to correlate with increased honesty. Furthermore, some forms of religious involvement, especially the most intrinsic, also correlate positively with prejudice, authoritarianism, and a loss of freedom to think. Indeed, some of the evidence suggests that many of the apparent benefits of religion are gained at the cost of hostility toward groups other than one's own (see Beit-Hallahmi and Argyle 1997, 208–209).

Evaluation of the empirical approach

Notwithstanding the vast amount of empirical work that has been undertaken on the psychology of religion and the many informative results that have been obtained, there remain problems with empirical approaches. One problem is that empirical psychological

work tends to focus on persons rather than on contents, such as symbols, myths, and rituals. As a result, the work is often insensitive to the complex history and rich connotative meaning of the contents (see Wulff 1997, 256–257).

Another problem is that the sought-after objectivity of the empirical approaches can do violence to the subjective quality of many religious phenomena. In experimental and quasi-experimental studies the scientific ends are likely to interfere with the religious engagement of the subjects, yet if there is no effective entry into the religious sphere by the subjects, then the behavior and experiences investigated will not be religious (see Wulff 1997, 252). Again, in correlational studies based on questionnaires, quantifiable data can usually be obtained only when the possible responses are standardized and simplified. Yet standardization and simplification often leave both respondents and historians of religion dissatisfied at the loss of important distinctions (see Wulff 1997, 253).

An increasing number of researchers is coming to appreciate that subjectivity cannot be excluded altogether from the psychology of religion. Even with questionnaire studies, for example, while the use of standardized questions and statistical techniques for analyzing results can exclude the subjectivity of the researcher, it does so by shifting the subjective element in the study onto the subjects. These subjects, if they are adequately to answer the probing questions about their practices, beliefs, and experiences, are implicitly expected to engage in often quite deep and subtle levels of introspection, for which in most cases they will not have been trained (see Wulff 1997, 254–256). Recognizing this problem, some researchers have begun to explore more qualitative psychological research methods, in which the researcher's subjectivity is not just acknowledged but actively used as a research instrument – for example, in interviews and participant observation studies. These methods can complement the more objective and quantifiable empirical approaches. They also provide a point of rapprochement with psychoanalytical approaches, for acknowledgment and use of subjectivity, especially in the dynamics of transference and countertransference, are one of the analyst's core investigative methods.

Some consider that the success of empirical psychology of religion has been modest and has been hampered by its lack of a governing theory (see Hood et al. 1996, 446–452). While it is admittedly difficult to operationalize and to test many of the most interesting theoretical insights in psychology of religion, it is also the case that effective measurement without an adequate theoretical framework is liable to be trivial and uninformative. As Ralph Hood and his colleagues aptly observe, there is a need for “theory congruent with the passion and interest elicited by religion” (Hood et al. 1996, 446). Even in the current state of the field, however, informative data have been obtained by empirical means, and certainly the more objective empirical approaches need to be pursued if psychologists of religion wish not only to formulate theories and construct hypotheses but also to test them. Recognizing these difficulties, some researchers have begun to develop what has been called a “multilevel interdisciplinary paradigm,” which “recognizes the value of data at multiple levels of analysis while making nonreductive assumptions concerning the value of spiritual and religious phenomena” (Emmons and Paloutzian 2003, 203; see Paloutzian and Park 2005 and 2013).

Religion and Psychology

Although psychology of religion in the strict sense involves the application of a psychological theory to the elucidation of religious phenomena, the field has been greatly influenced by various ways in which the relationship between psychology and religion has been less straightforward.

Theology, psychology, and psychotherapy

In some cases religion has explicitly taken the initiative in relation to psychology by appropriating psychological insights and practices for its own ends. For example, the years between 1930 and 1960 saw, particularly in America, a period of productive dialogue between theology and psychology, when a number of prominent theologians welcomed the challenging new perspectives that psychological and psychoanalytical thinking provided on traditional religion, seeing in these styles of thinking an opportunity to enrich their own theology (see Homans 1989, 69–71). A notable and influential representative of this trend was the Protestant theologian Paul Tillich (1886–1965), who not only included psychoanalytic insights in his theological works but also explicitly attempted to synthesize the Christian tradition with psychoanalysis, as well as with Marxism and existentialism. He attempted this synthesis largely through his “correlational method,” whereby theological questions were illuminated in a sophisticated way by being reframed as modern cultural discourses. For example, Tillich saw neurotic conflict and neurotic anxiety as a means of avoiding existential awareness of one’s finitude – a failure to engage with ultimate realities, to recognize one’s freedom, and to find “the courage to be” (see Tillich 1952). Developments in psychology and psychoanalysis also encouraged the emergence of pastoral counseling, where ministers employed the new psychological and therapeutic understanding to help them in their pastoral practice (see Heisig 1989, 64–65).

Religious and anti-religious agendas

In other cases the effect of religious, or anti-religious, commitments has had a more covert influence on the engagement of psychology with religion. For example, Freud’s work in this area is not merely a disinterested application of psychoanalytic theory to religion. It is motivated by a conscious anti-religious attitude. Contrary to Freud, Jung’s work seeks to reframe some of the main concerns of religion in terms more acceptable to modern consciousness. Within empirical psychology of religion some have suggested that subjective-empirical approaches tend to be pursued by more conservative scholars of religion, whereas objective-empirical approaches tend to be pursued by more liberal scholars (see Spilka 2001, 31). Others, however, argue that the questionnaires used in objective correlational studies “have tended to define religion in literalistic terms” and that “much research of this type has been carried out in defense of more or less

conservative views" (Wulff 1997, 635). In each of these cases the kind of psychology of religion practiced is arguably influenced by a prior agenda.

Humanistic and transpersonal psychology

Prior agendas also influence research and practice in humanistic and transpersonal psychology. Although many previous researchers, such as James, Jung, and Allport, can be said to be in the humanistic tradition, the approach is most often associated with the work of Abraham Maslow (1908–1970), especially his book *Religions, Values, and Peak Experiences* (1964). According to Maslow, human beings have a "hierarchy of needs." In addition to physiological needs, safety needs, belongingness needs, and self-esteem needs, humans have a need for "self-actualization." Indicators of progress toward self-actualization include greater acceptance of reality, deeper relationships, philosophical humor, moral elevation, and, most famously, "peak experiences." Peak experiences are basically mystical experiences presented as universally occurring naturalistic events, not unique to any religion but rather the common core of them all (see Wulff 1997, 604–616). Humanistic psychology resembles the depth psychological approaches in its emphasis on human subjectivity and direct inner experience but resembles the empirical approaches in its attempt to investigate religious phenomena, especially religious experience, through observation, experiment, and measurement.

Researchers in humanistic psychology, including Maslow himself, increasingly focused their attention on those aspects of psychology that seemed to transcend personal boundaries, such as the experiences of unitive, spiritual, and transcendent states of consciousness, and this emphasis gave rise to the distinctive movement known as transpersonal psychology (see Wulff 1997, 616–623). Researchers in this area such as Charles Tart, Robert Ornstein, and Ken Wilber have been particularly concerned with Eastern religious experience, meditation, and the search for new paradigms that can integrate religion with science – or, even more boldly, to account for the whole of reality.

Although purporting to apply the most rigorous scientific methods, humanistic and transpersonal psychologies are both usually pursued by researchers sympathetic to claims for a transpersonal dimension of human experience, and their experiments have often been criticized for being designed less to test than to confirm transpersonal assumptions. In this sense the religious or transcendental orientation of the researchers has reciprocally influenced the kind of psychology of religion done. These researchers are not simply operating with a body of mainstream psychological theory and applying it to the phenomena of religion. Rather, they are crediting the claims for mystical and religious experience and are attempting to devise psychological methods and theories adequate to this experience.

Psychology and comparativist approaches to religion

Another area in which religion has forced a reconsideration of some of the assumptions governing its psychological investigation is in comparativist religious studies. Although

there was a definite Christian and Protestant bias in much of the early work in the psychology of religion, several prominent researchers did look to other traditions, especially Eastern ones. James discussed Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist experiences. Pratt wrote knowledgeably about Hinduism and Buddhism, traveling to the East specifically in order to learn more. Freud referred to Hinduism when discussing the mystic's "oceanic feeling." Jung traveled to India and Africa and wrote on Indian Yoga, Chinese Taoism, both Tibetan and Zen Buddhism, and many other non-Christian traditions. To be sure, all of this work can be criticized for its orientalizing tendencies and its limited knowledge of the traditions, but it set in motion a fruitful trend in contemporary psychology of religion (see Parsons 2001). As this trend has developed, the parochialism of the early psychology of religion has been challenged by awareness both of the great diversity of world religions and of the existence of sophisticated models of psychological understanding – Hindu, Buddhist, Taoist, Kabbalistic, or Sufi – very different from those that were developed in Europe and the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Psychology as religion

There have been various suggestions, ranging from the scathing to the enthusiastic, that psychology itself might be a new form of religion. Here psychology and religion would be related through neither subordination nor dialogue but partial merging. The kind of psychology involved in this position is primarily either humanistic or phenomenological – in both cases concerned with the exploration of psychic depths and the realization of hidden potentials through aligning oneself with those depths. The kind of religion involved here is noninstitutional and nondogmatic spirituality. The influence of theorists such as Jung, Maslow, and Wilber has contributed to what is arguably the most conspicuous form of "psychology as religion": the New Age Movement, with its highly psychologized form of nonaffiliated spirituality (see Barnard 2001).

The existence of these less straightforward relationships has led some researchers to prefer to place their work within a more broadly defined field of "psychology *and* religion" or "religion and psychological studies" rather than within "psychology *of* religion" (see Homans 1989; Jonte-Pace and Parsons 2001). Psychology of religion would, then, be a subdiscipline or specific approach within this broader field.

Conclusion

The psychology of religion is a complex field involving a diverse range of psychological theories, ways of understanding religion, and relationships between psychology and religion. This complexity ensures that the field will continue to develop in more than one direction, with various approaches challenging and enriching one another. In particular, there is scope for more explicit crossovers among psychoanalytical, empirical, and humanistic approaches as well as among those involved in the psychology of religion in

the strict sense and those involved in the relationship between religion and psychology more broadly. The bold theories of psychoanalysis, for example, have been able to yield at least some testable hypotheses, and more should become possible as empirical methods increase in sophistication. Furthermore, the shift within academic psychology toward the inclusion of qualitative methods in addition to quantitative methods allows for closer engagement with depth psychological and other hermeneutic approaches. Recent developments within specific branches of academic psychology, including social psychology, cognitive psychology, developmental psychology, evolutionary psychology, and neuropsychology, may also prove fruitful for the study of religion (see Hood et al. 1996, 449–450; Newberg and Newberg 2005).

Prospects for fuller integration of the diverse approaches to psychology of religion have been widened through the proposal of a multilevel interdisciplinary paradigm and the identification of a number of “integrative themes” informing the diversity of past and current work, including the paradigm issue itself as well as debates about methods and theories, questions of meaning, and discussions of the future direction and role of the psychology of religion (see Paloutzian and Park 2005, 5–6; 2013). Since 1991 the field of psychology of religion has been served by the *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* (1991–present), avowedly an attempt to recreate Hall’s *American Journal of Religious Psychology and Education* (1904–1911), as well as by an increasing number of other journals and handbooks (see Paloutzian and Park 2013, 4–5).

Whatever the approach, the standard of work in the psychology of religion can certainly be enhanced by psychologists learning more about religion and by scholars of religion learning more about psychology. More work also needs to be done to counteract the biases that arguably have entered the field from the localized provenance of the data. For example, the majority of empirical work has been done in North America and very often, for convenience of data collection, on American university campuses. While some of the findings appear to be safely universalizable, others almost certainly are not (see Beit-Hallahmi and Argyle 1997, 230–231). Like other areas in the study of religion, psychology of religion also needs to pay more attention to the gender biases embedded in both its history and its current practice (see Jonte-Pace 2001). Psychology of religion arguably also has much still to contribute to understanding various religious phenomena that have recently become socially and politically salient, such as resurgent fundamentalism and religious violence, including terrorism (see Silberman 2005).

The development of psychology of religion as a field was long hampered by mutual suspicion between psychology and religion – an inheritance largely from the science-versus-religion debates of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As levels of awareness both within and between these disciplines continue to become more sophisticated, plural, and self-reflexive, there is less of a sense either that psychology necessarily is reductive of religion or that religion necessarily is intolerant of the aims of psychology. Psychology of religion is now a well-established, vibrant field that can help both students and adherents to understand more deeply some of the many factors influencing religiosity.

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