The Excluded Other in Psychological Research: Diary of a Probing Theist

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Research methods in psychology are often presented as if they can study anything relevant to the discipline (e.g., Haworth, 1996). Yet we will attempt to explain how there is an enormous exclusion in their relevancy to a whole range of phenomena and issues associated with psychology's largest group of clients and consumers—theists. Theists are those who assume that a difference-making god is currently active in psychological events (Slife & Reber, 2009; Slife, Reber, & Lefevor, 2012; Taylor, 2007). As theists ourselves, we will describe how we have frequently felt like the "excluded other" of psychological research, with special emphasis on the first author's career-long experiences and his intellectual "diary" during that career. He has not only probed into the reasons for this exclusion but also puzzled about the *lack* of probing among fellow psychologists who are theists. Indeed, we will contend that even non-theists should be interested in this career-long journey, because it exposes an extraordinarily pervasive and yet utterly underestimated disciplinary prejudice.[i] Let's have him tell his story in first-person for ease of reading[ii].

God's Irrelevance

My story began many years ago when it seemed I was compartmentalizing my faith and my profession. Where God was a vital part of my Sundays, I seemed to overlook this divine personage during my workday as professor and psychotherapist, no matter what I tried. My theistic colleagues reminded me repeatedly of psychology's secular status and seemed to be totally unconcerned about the issue. Yet, it bothered me. So I decided to bring my meager academic powers to bear by posing a fairly straightforward question: what difference would it make if one of the grounding assumptions of my discipline was a currently active and difference-making God? It perhaps goes without saying that the secular discipline of psychology does not actively consider this question. Disciplinary texts in psychology—often the compendiums of settled knowledge in the profession—tend to evidence not the slightest interest in this query (Morris & Maisto, 1999; Slife & Reber, 2009; Starks, 2014). Moreover, the initial answers among my colleagues were clear about the irrelevancy of the question: the assumption of God would make *no* difference in psychology, because psychology is an objective discipline, with spiritual content only incidentally involved in its research, if at all. "Add a god onto the findings of psychology, if you wish," they would say, "but it won't change those findings."

Dualism. As it turns out, this answer was one of my first encounters with what I now know to be subject/object dualism in psychology—the notion that the subjective realm (biases, values,

opinions) can and should be separated from the objective realm (data of reality). Beliefs in God, from this perspective, are typically located in the subjective part, and psychology's research and practices are, or should be, in the objective part. This sort of dualism makes God not only irrelevant to an objective discipline but also more like a subjective bias that no self-respecting scientist would want to hold professionally. The only problem with this dualistic view, I realized later, is that it is a *view*—a philosophy of science, rather than a fact of science (Richardson, Fower, & Guignon, 1999; Slife, O'Grady, & Kosits, 2017).

Indeed, recent scholarship has deemed this form of dualism impossible (Bishop, 2007; Goodman & Freeman, 2015; Richardson, Fowers, & Guignon, 1999; Slife, Reber, & Faulconer, 2012). Even if the latest research methods are used to produce "objective" data, there are always dozens of methodological "choice-points" where the researchers' "subjectivity" enters this production, from the choice of subject, research design, and operationalization to the choice of statistic, data presentation, and interpretation of results—just to name a few (Porpora, 2006; Slife & Reber, 2009). As the "sponsor effect" in the natural sciences and the "allegiance effect" in the social sciences show, there are always researcher biases and values inherent in research, perhaps especially psychological research (Bhandari et al., 2004; Gantt & Slife, 2016; Kjaergard & Als-Nielson, 2002; Lexchin, Bero, Djulbegovic, & Clark, 2003; Luborsky & Barrett, 2005; Taylor, 2007). In any case, this dualistic conception of psychological science merely begged my original question and put it in a slightly different form: what if God mattered in the so-called *objective* psychological world? Clearly many theists presume that God does matter in this world (Richards & Bergin, 1997). Psychological researchers can, of course, dismiss this worldview out of hand, but thoughtful examination rather than dismissal seems more in keeping with the spirit of science, especially when theists are the primary population served by psychologists (Richards & Bergin, 1997).

Deism. As my exploration of this theistic question continued, it was stymied by yet another argument for God's irrelevance to psychology, coming from perhaps an unlikely source—my Christian colleagues in the natural sciences. They pointed to all the natural laws God had created and now lovingly hopes we will use appropriately. The gist of their argument, especially as they developed it further, was that God is the Creator of these wonderful natural laws but is essentially irrelevant in natural events of the present. God is not currently a difference-maker. For this reason, psychology (or any other science for that matter) need not take this divine entity into account for understanding the present state of the world. God may exist, in some sense, but is not practically relevant.

In considering this new argument, I realized that it begged the theistic question again, because this conception is deism rather than theism. With deism God is limited, by definition, to the role of past creator (e.g., of the natural laws); God is no longer active. God may exist, but is not practically relevant, and thus not a theistic God. This conception does not rule out theism

through logic or evidence; it rules it out through definitional fiat. In other words, deism is merely a different rather than a refuting conception. Indeed, deism would leave me compartmentalized again—worshiping, perhaps, the Creator on Sundays but having no reason to consider this divinity's relevance in my professional activity. Moreover, a deistic God is not a Christian God (e.g., Yoder, 2008). When I offered this clarification to these Christian natural scientists and asked them where they saw God's current, difference-making activity in their research findings or in their disciplines, they were frankly puzzled. As a physicist friend put it, "I've never really thought of God's activity in the natural world. I've always thought of God's activity as me receiving spiritual promptings from him in the supernatural realm."

Supernaturalism. Now we can omit for the moment that my physicist friend is obviously receiving these prompts in the natural realm. His assumption, especially as the conversation continued, was that God was limited, or self-limited, to a realm that did not bother the natural world. Otherwise, of course, my friend would have had to take God into account in his physics, which he admitted he never did. Indeed, the phrase he used—the phrase "supernatural realm"—was essentially spawned by the secular separation of the natural and the supernatural worlds—to distinguish any reference to the supernatural from the natural world (Bernstein, 1983; Reber & Slife, 2005). Theists actually have no reason to separate or even distinguish the two, because they do not view their God as limited to either. In this sense, supernaturalism limits God's activity to some corner of the universe, such as a distinctly spiritual realm; deism relegates this activity to some particular time, such as Creation; and dualism restricts the activity to subjectivity. These conceptions allow for God to exist perhaps, but, knowingly or unknowingly, they disallow God's involvement in the current, objective, and natural world. The upshot is that these conceptions—deism, dualism, and supernaturalism—do not consider, let alone examine, a theistic understanding of the psychological world. They define theism away.

At this point, my early sojourn through deisms and dualisms helped me to understand what a thorough-going theistic worldview would need to be: it would require the primary assumption of a God who is currently active and difference-making in *all* the world. Please note that this theistic assumption does not necessarily make God the object of study; this assumption, rather, is part of a psychological theory that guides study. At the very least, this theistic approach would provide a framework for how researchers explain their data. Instead of always assuming a secular interpretation of data, which is itself guided by assumptions (Kemp, 1998), the theist could assume the influence of God is at least a necessary condition for all the events and things of the world—the internal combustion of a car engine, the falling of apples from an apple tree, and people's lives, whether or not these divine influences are recognized. From a thorough-going theistic perspective, explanations of *anything* that exclude this divine necessary condition would either be incomplete or wrong. The typical engineer's assertion that a car engine is merely the work of mechanical laws is an explanation that is ultimately incomplete, if not

fundamentally in some error. This mechanical explanation may be useful, but it cannot be the whole story when a theist assumes the significance of an active God.

Theism as More Value-laden

With these early clarifications, I could now ask how this primary assumption of theism could conceivably matter to psychological science. However, when interacting with other psychologists over this question, I discovered an intriguing variation of the objectivity objection again. It went something like this: theism is so undeniably laden with subjective assumptions and values, how could it possibly work in an objective science? My initial response was a simple one: all the theories and hypotheses that psychologists attempt to test are laden with assumptions and values, yet these theories are still considered part of the process of science. The personality theory tradition, for instance, is rife with such values and assumptions (e.g., Rychlak, 1981), but even such fields as neuroscience, clinical psychology, and social psychology test conceptions that are riven with assumptions (Batson, 1998; Beutler & Bergan, 1991; Griffin, 2000; Slife, Reber, & Richardson, 2005; Slife, Smith, & Burchfield, 2003; Slife & Williams, 1995; Swanson, Lufkin, & Colman, 1999; Tjeltveit, 1991). Indeed, this is part of the reason for empirically testing these conceptions—to see if these assumptions hold up under real world conditions. In this sense, at least, theistic hypotheses are no different; all theories have subjective assumptions.

But are theistic theories *more* assumption-laden? Are they somehow less objective than the theories and hypotheses of conventional psychology? Many of my interlocutors pointed to the secularism of psychology in this regard (e.g., Hibberd, 2011). They contended that secularism is basically a neutral or more objective general framework for theories and hypotheses, and thus produces assumptions that are more "scientific." This contention intrigued me greatly, yet as I delved into secularism, I realized that even a tiny bit of its history belies this contention. As Wolfhart Pannenberg (1996) chronicles, original secularism was never intended in this manner. If anything, it was a pluralism of *value-laden* perspectives, including theistic perspectives, not the value-free, anti-theism that some psychologists seem to consider it to be (Helminiak, 2010; Hibberd, 2011).

My research into this more recent, non-theistic secularism revealed another important fact: its popularity is at least partially due to its association with reductive naturalism. Reductive naturalism assumes the study and interpretation of the world should be kept solely to natural events and explanations. Secularism may be a bit more visible than its naturalism cousin as a framework for psychology, but naturalism is just as prevalent (Leahey, 1991). Its prevalence does not mean that science was derived from reductive naturalism; it was not (Bishop, 2007; Smith, 2014). Nevertheless, a quick scan of virtually any scientific literature will show the many

scientists who believe their findings "prove" the correctness of a naturalistic (or secular) worldview.

As a quick case in point, consider the renowned British anthropologist, Evans-Pritchard, who was aghast at the spiritual claims of a central African tribe, the Azande (Evans-Pritchard, 1937/1976; Slife, Starks, and Primosch, 2014; Starks, 2014). He even attempted to convince the Azande that science had proven there can be no witches, violating his own anthropologist ethic in asserting his personal beliefs. More to the point, his contention is simply false; science has not even investigated the influence of witches with the Azande, let alone proven their absence. Evans-Pritchard was merely extending what he figured was an implication of all the other findings of science—naturalism.[iii] The point here is that naturalism and science are highly associated (Bishop, 2007), and it is the persuasiveness of science that has led to our modern conceptions of non-theistic (naturalistic) secularism.

What is forgotten here, unfortunately, is that naturalism is itself a modern philosophy, replete with its own assumptions and values like all philosophies. Its philosophical status prohibits it from claiming any "objective" status, even though there is little question that many scientists, such as Evans-Pritchard, tend to treat it this way. In this sense, I realized that naturalism and theism are both philosophies or worldviews with whole systems of assumptions that define their perspectives on the world. Indeed, as Huston Smith (2003) notes, naturalism and theism are the two great worldviews of Western culture. Much like any set of worldviews they each appeal to a certain segment of the culture: the assumptions of naturalism are the more popular in science, and the assumptions of theism are the more popular in religion. Even so, this popularity does not rule out either for use by the other segment. There is no question the Enlightenment period of modern history turned off many scientists to theism, but there is also no evidence that a sophisticated theism was ever seriously considered in this historical light. Serious examination of such a thorough-going theism for psychology still remains.

At this point in my journey, I felt I had come to two major clarifications. First, theism is not inherently irrelevant to psychology; God's supposed exclusion to the subjective world, the supernatural realm, or the creator role is exclusion by conceptual fiat, and is not what most theists believe anyway. Most theists believe that God is not limited to either that those locations or that role. Second, what many psychologists consider to be the current frameworks for psychology—secularism and naturalism—contain subjective assumptions themselves. Their greater familiarity and acceptance in psychology is more a product of history than empirical evidence (King, Viney, & Woody, 2013).

Prejudice Against Theism

These clarifications allowed me to return to my initial query—could the assumptions of theism be practically relevant to psychology? I realized, of course, that theism had never been developed in psychology, but I also began to realize how it could never be explored professionally with the incredible headwind of prejudice against it (Brown, 2005; Slife & Reber, 2009). I was told that psychology is secularistic, and its research is naturalistic, period. Examination of alternative worldviews was thought to be not only unneeded but also unwanted, a kind of threat to the very identity of the discipline and psychologists themselves, or at least their pocketbooks (Helminiak, 2010). Moreover, it was offensive to postulate prejudices against theism because professional psychologists are scientists, and as such do not engage in prejudices professionally.

Here I realized that my meaning of prejudice was being misunderstood. I did not intend it to be comparable to racial or sexual prejudice. I meant it more as a Gadamerian prejudice, what Charles Taylor would call the "social imaginary" of the discipline (Gadamer, 1995; Taylor, 2007, p. 171). Gadamer calls attention to our singular prejudice against prejudice, our extreme sensitivity to the possibility we might be prejudiced, even though he doubts that we can avoid some sort of interpretive slant. Psychologists, in this Gadamerian sense, are not consciously prejudicial, nor are they intending to do theists harm. Still, as we now understand about implicit prejudice (Dovidio, Kawakami, & Gaertner, 2002), this lack of conscious intention does not mean they are not doing harm to theists. Consider just a few examples that I've encountered in my scholarly odyssey, first in philosophy and then in psychological research and theory.

I obviously cannot do a survey of professional philosophy, and I certainly recognize that some philosophers straddle both theology and philosophy in some institutions. Nevertheless, consider the Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy as a case in point for mainstream philosophy (Blackburn, 2005). Here, the renowned Cambridge philosopher, Simon Blackburn, lists what are often considered non-theistic religions[iv]—Buddhism, Taoism, Hinduism—as "philosophies" or even "philosophical systems." Yet theistic traditions, especially the Abrahamic conceptions of Islam, Judaism, and Christianity, are not listed in the dictionary at all. The term "theism" is only provided with one basic phrase, "belief in the existence of God" (p. 361). This term not only has no philosophical status; there are also no theistic religions that have any philosophical status in this dictionary. However, non-theistic religions, along with myriad other value-laden systems of various stripes, are all accorded this status. This type of exclusion is obviously not merely secularism in the modern sense, because many other religions are granted philosophical existence and allowed an intellectual voice. The bias here, as we will see in psychology, is more an implicit bias against theism (Slife & Reber, 2009).

Has this type of implicit prejudice infiltrated psychological theory and research? Consider two brief examples, one in psychological theory and one in psychological research. As an example of theory, Martin Buber has always been completely clear about the necessity of God in all of his

work and ideas (Buber, 1958; Friedman, 1981; Watson, 2006). However, when his I-Thou philosophy, for instance, is applied as a theory of psychotherapy, there is no trace of God's influence to be found (Buber, 1958; Chiari & Nuzzo, 2006; Fishbane, 1998; Hess, 1987; Slife & Reber, 2009). There are not even notes from the authors who do this application that this divine influence had been excluded, nor is there a defense of their decision to exclude. How might a currently active God change, if any, these therapy strategies? We do not know at this point, because Buber's clearly theistic philosophy has yet to be developed in this regard.

Consider also psychological research on the representation or image of God, a program of research that would clearly seem to be theistic by its very nature. This research shows that the image people form appears to be pivotal to their development, their interpersonal relationships, and a host of other significant things (Basset & Williams, 2003; Cassibba, Granqvist, Costantini, & Gatto, 2008; Demoulin, Saroglou, & Van Pactherbeke, 2008; Granqvist, Ivarsson, Broberg, & Hagekull, 2007). However, in a recent review of this literature, we found that none of these studies considered the possibility that God could have some influence on the participants' image of God (Reber, Slife, & Downs, 2012; Slife & Reber, 2009). The implicit prejudice against theism is so intense in psychology that no one seemed to consider it, in spite of what would appear to many Western theists to be a common sense hypothesis, given the topic of study. In fact, we added a few questions about God's influence to the usual questionnaire for these studies and found that theistic factors accounted for the greatest amount of variance (Reber, Slife, & Downs, 2012).

Theistic Approach to Psychological Science

These types of findings suggested to me at least the possibility of a full-blown program of psychological research founded on theistic assumptions. But now I had to consider what such a program would look like? First, as my previous examples suggest, such a program could generate theistic hypotheses that are testable in the usual manner. Again, God would not necessarily be the object of study; divine activity is an assumption at the foundation of theistic theory, much like lawful activity is an assumption at the foundation of naturalistic theory. Theistic hypotheses are overlooked in the research literature, not because investigators are all atheists but because even avowed theists have been trained to think of their theories and studies from a naturalistic perspective only. As the research I described (above) exemplify, however, theistic theories and studies are quite possible. Indeed, my co-investigator, Jeff Reber, and I have conducted other studies of this nature (e.g., Reber, Slife, & Downs, 2012), and Scott Richards and I have developed and tested theistic strategies of psychotherapy (Richards & Bergin, 1997; Slife & Richards, 2001).

Even so, I realized that this hypothesis-testing approach assumes that psychological methods are fundamentally neutral to the subject matter being tested, regardless of the worldview

assumptions entailed by that subject matter. In other words, the design of investigations—their ultimate epistemology or theory of how knowledge is acquired—is assumed not to affect the investigation conducted and thus the data collected. But is this true? I knew, for example, that qualitative researchers were extremely skeptical of this assumption (Packer, 2017). Coming from a different epistemology of knowledge acquisition, these researchers see everyday how the traditional epistemology of mainstream quantitative research affects not only the way that topics are studied but also what investigative questions are asked and how the data are eventually interpreted. Yes, I realized, we could study theistic hypotheses in the usual hypothesis-testing manner, but I couldn't help wondering if we were selling the other main worldview of Western culture, theism, short. Just as naturalism birthed a general method of knowledge acquisition, should theism be allowed to spawn its own? Theologians have developed methods for theological topics, but they are not typically intended for psychological topics. What would a truly theistic method be like for psychology?

As I studied these questions, I became aware that philosophers of science had long considered the scientific method to consist of two basic phases: the context of discovery and the context of justification (Bishop, 2007; Evans, 1989). The context of discovery involves the creative generation of the ideas, hypotheses, and topics to be studied. Interestingly, at least to me, this first phase has traditionally been quite open to even frankly religious explanations (Evans, 1989). Brilliant ideas and insightful hypotheses have frequently been viewed unabashedly as "inspired" and even "a gift from God" (Slife & Richards, 2005, p. 10). O'Grady & Richards (2005) surveyed natural and behavioral scientists in the United States and found that the majority had no problem believing that God inspires scientists and researchers in this discovery phase of research and scholarship.

Still, I learned quickly that the context of justification—what most scientists consider to be *the* scientific method—is another matter entirely. This context involves the procedures or logic that scientists use to test the ideas generated in the context of discovery. As Christian philosopher C. Stephen Evans (1989) put it, "Christian convictions must be put aside [in the context of justification]; here objectivity reigns . . . Distinctly Christian values [and assumptions] do not reappear until knowledge is being applied" (p. 14). Why are Christian values put aside, we could ask, especially by those psychological researchers who might consider them to be true? As we have described, methods of justification were formulated with a naturalistic world in mind, a world in which God, if this divine being exists at all, is functionally passive or irrelevant. Researchers are allowed to have informal ideas that are inspired by God, but they are trained, often unknowingly, in an epistemology of method that assumes God does not matter.

So I asked the question that began my journey with a new slant: What would a method be like that assumes God is integral to the context of scientific justification? I knew that the details of such a method would require the collaboration and development of many interested researchers

over time, but I could not help but wonder what a first foray into an epistemology would be like—one of perhaps several possibilities, but all of them centered on the assumption of a currently active and difference-making God. Is such an epistemology even possible, especially in view of Blackburn's presumption (above) in his *Dictionary* that theism is not even a proper philosophy?

Theistic Hermeneutics

To answer this question, I began with a lesson from the early part of my story: no methods, whether therapeutic or scientific, occur without assumptions to guide them. In fact, there is unusual agreement among the observers and scholars of science that we will never escape assumptions and values—that all methods, all approaches to studying any phenomena will require pre-investigation assumptions and biases (Beutler and Bergan, 1991; Kelly, 1990; Slife, Smith, & Burchfield, 2003). Indeed, even to approach a phenomenon for the purpose of study is already to have assumed: 1) that it is a phenomenon, 2) that it deserves study, and 3) that it can be studied. The upshot is that debatable, pre-investigatory biases are inescapable for all methods. They will always govern to some degree how we study, what we see, and how we interpret what we see.

Still, this lesson led me then to wonder—if all our methods are inescapably assumption-based, and thus biased to some degree, are we then doomed to confirm our own biases and never see the world for what it truly is? Some postmodernists would undoubtedly answer this question affirmatively. However, there are those who recognize the import of assumptions and values in methodology but who do not believe we are relegated to merely confirming our biases. This tradition of epistemology is the hermeneutic tradition. Scholars such as Alasdair MacIntyre (1981), Hans-Georg Gadamer (1995), Charles Taylor (1989), and Paul Ricoeur (1981) describe a hermeneutic approach to knowledge advancement where assumptions and biases are viewed as unavoidable in our methods, but they do not lead us necessarily to mere opinion or relativism. Microscopes and telescopes, for example, always bias their viewers in the particular way they illuminate the phenomena of interest—in the angle they take or the enlargement they offer—but this bias does not mean the phenomena are not illuminated in some fashion. Similarly, researcher biases allow important facets of psychological phenomena to be selected, focused upon, and illuminated—from a particular assumptive or worldview perspective. Yet these perspectives on phenomena can be incredibly useful, especially for those who may share in the worldview. The key is to take into account the biases or assumptions, rather than to ignore them. The obvious utility of traditional methods, in this sense, stems not from their bias-free nature, but from their application of the useful bias of naturalism[v].

As apparently useful as naturalism has been for psychology, it is still a *particular* perspective, implying that other perspectives might also be useful. Moreover, some perspectives might be

better than others for particular topics in psychology, and we cannot rule out the possibility that some might even be wrong. How, then, is the hermeneutist able to make these discernments without investigators forever confirming their own biases? The answer from many hermeneutists is that researchers need to be surprise-able (Marion, 2002; Slife, 2014; Slife, Johnson, & Jennings, 2015; Sugarman & Martin, 2005). They need to have enough openness to the phenomenon of their study that they can sense it is not being properly understood with the perspective inherent in their methods. This surprisability or openness requires not only humility about one's current assumptions concerning the phenomenon under study but also thorough knowledge of alternative assumptions, including basic method assumptions, that could—potentially at least—serve the phenomenon better. Such a "surprise" should allow us to adjust our assumptions and thus methods, so that when we engage the phenomenon again, we can perhaps illuminate it better. This tacking back and forth between engaged study and adjustment of method assumptions is often called the hermeneutic circle (Richardson, Fowers, & Guignon, 1999). We never escape our biases in this hermeneutic circle, but we can replace them with better biases.

This replacement process made good sense to me, but I found myself pondering how these researchers knew when to shift from current to alternative assumptions. How do we sense the inadequacy of our assumptions or biases for the phenomenon at hand, especially when we perceive the phenomenon *through* these assumptions and biases? This question is pivotal because there is considerable theoretical, scientific, and historical evidence that humans steadfastly cling to their biases and assumptions, frequently in spite of evidence to the contrary. Indeed, virtually every major theory of psychotherapy describes some mechanism whereby people routinely become stuck in their biases and beliefs, from Carl Jung to George Kelly to Aaron Beck (Beck, 1991; Rychlak, 1981). And social science is full of studies indicating that we continually confirm our own biases, in our everyday lives and in our science (Nickerson, 1998). How then can we know when these implicit assumptions are inadequate or wrong, especially when our experiences are bathed with the assumptions in the first place?

I found that those who have studied this issue have long pointed to certain experiential indicators that at least hint something is amiss. They fall under a variety of labels. Gadamer (1995) calls them surplus of meaning; Ricoeur (1981) terms them affectivity; Levinas (1969) labels them exteriority or alterity; Heidegger (1982) refers to them as the unveiling; Taylor (1985) often puts them as surprise; Marion (2000) terms them saturated phenomena; and Faulconer (2005) considers them interruptions or ruptures. Differing labels notwithstanding, all these varied scholars agree that somehow there is a rupture of our biased world that originates from *beyond* that world. Now what "beyond that world" might mean also differs, but some of these scholars more than hint that a divine personage is behind these ruptures (Faulconer, 2005; Levinas, 1969; Marion, 2000; Ricoeur, 1981; Taylor, 1985). Indeed, many in the field of phenomenology—the rigorous study of subjective experience—point to various forms of divinity as the source of these

other-worldly ruptures. Some have called this disciplinary turn the *theological turn* of phenomenology (e.g., Janicaud et al., 2000). It is considered a "turn" because the secular and naturalist roots of this discipline make it an improbable turn. Still, many phenomenologists feel that they cannot ignore their data, which seem increasingly to reveal that the rupturing of deeply held assumptions often stems from transcendent origins.[vi]

As I attempted to absorb this incredible turn in phenomenology, I couldn't help but wonder: what if this understanding of ruptures was true? Could it be, for example, that these ruptures are one of the ways in which a theistic God acts in the world, perhaps subtly correcting us, if we are willing to heed the correction? If so, could this type of divine correction be part of a serious theistic epistemology? It could, for instance, mean that God is responsible, at least part of the time, for combating our tendencies toward confirmation bias. It could imply that divine influences provide at least some of the other-worldly ruptures that prompt us to change our theoretical and methodological assumptions and bring us closer to true understanding of whatever we are studying.

Moreover, this theistic epistemology could apply to all types of correction and learning, both prosaic and professional. As an example of the prosaic, consider the rupturing of assumptions that occurs in reading a book. Mature readers typically scan the text until their assumptions about the story or plot are ruptured. They then reflect upon the rupture, adjust their assumptions, and read on until a rupture occurs again—a hermeneutic circle. Professional methods are frequently thought to operate similarly (Gadamer, 1995; Sugarman & Martin, 2005). In this theistic hermeneutic sense, both quantitative and qualitative researchers already take advantage of this rupturing/adjustment process, whether or not they acknowledge it. They sense somehow the need for an adjustment to their method of inquiry, which ultimately results in a better study. One would not have to believe in theism for God to work in this manner. However, this pivotal rupturing process might work better if these methods were explicitly formulated to take better advantage of this divine activity.

Distinguishing Characteristics of a Theistic Epistemology

What, then, might a more explicit formulation of this theistic epistemology mean, especially in relation to the rival method assumptions of naturalism? This is the final chapter in my journey thus far. First, unlike conventional naturalistic methods, where the investigator is required to set up a particular research design in advance and then stick rigidly with its procedures throughout the study (Bohman, 1993; Feyerabend, 1975), a theistic perspective would be open to, and perhaps even expect, the questioning and replacing of core method procedures, along with the assumptions and logic that spawned them. In other words, whatever served the investigator's understanding of the phenomena of interest, including changing the method procedure and even the logic of science itself, would have the highest priority. Indeed, some historians of science,

such as Paul Feyerabend (1975), contend that the major contributions of the natural sciences occurred not by following the logic or procedures of the scientific method, but by disobeying them. Could these major contributions have been "prompted" by other-worldly ruptures to disobey the usual assumptions of method? Feyerabend does not raise this particular question, but he recommends that scientists should be ready at all times to violate the logic of scientific method, whatever the source of the knowledge prompting the violations.

Feyerabend's call for readiness implies a second characteristic of a fully theistic inquiry: researchers should maximize the possibility of assumption ruptures in their studies so that they do not merely confirm their own biases. This maximization would require a twofold knowledge or skill (Jung & Hull, 1960; Kelly, 1963; Rychlak, 1981; Slife, Johnson, & Jennings, 2015; Slife, Reber, & Richardson, 2005). First, researchers would need to become aware of their most cherished assumptions so that they *can* be ruptured, a practice that is distinctly missing from current naturalistic methods. In fact, psychological researchers often proceed as if they have no assumptions and their data reflect an uninterpreted reality.

This common research practice is mainly because psychological investigators rarely have the second type of knowledge that is needed to maximize ruptures: alternative assumptions. When viable alternatives are realized, cherished assumptions can truly become assumptions, rather than truisms. Knowledge of alternatives provides the contrast necessary for long-hidden assumptions to stand in bold relief. This knowledge also allows current assumptions to be examined and even rejected if our ruptured experience indicates they should. Alternatives are vital to what many theists call humility. As C.S. Lewis (1976) put it for Christian theism, God is "the great iconoclast" (p. 76), the breaker of our reified images of the world. As such, a humility that allows strongly held images or assumptions to be "broken" would seem to be imperative to avoiding confirmation bias.

This radical openness to theistic ruptures leads to a third difference from natural science methods in psychology: fully theistic psychological researchers must revise their traditional reliance on predictability. These researchers would not abandon predictability altogether, because it remains important for testing hypotheses and discerning the divinely sustained regularities or "laws" of the natural world. However, these theistic inquirers must also value the violations of their expectations and hypotheses that divine ruptures could ultimately bring. In other words, theistic researchers should learn from expectational unpredictability as well as hypothesis predictability. As Kuhn (1970) has observed, it is the unpredictability of research anomalies, not the predictability of confirmed hypotheses, that leads to the questioning of our basic assumptions and thus paradigm shifts. Feyerabend (1975) appears to agree with Kuhn in this regard, because he contends that the serendipitous and anarchic in science, not the intentional and systematic, result in the most significant contributions to science.

To truly apprehend the serendipitous as well as the predictable, the fourth and final distinction from naturalistic methods is the need to truly engage rather than disengage the phenomenon we are studying. Researchers are traditionally taught that careful detachment or objectivity is the best approach to studying phenomena (Haworth, 1996). However, as Charles Taylor (1989) has put it, this prevents us from taking advantage of the interruption that truly teaches.

. . . when we see something surprising, or something which disconcerts us, or which we can't quite see, we normally react by setting ourselves to look more closely; we alter our stance, perhaps rub our eyes, concentrate, and the like. Rather than disengaging, we throw ourselves more fully into the experience, as it were (p. 163).

As important as this engagement is for a theistic epistemology, some theists have contended that it does not go far enough. Rohr (2009) and Marion (2007), as examples, argue that the best engagement, or even the best mode of knowing, is the kind of intimacy we have when we truly love and respect an object of inquiry—understanding not only its similarity to but also its radical otherness from us. This type of knowing fits nicely with Christian theism, for instance, because "knowing" in the Biblical sense is not a detached incorporation of facts but a relational intimacy with what or whom we care about deeply. Unfortunately, as Manoussakis (2016) describes, naturalistic researchers singled out the wrong sensory experience in their development of knowing—the sense of vision or observation. He contends that this sense allows for and even encourages passive disengagement, because metaphorical or literal distance is needed for full observation. The sense of touch, on the other hand, is the better sensory experience for true knowledge, because it is difficult to experience without the radical intimacy of theistic empiricism.

Conclusion

So, as we end the story of the first author's attempt to recover the excluded other of theism in research, we realize how wild the notion of a theistic approach to psychological research might seem. If nothing else, his experiences have shown us how often this notion shakes psychologists to their Enlightenment "bones." Indeed, it has seemed to some psychologists that this scholarly journey is an attempt to transport us back to the Middle Ages (e.g., Helminiak, 2010). The differences, however, between our fledgling proposal of a theistic epistemology and one from the Middle Ages are stark.

We conclude with two important differences. First, this proposal seeks a pluralism of methods in psychology, not the domination of a theistic epistemology. Our proposal, perhaps ironically, seeks an original or authentic secularism, where in today's secularism theism is an excluded other in the academy, especially as a method for advancing knowledge. The pluralism we are seeking would also imply a second vital difference from Middle Ages theistic science: closed-

minded approaches to knowledge advancement would be considered problematic, whether theism or naturalism. As we described above, humility and openness to experience would be one of the hallmarks of a theistic epistemology. If anything, naturalism is currently, as the historian of psychology Thomas Leahey (1991) put it, "the dogma" of psychology (p. 379). Why not at least stir the psychological pot by mixing in a pinch of theism, if for no other reason than to understand our naturalistic underpinnings just a bit better?

Endnotes

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[i] We have learned through experience to issue a cautionary note regarding the term "prejudice." As we will show, this term is used in the Gadamerian sense of background interpretive slant or what Taylor would call the social imaginary of the academy. We are not meaning it in the common sense of racial or sexual prejudice. Our reactivity to accusations of prejudice stems from what Gadamer considers our prejudice against prejudice, our extreme sensitivity to the possibility we might be prejudiced, even though we doubt that some sort of interpretive framework can be avoided.

[ii] This first-person story would typically be sole-authored, and, indeed, was sole-authored as a presentation to the Psychology and the Other Conference of 2017. However, the junior authors of this chapter played a substantial role in its reformulation and reorganization.

[iii] As Gantt and Williams (In Press) have shown, this understanding is scientism not science.

[iv] We recognize that some variations and/or interpretations of these religions may include a God or Gods of sorts. Our point here is that any emphasis of such divinity would have likely disqualified this "philosophical system" for philosophy status.
against the activity of God, and thus is better considered a prejudice of naturalism.

[v] Here, many scholars of science would distinguish between methodological (or epistemological) naturalism and metaphysical (or ontological) naturalism, but it is difficult, if not impossible, for this distinction to be sharp. Blurring of the distinction is inevitable because the methodological and metaphysical obviously share many assumptions.

[vi] Emmanuel Levinas (1969) may be one of the more noted of these scholars, pointing explicitly to divinity as the *Other* of this assumption correction (p. 78, 88, 92, 211, 226). In discussing the "dialogue" between researchers and their subject matter, for example, Mikhail Bakhtin (1984) talks of the "invisibly present third party who stands above all participants in the dialogue" (p. 126). And when this improbable surprise or rupture prompts us to adjust our guiding assumptions, Gadamer calls this a "miracle of understanding" in which "religious concepts [are] thus appropriate" (1995, p. 145). Jean-Luc Marion is perhaps the most explicit when he identifies the intuition that transcends or exceeds our grasp as "revelation," with one type of revelation being "theophany." (Faulconer, 2005, p. 7; see also Gschwandtner, 2007; Marion, 2000).

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