

The Accompaniment of Psychology and Theology: A Response to Jessica Coblentz¹

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I AM GRATEFUL FOR the opportunity to respond to Jessica Coblentz's "What Can Theology Offer Psychology,"² and I am grateful for her thorough consideration of the way in which theologians' path to understanding theodicy might help psychologists better address how they understand suffering. As the late Henry Gleitman once wrote, "All the science of psychology gives us is small islands of coherence in a vast sea of chaos."³ We can use all the help we can get to enlarge those islands. I share her hope for collaboration between theologians and psychologists in understanding the human condition.

Collaboration often begins with accompaniment and with a sharing of stories. As we come to better understand each other's stories, we can more readily find ways to collaborate. In that light, my response will be to share stories from psychology that touch on some of the main themes that Coblentz raised in her paper. First is a story of psychology's understanding of bias; the second considers psychologists' understanding of the good life, for without a clear understanding of the good life, suffering is likely to be misunderstood; and third is the story of a particular school of thought within psychology that might help address the importance of, and suggests some methods for, listening to each individual's view from within.

I offer these thoughts as I come from a particular background. As a psychologist, I began my research career with work on the ways that thoughts are related to depression. How does the way we explain things relate to depression? How do the goals we set for ourselves, and the way we think about those goals, relate to depression? As a Catholic, I did the 19th Annotation of the Ignatian Exercises not that long

¹ I thank Daniel Cervone, David Cloutier, and Courtney Forbes for their helpful comments on a previous draft of this paper.

² Jessica Coblentz, "What Can Theology Offer Psychology? Some Considerations in the Context of Depression," *The Journal of Moral Theology* 9, no. 1 (2020): 2-19.

³ Henry Gleitman, "Introducing Psychology," *American Psychologist* 39, no. 4 (1984): 421-427, at 425.

after receiving tenure.⁴ That experience, along with a mindfulness practice, drew me to the psychology of contemplation and of gratitude. I am currently studying the ways in which wanting to see ourselves as independent can interfere with the experience of gratitude. I have also begun work on the psychology of the Ignatian Examen. In the last four years I have worked with a theologian on the relation of psychology to virtue theory. From these background experiences, I now turn to some reflections inspired by Dr. Coblentz's paper.

BIAS

In part, Coblentz's paper argues that theology can help psychology understand its biases. I believe this is both true and important. To make this clear, it helps to understand some of what psychology tells us about bias. That psychological scientists are biased is an old story within the field of psychology. The clinical psychologist Michael Mahoney wrote in 1976: "Our continued neglect of the scientist could well be the most costly blunder in the history of empiricism. We can hardly hope to have much confidence in the products of science if we choose to remain ignorant of the limitations imposed by its physical imbedment (sic)... I will argue that the conventional image of the scientist is not just a myth—but perhaps a malignant one."⁵ Some of the biases he raised largely went unexamined for decades until recent years have brought a crisis upon the field. Some papers published in good journals, widely taught in our courses, have failed to be replicated and increasingly are being disbelieved.⁶ As we try to understand how our field came to this, we have given increasing attention to the biases that we had ignored for too long.⁷

⁴ The 19th annotation of the Ignatian Exercises is a version of the Spiritual Exercises designed for people who cannot be away for 30 days to do the Exercises as they were originally designed.

⁵ Michael Mahoney, *Scientist as Subject: The Psychological Imperative* (Cambridge: Ballinger Press, 1976), xii.

⁶ Alexander A. Aarts, Joanne E. Anderson, Christopher J. Anderson, Peter Attridge, "Estimating the Reproducibility of Psychological Science," *Science* 349, no. 6251 (2015): 943-950. While much of the focus on the replication crisis has been on psychology, the problem affects other fields, such as medicine (C. Glenn Begley and Lee M. Ellis, "Raise Standards for Preclinical Cancer Research," *Nature* 483 (2012): 531-533) and economics (Andrew C. Chang and Phillip Li, "Is Economics Research Replicable? Sixty Published Papers from Thirteen Journals Say 'Usually Not,'" *Finance and Economics Discussion Series 2015-083* [Washington: Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, 2015]). The sorts of biases that produce replication issues seem general rather than limited to psychology.

⁷ In one study, ministers did better than psychologists or physical scientists at a test of hypothesis testing skills; see Michael J. Mahoney and Bobby G. DeMonbreun, "Psychology of the Scientist: An Analysis of Problem-Solving Bias," *Cognitive Therapy and Research* 1, no. 3 (1977): 229-238. That alone might give psychologists reason to listen to the stories of theologians!

Bias can arise from many processes.⁸ Some are motivational. That is, people tend to prefer some things to be true rather than others. They will hold evidence supporting their position to a low bar but evidence contrary to their position to a high bar, so their favored belief receives the most support.⁹ Some biases are based on the dynamics of groups to which we belong. For example, groups that lean in one direction tend to have conversations that bias them to move further in that direction.¹⁰ Some biases are cognitive. For instance, we have concepts for some things and so can process parts of the world related to those concepts easily, but we lack the concepts to understand other things and so miss related information when it arises.¹¹

I want to focus on one bias that arises from humans' limited capacity for attention. The world is large, our attention in many ways like a flashlight, illuminating only a part of that world.¹² As a result, we typically only have a small part of the world in mind as we think. Psychologists who study attribution, that is, how people explain why things have happened, have demonstrated that one factor affecting attribution is where our attention is focused when we are trying to find an explanation.¹³ If we witness a group interaction and our attention is focused on Person A in the interaction then A will be seen as playing

⁸ The understanding that humans are subject to a variety of biases is not unique to psychologists. For instance, Bernard Lonergan writes of "the bias of the dramatic subject, of the individual egoist, of the member of a given class or nation" in *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*. (New York: Harper and Row, 1958), 225.

⁹ For more, see Ziva Kunda, "The Case for Motivated Reasoning," *Psychological Bulletin* 108, no. 3 (1990): 480-498, and Dan M. Kahneman, "Ideology, Motivated Reasoning, and Cognitive Reflection," *Judgment and Decision Making* 8, no. 4 (2013): 407-424.

¹⁰ Garold Stasser and William Titus, "Pooling of Unshared Information in Group Decision Making: Biased Information Sampling During Discussion," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 48, no. 6 (1985): 1467-1478.

¹¹ See, Rodger C. Schank and Robert P. Abelson, *Scripts, Plans, Goals, and Understanding* (Hillsdale: Erlbaum, 1977). This has been far from an exhaustive list of biases. Some of psychologists' cognitive biases likely arise from the limitations of our methods. I'll mention two. First, most psychology studies have very limited time frames. Most of the longest term studies last perhaps two years. While information about what can affect people's trajectories over two years can certainly be important, it leaves us largely ignorant as to how actions today might affect how we experience our deathbed. Second, the statistics that psychology uses tend to be focused on unidirectional processes. What is the effect on B if I manipulate A? But people live in ecological systems whereby the temporary effect of A on B might also trigger a system that brings B back to the baseline. Perhaps this focus on unidirectional effects helps give rise to the erroneous sense of autonomy.

¹² Michael I. Posner, Charles R. R. Snyder, and Brian J. Davidson, "Attention and the Detection of Signals," *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General* 109, no. 2 (1980): 160-174.

¹³ Shelley E. Taylor and Susan T. Fiske, "Salience, Attention, and Attribution: Top of the Head Phenomena," *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* 11 (1978): 249-288.

a greater causal role than if our attention has been focused on Person B. People stereotype in part because of attentional biases. The category to which the other belongs is visible, the unique aspects of their character and context less so. The world outside our attention tends to be forgotten.¹⁴

Psychologists, given that they are human, are subject to this attentional bias. I find it helpful to think of ourselves, in some ways, as dogs happily chasing tennis balls, focused intently on the ball in front of us, forgetting those we cannot see. Among the balls we have chased over the years have been Freudian unconscious conflict, Pavlovian and Skinnerian reinforcement, how it is that we think, and how the brain operates. It is not that any of these are bad targets of attention as we try to understand why people do what they do. I find each helpful. But attention to any one of these becomes problematic when we neglect that to which we are not attending, as when focus on the brain leads to neglect of what people think or the nature of their relationships as a cause of what they do.

Accompanying theologians can help remind psychologists of that to which they are not attending. A relevant example can be seen in the benefits of expert Buddhist monks' criticisms of mindfulness as taught by (largely) secularized psychologists.¹⁵ Mindfulness practices were developed to exist in a particular space in a Buddhist ecosystem. In Buddhism, mindfulness is part of the Noble Eightfold Path that as a whole is for the pursuit of enlightenment. Removed from its native ecology, for instance, from other aspects of the Noble Eightfold Path, mindfulness might have different effects than it did in its original ecology. Thomas Joiner has begun to argue that teaching mindfulness to narcissists (absent the ethical instructions of Buddhism) makes them more narcissistic.¹⁶ Getting better at controlling attention, as likely happens from mindfulness training, does not tell people to what they should attend. Psychologists chased the tennis ball of the benefits of mindfulness and lost sight of its possible downsides and the context in

¹⁴ This attentional issue applies to many issues facing the Church today. For instance, explanations for the abuse crises and the rise of the Nones likely are placed wherever people happen to be looking. Different Catholics are looking in different places and so tend to reach different (and at best partial) explanations. And then confirmation bias likely leads them to challenge strong evidence that runs counter to their beliefs but to accept with only limited challenge weak evidence that supports their beliefs. As I reflect on the return of the prodigal son, I wonder whether his focus on his sins and what comes next, rather than on the causes of his sins, is because the list of causes would be so long and more difficult for him to fully discern.

¹⁵ For instance, see Xuan Joanna Feng, Christian U. Krageloh, D. Rex Billington, and Richard J. Siegert, "To What Extent is Mindfulness as Presented in Commonly Used Mindfulness Questionnaires Different from How it is Conceptualized by Senior Ordained Buddhists?" *Mindfulness* 9, no. 2 (2018): 441-460.

¹⁶ Thomas Joiner, *Mindlessness: The Corruption of Mindfulness in a Culture of Narcissism* (New York: Oxford, 2017).

which benefits accrue.¹⁷ Perhaps these problems would have been avoided with more attention to experts in Buddhism.

How can an understanding of psychology's stories of bias, and, especially, attentional bias, bear on the accompaniment of psychology and theology? Simply put, theologians often look in directions that psychologists do not. Psychologists, then, could benefit by following the gaze of theologians.¹⁸ In this particular instance, psychology might do well to heed the gaze of Coblentz on the dangers of dualism as theologians contemplate theodicy. What are we not attending to when something, in this case depression, is classified as good or evil, a good life or a bad life, and then not looked at more deeply? What do we not attend to when we use a particular definition of depression and then look at groups we label "depressed" and "nondepressed" rather than attending carefully to the lived experience of individuals who experience depression? These two questions lead me to other psychology stories, one in response to each question.

THE GOOD LIFE

One gaze of theologians that psychologists would do well to follow is that on the good life. In recent years there has been a marked upswing in attention given by psychologists to "the good life."¹⁹ This has occurred in the context of the rise of "positive psychology," which focuses on the presence of that which makes life worth living, rather than the absence of depression, anxiety, and other disorders.²⁰

¹⁷ A set of psychologists working together at the Mind and Life Institute—whose mission is "to alleviate suffering and promote flourishing by integrating science with contemplative practice and wisdom traditions," and one of whose founders is the Dalai Lama—write, regarding mindfulness: "At a practical level, the misinformation and propagation of poor research methodology can potentially lead to people being harmed, cheated, disappointed, and/or disaffected. At a philosophical level, misunderstandings of the work and its implications could limit the potential utility of a method that proposes unique links between first-person data and third-person observations." Nicholas T. Van Dam, David Vago, Marieke K. van Vugt, Laura Schmalzl, "Mind the Hype: A Critical Evaluation and Prescriptive Agenda for Research on Mindfulness and Meditation," *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 13, no. 1 (2018): 36-61.

¹⁸ Jonathan Haidt has made a similar point regarding moral psychology, noting that moral psychologists tend to be secular liberals—thus, there has not been much exploration by moral psychologists of moral issues that are of interest to conservatives and members of religious groups. Jonathan Haidt, "Morality," *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 3, no. 1 (2008): 65-72.

¹⁹ See, for instance, Christie Napa Scollon and Laura A. King, "What People Really Want in Life and Why It Matters: Contributions from Research on Folk Theories of the Good Life," in *Positive Psychology and Social Change*, ed. R. Biswas-Diener (New York: Springer, 2011): 1-14.

²⁰ Martin E. P. Seligman and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, "Positive Psychology: An Introduction." *American Psychologist*, 55, no. 1 (2000): 5-14.

Much of this work on the good life has focused on subjective experience.²¹ How satisfied are people with their lives? How happy do they report being? Does the report of happiness over a period of time differ if we ask people to reflect on the time as a whole as opposed to asking repeatedly about momentary experience during the event?²² Jessica Coblentz's work reflects on the limitations of examining emotion alone as we try to understand depression and raises the question of how individuals can experience vitality while depressed. One reason this is important because there is a normative judgment implicit in psychology's use of particular instruments to measure a concept like well-being or depression. For instance, one measure often used by psychologists to assess "eudaimonic well-being" includes items such as, "In many ways I feel disappointed about my achievements in life."²³ This suggests that the presence of disappointment with one's achievements is a sign that one has not led a good life, that bad feelings and struggles are a sign of a life not well-lived. On what basis do psychologists make this assertion, and what are the implications of this approach to understanding well-being?

There is a need to expand our attention to other possible understandings of well-being. Perhaps psychologists could find in theologians' work a different framework in which struggle and suffering are consistent with living a good life. In recent years, I have been accompanying the theologian David Cloutier as we contemplate well-being. This experience provides an example of a way in which attention to the gaze of a theologian has helped me see a way of thinking about well-being that I, as a psychologist, had missed before. In our conversations, I learned about virtue theory. Virtue theory may be old news to theologians, but, as a psychologist, I am unsure if I had heard the term before I began my work with Cloutier. Some psychologists had drawn upon virtue theory, but at least in my part of the field, these seem to be few.²⁴ The idea that well-being might consist of developing and having habits of doing the right thing for the right reasons in the right circumstances is very different from the ideas that well-being is

²¹ Daniel M. Haybron, "The Philosophical Basis of Eudaimonic Psychology," in *Handbook of Eudaimonic Well-Being*, ed. J. Vitterso (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2016), 27-53.

²² Daniel Kahneman, Barbara L. Fredrickson, Charles A. Schreiber, and Donald A. Redelmeier, "When More Pain Is Preferred to Less: Adding a Better End," *Psychological Science* 4, no. 6 (1993): 401-405.

²³ Carol D. Ryff and Corey Lee M. Keyes, "The Structure of Psychological Well-Being Revisited," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 69, no. 4 (1995): 719-727.

²⁴ Anthony H. Ahrens and David Cloutier, "Acting for Good Reasons: Integrating Virtue Theory and Social Cognitive Theory," *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* 13, no. 4 (2019): onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/spc3.12444.

about emotional happiness or a sense of satisfaction about one's life (and a lack of struggle and negative feelings).

Doing the right thing for the right reason might well leave one in a desert, in depression. Consider the lot of brave whistleblowers cast loose from their work and friends. Does the depression they might experience negate their excellence in action? If people were to engage in excellent action but also experience depression, why would that be considered less indicative of flourishing than the experience of people who do nothing excellent but do not experience clinical depression?²⁵ This reflection on the nature of the good life seems particularly relevant for Catholic psychologists, whose faith holds up the lives of martyrs as lives to be emulated and instructs us to take up our crosses, for whom Ignatius of Loyola prescribed that “[w]e should not fix our desires on health or sickness, wealth or poverty, success or failure, a long life or a short one. For everything has the potential of calling forth in us a more loving response to our life forever with God. Our only desire and our one choice should be this: I want and I choose what better leads to God’s deepening life in me.”²⁶ Perhaps Ignatius could also have included a phrase about not fixing our desires on being depressed or not depressed. Blessed are the sorrowing.²⁷

ATTENDING TO THE VIEW FROM INSIDE

Coblentz expresses the dangers of missing the emic in the pursuit of the etic, thereby losing the subjective meanings that people draw from their idiosyncratic experiences. Indeed, this points to a limit in much of psychology, discussed perhaps most frequently in the debate about nomothetic versus idiographic approaches to personality.²⁸ Nomothetic approaches seek to identify general laws. One example of

²⁵ I raise this example solely to distinguish two views of the good life, that of focusing on the absence of depression and that of focusing on engagement in excellent activity. I do not wish to imply that the experiences of depression, and the consequences flowing from it, are not terrible, nor that depression is homogeneous.

²⁶ David L. Fleming, S.J., *Draw Me Into Your Friendship: A Literal Translation and a Contemporary Reading of the Spiritual Exercises* (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996), 27.

²⁷ Fear of depression and other strong emotional experiences is likely tied to a variety of disorders including depression (see, for example, Sunkyung Yoon, Van Dang, Jessica Mertz, and Jonathan Rottenberg, “Are Attitudes Towards Emotions Associated with Depression? A Conceptual and Meta-Analytic Review,” *Journal of Affective Disorders* 232 [2018]: 329-340) and post-traumatic stress disorder (see, for example, Shannon R. Miles, Tracey L. Smith, Kelly P. Maioritsch, and Eileen P. Ahearn, “Fear of Losing Emotional Control Is Associated with Cognitive Processing Therapy Outcomes in U.S. Veterans of Afghanistan and Iraq,” *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 28, no. 5 [2015]: 475-479; K. Elaine Williams, Dianne L. Chambless, and Anthony H. Ahrens, “Are Emotions Frightening? An Extension of the Fear of Fear Construct,” *Behaviour Research and Therapy* 35, no. 3 [1997]: 239-248.)

²⁸ Gordon W. Allport *Personality: A Psychological Interpretation* (New York: Holt, 1937).

such an approach in psychology is “trait theory,” which attempts to classify people along different dimensions. Perhaps the most widely used of these is the “Big 5,” which argues that people are different from each other in five main ways, extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, openness to experiences, and emotional stability (or “neuroticism”).²⁹ If one uses trait theory to understand others, an individual’s actions are interpreted a priori through these categories, and any coherences about the individual that do not fit these concepts are missed.

In contrast, an idiographic approach to personality tries to identify particular facts, rather than general laws. While some facts about a person, such as their fingerprints, can be identified from the outside, others can only be identified by listening to each individual’s view from within.³⁰ One approach to understanding personality that emphasizes the idiographic, including the view from within, is social cognitive theory, which focuses on personal knowledge, beliefs, and skills as they are acquired in social contexts. Assessment approaches from a social cognitive perspective are very open to individual idiosyncrasies and an emic approach. In that light, I provide some detailed background on social cognitive theory.³¹

Social cognitive theory arose from a variety of factors. One was a dissatisfaction with the deterministic views of some dominant psychologies. Freud suggested that our actions are determined by early childhood experiences. Behaviorism suggested that our actions are determined by our reinforcement history. Social cognitivists sought to reclaim a place in personality psychology for human agency when so much attention was focused on determinism.³² A second origin of social cognitive theory was the related point that people can change and there was a need for a psychology that could better understand that change.

²⁹ Robert R. McCrae and Paul T. Costa, “Validation of the Five-Factor Model of Personality Across Instruments and Observers,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 52, no. 1 (1987): 81-90.

³⁰ This is not to say that it is easy to get this view from inside. People are often unaware of their own information processing and even if aware, they might not want to share what they know. This has led psychologists to develop a variety of ways of eliciting people’s views from inside, and to recognize that there will be limits to these methods. But even if we cannot attend perfectly to people’s inner experience, we can still gain some knowledge. See Richard Robins, Chris Fraley, and Robert Krueger, *Handbook of Research Methods in Personality Psychology* (New York: Guilford, 2007).

³¹ See Albert Bandura, *Social Foundations of Thought and Action: A Social Cognitive Theory* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1986); Daniel Cervone and Yuichi Shoda, eds., *The Coherence of Personality: Social-Cognitive Bases of Consistency, Variability, and Organization* (New York: Guilford, 1999).

³² Albert Bandura, “Toward a Psychology of Human Agency,” *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 1, no. 2 (2006): 164-180.

A third origin was a concern about the limits of the personality assessment proposed by trait theory, touched on above. Trait theory focuses on average level differences between individuals. For instance, one might count how many times out of 100 someone acts “agreeably.” The more one acts agreeably, the more one would be considered to have the trait of agreeableness. Rather than focusing on averages, social cognitive theory focuses on the individual in particular contexts. Two people might be equally outgoing on average, both acting outgoing in 70 of their last 100 opportunities to act outgoing, but one might be outgoing at parties and shy in academic circles, whereas the reverse may be true for the other. Trait theory does not have a good way of measuring and understanding the difference between these two. Trait theory might then not understand how different people can seem to take on different traits when context changes in a particular way, for instance when both of our individuals spend more time at parties, and one becomes—by the same measures of agreeableness as before—more agreeable, the other less.

Social cognitive theory presents an alternative form of conception and assessment that addresses these limits of trait theory.³³ As one example, consider a study by Daniel Cervone.³⁴ He asked people to identify their individual strengths, allowing people to give their view from within. He then asked about their ability to engage in a variety of actions and whether their idiosyncratic strengths mapped on to those actions. For instance, he asked if people would be able to offer saving money on a date, refrain from criticizing their partner’s driving, be gracious to their partner’s parents, and so on. Figure 1 shows data from two subjects. Both of them judged that they could offer to save money, refrain from criticism, and be gracious. From a nomothetic standpoint, these two would seem much the same, and the word “agreeable” might be used to describe them. But this misses something essential. One person described their strength as being “nice.” The other described their strength as being “able to manipulate people.” It was necessary to understand the views of these two from within to understand the essential difference between them.

³³ For a good overview of distinct approaches to understanding personality psychology, see Daniel Cervone and Brian R. Little, “Personality Architecture and Dynamics: The New Agenda and What’s New About It,” *Special Issue, Personality and Individual Differences: Dynamic Personality Psychology* 136, no. 1 (2019): 12-23.

³⁴ Daniel Cervone, “The Architecture of Personality,” *Psychological Review* 111, no. 1 (2004): 183-204.

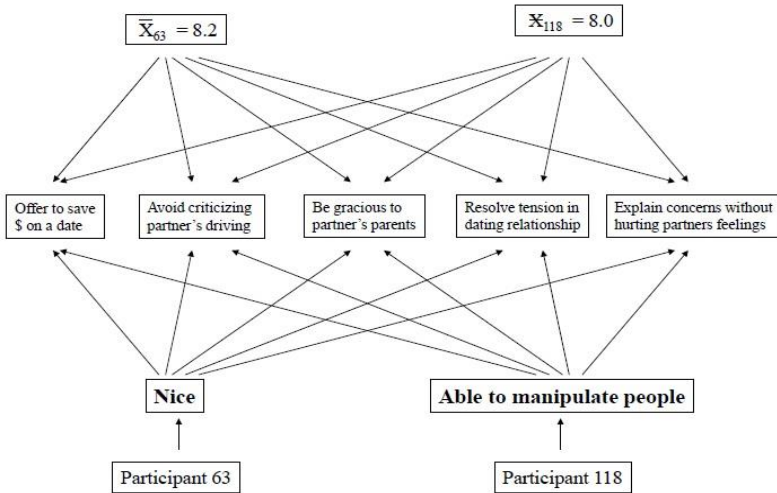


Figure 1: An illustration of social cognitive assessment.³⁵

It is likely that many theologians have heard of some personality psychologies—psychoanalytic approaches, behaviorist approaches, trait approaches—but not social cognitive theory. It is important to realize that these personality theories generally make claims about different sorts of phenomena and use different types of evidence to investigate these claims, just as people interested in the ways in which cells work will use different methods from those interested in the ways different nations work. Psychoanalytic theories emphasize conflict within an individual, outside their awareness, that are typically based in childhood experience. They then use methods, such as dream interpretation, to discover those hidden conflicts. Behaviorist approaches emphasize the ways people do what they do as a result of the consequences of their actions. They then watch what happens after people act and whether, in the same context, those people will subsequently act in a similar way. Trait theories emphasize ways in which people behave consistently across contexts. And so they construct scales for measuring aggregate behavior. It is important not to lump together different approaches to understanding personality given their different interests and methods.³⁶

³⁵ Daniel Cervone, “The Architecture of Personality,” *Psychological Review*, 111 no. 1 (2004), 196.

³⁶ It is unclear why some psychological approaches become generally known and others not, but I will offer one possibility for why social cognitive theory might be less known in many circles. (It is clearly well known in other circles. For instance, one attempt to identify the most eminent psychologists of the twentieth century listed social cognitive theorists Albert Bandura fourth and Walter Mischel twenty-fifth. See Steven J. Haggblom, Renee Warnick, Jason E. Warnick, Vinessa K. Jones, Gary L.

Our theories of how people work, of what personality is, affect how we live. One clear example of this is work on implicit theories of intelligence.³⁷ Those who think their intelligence is fixed experience life very differently than do those who believe intelligence is malleable. Those who think intelligence is fixed give up more readily when faced with academic challenge and see intellectual work as threatening given what it might tell them about their own limits. Those who believe intelligence is malleable enjoy academics more and see their failures as not threatening but rather an opportunity to learn.

Some theories of how humans work will be more likely to de-emphasize the importance of first-person perspectives. Attention to those theories is likely to favor the etic over the emic. For instance, there is some evidence that media emphasis on the role of the brain in human functioning has shifted public attention to the brain as the cause of their actions.³⁸ If the brain is the determinant of our behavior, of what import are first person accounts of experience? In this light, then, a psychology, such as social cognitive theory, that speaks to the importance of first person accounts and that was born in part from an emphasis on agency and on how change occurs in people might be particularly valuable and speak to the concerns raised by Coblentz about the failure to attend to first-person perspectives.

Yarbrough, Tenea M. Russell, Chris M. Borecky, Reagan McGahhey, John L. Powell III, Jamie Beavers, and Emmanuelle Monte, "The 100 Most Eminent Psychologists of the 20th Century," *Review of General Psychology* 6, no. 2 [2002]: 139-152.) Social cognitive assessment can require considerable effort. Imagine that I want to hire an employee. If I give a standard trait assessment of how conscientious someone is that might take a couple minutes. And the results of that assessment would help me predict how the employee would do on the job better than would, for instance, flipping a coin. In contrast, asking the employee to name their strengths and then map those strengths onto the many different aspects of a job (e.g., for professors, giving a lecture on a topic in the person's area of expertise, giving a lecture in an area far from their expertise, grading papers, meeting with students to give corrective feedback, writing grant proposals, writing empirical articles, speaking cogently and charitably in a heated faculty meeting, etc.) might do a better job of predicting the future but would also take considerably more effort. It is much easier to collect data using trait methods, and as a result more studies are published using trait assessment methods, losing valuable insight from first person perspectives. Some things are hard to know, and those may be less likely to receive the sustained research attention that makes particular approaches visible. By analogy, health might be measured to some degree simply by asking people if they feel healthy. But in medicine, more time-consuming and expensive tests than brief self-report are often deemed helpful. For more on this perspective, see the Epilogue in Gian Vittorio Caprara and Daniel Cervone, *Personality: Determinants, Dynamics, & Potentials* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

³⁷ See, for example, Carol S. Dweck, *Self-Theories: Their Role in Motivation, Personality, and Development* (New York: Psychology Press, 2013).

³⁸ Cliodhna O'Connor and Helene Joffe, "How Has Neuroscience Affected Lay Understandings of Personhood? A Review of the Evidence," *Public Understanding of Science* 22, no. 3 (2013): 254-268.

I suspect that social cognitive theory will offer other insights for theologians as well. David Cloutier and I have recently published work on ways in which an understanding of social cognitive theory can enrich virtue theory.³⁹ Social cognitive theory draws from appraisal theory of emotion.⁴⁰ Appraisal theory suggests that humans are constantly judging their circumstances and these judgments prepare them for action. The felt sense of this preparation and these judgments gives rise to the experience of emotion. At the heart of judgment is the question of what we desire. In the same context (consider learning the results of an election) different people will desire different outcomes and so will experience different emotions. Social cognitive theory might help us to understand better what an individual desires, which should be helpful for understanding whether they desire a pearl of great price or a fake pearl.

Coblentz discusses the importance of gaining an understanding of the views from inside that depressed individuals have if we are to understand the varied experiences that are depression. Different theories of what personality is will have different ways of addressing this point. A neuroscience approach to depression might emphasize brain scans. A behaviorist approach might emphasize the varied things that happen to depressed people after they act and how this affects what they do. A psychoanalytic view might use such things as inkblot tests to have people give light to that of which they are unaware.

Social cognitive theory offers a different approach, and one that emphasizes the emic. It provides questions that might be asked to elicit the view from inside. What do people who are depressed but thriving perceive to be their strengths? What are their desires? Do they believe that their strengths are related to their desires and to the opportunities afforded by their contexts? Answers to these questions would certainly vary and these diverse answers would help us better understand the experiences that people describe as depression.

CONCLUSION

I have sketched some particular responses to Coblentz's paper from the point of view of psychology. Her work on bias in theology can inform work on bias in psychology. Her point about living a good life while suffering calls for examination of the psychology of this experience. Her point about the degree to which individuals' views from

³⁹ Ahrens and Cloutier, "Acting for Good Reasons."

⁴⁰ See Craig A. Smith and Richard S. Lazarus, "Emotion and Adaptation," in *Handbook of Personality Theory and Research*, ed. L. A. Pervin (New York: Guilford, 1990), 609-637. Appraisal theory was initially developed by Magda Arnold, a professor who had recently returned to Catholicism and was looking for a better psychology for understanding Aquinas. Randolph Cornelius, "Magda Arnold's Thomistic Theory of Emotion, the Self-Ideal, and the Moral Dimension of Appraisal," *Cognition and Emotion* 20, no. 7 (2006): 976-1000, at 978-979.

within can be missed raises the necessity of psychological assessment that taps the view from inside. Coblentz expressed hope for a collaboration of theologians and psychologists. I share her hope and have offered the idea of accompaniment and sharing stories as a step toward such collaboration. Knowing well the narratives central to the other seems likely to be helpful in developing such collaborations.

It is important that these collaborations be sustained and substantive. My sense is that one limitation of recent work in psychology on the good life is that it has too often given only a superficial reading of other disciplines' literatures on the topic. Psychologists' representations of what philosophers say seem at least sometimes not to be how philosophers would represent their own stories. The relatively brief reading psychologists sometimes give to philosophy is understandable. I know that I cannot keep up with the relevant psychology literatures. To add on the literature of other disciplines seems daunting. Still, the alternative of superficiality seems dangerous.

I would like to offer my own recent story of collaborating with the theologian David Cloutier as an example of this process of accompaniment and collaboration. David and I are choir mates and had known each other for around two years when we saw a call for letters of intent to submit grant proposals on interdisciplinary work on well-being. We began talking to each other about what might be of interest in September 2015. I do not think he had ever heard of social cognitive theory nor had I heard of virtue theory. We had to listen to a number of stories from each other about what we were doing that touched on well-being before we realized we had these two stories that would likely speak to each other. Happily, we were awarded a grant. We then sent each other papers from our disciplines and met to talk about them, diving more deeply into the stories so that I could competently write about virtue and he about social cognitive theory. Over three years later, in November 2018, we submitted a paper to *Theological Studies*, where it is now in press.⁴¹ I am skeptical that a lesser commitment of time, including the time for ideas to ferment, would have produced as good a paper.

When we meet a stranger, we do not know how long it will take to deeply learn their important stories. We are likely to face incentives to cut the conversation short, given the busyness of our lives. We attend to that about the other which we know and have invisible to us those parts we do not know. As a result, we tend to be overconfident about how well we know the other.⁴² These same pressures of time and limited awareness of what we do not know apply as we try to understand

⁴¹ David Cloutier and Anthony H. Ahrens, "Catholic Moral Theology and the Virtues: How Psychology Enhances Models of Moral Agency," *Theological Studies* (in press).

⁴² Knowing our incompetence would often require competence, and so in our areas of incompetence we can have particular biases toward overconfidence, a phenomenon

other disciplines. Good collaboration involves considerable effort. Jessica Coblentz has taken a first step toward greater mutual understanding and enrichment of our understandings of our own disciplines. I look forward to more such steps in the future. **M**

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that has come to be known as the Dunning-Kruger effect, Justin Kruger and David Dunning, "Unskilled and Unaware of It: How Difficulties in Recognizing One's Own Incompetence Lead to Inflated Self-Assessments," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 77, no 6. (1999): 1121-1134.