Research Paper

Religion as a psychological concept

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The use of psychological methods and concepts to religious traditions, as well as to both religious individuals, is referred to as religion. Religious science tries to explain the specifics, origins, and applications of religious beliefs and behaviours. Although religion psychology only emerged as a self-conscious discipline in the late nineteenth century, all three of these objectives have a long history dating back many centuries. Many aspects of religion remain undiscovered, and while religion and spirituality play an important role in many people's lives, it is unclear how they contribute to beneficial and harmful effects. The challenge for religion psychology is essentially threefold: (1) to provide a description of the objects of investigation, whether shared religious content or individual experiences and attitudes; (2) to account in psychological terms for the rise of such phenomena; and (3) to clarify the outcomes—the fruits, as William James put it—of these phenomena, for individuals and for society as a whole.

The first, descriptive task, of course, necessitates a definition of one's terminology, most notably the term religion. Religion historians have long emphasised the term's problematic nature, noting that its meaning has evolved significantly over time, generally in the direction of reification. The early psychologists of religion were well aware of these issues, often admitting that the classifications they chose were arbitrary in certain ways. With the emergence of positivistic trends in psychology in the twentieth century, particularly the requirement that all phenomena be measured, religious psychologists devised a slew of scales, the majority of which were designed for use with Protestant Christians. In order to develop a fixed core of dimensions and a related set of scales, both religious psychologists used factor analysis. The validity and adequacy of these attempts, particularly in light of constructivist and other postmodern perspectives, is still a source of contention.

Psychologist and philosopher William James (1842–1910) is regarded by most psychologists of religion as the founder of the field. In the psychology of religion, James' influence endures. Personal religion, in which the individual has mystical experience, can be experienced regardless of the culture. James was most interested in understanding personal religious experience. James made a distinction between *healthy-minded* and *sick-souled* religiousness. Individuals predisposed to healthy-mindedness tend to ignore the evil in the world and focus on the positive and the good. William James' hypothesis of pragmatism stems from the efficacy of religion. If an individual believes in and performs religious activities, and those actions happen to work, then that practice appears the proper choice for the individual. However, if the processes of religion have little efficacy, then there is no rationality for continuing the practice.

Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) gave explanations of the genesis of religion in his various writings. In Moses and Monotheism, Freud reconstructed biblical history in accordance with his general theory. His ideas were also developed in The Future of an Illusion. When Freud spoke of religion as an illusion, he maintained that it *is a fantasy structure from which a man must be set free if he is to grow to maturity*.Freud views the idea of God as being a version of the father image, and religious belief as at bottom infantile and neurotic.

The Swiss psychoanalyst Carl Jung(1875–1961) adopted a very different posture, one that was more sympathetic to religion and more concerned with a positive appreciation of religious symbolism. Jung considered the question of the existence of God to be unanswerable by the psychologist and adopted a kind of agnosticism.Austrian psychiatrist Alfred Adler (1870–1937), who parted ways with Freud, emphasised the role of goals and motivation in his *Individual Psychology*. One of Adler's most famous ideas is that we try to compensate for inferiorities that we perceive in ourselves. A lack of power often lies at the root of feelings of inferiority. One way that religion enters into this picture is through our beliefs in God, which are characteristic of our tendency to strive for perfection and superiority. Our ideas about God are important indicators of how we view the world.

An important thing for Adler is that God motivates people to act, and that those actions do have real consequences for us and for others. Our view of God is important because it embodies our goals and directs our social interactions.Compared to science, another social movement, religionis more efficient because it motivates

people more effectively. According to Adler, only when science begins to capture the same religious fervour, and promotes the welfare of all segments of society, will the two be more equal in peoples' eyes.

In his classic book *The Individual and His Religion* (1950), Gordon Allport (1897–1967) illustrates how people may use religion in different ways. He makes a distinction between *Mature religion* and *Immature religion*. Mature religious sentiment is how Allport characterized the person whose approach to religion is dynamic, open-minded, and able to maintain links between inconsistencies. In contrast, immature religion is self-servingand generally represents the negative stereotypes that people have about religion. These dimensions of religion were measured on the Religious Orientation Scale of Allport and Ross (1967).

Erik Erikson (1902–1994) is best known for his theory of psychological development, which has its roots in the psychoanalytic importance of identity in personality. He considered religions to be important influences in successful personality development because they are the primary way that cultures promote the virtues associated with each stage of life. Religious rituals facilitate this development. Erikson's theory has not benefited from systematic empirical study, but it remains an influential and well-regarded theory in the psychological study of religion.

The American scholar Erich Fromm (1900–1980) modified the Freudian theory and produced a more complex account of the functions of religion. The right religion, in Fromm's estimation, can, in principle, foster an individual's highest potentialities, but religion in practice tends to relapse into being neurotic.According to Fromm, humans have a need for a stable frame of reference. Religion apparently fills this need. In effect, humans crave answers to questions that no other source of knowledge has an answer to, which only religion may seem to answer. However, a sense of free will must be given in order for religion to appear healthy. An authoritarian notion of religion appears detrimental. It also sets a paradigm for the study of religion that focuses on the need to realise the religious as a non-reducible, original category in its own right.

Allen Bergin is noted for his 1980 paper "Psychotherapy and Religious Values," which is known as a landmark in scholarly acceptance that religious values do, in practice, influence psychotherapy. He received the Distinguished Professional Contributions to Knowledge award from the American Psychological Association in 1989 and was cited as challenging "psychological orthodoxy to emphasize the importance of values and religion in therapy."

The role of religion

There are three primary role of religion in the modern world. The first, secularization, holds that science and technology will take the place of religion.Secularization supports the separation of religion from politics, ethics, and psychology. Taking this position even further, Taylor explains that secularization denies transcendence, divinity, and rationality in religious beliefs.

Challenges to the secularization led to significant revisions, resulting in the religious transformation.This perspective holds that general trends towards individualism and social disintegration will produce changes in religion, making religious practice more individualized and spiritually focused. This in turn is expected to produce more spiritual seeking, although not exclusive to religious institutions.Eclecticism, which draws from multiple religious/spiritual systems and New Agemovements are also predicted to result.

In response to the religious transformation hypothesis, Ronald Ingle hart piloted the renewal of the secularization hypothesis. His argument hinges on the premise that religion develops to fill the human need for security. Therefore the development of social and economic security in Europe explains its corresponding secularization due to a lack of need for religion.However, religion continues in the third world where social and economic insecurity are rampant. The overall effect is expected to be a growing cultural disparity.

Psychometric approaches to religion

Since the 1960s psychologists of religion have used the methodology of psychometrics to assess different ways in which a person may be religious. An example is the Religious Orientation Scale of Allport and Ross,which measures how respondents stand on intrinsic and extrinsic religion as described by Allport. More recent questionnaires include the Religious Life Inventory of Batson, Schoenrade and Ventis, and the Age-Universal I-E Scale of Gorsuch and Venable. The former assesses where people stand on three distinct forms of religious orientation – religion as means, religion as end, and religion as quest. The latter assesses.

Developmental approaches to religion

Piaget and Kohlberg and has proposed a staged developmentof faith across the lifespan in terms of a holistic orientation, and is concerned with the individual's relatedness to the universal.James Fowler proposes six stages of faith development as follows: 1.Intuitive-projective 2.Symbolic Literal 3.Synthetic Conventional 4.Individuating 5.Paradoxical 6. Universalising. However, this model has been attacked from a standpoint of scientific research due to methodological weaknesses. Nevertheless, the concepts Fowler introduced seemed to

hit home with those in the circles of academic religion, and have been an important starting point for various theories and subsequent studies.

There are four primary types of **prayer** in the West. Poloma and Pendleton, utilized factor analysis to delineate these four types of prayer: meditative, ritualistic, petitioners, and colloquial. Further scientific study of prayer using factor analysis has revealed three dimensions of prayer. Ladd and Spike's first factor was awareness of self, inward reaching. Their second and third factors were upward reaching andoutward reaching. This study appears to support the contemporary model of prayer as connection.Prayer appears to have health implications. Prayer is also positively correlated with happiness and religious satisfaction (Poloma& Pendleton, 1989, 1991). Overall, slight health benefits have been found fairly consistently across studies.

There is considerable literature on the relationship between religion and health. Psychologists consider that there are various ways in which religion may benefit both physical and mental health, including encouraging healthy lifestyles, providing social support networks and encouraging an optimistic outlook on life; prayer and meditation may also help to benefit physiological functioning.

Religion appears to positively correlate with physical health.For instance, mortality rates are lower among people who frequently attend religious events and consider themselves both religious and spiritual. One possibility is that religion provides physical health benefits indirectly. Church attendees present with lower rates of alcohol consumption and improvement in mood, which is associated with better physical health. Kenneth Pargament is a major contributor to the theory of how individuals may use religion as a resource in coping with stress; His work seems to show the influence of attribution theory. Additional evidence suggests that this relationship between religion and physical health may be causal. Religion may reduce likelihood of certain diseases.

Religion is certainly not a guarantee for mental health. Evidence suggests that it can be a pathway to both mental health and mental disorder. For example, religiosity is positively associated with mental disorders that involve an excessive amount of self-control and negatively associated with mental disorders that involve a lack of self-control. Overall, religion is positively linked with mental health. This might be due to the social support that it offers to individuals. By these routes, religion has the potential to offer security and significance in life, as well as valuable human relationships, to foster mental health. Religion also provides coping skills to deal with stressors, or demands perceived as straining. This model of religious coping has been criticized for its over-simplicity and failure to take into account other factors, such as level of religiosity, specific religion, and type of stressor.

The large variety of meditation techniques shares the common goal of shifting attention away from habitual or customary modes of thinking and perception, in order to permit experiencing in a different way. Many religious and spiritual traditions that employ meditation assert that the world most of us know is an illusion. This illusion is said to be created by our habitual mode of separating, classifying and labelling our perceptual experiences. Meditation is *empirical* in that it involves direct experience. However it is also *subjective* in that the meditative state can be directly known only by the experience, and may be difficult or impossible to fully describe in words. Meditation can induce an altered state of consciousness characterised by a loss of awareness of extraneous stimuli, one-pointed attention to the meditation object to the exclusion of all other thoughts, and feelings of bliss.

Psychotherapy

Various forms of explicitly religious psychotherapies that maintain the traditional psychological framework have recently become more prevalent. Clients' religious beliefs are increasingly being considered in psychotherapy with the goal of improving service and effectiveness of treatment. A resulting development was theistic psychotherapy. Conceptually, it consists of theological principles, a theistic view of personality, and a theistic view of psychotherapy. This opens up the potential for therapists to directly utilize religious practices and principles in therapy, such as prayer, forgiveness, and grace.

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