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Is a Viable Theistic Program of Psychological Research Possible?

Michael Zhang

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Science

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ABSTRACT

Is a Viable Theistic Program of Psychological Research Possible?

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This thesis explores whether a viable theistic program of psychological research is possible. The importance of this exploration has to do with naturalism's bad monopoly on psychological science, inasmuch as naturalism prevents other worldviews from competing fairly in psychology's scientific marketplace by controlling the criteria of psychological science. Because theism is naturalism's most complete rival, considering theism's scientific potential in psychology is crucial to dismantling naturalism's bad monopoly. Contrary to conventional wisdom, theism encompasses a unique set of understandings about the natural events that constitute the discipline of psychology. Therefore, a robust scientific conception of theism would change how psychological researchers understand and utilize existing research methods and psychological topics. Not only are quantitative and qualitative methods capable of theistic deployment; traditionally theistic topics and radically secular topics within psychology can also be reconceptualized and investigated theistically. Indeed, theistic reconceptualizations of psychological theories and topics lead to new and different research questions, hypotheses, and predictions as well as original studies and prospective programs of research, suggesting that theism is heuristic for the discipline of psychology in its current constitution. A viable theistic program of psychological research is not only possible, but also necessary for psychological science.

Keywords: psychological science, naturalism, theism, worldviews, psychological research, methods, topics

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Is a Viable Theistic Program of Psychological Research Possible?.....	1
Chapter 1: Does Psychological Science Need Alternative Worldviews Like Theism?.....	6
Naturalism's Success: Good or Bad Monopoly?.....	7
The Worldview of Naturalism.....	16
Theism's Worldview Candidacy for Psychological Science.....	23
Objections to Theism.....	26
To Be Truly Scientific, or Not To Be.....	43
Conclusion.....	45
Chapter 2: Can Theism Add Something New or Different to Psychology?.....	47
Fundamental Differences.....	49
Other Conceptual Differences.....	52
Practical Implications for Psychology.....	53
Conclusion and Implications for Psychological Research.....	59
Chapter 3: What Does a Theistic Program of Psychological Research Call For	
Conceptually?.....	61
What are Theism's First Premises?.....	62
Does Theism Require a Wholly Different Philosophy of Science?.....	66
Are Existing Research Methods Capable of Theistic Deployment?.....	70
In What Ways Would Theism Change Conventional Forms of Inquiry in	
Psychology?.....	84
Conclusion.....	90

Chapter 4: What Would a Practical Program of Theistic Research Look Like?.....	91
Cognitive Development.....	92
Spiritual Development.....	102
Conclusion.....	114
A Viable Theistic Program of Psychological Research is Possible.....	115
References.....	116

Is a Viable Theistic Program of Psychological Research Possible?

Some recent efforts to expand the purview of psychological science have ventured into an unprecedented theistic territory. These efforts have led many psychologists and scholars to wonder about what a truly theistic approach to psychology might entail, i.e., a psychology that assumes a functionally relevant God. For example, Richards and Bergin (2004, 2005), Slife, Stevenson, and Wendt (2010), York (2009), and O'Grady (2012) have explored the possibility of theistic psychotherapeutic practices; Slife and Reber (2009a), Slife, Reber, and Lefevor (2012), and Nelson and Thomason (2012) have considered theistic approaches to psychological theorizing; Slife and Whoolery (2006) and Johnson (2007) have attempted to formulate a theistic philosophy of science for psychology; and Melling (2009, 2013), Slife and Reber (2009b), and Slife et al. (2012) have begun laying the groundwork for a theistic program of psychological research, with Slife et al. (2012) and Slife and Zhang (2014) bringing together the various branches of the theistic research project.

These proposals for a theistic approach to psychology beg an important question: can it really be done? Can these explorations be translated into an approach that allows for a theistic science of human psychology? More specifically, is a viable theistic program of psychological research possible? If such a program of research were possible, it would have important implications for psychological science and for the discipline of psychology in general. Indeed, a whole new program of research and practice would be opened for exploration, possibly yielding new insights into the nature of humans, behavior, and therapy.

In fact, Reber, Slife, and Downs (2012) have already begun to consider the answers to these timely questions and have demonstrated the preliminary fruitfulness and significance of a theistic approach to psychological research and scientific investigation. They describe two demonstration studies in their article that clearly seem to indicate the possibility of theistic research. Their first example shows how existing research can be tweaked to accommodate theistic hypotheses and explanations. Reber et al. make some modifications to an existing line of psychological research, illustrating how a theistic framework can generate new possibilities for investigating a conventional research topic. Their second example shows how theism can also spawn an entirely original program of psychological research, as well as new scientific instruments. This foray into theistic research leads Reber et al. to conclude that "...theistic programs of research have great heuristic potential, suggesting a whole host of possible hypotheses and research studies..." (p. 210).

However, they have yet to develop a comprehensive program of theistic psychological research, or thoroughly outline the contours of such a program, making observers wonder if an actual, heuristic program is really possible. One way to determine whether a viable theistic program of psychological research is possible is simply to set up theistically-informed studies and let the findings speak for themselves. Not only would this be a relatively unguided approach, however, it could also prove contrary to one of the primary justifications of a theistic approach to psychology, i.e., that findings are not capable of speaking for themselves (Slife et al., 2012).

Perhaps a better approach—one that is more disciplined and the one I will adopt in this thesis—is, first, an extensive treatment of the theoretical issues at play in raising

the title question, which would provide sufficient justification for exploring theism's scientific potential in psychology, followed by a practical rendering and application of theism in a prospective program of psychological research. Some preliminary theoretical work (Slife & Reber, 2009b; Slife et al., 2012), in this regard, has already been done, and a few prototypical conceptual and practical demonstrations have been made (Melling, 2009, 2013; Reber et al., 2012; York, 2012; Bishop, 2012), but a forward-looking program of research that is capable of cutting across several subdisciplines of psychology has not yet been outlined. Thus, this thesis will be different from what has been previously accomplished because it explores whether theism is sufficiently justified as an alternative scientific worldview in psychology and develops a prospective, practical program of research with which to move forward.

Such a prospective program is apropos because the main consumers of psychological information and services, whether in books or in counseling, are theists (Richards & Bergin, 2005; Reber, 2006; Vogel, Gerdin & McMinn, 2012; Reber et al., 2012, O'Grady, 2012); perhaps, for the first time, this population will be able to engage with a psychology that takes their preferred worldview seriously in its studies and practices. As Reber et al. (2012) put it, "Given the large number of theists, including theistic psychologists, theistic psychology students, theistic therapy clients, and theistic research participants, it appears to us to be potentially worthwhile and even important to put theistic hypotheses and theories to the test" (p. 210). In view of the significance of these implications, it seems prudent to explore whether a theistic approach to psychology can sustain a viable, and extensive, program of research (Slife & Reber, 2009b) that has

applicability to mainstream theories, methods, and topics. The purpose of the present project is to embark on this very exploration.

Undertaking this project requires me first to analyze, in this thesis, the monopolistic status of the current philosophy, or worldview, undergirding psychological science: naturalism. This analysis is needed in order to assess whether theism should be considered as a plausible additional worldview to the current dominance of the naturalistic worldview in guiding psychological science. If there is sufficient justification for theism to serve as an additional scientific worldview in psychology, it would be important to consider whether theism can bring new or different research findings to light, and thus add to psychology's encyclopedia. Therefore, I also explore whether theism is different enough from naturalism to warrant its inclusion as another guiding philosophy for psychological research. Many researchers presently assume that the findings generated by naturalistic methods sufficiently explain the psychology of all humans (Reber & Slife, 2013a), regardless of their worldview orientation, so it is important to describe how theistic modes of inquiry might be uniquely heuristic for psychological research.

Thus, following this discussion, I elucidate ways in which theism could alter conventional modes of psychological inquiry while retaining the use of existing psychological research methods. Furthermore, by utilizing these various ways in which theism offers an alternative research framework that redirects the deployment of quantitative and qualitative methods, I attempt to conceptualize a prospective program of practical research in developmental psychology as an applied exemplar of theistic psychological research. My chief objective for this thesis is to scrupulously follow the

assumptions and concepts of the theistic worldview, while working within some of the existing parameters of the psychological enterprise, such as method and subdiscipline, to see if I can give form to a prospective program of psychological research that makes conceptual, methodological, scientific, and practical sense to engage in. At the same time, the rationale and context for exploring the title question of this thesis will be clearly conveyed in this attempt to offer the most compelling answer yet.

Chapter 1: Does Psychological Science Need Alternative Worldviews Like Theism?

This opening chapter considers the fundamental question that must be adequately addressed before attempting any conceptualization of a theistic program of psychological research: “Does psychological science need alternative worldviews like theism?” Only if this question is answered affirmatively can a theistic program of research be justifiably considered. The problem with posing such a question, however, and the challenge to attempting to answer it affirmatively, is that most scholars and psychological scientists already believe they have answered this question quite convincingly, and that the answer is “no” (Johnson, 1990a; Starks, 2014; Helminiak, 2010). To them, time would be better spent simply doing psychological science instead of reflecting on what philosophically questionable aspects might undergird that science (Provine, 1990). As I will show in this chapter, understanding exactly what kind of science psychologists are doing is absolutely warranted as there are many such philosophically questionable aspects, and each is directly concerned with *naturalism*.

Thus, I begin this chapter by exploring what makes naturalism as successful as it is. Appropriately applying naturalism in a scientific context in psychology requires recognizing the extent to which it is a *worldview* rather than the natural world itself. Therefore, I expose the implications of naturalism’s worldview status. Next, I consider reasons for theism’s candidacy as not only another potential scientific worldview for psychology, but also perhaps the one deserving of most urgent consideration. Finding these reasons to be compelling, I will also examine the credibility of the common objections levied against theism’s worldview candidacy by responding to a string of claims that, both independently and taken together as a whole, color theism as inferior or

problematic compared to naturalism. I examine each of these claims in turn, showing that naturalism can be subjected to all of the same criticisms, and then further consider theism's status as a viable worldview candidate for psychological science by showing why psychological science might need the kind of worldview comparison that theism would allow for.

Naturalism's Success: Good or Bad Monopoly?

Naturalism is a system of ideas based on the premise that natural laws sufficiently explain the natural world (i.e., lawfulness), and therefore the supernatural need not be considered (i.e., godlessness) (Slife et al., 2012; Slife & Whoolery, 2006). Despite originating in the natural sciences, it has spurred countless successful programs of psychological research after being imported into modern scientific psychology (Johnson & Watson, 2012). It is so successful, in fact, that it could be said to have a monopoly on psychological science (Johnson & Watson, 2012; O'Grady & York, 2012; Slife & Zhang, 2014). While naturalism is to be highly commended as a consistent and constructive system of guiding scientific ideas for psychology, monopolies are not always a good thing. As Read (1960) put it in economic terms, "There are two ways to attain an exclusive position in the market, that is to say, there are two ways to achieve monopoly. One way is not only harmless—indeed, it is beneficial [good]; the other is bad. The beneficial way is to become superior to everyone else in providing some good or service. The bad way is to use coercive force to keep others from competing effectively and also from challenging one's position" (para. 5).

To illustrate this distinction clearer, consider the contrast between the following two notable historical examples of U.S. monopolies: Standard Oil and U.S. Steel.

Rockefeller's monopoly on the oil industry was initially deemed a good monopoly, to use Read's terms, because (his) Standard Oil Company was efficient and responsible, rising above the competition (Beattie, n.d.). Standard Oil used waste products such as gasoline to fuel its machines rather than pumping it into rivers like its competitors did, and even turned industrial waste into new products such as Vaseline and synthetic beeswax (Beattie, n.d.). In these ways, Standard Oil benefited not only the economy but also the environment; the competition, in the early years, was utterly bested because of Standard Oil's sheer excellence and superiority. Standard Oil's initial rise to excellence suggests all the features of a good monopoly.

Consider U.S. Steel on the other hand, which was originally considered a bad monopoly. While a good monopoly competes *fairly* because of its excellence, a bad monopoly competes *unfairly* by controlling the criteria by which it is judged. The formation of the United States Steel Corporation via merger by the likes of Carnegie, Morgan, and Schwab has been widely viewed as indicative of a bad monopoly (Beattie, n.d.; Reback, 2007) because U.S. Steel "exerted market power over the steel industry" (Reback, 2007, p. 105). Market power is characterized by "a firm's ability to raise prices without provoking an adverse competitive response" (McCraw & Reinhardt, 1989, p. 601). It creates, in other words, a non-competitive market structure (Parsons & Ray, 1975), where competitors have no way of competing fairly. After its merger, U.S. Steel began price fixing and this resulted in an increase in profits because it had control of the market and thus the judgments made of its quality; in other words, U.S. Steel could "justify" its sharp price increases with its prominent position.

This sort of price fixing suggests a bad monopoly because, as Reback (2007) put it, “If U.S. Steel had only been a more efficient competitor, then the competitor’s stock prices would have reacted negatively as the more efficient U.S. Steel captured some of their business, which would have reduced their profits [i.e., good monopoly]” (p. 113). However, the competitors’ profits actually increased (Reback, 2007), which could only happen “when a monopolistic U.S. Steel was able to increase the price of steel by controlling the market [i.e., bad monopoly]” (p. 113). Because U.S. Steel prevented early competitors from challenging its market position and competing fairly with it (Parsons & Ray, 1975; Reback, 2007), it was considered a bad monopoly. In other words, U.S. Steel did not eliminate its competition through excellence, as a good monopoly does; rather, it controlled the criteria (e.g., price) by which its competitors were judged, making it a bad monopoly.

In the case of naturalism and psychological science, this “monopoly” metaphor emphasizing fair competition is especially appropriate because naturalism’s dominance could actually be good for psychological science by eliminating unproductive competitors through excellence, and this metaphor takes that possibility into account. The other way of understanding and challenging dominance—the commonly adopted “power” metaphor emphasizing equality (Johnson & Watson, 2012; Slife & Zhang, 2014; O’Grady & York, 2012)—frames naturalism’s dominance not as success but as “hegemony,” “ideology,” “dogmatism,” “prejudice,” “dictatorship,” “marginalization,” “oppression,” and “totalitarianism” (see, e.g., Johnson & Watson, 2012; Slife & Zhang, 2014; O’Grady & York, 2012). This metaphor originates from the critical psychology tradition that tends to view the possession of power as necessarily problematic (Fox,

Prilleltensky & Austin, 2009). That is to say, naturalism's dominance represents a power differential that must be overturned or rebalanced for the sake of equality. Naturalism's dominance, from this perspective, is always bad for psychological science. Therefore, the "power" metaphor automatically discounts naturalism's success.

While this metaphor is used by many commentators such as critical psychologists to frame critiques of naturalism's influence on psychological science (Fox et al., 2009; Johnson & Watson, 2012; O'Grady & York, 2012), it is not critical enough in that it dismisses naturalism's success on the basis of power. These commentators do not take into account the possibility of the powerful being excellent and benevolent, like Standard Oil was in the beginning. In this sense, the "monopoly" metaphor is better than the "power" metaphor because it does not assume on an *a priori* basis that being powerful is wrong. After all, Standard Oil's position of power was earned through efficiency and excellence and it did a whole lot of good for the economy and environment; just because something is powerful does not mean it is not benevolent and excellent. Naturalism could very well fit that description as well, so the "monopoly" metaphor is preferable because it considers that naturalism's success could be a good thing or a bad thing for psychological science.

Framing naturalism and psychological science with the "monopoly" metaphor is a more even-handed approach that investigates naturalism's success more critically than the "power" metaphor. Naturalism's extraordinary success would cause the most critical of observers to wonder about the viability of the conditions surrounding, supporting, and sustaining its success in the scientific market of psychology, and to raise questions about the kind of influence naturalism has on psychological science in order to

determine whether naturalism has a good or bad monopoly on psychological science. These observers would question how naturalism's monopolistic status was achieved: Did it succeed by rising above competitors in a fair psychological marketplace of scientific ideas like Standard Oil (good monopoly) or did it come to this monopolistic status using market power and control like U.S. Steel (bad monopoly)? In other words, has naturalism been adequately tested, compared, and challenged against other possible scientific frameworks for psychology (good monopoly) or has it succeeded solely under its own set of conditions for success that prevent competitors from competing fairly with it (bad monopoly)? Put more simply another way, has naturalism earned (good monopoly) or enforced (bad monopoly) its monopolistic status?

The importance of this series of questions has to do with the very definition of psychological science. Naturalism has come to be identified with psychological science so that psychological science that is not naturalistic is actually not considered scientific. The National Academy of Sciences seems to support this sentiment in their statement that "the most basic characteristic of science [is] reliance upon naturalistic explanations" (Johnson, 1990a, 18). This, according to Johnson (1990a), means that "science by definition is based upon naturalism" (p. 19). The identification or confounding of naturalism with psychological science, however, could prove to be particularly problematic if Johnson (1990a) is correct in his appraisal of naturalism as a "highly controversial philosophical presupposition" (p. 15), to the extent "that it obscures its own untested presuppositions [whereby its] values and assumptions are 'the way of science' or axiomatic" (Reber & Slife, 2013a, p. 14). This *a priori* identification of naturalism with psychological science, and the general unawareness of naturalists about their own

assumptions (Reber & Slife, 2013a, Slife et al. 2012), means that naturalism has not been compared against other possible scientific frameworks for psychology since it automatically rules out all such possibilities as unscientific (Johnson, 1990a), thus making comparison unnecessary. That is to say, the confounding of naturalism with psychological science prevents the existence or growth of a fair marketplace of scientific ideas in psychology, not allowing alternative frameworks to compete, and thus making naturalism a bad monopoly like U.S. Steel originally was. Naturalism's influence on psychological science, in other words, is akin to price fixing, in that it controls the scientific marketplace of psychology and therefore judgments of research quality in that marketplace.

It is not surprise then that naturalism is considered psychological "science's central dogma" (Leahey, 1991, p. 379). Indeed, "naturalism's propensity toward dogmatism" (Reber & Slife, 2013a, p. 14) has led most psychologists to provide only naturalistic explanations and interpretations when they study natural events and processes in their scientific attempts to understand and explain psychological phenomena (Slife & Reber, 2009a). This approach to psychological science has become so dogmatic that an exclusive focus on methods and topics that are natural coupled with naturalistic understanding and interpretation is largely considered the *only* way of performing respectable and rigorous scientific investigation in psychology. In this sense, naturalism has a bad monopolistic claim upon psychological science, exerting a clear, unchallengeable, dominance that allows it to legislate "in advance... that only naturalistic explanations of phenomena be considered acceptable" (Larmer, 2012, p. 135). As Johnson (1990a) notes, "The problem with scientific naturalism as a worldview is that it

takes a sound methodological premise of natural science and transforms it into a dogmatic statement about the nature of the universe” (p. 21).

Despite these criticisms, many are quick to point out that “The reason that naturalism is preferred by psychological scientists is because it *works*” (Provine, 1990, p. 24, emphasis added), and that it is perfectly reasonable that naturalism has a monopoly on psychological science, and not at all dogmatic. In other words, Provine and others like him are making a Standard Oil claim about naturalism, indicating that naturalism is a good monopoly because it is benevolent and excellent, all the while being open and fair to scientific competitors yet maintaining that because it works it is the single best scientific alternative for psychology. There is no doubt that naturalism is very successful in psychological science. It has produced findings that have allowed for extraordinary modern progress such as “the development of new technologies and tools” (Reber & Slife, 2013a, p. 14). Thus, it not only “works” but is also “useful” and “productive” (p. 14). However, as Reber and Slife note, such notions are “meanings, understood in terms derived from [naturalism]” (p. 14). That is, naturalism defines what it means when something “works” or is “useful” or “productive.”

It is important to note, in this regard, that there are no universal criteria for scientific success, much in the same way that there are no universal criteria for social, political, or economic success: success depends on the particular frame in which it is conceived, viewed, and measured. In economics, for example, rational choice theory has typically determined what economic success means, such that only consumer decisions reflecting an instrumental rationality, such as getting more for less or getting the best deal, are considered economically successful (Scott, 2000). This framework for success

implies that consumer decisions motivated by emotion and sentiment at the expense of “rational choice,” such as paying top dollar for name brands, are not successful economic decisions per se. But consumers are often equally if not more satisfied when they buy name brands and they frequently make purchases of this kind (Murray, 2013). This suggests that there may not be any universal criteria for economic success, or perhaps any sort of success, because success is interpreted and understood within a particular, preexisting framework.

In naturalism’s case, it has set the conditions for and the definitions of what it means to be scientifically successful. Consider, for example, one of naturalism’s defining features—natural lawfulness—and its influence upon the scientific principle of replicability. Natural laws imply that the world operates in the same ways everywhere, every time, and with every one (Slife & Whoolery, 2006), meaning that the more a study’s findings are replicated, the more successful those findings are. Laws are inherently replicable in this naturalistic sense, and therefore the scientific requirement of replicability assumes they are most important for scientific success. Because the lawful is regular and repeatable across all contexts, the success of finding laws depends on their repeatability and thus replicability in scientific studies. Therefore, as one psychology textbook author put it, “*We shouldn’t place too much stock in a psychological finding until it’s been replicated*” (Lilienfeld et al., 2013, p. 24, emphasis in the original).

However, by emphasizing replicability in this naturalistic way, certain phenomena and events will automatically be regarded as less than scientific or pseudoscientific because they are not easily replicable. For example, rigorous studies of paranormal phenomena often produce startling, significant, singular findings, but because they are

not replicable, they are not considered successful or real because of naturalism's criterion for scientific success: "As researchers of extra-sensory perception (ESP) can attest, a lack of replicability is construed by psychologists as a lack of real or ultimate existence" (Slife & Whoolery, 2006, p. 223). In other words, the lawfulness criterion of naturalism is used to frame its own notion of what it means to be scientifically successful—replicability, in this case. This is the reason parapsychology is often considered pseudoscientific (Lilienfeld et al. 2013), and even unscientific. In fact, in many introductory psychology textbooks, the proper approach to psychological science is contrasted to pseudoscience with scientific characteristics defined in terms of naturalistic assumptions (Lilienfeld et al., 2013; Starks, 2014) or the criteria naturalism controls.

Hence, naturalistic scientific success can only be understood in naturalistic terms. The upshot is this is not the same as scientific success per se. Therefore, naturalism can lead to scientific accomplishments, and can claim to be successful in this way, but it is not itself a scientific accomplishment. When you frame both the criteria for success and the investigation to take place (e.g., method), there is a stacked deck or rigged game that always allows you to "win." This point is important because it suggests that the monopolistic claim naturalism has on psychological science is enforced by unfair preclusion (bad monopoly) rather than earned by fair comparison (good monopoly). Until naturalism is subjected to a fair test, it will remain a bad monopoly for psychological science.

This fair test can only be one of comparison or competition with other philosophies or frameworks, much like in a fair economic marketplace, since no framework can be subjected to its own conditions for testing (Slife et al., 2012). Such

competition is necessary to bring a fair psychological marketplace of scientific ideas into existence and in order to break up naturalism's bad monopoly that is detrimental to the market. How exactly can naturalism be appropriately tested and compared with other possible scientific frameworks in psychology to bring about fair competition? The key to accomplishing this task lies in first recognizing the extent to which naturalism is a worldview.

The Worldview of Naturalism

Naturalism's bad monopoly is also partly the result of its improper identification with the objective natural world. This identification happens at the methodological and the metaphysical levels. The methods of naturalistic psychological science are assumed by many to be neutral, "transparent and unbiased windows to the real objective world" (Slife et al., 2012, p. 215). These methods are thought to map the natural world as it is, utilizing a "neutral or universal logic that attempts to sweep away the subjective elements of human experience, such as biases and assumptions, to reveal the uninterpreted, assumptionless objective world" (p. 215). At the methodological level, naturalism supposedly allows for the "uninterpreted reality of the natural world" (p. 215) to be made apparent.

Similarly, there is also a metaphysical manifestation of naturalism's identification with the natural world. Naturalistic realism is an appropriate way of describing this manifestation because to many psychological scientists naturalism is not just an approach or philosophical system that guides scientific investigation and method; rather, the world *is*, as a matter of *fact*, naturalistic (Slife et al., 2012); in other words, the world is *actually* naturalistic in *nature*. It is an objective reality that the neutral naturalistic method can

make known to everybody. This coupling of naturalism with the objective world is another reason psychological studies are often relegated to methods and topics that are natural. Not surprisingly, “the success of natural science methods and the belief that they lead to the greatest possible objectivity... has led naturalist human scientists to be especially susceptible to dogmatism...” (Johnson & Watson, 2012, p. 270).

The mistaken association of naturalism with objectivity has resulted in a general reification of naturalism as both a methodological framework and a metaphysical premise. In actuality, however, naturalism is a *worldview* through and through, “not the natural, or even a compendium of the natural” (Reber & Slife, 2013, p. 11); it is not the natural world itself, nor does it provide unbiased access to this world. Rather, the worldview of naturalism “is a particular way of looking at the world that is guided by systems of assumptions, values, and meanings that say at least as much about the adherents of the worldview as they do the objects of the world” (p. 13). In this sense, naturalism is no more or less objective than any other worldview, because all worldviews are equally constituted by both the person holding the worldview and the world that is viewed, i.e., “by both subjectivity and objectivity in an interpreted reality” (p. 11).

It is important to recognize that despite naturalism’s pervasiveness, dominance, success, and tone-setting nature in psychological science, the world is only naturalistic inasmuch as psychological scientists *frame* it in such a way. As much as many psychological scientists might think that their activities are guided by *the* proper understanding of reality, this understanding can be at best an interpreted reality. Consequently, psychological phenomena are natural events that are supposedly governed by natural laws according to the *worldview* of the naturalist, i.e., his or her interpretation

of or system of assumptions about the world (Harris, 2004; Slife & Reber, 2009a; Reber & Slife, 2013a). While many might hold that governance by natural laws is not simply a worldview, that it is supported by data, data does not exist in a vacuum. Rather, data are collected under a pre-established method that already assumes the world is a certain way (Slife et al., 2012), and interpreted or made sense of under the same worldview that guided its collection. Thus, natural events, including their regularity, could, in principle, also be interpreted in other ways, through alternative worldviews, but worldviews other than naturalism have not been seriously considered or put to the test yet in psychological science (Slife et al., 2012; Slife & Zhang, 2014).

This non-consideration of alternative worldviews has created a problem in contemporary psychology, where the naturalistic worldview is “taken for granted” (Slife et al. 2012, p. 217) as “the way we think today” (Johnson, 1990a, p. 21) and “the air that we breathe” (Johnson & Watson, 2012; p. 271). Therefore, it is not as easily recognized as a worldview compared to other worldviews. The largely unexamined and unquestioned dominance of the naturalistic framing of the world in psychological science makes it impossible to know if the world really is naturalistic, or whether naturalism is indeed the *best* scientific worldview, because it is never compared to other worldviews, conceptually or practically. According to Slife et al. (2012), such comparison is vital because “Only alternative method worldviews make the evaluation of method assumptions possible. They contrast with and thus expose these implicit assumptions, allowing them to be compared pragmatically and thus evaluated for their usefulness” (p. 221).

This kind of comparison is necessary for *fair* competition in the scientific marketplace of psychology. If naturalism is not compared against other worldviews, the bad monopoly that is the status quo will remain unchallenged and hold psychological science back in some ways. Fair competition can only come about by allowing competitors into the marketplace to “rise or fall on [their] own merits to the discipline” (Slife & Zhang, 2014, p. 1946). In order to level the scientific playing field of psychology, so to speak (Slife & Gantt, 1999), it would be important to explore the scientific potential of other worldviews, in addition to naturalism, as all worldviews are equally value-laden and rife with subjectivity and no one worldview should be scientifically privileged above the rest prior to the systematic investigation, application, and comparison of other worldviews in the scientific market of psychology. As Slife and Zhang (2014) put it, “What is needed now is a chance for [alternative worldviews] to compete fairly in the marketplace of psychological and scientific ideas” (p. 1945).

Historically, in fact, worldviews other than naturalism have led to many respectable modes of inquiry and types of knowledge (Harris, 2004; Johnson & Watson, 2012), but psychological science has mainly operated on the basis of a naturalistic worldview and has rarely acknowledged the epistemological merit of alternative worldviews (Johnson & Watson, 2012). This is not only further evidence of naturalism’s bad monopoly on psychological science; perhaps, more importantly, it suggests that if alternative worldviews could also have the potential to advance knowledge (Harris, 2004, Johnson & Watson, 2012), like naturalism, then psychological science may benefit from their consideration. After all, as Watson and Johnson (2012) observe, “there are many worldview beliefs that appear to be logically and empirically compatible with the

universe within which we live” (p. 271). Thus, to challenge naturalism’s bad monopoly, “a fair accommodation of competing worldviews” is needed (Johnson, 1990a, p. 19). “Fair competition, however, is easier said than done” (Slife & Zhang, 2014, p. 1945), making the explorations in this thesis that much more vital.

Exploring the potential of other worldviews in a scientific context does not refute or downplay naturalism’s illustrious and voluminous contributions to psychological science either. As has already been well established in the research literature, naturalism is highly successful within its own sphere of influence upon psychological science. The problem is not naturalism’s success per se—naturalism’s success is good for psychological science; rather, the problem is naturalism’s control of what counts as success.

Thus, an exploration of possible alternative scientific worldviews is concerned with promoting a plurality of approaches to psychological science, expanding psychology’s boundaries, and advancing psychological knowledge in all its various forms (Slife & Gantt, 1999; Slife & Zhang, 2014; Larmer, 2012); indeed, it opens the market for all qualified competitors to be successful if they excel at contributing to the psychological encyclopedia. As Slife and Zhang (2014) put it, proponents of a truly critical approach to psychology “merely [want] to push the pluralism and diversity envelope a little further” (p. 1946) by establishing a “*real* methodological pluralism in psychology” (p. 1945). They contend that methodological pluralism in the traditional sense is limited to methodological procedures generated from and applied under a naturalistic worldview—a conception of pluralism controlled by naturalism’s bad monopoly—and conclude that “To effect a genuinely pluralistic methodology is to

consider not only a diversity of procedures but also a diversity of the worldviews that guide the procedures” (p. 1946), i.e., not only “the methodological procedures of each method but more importantly... the different philosophies that implicitly inform and guide the methods” (Reber & Slife, 2013a, p. 17).

An openness to alternative worldviews in this pluralistic sense does not mean that every, or just any, worldview should be considered for psychological science though. That would be more of an “anything goes” relativism, which is not a proper pluralism (Reber & Slife, 2013a, p. 17). A proper pluralism may also be not the kind framed by the previously discussed “power” metaphor that emphasizes equality or equal treatment for all worldviews, since such a conception of pluralism may also border on relativism by granting an inherent sense of epistemological entitlement to all worldviews without any grounds for differentiation (Reber & Slife, 2013a). While it is important that alternative worldviews have an *equal opportunity* or fair chance to compete, not all worldviews can or should be treated the same under psychological science. Before a business or company begins operating, for example, it must first undergo certain checks and processes, and if it is to qualify as a competitor in the market, it must already be established in some sense. Similarly, there has to be an adequate rationale for the consideration of a worldview in the scientific marketplace of psychology because it would be careless, relativistic, and perhaps even unscientific to simply select just any random worldview to guide psychological science.

Moreover, such a pluralism is not only concerned with the question of which alternative worldviews ought to be given a trial in the scientific marketplace of psychology; it also has implications for the manner by which these worldviews should be

judged once they have been allowed into that marketplace. What this means is that upon scientific investigation, “Those worldviews, epistemologies, and methods that do not advance knowledge of the phenomenon [studied]... would not bear disciplinary fruit, and would eventually be eliminated” (Reber & Slife, 2013a, p. 17). A pluralism framed by an understanding of the scientific landscape of psychology as a marketplace is not concerned with providing equal treatment to alternative worldviews if these worldviews do not yield credible scientific findings; it emphasizes equal opportunity for the sake of fair competition instead of striving for equal outcomes. As long as worldviews can compete fairly, they must rely on their own “intellectual or methodological fertility” (Slife & Zhang, 2014, p. 1945). That is to say, “The worldviews that guide methodologies must establish a track record of knowledge advancement in the discipline if they are to remain in the marketplace of ideas. Their methods must illuminate appropriate meanings of a phenomenon of importance to psychology in order to remain relevant” (Reber & Slife, 2013a, p. 17). In this sense, equal opportunity does not necessarily lead to equal outcomes, nor should it.

Worldviews would therefore rise or fall, succeed or fail, or win or lose in the scientific market of psychology based on their actual ability to contribute to scientific knowledge of psychological topics, not unlike competing companies in a fair economic marketplace. Alternative worldviews would not be considered simply because they are afforded some sort of default epistemological credit by relativism, nor would they succeed simply by being granted equal status by the “power” metaphor. Worldviews that are outperformed would no longer have the resources to remain in the market and are eliminated in this way rather than from preclusion by or the control of a bad monopoly.

This also means that if naturalism were the best scientific worldview for psychology as many claim, it would rise above other worldviews by *fair competition* in the marketplace and could therefore be considered a good monopoly instead. The upshot is worldviews other than naturalism can also achieve success this way.

O’Grady (2012) refers to the sort of pluralism that hinges on this fair marketplace analogy as “an inclusive, ethical, and sophisticated conceptualization of psychological science and practice” (p. 122)—it is inclusive without assuming relativism, ethical without guaranteeing equal outcomes, and sophisticated without necessitating a bad monopoly. She correctly understands what is at stake when she suggests that “the implications of a truly inclusive conceptualization of science in which theism is accepted on an *assumptive* level” (p. 122, emphasis added) be considered. What she means by this pluralistic conceptualization is the consideration of acceptable, alternative frameworks through which scientific investigation in psychology can take place, i.e., a pluralism of worldviews and not simply methods (Slife & Zhang, 2014; Reber & Slife, 2013a). But what makes the theistic framework or worldview to which she refers a vital candidate for such consideration that it is explicitly identified over all other possible worldview alternatives? Evidently, theism’s worldview candidacy for psychological science needs to be evaluated next.

Theism’s Worldview Candidacy for Psychological Science

The pluralism of scientific worldviews discussed at the end of the previous section raises the question of which specific worldviews should be considered. Why, in this case, should psychologists consider theism as a viable candidate for an additional worldview to guide psychological science, indeed, as the very first candidate? Of the

many cultural worldviews that are held by different populations throughout the world, and the worldviews that currently inform the various branches of the academic enterprise, any number of these could *potentially* stand in addition to naturalism in guiding scientific research and practice in psychology upon proper examination and appropriate application. But Slife et al. (2012) suggest that there are several significant reasons for theism to be especially recommended as a worldview for researchers engaged in psychological science, perhaps as the worldview deserving of most urgent consideration:

First, [theism] presents a fairly direct contrast to many secular scientific assumptions, allowing psychologists to become more aware of their current method assumptions. Second, the number of people, both scholar and layperson alike, who subscribe to a theistic worldview is substantial, including the primary consumers of psychological information (Richards & Bergin, 2005). Third, many scholars consider theism to be the main rival to a conventional scientific (naturalistic) worldview in Western culture (e.g., Armstrong, 2011; Griffin, 2000; Smith, 2001). Fourth, theism may be an important intellectual resource for psychologists, especially in view of its long tradition of some of the world's greatest scholars considering important psychological issues (Nelson & Thomason, 2012). Fifth, theism will attend to other aspects and explanations of psychological phenomena that conventional methods may overlook, making it a potentially valuable supplement or complement, much as the qualitative worldview presently functions in the discipline. (p. 218)

These seem like important reasons to consider theism in psychology's scientific context. In comparison to other worldviews, few are as durable, investigated (in some sense),

influential, or encompassing as theism. Indeed, despite its stark contrast to naturalism, theism has obvious relevance, ethical backing, and utility (Vogel et al., 2012).

In fact, it is because of this contrast with naturalism that theism has so much scientific potential in psychology. Theism is, after all, the most dramatically non-naturalistic worldview. Most other worldviews are somewhat compatible with naturalism, and even share some of the same assumptions (Slife, Mitchell & Whoolery, 2004). Naturalism, on the other hand, is the most incompatible with theism (Slife et al., 2004). Not only does it not share most assumptions with theism, many of these assumptions are directly opposed. For these reasons, theism is most unlike the received view in psychological science. Therefore, not only is theism the main rival to naturalism; it is also the most complete rival.

This complete rivalry is perhaps the most pertinent justification for theism's scientific worldview candidacy. For psychological science to be best served naturalism cannot just be compared with near rivals; it needs a full-blown rival whose understandings are beyond naturalistic interpretations of natural events and explanations, one that is seen as almost the opposite of naturalism. This is so because naturalism's current bad monopoly cannot be truly challenged until such a drastically non-naturalistic competitor is pit against it. The consideration of a full-blown rival is perhaps the best way to establish a fair marketplace because near rivals more easily fall into the control of a bad monopoly. In other words, rival worldviews that are more similar than dissimilar to naturalism will, by virtue of the control naturalism has on the judgments made of its qualities, enjoy more success simply because they share some of the same qualities as naturalism. The success of a bad monopoly, as illustrated by the historical case of U.S.

Steel, seems to benefit its near rivals whose profits also increase as a consequence of monopolistic price-fixing or perhaps even collusion (Reback, 2007; Parsons & Ray, 1975). A non-naturalistic competitor, on the other hand, would give the bad monopoly a real run for its money and level the playing field in doing so because it does not benefit at all from naturalism's success and is the least susceptible to collusion. Of the available non-naturalistic alternatives, theism has the most justification as an "important intellectual resource" with somewhat of an established track record (Slife et al., 2012, p. 218). This makes theism the prime candidate to be considered as another worldview with which to guide psychological science.

Objections to Theism

Despite these compelling reasons for considering the scientific potential of an alternative worldview like theism for the discipline of psychology, many have opposed this proposition (Helminiak, 2010, 2012; Alcock, 2009). They have objected that theism is not as capable as naturalism because it lacks the characteristics naturalism has to guide psychological science. Theism does not merit the same consideration as naturalism because, they claim, theism is too subjective, too personal, too fragmented, not neutral, irrational, has unproven assumptions, is based on faith rather than evidence, cannot produce facts, and is unfalsifiable (Helminiak, 2010, 2012). Their objections to theism on these grounds may even appear *self-evident* to these critics, and to many psychological scientists and scholars in general, as if to require no justification or defense (Alcock, 2009). To them, theism *obviously* lacks the characteristics of a valid scientific worldview to the extent there exists an *automatic* presumption that theism is incapable of scientific application in psychology (Helminiak, 2010, 2012) and is therefore unscientific.

Moreover, there is frequently an *unabashed* certainty behind the objections raised against theism, suggesting forcefully that theism is inferior or problematic on its face compared to naturalism (Reber & Slife, 2013a).

The reason these characteristics may seem self-evident and are thus taken for granted has to do with the bad monopoly of naturalism. That is to say, if naturalism really is the bad monopoly I contend it to be, then these characteristics are defined in terms of the criteria naturalism controls, which enforces naturalism's superior scientific status while lowering that of competing worldviews. Naturalism, unlike the previously described characteristics of theism, is supposedly objective, public, coherent, neutral, rational, has proven assumptions, is based on evidence rather than faith, produces facts, and is falsifiable, and it is these characteristics that make naturalism the best scientific worldview and any other worldview that falls short of these standards inferior to naturalism and problematic for psychological science. These criteria are considered necessary for psychological science because the naturalist favors the characteristics associated with naturalism and controls conceptions of what frameworks or worldviews are appropriate for psychological science, meaning the list of objections against theism has to do with the characteristics *naturalists* feel a scientific worldview should have. This is not surprising given that bad monopolies control the criteria by which they and their competitors' quality are judged. Since theism's characteristics oppose the criteria naturalism has set, theism is not fit as a scientific context for investigation in psychology. Naturalism, on the other hand, is ideally suited to psychological science because it supposedly satisfies those criteria.

Since the bad monopoly of naturalism controls these criteria, this makes the criteria themselves automatically suspicious and questionable. In other words, the characteristics that are supposedly conducive to psychological science are necessarily unfair inasmuch as they are the characteristics endorsed by a worldview that has exerted a bad monopolistic influence on psychological science. How could other worldviews ever be fairly judged against these criteria? In this sense, the issue is not whether theism can satisfy naturalism's criteria because those criteria are not fair. But what if, for the sake of argument, we granted that the criteria of naturalism are crucial to the scientific enterprise? After all, these characteristics are nevertheless seen as representative of psychological science and have become important to what people think psychological science is. Therefore, we could examine whether theism really is as problematic to psychological science in terms of its characteristics. Certainly one approach to dismantling a bad monopoly, in this regard, is to evaluate competitors according to their own merit and production to see if they really are as inferior as the bad monopoly has made them out to be. Since bad monopolies are notorious for preventing good competitors from succeeding as promisingly as their excellence might allow in a fair marketplace, defending theism, in this sense, would be necessary at some point.

But before this can take place, it is important to determine whether the bad monopoly is as superior as it claims to be by evaluating whether it actually meets its own standards or if the criteria it has set are really a façade, akin to raising prices based on brand recognition without also improving quality or excellence. Brand recognition, in this case, is the name or reputation of naturalism, so what needs examining is whether naturalism itself lives up to its own understanding of quality and excellence. The task,

from this standpoint, is attempting to incriminate naturalism on the premise that naturalism might not be all that it claims to be. If this were true—if naturalism actually fails to meet the standards it holds other worldviews to and really has all the same characteristics as theism—it would mean that the objections to theism should not in principle rule it out as a potential worldview with which to guide psychological science.

If naturalism is properly understood as a worldview (Slife et al., 2012; Reber & Slife, 2013a), it may not as easily fit the criteria it is conventionally associated with, and thus could be “brought down” to theism’s level, so to speak. In other words, naturalists often refer to naturalism’s aforementioned list of characteristics as support of its scientific credibility, and they identify objections to theism based on these characteristics, showing theism to be flawed because it does not meet the criteria like naturalism supposedly does. But naturalists have not considered that naturalism might be just as flawed as theism because they have not typically understood naturalism as a *worldview* (Reber & Slife, 2013a; Slife et al., 2012). The first step to resolving this misunderstanding, then, would be to see if the worldview of naturalism is as problematic as the worldview of theism according to the granted characteristics (that are questionable themselves because of the bad monopoly). If it were, this would then allow for theism to be “brought up” to naturalism’s level by demonstrating its scientific potential for psychology like naturalism has been able to do. Since demonstration is a practical matter and we are still only considering the conceptual foundations of worldviews, i.e., worldview foundations (Harris, 2004), at this juncture, it is necessary to reach some conclusions about naturalism’s conceptual influence first before having the justification to explore theism’s practical potential. The purpose of this section, then, is to explore whether naturalism

can be incriminated for misrepresenting itself and thus be exposed as “problematic” as theism for psychological science.

Instead of countering or disproving the objections to theism and defending theism per se, or even examining whether the claims are as true as critics might believe them to be, I will explore whether naturalism can also be subjected to all the same criticisms, i.e., I will put naturalism on trial by cross-examining it against the objections to theism. If naturalism is guilty of misrepresenting itself and defaming theism, the case could then be made that naturalism’s bad monopolistic status blurs or covers its actual characteristics to make it seem more suitable for psychological science than other worldviews, which would also mean that the characteristics associated with theism are not valid justifications for preventing theism from scientific application in psychology and that conventional wisdom is wrong. In other words, if these objections to theism also apply to naturalism, then there is no reason theism cannot be considered a viable or appropriate scientific worldview, not only suggesting that the list of objections is about what worldviews are appropriate for psychological science according to naturalism’s terms, but more importantly that naturalism does not even represent itself accurately.

To ensure a pragmatic yet adequate exploration of this issue, this section will proceed by providing a cursory treatment of each of the aforementioned objections in the form of a list. Each of these objections or characteristics is profound and much could be written about any one of them. Because I do not have the space to do each of these objections complete justice, and since I only intend to compare theism’s objectionable characteristics to those of naturalism, I will only examine briefly the extent to which each objection could also be applied to naturalism, while providing some references

summarizing how other scholars have addressed these objections. All I am trying to do in reviewing each characteristic is raise doubt about the automatic presumption that these characteristics are problematic for theism, while attempting to expose the ways in which naturalism's bad monopoly might be responsible for this framing of theism as obviously invalid and self-evidently unacceptable for psychological science.

Theism is too subjective. Many observers will say that theism, unlike naturalism, cannot be considered scientific because it is too *subjective* (i.e., “thoroughly subjective,” “wholly subjective,” “subjectivity par excellence,” etc.; Reber & Slife, 2013a, p. 10); naturalism, on the other hand, maps an “objective” reality, which is the same for any person regardless of the worldview he or she subscribes to (Slife et al., 2012). The problem with this reasoning, as I have already discussed, is naturalism is a worldview rather than a depiction of the objective world or an instrument of objectivity (Reber & Slife, 2013a; Slife et al., 2012). In other words, naturalism is how naturalists *see* the world; it is not itself the natural or objective world devoid of subjectivity. As a *worldview*, it is flush with a whole system of values and assumptions (Slife, et al., 2004; Reber & Slife, 2013a), as well as biases and prejudices (Harris, 2004, Slife & Reber, 2009a), which frame or give certain meanings to the data of psychology. Naturalism, in this regard, is no more or less subjective (or objective) than theism—it is equally susceptible to subjectivity as theism (Reber & Slife, 2013a). Naturalism's valuing of objectivity, then, is really a subjective construal of objectivity, suggesting that naturalism *values* value-freeness, and therefore psychological science *ought* to proceed in an objective fashion (Slife et al., 2004). In this sense, naturalism is also value-laden and shrouded in subjectivity like theism.

This objection to theism is perhaps the most important because it relates to and undergirds in some sense all the other objections. The characteristics naturalists feel a scientific worldview requires all stem from the belief that naturalism is objective and only that which is objective is scientific. This conventional view of naturalism as a manifestation of or as synonymous with objectivity considers naturalism as equivalent to the natural world. In other words, it reifies the worldview of naturalism and the modernist dualism that accompanies it, and in doing so provides life to each of the characteristics naturalism is commonly associated with while also painting the objections to theism from this angle. The upshot is these characteristics of a reified naturalism and modernist dualism can all be subverted if naturalism is correctly understood as a worldview, with the same foundations as worldviews that are more easily recognized as worldviews, such as theism.

Theism is too personal. Theism has also been accused of being too “personal,” e.g., the “private realm of ‘personal beliefs,’ ‘personal conception,’ ‘personal opinions,’ ‘personal faith,’ and ‘personal piety’ ...” (Reber & Slife, 2013a, p. 9). Naturalism, on the other hand, “enjoys a large very public role” (p. 9) in the realm of psychological science. It is worth noting that “personal,” in this sense, has two related dimensions. The first dimension concerns the private vs. public distinction where knowledge of something is left to the individual because it differs from person to person (private) or is validated and thus shared by a community (public). This distinction is often accompanied with the provision that true knowledge cannot be considered as such until it is publicly accepted. The second dimension concerns the related disagreement vs. agreement distinction. If a matter is personal, it will be expected that people will disagree with one another. On the

other hand, when people come to agreement, the matter of concern is no longer simply personal. Disagreement is more likely within the private realm while agreement is expected in the public realm. The former is a manifestation of subjectivity while the latter eschews subjectivity for objectivity.

While naturalism tends to be viewed as public and therefore as something people will agree upon, it is more similar in kind to theism than is typically thought in that naturalism is also a belief system that not everyone agrees with. Because theism is often viewed as a personal concern, “not every [therapy] client will agree with the assumptions and biases of a theistic approach...” (Slife et al., 2012, p. 232). But “this point applies with equal force to naturalistic approaches. Naturalism is... a worldview... about which many clients, both theistic and non-theistic, might not agree” (p. 232). Moreover, Johnson and Watson (2012) note that “not all thoughtful humans believe that that worldview [naturalism] is even valid” and some “have argued that naturalism is inherently self-contradictory” (p. 271). Such disagreement denotes that naturalism may be more private than conventional wisdom suggests. By referring to itself as public and theism as personal, naturalism puts itself in an easy position to quash any challenge to its scientific mantle.

Theism is too fragmented. Because theism has many varieties, some will say that it is too fragmented and not unified or coherent enough to guide psychological science (Helminiak, 2010, 2012). With such divergent categorical varieties as idealistic monism, panentheism, monotheism, Trinitarian theism, deism, polytheism, animism, etc. (Johnson & Watson, 2012), not to mention subcategorical varieties such as Islam, Judaism, and Christianity of the Abrahamic religions, theism could lead not only to

further fragmentation in psychology, but potentially to a complete relativism as well (Helminiak, 2012). This issue also stems from the disagreement (fragmentation) vs. agreement distinction discussed under the previous objection.

While naturalism is not typically thought to be fragmented like theism, Johnson and Watson (2012) clarify that “naturalism is not as unifying as might be believed. This is partly because there are significantly different kinds of naturalism: ontological or strong, supervenient or non-reductive, and methodological, as well as humanist and postmodernist versions...” (p. 272), not to mention “Marxist, and classical Buddhist” (p. 274). In this sense, naturalism is just as susceptible to fragmentation as theism, but that has not prevented a unified or coherent conception of naturalism from emerging as a scientific worldview. Moreover, a similarly coherent notion of theism may also be available (e.g., Slife & Zhang, 2014; Melling, 2013), and some scholars actually welcome fragmentation in the form of rich diversity and consider it an academic advantage (e.g., Johnson & Watson, 2012).

Theism is not neutral. Theism is typically considered extremely biased and prejudiced, perhaps more so than any other belief system (Slife & Zhang, 2014). The implication of this bias is that theism is not neutral toward other beliefs and therefore cannot guide scientific investigation in psychology. Naturalism, on the other hand, is often thought of as neutral toward other worldviews because of its supposed objectivity. In other words, it is considered “neutral to or compatible with” worldviews other than those that the methods assume” (Slife et al., 2012, p. 214) and therefore psychologists “only present the objective evidence gained from their scientific psychological research;

evidence that is supposedly neutral with regard to theism or any other worldview” (Reber & Slife, 2013b, p. 63).

However, this naturalistic tendency toward neutrality has been identified as “the myth of neutrality” (Slife et al., 2012; Reber & Slife, 2013b) because naturalism is really not as neutral toward other worldviews as it may purport to be. When naturalists claim to have discovered an objective law of nature in science or psychology, the law is supposedly “true for adherents of other worldviews as well” (Reber & Slife, 2013a, p. 9) and “Because the objectively discovered laws are true for all people, including theists, then theists must accommodate the physical and psychological laws into their worldview” (p. 9). This is not a consequence of neutrality however, since natural laws are considered as such as a result of a naturalistic (rather than objective) interpretation of law-resembling regularities, suggesting that all worldviews including naturalism are equally susceptible to bias toward their own interpretive systems and against those of other worldviews. Claims of objectivity and thus neutrality are therefore not only superficial but also manipulative, in some sense.

Theism is irrational. Some will equate naturalism with reason, arguing that rationalism is one of the pillars of psychological science, and relegate worldviews such as theism to the realm of irrationality (Harris, 2004; Johnson, 1998; Slife & Richards, 2001). This is, however, a mistaken idea about the relationship between worldviews and reason. Worldview *preferences*, in fact, “precede the rational support of those preferences,” so that all worldviews, including naturalism, are “pre-rational rather than the required outcome of inescapable logic” (Harris, 2004, p. 91). In other words, naturalism’s “preferences” or assumptions are not themselves arrived at logically. Its assumptions,

like those of any worldview, must already be in place to logically reason from (Slife & Richards, 2001), implying that all worldviews necessarily have some “rationality” and “irrationality” to them. Rationality is contingent on a worldview’s foundations and its resulting system of interpretation, and thus is not pure, uninterpreted, or universal logic; therefore, naturalism is not the only worldview that can claim to be rational (or scientific). To believe otherwise is to attempt to establish the credibility of naturalism using logic derived from the same worldview—the bad monopoly situation again. Equating naturalism with reason ensures that naturalism always “wins” the rigged game. Since such circularity of logic is an apparent logical problem in itself, it is evidently another of naturalism’s dirty tactics to maintain its monopolistic status.

Theism’s assumptions are unproven. Others will challenge theism on the basis of its “unproven” assumptions. They frequently argue that the existence and activity of God is purely a theological question that cannot be definitively answered or proved one way or another, and therefore has no place in psychology (Helminiak, 2010, 2012), whereas natural laws are apparent for all to experience and comprehend and have been proven to operate in a knowable and predictable way. The problem with this argument is every worldview has a core foundation that consists of basic ideas or assumptions that cannot be proven yet must be *granted* for coherency (Harris, 2004; Reber & Slife, 2013a). In the case of naturalism and theism, “neither the assumption of material exclusivity [natural laws¹] nor the assumption of God’s presence [and activity] can be proven empirically. They are not subject to proof but are assumed as part of one’s

¹ The irony is that natural laws are not themselves material; otherwise they would corrode and change, as all material entities do. They are, instead, metaphysical “realities” that govern the material.

ontological set” (Harris, 2004, p. 80). In other words, the basic assumptions of naturalism are unproven—and unable to be proved—like those of theism (Slife et al., 2012; Reber & Slife, 2013a).

Reber and Slife (2013a) reinforce this point by noting that naturalism, like theism, is grounded in “untested assumptions” and that these assumptions

cannot be observationally studied... The worldviews of naturalism and theism, in this sense, are not observable, nor are the assumptions that inform each worldview. Indeed, the scientific doctrine of observability—that only the observable is knowable—is itself unobservable. In this sense, any presumption (e.g., Alcock, 2009) that the first premises that inform naturalism have somehow passed an empirical test that the first premises of theism have failed is, in principle, deeply problematic... They each accept the first premise of their respective worldviews as true without... empirical validation... first premises are ‘leaps of faith.’ (p. 13).

In this sense, natural laws are not observable or empirical, no different than theistic activity. Rather, both natural laws and God are unobservable, unseen entities *inferred* from their postulated observable manifestations or empirical evidence (Slife et al., 2012; Slife & Zhang, 2014).

Theism is based on faith rather than evidence. Many observers will color theism as the antithesis of psychological science because theism is based on faith whereas psychological science is based on evidence. While this is somewhat accurate in the sense that theists have faith in a God that is unseen, it is worth nothing, as it pertains to psychological science, that naturalists also have faith in their unseen natural laws. This is

the reason Johnson (1990a) states that “faith in naturalism is no more ‘scientific’ (i.e., empirically based) than any other kind of faith” (p. 17; see also Johnson, 2010). In other words, natural laws as the first premises of naturalism are “leaps of faith,” just like God is a leap of faith for theism. This means, according to Reber and Slife (2013a), that “it would be inappropriate to differentiate naturalism from theism by claiming that naturalism is devoid of unproven, *taken-on-faith*, assumptions, values, and interpretations, or that it is free of the influence of such things” (emphasis added, p. 13). Because fundamental assumptions and suppositions cannot be proven, they must be taken on faith, meaning naturalism’s assumption of natural laws also requires faith on behalf of the beholder, similar in kind to faith in a divine being.

This point is associated with a related issue concerning what counts as evidence. As discussed under the previous objection, empirical evidence derived under naturalism is not proof of naturalism per se. Rather, empirical evidence is used to make inferences about the non-empirical entities that make up a worldview. Evidence, in this sense, can only be gathered and interpreted within a pre-established view of reality. As Larmer (2012) puts it, “Evidence is always assessed within the context of numerous background beliefs... we seek to interpret and fit evidence into a prior framework of belief” (p. 147). This is why naturalists and theists often both point to the same events as evidence of their assumptions: natural laws or God (Forland, 2008). That the same event can be evidence of two opposing worldviews suggests the significance of the interpretive element of evidence, also meaning there is evidence for theism in the same way there is evidence for naturalism.

Furthermore, the conventional naturalistic spin on evidence often restricts what counts as evidence to that which is empirical in the sense that the natural world is thought to be comprehensible by sensory experience. Naturalism controls the notion of evidence, in this regard, by granting greater credibility to forms of evidence that are more consistent with its own assumptions and points of focus, so that “evidence” is not as broadly construed as it could be but rather is compounded with or reduced to empirical evidence of the sensory sort (Slife & Slife, 2014; Slife & Melling, 2008). In this manner, naturalism often precludes forms of evidence that are considered more consistent with theism, such as evidence based on epistemologies other than the narrow empiricism naturalism is frequently associated with (Slife & Slife, 2014; Slife & Melling, 2008), suggesting that the evidence for theism is not necessarily the evidence controlled by naturalism.

Theism cannot produce facts. This particular objection can be framed by what is known as the belief vs. fact or belief vs. knowledge distinction. According to Slife, Starks, and Primosch (2014), “beliefs are frequently considered more subjective, more arbitrary, and more disputable, whereas facts are more objective, less arbitrary, and less disputable” (p. 346). This means that theism cannot produce facts because it is simply too subjective of a belief, which makes it the antithesis of plain factual knowledge. Naturalism, meanwhile, is supposedly capable of producing “objective and assumption-free facts” (p. 346). This objection to theism prioritizes facts over beliefs so that theism is inferior to naturalism because mere belief without justification cannot be considered knowledge. Nelson (1990) is skeptical about this distinction because, as he says, “all facts... are capable of alternative interpretation” (p. 25), suggesting that all “facts” are

interpretations. This is consistent with Popper's (2002) analysis that naturalism's "upholders fail to notice that whenever they believe to have discovered a fact, they have only proposed a convention" (p. 52). Facts, in this regard, are a "pretense of factuality or truth" (Slife & Reber, 2013a, p. 14).

The belief vs. fact distinction, then, is actually superficial because "facts" are "labels" (Johnson, 1990a, 2010). The real issue is not, for example, the "fact" of the existence of regularity in the natural world; it is the interpretation of that regularity as such and the meaning given to it. In other words, all "facts" are based on beliefs or interpretations derived from a worldview or "features of an assumption-laden interpretative framework" (Slife et al., 2014, p. 346), that make sense of the grounding of a phenomenon, e.g., the naturalistic interpretation of the existence of regularities as evidence of natural laws. This explains the "tendency to reify naturalism [or naturalistic beliefs] through the belief vs. fact distinction" (p. 346), since naturalists have typically reified their interpretation made of the grounding of "facts" to the extent that there exists a lack of awareness surrounding where their interpretation originated from and alternative interpretations become negligible. Once the belief vs. fact distinction is broken down, however, it becomes apparent that naturalism's ability to produce facts and to decry theism as incapable of doing so is really an act of labeling, not knowledge advancement, thus further incriminating naturalism.

Theism is unfalsifiable. Theism has also been traditionally considered an unfalsifiable philosophy incapable of producing falsifiable hypotheses, much like psychoanalysis, for example (Lilienfeld et al., 2013; Helminiak, 2010, 2012). Its concerns, critics say, are "metaphysical" or "speculative" (Lilienfeld et al., 2013), and

thus not scientific because the metaphysical and speculative are not viewed as falsifiable. In a way this is true since, as we have already discussed, the assumptions of any worldview cannot be proven, or, conversely, falsified, which means that naturalism is not immune from this criticism either. As a worldview, naturalism is just as unfalsifiable as the worldview of theism because no worldview can be falsified under its own conditions. For example, while naturalistic methods are capable of falsifying hypotheses generated by the naturalistic worldview, these methods are not capable of falsifying the assumptions of the naturalistic worldview that undergirds them (Slife et al., 2012; Dilley, 2010). In other words, “to adopt methodological naturalism is to guarantee that all phenomena will be viewed as having a naturalistic explanation...” (Larmer, 2012, p. 139).

Consider, in this regard, how methodological naturalism’s ability to generate falsifiable hypotheses is related to an unfalsifiable metaphysic of its own:

under [methodological naturalism] scientific counter evidence against [metaphysical naturalism] is barred. Since [methodological naturalism] requires that all scientific evidence be given a natural explanation, evidence can never disconfirm [metaphysical naturalism], *no matter what the evidence on hand actually is*. This is not to say that scientific evidence fails to disconfirm [metaphysical naturalism] as a matter of fact, but that it cannot as a matter of principle... (Dilley, 2010, p. 129).

In other words, you cannot falsify naturalism with its own method. Thus, naturalism is unfalsifiable in this sense, not unlike theism. Because both worldviews are unfalsifiable, the worldview of naturalism is also “metaphysical” and “speculative” like theism. This

also means that it may be possible for the unfalsifiable theistic worldview to generate theistic *hypotheses* that are falsifiable (and therefore scientific) like traditional naturalistic hypotheses generated by naturalism (Reber et al., 2012; Dilley, 2010). After all, naturalism has clearly demonstrated that unfalsifiable worldviews can still give rise to constructs with which to operate and investigate.

Conclusion. Thus, we see that the criticisms of theism are applicable to naturalism as well, and therefore the objections toward considering theism’s scientific potential must really be based on the control enacted by the bad monopoly of naturalism to sway scientific judgments in psychology. In this sense, naturalism can be incriminated for misrepresenting itself as somehow inherently superior or non-problematic for psychological science compared to theism when, according to the analysis in this section, it really has all the same characteristics or qualities as theism. These qualities are what naturalists claim make other worldviews incapable of guiding psychological science (or unscientific). But none of these reasons have prevented naturalism from doing so. Therefore, there is no good reason theism should be disallowed to guide psychological science, given this perspective, unless it is subjected to a different standard altogether (Reber & Slife, 2013a, 2013b).

Perhaps the more important conclusion is that naturalism has been a fruitful scientific worldview despite actually sharing the same qualities as theism. Given the scientific fruitfulness of naturalism despite its putatively nonscientific properties, and its similarities in this regard to theism, theism’s worldview candidacy for psychological science cannot be as easily disputed as typically thought. The reasons supporting theism’s candidacy outweigh all of these “objections” because naturalists are guilty of a

kind of defamation of character against theism by drawing on various questionable dualisms to paint theism's inferiority while unfairly and deceptively extolling their own worldview.

To Be Truly Scientific, or Not To Be

Given that naturalism is a worldview like theism, it is also subjective, personal, fragmented, irrational, and unfalsifiable like theism. Like theism, naturalism is also not neutral toward other worldviews, has just as many unproven assumptions, is based on faith, and cannot produce facts. In other words, naturalism is another set of biases rather than the objective, public, rational, proven, neutral, factual entity it claims to be. That being the case, by masquerading as said entity, as if it is not actually a worldview, naturalism has skewed psychological science toward its own biased direction and has not examined its own basis critically. The most serious implication that follows is naturalism has maintained its monopolistic status by preventing other worldviews from competing fairly in the scientific marketplace of psychology, often ruling them out before they even have the opportunity to be investigated.

But since, as a worldview and system of biases, naturalism is really no different in kind to theism, it needs to re-examine itself, particularly its bad monopolistic influence on psychological science. Because of this influence, naturalism has controlled the criteria of psychological science and shaped psychological science in its own image, and theism has been assumed to be the opposite of or anathema to psychological science—supernaturalism versus naturalism—where theism is concerned with the supernatural and the supernatural is not scientific. The main purpose of this thesis is to investigate this presumed problem to see if this perceived opposition is really true: Can theism actually

follow through (like naturalism) and establish testable constructs and hypotheses, produce new and significant findings, and deliver a program of research for psychology?

Before theism is explored further in this sense, it may help to briefly consider what true science really is. So far, I have only alluded to this in discussing the implications of naturalism's bad monopoly on psychological science, and it might have been assumed all along that this sort of monopoly is not scientific, but I have not explicitly identified why this is so and what it means to be truly scientific. Therefore, I will clarify naturalism's relationship to science here to tie it all neatly together before proceeding to the next chapter.

Because the worldview of naturalism is at best "an arbitrary commitment, a philosophy standing before and outside of science, and not an essential aspect of science or the scientific method" (Harris, 2004, p. 112), it is wrong to consider naturalism as synonymous with psychological science. "After all," as Rea (2002) questions, "if everything else is at the mercy of science, why not naturalism?" (p. 52). Rather than being scientific, naturalism is actually "extra-scientific" (Vogel et al., 2012; Midgley, 2011). The danger to psychological science is not the consideration of alternative worldviews like theism, as naturalists tend to think (Reber & Slife, 2013a), because *all* worldviews are equally extra-scientific. No, "The real danger to psychological science," as Johnson (1990b) observes, "is that it is being linked to a dogma [naturalism] that can't stand close examination in order to further an ideological agenda that goes way beyond the proper concerns of science" (p. 52).

This bold declaration suggests at its heart that psychological science in its fullest and truest sense is "the systematic investigation of ideas" (Reber & Slife, 2013a, p. 17)

and that such investigation cannot be limited to any one worldview. Otherwise, it risks control by a bad monopoly such as naturalism. Slife et al. (2012) drive home this point when they conclude that since “The hallmark of science is the investigation of ideas... To identify science with a particular epistemology and/or method [worldview] is to decide before investigation what philosophies work best. This position seems singularly *unscientific* to us” (p. 221; emphasis added). This suggests, contrary to conventional wisdom, that naturalism’s monopoly is detrimental to psychological science and needs upending. For these reasons, unrestrained scientific inquiry in psychology is not only open to alternative guiding worldviews but demands they are considered. Thus, establishing a fair marketplace for these worldviews is the only way to be truly scientific.

Conclusion

This chapter has raised several important questions about the nature of psychological science. Foremost among these is the question of whether psychological science needs to consider alternative worldviews than naturalism and whether theism should be an important alternative worldview for guiding scientific investigation in psychology in addition to naturalism. I have answered both questions in the affirmative because naturalism—the current guiding philosophy of science in psychology—has a bad monopoly on psychological science, inasmuch as it prevents other worldviews from competing fairly in psychology’s scientific marketplace by controlling the criteria of psychological science and giving itself its own stamp of approval. This sort of exclusiveness is not only detrimental to psychological science; it is wholly unscientific. It means that naturalism itself has not been investigated with the same rigorous standard it demands for scientific investigation. For naturalism to be subject to a truly scientific

standard requires recognizing naturalism for what it is: a worldview. It also means that alternative worldviews be allowed to compete fairly in the scientific marketplace of psychology. There is perhaps no better worldview to consider, in this regard, than theism because it has the strongest candidacy as naturalism's most complete rival.

Chapter 2: Can Theism Add Something New or Different to Psychology?

Now that it is clear that naturalism is itself a worldview that affects the framing and interpretation of psychological findings and that theism is an important alternative worldview to consider for psychological science—indeed, as the most complete rival worldview to naturalism—it is crucial to query what theism might add to psychology, or whether it is capable of adding anything new or different at all. After all, if theism really is the most complete rival to naturalism, why are the theists of psychology not raising the alarm about naturalism? Why are they seemingly content to continue their naturalistic work? The answer to these questions is a kind of compartmentalization of these worldviews, where each is relegated to separate portions of the world. In other words, theism might make sense as this quintessential rival to naturalism inasmuch as it deals with the supernatural world, but there would be no point to entertain the possibility of theism in psychology because naturalism already takes care of the natural or psychological world. This compartmentalization (or relegation) of theism and naturalism to different parts of the world (the supernatural against the natural) gives rise to the presumption, held even by many theists, that theism is not capable of producing new psychological findings.

Because each worldview concerns a different part of the world, from this perspective, theism, for many theists, is seen to complement rather than really rival naturalism since their concerns do not overlap.² In other words, many theists, especially in psychology, understand theism to mean “naturalism plus God,” whereby they

² The principle of non-overlapping magisteria could be applied to capture the complementarity of these two worldviews according to the way in which many theists view the compartmentalized relationship.

understand their world with a naturalistic philosophy for all natural events and processes and with a theistic philosophy for all supernatural events and processes (Slife & Reber, 2009a). This is the principle reason theists typically have no worries working with naturalism as psychologists (Reber & Slife, 2013a). Theism, in this sense, is really not a wholly other or different worldview or philosophy when natural events and processes are concerned because it is thought to be irrelevant rather than to make any difference regarding the natural world. Not only does this suggest that even many theists find naturalism to comprehensively and sufficiently cover the natural world of psychological events; it also implies that when theists may want to add God onto the naturalism picture in psychology, this addition would alter none of the picture's fundamental features (Slife & Reber, 2009a).

This chapter calls this compartmentalized view of theism into question, and considers whether theism really is a different philosophy with different explanations and predictions for psychological (and thus natural) events. In other words, the main focus of this chapter is whether theism has different conceptual and practical implications for natural (and thus psychological) events. Put another way, although theism seems to be mainly concerned with supernatural events, does it also have something to say about the natural events of psychology? We know that naturalism denies the supernatural (Slife & Reber, 2009a) but what does theism really make of the natural? Theism has to be able to produce alternative or new psychological findings to those already being produced under the worldview of naturalism to be considered a viable additional worldview candidate for psychological science. If it simply repeats the findings of naturalism, as the

compartmentalized view suggests, it would be a superfluous consideration and an unnecessary addition to the plurality of approaches to psychological science.

Hence, I compare naturalism with theism in this chapter to see if they are different enough for theism to offer a unique and difference-making understanding of the psychological world. First, I examine the theoretical premises of naturalism and theism as well as their most fundamental differences to understand how a non-compartmentalized theism would approach the natural. Second, I consider some other conceptual differences between these two worldviews that may be less apparent but not less important. All of these conceptual differences have practical implications for how psychological events and subjects are understood, so a final comparison will be made to determine whether or to what extent theism might differ with naturalism in terms of practical psychological phenomena. I conclude by briefly considering what implications these conceptual and practical differences might have for psychological research in its current disciplinary constitution.

Fundamental Differences

At first blush, as suggested by their rivalry, theism might appear to be quite different from naturalism. After all, clearly these two worldviews differ on whether they affirm divine action. Naturalism's very tenets reject the transcendent (Taylor, 2007) because it considers natural laws to be *sufficient* explanations of all the world's events (Slife & Whoolery, 2006). Thoroughgoing naturalism understands the world as godless, i.e., God is not considered real or effectual, to the extent that any supposed manifestations or experiences of God can be explained as fundamentally natural events or functions.

Still, there are varieties of naturalism that are seemingly compatible with theism, such as deism and dualism (Slife & Reber, 2009a; Melling, 2009). Deism and dualism compartmentalize natural processes and divine action so that only one or the other is relevant at a particular time—deism’s notion of God’s involvement in creating the world but the subsequent governance of natural laws in sustaining it—or in a particular place or event—dualism’s separation of the supernatural sphere from the natural sphere (Slife & Reber, 2009a). Since both of these conceptions are not closed off to the divine per se, they are, in fact, traditionally considered varieties of theism (Melling, 2009). However, because God is not thought to matter in the *current, natural, psychological* world according to either deism or dualism, these conceptions foreground, in effect, the present natural world and its lawfulness, and thus are actually and ultimately naturalistic.

By contrast, theism, in its most encompassing and legitimate sense, is different from naturalism and these “theistic” subsets of naturalism because God’s current, practical activity must be conceived of and accounted for according to a thoroughly theistic view of reality. In this sense, theism assumes that “God is already and always intimately acting in nature which depends moment to moment... upon divine activity” (Plantinga, 2001, p. 350), while naturalism, even with its “theistic” allowances (such as deism or dualism), “makes the preinvestigatory assumption that the supernatural [i.e., God] is not needed for conceptualizing, conducting, or explaining scholarship and investigation in psychological science” (Slife & Reber, 2009a, pp. 64-65). According to Slife and Zhang (2014), naturalism’s “contrast with theism stems from its specific focus on natural events and topics as if they can be distinguished from supernatural events and topics. A theist does not make this distinction and thus does not engage in this sort of

dualism; God is just as involved in the ‘natural’ as the ‘supernatural’” (p. 1942).

Naturalists, meanwhile, posit a dualism of natural and supernatural entities and discredit, explicitly or implicitly, the supernatural realm, relegating it to a level of explanation that makes no meaningful difference to the self-contained and self-operating natural world.

Thus, these two worldviews clearly differ on the assumption of God’s current, practical activity in the natural realm. Theism (properly understood), in this sense, is not only postulating a supernatural realm, it also offers a different conception of the *natural* realm. A theistic interpretation of reality implies divine concurrence with all of nature (Bishop, 2009), with divine involvement, influences, and actions constituting a necessary condition (among other necessary conditions) in understanding and explaining—and thus investigating—any “natural” psychological phenomenon (Slife & Reber, 2009a). The problem is that this fundamental difference has been underestimated because the attempt to make theistic aspects compatible with naturalism has altered what theism in its most thoroughgoing sense actually is (Melling, 2013). Theism, in actuality, makes a big difference in understanding the world (Slife et al., 2012) since its conception of the natural realm necessarily includes divine activity; the supernatural is not merely added onto the natural, even if it is given equal status or greater weight compared to the natural. In this way, theism is not only wholly different than naturalism; it is also considerably different from many people’s conceptions of theism, including the compartmentalized view held by many theists in psychology who consider theism to be complementary to naturalism. Therefore, the difference theism makes in understanding the natural is the principal point of consideration of this thesis.

Other Conceptual Differences

Although the assumption of God’s current activity in the natural realm is perhaps the most notable conceptual difference between naturalism and theism, it is not the only assumption on which these two worldviews differ, by which theism could be granted license to make a practical difference. Consider, also, how naturalism and theism offer different understandings of the concept of natural “order.” Although the naturalist and the theist are equally interested in the patterns and regularities of the world, their interpretations of these natural patterns and regularities are starkly opposed (Slife & Reber, 2009a; Slife & Zhang, 2014). According to Taylor (2007), “Modern [naturalistic] science offers us a view of the universe framed in general laws. The ultimate is an impersonal order of regularities in which all particular things exist...” (p. 362). Consistent with this interpretation, the naturalist sees natural order as “impersonal, lawful, and determined” (Slife & Reber, 2009a, p. 70). The theist, on the other hand, understands order as it “relates [humans] to a personal Creator-God” (Taylor, 2007, p. 362); in other words, the theist conceives of natural order as a “personal, divine, and obedient order. The common term ‘order’ denotes the importance of *regularities* for both perspectives, but the *nature, source, and meaning* of this term could not be more *different*” (emphasis added; Slife & Reber, 2009a, p. 70).

Furthermore, although both naturalism and theism understand the order of the natural world as consisting of regularities (despite understanding these regularities differently), only theism considers the possibility of and has interest in *irregularities* (Slife et al., 2012; Melling, 2009). “Irregularities” refer to singular, one-time, or particular events or experiences, which could be as momentous as the one-time

resurrection of Jesus Christ for the Christian theist or as relatively inconsequential as the particular love of a particular mother for a particular child. Naturalism, by contrast, emphasizes only lawful regularities, thus not attending to irregularities or understanding them as either unknown regularities or more complex regularities, but regularities nonetheless. The naturalistic worldview would either explain away such particularities because they are supposedly the convergence of more general laws, or not study them at all because they are not replicable.

From the theist's perspective, however, it is perfectly reasonable to study singular events (Forland, 2008; Nichols, 2002; Larmer, 2011, 2012), even though they are not usually replicable in the traditional naturalistic sense. By contrast, the theistic worldview approaches particularities by exposing all their uniqueness, particularly the divine aspect of God's particular, context-specific ministering and activity (Reber & Slife, 2013b). This also means that what may appear to be natural regularities or patterns might be more singular in divine nature. Thus, theism values the irregular while naturalism discounts it, which is another significant conceptual difference between the two worldviews.

Practical Implications for Psychology

The differences between naturalism and theism are not limited to merely abstract or conceptual differences either. Practical implications for subjects directly related to psychology are also apparent from their differences. In other words, theism's conceptual differences to naturalism mean that a theistic approach to psychological phenomena will differ significantly from a naturalistic approach. There will be practical implications for

the research and practices of psychology³ (Slife et al., 2012, Slife & Zhang, 2014, Melling, 2013). In this section, however, I will not directly consider any implications for psychological research, though such implications could be inferred. Because the prospect of theistic research is the overarching purpose, I will devote the following two chapters to establishing an expansive foundation and executing the ensuing formula.

This section, on the other hand, will explore some implications of theism's differences from naturalism pertaining to some prominent examples of psychological subjects that are tied to practices. In other words, the purpose of this specific section is to explore practical rather than research implications. While a large variety of examples could be utilized to delineate the effects of these implications, including approaching this task with a flurry of such examples, I will consider just two illustrative examples for the sake of depth rather than breadth. Both examples have clear implications for mental illness and psychotherapy, which constitute some of the most practical and pressing concerns of psychology. The first example considers how theism might suggest a different understanding or approach to evaluating certain diagnostic criteria for schizophrenia. The second example relates depression to the medical model and shows how a theistic approach to treatment might differ from a traditional naturalistic approach.

Example 1: Schizophrenia. Psychiatrist Thomas Szasz (1973) once critiqued the commonly accepted psychopathologic conclusion that “If you talk to God, you are praying; If God talks to you, you have schizophrenia” (p. 113).” Although Szasz's critique occurs in a different context than the current exploration, some of his ideas are

³ Although research and practice are typically not as easily separable despite being clearly distinguishable from each other, I regard them separately based on their defining functions while recognizing that their purposes are tied together.

also applicable here in distinguishing between naturalism and theism. It is well documented that many hallucinations and delusions of paranoid schizophrenia involve religious content (Krzystanek et al., 2012; Bhavsar & Bhugra, 2008; Doerr & Velasquez, 2007) and that many schizophrenic patients experience religious delusions (Krzystanek et al., 2012; Siddle et al., 2002; Rudaleviciene et al., 2008). It has also been postulated that those who suffer from such delusions are more seriously ill (Siddle et al., 2002). Many reported religious delusions involve visions of, interaction with, or identification as God or other divine entities (Krzystanek et al., 2012). Naturalists would likely surmise that God speaking to or visiting a person qualifies in many cases as a symptom of schizophrenia because God cannot be real in any meaningful sense in a naturalistic world. This is partly the reason these divine manifestations are considered hallucinations or delusions; they are thought to arise from pathologic mental (and thus natural) processes as framed by naturalism, rather than reflect the possibilities of a different worldview.

Theists, on the other hand, would be open to the possibility of God speaking to or visiting a person in a way not automatically considered to be delusional, even for schizophrenic patients, because their worldview does not obviate it from the outset. A theistic worldview would consider that God is capable of acting in natural, mental processes, and this way theists might not necessarily consider communication from God as a symptom of mental illness, though they would, of course, also consider the possibility of such religious content being delusional. The difference is theism is not closed off to any of these possibilities before they are investigated, while naturalism deems investigation to be unnecessary because it presupposes the impossibility of divine

occurrences being real and therefore also does not consider that such experiences might be real or meaningful to schizophrenic patients.

A theistic approach to psychotherapy, then, might entail exploring purported divine communication in different and more meaningful ways than conventional naturalistic approaches. For example, supposedly pathologic divine experiences could be interpreted against a backdrop of religious narratives and the specific beliefs of the patient, instead of automatically attributing such experiences to psychopathology. This would necessitate that psychotherapists be at least somewhat educated in different religious traditions and theology to be able to explore all possible diagnoses and interpretations. Furthermore, theistic psychotherapists could also operate with the assumption that just because they may not be able to witness what their clients claim to be experiencing does not necessarily mean that those experiences are invalid. That some divine experiences are automatically discounted or discredited before they are thoroughly investigated, if at all (Slife et al., 2014), demonstrates the covert operation of an *unscientific*, naturalistic worldview that makes *a priori* judgments about divine involvement; a theistic worldview, by contrast, is open to exploring God's involvement in less presumptuous ways, taking theistic claims at face value and practicing sensitivity toward patients' interpreted realities, but also thoroughly investigating such claims and determining whether they are delusional or not. In this regard, learning about cultural and religious traditions would be needed to help distinguish between delusional and acceptable (normal) religious experiences (Slife & Reber, 2012).

Although this brief discussion undoubtedly simplifies the criteria and complexities of schizophrenia, taking only one particular symptom out of the larger

context of psychosis as an illustration, it clearly exemplifies how naturalism and theism could have quite different understandings of the same psychological event, with differing practical and psychotherapeutic ramifications. Unlike naturalism, theism would not automatically necessitate (i.e., *a priori*) that patients' mental or supposed physical experiences of God indicate they are out of touch with reality, as if to say one cannot experience divine beings or manifestations because such things do not exist except in a person's (natural) imagination. Indeed, theists might understand the mental world differently, perhaps as harmonious with the transcendent or in terms of divine immanence within a particular religious tradition (Melling, 2013).⁴

Example 2: Depression. As another telling example of practical psychological import, consider how depression could be understood quite differently from the perspectives of naturalism and theism. Many naturalists consider depression to be an illness to be treated, an obstacle to be removed, or a problem to be solved because it is a form of suffering and suffering is generally considered unpleasant, undesirable, and unnecessary (Hall, Langer & McMartin, 2010); therefore, it would make sense to treat or eliminate depression, from this perspective, so that a patient's mental condition and general wellbeing improves, moving him or her toward happiness and away from misery. This is because one of naturalism's direct implications is hedonism, the assumption that it is natural and normal to seek pleasure and avoid pain (Slife et al., 2004). Human nature,

⁴ The standard conception of immanence implies a complete opposition to divinity or transcendence (Vandenberg & O'Connor, 2005). Larson (2014), however, distinguishes between transcendence and immanence while basing both concepts on the experience of the divine. With transcendence, experience of the divine is beyond human limits (e.g., supernatural), while immanence involves more concrete divine manifestations such as the mental (i.e., natural) kind.

according to naturalism, along with the natural laws governing it, is considered hedonistic, and therefore so are the most ideal therapy outcomes (Slife, 2004a; Richards & Bergin, 2005; Slife & Whoolery, 2006). In other words, “Some version of happiness or self-benefit is a standard therapeutic goal. Chronic suffering or depression is typically viewed as inherently bad. Part of the obligation of any health professional, in light of the medical (naturalistic) model, is to prevent pain and relieve suffering” (Slife, 2004a). Depression, therefore, as perhaps the most common example of psychological pain and suffering, should be approached as any medical illness, i.e., it should be eliminated by any means necessary because it is mutually incompatible with good mental health. This also means, however, that hedonism “puts severe constraints on the meaning and purpose of suffering... Depression, for instance, can have no legitimate purpose or function in itself. It is only legitimate if it serves as a means to some greater happiness (e.g., stress inoculation)” (Slife, 2004a).

On the other hand, this supposedly “common-sense” psychological (naturalistic) understanding of therapy outcome (Hall, Langer & McMartin, 2010) might not necessarily be the understanding of a theistic approach to suffering and psychotherapy. Theists, for example, may view depression as a form of necessary suffering for some people to experience (Paul II, 1984; Hall et al., 2010). From this perspective, depression, as a unique psychological (and perhaps physical) form of human suffering, could be a way of sharing in God’s suffering to redeem mankind (Paul II, 1984). In the case of the Christian theist, for example, “Suffering can lead to increasing conformity to the character of Christ” or reorientation “toward the God who promises to redeem suffering and who suffered with [mankind] in the form of the cross” (Hall et al., 2010, p. 120).

Thus, suffering could have a broader meaning and a greater purpose in a theistic context; indeed, suffering could take on special meaning in the hands of God (Hall et al., 2010), suggesting that hedonism might not be the only natural or reasonable way to understand depression (i.e., as bad), nor the only sensible way of approaching it (i.e., as a medical condition).

A theistic approach to psychotherapy, then, would not necessarily consider all forms or instances of depression as problems or inconveniences to be reduced, resolved, or removed; rather, depression might also be seen as an experience that draws one closer to God (Paul II, 1984), and thus to one's own identity as a child of God. As one participant in a qualitative study on depression and spirituality (Sorajjakool et al., 2008) put it, "I feel this [depression] is all part of me getting to know God better... I see me eventually getting closer, knowing him better" (p. 528). Depression, in this sense, might not require "treatment" as much as *being with* the client through the suffering from the part of the psychotherapist or mental health practitioner, and openness to exploring these theistic meanings in a theistic context. A theistic psychotherapist might explore the significance or meaning of a client's experience of the suffering, and the crucial role that his or her depression plays in that meaning, as well as entertain unique theistic possibilities such as allowing God in the suffering to teach, succor, or prepare, or enduring the suffering "righteously" (Paul II, 1984; Hall et al., 2010; Sorajjakool et al., 2008).

Conclusion and Implications for Psychological Research

These different perspectives begin to illustrate how the initial philosophical differences described concerning the natural world, regularities, and irregularities might

have real and concrete practical and therapeutic implications for psychological events. Since, contrary to conventional wisdom, theism not only has a perspective to offer on the natural world, but a very different one compared to naturalism, it follows that theism has something unique to say regarding the natural events that concern psychologists. This also means that the compartmentalization of naturalism and theism by many theists working as psychologists is problematic inasmuch as theism is seen to complement naturalism. Rather, if the practical examples explored in this section are any indication, then theism really is the most complete rival to naturalism, offering different or opposed perspectives on the topics of psychology because their concerns directly overlap.

Given that theism and naturalism differ intellectually and practically, could they also have different implications with respect to psychological research? The exposition of some conceptual and practical differences between theism and naturalism in this chapter evidences at least the *potential* for the consideration of a theistic program of psychological research to be worthwhile because theism is different enough from naturalism. It appears that the way in which theism depicts the natural, psychological world can be substantially different from naturalistic approaches, and that theism could be useful in psychology in a way that allows for different meanings in research to emerge. Since psychology as it is currently constituted is a discipline of natural events, the alternative understanding of natural events offered by theism suggests that it can add both something new and different to the topics and methods that concern psychology. Perhaps it could bring fresh insights into the psychological world.

Chapter 3: What Does a Theistic Program of Psychological Research Call For Conceptually?

At this juncture, I have attempted to establish that naturalism is a worldview, that other worldviews than naturalism should be considered for psychological science, that theism is a prime candidate for consideration, and that theism is a significantly different set of explanations and hypotheses for even the *natural* events of psychology. Now the question is: Can theism be rendered into a scientific program of psychological research? Can it inform scientific investigation in ways that could lead to important new insights into our psychological natures? Miller (2005) seems to assume in his challenge, “*dare we develop a theistic psychology*” (emphasis added; p. 16), that it can, that a viable theistic program of psychological research is possible, but, as I determined at the outset of this thesis, this has not been sufficiently demonstrated. Therefore, in a manner of speaking, I accept Miller’s dare to develop a theistic psychology by exploring in the remainder of this thesis theism’s scientific and research potential in psychology.

Until this point, I explored only the justification for theism to be applied in a scientific context for psychology. Since there is sufficient justification for this endeavor, my task now becomes more prospective or forward-leaning. In other words, I now attempt to show how a viable theistic program of psychological research could unfold, thus taking another step toward answering the title question. But before I can explore theism in a more practical scientific context, I must first examine what theism calls for at a conceptual level and how it would affect the ways in which psychological science is currently conducted.

Theism's first premises are important, in this regard, so they will be explicated and rendered into a workable scientific framework. A theistic framework has important implications for the philosophy of science, research methods, and psychological subject matter, so I explore each of these in turn in this chapter. A robust scientific conception of theism would change researchers' approaches to studying psychological topics, including how they may understand and utilize existing research methods and psychological topics. Thus, the purpose of this chapter is to outline and discuss the conceptual foundations and considerations of a theistic program of psychological research that is directly applicable to the process (i.e., method) and content (i.e., subject matter) of psychological research in its current constitution. If this conceptually-oriented project is successful, it will provide an organization to be implemented in the next chapter's practical illustration of a prospective program of theistic research in psychology.

What are Theism's First Premises?

As previously discussed in Chapter 1, the issue of first premises is important for any scientific investigation, but it is often overlooked or under-examined in psychological science because of naturalism's bad monopoly and thus subsequent control of the criteria of psychological science. Indeed, when Reber and Slife (2013a) explain that "important aspects of the metaphysical and ontological subtly undergird and lead to the methodological and epistemological" (p. 6), first premises are the "important aspects" to which they refer, and what they mean by "subtly" is that first premises are often simply *taken for granted* in most scientific investigations. In a certain respect, first premises must be "taken for granted," since, as I have already shown, every worldview has unproven assumptions, i.e., first premises that cannot be proven empirically or logically

(Harris, 2004; Reber & Slife, 2013a), and thus have to be “taken for granted” or “granted for coherency.” But there is another sense in which *taken for granted* means that first premises are reified or assumed to be established facts, like in the case of naturalism’s natural laws, and therefore *taken for granted*, in this sense, can also indicate critical unawareness by the psychological scientist or researcher (Reber & Slife, 2013a). A theistic program of psychological research would rely on the former conception of what it means to take first premises for granted because it recognizes, due to its contrast with its main rival and its subsequent heightened critical sensibility (Slife & Zhang, 2014), the impossibility of proving first premises, as some other unproven first premises would necessarily have to be assumed in attempting to offer such a proof.

Theism’s first premises are further complicated by the variation of specific beliefs between its worldview adherents. Recall that theism not only has many categorical and subcategorical varieties (Johnson & Watson, 2012), but it also is assumed by many who claim to be theists themselves to be fully compatible with or complementary to naturalism and therefore is often syncretized into a dualistic or compartmentalized conception that includes both naturalistic and seemingly theistic components (see Chapter 2). Both of these difficulties are overcome, however, by recognizing that one common thread to any adequate conception of theism is how the activity or involvement of God is conceptualized. Theism conceives of God as *currently active, practically relevant, or meaningfully involved* in the world of psychological events (Slife et al., 2012), assuming as its *first premise* that God is (or could be) engaged in a difference-making way in every facet of the natural world, including all psychological events. Theism, in this sense, also entails considering God’s activity as at least a necessary condition (among other

necessary conditions) to fully understanding any psychological phenomenon (Slife & Reber, 2009a).⁵

This first premise seems clear enough but there has been no shortage of backlash against adopting this particular first premise (Helminiak, 2010, 2012, 2013; Alcock, 2009; Hibberd, 2009, 2012), for many of the same reasons previously identified as objections to theism's worldview candidacy. Naturalism's first premise of natural laws, critics might suggest, is more self-evident than theism's premise of God's involvement, and therefore a theistic worldview would only present unnecessary difficulties and challenges for psychological researchers, namely the detection of divine activity and the inability to prove that such activity even exists (Hibberd, 2009, 2012). But it is important to realize that the reason naturalism's first premises appear more self-evident has more to do with the mindset of those who accept the first premises (i.e., naturalists) than the truthfulness of the premises (i.e., natural laws) themselves. Naturalists typically consider their studies to be set up so as to detect natural laws and their significant findings as proof that such laws exist. Hence, natural laws appear self-evident to naturalists because they suppose that their successful studies prove the existence of these laws. This conclusion, however, betrays rather than affirms their first premise, which *already, a priori*, makes the assumption that such laws exist. Why would naturalists accept a first premise as true or axiomatic at the beginning of their studies and then use the findings that follow as proof that that first premise is true? They must be misunderstanding psychological science and thus either misconceptualizing or misrepresenting naturalism. In either case, what this means is upon clarifying this misunderstanding, naturalism's first premises are

⁵ This would apply whether God is engaged or not. Even God's lack of engagement,

not really more self-evident than theism's first premises, and the difficulties and challenges associated with accepting theism's first premises for investigation are illusory.

Theistic psychological researchers, on the other hand, properly recognize that accepting first premises as axiomatic in an investigation means the purpose of the investigation is not to prove the existence of those first premises. When they treat the involvement of God as a *first premise*. This means... that the theist *begins* with God's involvement in the world, whether formulating a hypothesis, theory, practice, or method of inquiring about the world. God is not a variable to be studied but a premise to be assumed. In this sense, the theist does not formulate a method of inquiry and *then* ask whether God exists or is involved, because this does not treat the involvement of God as *an assumption already made*, which would then guide the conduct of inquiry. (Slife & Reber, 2009b, p. 132)

Whether the involvement of God is actually true would not be the concern of theistic psychologists, any more than the involvement of natural laws is actually true (or even provable), since to them theism is just a worldview with as many unproven and unable-to-be-proven assumptions or first premises as naturalism (Reber & Slife, 2013a; Harris, 2004). Thus, they recognize that the proper purpose of scientific investigation in psychology is not to detect or prove these first premises to be true. Rather, theistic psychologists would be concerned about how their particular worldview could affect or change modes of scientific inquiry, including the sort of questions posed, the subject matter explored, the methods deployed, and the explanations given; they would not deal

given the *possibility* of engagement, is a necessary condition.

with theological questions any more than naturalists would deal with the philosophical questions of naturalism.⁶ They would be more interested in whether their respective worldview could predict and understand psychological phenomena.

Theistic psychologists would assume that God *does* act—though not knowing or caring “exactly” how (which is a theological rather than a psychological question)—and that God’s activity might be manifested in psychological events and processes.

My purpose is to show how psychologists can work within these most fundamental understandings of the theistic worldview to conduct research that brings new psychological findings and knowledge to the table. It is to perform a thought experiment, so to speak, by *assuming* that God makes a current, practical difference in the psychological world (though not knowing exactly how God acts in the world) and then to see what this difference could mean for psychological science. Could this assumption change a psychological researcher’s mentality and approach and still produce significant and defensible findings?

Does Theism Require a Wholly Different Philosophy of Science?

Given the potentially radical implications of theism for psychological science, some may assume that theism must necessarily require a wholly different philosophy of science to naturalism. After all, if naturalism is the philosophy undergirding psychology’s current research methods, as some claim (Johnson & Watson, 2012), then these methods were adapted from or created based on the natural sciences to suit the naturalistic worldview (Slife et al., 2012; Johnson & Watson, 2012). It might therefore

⁶ Interestingly, there exist just as many philosophical proofs of (and against) natural laws as for (or against) the involvement of God, reflecting the philosophic rather than scientific nature of these respective first premises.

seem inconsistent or even implausible to combine the theistic worldview with naturalistic methods that are biased in favor of and make the most sense when guided by the naturalistic worldview.

Some may even assume that a theistic philosophy of science would be the best alternative to the current naturalistic philosophy of science if theism is to be taken seriously in psychology, and that such a philosophy of science should be formulated and allow for the invention of new theistic methods of study. This is the reason Richards has repeatedly championed epistemological and methodological pluralism for psychological science (Richards & Bergin, 2005): to move toward a theistic philosophy of science. Indeed, a theistic philosophy of science might entail exploring new and different ontologies, epistemologies, methods, and approaches from the ones psychologists currently use. As Slife et al. (2012) put it, a theistic philosophy of science could contribute to new theistic “ways of advancing knowledge. After all, if theism is a wholly different method worldview, then it has its own implications for how methods should be developed” (p. 228). Such considerations would certainly be required for a comprehensive program of theistic research in psychology.⁷ However, they are beyond the scope of what I intend to accomplish with this thesis.

In this thesis, I attempt to explore another claim made by Slife et al. (2012), that a theistic worldview “does not have to mean a wholly different philosophy of science, and thus set of methods. Theism can move in the direction of another philosophy of science... but we would argue that theism also has important practical implications for conventional forms of inquiry” (p. 225). These authors seem to suggest that it would be

wise to first consider how theism might affect psychology as it is currently constituted, instead of developing a new philosophy of science altogether from the outset. If theism could have “important practical implications for conventional forms of inquiry,” it makes sense to attempt to work within some of these existing parameters rather than drastically altering the prominent features of the discipline when there is no need to. But retaining a large part of psychology’s current naturalistic identity in attempting to conceptualize a theistic program of research raises some interesting questions: Can theism, the most complete rival of naturalism (Slife et al., 2012), be applied in a setting designed, as some would claim, by and for naturalism? Can psychologists conduct theistic research using many of the existing conventions, methods, subdisciplines, and topics formed or founded under naturalism?

Slife and Reber (2009b) suggest that theism can be employed in psychology in its current naturalistic constitution. They explain that all research methods are metaphorical hammers that are not biased against, and thus are neutral to, the pounding of a variety of nails. Still, there are activities that hammers *are* “biased against,” such as screwing screws and sawing boards. Translated into the present context, our original claim was that the naturalistic philosophy underlying traditional psychological inquiry makes it ill-suited (like the hammer) for theistic inquiry (like the screws)... Theism is a different worldview, so it has its own implications for methods. Still, even a hammer can pound a few screws, though this is rarely ideal. (pp. 132-133).

⁷ See Slife and Whoolery (2006) and Johnson (2007) for some preliminary considerations toward a theistic philosophy of science for psychology.

In other words, this analogy suggests that carpenters usually attempt to fit the best tool to the job at hand, but sometimes the exact right tool is not available. Another tool could be used when this occurs, such as a hammer to pound a screw. This might not be as ideal as using a screwdriver, but it can still get some semblance of the job done. Analogously, naturalistic tools can be used, within limits, for some theistic purposes.

This is because the theistic worldview also has implications for the naturalistic methods that were designed to investigate the natural world. After all, recall that theism is also concerned with that same natural world. Theism is not simply about the supernatural; it is just as interested in the natural as the supernatural, and as naturalism is. In this sense, theism is concerned with different explanations and hypotheses concerning *natural events*, not supernatural events. The upshot is that naturalists and theists view natural events differently. That is, they are both interested in the same psychological events, not to mention the regularities of the natural world, but they approach psychological events with two different sets of lenses and therefore interpret these same events differently (see Chapter 2).

Given that the success of naturalistic methods depends on a construal of the world as consisting of natural events, and that theism also has something to say about natural events, the existing research methods of psychology might be, in many ways, deployable under a theistic worldview if they are themselves reinterpreted. Therefore, I will not explore how theism might alter the methods used to conduct psychological inquiry under a brand new philosophy of science. While this may be necessary for a full-fledged theistic program of psychological research, the first practical application of theism to psychology should have direct relevance to psychological science as it is currently

constituted. The next inquiry, then, concerns how the current set of readily available research methods in psychology can also be deployed within a theistic interpretation of psychological subject matter, and of the methods themselves.

Are Existing Research Methods Capable of Theistic Deployment?

The purpose of this section is to explore implications for the research process pertaining to the use of traditional research methods. These research methods seem to be inspired by a naturalistic understanding of the psychological world (i.e., as lawful and godless), so one may wonder whether they are adaptable to a theistic understanding and thus retainable for a theistic program of research. It should be noted, in this regard, that I have identified traditional research methods rather closely with naturalism. While this is the prevailing conception, the methods themselves are not as essentially naturalistic as people may think; they may avoid supernatural events, and are naturalistic in this sense, but their concern with natural events, especially the regularity of these events, is also shared by theism.

Since theism is also interested in the natural events of psychology and does not require a new theistic philosophy of science be invented to have an effect on psychological science, the question now is: Are the extant methods of psychological science, namely quantitative and qualitative methods, open to investigation performed under a theistic worldview? In other words, are these existing research methods capable of theistic deployment? If the assumptions of these methods could be reinterpreted to make sense according to a theistic view of reality, then quantitative and qualitative methods could theoretically allow for designs and lead to findings that are accommodating of theistic conceptions and explanations. Thus, in what follows, I

explore in turn some of the most prominent features of quantitative and qualitative methods to determine whether they can be justifiably deployed for scientific investigations of psychological phenomena when guided by theism. In the case of quantitative methods, I consider the lawfulness assumption undergirding natural events and its implications for research design, while focusing on how the godlessness assumption could limit the range of permissible meanings identifiable with qualitative methods.

Quantitative methods. Although quantitative research methods have typically been associated with a naturalistic approach to psychological inquiry, and the exclusive use of quantitative methods has been questioned by some proponents of a theistic approach to psychological science (Nelson, 2006), Tan (2006) and Slife and Reber (2009b) note that these methods can and should still be implemented by theistic psychological researchers. Tan (2006), for example, argues that “good science that uses quantitative methods... can be appreciated with its philosophical and methodological limitations freely acknowledged” (p. 262), and Slife and Reber (2009b), using a familiar analogy, express that although “the naturalistic philosophy underlying traditional psychological inquiry [quantitative research] makes it ill-suited (like the hammer) for theistic inquiry (like the screws)” (Slife & Reber, 2009b, p. 132), “Still, even a hammer can pound a few screws...” (p. 133). But in what sense is this possible? If quantitative methods were formulated, as some claim, for the express purpose of identifying patterns in an exclusively natural-law-oriented and -governed world, where exactly is the openness to God’s involvement? How could theism possibly fit within the quantitative framework? The answer lies in recognizing how the lawful picture of natural events is

painted differently by naturalism and theism in respect to the features of quantification, empiricism, operationalization, and replication that undergird quantitative methods. As I will show, theists can have different interpretations and explanations of natural lawfulness and therefore of these methods.

Quantification. The identifying feature of quantitative methods is the quantification or measurement of natural phenomena, i.e., comprehending the natural world in numerical terms. Quantification or measurability, in this sense, requires that natural events be translated into numbers, hence the importance and prevalence of scales and measures in psychological research. When psychologists construct items to measure psychological phenomena, they do so in a way that takes into consideration the regularity of the natural, psychological events measured and then subject their data to analysis. The quantifying of data, in this sense, is not restricted to a naturalistic interpretation of those data, because data are underdetermined (Slife & Williams, 1995; Melling, 2009; Slife & Reber, 2009b). This means that theistic interpretations could possibly also be offered of data, since natural events and their regularity are equally accessible by and applicable to theism as naturalism. Moreover, since many quantitative measures and scales contain people's self-reported experiences, there is no reason, in principle, that experiences related to God could not be measured in this same way (Reber et al., 2012).

Empiricism. The narrow brand of British empiricism that is the eminent epistemology of conventional (naturalistic) psychological science regards only what is observable as knowable (Slife & Slife, 2014; Slife & Melling, 2008). Many psychological scientists understand natural laws to fit this criterion (Slife & Whoolery, 2006), while the activity of God is not considered to be observable in the same way—

hence the conventional outlook that even if God were active in the world there would be no way to observe the activity of such an unseen divine being. It is important to note, however, that natural laws themselves are actually also unobservable entities, just like God. Although the postulated *manifestations* of these laws are observable, the laws themselves are not (Slife et al., 2012; Slife & Zhang, 2014). The laws are unseen entities inferred from the manifestations they supposedly govern, e.g., the law of gravity behind the manifestation of a basketball returning to the ground after it is shot through a ring. Like natural laws, “God is an unseen entity that supposedly governs or influences world manifestations” (Slife et al., 2012, p. 224), and there is no reason that inferences cannot also be made about God’s activity in the world in much the same way (Slife & Zhang, 2014). Natural laws are no more observable than God’s activity, in this sense. Put another way, natural laws are one interpretation of natural events while God’s activity is a different interpretation of those events—there is nothing more observable about a naturalistic interpretation (involving natural laws) compared to a theistic interpretation (based on God’s activity) of natural events.

Operationalization. Operationalization, in a related manner, turns the unobservable or unreportable into the observable or reportable. As Slife and Melling (2008) put it, “When some unobservable subject matter is of interest... empiricist epistemology requires that the psychological researcher ‘operationalize’ and thus translate these unobservable constructs into observable procedures or operations” (p. 45). The postulated manifestations of either natural laws or God’s activity just described are operationalizations because the observable (i.e., manifestations) represents the unobservable. In naturalism’s case, its operationalizations are based on a naturalistic

interpretation of the regularity and order of natural world events. Theism offers an alternative interpretation but, as I have already shown, one that is also consistent with the world's regularity and order (see Chapter 2). This means that theism will have its own operationalizations, as will naturalism, because operationalizations will vary with respect to the interpretive framework in which they are formulated. Although theism may seem at a higher level of abstraction than naturalism, and thus appear more difficult to operationalize, natural laws are really not any less abstract than divine activity, in which case theism can lead to constructs and operationalizations just like naturalism. Because operationalizations can only occur in the context of a preexisting interpretive framework that makes sense of the phenomena in a particular way, theism is just as operationalizable, in this sense, as naturalism.

Replication. The feature of replication or replicability that is so important to quantitative methods seems to be based on a naturalistic interpretation of regularity, whereby natural laws are assumed to be operating continuously without any deviation in the natural world. As Slife and Whoolery (2006) put it, because

unchangeable and universal natural laws and principles are [assumed to be] the most fundamental realities of the world... natural science [i.e., quantitative] methods have been formulated to detect these unchangeable and universal laws. The need for replication and repeatability in psychology is perhaps the most obvious manifestation of this formulation of the scientific method, because unchangeable natural laws should be detectable and repeatable (under the same conditions). (p. 223).

Experimental conditions are taken to be equivalent to “real world” conditions since these laws are meant to hold no matter the setting or context, and research findings must be replicable to be considered valid for this reason—i.e., the more a particular finding can be replicated, especially across different populations, the more likely it can be considered to reflect a natural law in operation.

While theism is open to findings that are not replicable (i.e., irregularities⁸), it is also just as concerned with the patterns and regularities of the world, and therefore endorses this replication feature of quantitative methods as much as naturalism. This is so because theists see God as providing natural regularity for predictability and rationality. A totally unpredictable world would not be sensible or meaningful, not to mention uninhabitable. A world of regularities, on the other hand, is predictable and habitable. In this sense, God is seen as involved in the continuing operation of natural laws; according to Plantinga (1997), “natural laws are not in any way independent of God, and are perhaps best thought of as regularities in the ways in which he treats the stuff he has made...” Therefore, a theistic interpretation considers that God provides a world consisting of regularities for the sake of those inhabiting the world. For this reason, a theistic interpretation of worldly regularities would emphasize replication no less than a naturalistic interpretation.

Conclusion. These four features of quantitative methods—quantification, empiricism, operationalization, and replication—can clearly be reinterpreted with an openness and sensitivity toward divine action; they are thus not opposed to theism in principle, as many suppose. The lawfulness assumption of the naturalism that undergirds

these features is, therefore, only as godless as the naturalists behind it. Perhaps more importantly, quantitative methods can be deployed to investigate God's postulated activity in psychological events without having to diminish or eliminate the importance of the methods' standard features.

Qualitative methods. Traditional qualitative research methods, like traditional quantitative methods, are also not necessarily or ideally applicable to theistic research in psychology given their non-theistic foundation. To be sure, the worldview of qualitative methods is a different worldview than that of quantitative methods (Packer, 2011; Slife & Melling, 2012), but “both quantitative and qualitative researchers have typically adopted different forms of naturalism, and thus have agreed on the *a priori* dismissal of theistic theorizing” (Slife & Zhang, 2014, p. 1946). In other words, qualitative researchers, like quantitative researchers, do not typically postulate that God matters in the formulation or deployment of their methods. While qualitative methods do not emphasize the lawfulness feature of naturalism as much as quantitative methods, the secular and social foundation of the qualitative method worldview assumes a functional *godlessness*.

However, these methods might be somewhat more open to or compatible with theism in ways that reflect the unique features of the qualitative worldview. Consider, for instance, Nelson's (2006) argument that

Qualitative methods...are more open to the kinds of values and methods... of a theistic framework of inquiry. Qualitative studies are (1) driven by phenomenon rather than method, (2) involve an examination of potential biases, (3) establish a relational engagement with the participants that encourages the investigator to act

⁸ Irregularities will be addressed under the following section regarding qualitative

out of love and care toward the people being studied, and (4) explicitly look for unpredictable events [i.e., irregularities] that challenge current conceptions of a phenomenon (cf. Gorsuch, 2002; Slife & Whoolery, 2006). Obviously, the use of these methods does not guarantee a place for theism, but appropriately used the methods provide a space where theistically-informed inquiry can be conducted. (p. 278).

Nelson's defense of qualitative methods suggests that these methods could be deployed in ways that take God's practical activity and involvement seriously. But how exactly could this occur when qualitative methods are typically associated with features such as phenomenology, social constructionism, subjectivity, and relativism that, in a conventional sense, seem to exclude genuinely theistic meanings? Like Nelson, Slife and Melling (2008) claim that "the assumptions associated with qualitative methods (and methodology) may be more compatible with some [theistic] investigative questions" (p. 46). But how might they be more compatible when qualitative methods typically assume a godless worldview? Can qualitative methods, like quantitative methods, be understood in a different manner than that dictated by tradition to allow for truly theistic possibilities to be taken into account? Specifically, can the features of phenomenology, social constructionism, subjectivity, and relativism that are typically associated with qualitative methods take theistic meanings seriously if understood in a less conventional but perhaps more proper sense?

Phenomenology. If quantification is the primary means by which quantitative methods operate, then phenomenology, or the foregrounding of lived human experience, methods.

is its qualitative counterpart. Qualitative researchers, therefore, tend to “emphasize the goal of understanding the ‘lived experiences’ (*Erlebnis*) from the point of view of those who live it day to day” (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 129). From this phenomenological perspective, experiences involving God *could* be taken just as seriously as any other experience. That is to say, many experience God in their daily lives, so it is important to understand these experiences and not relegate them to a different category of experience that is somehow distinguishable from more “concrete” or “tangible” experiences.

On the other hand, when qualitative researchers think they are taking experiences of God seriously, they are often participating in the overlooked tendency of understanding theistic experiences in secular terms (Roehlkepartain et al., 2005; Smith, 2003). In other words, theistic experiences are often simply considered “religious” experiences, no different than experiences of one’s class, gender, race, or sexuality as features of one’s identity. This is so because religion is understood in the image of secularism (Calhoun, Juergensmeyer & VanAntwerpen, 2011), as no more than an institutional embodiment of one’s personal values. When experiences with a divine being are believed to be no more than some form of religious (i.e., secular) identity- or meaning-making, a person’s lived experience is somewhat discounted because the meaning-making is not in the service of a God (or does not stem from a God); it originates from the person and is thus assumed to be in the service of the person—a point of view inconsistent with most religions. In this sense, secular understandings can be functionally equated to godlessness. The upshot is this godlessness is not derived from the phenomenological “point of view” of those experiencing God, in which case the phenomenologist or qualitative researcher is not truly open to the phenomenology of their

participants. Properly understood, phenomenology should be open to lived experiences involving God without secularizing these experiences.

Social constructionism. The godlessness of qualitative methods is also evident in the epistemology often associated with these methods (Darlaston-Jones, 2007): social constructionism. There are two different but related issues concerning how theism is conventionally understood within a social constructionist framework. The first issue concerns social processes—according to Richardson and Slife (2013), “social constructionism retains the claim that knowledge is ‘the product of social processes’ (Burr, 1995, p. 4). So, in this sense, social processes can be considered the only relevant reality from a social constructionist perspective” (p. 8), meaning the very notion of God itself is the product of social processes. This often results in what might be termed “social reductionism,” “that dismisses religious or spiritual phenomena as expressions of something else. ‘What appears to be divine or spiritual or transcendent or pious or sacred are *really only* about social class, race, gender, ethnicity, nationalism, solidarity, social control, and so on’ (Smith, 2003, p. 19)” (Roehlkepartain et al., 2005, p. 3). But “If experiences of God are simply social constructions... God... is again rendered functionally non-existent” (Richardson & Slife, 2013, p. 9). The whole concept and being of God, in other words, is reduced to some level of social construction because this epistemology implies that any understanding involving God can *only* make sense in terms of a social reality that is constructed only by human beings. The God of theism is “not simply a socially constructed concept of God” (p. 9), however, leading straight to the next issue.

The second issue deals with God's possible involvement *in* or as *part of* these social processes. God is typically not considered to play an active role in these social processes or social constructions, whether they involve constructions of God or not. Instead, social processes and constructions are usually considered to be mere human construction, as if invented *ex nihilo* without God contributing to the construction in some manner. However, as Slife (2012) explains,

many spiritual and religious traditions... claim their propositions and meanings are more than merely human constructions (Netland, 2001). This is not to say that many religions would not acknowledge a constructive or interpretive element in many lived religious meanings. Nevertheless, it is one thing to assume that this element is *one* factor in the lived experience of religious people and quite another to assume that this constructionist element is *the* factor (see Slife and Richardson, in press). (p. 806).

In the specific case of theism, God could be involved as a co-constructor in a person's constructions, but the narrow version of this social constructionist epistemology excludes this possibility *a priori* and therefore maintains a commitment to godlessness.

However, qualitative researchers need not limit themselves to such a narrow version of this epistemology, and thus the immanent frame of a social world that stems from it. If qualitative methods are not unnecessarily confined to a narrow social constructionist epistemology, they could also be open to interpretations and meanings that fit the transcendent frame of a divine world permitted by theism, without reducing them to purely social processes and human constructions when taking these factors into consideration. God is not simply the product of a social construction, in this regard;

rather, God could be taken seriously as a co-constructor of knowledge. A hermeneutic inclination for qualitative research could prove helpful to avoiding the sort of social reductionism as well as the *a priori* exclusion of God as a potential co-constructor that frequently accompany social constructionist accounts because such an inclination situates understanding in the experience of meanings broadly construed (Slife, 2012; Reber & Slife, 2013a) and thus not limited to a purely social reality or merely human construction.

Subjectivity. A hermeneutic approach could not only expand the narrowness or correct the misunderstandings of social constructionism; it could also allow for qualitative research to be meaning-oriented rather than merely subject-oriented (Reber & Slife, 2013a; Slife & Richardson, in press). While many qualitative researchers seek to avoid the modernist dualism of objectivity/subjectivity that prioritizes objectivity, they have equated meanings with the other side of the dualism: subjectivity. Thus, many have understood meanings, especially those involving God, to be purely subjective experiences,⁹ i.e., contained in the subject, and therefore bearing no practical implications for the world (or object) per se. Reber and Slife (2013a) correct this misconception, however, by noting that

the conventional, dualistic notion of meaning... is a distinctly subjective entity, [while] the hermeneutic conception... understands meaning as constituted by both subjectivity and objectivity in an interpreted reality that is not merely subjective speculation about an objective world out there (Gadamer, 1997). From the hermeneutic perspective we live with and through the world, not as subjects over against objects, but as participants in a world of co-constituted meanings where

ontological distinctions between subjects and objects are not experienced and consequently a subjectivity/objectivity dualism does not arise (Heidegger, 1962). (p. 11).

In this sense, theistic meanings involving the experience of a divine being are not ungrounded ideas (Gadamer, 1997; Warnke, 1994). Meanings do not refer to the contents of the mind of the interpreter [subjectivity] or to the objects in themselves [objectivity]. Instead, they are mutually constituted by the interpreter, interpretive context, and the thing interpreted (Heidegger, 1962). In terms familiar to the dualist, they are inextricably interpreted realities—subjective objectivities or objective subjectivities—with neither the ‘subjective’ nor the ‘objective’ aspects of these meanings separable from one another (Slife, Reber, & Faulconer, 2012). (Reber & Slife, 2013a, p. 15).

The point is that under a hermeneutic paradigm God is not simply assumed to be a subjective entity in a person’s consciousness. Qualitative methods can thus be sympathetic toward theistic meanings, if framed hermeneutically, because hermeneutics entails that a person’s meaning of God’s involvement in his or her life events is as potentially “grounded” and thus “real,” in this sense, as any other meanings, making God functionally relevant from this perspective. Some forms of qualitative methods would thus be conducive to theism because they can presume a theistic interpretive reality in order to make sense of theistic meanings and possibilities.

Relativism. Such a hermeneutic approach to qualitative research also avoids the relativism that devolves from the conventional notion of subjectivity, whereby “a

⁹ Some might even say that experiences of God are the *most* subjective of experiences

detachment of meaning from the objects that constrain that meaning would lead to an idealist or subjectivist ideology and a *rampant relativism*” (emphasis added, Reber & Slife, 2013b, p. 67). This kind of relativism suggests complete epistemological ungroundedness and resists any claim to truth, especially when the involvement of a “subjective entity” such as God is concerned. This relativistic understanding of ungroundedness, however, differs from the groundedness of hermeneutics. That is to say, relativism posits “that the truths and moralities of the world are completely ungrounded” (Slife, 2012, p. 806), while hermeneutics understands that “the context of any event puts *parameters* on the interpretations of constructions that can reasonably be made of the event” (emphasis added, p. 806).

Because meanings and interpretations are grounded in the object or event, for the hermeneuticist, some meanings and interpretations will necessarily be more acceptable and truthful than others, and vice versa. For example, “Consider the... ethical event of a large truck accidentally hitting a small girl. Some [interpretations] of this event simply are not reasonably available, such as referring to the mangled and bleeding girl as being ‘beautiful’ or ‘delightful’” (p. 806). On the other hand, the relativist would, from subscribing to ungroundedness, be equally open to all interpretations or meanings because any hard truth is altogether avoided. “If, by contrast, world meanings can be understood to be grounded in the lived and ethical world, then they can be understood to reflect a practical truth and a meaningful reality. The meaning of the truck hitting the little girl is some variation on ‘tragedy,’ because there is a meaningful reality to her suffering or death” (p. 806). In this sense, interpretations do not come solely from the

(Slife & Zhang, 2014).

interpreter, as the ungroundedness of relativism would entail; rather, interpretations arise from the relationship between the interpreter and that which is interpreted, i.e., what *grounds* any interpretation (and thus affords particular interpretations). In the hermeneutic sense, theistic meanings can embody a form of truthfulness derived from a theistic interpretive reality in which these meanings are grounded and afforded.

Conclusion. When the qualitative features of phenomenology, social constructionism, subjectivity, and relativism are understood in conventional terms, theistic meanings and understandings are often reduced or relegated to the secular, social, subjective, and/or relativistic realms. As I have shown, however, these features can also be approached in less conventional, more hermeneutic ways that take theistic meanings seriously. Some might even say, in this regard, that the qualitative worldview and its research implications have not been *properly* understood under the more conventional, more secular or naturalistic lens (Packer, 2011). Hermeneutics embodies qualitative inquiry more appropriately (Packer, 2011), in this regard, displaying a unique openness to a theistic interpretive system because of its distinct focus on meanings and truth, and thereby granting theistic meanings a level of validity not conferred by conventional approaches.

In What Ways Would Theism Change Conventional Forms of Inquiry in Psychology?

Now that it is apparent traditional research methods can be reinterpreted and deployed according to a theistic worldview, theistic implications for the subject matter of psychology should be considered. Recall Slife et al.'s (2012) argument that "theism also has important practical implications for conventional forms of inquiry" (p. 225). As I

have already shown, some of these practical implications are directly related to the deployment of methods, i.e., the *process* of research. But what are the practical implications for the conventional *content* of psychological research, the other necessary, and perhaps more significant, aspect of any inquiry? I will explore three such implications in this section: First, existing subdisciplines of psychology can be approached theistically. Second, psychological topics and events that are traditionally and substantively theistic can, for perhaps the first time, be studied within a theistic framework. Third, traditionally secular topics and subjects that are typically seen to have little or nothing to do with God can be “reconceptualized and rendered theistically” (Slife et al., 2012, p. 228). The purpose of this section is not to provide extensive examples or to show how specific studies might look; rather, it is to offer guidelines as to how theism would approach existing psychological subject matter in a program of research. These guidelines will be followed and the resulting template implemented in the following chapter. What this section provides is simply the promise for the prospect.

Approaching secular psychological subdisciplines theistically. As to the first area of psychological content, it should be noted that “theistic psychology” is not itself a subdiscipline of psychology so much as it is a *way of thinking* about the various subdisciplines of psychology, such as social psychology, clinical psychology, or any other subdiscipline. Theistic psychology would not have to focus on its own exclusive set of topics, theories, and practices, as most subdisciplines of psychology do, although this would certainly be a possibility with a full-fledged theistic psychology. Rather, the main concern in light of holding onto the discipline of psychology in its current constitution, one of the purposes of this project, is to move theism into a more

conventional psychology that is already familiar to most. Since theism, as we have already discussed, is also concerned with the natural events of the psychological world, it remains to be seen how theism would systematically interpret these events. An appropriate starting point, then, is by theistically addressing one or another existing secular psychological subdiscipline that brings together a constellation of related natural, psychological events and processes.

Theistic psychology, in this regard, would function like evolutionary psychology, which offers a perspective on or approach to *all* of psychology (Liddle & Shackelford, 2011), including, potentially, all of its different subdisciplines, and is not simply its own subdiscipline per se. Evolutionary psychology embodies a systematic way of approaching the study of different psychological subjects based on evolutionary theory (Liddle & Shackelford, 2011), which is also arguably the quintessential theoretical embodiment of naturalism (Plantinga, 2011), having implications for both the origins and current bases of human behavior. The tenets of theism, on the other hand, have not been similarly considered because traditional debates have largely been limited to that of evolution against creation. While evolutionary theory offers a perspective on the ongoing, present influences on behavior, e.g., adaptation, creationism does not because it is focused mostly on the issue of origins. Thus, creationism is not the best representation of theism since theism, like evolution, also has implications for current behavioral influences. Moreover, theism provides different interpretations of the same natural events. Even evolutionary explanations can be understood from a theistic perspective (Plantinga, 2011), such as survival and reproduction, with the same number and kind of unprovable assumptions (Reber & Slife, 2013a).

Approaching the secular subdisciplines of psychology theistically, then, requires that God's *current* activity be postulated as at least a necessary condition among other necessary conditions in the constitution and explanation of psychology's subdisciplinary content, i.e., the order of a set of natural psychological events. It would require looking at the specific topics, concepts, theories, and ideas that are studied in any given subdiscipline in a theistic way. It would also require considering any explanation that does not include God as a necessary condition as either incomplete or wrong. This way of changing conventional explanation and inquiry could also entail contextualizing and illuminating the naturalism of a subdiscipline via historical or theoretical inquiry (e.g., Slife & Reber, 2009a). Finally, it also encompasses the following two ways of approaching specific topics theistically, since the topics studied in psychology are typically organized under one or another subdiscipline.

Studying theistic topics theistically. The second way that theism could change the content in conventional lines of inquiry concerns the study of psychological topics that are typically viewed as theistic or as associated with theism, namely religious and spiritual topics and events. Until now, a theistic approach to topics traditionally associated with theism has generally been lacking because "systematic biases against a theistic interpretative framework have led the discipline to avoid considering theism in the formulation and interpretation of psychological theories and research, even when that research is focused on seemingly theistic topics" (Slife & Reber, 2009a, p. 72). Consider, for example, the psychology of religion, which, despite displaying openness to the study of theistic content and topics such as prayer, worship, forgiveness, and image-of-God, often approaches and interprets these topics in naturalistic ways that are inconsistent with

and sometimes even opposed to the ways theists themselves understand these topics (Slife & Reber, 2012; Slife & Reber, 2009a), such as conventional image-of-God research that overlooks experiences with God as a factor in the formation of a person's image-of-God (Reber et al., 2012; O'Grady & Richards, 2008; Slife & Reber, 2009a). While psychology-of-religion studies that understand theistic topics in a naturalistic way undoubtedly reveal important aspects about these topics, they also conceal other important aspects (Reber & Slife, 2013a). Allowing the theistic worldview to guide such studies could not only reveal important theistic aspects for perhaps the first time, but also prevent any misunderstanding or misrepresentation of theists or theistic practices (Slife & Reber, 2012).

A whole program of research could be devoted to the study of theistic topics in psychology and the psychology of theists under the interpretive framework of the theistic worldview that takes God's involvement into account. Indeed, many existing studies related to the psychology of religion could be modified and replicated with sensitivity towards theism, such as an image-of-God study that actually considers experiences with God as possibly contributing to that image (see Reber et al., 2012 for such a theistically modified study). Moreover, traditionally theistic topics have also been investigated in tandem with traditionally nontheistic psychological content such as mental health, addiction, neuroscience, etc. When topics are combined in this way, theistic understandings of theistic topics would also change how traditionally nontheistic content is investigated. For example, if one were to study the effects of prayer (a theistic topic) on addiction (nontheistic content), a theistic change in conceptualizing prayer would also lead to a theistic change in understanding addiction. It would not take many procedural

changes to approach the study of theistic topics theistically, whether they are studied within their own parameters or in relation to traditionally nontheistic topics, although attention to detail would be necessary since the theistic nature of these topics may give the impression that they are already being studied theistically when they are really not.

Reconceptualizing secular topics theistically. The third way in which theism can change the naturalistic content of conventional psychological inquiry takes the secular or naturalistic topics of psychology directly into consideration. Can psychological topics that are so traditionally secular it is even difficult for theists to imagine how God could have any practical relevance to these topics also be studied with regard to theism? Slife et al. (2012) “argue that even traditionally secular psychological topics [such as prosocial behavior] can be reconceptualized and rendered theistically” (p. 228; see also Melling, 2009). For many theists, for example, the possibility of God prompting a person to engage in altruistic and loving behaviors is quite reasonable, so to study prosocial behavior within a theistic interpretive framework, though it may be more difficult, is not all that farfetched. But could this also be true for topics that are radically secular, “topics that are often not considered to be connected with God at all, such as neuroscience and child development” (p. 222)? Slife et al. argue that the conceptual differences of theism can also lead to practical research differences for radically secular topics since “This extension to less traditional topics derives from the thoroughgoing variety of theism” (p. 222). Although, from this perspective, God could be potentially involved in even the most radically secular of topics, no formal theistic reconceptualizations along these lines have yet to be offered, which raises the question of how or whether secular topics can be rendered theistically. Can existing theories and

programs of research be reconceptualized? Can original studies be designed based on theistic reconceptualizations? Answering these questions is the purpose of the next chapter.

Conclusion

The conceptual foundations of a theistic program of psychological research explored in this chapter lay an agenda to be followed for a practical research program. This agenda suggests not only that the traditional research methods already used by psychological researchers could be reinterpreted to have application to theistically-guided investigation; it also considers ways in which the existing subject matter of psychology can be reconceptualized and researched with theistic proclivities. Thus, the discipline of psychology need not be recreated in the image of theism, as a new philosophy of science might require. Rather, psychology in its current constitution as a discipline of natural events and conventional methods seems suited to the possibility of some forms of research that is done within a theistic interpretive framework, as a matter of principle. Now the question is whether the principle can be transformed into practice. Can the conceptual roots of theistic research presented in this chapter prove to be a reliable template for future studies and prospective programs of research in psychology?

Chapter 4: What Would a Practical Program of Theistic Research Look Like?

The previous chapter's exploration suggests the conceptual or technical viability of deploying quantitative and qualitative methods for theistic research if these methods are reconstrued from a theistic worldview, and of investigating the current subject matter of psychology theistically. There appears to be a certain scientific utility to theism, not unlike conventional naturalistic approaches to psychological research. That is to say, it seems that theism could be appropriately applied in the context of psychological research with many of the same conventions used by naturalism, but utility and application need to be demonstrated and established, not simply claimed or envisioned. Therefore, in this chapter, I explore whether the conceptual template or agenda articulated in the previous chapter can be applied in a practical psychological context. The purpose of this chapter, in other words, is to provide an illustration of theism's practical viability in guiding psychological research.

Given the vast diversity of psychology, there are potentially many programs of research by which such an illustration could be imparted. Since space limitations prohibit an extensive treatment of all such programs, I will only highlight a few in this chapter. For the sake of more fully developing one particular strand of theistic research, my specific focus will be within the subdiscipline of developmental psychology. Not only is developmental psychology one of the most celebrated and influential subdisciplines in the field of psychology; it also represents the gamut of psychological concerns, has an expansive tradition of theorizing, and studies a variety of populations, while focusing unyieldingly on methodological rigor (Miller, 2010). For these reasons, it is an ideal

starting point with respect to conceptualizing a prospective program of theistic psychological research.

This chapter will be separated into two major sections. While both sections concern developmental psychology, the first section addresses a traditionally secular topic while the second section examines a traditionally theistic topic. The initial purpose of each section is to show how conventional approaches to the topics studied are not theistic, and how theistic reconceptualizations of these topics would look. Because developmental psychology is heavily infused with theory, I will draw topics from within a major theory in each section. The main purpose of this chapter is to show how theistic reconceptualizations lead to new and different predictions, hypotheses, and research questions and how one can go about investigating these differences with quantitative and qualitative methods. I will illustrate how all this can be done in each major section. Because these are trailblazing illustrations, they will necessarily be somewhat crude and thus unrefined. Nevertheless, they will sufficiently demonstrate how practical theistic psychological research can be done.

Cognitive Development

From its inception, developmental psychology has been distinctly secular, with its main historical thrust being to move away from theistic explanations. Vandenberg and O'Connor (2005) identify, in this vein, that developmental psychology was born in the era of Nietzschean nihilism that proclaimed God to be “dead.” Therefore, developmental psychology’s roots hinge largely on naturalistic assumptions, theories, and methods, “presum[ing] a [naturalistic] worldview that differs, radically, from the prior, dominant, theological cosmology” (p. 190). Indeed, its guiding naturalistic assumption is that

“Change results from material (biologically derived) forces immanent in the system, not from transcendental acts of God outside the system” (p. 192). The main area of developmental psychology, cognitive development, manifests this assumption in its theories in several ways. Not only is cognitive development viewed as a godless, natural process shaped by natural laws (i.e., material forces), but godless, logico-mathematical, scientific thinking is held to be the touchstone of cognitive advancement. In other words, the endgame to cognitive development is when “young children’s animism and magical thinking about the physical world is supplanted by logical thinking and [naturalistic] scientific understanding” (p. 192). Since cognitive development is constituted by and laden with such godless understandings and naturalistic undertones, it is not surprising that most of its research topics are radically secular topics, entirely disassociated with theism. These topics are so secular that many people, including theists, may think they cannot be understood in any other way than secularly, or naturalistically. In this section, I will show that, contrary to this conventional wisdom, even secular topics can be reconceptualized and rendered theistically. Jean Piaget’s seminal cognitive-stage theory will provide the secular context for this theistic reconceptualization.

Piaget’s theory of cognitive development, perhaps the most emblematic theory in all of developmental psychology, outlines several stages children undergo before they can think abstractly and solve problems scientifically. Instead of addressing the specific stages of Piaget’s theory, I will focus on the overall pattern of reasoning as children age and the manner in which learning takes place according to his theory. Cognitive development, as I will describe, concerns both the content of cognitions (i.e., thoughts and explanations) and the process behind knowledge acquisition (i.e., learning and

epistemology). Both the content and the process of cognitive development as conceived by Piaget's theory uncritically validate naturalism while excluding theism, so it is important to understand how this is so and to describe what a theistic reconceptualization would entail for each of these aspects. Research implications for these theistic reconceptualizations will also be considered in what follows; that is to say, I will show that different research hypotheses and questions will come about and how they can be investigated using quantitative and qualitative methods.

Content: Intuitive theists. The content of cognitive development concerns what children understand, i.e., how they reason about and understand the world. According to Piaget's theory, the ways in which children understand the world will "move from primitive concepts to more objective and scientific concepts" (Harris, 2009, p. 229) as their cognition and intelligence develop. When younger children conceptualize causation, for instance, they often do so in a way that involves magical thinking, but as they learn to think scientifically they will begin to adopt mechanical causal explanations (Harris, 2009; Rosengren & Gutierrez, 2011). This developmental progression suggests that children may use explanations that involve God or teleology when they are younger but these explanations represent "an earlier, more primitive stage of intelligence" (Vandenberg & O'Connor, 2005, p. 201), or magical thinking, which is "superseded by a more advanced stage marked by logic, reason, and scientific analysis" (p. 201). The implication is that understanding the events of the world in theistic ways is a rudimentary form of understanding that will eventually be replaced with correct naturalistic explanations, and that children who do not move away from theistic explanations and toward naturalistic explanations are not developing properly.

Piaget's premises are substantiated by Kelemen's empirical research (2004) that shows young children appear to be "intuitive theists," as if they are "predisposed to construe natural objects as though [these objects] are nonhuman artifacts, the products of nonhuman design" (p. 295). Because "Children view natural phenomena as intentionally designed by a God [i.e., intelligent design]... they... view natural objects as existing for a purpose [i.e., animism]" (p. 296). The conventional logic behind cognitive development would automatically assume that children are intuitive theists because they have not yet developed the structures and intelligence to fully understand the mechanical causes behind natural objects, and that they would ultimately become intuitive scientists once they can grasp these causes (Kelemen, 2004). Thus, to be an intuitive theist means that one's thinking has not yet matured and is akin to "magical thinking." Intuition, in this case, has a negative connotation since it is not considered to lead to correct knowledge, which means the intuition is flawed.

Reconceptualization. A theistic reconceptualization of this understanding of children as intuitive theists would not carry the same kind of negative connotation. Instead, it would consider that children's innate intuition to understand the world they live in in theistic ways might point to an actual theistic influence on their thinking. After all, research has suggested that "very young children all over the world, often despite their parents' own beliefs, seem to generate concepts of God" (King and Roeser, p. 447), including studies by Evans (2000, 2001) showing that children explain the origins of the world and of natural objects in theistic ways regardless of whether they grow up in a secular or religious home. As Barrett and Burdett (2011) suggest, "Perhaps such evidence could even be used as part of an argument affirming a divinely implanted

receptivity to the transcendent” (p. 255). Indeed, there may be a certain value and practical relevance in considering children as intuitive theists that is missed when God is taken out of the equation. Being an intuitive theist could instead mean that God allows a way for children to begin to understand the purposes God has for the world in which they are born. Perhaps the purity associated with “little children” in the scriptural sense, according to Christian theists (Gundry-Volf, 2000), also applies to the way they understand and think about their world. Taking this perspective seriously would mean the theistic explanations young children give to natural events may not actually be all that wrong and do not need to be replaced so much as refined or cultivated as children develop. Perhaps the naturalistic explanations of the received view (and the desired developmental outcome) are lacking because they do not account for God’s involvement in natural events.

The most practical implications of this reconceptualization are those pertaining to education, since children spend most of their waking days at school than anywhere else. Nord (2010) suggests that there is a “scientific naturalism” operating in every course of study, which guarantees a “secular mentality that marginalizes and... discredits contending religious [i.e., theistic] interpretations” (p. 91). Thus, children are taught to “block out of consideration all but the secular viewpoint” (Feinberg, 2013, p. 433). Schooling, in other words, is specifically geared toward turning children away from their intuitive theism. But if their intuition really is not wrong, discouraging them from theistic explanations may lead to negative psychological effects, such as cognitive dissonance and disengagement. Conversely, encouraging these theistic intuitions may mean that children will show more engagement as well as enthusiasm toward their

learning. This alternative understanding of children's intuitive theism would lead to new studies and investigations.

Research. If children are discouraged from theistic explanations at every turn of their education, this would have negative effects on them since they are not being taught what is natural to them. The negative effects of imposing naturalism on children could be catalogued or measured with a quantitative study. This study would predict that children experience recurring cognitive dissonance when presented with naturalistic explanations. While children may ultimately conform to reasoning about the world in a way that is not natural to them, they will experience cognitive pains or psychological harm along the way. Such a study could, using conventional instruments, measure the dissonance, anxiety, or stress children experience when presented with explanations that conflict with their existing cognitions. It would also consider the hypothesis that children may have a difficult time letting go of theistic explanations and this may lead to disengagement in the educational process. A longitudinal study could investigate whether these negative effects are recurring or lasting.

A qualitative study, on the other hand, could investigate the positive effects of encouraging children's intuitive theism. It would first seek to understand children's experience of coming to theistic explanations, i.e., it would focus on their own experience of their explanations. Where children feel their understanding of God comes from would also be important to consider since the research suggests it does not originate from their parents (Evans, 2000, 2001). Encouraging "animism" and "magical thinking" as teleological or spiritual thinking may also mean that children will be more engaged, enthusiastic, or energized by their educational experiences. Perhaps the curriculums of

some sectarian schools do not discourage theistic thinking as much, so the educational experiences of children from these schools could be investigated for themes of engagement or enthusiasm. Perhaps children learn better and are more engaged when their intuitions are encouraged and rewarded. Does encouraging intuitive theism also impact other areas of children's lives? These are all topics that a theistic approach to research could seriously investigate, rather than asserting the conventional logic that children's intuitive thinking be supplanted (Kelemen, 2004).

Process: Revelational epistemology. The other aspect of cognitive development—the process behind knowledge acquisition—could be similarly reconceptualized and rendered into a theistic program of research. Because cognitive development is typically assumed to occur through natural (immanent) processes, as Piaget's theory suggests, the epistemology with which it is associated considers knowledge something children construct within themselves based on their interactions with the world. In other words, a constructionist epistemology undergirds his theory (Harris & Koenig, 2006). Learning, in this regard, is a fundamentally internal activity through which children construct knowledge on their own based on their experiences. From this perspective, children are endowed with biological and cognitive mechanisms and structures that allow them to construct or incorporate knowledge. Knowledge, in other words, is not something that is revealed to them, and it is only through their capacity that they are able to learn. Although their environment influences what they can learn, they have to bring in or accede to what is afforded to them, which implies they are self-contained learners.

Reconceptualization. A theistic reconceptualization of epistemology would view knowledge not only as something constructed within the self but that could also be *given* by God. In other words, instead of only considering a constructivist epistemology that operates within the “isolated, encapsulated self” (Melling, 2013, p. 106), knowledge could also originate “from a divine source that exists beyond the limits of self” (O’Grady & Richards, 2011, p. 360). When children experience sudden or effortless insights or say they came up with something they never would have thought of on their own (O’Grady & Richards, 2011), this could be considered revelation, or knowledge that is given by God. An epistemology based on divine revelation would not view the self as detached from God, and cognitive development would be a process within which God is actively involved. Indeed, God may not only prompt people to action in the spiritual sense, as if God could only be active in a different, non-psychological realm, but may also enlighten people’s cognitive understandings (Melling, 2013). Furthermore, revelation need not be understood solely in terms of irregularities, e.g., special revelation. Revelation could also be understood as an epistemological regularity which people experience as they routinely explore and study God’s world in their daily lives. God could be actively prompting them with insights or inspiration in response to their queries, perhaps even frequently without their conscious awareness; actively petitioning God for knowledge may also have different consequences.

The key difference between the conventional constructivist epistemology undergirding Piaget’s theory and this theistic revelational epistemology is that the latter is necessarily relational while the former is atomistic. In a general sense, no theistic conception can do without relationality because people are necessarily related to God and

essentially constituted by God’s activity, meaning they are not self-contained as typically thought by psychologists.¹⁰ This would suggest, in the case of epistemology, that the self is not sufficient to acquiring knowledge, since God would at least be a necessary contributor, authority, and source of knowledge. Meaningful learning is more a “betweenness” than a “withinness.” It is not so much “within the brain” as it is “between God and man”—a relational learning rather than an incorporation. In this sense, a learning theory based on a revelational epistemology would consider learning a joint enterprise rather than a single enterprise, as dependent on God rather than independent of God; while the self moderates what is learned from either perspective, a theistic learning theory posits a self that is in necessary relation to a teaching and truthful God rather in relation with itself in the form of a self-contained learner. It means that the truth cannot be learned unless it is done in relation to God; from a theistic perspective, humans alone cannot advance meaningful learning or truth. Real knowledge, in other words, is only gained in relation to God. A revelational epistemology is not concerned with exactly how God is involved in knowledge acquisition, however; it simply assumes that God is involved, allowing researchers to consider the difference this makes in investigating cognitive processes and learning (Slife et al., 2004; Melling, 2013).

Research. The theistic notion of a revelational epistemology for cognitive development would lead to some new research hypotheses and studies that have not been proposed and do not make sense under the conventional, widely accepted constructivist epistemology. A quantitative study could explore whether children are more likely to

¹⁰ The necessary relationality behind theism will be developed and discussed at greater length in the next major section of this chapter in contrast with its ontological counterpart, abstractionism.

learn from theistic content than naturalistic content. Recall that young children may innately understand the world in theistic and teleological ways but are expected to replace these understandings with naturalistic and mechanistic explanations. Instead of assuming that the reason young children are naturally inclined toward one set of explanations is that their self-contained ability to construct is undeveloped or immature, a theistic reconceptualization of the epistemological process behind the content would suggest that children are prompted by God in what they come to know or understand. Children, in this sense, learn in relation to God's implanted revelation and this should be fostered rather than replaced. Therefore, a learning theory based on this revelational epistemology would predict that children learn better what they already know, not unlike Rychlak's logical learning theory (Rychlak, 1986). It would predict that children attend to, engage with, and learn from theistic explanations (i.e., animism and magical thinking, or teleological or spiritual thinking) in an organic way. An experiment based on these predictions could compare two groups of similar children on their ability to learn the specific details of stories containing content that is beyond the grasp of their expected abilities. One group would be told a story involving difficult theistic or spiritual explanations of some events while the other group would be told the naturalistic equivalent of that story. Children from the first group should not only show greater engagement with the story but also be able to learn more details despite the two stories being equally difficult to understand because of the organically theistic revelational epistemology that informs the way they learn.

A qualitative study could investigate the particular experience of a revelational epistemology, especially the experience of theistic ruptures. As Melling (2013) put it,

ruptures “are those acts of God in which new ideas, concepts, or cognitions are impressed upon the mind in an almost shocking or overwhelming manner. They are given by God in the sense that they are not considered the sort of thoughts that humans would have come up with naturally on their own...” (p. 100). It would be valuable to understand how people’s experience of ruptures is different to their experience of constructions. Since ruptures can come suddenly or surprisingly (Melling, 2013), the particular circumstances in which ruptures may occur as well as the ways in which people are sensitive toward them would also be important considerations in this qualitative investigation, not to mention how people respond to them and the resulting consequences. This research could also explore whether technical rationality (Slife, Johnson & Jennings, in press) desensitizes people to ruptures or surprises. Since professional methods endorse the predictability of technical rationality, they undermine the importance of practical rationality that embraces unpredictability, surprise, ruptures, and openness to theistic promptings. Because a revelational epistemology emphasizes the features of practical relationality, it would be appropriate to investigate how people become open to unpredictability and outside promptings in professional settings actively discouraging such openness.

Spiritual Development

I just illustrated how a theistic approach to psychological research could impact the investigation of a traditionally secular topic such as cognitive development. Now the task is to show how a traditionally theistic topic within the subdiscipline of developmental psychology can be investigated under a theistic worldview. Some may wonder though why theistic topics even need to be reconceptualized theistically when

they already seem inclined toward theism. Recall that while theistic topics are drawn from theistic contexts, “systematic biases against a theistic interpretative framework have led the discipline to avoid considering theism in the formulation and interpretation of psychological theories and research, even when that research is focused on seemingly theistic topics” (Slife & Reber, 2009a, p. 72). This means that even traditionally theistic topics have themselves not been conceptualized and investigated in theistic ways. Thus, the purpose of this section is to show how a traditionally theistic topic of developmental psychology has not been conceptualized theistically and how a theistic reconceptualization could lead to new and different studies of that same topic.

Within developmental psychology, the area of spiritual development has emerged in recent years, garnering serious attention as an important facet of human development that requires further understanding (Roehlkepartain et al., 2005; Boyatzis, 2005). While many of the specific concepts and constructs studied under spiritual development seem to be derived from or associated with traditionally theistic topics, developmental psychologists have generally exhibited a tendency to understand and study these topics naturalistically. The consensus, in other words, is “to define spirituality without explicit reference to a sacred or transcendent realm” (Roehlkepartain et al., 2005, p. 5) because “notions of divinity, God, or gods are not essential for spiritual development” (p. 9). While those studying spiritual development might acknowledge theism’s relevance in a particular religious domain, e.g., religious people understanding spiritual development in theistic ways, they would claim that their consensus to specifically avoid theism is based on a scientific approach that is neutral toward all forms of spirituality (see Chapter 1). This approach is not really neutral toward theism, however; it is influenced by a

naturalistic tendency that forbids theism, which is a *preference* enacted prior to investigation and not as a result of investigation (again, the influence of naturalism's bad monopoly).

Space constraints prohibit a full review of the spiritual development literature, so my focus will be on perhaps the most well-known and well-examined conception in this area: James Fowler's theory of faith development. Fowler's theory has shaped the landscape of spiritual development, resulting in many programs of research (e.g., Leak, Loucks & Bowlin, 1999; Leak, 2003, 2008), and as a consequence it has "put the study of religion, spirituality, and faith on a serious developmental footing" (King & Roeser, 2009, p. 446; see also Roehlkepartain et al., 2005). This is also partly because his faith development theory is strongly influenced by the seminal developmental stage theories of Piaget (cognitive), Erikson (psychosocial), and Kohlberg (moral) (Bridges & Moore, 2002; King & Roeser, 2009). Since Fowler's theory is in some sense an amalgam of these pivotal developmental theories, it serves as a bridge to developmental psychology at large. Therefore, focusing on Fowler also allows me to address some broader, mainstream developmental conventions and conceptions.

But perhaps the most important reason to explore Fowler's faith development theory in the present context is it already seems as though it is a theistic theory and perhaps may be one of the most traditionally theistic conceptions of spiritual development, in this regard (King & Roeser, 2009). Because it displays what appears like openness to theistic content and meanings (Jardine & Viljoen, 1992), many will think that it is already conceptualized and investigated theistically. I will show why this is not so, while also laying out how his theory can be reconceptualized theistically. Following

this, I will sketch some implications of this reconceptualization for quantitative and qualitative research.

Fowler's faith development theory. Fowler's theory traces the progression of people's faith across their lifespan through six developmental stages (Fowler, 1981; Nelson, 2009). Instead of describing each of these specific stages in detail, I will focus on the overall shape of Fowler's theory while drawing on select stages to illustrate certain points. The beginning stages of Fowler's theory suggest that faith is based on stories told to children, which are understood in literal ways. When taken literally, the symbols in these stories are considered misunderstood (Fowler, 1981). As children become adolescents and young adults, they develop a system of tacit beliefs without reflection and have difficulty seeing outside their own boxes. In the prime of adulthood, however, one's beliefs can be subject to reflection; tacit beliefs can be explicated and critically examined (Nelson, 2009; Fowler, 1981). People often become disillusioned with their beliefs at this stage when they realize there are other viable belief systems than their own. Therefore, instead of taking literally the symbols of the stories on which beliefs are based, people begin to demythologize these stories as they move toward "transcendence" based on the meaning of these stories (Fowler, 1981). In later life, people may achieve this transcendence and see the ultimate meaning of these stories as pointing to a life of sacrifice for the sake of the helpless.

While this characterization of faith development by Fowler (1981) might involve religious stories of God, the realization that people of advanced faith will inevitably come to, according to the theory, is that God is not literal. That is to say, the "human quest for relation to transcendence" (p. 14) is not shaped by anything distinctly theistic, and the

“vision of transcendent value and power, one’s ultimate concern” (p. 14) to which a person of faith is oriented is not that of a real divine being. Rather, faith is focused “in a center or centers of value, and on images and realities of power. In faith we find coherence for our lives through allegiance to an emerging, conscious *master story or stories*” (Fowler, 1991, p. 33, emphasis added). What is “transcendent” is rooted in these master stories, and thus faith is something developed entirely on the basis of these stories. These stories are not revelatory stories given by God to humanity designed to help people understand their lives. This means that even when stories include God, people construct them, and God does not contribute to or participate in the meanings of these stories or the influence they have on people in any active way because, as somebody who progresses through the faith stages successfully will come to realize, the God in these stories is not a literal God. The clear implication is any sophisticated person should understand that God is not to be taken literally.

Thus, Fowler really only considers that “faith is based in our sense of self that develops on several levels” (Nelson, 2009, p. 232), i.e., based on the reality of the person rather than the reality of God. Faith is not something that is co-developed with an active God in the meaning of the story or alongside the story, as theism entails, and when a story has a ring of truth to it, that truth does not come from God. Rather, faith is wholly contingent on the interplay of master stories (which themselves only have a metaphorical God within them) with the self, making God simply one of many “shared centers of value and power” (Fowler, 1996, p. 21) and only as influential toward a person’s faith as the master story featuring God’s depiction as a fictional character of power and value in that story, which is all God can ever be in the framework of Fowler’s theory. In this sense,

God could be a center of that value and power but it is not a real God so much as a God constructed by the self at various stages of development. Fowler does not postulate that a real God interacts with and perhaps changes master stories because the self is the only agent of those stories. Not only is this at odds with the theistic understanding that God could be the agent of these stories; it also implies that all master stories that inform a person's faith are ultimately sourced in the self. God in no way participates, acts, or has a real contribution to the stories through which people achieve transcendence, which itself is not the conventional theistic notion [of transcendence] many religions accept.

Theistic reconceptualization. Fowler's theory is framed in a way that does not take theistic influences into account in the development of one's faith (Loder & Fowler, 1982; Conn, 1998; McDargh, 2001); therefore, a theistic reconceptualization of his theory would, from the beginning, consider God to be actively involved in people's faith development throughout their lives. Perhaps the clearest way to illustrate the implications of such a reconceptualization is to identify the abstractionist tendencies that inform his theory and to contrast them with the relational sensibilities of a theistic reconceptualization of his theory (Slife, 2004b). For the purposes of this section, these abstractionist tendencies include an emphasis on the contextless, the universal, and the self as fundamental reality; a relational understanding, by contrast, considers the contextual, the particular, and the relationship to be what is more fundamentally real and meaningful (Slife, 2004b). Fowler's abstractionist inclinations are present in 1. the way he standardizes faith, 2. his contrast of Stage 4 individuative-reflective faith to earlier stages, and 3. his humanistic interpretation of Stage 6 universalizing faith. In this section, I will describe how the abstractionism characterizing these three approaches is not

acceptable within a theistic worldview, while illustrating theistic reconceptualizations that could be applied to each of these approaches based on relationality.

Fowler's theory considers that faith is developed fundamentally the same across all people and contexts, no matter how qualitatively different specific versions of faith may appear to one another. Faith in one's God, in this sense, is considered no different than faith in one's family or country, for example. This results in the standardization of faith, which is an abstractionist tendency because it takes faith out of its specific contexts and regards all forms of faith as a generic kind of faith. Faith development is therefore viewed as a universal phenomenon guided by the same processes for everybody, none of which processes include God; even faith that is centered on God is ultimately a function of these godless processes. Instead of standardizing theistic faith into some generic version of faith development, which Fowler's theory does (McDargh, 2001; Jardine & Viljoen, 1992), a relational reconceptualization would recognize that theistic faith has unique aspects that cannot be realized in any other form of faith, and therefore cannot be properly understood outside of its particular theistic context, such as, according to Loder, "the function of faith in giving certainty to existence, faith as participation in the omnipotence of God, faith as salvific power, [and] faith as concrete experience of transcendent realities" (Jardine & Viljoen, 1992, p. 75). To consider the theistic context of faith seriously also means that instead of being solely sourced in the self, faith is a real relationship with God. This would mean that God's influence on the faith of theists who welcome that involvement is likely greater than or at least different from those who resist that influence. A theistic reconceptualization will take these potential differences into account rather than treat the developmental processes behind all versions of faith the

same way for everyone as if God is not involved in these processes for anyone. It would consider that God meaningfully ministers to people in ways suited to their particular circumstances. In this sense, theistic faith is fluid rather than fixed.

The contrast between Stage 4 individuative-reflective faith of Fowler's theory with earlier stages is also characterized by abstractionism. Stage 4 suggests that advanced faith involves subjecting one's own beliefs to critical examination rather than simply accepting these beliefs dogmatically (Fowler, 1981). The earlier stages of Fowler's theory are consistent with a parochial faith while Stage 4 moves away from what is viewed as a restricted faith. Stage 4 begins to move toward a more universal perspective that, instead of being captured by particular local traditions, notions of absolute truth, or dogmatism, is concerned with a relativist approach to truth where each person's beliefs, no matter how different, are universally validated. This move from the local to the general, the particular to the universal, and from closedmindedness to openmindedness is ultimately a progression from relationality to abstractionism. A relational and theistic reconceptualization, on the other hand, would consider that one need not depart from one's beliefs and be less confirmed in one's dogma to achieve an advanced faith. Faith, in the theistic sense, would be less about one's beliefs than about one's relationship with God (e.g., sanctification). The main issue, in other words, is whether beliefs foster a relationship with God; for the relationist, beliefs are a means, not an end. Therefore, theistic faith moves from abstraction to concreteness, the universal to the particular, openmindedness to loving closedmindedness, and from beliefs to relationship.

A third manifestation of the abstractionism in Fowler's theory concerns his humanistic interpretation of Stage 6 universalizing faith. Stage 6 faith is supposed to embody the acceptance of a universal human community in which one should live for the sake of serving others (Nelson, 2009). The universal human community represents perhaps the ultimate abstraction because it is a commitment to a contextless principle or ideal. The service rendered toward others, from this perspective, is based on a commitment to some universal principle; it is not a relationship with God that makes the service meaningful, or even a relationship with the people being served. This kind of service serves the self's abstraction rather one's relationship with God. A theistic reconceptualization would render service meaningful because it is done out of gratitude for God and therefore in humility and submission to God's will. This commitment to a fairly concrete relationship with a divine other is not an abstraction or a way to serve the self. Rather, the very capacity to serve God and others comes from God, as does the source of one's love for others and inspiration concerning how they should be served.

Quantitative research. Quantitative studies that adopt some of these theistic reconceptualizations of Fowler's theory of faith development could investigate several new hypotheses regarding some of his stages that would not be apparent within the abstractionist bounds of his theory. I will consider one such study for Stage 4 and then another for Stage 6. First, instead of limiting the investigation of faith development to scales that focus on merely the "narcissistically-tinged introspectiveness, distancing, and criticalness that operate primarily within a cognitive realm of beliefs" (Leak et al., 1999, p. 122) of Stage 4, such as the Faith Development Scale (Leak et al., 1999; Leak, 2003, 2008), it could also be investigated with scales such as a closeness to God or

sanctification scale that reflects one's relationship with God. The Clergy Spiritual Well-being Scale (Proeschold-Bell et al., 2014), for example, is one such scale that could be adapted to exploring the faith not simply of those in religious professions but also the faith of people in general, and it could even be altered in ways to allow closeness to God to be measured among those who do not profess an obvious theistic faith. Other conventional measures such as the Daily Spiritual Experience Scale (Underwood & Teresi, 2002) and the Faith Maturity Scale (Benson, Donahue & Erickson, 1993) could be similarly adapted. It could be that people feel close to God whether they are self-identified theists or not, and whether they know it or not. In other words, people may be in touch with God but may not use the standard religious rhetoric to express their experiences, so it would be important to introduce a scale that is sensitive to this theistic possibility.

Another quantitative study could explore the differences in humility and motivation in those considered to be characterized by two different forms of Stage 6 faith: the Fowlerian conception and the theistic reconceptualization. It would hypothesize that those attaining to Fowler's basically humanistic conception would differ from those of the theistic reconceptualization in that the former is ultimately a way of serving the self (or the abstracted self, a sophisticated egoism), while the latter is constituted by motivations that are centered on one's relationship with God, perhaps a true altruism. Because humility is defined by a relatively low focus on the self and a genuine desire to serve others (Powers et al., 2007; Elliott, 2010), one would expect those who serve theistically to score higher on a humility scale, such as the Humility Scale (Elliott, 2010) or the Relational Humility Scale (Davis et al., 2011), than those who serve

humanistically (and thus abstractly). As Elliott (2010) put it, humility is concerned with how people “relate to their God, as well as how they are to relate with others” (p. 5), suggesting that humility is a relational construct suited to differentiating between those who serve for higher motivations that extend outside of themselves from those who serve others ultimately for themselves. In the latter case, for instance, one might only serve people one deems as “deserving” according to the humanistic principle of social justice that is frequently associated with universalizing faith (Harrist & Richardson, 2012). Although social justice may also be the concern of theists, they would understand it somewhat differently. Their service would be characterized as more particular and meaningful since one is directed to the particular needs of particular people by humbly submitting to a loving God’s will. This may mean that one is directed to serving people who other people think do not need serving, such as those who might be thought to contribute to social injustices.

Qualitative research. Similarly, qualitative studies could be designed based on the theistic reconceptualizations of both Stage 4 and Stage 6. In the first instance, a qualitative study could explore people’s experience of their theistic faith without standardizing it into some generic version of faith that is closed off to theistic meanings. As people’s faith deepens, they may grow closer to God in the sense of sanctification, and qualitative research could be distinctly attuned to meanings that consider faith as a theistic relationship. The relationship would also be very particular and ultimately grounded in the specific context of the person with whom God ministers to and relates with. This would mean that while some meanings may be common across different

people's experiences of God in their lives, other meanings will be very unique and distinct.

The theistic notion of kenosis is another avenue for qualitative investigation. Kenosis is a different conceptualization of Stage 6 of Fowler's theory compared to the standard humanistic conception, inasmuch as living for the sake of others in submission to God's will results in the emptying of oneself for the fulfillment of God's purposes, i.e., kenosis (Nelson, 2009; Sorenson, 2004). This makes kenosis, or "self-emptying" one's own will to fulfill God's will, especially suited to some theistic meanings. Qualitative research could therefore explore the depth of the theistic meanings that consume people who experience kenosis. A qualitative study could recruit participants who have experienced kenosis and employ semi-structured interviews to understand the role God plays in their lives and why their faith in God mobilizes them to a life of selfless service, while keeping the theistic core of kenosis intact (Slife et al., 2012). Interview questions might specifically examine the source of the capacity for self-emptying. Since kenosis implies that this capacity is rooted in divine purposes, theistic meanings of self-emptying could be investigated. This self-emptying would be viewed in the context of humbly submitting to God's will, which serves and strengthens one's relationship with God. Participants' receptivity to God's will could be explored along with their capacity to self-empty, specifically in reference to their motivations for serving others selflessly and the feelings they have toward those they serve. They would be expected to have a strong capacity to love others since they have emptied themselves, and their meanings and motivations for service would be very different to those derived from humanistic values. How might they, for example, experience God to be present in their service?

Participants' responses could be coded and a grounded theory approach could be applied to generate a theistic model of faith development based on kenosis.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to show that both the secular and theistically-associated topics within a particular subdiscipline of psychology can be reconceptualized theistically in ways that lead to new and different research questions, hypotheses, and predictions, as well as original theistic studies and prospective programs of research. While the exemplars I provided are not fully developed studies or programs, they clearly seem to indicate that theism is heuristic, capable of generating new hypotheses and instruments, and that it has the potential to advance new theories. Furthermore, my use of cognitive development (a traditionally secular topic) and spiritual development (a traditionally theistic topic) within developmental psychology (a secular psychological subdiscipline) along with quantitative and qualitative methods shows that theism has direct implications for the existing topics and methods of psychological science.

A Viable Theistic Program of Psychological Research is Possible

Circling back to the original and overarching question of this thesis, it should now be clear that not only is a viable theistic program of psychological research possible; it is also necessary. The explorations undertaken in the first two chapters of this thesis point to this necessity, providing the rationale for considering the title question as well as the justification for illustrating a theistic program of psychological research. The next two chapters showed how such a program could look, demonstrating the very real possibility of some prospective, practical programs and studies. While I only sketched a few prospective programs of research using a theistic approach to developmental psychology, I could have gone about this task with several other subdisciplines of psychology equal to the prospect. Time and space limitations prohibited a more extensive presentation. Future directions would include illustrating additional prospective programs of research in other psychological subdisciplines and more importantly carrying out these programs.

The purpose of conceptualizing and carrying out theistic programs of psychological research is not to create another bad monopoly situation, with naturalistic research being replaced wholesale by theistic research. Rather, a theistic approach to psychological research represents a commitment to the principles that guide a scientific marketplace, with scientific ideas evolving through fair competition. Perhaps most importantly, such a marketplace thrives on a dialectic through which competitors are inextricably related to one another through contrast. This means that a theistic program of research makes sense only in relation to its contrasting naturalistic competition, and vice versa. Psychological science can therefore never be complete without embracing a dialectical marketplace to which theistic research contributes.

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