

***Bring Your Christian Worldview to
Psychology Class.***

Make Psychology Christian Again

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For Nana. Her gift of love keeps on giving.

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Introduction

This is not a psychology textbook. This is a book is about psychology -- it is about the intersection of psychology class and the Christian worldview. This book is about bringing the Christian worldview to psychology class.

There are plenty of quality resources available for students to use to learn psychology's subject matter. But most are critical of, or silent about, issues that Christians hold dear. This book is about the issues that Christians hold dear.

There are also many excellent Christian psychology teachers – in high schools and colleges – live and online. There are many resources available to help teach psychology's content areas. But there are few resources to help teach psychology from a Christian worldview perspective -- few that provide teachers with ideas for incorporating the Christian worldview into every lesson.

In college, Christian students may encounter professors and peers who do not believe in the Christian worldview. Students may encounter psychology professors who believe that the Christian worldview has no place in psychology – who ridicule Christianity as unscientific, irrational, and silly. This book is about explaining why the Christian worldview is not silly. Instead, the Christian worldview provides the most logical and meaningful framework for understanding psychology. Psychology class should strengthen students' faith.

In every psychology class, students learn about psychology's major school-of-thought – behaviorism, Freudian psychodynamic psychology, humanistic psychology, and evolutionary psychology. Each makes specific claims about human nature – what it means to be human. This book is about understanding those claims and contrasting them with what the Bible says about human nature and what it means to be human.

In every psychology class, students learn about the brain and nervous system, sensation and perception, motivation and emotion, abnormal and treatment psychology, and the rest of the 'fundamentals of psychology.' This book is about how each topic points toward God. This book is about positively asserting a Christian psychological apologetic so that students can boldly bring their Christian worldview to psychology class.

Chapter 1 – Bringing the Christian Worldview to Psychology

To bring the Christian worldview to psychology class, we need to accomplish several tasks.

#1 We need to have an expansive definition of psychology.

#2 We need to understand worldviews and to recognize the worldview beliefs underlying modern psychology's major theories.

#3 We need to understand what the Bible has to say about psychology's subject matter.

What is psychology?

You can know a lot about a person's worldview by the way they define 'psychology.' You can tell a lot about their worldview by what their definition includes and what it excludes. In fact, the difference between Christian and naturalistic psychologies can be reduced to their respective definitions of psychology.

Psychology is often defined narrowly – the scientific study of the human brain and behavior. Some people think psychology is all about mental illness, counseling, and psychiatric medications. Some think psychology is about mind-control and manipulation. As we'll see, many Christians equate psychology with Sigmund Freud and Humanistic theories.

A Christian approach to psychology requires an expansive definition because psychology is all those things and much more. It is the study of God's grandest creation. You. Psychology is the study of you, your joys and your sorrows, your memories and your ambitions, your sense of personal identity and your free will. Psychology is the scientific study of every mental power and capacity you possess. But that is not all.

The origin of the prefix 'psych,' or more accurately, 'psyche' (pronounced sy-key) is the Greek word 'psuche.' Psuche had two meanings. In the first, psuche was defined as the 'life force' – that which

animates all life on earth. It differentiated life from non-life. All life, at least all animal life, has psuche.

But psuche had a second meaning. Psuche also described something uniquely human, something special spiritual. Psuche described a quality that differentiated human life from all other life. A full definition of psuche recognized that humans are unique on earth and it made room for concepts like the heart, soul, and mind. With a big definition, it becomes clear that psychology is interested in topics dear to a Christian worldview – topics dealt with extensively in the Bible.

Psychology Is Old

Who was the first person to wonder about the human mind? It may have been King David when he wrote in Psalm8:4, "What is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou dost care for him?" Job was very interested in the causes of and cures for mental pain and suffering. Moses struggled with fear and self-doubt.

It wasn't called psychology and it wasn't scientific, but there is a rich history of Christian theologians writing about psychological topics from their Christian perspective. The early church fathers wrote about human nature, the mind, the soul, perceptions, emotions, and mental pain and suffering. Augustine wrote about love, sin, grace, memory, mental illumination, wisdom, volition, and the experience of time. Thomas Aquinas wrote about motivation, free-will, habits, virtues and vices, emotions, memory, and the intellect. Soren Kierkegaard, the most significant Christian psychologist since the Middle Ages, contributed profound psychological works. Jonathan Edwards and John of the Cross described spiritual development, sin, grace, knowledge, faith, and the nature of the Christian life.

The history of a Christian approach to psychology continued through the Protestant Reformation. Prior to Martin Luther nailing his theses to the door of the Wittenberg Castle church, the Catholic church had been the 'authority' on all matters. Prior to the reformation, Church scholars were the astronomers, physicists, doctors, and psychologists. After the

Chapter 2 – Theism vs Naturalism

Theism

God exists, or He does not. He created the universe, or He did not. A fundamental part of your worldview is your belief about God, the origin of the universe, and how we came to be. A Christian approach is theistic. It begins with the belief that God is real. There is one triune God who created the universe and everything in it – including the human mind. He is personal, loving, just, infinite, self-revealing, all-powerful, all knowing, ever present, self-existent, sovereign, eternal, and active in the world today. Our minds were designed and created by God and by His grace we reflect His likeness.

If God does exist, what are His attributes? Theology proper, the study of God's attributes, is a big topic, too. Some of God's attributes are more relevant to psychology than others. We are interested in God's immutability. His unchanging nature and His designs for the world are foundational to all sciences, including psychology. In as much as psychology is a

science, it is grounded in God's unchanging nature and His design for us. We are also interested in God's truth, goodness, purpose, righteousness, love, healing, and provision. These qualities are foundational to our understanding of human nature, morality, the causes and cures of mental pain and suffering, and more.

Naturalism

Students will feel pressure to conform to a belief that God is not real – to a philosophy of naturalism.

Modern psychology's major theories are not theistic. They are naturalistic. Naturalism is a worldview, a belief that natural causes and only natural causes created and can explain everything that exists – including the human mind. Naturalism demands a small definition of psyche – it excludes the possibility of the supernatural. From this perspective, all behavior and mental processes, every topic in every psychology textbook, without exception, are the result of the operation of natural forces.

Is the Bible a Psychology Textbook?

You may not think about it often, but a big part of your worldview has to do with epistemology – the study of truth and knowledge. How can we know truth with certainty? What sources and methods of gaining knowledge are trustworthy? Are there limits to what we can know?

One of the first chapters in most introductory psychology textbooks is research methods – the techniques used to study psychological phenomenon. Modern psychology’s goal, since its beginning, was to use scientific methods to gain understanding – to be a ‘hard’ science like chemistry and physics. As scientific psychology matured, new methods were developed – quasi-experimental designs, correlation studies, descriptive studies, surveys, and more.

The Bible is the inspired Word of God, but is it a psychology textbook? The Bible is inspired, authoritative, and sufficient, but it is not scientific. So,

in as much as psychology is a science, the Bible is not a psychology textbook.

But recall our big definition of psychology – of psuche. Psychology is about human nature. In as much as psychology is the study of human nature and the ways in which we're unique and spiritual, the Bible is most certainly a psychology textbook. The Bible says things about us that the techniques of science can never discover.

Students will feel pressure to conform to scientism, also called empiricism and logical positivism. Scientism is a philosophy, a belief that says, because the world operates only by natural processes, the only valid sources of knowledge are natural, too. From this perspective, the Bible has nothing to contribute to psychology. We can only know truth with certainty through scientific methods.

A Christian approach to psychology recognizes the importance of science, but it rejects the belief that scientific methods are the only way of discovering truth.

Chapter 3 – What is Man?

The question, ‘what is Man?’ is old. What is our nature? What is the source of our passions, our dreams, of love? What does it mean to be human? What is our substance – our essence. Are we one, two, or more parts? Are we conscious and free-willed, or do we simply react to environmental or psychic forces? Are we destined at birth to be who we are, or are we products of our histories? Questions about human nature may seem far from psychology’s focus, but each of its schools-of-thought brings explicit assumptions about human nature.

The Problem of Dualism

In every psychology class, students learn about ‘the problem of dualism.’ The problem of dualism highlights a major difference between Christian and naturalist approaches to psychology. The problem of dualism is about human nature – our substance.

Hippocrates thought that to be human was to be one substance -- he was a naturalist. Students today will

Chapter 5 – Evolutionary Psychology

Darwin's 'distant future' has arrived. Today, evolutionary psychology is the 'new' psychology. Students will feel pressure to conform to a belief in evolution.

It seems silly to think that the most complex structure in the known universe, the human brain, evolved by numerous and successive slight modifications – adaptations that provided survival and reproductive advantages. It seems silly to believe that the human mind was designed by evolution, not by an intelligent designer

Darwin wrote, "in the distant future" because he understood the world wasn't ready for evolutionary psychology. Today, many people claim to be evolutionists, but they haven't really thought deeply about evolution. If there is an organism whose existence can't be explained by the principles of evolution, it disproves the theory. You are that organism. You, your mind, proves evolution wrong.

Chapter 6 – Mental Pain and Suffering

Sometimes something goes wrong. Sometimes people think, feel, and behave in ways that are abnormal. Sometimes people get depressed. Sometimes people have hallucinations, believe crazy things, act in bizarre ways, and sometimes people kill themselves or other people. Part of what it means to be human in a fallen world is the experience of mental pain and suffering. Abnormal and treatment psychology are interesting, important, difficult, and sometimes personal topics. If it hasn't happened already, you or someone you love will experience mental pain and suffering.

But few topics in psychology are more worldview-laden and controversial among Christians than abnormal and treatment psychology. The worldview questions surrounding the causes of and cures for mental pain and suffering are complex and multifaceted.

Topics like the nervous system, sensation and perception, memory, and others are clearly not the