



Three Crucial Issues in Biblical Counseling¹

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Questions with regard to our view of humanity (anthropology) and how we determine truth (epistemology) are central to the practice of counseling. The view of science upon which we base our understanding of psychology and psychotherapy will also determine our willingness to accept—and conversely the sharpness with which we reject—elements of the various systems of counseling and psychology.

Issue One: Epistemology: The Infallibility of Scripture

Evangelical Christians believe that Scripture was “given by inspiration of God to be the rule of faith and life;” and that the Scriptures teach “what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man,” as the *Westminster Confession of Faith* states. This doctrine of the inspiration and authority of Scripture is 1) based upon the witness of Scripture to itself—what it claims; and 2) derived from the witness of Scripture *as a whole*.

The foundation of a biblical approach to counseling is based upon our view of Scripture *as a whole* with regard to counseling. The heart of biblical counsel is that Scripture alone should be our “rule” for all of life. This would include doctrines or theories on human nature (anthropology); on why we do the things we do (human motivation); and on what God requires of us as we go about the business of worshipping and enjoying Him—our chief end or purpose, according to the Westminster Catechisms.

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According to theologian John Murray, “Any doctrine [or theory] severed from the total structure of revelation is out of focus.” If the total structure of revelation in Scripture is to be the *rule of our life*, then any psychological theory built apart from Scripture is out of focus in this manner as well. Particularly in the areas of counseling theory, abnormal psychology, diagnosing mental illness and theories of human personality or development, psychology interacts with theories of human anthropology, motivation and purpose; and has the potential to be out of focus when it ignores the Biblical data on human nature. While this point is obvious for secular psychological theories, it can also be true of “Christian” ones as well.

There are at least two ways that Christian theories of psychology and counseling can be out of focus in this way:

- Declaring its limited application by formally confessing the authority of Scripture but not consistently applying it when dealing with counseling and psychology.
- Imposing an arbitrary meaning upon certain Scriptures—i.e., interpretive, hermeneutic error.

The first point suggests that we will intellectually acknowledge the authority of Scripture, but then limit its sufficiency to speak to issues in counseling or psychology. Variations on this point can include stating that the Bible is not a textbook for counseling or psychology; or as Stanton Jones and Richard Butman (the authors of *Modern Psychotherapies*) comment, the Bible “is not an all-sufficient guide for the discipline of counseling.”

The Bible does not claim to be a textbook or “all-sufficient guide” for the disciplines of counseling or psychology. But if Scripture is to be a “rule for faith and life,” the disciplines of psychology and counseling cannot be independent of Biblical authority. Systemizing psychological and counseling knowledge into textbooks and coherent disciplines should not grant that knowledge (in the form of general revelation) autonomy from the authority and sufficiency of Scripture. In the words of Anselm: “Grant that I may taste by love what I apprehend by knowledge, that I may feel in my heart what I touch through the Spirit For I do not seek to understand so that I may believe; but I believe so that I may understand.” What we believe as Christians precedes our understanding. If we believe that Scripture is infallible, authoritative, and sufficient, then it has a claim upon our lives that transcends time, culture, and even well accepted theories of psychology and counseling. *Modern Psychotherapies* is generally insightful and has a significant value for the Christian in its critique of

various psychotherapies (I use it as a text), but it can be “out of focus” at times because it grants too much autonomy to theories of counseling and psychology.

Infallibility of Scripture is Presupposed

The second point suggests that we can read into a particular Scripture (eisegesis) what we want it to say. The presumed infallibility of the entirety of Scripture is a corrective for the human tendency to see what we want to see in Scripture; to impose our understanding upon what God truly says in his Word.

The infallibility of Scripture is not something that can be “proved,” empirically or scientifically, as we prove the existence of atoms or electricity. For example, how could we prove that the first chapter of Genesis is substantially true—what independent evidence do we possess regarding the action by which created organisms came into being? Or how can we prove that after Christ ascended into heaven that he sat down at the right hand of the Father? In the words of John Murray, “It can be demonstrated that Scripture so teaches but not that these things are true.” We believe Scripture is infallible, because Scripture says so; and we believe what Scripture says.

Although there is a type of logical circularity here, there is also evidence we can muster to support this claim. Thus there is a “spiraling” of logic and interpretation and not just a vicious circle. Beginning with the presumption of Scriptural infallibility, we can logically advance our understanding of a doctrine or belief before returning to “because Scripture says so.” But the authority and infallibility of Scripture is ultimately presumed. We believe Scripture is true because it says it is.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

One of the two classic passages on the inspiration and authority of Scripture (the other is 2 Peter 1:21), 2 Timothy 3:16 also speaks to the significance of Scripture for counseling. 2 Tim. 3:16–17 reads:

“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.”

A literal translation of 3:16 would be: All Scripture [is] God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness. All Scripture is God-breathed (*theopneustos*) and profitable (*ophelimos*). It is used for teaching, reproof, correction and training in righteousness; so that the believer is

competently equipped for the work God has for him/her to do. *Theopneustos* is a unique word in Scripture; found only here in this passage. In circumstances such as these, we should presume the significance or importance of what the author is communicating by using a rare or unique word. Paul is saying something of extreme importance to Timothy and us: Scripture is *God breathing* on us—imparting his breath and life to us. *All Scripture* is like this for the purposes just described.

Profitable (*ophelimos*) is itself a rare word, found only three other time in two verses: 1 Timothy 4:8 (for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of *value* in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.) and Titus 3:8 (The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and *profitable* for people). Useful, valuable, beneficial, are all terms that apply to the English translation of this word. Here in 2 Timothy 3:16 Paul is saying that *all Scripture* is God-breathed *and* useful—for reproof, correction, training in “righteousness.” All Scripture is useful for training in righteous and godliness; to prepare those who believe to do good works. The grammatical construction here is saying that “God-breathed” and “useful” are equally applicable to all of Scripture in the task of training for righteousness. This exegetical point becomes significant when we see how of 2 Timothy 3:16 can be interpreted in a manner that limits Scripture’s application to counseling and psychology as discussed above.

Righteousness in the passage, in a broad sense, means “the state of him who is as he ought to be”; the condition acceptable to God. This process is also the heart of any counseling activity: reproof, correction, training in “righteousness” (as defined by the “rule” used to gauge how well-equipped the person is for the purpose he/she is being reproofed, trained, or corrected). As Dave Powlison says, “The equipping and overseeing work of the pastors and the one-anothering of the rest of the body of Christ are intrinsically counseling activities.” Counseling that proceeds from the starting point of believing in the authority and infallibility of Scripture as noted here must self-consciously seek to use Scripture as its standard or rule for what it believes and what it practices.

Issue Two: Anthropology: the Doctrine of Humanity

“If as the Bible teaches, the most important thing about man is that he is inescapably related to God, we must judge as deficient any anthropology which denies that relatedness.” (Anthony Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*, p. 4)

A wide variety of responses have been offered in answer to the questions: “What is man” (anthropology) and “Why do we do the things we do?” (motivation). As belief in God fades away, so does the consideration of how we are related to God in theories of human anthropology and motivation. I want to suggest that there are two general types of non-Christian anthropologies: idealistic and materialistic; each addressing a crucial aspect of a biblical view of human nature.

An idealistic anthropology emphasizes the nonmaterial, spiritual aspect of humanity. Akin to Plato, there is attention to the ideals of reason and intellect; the real “essence” of who we are. And there is a corresponding de-emphasis on the physical, bodily aspect of our existence. Following Platonic thought, there can even be a belief in a spark of divinity within the person; the immortal soul. But since the body is of a lower order of reality, it is a hindrance to be overcome. It certainly is not resurrected.

Increasingly in our time, a materialistic view seems to dominate culturally accepted views of humanity. Here the bodily, material aspect of humanity is emphasized. Our mental, emotional, and spiritual lives are simply by-products of our material constitution. Humanity is at best part of a social or environmental structure. The individual is important only in terms of his/her relationship to society as a whole. A radical materialism such as that of B. F. Skinner sees humanity as fully determined by his/her environment. The notion of freedom, the ability to choose how we act is a myth. Moral responsibility for our actions is not something the individual can claim; the autonomous individual does not exist. Either society or the environment is ultimately responsible for behavior; good or bad.

We typically see in various systems of psychology and counseling the presumption of either a materialistic or idealistic anthropology. Abraham Maslow had an idealistic view in that he believed "people are all decent underneath;" that they have “a higher nature;” and that “evil or pain or threat is only a partial phenomenon, a product of not seeing the world whole and unified.” Carl Rogers also believed people were “decent.” In his opinion: "the core of man's nature is essentially positive;" and he is a "trustworthy organism." His understanding of human behavior was that it was “exquisitely rational.”

So when psychological idealists grapple with human motivation (why we do the things we do), the sinful, irredeemable nature of the heart is not considered; nor is it searched and tested by God (Jer. 17:9–10).

Psychological materialists, in their own fashion, do attempt to explain the observable influence of sin upon human nature. However, they sacrifice the glory of humanity as created in the image of God. The materialism of B. F. Skinner is seen in this statement of Frazier in *Walden Two*: “I deny that freedom exists at all. Perhaps we can never *prove* that man isn’t free; it’s an assumption. But the increasing success of a science of behavior makes it more and more plausible.” While *Walden Two* is a work of fiction, Skinner did claim in a 1956 *American Psychologist* article that his protagonist, Frazier, is often boldly setting forth ideas that Skinner himself was not prepared to advance in his own name.

Sigmund Freud was a psychological materialist of a different sort. The “organ” of the human psyche (or mental life) is the brain, according to Freud. Freud believed that between the brain and the “data” of our conscious acts, mental life is a function of the *id*, which contains the genetic inheritance of instinct; the *ego* (“from what was originally a cortical layer”), which controls voluntary muscular movement and performs the task of self-preservation; and the *super-ego*, which is the absorbed influence from other people: parents, family, teachers, role models, and culture.

These two categories of anthropology, idealistic, and materialistic, emphasize one aspect of humanity at the expense of others. Idealistic anthropologies accentuate one’s soul or reason, while minimizing the full reality of his/her material structure. Materialistic anthropologies absolutize the physical part while denying the reality of what we see as the “mental” or “spiritual” side of humans. Both of these errors proceed from a marginalization or denial of the existence of God; and a failure to consider how humans are related to Him. Where these anthropologies view one aspect of human existence to be ultimate and apart from any dependence upon God, they are guilty of idolatry. As Oswald Chambers has said, “The disposition of sin is not immorality and wrong-doing, but the disposition of self-realization—I am my own god.” So what motivates humans to do what we do—the same thing at times. We want to be independent from God.

Idolatry and Motivation

This notion of idolatry is a key concept for Biblical counseling within the counseling relationship as well as the critique of psychological and counseling systems. Question 95 of the Heidelberg Catechism which asks: “What is idolatry” (Mark Noll, *Confessions and Catechisms of the Reformation*, 157); and then answers: “It is to imagine or possess something in which to put one’s trust in place of or beside the one true God who has revealed himself in his Word.” John Calvin said that “the human mind is, so to speak, a perpetual forge of idols.” Biblical counseling is fundamentally a process of rooting out and demolishing psychic idols.

A Christian anthropology and theory of motivation will recognize that humanity was created in the image of God and that as a result of the Fall, has become perverted; a veritable “factory of idols.” This imaging of God is something true of all people; so we must always view others in the light of this destiny. The image of God in humanity is metaphysical; we *are* the image of God; we don’t just possess it. The physical aspect of our nature is then a part of this image. We image God in our threefold relationship toward God, toward others, and toward nature. After the Fall, we began to function wrongly in all three relationships. In redemption the image is renewed, so that we can now be properly directed towards God, others, and nature. In *The Weight of Glory*, C. S. Lewis said:

It is a serious thing . . . to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or the other of these destinations. It is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all lovers, all play, all politics. . . . It is immortals that we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit—immortal horrors or everlasting splendors.

There has been a twofold perversion of the self-image of humanity after the Fall. Sometimes it is inordinately high (in the form of sinful pride) or excessively low (in the form of feeling of shame or worthlessness). Separate from the grace of God, humans tend to think of themselves as autonomous. They seek to live as they please; refusing to obey God or his commandments. Here there is not a sense of dependence upon God, but rather pride in personal achievement and an exaggerated sense of self-importance.

Conversely, because a person realizes that he falls short of what he should be, he often looks down upon himself; despises and even hates himself. Carl Rogers said, “The central core of difficulty in people as I have come to know them . . . is that in the great majority of cases they despise themselves, regard themselves as worthless and unlovable.”

Created in the image of God, but fallen is a biblical approach to human anthropology. Carl Rogers and other psychological theorists can rightly and even biblically address one aspect of humanity, and still be idolatrous in minimizing or ignoring the other.

Issue Three: The Role of Science in Counseling and Psychology

In addition to anthropology and epistemology, a third crucial issue for Biblical counseling is to understand the role of science in systems of counseling and psychology. The view of science upon which we base our understanding of psychology and counseling will also determine our willingness to accept—and conversely the sharpness with which we reject—significant elements of the various systems of counseling and psychology. The three epistemological priorities discussed by Dave Powlison for biblical counseling in the “Cure of Souls” are relevant here with regard to the role of science. “Articulating our own model (1st) and critiquing other models (2nd) frees us to learn from others (3rd) without being counter-converted or becoming syncretistic.” The general revelation of all “scientific” knowledge is necessarily subordinate to the special revelation of Scripture. Especially when this knowledge presumes or articulates theories of human nature and motivation, Christians need to carefully and intentionally apply these priorities.

Our starting point in all thinking should be with God and His revelation in Scripture. We presume the authority and preeminence of His Word to the tasks of psychology, counseling and science. So then, our theory of psychology, our model of counseling, or our view of science must be built upon and compatible with His revelation in Scripture. The foundation of any truly Christian system of thought must be, “What does the Bible say?” All systems of thought (including psychology, counseling and science) should then be appraised from the same starting point, “Is it compatible with Scripture?” Then and only then can we trust that what we see and what we learn from this natural revelation. We must be sure that we have not “exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.” (Ro. 1:25)

There is a vast literature on the philosophy of science, and the relationship of science to religion which I cannot fully address. Here I will make some opening remarks on the coherence of psychology as a science; survey three ways of understanding science (there are many more; and even more subtle qualifications of the ones I will present); note a couple of general ways to view the encounter of religion and science; and point out along the way some of the areas in which these issues are crucial for Biblical counseling.

The Coherence of Psychology as a Science

I want to first suggest that approaching psychology as a “coherent scientific discipline” may be a mistake. A better way of thinking and referring to psychology might be as the division of psychological *studies* or *sciences*. The sheer diversity of subjects covered by psychology is too broad to fit within one scientific paradigm. Sigmund Koch, a major thinker in the philosophy of psychology, stated “For some years I have argued that psychology has been misconceived, whether as science or any kind of coherent discipline devoted to the empirical study of man.” He suggests that psychology departments become “divisions of psychological studies.” He went on to note that nothing “so awesome as the total domain comprised by the functioning of all organisms (not to mention persons) could possibly be the subject matter of a coherent discipline.” Psychological events are multi-determined; they are ambiguous in their human meaning, and contextually bound in complex and vaguely defined ways. This means that the inquirer is necessarily constrained in his investigation, and limited in the knowledge he can hope to uncover (Sigmund Koch 1999, pp. 23–24).

Koch stated that the “*hope* of a psychological science became indistinguishable from the *fact* of psychological science. The entire subsequent history of psychology can be seen as the ritualistic endeavor to emulate the forms of science in order to sustain the delusion that it already is a science.” (Koch 1973, 636) One example of this from the work of Carl Jung is in the opening paragraphs of his 1938 work, *Psychology and Religion*, where he said “Notwithstanding the fact that I have often been called a philosopher, I am an empiricist and adhere to the phenomenological standpoint. I trust that it does not collide with the principles of scientific empiricism if one occasionally makes certain reflections which go beyond a mere accumulation and classification of experience.” (1-2)

The diversity noted by Koch is not confined to just psychology or the other social sciences. Writing about science from within the hard or natural sciences, Henry Bauer (1994, 28) observed that after saying that science is the study of nature, and that scientific knowledge is valid as long as it does not contradict nature, you have said all that is truly common among the sciences. This diversity in science comes partly from what sort of science it is: young or mature; data-driven or theory-driven; data-rich or data-poor; experimental or observational; quantitative (hard science) or qualitative (social science). These five characterizations begin to suggest where some of the problems within the diversity of psychology may lie.

Particularly when psychological findings are theory-driven instead of data-driven; or observationally-based instead of experimental we find competing explanations of the data, and a divergence—rather than a consensus—in how to properly interpret the results. In these cases, the findings should be of limited value beyond the context in which the observations took place. Bauer noted how the specializations within each scientific field have become “an idiosyncratic blend of theorizing and empiricism” which in turn results in distinct notions of what is knowledge, and to what extent that knowledge can be viewed as “certain.” To generalize beyond the immediate situation in these cases is more like speculation, than good science. But this type of speculative “science,” seems to occur more frequently in certain areas of psychological study; namely in counseling theory, abnormal psychology, diagnosing mental illness, and certain theories of human personality or development. Extending the claims of these areas of psychology beyond what its findings legitimately establish as certain can and will create a myriad of problems. To use a biblical metaphor, we are in danger of building our psychological house on sinking sand.

For example, if an individual presumes an idealistic view of human nature, how would they interpret data that indicates there is no strong correlational relationship between measures of self-esteem and social problems? The editor of *The Social Importance of Self-Esteem* was “disappointed” that every study reported in the book demonstrated a low correlation between self-esteem and behavior; because for him and others, it was self-evident that self-esteem was “the causal prior factor in individuals” getting involved in socially problematic behavior. A popular self help writer, Nathaniel Branden said: “I cannot think of a single psychological problem—from anxiety and depression, to fear of intimacy or of success, to spouse battery or child molestation—that is not traceable to the problem of poor self-esteem.”

If the correlational evidence is weak, the causal relationship between self-esteem and social problems should be questioned. This doesn't occur because of the original idealistic presupposition of human nature: humans are basically good; and thus should have a healthy opinion of themselves. So if they become involved in socially problematic behavior, it must be that something outside of the individual has caused him to despise himself.

A Biblically errant view of human nature will tend to ignore or misinterpret data that is contradictory to its basic premise. Coupled with a methodological presumption that what is observed constitutes a firm basis for knowledge (I see; therefore it is as I see), this uncritical acceptance can lead to a confident, and even "scientific" endorsement of psychological theories that are in direct contradiction to Scripture; and therefore wrongly present who we are and why we do the things we do.

Three Ways of Understanding Science

The "Traditional" Inductive View of Science

Modern science began when systems of theory or belief were based upon evidence and not just on tradition or revelation (Bauer 1999, 33). Beginning with Francis Bacon, science held that we could not simply reason our way to truth. Reason alone could not assure us of the validity of our conclusions; experiment and observation were also necessary. This empirical methodology became the foundation upon which scientific inquiry in any discipline was based. Bacon conceived of science as a massive, communal effort of induction. That is, moving from premises (or observational statements) about what we have observed to conclusions about what we have not. Discrete facts about nature would be gathered together, and from this accumulated body of knowledge, general laws would be formulated. The basic assumption that made all this possible was to presume the uniformity of natural causes. If we observed "a" result in "b" 1,000 times, we were confident that if "a" were to occur again, "b" would follow. Not only was inductive, empirical thinking a radical departure from previous ways of organizing knowledge, it was an extremely effective way of doing so as well. But this success came with a price, as knowledge was separated from value; and truth was divorced from meaning.

What followed from the success of scientific inquiry was a philosophical belief in naturalism, where nature is the only realm there is, and science is our only access to

the fundamental structures and principles governing that reality. In science, a methodology of naturalism called positivism emerged. Whether or not philosophical naturalism was true or not, it was thought that science must proceed empirically as if it were true, excluding all reference to the subjective, including the supernatural, from its descriptions, explanations, and theories. Francis Schaeffer calls this the birth of *modern*, modern science. The unity of natural causes became the unity of natural causes in a *closed* system; the closed system of nature. God, freedom, meaning, or value were either meaningless or didn't exist if they couldn't be located within the realm of nature (Schaeffer 1968, 21; 36–38).

There are two problems with this view of science that Del Ratzsch (2000, 93) points out. The first is that belief in the uniformity of natural causes (essential for science to be done) must be presupposed; it cannot be proven with certainty. Inductively, there is always the possibility that the next phenomena will not fit the established pattern or the accepted law. Second, the additional axioms required for a scientific investigation must also be presumed. “Thus either accepting science is not justified, or there is some nonscientific justifiable basis for accepting science.” So there are some areas of knowledge that do exist *outside* the competence of science; at least there are if we are willing to accept science and its foundational axioms. This also implies that science cannot be the *only* legitimate basis for believing in something. Nature is not a closed system.

The Falsificationist View of Science

Separate from the philosophical problems of naturalism, even a careful, inductive investigation of phenomena cannot automatically qualify the conclusions of that investigation as valid science. A simplistic inductive methodology to science presumes that science starts with careful observation that in turn yields a secure basis upon which to build theoretical knowledge (I see; therefore it is as I see). But it is naïve to assume that brute observation is possible; or that it precedes theory. The reverse is actually true—theory of some sort always precedes observation. There are no uninterpreted “facts.” Additionally, as A. F. Chalmers (1994, 32) notes, “observational statements do not constitute a firm basis upon which scientific knowledge can be founded because they are fallible.” It is not always as it appears to be.

Karl Popper took this last point on observational statements even further. He stated that no amount of empirical data could raise the probability of a scientific theory above

zero; we “can never give positive reasons which justify the belief that a theory is true.” Science can never claim to have attained absolute truth. But science could systematically eliminate or falsify mistaken theories. According to Popper, for a theory to be scientific, it had to be empirically testable, or *falsifiable*. A further qualification of Popper’s falsificationist view of science is that the empirical data itself gathered to test a theory also had to be falsifiable in order for it to be legitimately accepted as scientific data (Ratzsch 2000, 34). The acceptability of an observational statement (or theory) was based upon its ability to survive a series of these attempts to falsify or “test” its validity. Science is not based upon solid bedrock, according to Popper. Rather like erecting a building upon piles driven into a swamp, we simply stop driving more piles (our attempts to falsify the theory) “when we are satisfied the piles are firm enough to carry the structure, as least for the time being.” (Chalmers 1994, 63)

Two problems exist with a consistent falsificationist position. First, not only does a consistent falsificationist position reject the possibility for a theory to be conclusively proved to be true, it also means that theories can never be conclusively falsified. Some later development may come along which challenges the observational statements that the falsification was based upon. The certainty of inductive truth and falseness is not possible. Second, given the fallibility of observational statements, the observational statements used to challenge or falsify a theory could be wrong. In this manner, a legitimate scientific theory could be rejected on the basis of a wrong interpretation of the data. The history of science has been fortunate to not have been ruled by falsificationism, in that several of its best examples of scientific theory, including Newton’s gravitational theory, Maxwell’s kinetic theory of gases, and Copernicus’s theory of a sun-centered solar system faced early challenges from (seemingly) legitimate, but conflicting observational statements. According to the falsificationist standard, they should have been rejected. Fortunately, there was enough of a consensus within the respective fields of science to not immediately reject these (and other) theories; and eventually the competing observational statements themselves were falsified (Chalmers 1994, 60–67).

So both a traditional inductive approach and a falsificationist approach to science have their respective limitations. And the above discussion suggests there is at least one other aspect of science to consider, namely the importance of consensus, which we will turn to in a moment. Here I’d like to suggest that the two views of science discussed above can be correctives for the limitations of each other. Returning to the

characterization of inductive methodology as “I see; therefore it is as I see,” falsification adds that we must then systematically attempt to test or falsify the inductive observational statement that emerges from our empirical, inductive method. And even when this observational statement has withstood the testing process to our satisfaction, we must realize that there may still be a future adjustment needed to the theory as we add to our knowledge. So we then adjust our methodological characterization of science to: “I saw; I tested; and so far it seems to be as I see it.”

But the consistent use of scientific methodology (inductive or falsifiable) as discussed above can utilize a form of empiricism that excludes observational statements consistent with Biblical teaching on the grounds that they are not “objective” or “neutral.” This was pointed out in the above discussion on positivism, but here I want to note that empiricism does not automatically exclude observational statements that are consistent with Biblical teaching on topics such as human nature; how people should behave towards one another; what God requires of us; and so on. Empiricism generally falls into two types. One type allows for the possibility of innate ideas or beliefs (subjectivity), while the other rejects the possibility (McLeish 1993, 233). So an empiricism that denies the existence of innate ideas or beliefs (as with positivism and a consistent falsificationist) denies from the outset the possibility of a view of science consistent with Biblical teaching (which requires the presumptive belief in God; His revelation in Scripture; etc.). Additionally, the presence of some innate ideas or beliefs may be acceptable, while others necessary for its compatibility with Scripture could be excluded (i.e.: Jung).

Consensus and the Kuhnian View of Science

There exists what Henry Bauer has called a “knowledge filter” by which initial scientific investigation (called frontier science) moves through a gauntlet of publication, peer review, and pruning to arrive at generally reliable “textbook” science. This filter involves a process by which other knowledgeable scientists review, replicate, extend, or reject the findings of the original investigation. Applying Popper’s building metaphor, if enough individual scientists drive piles into the same area of the swamp as the original pile (the initial frontier science), eventually you will be able to build your building (see your findings acknowledged as valid science). This filtering process highlights how “science seeks to attain a consensus of rational opinion over the widest possible field.” (Bauer 1994, 44–51) So we must now adjust our characterization of

scientific investigation to something like this: “I saw; I tested; and while it seems to be as I see it, my findings must be reviewed and validated by others.”

While the role of consensus in science is important for refining initial scientific speculation into reliable textbook science, it can pose some problems for innovation in science (as Thomas Kuhn discussed in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*), as well as for the compatibility of science and religion. While scientific knowledge per say may be valid as long as it does not contradict nature, a valid **Biblical** sense of science requires the added criteria of scientific knowledge not contradicting the special revelation of Scripture. The wrong-footed application of this additional criteria to an interpretation of Scripture that affirmed an earth-centered solar system (against the work of Copernicus and Galileo), is the classic historic example to which scientists point when justifying why the “subjective opinions” of Scripture must be kept apart from science. But as noted above, attempts to present science itself as neutral are equally in error. There are no uninterpreted facts.

The lesson to be learned from Copernicus was that consensus in scientific and religious belief can be wrong; not that science and religion must be kept apart from each other, or that scientific knowledge is the best and only way to attain true knowledge. Science is a human activity and as such is fallible. Interpreting Scripture (hermeneutics) is a human activity and thus fallible as well. A proper Biblical sense of the encounter of science and Scripture should recognize the fallibility of scientific theory and Biblical interpretation, so that apparent conflicts between science and Scripture result in a reexamination of both the theory and the interpretation. A valid Biblical science is then compatible with both general revelation in nature and special revelation in Scripture.

So human nature as created in the image of God but fallen; and Scripture as the final arbitrator for “theories” about human nature, and how to change human behavior (psychology and counseling) together act as limiting factors to Biblically validate scientific paradigms of psychology. For example, affirming that humans are created in the image of God but fallen means that as we approach any investigation of the “soul” or psyche our investigation is at the highest risk of error because of the *noetic* effect of sin resulting from our fallen nature. Compatibility with a Biblical anthropology is essential for a proper Biblical scientific paradigm. All systems of psychology—and particularly psychotherapy—are at the highest risk level for error simply because they seek to address the center of human existence: the soul. The danger of error requires

the careful application of an infallible Scripture and a sharply critical assessment of any system that proposes to know *true* truth of the image of God.

We can illustrate the importance of this point by noting that several originators of psychological and psychotherapeutic systems were non-Christians who formulated and presented “life views” that were opposed to Biblical belief. A review of the biographies and works of Sigmund Freud, B. F. Skinner, Carl Jung, Eric Fromm, and Carl Rogers will illustrate this point nicely. However, *all* psychotherapeutic systems present life views or paradigms, whether that system is presented by a Christian or a non-Christian. Here I am drawing upon the sense of paradigm suggested by Thomas Kuhn in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. According to Kuhn, a paradigm is “the universally recognized scientific achievements that for a time provide model problems and solutions to a [scientific] community of practioners.” (Kuhn 1970, viii)

In later writings Kuhn suggested that a less confusing term for this sense of paradigm was “disciplinary matrix.” He did not presume that a new paradigm would naturally triumph over an older one because of its improved explanatory power. Rather like religion, “The transfer of allegiance from paradigm to paradigm is a conversion experience that cannot be forced.” (Kuhn 1970, 151) Within an essay written in the early 1960s, Kuhn observed that the social sciences were in a pre-scientific stage, with most areas still “characterized by fundamental disagreements about the definition of the field, its paradigm achievements, and its problems.” (Kuhn 1977, 222) This observation of the lack of consensus still largely applies to the fields of counseling and psychotherapy; as well as closely aligned areas of personality, abnormality, and psychiatric diagnosis. Bauer (1994, 131–133) makes a similar point, noting that if science is a body of agreed upon and relied upon knowledge, that “social sciences do not command such a coherent body of acknowledged fact.” Rather than a governing paradigm, there are distinct schools with different beliefs about basic issues.

The paradigm used by a scientific discipline must be compatible with Scripture and here in lies a fundamental problem with many of the existing paradigms for psychological sciences. Naturalism (believing that nature is the only reality, and that science is our only access to the fundamental structures and principles governing that reality) is a key element of the paradigms. So from the starting point of investigation within a particular psychological paradigm, a methodology that is antithetical to Biblical belief is insisted upon as a requirement for the investigation to be science and not pseudoscience.

Models for the Encounter of Science and Religion

A final consideration is for us to examine some general models of the encounter of religion and science. While there is a vast literature devoted to the relationship between science and religion, I recommend beginning with the work of Alister McGrath. I have read and draw upon some of his earlier works here, namely “Science and Religion: an Introduction” (1999) and “The Foundations of Dialogue in Science and Religion.” (1998) He has more recently published a three volume series “A Scientific Theology” and “The Science of God: an introduction to Scientific Theology” and other on the relationship of religion and science that are available through Amazon. McGrath’s background in both the natural sciences and theology in many ways places him as an ideal candidate to write upon the subject.

In “Science and Religion: an Introduction,” McGrath (1999, 44–50) suggests that there are two general ways with which to understand the interaction of science and religion, a confrontational (or warfare) model and a non–confrontational model. A confrontational model typically sees science and religion as grappling with one another in an epic conflict or “war” for cultural influence and legitimacy. With science currently having the upper hand, many Christians advocate for a vigorous counterattack as the most appropriate form of defense against the incursions of science. Attention and concern with the prevalence of naturalism within psychological methods and paradigms (as with historic Biblical, nouthetic counseling) means that its encounter with science will be dominated by the confrontational model.

Two non–confrontational models of the interaction of science and religion either see science and religion as convergent; or science and religion as distinct. The “science and religion as convergent” model presumes that “all truth is God’s truth”; and welcomes a scientific understanding of the universe, including human nature. Inevitably, this approach requires that adjustments be made to the content of religious faith at several points. In many ways this is an attractive model for a Christian, Biblical model for all the sciences, including psychology. It is also seemingly consistent with what Jay Adams says is of value with science “as a useful adjunct for the purposes of illustrating, filling in generalizations with specifics, and challenging wrong human interpretations of Scripture.” (Adams 1970, xxi) The dialogue among Christians can become heated when the convergent sense of psychological science as “all truth is God’s truth” results in a real or perceived dilution of the other two crucial issues in Biblical counseling, namely

the inerrant Scripture as our standard for truth; and “created in the image of God but fallen” as a starting point for understanding human nature. Given the prevalence of naturalism within the sciences the danger is real.

A second non–confrontational model sees science and religion as distinct categories; where each approaches reality on the basis of very different assumptions. Science is concerned with asking the “how” questions of reality, where theology and religion ask the “why” questions. Science therefore deals with secondary causes (interactions with nature), while religion addresses primary causes (the ultimate origin and purpose of nature). Given our discussions above on the impossibility of neutrality in both science and Biblical interpretation, this second non–confrontational model is ultimately impossible; and not acceptable to either modern science or Biblical counseling. If modern scientific consensus sees naturalism as essential to obtaining knowledge and truth, it cannot peacefully coexist with Biblical counseling. Conversely, if Biblical counseling requires the presupposition of the inerrant Scriptures, it has violated one of the basic tenets of scientific naturalism.

It seems that many Christian counselors and psychologists willing to pursue an “integration” of Biblical, theological knowledge with psychological belief attempt to use a combination of the two non–confrontational models of science. But because of the above concerns, namely the *noetic* effects of sin and scientific naturalism, these efforts are doomed to fail. Perhaps a stronger argument can be made for science and theology as distinct categories for other disciplines, but because of the overlapping spheres of influence between sanctification and counseling change; or theological anthropology and psychological theories of abnormality, development, personality, and psychiatric diagnosis, it doesn’t seem possible that this encounter model can apply to many of the psychological studies and religion. We return to the necessity of Powlison’s three epistemological priorities in the “Cure of Souls,” articulating our own model of counseling (1st) and critiquing other models (2nd) frees us to learn from the other (3rd) without being counter-converted or becoming syncretistic.

Conclusion

Simply put, there are subdivisions within the range of psychological and therapeutic studies which legitimately present their findings as scientific, and others whose claims as science are marginal at best. While “all truth is God’s truth,” we must guard against the noetic effects of sin in our efforts; for there is a spiritual war going on for the

human soul or psyche. A cautious and even skeptical approach to the pronouncements in counseling, psychiatric diagnosis, abnormal psychology, human personality, and human developmental theory is warranted and necessary from a Biblical counseling perspective.

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