

THE PROBLEM OF “GOD” IN PSYCHOLOGY OF RELIGION: LONERGAN’S “COMMON SENSE” (RELIGION) VERSUS “THEORY” (THEOLOGY)

by Daniel A. Helminiak

Abstract. The emphasis on God in American psychology of religion generates the problem of explaining divine-versus-natural causality in “spiritual experiences.” Especially “theistic psychology” champions divine involvement. However, its argument exposes a methodological error: to pit popular religious opinions against technical scientific conclusions. Countering such homogenizing “postmodern agnosticism,” Bernard Lonergan explained these two as different modes of thinking: “common sense” and “theory”—which resolves the problem: When theoretical science is matched with theoretical theology, “the God-hypothesis” explains the existence of things whereas science explains their natures; and, barring miracles, God is irrelevant to natural science. A review of the field shows that the problem is pervasive; attention to “miracles”—popularly so-named versus technically—focuses the claims of divine-versus-natural causality; and specifications of the meaning of *spiritual*, *spirituality*, *science*, *world-view*, and *meaning* itself (suffering that same ambiguity: personal import versus cognitive content) offer further clarity. The problem is not naturalism versus theism, but commonsensical versus theoretical thinking. This solution demands “hard” social science.

Keywords: common sense; Council of Nicaea; hypothesis of God; implicit definition; Bernard J. F. Lonergan; possibility of human science; postmodern agnosticism; supernatural; theistic psychology; theory

The field of American psychology of religion is theoretically incoherent, a realization that is commonly admitted. A major source of the incoherence is the insistence on God—the ineffable, the other-worldly, the transcendent—in an empirical science. On the one hand, this insistence usefully suggests that the essential, the distinguishing feature of religion is the spiritual, most commonly conceived, at least in the West, as

Daniel A. Helminiak is Professor of Psychology at the University of West Georgia, 1601 Maple Street, Carrollton, GA 30118, USA; e-mail: dhelmini@westga.edu.

relationship with God. To understand religion, then, spirituality is key; and one recognizes that the psychology of spirituality—as mushrooming attention to it in recent decades evinces—is actually the focal point of the psychology of religion. Thus, with attention to spiritual experience, this article reviews and responds to this field’s problem of relating divine and natural causality.

On the other hand, this problem is hardly universal. Following a long-standing understanding that natural science is independent of theology, European theorists tend to focus on the human dimension of people’s religious beliefs, experiences, and practices without concern for the claimed ontological referent, oftentimes God, of those experiences and practices or even for the truth-status of those beliefs. In contrast, in the American Psychological Association a recent movement called “theistic psychology” challenges that traditional stance, faulting it as “naturalistic,” inherently atheistic, insensitive to the reports of religious believers, and, what is worse, oblivious to an essential factor that alone can make scientific explanation complete and accurate, namely, the ongoing involvement of God. Championing the traditional stance—but with nuance that envisions a *comprehensive* science, which does include technical theology on the divine side but also normative truth-and-value claims on the human side—this article responds to the provoked problem of God and argues that this problem depends on a methodological error, obscured in the fog of postmodern agnosticism. The solution is to understand, distinguish, interrelate, and differentially validate the popular thinking of everyday living and religion, and the theoretical thinking of science and technical theology.

Developing that solution, a first section of the article summarizes the essentials of Bernard Lonergan’s ([1957]1992, 1972, [1980]1990) thought, which governs the argument. A second section presents a selective overview of American psychology of religion and exposes the theoretical inconsistencies that need to be addressed. Then, using especially “theistic psychology” as a sharply focused test case, the third section introduces the problem of supposed opposition between “naturalism” and “theism” (i.e., science and religion). Exemplifying divine involvement with nature and specifying the methodological error that is in play, a fourth section highlights two pivotally different understandings of the notion of “miracle” (namely, again, technical and popular). Two subsequent sections provide examples of those two understandings, also elaborating the methodological issue that distinguishes them and showing how the scientific mode of thinking can be, and has long been, applied to specifically religious issues in “high-end” theology. Clarification of the difference between popular and scientific thinking, or “common sense” and “theory” (Lonergan 1972, 81–83), is the consistent effort of this article. Conceiving theism in a science-like mode, this clarification puts science and theism on a level playing field and dissolves the supposed opposition between them. The opposition results from the

attempted interface, not necessarily of different knowledge-claims, but of different modes of knowing—the personally relevant and the objectively accurate. The seventh section pulls the pieces of the presentation together to suggest how a theoretically tight—if you will, a scientific—theology incurs no conflict with the sciences and easily allows for creation’s wondrous events, which popularly believers might call “miracles,” and also for miracles strictly defined, which are extrascientific. The problem of God in the psychology of religion is not opposition between naturalism and theism, but the confounding of theoretical and commonsensical modes of conceiving theism. The “Conclusion” section projects the implications of this analysis, envisioning a psychology that is a genuine science of humanity, a science that matches today’s hard sciences via a consistently applied understanding of knowing and science.

METHODOLOGICAL PRESUPPOSITIONS

In all that follows, I presuppose and apply the thought of Bernard J. F. Lonergan ([1957]1992, 1972, [1980]1990), so I summarize it here although its implications will become evident—and further needed elaboration will be provided—only as the article unfolds. Many believe that his analysis of human consciousness constitutes a major theoretical breakthrough and provides an answer to the intellectual malaise of our times, and I write accordingly. In fact, not only this field but also the whole of academia lacks any consensus about the nature of human knowing or even its possibility, a situation that I call “postmodern agnosticism” (see Rosenau 1992; McCarthy 1990, 1997; Goldman 2006; Kasser 2006; Cahoon 2010). Lonergan (1972) approached these matters empirically, that is, by attending to the very workings of the human mind itself, “the native spontaneities and inevitabilities of our consciousness” (18). Therein he discerned four interactive facets, dimensions, emphases, or, as he metaphorically named them, “levels” of functioning: (a) experience, (b) understanding, (c) judgment, and (d) decision (6–20): (a) The encounter of a novelty (b) provokes inquiry, insight, and the formulation of ideas, which (c) raises the need for assessment and, if judged correct, (d) prompts some action. To these four activities accrue apposite requisites for effectiveness, the “transcendental precepts”: “Be attentive, Be intelligent, Be reasonable, Be responsible” (20, 53, 55, 231, 302). Fidelity to these precepts determines “genuine” (Lonergan [1957]1992) or “authentic” (Lonergan 1972) humanity, and violation of them always entails some degree of dehumanization. These spontaneities and inevitabilities constitute the inborn human way of knowing, an *ur*-method operative in every varied adaptive application to every cognitive endeavor: “transcendental method” (Lonergan 1972, 13–20). These analyses entail an epistemology and an ethics and ground a philosophy of science, all inherent implications of human intentional consciousness.

Note that in this case the term *intentional* does not carry the common psychotherapeutic and popular meaning of deliberate, considered, or purposeful, but the root Latinate meaning (*in + tendere* = to stretch toward), and indicates a subject–object engagement. This intentional mode of consciousness—awareness *of* something—is confoundingly similar to the receptor–stimulus engagement of sense experience, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, stands in contrast to the almost ubiquitously ignored conscious mode of consciousness: subjectivity itself. As a result, human intentional consciousness is regularly treated as a version of the sensate engagement an agent “in here” encountering an object “out there” (see Helminiak 2015b). But being conscious, the subject is self-present, experiences him- or herself as the subject “I,” not an object “me,” as the agent “experiencer.” Thus, the subject has a source of data on subjectivity and is subsequently capable of explicating and formulating this uniquely human phenomenon—even as Lonergan ([1980]1990) did through a process he calls “self-appropriation,” a phenomenology-like attentiveness to the workings of one’s own mind (2–21, 257–60, 270–71), which he earlier and more descriptively called “reflection on performance” (Lonergan 1967b, xiii). On these bases Lonergan is believed to have overcome the Kantian problem of knowing the thing in itself—not an “out-there” body engaged through sensation, not an idea that configures experience via *a priori* categories in the mind, but being, the intelligently discerned object of evidence-based affirmation—and has offered a coherent critical realism. It explains the human capacity for genuine knowing (realism) while elucidating the criteria, complications, and limitations of human knowing (critical).

In all these matters, human consciousness shows itself to be transcendent in its very nature, ever prompting questions, ever leading human subjects beyond themselves, not inherently conditioned or limited by space and time (Lonergan [1957]1992, 538–43), unrestricted in reach, geared not toward bodies but toward being: all that can be correctly affirmed, known, and loved. Therefore, human consciousness is spiritual in nature, as Lonergan frequently noted ([1957]1992, 372, 394, 640–642, 670–671, 696–697, 711; [1968]2006, tracks 46, 48, 51; 1972, 13, 210, 302, 352). Most significant here, then, I take Lonergan’s account of human consciousness to have delineated the basis of human spiritual experience in a nonobjectified, nondual self-presence, the human spirit, apart from any implication of God or other-worldly entities or forces (Helminiak 1987, 1996a, 1996b, 2008a, 2015a).

Obviously, these claims are profound and far-reaching and cannot be explicated here. They stand as an incredible—that is, not believable—challenge, perhaps as Patricia Churchland’s (1996) derisively called-for “real humdinger of a solution” (405), and even as an outright affront to postmodern agnosticism, epistemological pluralism, and reigning scientific

materialism. In light of Lonergan's achievement, an actuality, I urgently challenge the widespread opinion recorded by Edward Shafranske and Len Sperry (2005): "In addressing realities that animate spirituality, science is limited; it cannot take in all that exists. It hasn't the tools to grasp or a language to articulate what William James ([1902]1982, 53) named the 'reality of the unseen'" (12). I am aware that what I present is much at variance with current thinking (e.g., Helminiak 2015b). Nonetheless, I believe that Lonergan has offered a resolution of the subtle and difficult problems that bedevil the psychology of religion—as, I hope, this article will illustrate. I alert the reader that one will likely have to work through a good portion of this article before the argument coheres. This presentation anticipates the "hard social science" toward which it points. Therefore, as with any internally coherent theory, understanding the parts requires understanding the whole, and understanding the whole requires understanding the parts.

THE INCOHERENT STATUS QUO OF AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGY OF RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

In "An Editorial Call to Action," Ralph Piedmont (2014) highlighted a pervasive problem in the psychology of religion and spirituality: It is a field of mushrooming productivity, but "the field remains disconnected intellectually. Everyone seems to have his or her own ideas of what spirituality and religiousness are, and feely uses them in their research in ways that do not promote connection, convergence, and cumulativeness" (266). Raymond Paloutzian and Crystal Park (2013b) note the same urgent need for "a more solid intellectual grounding" and "an intellectually clear and compelling framework" (3), and they offer their own, a "multi-level interdisciplinary paradigm (MIP)" (7, 15), invoked throughout their *Handbook* in both editions (2005, 2013a). Yet even this suggestion exemplifies the incoherence in the field when it proposes to integrate "hard" explanatory neuroscientific and neurochemical *cognitive meanings* (i.e., empirically grounded conclusions; Paloutzian and Park 2013b, 16; also Hood and Chen 2013, 427–29) with "soft" descriptive psychological and sociological accounts of *personally meaningful* beliefs and practices (i.e., religious meaning systems, RMS; Paloutzian and Park 2013b, 6; Park 2013). The problem is that two different meanings of *meaning* are in play, and they express the two competing methodological emphases that I want to specify: theory and common sense.

Even to define the terms *religion* and *spirituality* is a fundamental challenge in the field, yet without specification religion and spirituality cannot fall within scientific explanation or be related to other scientific efforts. Attempts to provide such specification vary widely. In my opening paragraph, I funneled the psychology of religion into the psychology of spirituality because the topic of God elicits attention to the spiritual aspect of religion's

work. Nonetheless, entangled talk of religion and spirituality inevitably occurs in the reported summaries of the field that follow.

The Appeal to Survey Results

One effort at specification depends on survey research—an understandable enough empirical attempt to go to the people and see what “religion” and “spirituality” mean to them. The results have been stunningly incoherent, however (Piedmont 2014, 265). Shafranske and Sperry (2005) summarized the reports of major studies in this way: “No single category accounted for the majority of the definitions”; “a sizable amount of variability exists in the ways in which people use these terms and, perhaps, also in the ways in which they experience religion and spirituality” (14; see also especially Harris 2016)—and no wonder. This method is what Barnet Feingold called the “shopping-cart model” of research (Feingold and Helminiak 2000). Just as a science of nutrition could not emerge on the basis of tallies of people’s supermarket purchases, a science of religion and spirituality cannot depend on surveys of people’s personal religious beliefs. At best, such effort represents the descriptive data-collection stage of a budding science, the documentation of numerous instances or cases—as with early biological naturalists before Charles Darwin’s explanatory theory of evolution or, in a more advanced case, as with Johannes Kepler’s mathematical descriptions of the elliptical planetary orbits before Isaac Newton’s explanatory theory. Thus, even Piedmont’s (2014) call for refined research techniques cannot succeed because illuminative research depends on prior coherent theory, and none is commonly acknowledged in the field.

Appeal to God and Other-Worldly Forces

Attempting to get to the heart of the matter and accepting a longstanding popular presupposition, another effort to define religion and spirituality appeals to “an experiential singularity,” some “uniqueness,” “a thing unto itself that constitutes the core of ‘genuine religion’” (Paloutzian and Park 2013b, 9). The most obvious such core in Euro-American culture—but, most tellingly, not in non-theist Buddhism, Jainism, Confucianism, or Taoism (Muesse 2007)—is God, the object of worship and a prime connotation of the “spiritual.” Thus, some theorists assert outright that among their “basic theoretical assumptions” for the psychology of spirituality must be “that God exists” (Sperry 2005, 311; also Bergin 1980, 99; Richards and Bergin 2005, 112; Slife and Melling 2006, 282). Supposedly, “God is central to any understanding of spirituality” (Pargament and Mahoney 2002, 649; and emphatically Slife and Richards 2001). Likewise (depending on what *the divine* means; see “Fifth” below), “when religion is defined so broadly as to exclude the necessity for a sense of the divine, the term loses its analytic power” (Hood 2005, 349; Hood and Chen 2013, 423).

Recognizing that direct invocation of God is hardly a scientific maneuver, a majority of psychologists of religion obscure the matter and appeal to what I call “God-substitutes.” In general, the field has not absorbed the distinction between the spiritual and the divine (see Helminiak 1987, 1996a, 2006, 2008b), so appeal to God provides the best known, and often the only known, means of referencing the spiritual. Then generic terms are suggested, and, as best as I can determine (see also Wulff 2003), the Western understanding of God is always the prime analogue: boundlessness, divine, divine-like, higher power, holy, immanence, mystery, numinous, supernatural, transcendence, ultimacy (e.g., Hood and Chen 2013; Pargament et al. 2013; Park 2013; Piedmont and Wilkins 2013; Richards and Bergin 2014) or “whatever one wishes to call that which lies beyond” (Elkins 1998, 31), “that something beyond us” (Schneider 2004, xv), or, with a debt to Upanishadic thought, “man’s ‘innermost’ consciousness . . . identical to . . . Brahman, Tao, Dharmakaya, Allah, the Godhead” (Wilber 1980, 75–76) or “(choose whatever term one prefers) God” (Wilber 1996, 93). Above all and early on, the “sacred” (whether with an upper- or lower-case “s”; Pargament 1992) featured in “A Consensus Report” (Larson, Swyers, and McCullough 1998, front cover) and has become the most widely used construct.

A number of interrelated methodological problems encumber the appeal to God or God-substitutes.

- First, they are amorphous. To be sure, my theoretical criticisms notwithstanding, I find in the suggestive allusions of almost all theorists some valid sense of the spiritual. Nonetheless, “there is no agreement on what the essential ingredients of the sacred are” (Paloutzian and Park 2013b, 9). The theological consensus is that God is ultimately mystery in any case (e.g., Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 12, henceforth, *S.T.*; Armstrong 1993; Carmody and Carmody 1996), so appeal to those unspecified constructs, which all seem to point back to God, cannot provide firm content for a scientific account.
- Second, those constructs are external to humanity. They characterize human spiritual experience by reference to an amorphous something-else that attracts or impinges on humanity. These constructs “define the singularity itself as outside the realm of psychological [i.e., human-science] study and preclude explanations in terms of [inherently human] psychological processes” (Paloutzian and Park 2013b, 9). Allowing that there does indeed exist some nonhuman spiritual entity, the revealing psychological question would be this: What *in the human* allows relationship with this entity? My answer has long been human consciousness, or spirit, sufficient in itself to explain human “spiritual experiences” and also open to theological elaboration regarding human relationship with God (Helminiak 2015a, ch. 6).

- Third, given that ethics tends too easily to be grounded in religion (e.g., Richards and Bergin 2005) but the meaning of “God” can vary so widely—hence, the quotation marks around this term—the problem of ethical relativism attends any appeal to the divine. When an ISIS and a Mother Teresa can both claim to do their work “in the name of God,” human “science” exemplifies its inadequacy by claiming value-neutrality.
- Fourth, most psychological discussion of spirituality deals with psychotherapeutic practice, not theoretical explication. In this context—psychotherapy is more art than science—allusive language is adequate because in every case clients carry their personal understandings anyway, which must be the focus of therapeutic attention. The difference between successful practice and explanatory science, however, easily gets blurred. Indeed, the identity of all psychology remains ambiguous, two-pronged: a practice and a wannabe science. Significantly, discussion often bleeds from the practice into the science, from personal experience into ontological claims—as, likewise, in religion. From its earliest beginnings, religion involved belief in divine or other-worldly intervention. Even today there reigns a pervasive belief in “the power of God to work in human lives” (Keller 2014, 31). So out of religious practice, the scientific or explanatory question of causality arises (Muesse 2007). The challenge is to explain that divine work in human lives and—there’s the rub—in a world of highly developed naturalistic explanation. Science obviously discredits many longstanding religious assumptions, but in popular piety they continue to hang on. Thus, bolstered by the confusion of psychotherapy and psychology, a conflict between religion and science persists. Ever and again, common sense and theory are confounded.
- Fifth, however, it is difficult to know whether appeal to God-substitutes and even to God outright is to be taken literally or only metaphorically. The ambiguity is obvious in the unfortunate term for psychedelics, *entheogens*: sources of the divine within (Forte 1997; Richards 2003, 2005, 2016; see Helminiak 2015a, 101–05). Relating to a drug-induced experience, the *theos* in *entheogens* could not intend the Creator-God of Western religion at the beck and call of an ingested chemical but, rather, continues the classical Greek usage—or in another way, the Hindu usage—wherein *divine* or *godly* indicates something eternal, transcendent, or unchanging, such as Plato’s perfect triangle (Muesse 2003). Aristotle, however, recognized that triangle to be a universal concept in the human mind—ah, another indication of an inherently human spiritual capacity! Is the *sacred*, then—or *God*, *divine*, *ultimate*, and the like—to be taken as something extrahuman that impinges on human life, or is *the sacred* merely a generic term applicable to people’s

varied, internally generated notions of what they consider ultimately determinative and worthy of particular reverence? Psychological usage would like to restrict those terms to these varied personal creations and, thus, point to a genuine psychological phenomenon. If such is the case, however, psychology has no reality on which to ground the personal applications of those terms. What are they expressions *of*? What is the source that requires these extraordinary descriptors? The ontological, the truly scientific, question cries out for an answer. Readily in the West, the supposed ontological reality, God, provides the grounding. In the East, Atman is identified with Brahman and provides another, if incoherent, answer (see Helminiak 1996a, 14–17, 126; 2015a, 97–99, 349–52, 361). But no inherently human candidate—the human spirit or Buddha Nature, for example—is widely acknowledged to specify the spiritual and to ground God-substitutes in psychology.

Appeal to Belief Systems

Yet another approach to the psychology of religion and spirituality outright rejects appeal to any “singularity” or “uniqueness” “that constitutes the core of ‘genuine religion’” (Paloutzian and Park 2013b, 9) and, instead, explains religion as an instance of human meaning-making, “a conscious or unconscious need to make sense of one’s experience and to feel that one’s life has significance and purpose” (11). Specifying the human need for meaning as the “need for a functional meaning system,” Park (2013, 372; see also Park 2005; Park and Slattery 2009) developed this understanding: Religion is a meaning system, one product of an inherently human capacity. Others have proposed this same or a similar understanding. Speaking to social workers, Edward Canda (1989) defined spirituality as “the basic human drive for meaning, purpose, and moral relatedness among people, with the universe, and with the ground of our being” (573). Robert Emmons (1999) wrote of “a religious belief system and a religious worldview” (7), noting explicitly that “in form, there is nothing inherently different about religious and spiritual goals in comparison to any other type of goal” (91). Daniel Helminiak (1994) researched supposed midlife crisis as a spiritual matter of finding meaning and purpose in life, noted the role of “systems of meaning and value” in human living as a key aspect of religion (Helminiak 1996a, 35–36), and projected a spiritual vision for a pluralistic global society on the basis of shared beliefs and ethics (Helminiak 2008b).

This focus on a common human urgency is most welcome because it grounds religion—or, at least, one aspect of religion—squarely in the human make-up. Then, “meaning making and assessments, not religion and spirituality, are the core psychological processes” (Paloutzian and Park 2013b, 10). That is, religion emerges from the human “mind and heart,”

bottom-up, as it were, not from some exterior spiritual force, top-down. This promising emphasis, however, also has its complications.

- All human meaning systems are, indeed, of the same making, so *per se* religious meaning enjoys no special validity or importance, as Paloutzian and Park (2013b) rightly conclude.

The beliefs and values of the jet setters, of street gangs, financial planners, or sports enthusiasts, whether explicit or assumed, whether compatible with religion or not, are beliefs and values, nonetheless. They give meaning to people's lives, and they hold communities together—just as surely as a shared religion does. (Helminiak 2008b, 9)

A product of human consciousness, or human spirit, meaning is, perforce, a spiritual reality, and all meaning systems are spiritual in nature. They comprise beliefs and ethics, or ideas and ideals, or knowledge and love, respectively the productions of what classical and medieval philosophy called the uniquely human intellect and will. They involve humans in a realm of reality that goes beyond the here and now. Again the universal ideas that so awed Plato provide an easy example. And a new understanding—nay, a retrieved ancient understanding (Adler 1985)—of the spiritual is on the scene, and God has not yet made an entrance. This realization prompts the need to distinguish the spiritual nature of all meaning systems from a person's lived spirituality. Every human lives by some set of meanings and values, but not all deliberately attend to the enhancement of this spiritual or transcendent dimension of their lives. Only the latter qualifies as spirituality. Simply said, if all humans are spiritual by nature, not all have a spirituality; and traditional terminological usage must give way to contemporary specification (Helminiak 1996a, 34–36). In the parallel case of bodybuilders, we have no problem making that specification.

- What, then, once again, of epistemological and ethical relativism? People presuppose, and psychologists of religion argue to the effect, that religion is generally a good thing, a positive force in human life; yet all also allow in passing that religion does sometimes get things wrong and becomes destructive (e.g., Miller and Thoresen 1999, 11; Richards and Bergin 2014, 14–15; Park 2013, 362–63; see especially Aten and Leach 2009, 10–15 for a useful overview). Evil is frequently done in the name of God, and no one really knows the mind of God in any case. So, in line with longstanding philosophical analyses, I propose that some other factor beyond an appeal to God must be determining what is true and good. What we determine as best we are able, the meaning systems most likely positive for our changing situations, these we attribute to God: Surely, what is best is what God wants. Tellingly,

however, we ourselves make the determinations, and we make them by means of our intentional conscious capacity.

Analysis of human consciousness (e.g., Lonergan [1957]1992, 1972, [1980]1990) shows that it is geared to embrace the universe; it is *capax infiniti*, open to everything, as the medievals phrased the matter. The human mind moves toward Plato's one, true, good, and beautiful. Such movement could hardly be haphazard. The positive unfolding of human consciousness—and of humanity and our world, with it—follows inherent requisites, Lonergan's (1972) transcendental precepts, introduced above. Human intentional consciousness itself entails criteria for determination of the true and the false, and the good and the evil. Therefore, although all meaning systems are spiritual in nature, at their best religion and spirituality lay claim only to the positive systems—because they lead to human fulfillment and, in the Western ideal case, to God. In contrast, citing Lee Kirkpatrick (2005), Paloutzian and Park (2013b) deny psychology the right to make truth and value judgments: "We make no claims regarding 'the true meaning.' The science of psychology is neutral with respect to religious or other truth claims" (11; also Paloutzian and Park 2005, 560; the explicit policy of the *Journal of American Academy of Religion*, Cynthia Eller, ed., personal communication, August 12, 2016). Within so sweeping a statement, it would be useful to distinguish religion's other-worldly claims: the "indeterminables" of doctrine, from its this-worldly claims: the "inconsequential" of custom and, most important, the "indispensables" of ethics and consensual opinion, which are, indeed, subject to empirical investigation (Helminiak [2007]2013, 318–24; 2013, 49–50). In fact, every mature science, when it has determined the probable explanation of some matter, claims its understanding as trustworthy and acts in accordance with it. Medical doctors do not hesitate to prescribe medications, diets, and lifestyles; rocket engineers compute pathways to Pluto, trustingly applying the calculations of Einsteinian relativity; and, truth be told, in clinical practice psychologists themselves follow psychological findings and adhere to codes of ethics, implicit affirmations that life is simply not neutral in its unfolding. If psychology ever achieves the status of a true science, that is, if it discerns the essential structures, mechanisms, and processes that explain the functioning of the human being in all its varied expressions, like other sciences psychology will be in a position to state what it is to be a genuine, an "authentic," human being (Lonergan 1972; see Helminiak and Feingold 2011), to prescribe ways of living, and to authoritatively discredit dysfunctional meaning systems, including the religious. A major shortcoming in understanding religion as simply a particular kind of meaning system is to ignore the quintessentially human issues of truth and goodness. More hopefully, the appeal to meaning systems implicitly points to a deeper

reality, human consciousness, and, as Lonergan has elaborated, beyond generic meaning-making it has normative implications, the transcendental precepts.

- Appeal to meaning-making deliberately also ignores that singular and unique dimension of religion that comes to the fore when spirituality becomes the focus. True, “Ultimate goals [of religious meaning systems] can include . . . achieving enlightenment . . . or experiencing transcendence” (Park 2013, 363); but this admission does not yet account for the enlightenment or transcendence itself, for the religious, numinous, or mystical experience that religion might include or to which it might lead. Such experience transcends meanings and values; as in meditative practices, its moment of fulfillment moves in a realm beyond all thought, feeling, question, and seeking, in the nonobjectified, nondual self-presence of consciousness as conscious (Helminiak 2005). More incisively than an appeal to meaning systems, therefore, an appeal to the deeper reality that generates meaning is needed, namely, human consciousness or spirit. It can ground meaning systems and also explain both Eastern enlightenment and Western mysticism (see Helminiak 1996a, 2005, 2015a).
- A last consideration sheds light on a pervasive confusion. The very meaning of *meaning* is ambiguous. The term can apply existentially or commonsensically to personal or communal import—what things “mean,” that is, what they matter to us, facts that are self-validating and cannot be disputed. In this case, as a single notion, “meaning” encompasses knowing and evaluating, thinking and feeling, hoping and dreaming, the whole complex of human response (clearly exemplified also in Shafranske and Sperry 2005, 12–13, 18). The fact that Park and Jeanne Slattery (2009) categorize *meaningfulness* as “the emotional or feeling aspect” of meaning (125), not the cognitive, further highlights the ambiguity in this case. For the term *meaning* can also apply theoretically and differentially to only cognitive content—what is affirmed in propositions, assertions that are, indeed, subject to adjudication as correct or mistaken. Only attention to the differential meaning allows for assessment and judgment, and these are the makings of the tested explanation that constitutes science. Taking *meaning* in the commonsensical sense (what something matters to me) ignores the self-transcendence that judgments of true or false entail, allows the relativism that merely personally (or religiously) asserted beliefs can hold, overlooks the consciousness itself that generates the meanings and values in whatever sense, and obscures the uniqueness of consciousness that restricts meaning to the human case (Helminiak 2015a, 244–49; compare Paloutzian and Park 2013a, 8, 10, 357 re non-human animals). The difference between commonsensical and theoretical

meaning is critical to any field that would aspire to the status of genuine science.

SUPPOSED OPPOSITION BETWEEN SCIENCE AND RELIGION,
NATURALISM AND THEISM

Each of those three approaches to psychology of religion, reviewed above, entails a problem with God. Surveys reveal unwieldy different notions of God; outright invocation of God or God-substitutes depends on differing, amorphous, nonhuman constructs; and attempts to extricate God or any “spiritual” singularity from psychology and to focus only on meaning-systems leaves the psychology of religion truncated. A common theme runs through that entire exposition of the *status quo*, namely, a perceived tension and even opposition between science and religion. Is it actually possible to present a scientific explanation of religion without appeal to God? Contrariwise, invoking God to explain religion or spirituality, can psychology be an empirical science?

That longstanding question (see Helminiak 1998) comes to clear focus in a movement self-named “theistic psychology” (Richards and Bergin 2005). Professional conventions and journals have recently accorded this movement widespread attention (e.g., Slife and Richards 2001; Nelson and Slife 2006; Bartz 2009; Teo 2009; Piedmont and Village 2012; Hampson 2013). Its answer is this: God is so involved with natural, and especially psychological, events that divine intervention must be taken into account if explanation (science) is to be complete and accurate.

By the same token, suggesting—surely mistakenly, given the *status quo* just summarized—that the field of psychology depreciates the religious experience of its research subjects, this movement would champion the literal claims of religious believers that God is, indeed, active in their lives. Supposedly, however, a hegemonic naturalistic “worldview”—modern science (Teo 2009)—neglects and even denies these theist claims, setting up an opposition between theism and prevailing scientific thinking and, perforce, seriously hobbling psychology and, indeed, all science. To correct these supposed inadequacies, this movement would advance theistic psychology to the status of a standard “school” such as the psychoanalytic, behaviorist, humanistic, or cognitive (Bartz 2009, 69; Slife, Reber, and Lefevor 2012, 234). An extreme position, to be sure (Helminiak 2001, 2010, 2013; Helminiak, Hoffman, and Dodson 2012), theistic psychology is at least admirably up front about its insistence that scientific explanation must include the activity of God.

That yes–no question about God in psychology can be productively reformulated: How does God relate to the universe? Or else, what role does God play in reported personal religious experience? In its two forms, the question is subtly but critically ambiguous. The first formulation presupposes an ontological perspective, a scientific accounting of things in

themselves. The second formulation presupposes only personal belief and report, a commonsensical accounting of things as impinging on us, on you, on me. Clarification of the difference is the main point of this article: theory versus common sense.

Regarding that first formulation, about God's relationship to the universe, during the High Middle Ages Jews, Christians, and Muslims, working together, already evincing the scientific mode of thinking, elaborated an explanation. It included the following:

- the standard understanding of a Creator-God, uncreated necessary being, in contrast to created contingent beings (*S. T.*, I, qq. 44–45);
- the three-fold explication of “creation,” namely, divine *creation* as God's setting things in existence in the first instance, divine *conservation* as God's sustaining the ongoing existence of ever-contingent beings, and divine *concurrence* as God's acting to allow the production of new realities on the part of contingent beings in accord with their God-given natural capacities (I, q. 104, a. 1 & 2, q. 105, a. 5);
- explicating divine concurrence (that is, God's providence and governance of creation), the distinction between primary and secondary causes, namely, God as the ultimate explanation of all things and then the natural processes, secondary causes, through which God (almost?) always works (I, q. 22, a. 3; q. 103, a. 6)—not by manipulating individual events, but by having omnisciently set up an overall order whose unfolding will infallibly achieve the divine plan: the good (Lonergan 1971).

That explanation coherently explains the divine relationship with nature and is my proposed resolution to the “problem.” Postmodern agnosticism, however, precludes an appreciation of that traditional explanation, which envisages actual correct and objective understanding, so only the second formulation of the question remains viable. For example, most recently invoking a “hermeneutical perspective” on theistic psychology, Jeff Reber and Brent Slife (2013b) appeal to “non-dualism” (11 *et passim*) to disqualify the difference between objectivity and subjectivity (giving varied and shifting meanings to these terms) and to accommodate all opinions, seemingly without need for adjudication, under a canopy of “meaningfulness” (that term again used ambiguously; see Helminiak 2013). They seek to overcome the supposed opposition between “naturalism” and “theism” by rendering them as globally different perspectives, alternative “worldviews.” Reber and Slife (2013b, abstract, 15, 17) repeatedly reject relativism, but from the beginning of this movement, entangled in radical postmodernism, P. Scott Richards and Allen Bergin (2005) embraced relativism: “All modes of inquiry and theory building are based on faith and ‘biases’” (102); all science and research is “culture-bound, rooted in unproven assumptions,” and

“the criteria for judging results [in all areas, including religion and science] are personal” (105). Reber and Slife’s (2013b) application of hermeneutical analysis continues that embrace—because, supposedly (as best I can make out; see also Hathaway 2013), whatever is “meaningful” (religious beliefs) *ipso facto* stands on a par with whatever else is also “meaningful” (scientific conclusions). Theism and science are supposedly instances of the same phenomenon, namely, human meaning-making—yes, but only if all meaning-making is collapsed into the commonsensical form of personal significance or import! Then all is supposedly integrated—by avoiding assessment of (conflicting) religious and scientific assertions and, by the same token, precluding the possibility of affirming or denying the validity of theistic psychology itself, which, in self-contradiction, the theistic psychologists affirm religiously. Within American psychology of religion overall, a policy of emphatic respect for, and defense of, every religious opinion implicitly endorses this same agnosticism and relativism. This defense of religion goes so far as to equate naming questionable religious claims with the unethical denigration of religion (e.g., Kenneth J. Littlefield, assoc. ed., *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, May 12, 2016, personal communication). This extreme “tolerance” results, I believe, from confusing the ethical requirements of civility and psychotherapy (American Psychological Association Council of Representatives 2007; American Psychological Association 2010) with the canons of scientific research—again, the confusion and homogenization of commonsensical and theoretical enterprises (Helminiak 2016). Moreover, the same self-contradiction thrives throughout contemporary academia, which continues to publish reports and argue opinions while believing, implicitly or even explicitly, that firm determinations of true and false are impossible. For example, “The most famous American contributor to postmodernist philosophy, [Richard] Rorty argued that . . . knowledge is simply whatever the verification procedures of a society say it is” (Cahoone 2010, 85). Ever deferring to the commonsensical thinking of different persons, communities, and cultures and, thus, turning every position into just another opinion, postmodern agnosticism prevents serious consideration of that theoretically elaborated explanation of God’s relationship to nature.

However, traditional honesty still makes us wonder what making God an explanatory factor in psychology means in the concrete, not merely as a variegated speculative idea. Even with its forthright insistence on divine involvement, theistic psychology has been unable to offer one instance that withstands criticism (see Helminiak 2006, 62–65; 2013, 42.1, 47.1; Helminiak et al. 2012, 187–90; Johnson 2013). However, Reber and Slife’s (2013a) “reply to the comments” in a recent exchange on theistic psychology (Hampson 2013) usefully illuminated the pivotal issue on which much of the confusion rests—that ambiguous meaning of *meaning*. This issue is the difference between two modes of thinking about our world,

commonsensical and theoretical, or popular and scientific. These ways of thinking are oftentimes construed, however, as two opposing “world-views” or comprehensive understandings about our world with different epistemologies and even different ontologies. More accurately, presuming Lonergan’s claimed universally applicable transcendental method, I suggest that two different methodologies are in play, two different applications of the human knowing instrument. It is these that result in disparate conclusions and conflicting ontologies—as if objective reality were not itself, one and the same; as if two different epistemologies could produce conflicting, but still both equally correct knowledge claims; as if, in the final analysis, human intelligence were simply not able to achieve correct understanding.

THE TELLING CONTRAST: “WONDROUS HAPPENINGS” VERSUS “MIRACLES”

That contrast between commonsensical and theoretical understanding comes clear in the consideration of miracles. A miracle would instantiate an undeniable ontological point of contact between God and nature; and, as theistic psychology would want, miracles would provide evidence for God’s difference-making involvement in the world and for the need to include God in any accurate explanation. But what does *miracle* mean? Reber and Slife’s (2013a) most recent elaboration of what they mean by “miracle” (64.2–65.1) focuses the contrast between common sense and theory.

Emphatically, they insist, their understanding is not the Enlightenment definition of a rupture or suspension of some law of nature (Reber and Slife 2013b, 7; in fact, this strict definition of *miracle* is much earlier: *S. T.*, I, q. 110, a. 4, ad 3 & ad 4; II^a II^{ae}, q. 178, a. 1, ad 3; see Principe 2006, Lecture 4.) Elsewhere, however, they do champion divine involvement that operates in an “unlawful manner,” “irregular ways” (Slife et al. 2012, 219, 223) or that could “disrupt the autonomous and predictable laws that govern the world” (Slife and Richards 2001, 198). For example, they reject the expectation that “the law of gravity” be “not only true for the natural scientists [but] also true for theists” (Reber and Slife 2013b, 9.2).

Nonetheless, their new explanation of miracle makes sense. Word by word, they interpret the standard formula “extraordinary divine intervention” in their way. They now present a miracle as some occurrence, attributed in faith to God, that is striking, unusual, arresting, even an experience as subjective as “grace” or “forgiveness” (see Rushnell 2006). This usage—wonders, marvels, extraordinary things—is that of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, for which the technical definition of miracle is anachronistic (McKenzie 1965, *miracle* q.v.). I recall specifically the “signs” in the Gospel of John. They are not presented as ruptures in the natural world but as invitations to faith, regardless of their causes and whether

or not they “actually” happened as reported. For sure, striking events can shake our lives and open our minds and hearts to spiritual sensitivity. An example might be fireworks: The display draws us up into almost magical space beyond our petty everyday lives. More so, then, when striking events occur in a religious context, theists recognize God as the ultimate author of every wonder.

Certainly, in this sense, miracles do happen. Then what relevance do such experiences have for psychology? Obviously, they constitute an appropriate area of research. This much must certainly be at least part of what the theistic psychologists are urging. They remind the field not to overlook specifically religiously couched human experiences, conditioned and in part precipitated by religious belief itself. To this extent, few psychologists would disagree.

Moreover, such investigation has been the concern of the psychology of religion since its inception (e.g., James [1902]1982; Wulff 1997). Kenneth Pargament’s (1997) now classic research and Will Gervais’s (2013) award-winning research on the effects of religious belief or disbelief stand as relatively recent outstanding examples of such investigation. Why name “theistic psychology” as a unique approach as if it were something beyond standard psychology of religion? Well, as regards God-substitutes, although I and others (cf. Wulff 2003) see excessive religionizing in Division 36: Society for the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality of the American Psychological Association, the theistic psychologists’ contrasting sensitivity to an alleged “naturalistic hegemony” in psychology does add another twist.

I believe, however, that the only intended novelty is to require researchers to credit as unvarnished truth the personal insistence of believers that God has acted, not only through natural wonders as recognized by faith, but above and beyond any natural causality. If so, then obviously, from the standard psychological concern to understand various populations’ reported experiences, the psychology of religion veers into philosophical claims about the very ontology of those experiences, about their divine-versus-naturalistic natures and causes. That is, from concern about how things relate to us, what we recognize as divine benevolence, what personal significance things have for us, a matter that the medievals, following Aristotle (see Lonergan 1972, 120, 258), described as understanding *quoad nos*: as regards ourselves; religious and spiritual speculation turns to concern about how things relate to one another, what things are in themselves, how things happen and function and why, an understanding *quoad se*: as regards themselves. Lonergan ([1957]1992) also designates these two stances as *description* and *explanation* respectively. At stake is that double meaning of *meaning*: commonsensical and theoretical—and that double meaning of *miracle*: wondrous happening and suspension of nature’s laws. This ambiguity needs clarification.

A RELIGIOUS EXAMPLE: THE QUOAD SE MODE OF THINKING AT NICAEA

To make the needed clarification about that ambiguous talk of God's relationship to the universe, I offer an example of the theoretical mode of thinking that emerged at the Council of Nicaea (Lonergan 1976). In no way am I advocating Christian doctrine. Whether or not the Nicene decree was correct is irrelevant here. Neither would I identify this mode of thinking as specifically Christian. My point is, rather, that religion *per se* is not adverse to theory, so the supposed opposition between "naturalism" and "theism," science and religion, is misconceived.

The Issue at Nicaea

In 325 C.E., the Council of Nicaea solemnly defined the divinity of Jesus Christ in opposition to the Alexandrian priest Arius. He accepted all the biblical teaching about Jesus and, with all Christians, worshiped Jesus as God. But Arius claimed Christ was, not in himself the ultimate God, but the first and highest creation of God, the saving agent of God, and for this reason Christians revered Christ as God. Arius's pointed question was whether Christ was a creature or not. Phrased in terms of created-versus-uncreated, the question could not be avoided, and its abstract formulation is foreign to the New Testament. As scripture scholars name it, a "functional mentality" governs the Scriptures, namely, faith: a concern for what personal stance we should take, a concern for how things matter to us. But Arius's question entered into "ontological mentality," a concern to understand things in themselves, regardless of our personal feelings and commitments (see Helminiak 1986, 87–90; Brown, Fitzmyer, and Murphy 1990, 81:24, 82:29). Undoubtedly, the early Christians revered Jesus as God. He was God *for them*, and they related to him as to God. But with the notion of creation, Arius had pushed the question: Is Jesus really God *in himself*?

This question moved the consideration from a *quoad nos* to a *quoad se* perspective. Not how we relate to Christ, but what Christ is in himself became the issue to be addressed. The Council Fathers knew well that any citation from the Bible would not answer Arius. So after affirming in images the belief of all Christians in "one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, only-begotten, light from light, very God of very God," they added "begotten, not created, consubstantial to [or 'one in being with' or 'of the same substance as'] the Father."

The Council Fathers were forced to follow Arius in his *quoad se* mode of thinking. They clarified the status of Christ by relating him to the Father, not to personal faith. Far from ever stating what God is and regardless of one's accepting or rejecting the teaching, the Council taught that whatever the Father is as God, that, too, the Son is: They are consubstantial. And

appropriating Arius's own term, the Council taught that, although the Son is born of the Father, the Son is not created. The teaching rested on a technical distinction specified by the contrast between two mutually exclusive conditions: created and uncreated. Thus conceived, the teaching could almost be expressed in an equation: Christ = Father (as God) ≠ creatures.

The Methodological Implications: Scientific Thinking

The Nicene Council introduced a new way of thinking into standard religious teaching: ontological mentality and theoretical, or systematic, formulation. Via a differentiation of consciousness, the development of a specialized way of using the mind (Lonergan 1976), the Council moved from a commonsensical or *quoad nos* meaning of *meaning* (what something matters to us) to the theoretical or *quoad se* meaning of *meaning* (what things are in themselves). In so doing, the Fathers saw no conflict between personal faith and, now, theoretically formulated dogma (Helminiak 1986, 104–08). They saw no change in what Christians, certainly in practice, had always held. They saw, rather, an advance both in doctrinal clarity and in conceptualization (Helminiak 1986, 109–13).

When questions about important matters arise, the human mind pushes for clarification and precision: “the systematic exigence” (Lonergan 1972, 81–83). There eventually results a “differentiation of consciousness” (257–60, 302–05), a specialized way of using the mind, as exemplified in advanced formal education, especially in math and science. Namely, in the arena of everyday living, consciousness operates undifferentiatedly. All as facets of one whole: curiosity, attentiveness, ideas, facts, decisions, commitments, emotions, imagery, memories, hopes and dreams, all the makings of rhetoric and persuasive and moving discourse, focused on the here and now and geared toward action, the practical need to get on with living—these facets of human mentality function intertwined. Such undifferentiated consciousness is also the coinage of cultures and of popular religion—and the engine of the psychology of religion as currently conceived. Undifferentiated consciousness appeals to the whole person, beliefs and obligations, stories and lessons, emotions and commitments, all in one package: the ambient culture.

In contrast, questions that arise push for cognitive clarity, and this push prescind from those other aspects of the mind and advances the ability to question with focus, to understand and propose explanations, and to assess and confirm or reject these explanations. That is, “the pure desire to know” emerges (Lonergan [1957]1992, 372), the “detached, disinterested, and unrestricted desire to know” (696), relatively unencumbered, and even supported, by those other aspects of the mind. This desire results in the intellectual specialization aimed solely at understanding and

explaining. These are the makings of science—systematic explanation reasonably grounded in relevant evidence. And it can include refined theology!

With surrender to the pure desire to know, theory develops—but here the term *theory* has a particular sense. It does not mean abstract speculation of whatever kind; it means a particular kind of articulation of achieved explanation—actually, in its full-blown form, David Hilbert’s ([1902]1947) “implicit definition” (Lonergan [1957]1992, 37). A mathematical example would be the algebraic equation for a Euclidean right triangle, $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$. It specifies the unchanging relationships and *ipso facto* specifies the terms being related, intellectually capturing the essence of right-triangle-ness—pure intelligibility—without specifying any concrete triangle in particular. Such theory, as in all mature science, understands things on the basis of how things relate to one another, *quoad se*. In the equation for this plane figure, *a*, *b*, and *c* relate to one another in such a way that they could only constitute a right triangle and nothing else—challenging, by the way, the postmodern agnostic conceit that nothing can be formulated precisely. Theory expresses understanding by relating things to one another—for example, the created and the uncreated as intellectually distinct but factually inseparable aspects of the universe.

On these bases, I can state what, with Lonergan ([1957]1992, 297–303), I mean by “science,” because the term is problematic (Goldman 2006). Coming from the Latin *scientia*, it simply translates “knowledge,” but etymology hardly helps. Parenthetically above, I defined science as “systematic explanation reasonably grounded in relevant evidence.” In Lonergan’s usage, science is proposed *explanation*; it is not knowledge. Knowledge is factual and certain and results from a judgment at the third level of consciousness—for example, “Caesar crossed the Rubicon” or “This dial reads 4.78, not 4.75.” Indeed, despite loose popular talk, the natural sciences no longer claim to prove anything conclusively (Lonergan 1972, 94); rather, they accumulate evidence to make a hypothesis ever more confirmed and credible, or disconfirmed. Science is *reasonable* in that judgments of fact reliably credit the evidence as *relevant*, and they ensure the confirming or disconfirming outcomes (e.g., of experiments) that impinge on the hypothesis. Thus, acts of knowing on the third level of consciousness serve the specialized second-level concern to understand. So rather than factual knowledge, science is likely *explanation*, a matter of the second level of consciousness, attempted generalized understanding that pertains to an array of individual cases—for example, the Pythagorean theorem (inaccurate beyond Euclidean space). In mature form, after a breakthrough that discerned the necessary and sufficient factors involved, the explanation gets formulated via implicit definition (37), so it is *systematic* (304–10), or theoretical (81–83) in the strict sense of the prior paragraph—for example, $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$. This formulation occurs, and can be understood only, within

an array of interrelated terms, a system—for example, point, line, straight, plane, square. Finally, the explanation does not float in mid-air or rest on clever speculation, strong intuition, gut feeling, stunning experience, or divine revelation, but relies on appeal to relevant data, *grounding evidence*. Then, as with the German term *Wissenschaft*, translated as “science,” this understanding of science can apply to a range of rigorously pursued disciplines. It fits physics, which tends to set the paradigm; but it can also apply to other cases in which this particular kind of intellectual pursuit occurs: the periodic table of elements, the species of evolutionary biology, the bimodal and four-level structure of human intentional consciousness (120–21), or the Nicene teaching: Christ = Father (as God) ≠ creatures. On this understanding, in contrast to most prevalent usage, be it noted, it is not the materiality of its object or the history of successful naturalistic explanation that determines a science, but the mode of thinking that the enterprise employs. “Science” as an enterprise is implementation of this particular kind of intellectual pursuit; this particular kind is “science” as a method; and “science” as content is the resultant explanation.

Accordingly, the Nicene definition of the divinity of Christ evinces an inchoate scientific thinking, and with *Method in Theology* Lonergan (1972) proposes to extend the scientific mindset into cultural and religious studies. Of course, “science” in the usage of others cited in this article reflects the unsettled *status quo* and, thus, easily ends up pitting naturalism against theism, science against religion.

In Lonergan’s account, the contrast to theory, or systematic thinking, is in common sense ([1957]1992, 196–269; 1972, 153–54). As used here, then, *common sense* does not imply being smart rather than foolish: “Have some common sense! Don’t be so dumb!” Rather, the term denotes the shared understandings of how life is to be lived in different times and places: “When in Rome, do as the Romans do.” Different cultures have different common senses, that is, different consensual understandings about things and different ways of doing things. Essential to the notion is this: Common sense understands by seeing things in terms of ourselves, our needs, our practical purposes. Thus, for example, in the popular religious understanding, Jesus is Master for Christians, followed as Lord and revered with the ultimacy of God; whereas in theoretical explanation, Jesus is the Eternally Begotten of the Father become human, uncreated God even as the Father is God. One and the same belief gets expressed in two different ways; one refers to practical import, and the other, to precise explanation. Similarly, to preach well is not to present a theological lecture; to inspire is not to explain; to believe deeply is not what it means to have the truth.

Driven by the human need to understand, in religion the move from popular piety into theory is a rarified instantiation of Anselm’s definition of theology as *fides quaerens intellectum*, faith seeking understanding. At stake

is the difference between religion and theology as instances of common sense and theory—although, unlike as in contemporary physical science, little theology (or human “science” in general) ever achieves the status of theory as understood here. Most “theology” is merely sophisticated preaching or intricate speculation (cf. Williams 2000). So, by *theology* I mean neither the beliefs of this or that religion nor religious thought about whatever topic; rather, like Aquinas (*S.T.*, I, q. 1, a, 7; see Helminiak 1998, 115–20), I mean refined and interrelated analytic conceptualization about God and God’s relationship to the created universe. At Nicaea religious thinking achieved such theoretical conceptualization and formulation without in any way betraying popular religion. No opposition between “science” and religion pertained.

FURTHER EXAMPLES OF COMMON SENSE AND THEORY, AND FURTHER IMPLICATIONS

Another Religious Example

There is the term *supernatural*. It has a popular usage, absolutely legitimate in its own right, and Reber and Slife (2013a, 64.2–65.1) invoke it to characterize “weak” theism in contrast to their own “strong’ or ‘thoroughgoing’ theism” (Slife and Melling 2006, 282; Slife et al. 2012, 220). A weak theism does not allow that “divine activity truly makes a difference in the world” and “limits God’s involvement to a corner of the universe (e.g., the supernatural realm . . .)” (Reber and Slife 2013b, 6.1). In this case *supernatural* is used pictorially to indicate spatial distance *from us*; its usage is *quoad nos*. I would express that popular meaning as *other-worldly* because, like *metaphysical*, the term *supernatural* also has a technical meaning.

The technical meaning arose from the medieval attempt to understand how divine grace relates to human nature—another example of divine involvement with the natural universe. “About the year 1230 Philip the Chancellor completed a discovery . . . a distinction between two entitatively disproportionate orders: grace was above nature, faith was above reason; charity was above human good will; merit before God was above the good opinion of one’s neighbors” (Lonergan 1972, 310). The lower order is the natural, and the higher, the supernatural. Today the terms *proportionate* and *disproportionate* more accurately convey the meaning of the distinction. Certain aspects of human experience are proportionate to humanity. They are what would be expected of a human being endowed with intentional consciousness or an immortal soul—the capacity to question, understand, know, and love, and even to recognize and reverence God. But, according to Christian belief—and I am not advocating it, but only using it to exemplify a mode of thinking—other aspects of current

human experience also apply but only because of the redeeming work of Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit. These offer humanity the possibility of a created participation in the very life of God, deification, or *theosis* as the Greek Fathers named it (cf. Helminiak 1998, 123–43), specifying the intent of Jesus' prayer to his heavenly Father "that they may all be one as we are one" (John 17:22 *NRSV*). Regarding such fulfillment, no human being has a right or natural possibility. Yet through divine graciousness, the effects of deifying (sanctifying) grace are now part and parcel of the human situation redeemed in Christ (cf. Helminiak 1998, 135–40, on "Different Opinions about the Universality of Grace"; Lonergan 1967a). Two different dimensions constitute the one *de facto* human state, one dimension proportionate to humanity and the other, fully gift, disproportionate. Specified by opposition to each other, these two are not separate realms or separable components. Rather, they are two conceptually distinguishable facets of one and the same human reality, and distinguishing them allows for focused and interrelated explanation of the two: theory.

The achievement of that medieval distinction is methodologically instructive. It exemplifies again a theoretical means of conceiving even a religious issue. The distinction introduced a new level of precision in the understanding of the common Christian beliefs about grace and nature. At the same time, the achievement of this distinction also entailed the development of a new way of thinking about those beliefs: It related distinguishable matters to each other; it moved from a *quoad nos* into a *quoad se* way of thinking. This latter advance is the point: Theoretical or systematic—science-like—thinking spontaneously surfaced again in religion. Whereas popularly (what it matters to us) grace is the wondrous, unmerited experience of inner healing, freedom, and transcendence, in its theoretical explanation (what it is in itself) grace is a disproportionate, deifying aspect of redeemed humanity; and both understandings validly apply to the same religious reality.

Again I emphasize that my point is not to advocate Christian doctrine, but to demonstrate theory, a way of thinking about doctrine (Lonergan 1972, 81–85). That way emerged inchoately at Nicaea as a spontaneous development of reflective religion. The firmer reemergence of this mode of thinking in the High Middle Ages partially laid the foundation for the emergence of empirical science in the Renaissance and Early Enlightenment (Goldman 2007). Initially developed by Aristotle, then lost and recovered, lost again and recovered, implicitly defined theory, evinced by the ubiquitous use of equations, has finally become a secure intellectual achievement in modern science (Lonergan 1976; [1980]1990, 6–13). Such thinking is hardly a naturalistic aberration. It is not inimical to religion. In no way does it conflict with theist beliefs. *Quoad se* theorizing is simply a different way of thinking about theist beliefs.

A Secular Example

Another example, more obviously “scientific” because of its subject matter but only for this reason, regards the rising and setting of the sun (Lonergan [1957]1992, 319–20). In commonsensical experience and thinking, the sun does rise and set. Such movement is precisely how the sun relates to us, how we experience the sun, when examined from our personal standpoint. Explained theoretically, however, explained in terms of how the sun and the Earth relate to each other, the sun is relatively motionless and the Earth is rotating. These two understandings, common sense and theory, pertain to the same phenomenon, and it does not change when understood in these different ways—one way, completely sufficient to simply get on with the practicalities of living and the other, to explain, as needed, the exact functioning of matters behind the living. They pertain to “separate but complementary domains” of knowledge (319).

There is no disjunction, opposition, or multiplicity of realities in this state of affairs. Indeed, given the further precision of the theoretical account, granted the explanation of things related among themselves, the theory can even explain why common sense would naturally—and, from its own standpoint, absolutely correctly!—think of the sun as rising and setting. Even as I am doing here, theory can explain common sense (Lonergan [1957]1992, 419, 538, 562). Theory can consider common sense as a particular instance of how things relate to one another, namely, how things relate to flesh-and-blood people, why people experience things as they do, and what they make of the things they encounter. But this explanatory ability does not move in the opposite direction: Common sense cannot generate theoretical explanation. Common sense “is concerned with the concrete and particular” (251). Its limitation to personal experience and daily-life practicality does not include the theoretical commitment to a pure and unrestricted desire to know (316–24; Lonergan 1972, 82). By the same token, reported personal religious experience cannot specify the relationship of God to the universe. Nonetheless, different understandings, popular and scientific, or commonsensical and theoretical, or descriptive and explanatory, or *quoad nos* and *quoad se*, can cohere and interrelate in one differentiated consciousness, so no perspective is lost. The differentiated mind is able to shift from this to that way of thinking easily, comfortably, and interrelatedly, as is appropriate to every situation (Lonergan 1972, 84). Only a pedant at a cocktail party would fault a comment about the beauty of the setting sun or rebuke a person who thanked God for having arrived safely despite a near accident.

RESOLUTION OF THE PROBLEM OF GOD IN PSYCHOLOGY OF RELIGION

The Problematic Option for Religion over Theology, Common Sense over Theory

With the technical notions of common sense and theory, or religion and theology, in place, I return to the matter of miracles as an example of divine involvement, and I explicate the methodological implications of Reber and Slife's (2013a; 64–65) recent forthright definition. Their account of miracle as a wondrous happening presents an exquisite, a quintessential, example of commonsensical thinking or biblical functional mentality—and on this score, with the rest of the psychology of religion, they move in the arena of mere popular opinion. Likewise, the flaw in their hermeneutical attempt to put religion and science on a level playing field is to appeal to “meaning,” but only as commonsensical, as personal import, and to overlook the meaning that is pure cognitive content, theory (Helminiak 2013, 42.2). The problem of God in science results from overlooking that difference.

Reber and Slife's (2013a; 2013b) presentation appears to be “theoretical”—but it qualifies as such only in the sense of elaborate speculation. For example, they formulate their position with the abstract term *worldview*—a rather common usage in the field (e.g., Pargament 1997, 6–9; Emmons 1999, 7; Shafranske and Sperry 2005, 17; Richards and Bergin 2005, 74, 2014, 15; Park and Slattery 2009, 121). The exchange in Peter Hampson (2013), however, never resulted in a firm or useful understanding of this fuzzy notion. On my Lonerganian analysis, *worldview* actually refers to the different versions of common sense of varied people and societies, not to theoretically elaborated positions with differing ontological implications. It bespeaks cultural and personal perspectives, not theoretical stances. Physicists around the world, for example, comfortably live within the worldviews of their different cultures, but on physics they share one understanding, which applies in every culture. Appeal to worldviews fails to distinguish common sense and theory.

Again regarding what might appear as clean theory but is merely elaborate speculation, Reber and Slife (2013b) specify worldviews in terms of differences in basic beliefs—as if, for example, they believe in God, and scientists do not; as if science has to be defined as a “naturalistic-atheistic worldview” (Richards and Bergin 2005, 19; but, at long last, see Slife et al. 2012, 220); or as if every culture that believes in God or gods shares the “theist worldview”—ancient Greece, Hindu India, and Southern Baptist U.S.A., for example. Obviously, given that “God” means different things to different people, not theoretical positions, but, again, only varied personal beliefs are in question, and some one preferred common sense is being gratuitously taken as normative.

Said otherwise, the conflicting, differing beliefs by which the theistic psychologists specify competing worldviews are theism (personal belief in God) and science (reasonable belief in evidence-based explanation). But these two are incommensurate. “Theism,” belief in God, is an *a priori*, particular *content* of personal faith, an already formulated answer, whereas science is an enterprise with a method for generating answers and assessing their cognitive content. This confusion is clear in Reber’s (2006) claim that theist religion—not theology—enjoys its own “method, or means by which to understand” (202; similarly Gorsuch 2002). Besides, as I have been arguing, the method of *quoad se* explanation can apply to the question of God or any other; genuinely “scientific” theism, or “high-end” theology, is possible (compare Richards and Bergin 2005, 97–102). But confounding beliefs with different modes of conceiving beliefs, the theistic psychologists take the different conceptualizations to actually be different beliefs: theism versus naturalism, revelation versus science, that old dichotomy of faith versus reason, which ignores the mediation of Anselm’s *theology*, “faith seeking understanding.” Their proposed resolution of the conflict relies on a somehow-coexisting pluralism of opinions (but conflicting, if compared), all “meaningful”; but their controlling choice is for theism, not science, for faith, not reason. Yet one cannot have it both ways—impugn a hegemony of science, champion the inviolability of religion, and then attempt to reconcile science and religion. In this case, religion trumps every other claim; and religious belief becomes the criterion of reality, the proposed measure of ontology. Such, indeed, has been the traditional stance of religion for millennia, so conflict with science arises—but only because evidence-based reasoning has inevitably asked whether the religious opinions are actually correct, and naïve religion does not entertain this question whereas science is built on it. Only in this muddled scenario does conflict arise.

In sum, Reber and Slife (2013a) advocate a purely commonsensical, and therefore particularistic, understanding of theism and its claimed miracles. They advocate the right of individual believers to be taken, not just seriously, but literally at their word (cf. White 1993, 139). Then, supposedly, scientific breakthroughs are extraordinary divine interventions “given as insights to scientists through divine inspiration” (Richards and Bergin 2005, 101). Then, supposedly, in response to a prayer, God did intervene in an extraordinary way to give Jeremy Bartz (2009) the insight he needed to help his client. These claims would appear to be dealing in theory because they are engaging psychology and the natural sciences and asserting opinions about God’s causal role *beyond natural occurrences*. But the “theism” in question is not so. The theism is a statement of personal faith—as is also the theism of all survey studies of theist believers. And the “miracle” in question—at least as most recently explicated—is simply a naturally occurring but awe-inspiring event. In faith, believers see the working of God in everyday events—in some mysterious way, to be sure, often

heartbreaking, but actual and real, nonetheless—and they praise God for it. As a believer myself, agreeing, but from a nuanced theoretical perspective, I would hold that the believers' faith is valid. I am not out to disparage popular religion wholesale, but popular religion and a scientific account of it are very different enterprises, and I urge that the difference be respected.

Working fully with a commonsensical understanding, working within the undifferentiated consciousness of popular religion and culture, the theistic psychologists and psychology of religion have unwittingly been pitting common sense against theory, popular personal devotion against evidence-based reasonable explanation, as if these two modes of conception constituted competing theoretical stances and competing beliefs. In contrast, hard-won differentiated consciousness can specify these two modes of thinking and even explain a congenial relationship between them. Common sense and theory are merely different ways of dealing with one and the same reality—for example, the rising or setting of the sun and the rotation of the Earth, or the reverence for Christ as God and the profession that Christ is God. An experience can be wondrous and, in this sense, miraculous, an “act of God,” and not entail actual suspension of the laws of nature. God can be involved in the processes of nature—positing (creation), sustaining (conservation), and facilitating (concurrence) them—without needing to make some “difference in the world,” “a meaningful [?] difference in the order of nature” (Reber and Slife 2013b, 5.2), in order to certify divine involvement. Popular religion and scientific explanation, including theology, are not in opposition.

A Historical Perspective on the Problem

The distinction between common sense and theory mollifies the problem of God in the psychology of religion. The possibility of acknowledging these two modes of thinking, however, has forcefully arisen only with the emergence of modern science—and a whole new era in history has opened, masterfully recounted by Lawrence Principe (2006). Credible scholarship must understand and accept this historical development. The alternative is to reject the validity of modern science and to choose personal opinion and cultural preference over evidence-based explanation. Epitomizing a trend in psychology of religion and in culture at large (Otto 2012; Denialism 2016), theistic psychology has opted for this alternative; but, befogged in postmodern agnosticism, it cannot explicate its choice as such and unwittingly mixes apples and oranges, common sense and theory.

This realization can be stated otherwise: “Outdated simplistic religion is struggling to survive in a highly sophisticated culture,” but “this sorting out of the issues requires the very strategies of contemporary thinking and science that the religionists are, in principle, often unwilling to embrace” (Helminiak 2013, 54.1). Echoing a famous medieval debate, Lonergan

(1972) made the same point: “Those with no taste for systematic meaning will keep repeating that it is better to feel compunction than to define it” (329). At stake is what I called “leveling the field . . . by obfuscation” (Helminiak 2013, 47.2), namely, the refusal or inability to address theism in a theoretical mode; the insistence that commonsensical religion—personal piety and faith—be immune to criticism or questioning (Helminiak 2001, 243–44; 2010, 66); and the assumption that the achievement of accurate knowledge and its precise expression is a human impossibility in any case (Helminiak 2010, 49, 53, 59; see 2015a, 133). Making the same point in yet another way, Lonergan (1972) insists on the critical difference “between the religious apprehension of a doctrine and the theological apprehension of the same doctrine” (333). Current psychology of religion seems to rest its whole case on personal religious apprehension, almost innocent of theological apprehension.

Further considerations support this suggestion and illuminate the tensions between religion and science at this point in history. For example, the theistic psychology in question here emanates from Brigham Young University. Although its Mormonism serves its faithful followers strikingly well, the religion has no tradition of theological analysis: “Since scriptures and specific revelations supply Latter-Day Saints with authoritative answers to many of the traditional concerns of faith, members of the Church tend to devote little energy to theoretical, speculative, or systematic theology” (Midgley 1992). Similarly, affirming “The Great Apostasy,” Mormonism is highly critical of the religious development between the apostolic era and the time of Joseph Smith, rejecting, for example—and tellingly in the present context—“the pagan philosophical systems of the day (Trinitarianism, resulting in the Nicene Creed . . .)” (Talmage [1909]2011, reported in Compton 1992) and “[denial of] the existence of miracles” (Compton 1992; see Helminiak 2010, 68–69; 2013, 53). Something similar can be said about Protestantism and, more so, fundamentalist-leaning Evangelicalism, which color much of American psychology of religion (Hill and Hood 1999, 3; Wulff 2003, 20–21, 26–28). Their founding emphasis on faith alone, scripture alone, and God alone—transcended in professional theological circles (Reumann 1982; Rusch 2003; Mattes 2004) but living on in the popular religious ethos—presents problems, in principle, for any interdisciplinary religious studies, which must grant validity to human (“sinful,” “fallen”) science (see citations under “Appeal to God and Otherworldly Forces” above and Helminiak 1998, 30–50, on the Evangelical project of “integration” of psychology and religion). Roman Catholicism, too, continues to require miracles as evidence of sainthood (McBrien 1995, *beatification, canonization, q.v.*); proposes that the individual human soul is an immediate (unmediated) creation of God (John Paul II 1996, §5); ignoring contemporary sexology, holds procreation to be an inviolable aspect of every human sex act (Congregation for Catholic Education 2005;

Congregation for the Clergy 2016); and, with most Western religion but without the input of current neuroscience, has consistently understood mysticism to be a matter of the direct experience of God (Tanqueray 1930; Carmody and Carmody 1996). Thus it is that, for varied historical and highly personal reasons, religious believers across the board often struggle to reconcile their religion and the sciences.

The Reconciliation of Theism and Science

As long as the psychology of religion looks to personal belief as its primary subject matter, it cannot propose more than sophisticated descriptions of varied belief systems, never a genuinely scientific explanation of beliefs, their sources, their practical functions, and their validity in the face of living on planet Earth. If, however, theoretical theology is compared with theoretical science, conflict easily dissolves and scientific explanation of religion becomes possible. In the face of postmodern agnosticism, the question is whether we are willing to allow the possibility of a genuine, explanatory, scientific psychology of religion and also acknowledge an explanatory theology. “If the competence of theology is specified as a *specialized cognitive contribution to comprehensive* understanding, theology fits hand in glove with the other sciences” (Helminiak 2013, 50.1, emphasis added; see also 2015a, ch. 6)—as follows.

Summarizing the consensus of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim medieval thought, Aquinas (*S.T.*, I, q. 3, a. 4; q. 8, a. 1) specified the essence of the Creator-God as existence itself, *ipse esse*. God is the answer when existence becomes a question.

- Scientifically speaking, then, “the God hypothesis” (Helminiak 2015a, 361–64) accounts for the very existence of things. Existence is the one datum that the sciences, natural and social, must presuppose.
- Theologically speaking, the sciences explain existing realities such as God chose to create them and have them function. Science unfolds the wonders of God’s handiwork.

Thus, the God hypothesis offers a reasonable answer to a reasonable question: Why is there something rather than nothing? How is it that anything at all exists when all existents we know are inherently contingent? To explain the given evidence—namely, the datum of contingent being—the hypothesis of God arises: necessary, self-explanatory, eternal, nonmaterial Being. Understood in this way, the God hypothesis is as cogent in its right as is the affirmation of imperceptible fields, quarks, leptons, and dark matter in contemporary physics. All are the unavoidable conclusions of careful, evidence-based understanding; all are intelligibles—realities constituted in part by meaning (Lonergan 1972, 121)—that must be affirmed as actual if explanation of the data is to be coherent and effective. Then,

theology and science cohere as instances of compatibly formulated human understanding. In every case, sophisticated human self-conscious intelligence is making sense of the given.

In such a comprehensive scientific endeavor, on a level playing field, theory engaging theory, God explains the existence of things and science explains the nature of the created existents. On this basis, God can be reasonably and safely extracted from all this-worldly scientific explanation. Affirming God or denying God changes nothing of the existing realities that science studies. God has no place as an explanatory factor in the natural and social sciences. In *Questiones Naturales* Adelard of Bath enunciated this consensual principle of science 900 years ago. God's only place in science is to address the further question, which many might legitimately raise, about the very existence of those natural and social realities.

Then, what of miracles? The miracle, strictly taken, is the only case that falls outside of such an approach to comprehensive explanation because a miracle entails some suspension or alteration of the laws of the created natural order. Unique by definition, however, miracles cannot pertain to the generalized explanation that is science. There can be no science of unique events. Alternatively, God could providentially use secondary causes to effect results that, respecting the natural order, are possible but improbable or even likely. As instances of genuine divine intervention, these would be miracles; but fully explicable naturalistically, they would neither afford determination of, nor need additional appeal to, divine intervention. If it remains that the defense of miracles, strictly taken, does, indeed, govern the concern of religious psychologists, if literal divine interventions are what believers mean by God's being active in their lives, let us all freely and respectfully admit that such miracles might well occur, but let us sanely also realize that they do not pertain to science and are not opposed to it.

Let the religionists pursue their concern about miracles in religious circles, where such concerns belong, not psychological or natural-scientific circles. In the last analysis, however, I would wager that the only coherent theism the varied religionists might achieve by consensus—if such a goal still merits consideration amidst postmodern agnosticism!—is the longstanding, Western consensus that I have summarized. I, at least, see no other coherent option (on Eastern philosophy and Western process theology, see Helminiak 1998, 182–85, 213–92; 2015a, 205, 307, 321–24, 330, 351). Besides, any achieved consensus would need to rely on some meta-agency that could address all the religions fairly. Exemplifying again the emergence of critical thinking and theoretical formulation as history unfolds, that agency could only be critical reason, the same agency that guides the sciences. That agency could hardly be a particular claimed revelation: The “revelations” tend to differ. Thus, in a pluralistic and truly global twenty-first century, as they say, “It’s a new ballgame.” The ultimate foundation of religious claims has become human consciousness

itself, “interiority”—as is the grounding thesis of Lonergan’s (1972, 257–66) *Method in Theology*. Happily, this approach both leaves room for the, perhaps, occasional genuine miracle and also allows the sciences to explain the otherwise lawful functioning of the universe without need to invoke God but also allows believers to correctly see God’s creative power working in some way (namely, through the natural order, via secondary causes) in life’s every occurrence.

The Contemporary Challenge of This Resolution of the Problem

The supposition of the psychology of religion as specified by the theistic psychologists—naturalism versus theism, or psychology versus religion—and the resultant need to append God to otherwise sufficient explanation are ill-conceived. They stand as an example of what Lonergan (1972) called “troubled consciousness” (84), the crisis of epistemology that emerges when highly sophisticated theory, as in the current sciences, is “sufficiently advanced for the sharp opposition between the two realms of meaning [common sense and theory] to be adequately grasped” as “when an Ed-dington contrasts his two tables: the bulky, solid, colored desk at which he worked, and the manifold of colorless ‘wavicles’ so minute that the desk was mostly empty space” (84). The exit from this problematic does not come through uncritical and unconditional respect for religious beliefs, that is, not through regression to, and insistence on, undifferentiated religious consciousness, which would credit—and has long credited—naïve beliefs as valid ontological statements. Rather, the exit comes by pushing through in advance to fully differentiated consciousness, which can sort out the intricacies (85, 256–60). Then “the subject relates his [or her] different procedures [relation of things to oneself or relation of things to one another] to several realms [common sense and theory], relates the several realms to one another, and consciously shifts from one realm to another by consciously changing his [or her] procedures” (84).

In commonsensical terms, in popular lingo, I spoke of such differentiation of consciousness as my wearing many hats and easily interchanging them as the situation required (Helminiak 2013, 43.1). Producing the present article, again exchanging many hats, I am struck by my need to draw on my early theological training and writings, matters that slipped into the background once I joined a department of psychology in a state university. This realization confirms my earlier assessment: Often, this discussion about psychology and religion “is not really about the relationship of psychology and theism” at all but “about different sets of religious beliefs, different claims to infallible revelation, and different theologies [in the loose sense of different creeds or religious speculation]” (50.1). Indeed, there is available an elaborated and pedigreed technical theology that entails no conflict of naturalism-versus-theism whatsoever.

CONCLUSION

Reber and Slife (2013a) finally provided explicit detail on their understanding of miracle: some natural happening that is marvelous, stunning, surprising. Their offering focused the methodological complications that drive their agenda and pervade the psychology of religion overall: Their “miracle,” God’s involvement, in no way entails the laws of nature but is quintessentially commonsensical; it is simply that something strikes believers as a wonder of divine love. Only mistakenly, then, such a perspective gets pitted against scientific findings, especially when science-like theology can offer other sciences an equal partner. The argument for needing God in psychological and scientific explanation would impose popular religious beliefs on empirically grounded, critically conceived, conceptually robust natural, and budding human, science; or if not to impose its beliefs, it attempts at least to carve out some safe space in which uncritical popular religious beliefs can still claim ontological validity despite their incompatibility with the evidence-based conclusions of science.

Recognizing a problem, Piedmont (2014) called for “philosophical discussions on the ontological differences between psychological and theological aspects of spiritual constructs” (267). By appeal to Lonergan, this article has offered an approach, fully compatible with contemporary science, to sorting out and coherently interrelating those varied aspects. In contrast, current emphases—appeal to a “pluralism of . . . epistemologies and ontologies” (Richards and Bergin 2005, 101; see also Reber and Slife 2013b, 17.1), to a loosely defined “multilevel interdisciplinary paradigm” (Paloutzian and Park 2013b, 7, 15), to variably conceived God-substitutes, or to the cold survey results from multifarious religious believers—these current emphases should be recognized as fully commonsensical, as inherently relativistic, as having in postmodern agnosticism abandoned the standard scientific concern for unique and accurate understanding and explanation. The argument for God in psychology impugns the very achievement of modern science and should be recognized as such and be contained.

Even apart from scientific considerations, today’s world (Editors, *Scientific American* 2016) does not need more true believers insisting on personal beliefs and particularistic divine revelations or need social scientists, with due but decontextualized respect, defending these personal beliefs *per se*. Of course, with heavy heart, long pastoral experience, and a price paid for personal integrity, I recognize that acceptance of my proposed position poses a massive challenge to popular religion and a serious threat to devout, good-willed, simple believers, who, literally, need their faith to survive. With all the more reason, then, social scientists should honor the difference between religious belief and theological explanation and offer religious leaders solid and nuanced understanding at this critical period of discombobulating change in human history (e.g., Helminiak 2005; [2007]2013).

If it be granted that human knowing is geared to reality, ontology and knowledge are correlates (Lonergan [1957]1992; 1980[1990], 145–55). When we know correctly, what we know is being, namely, what can be correctly affirmed, what actually exists. Surely, as best we understand at this point in history, the knowledge in question (paralleling Lonergan’s analyses: experience, understanding, and judgment) must be the conclusions that characterize contemporary science (evidence-based, critically conceived, and collaboratively validated). The needed knowledge is not claimed revelations, personal beliefs, deep intuitions, or individual preferences, whether religious or otherwise. Even religious topics can be treated in a science-like manner and formulated via the implicit definition of scientific theory. Granted theory, a coherent system of “higher viewpoints” can intellectually distinguish (but not physically separate) and interrelate four analytic dimensions of a *comprehensive science* of the human: positivist, philosophic, theist, and theotic (Helminiak 1996b; 1998; 2015a, 366). The all-too-common collapse of these four into the two popular and competing categories, science and religion, is too simple. Contemporary physics suggests that such comprehensive and consistent science is possible: Credibly and productively physics affirms absolutely imperceptible realities, even as religion and psychology do (Goldman 2004). Reality is what is so in itself, not what is personally experienced of it. Accordingly, for a valid psychology of religion, common sense and popular religion simply do not suffice. Granted, for example, the epistemic priority of science over personal belief, to a significant extent neuroscience can already explain “spiritual experiences,” and even induce them, on the basis of known neuronal functioning (Helminiak 2015a, ch. 3; Richards 2016). Evidently, appeal to other-worldly causality is unnecessary to account for the numinous. Abraham Maslow ([1954]1970) made this same point decades ago: “It is quite important to dissociate this experience from any theological or supernatural reference, *even though for thousands of years they have been linked*. Because this experience is a natural experience, well within the jurisdiction of science, I call it the peak experience” (164, emphasis added).

As conscious, or spiritual, the human mind entails a self-transcending dimension *per se*. It is sufficient to explain numinous experience as well as human belief systems—all the core makings of religion. Then, with a systematic theology, if God is recognized as the creating, conserving, and concurring Creator of this same human capacity and everything else, God *is* ever involved and active (*S.T.*, I, q. 8, a. 1 & 2)—if not pictographically enough to satisfy many believers and some psychologists of religion. But methodologically distinguished from popular religion, the relative contributions of theology and science to numinous experience are already sketched out (Helminiak 2015a). There is no problem.

This construal of the matter entails a vast rethinking of the nature of psychology of religion even as the very notion and the relevance of religion are

changing rapidly in our postmodern world. I suspect the era is ending that began with the Axial Age (Muesse 2007), which appealed to other-worldly Transcendence to guide human living. Today such guidance becomes a wholly human responsibility, governed by human authenticity, grounded in “the native spontaneities and inevitabilities of our consciousness” (Lonergan 1972, 18). Such grounding does not lose God; on the contrary, it requires some such hypothesis. Such governance does not lose ethics; on the contrary, it insists that ethics is a human indispensable (cf. Helminiak [2007]2013, 319–21). The apparent solidity of Lonergan’s analyses allows that a new paradigm can be set (Kuhn [1962]1970; compare Wilber 1996). Something of that magnitude is, indeed, at stake in the resolution of the problem of God in psychology. In a new paradigm, the popular religious claims of psychologists and other religionists can continue to raise deep questions—but now for a genuinely scientific program. Lonergan’s analysis of human intentional consciousness is the missing piece in the human-science puzzle.

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