

Definitions and Brief History of the Field

Definitions

- Psychology (“psyche” + “logos”)
- What is Religion?
 - “legare”
 - “religio”
 - Religion is a reconnecting with a cosmic force, or striving for wholeness or commitment.

Defining Religion

- Personal versus Social Dimensions
- Functional vs. Substantive
 - Functional: defined by what religion *does*
 - Substantive: defined by what religion *believes*
 - Examples
- Defined by what it is NOT
 - Case of spirituality
- Ultimately, defining religion is difficult.

Dimensions of Religious Commitment

Glock's Dimensional Approach

1. Religious Belief
2. Religious Practice
3. Religious Feeling
4. Religious Knowledge
5. Religious Effects

Brief History of the Field

“Like psychology itself, the psychological study of religion has emerged out of a shadowy past that long antedates its formal history”

David Wulff, p.21

Major Points

- Descriptive vs Explanatory Approaches
- The history is rich and often misunderstood
- Pre-modern Psych of Religion
- Three major “periods”:
 - Early, Decline/Disinterest, and Resurgence

“Pre-Modern” Psychology of Religion

. . . the psychological study of religion has emerged out of a shadowy past that long antedates its formal history . . .

- What is the “Pre-Modern” Period?

“Pre-Modern” Psychology of Religion

- Descriptive Approaches
 - What is it?
 - Examples
 - Sacred writings
 - Religious writings (noncanonical):
 - Theological Works
 - Moral Teachings
 - Mystical Works
 - Others?

“Pre-Modern” Psychology of Religion

- Explanatory Approaches
 - What is it?
 - Examples
 - Greek Rationalists: Deification of past rulers.
 - Lucretius-Roman poet and Epicurean
 - Gods: dream images and result of fear of nature
 - Enlightenment/Scientific Philosophy
 - Religion can be explained by natural processes

Formal History of the Field

Overview of the “Formal” history:

1. Early Period
 - 1880’s to 1930’s
2. Period of Decline and Disinterest
 - 1930’s to 1960’s
3. Resurgence Period
 - 1960’s to present

Formal History of the Field

Who were influential people in the very beginning of psychology?

Early Period

Psychology as Philosophy

- Early published works
 - How Religion Arises: A Psychological Study (1888)
 - The Psychological Elements of Religious Faith (1902)
 - Mostly descriptive
 - Used speculation, theory development, and introspection familiar to philosophy

Early Period

Psychology as Modern Science

- Sir Francis Galton (1872):
 - Studied petitionary prayer through data collection.
- George Coe (early 1900's)
 - Used correlations to study the individual experiences of religion.
 - Examples of his work

Early American Explorations

- The zeitgeist of the early 1900's
 - Progressivism and Humanism
 - Social Gospel Movement
 - Collaboration between science and religion (or more specifically Liberal Christianity)

Leaders in the Early Period

G. Stanley Hall (1844-1924)

- Founder of American psychology of religion.
- Established the first “school” of religious psychology
- Founded a psychology of religion journal
- Advised two scholars, Starbuck and Leuba.

Leaders in the Early Period

Edwin Starbuck:

- Studied conversion
- Oriented toward development and quantitative analysis of survey responses.
- Hoped to apply findings to religious education.
- Wrote the field-defining book Psychology of Religion.

Leaders in the Early Period

James Henry Leuba:

- Unlike Hall and Starbuck, not a believer.
- Challenged religion:
 - Psychophysical process only
 - Doubt of experts
- However, not wholly a materialist.
 - Inherent human drive toward higher moral good
 - Moral good can be attained through religion that is directed by science

Leaders in the Early Period

William James:

Background

Descriptive approach

Varieties of Religious Experience

- Explored the religious experiences of extreme cases.
- Phenomenological view toward science
- Includes his personal experiences and attempt to justify religious faith.
- Varieties stands as one of the classics in Psychology of Religion.

Early German Explorations

- Wilhelm Wundt (1832-1920)
 - Critiqued case studies
 - Used history and development of religion
 - Outside the mainstream German approach
- Dorpat School:
 - Used Wundt's experimental introspection

Early French Explorations

- Religion and abnormality
 - Religious content of patients suffering from mental disorders
 - Noted connection between their patients and religious mystics.
 - Stigmata
 - Ecstatic “union with God” and states of emptiness and “isolation from God”

Early French Explorations

- Theodore Flournoy
 - French physician
 - Brought scientific rigor to parapsychology.
 - Principle of the Exclusion of the Transcendent
 - Provided a foundation for psychological study of religion

Period of Decline and Disinterest

“Among modern intellectuals—especially in the universities—the subject of religion seems to have gone into hiding . . . The persistence of religion in the modern world appears as an embarrassment to the scholars of today. Even psychologists . . . are likely to retire into themselves when the subject is broached.”

-Gordon Allport (1950)

Period of Decline and Disinterest

- Decline of the Field's Popularity
 - Starting in the late 20's continuing into the 30's.
- What were some of the factors that contributed to the reduction in the field's popularity?

Factors Contributing to the Decline

1. The decline in progressivism and liberal theology.
2. Rise of behaviorism
3. Failure to separate from philosophy and theology
4. Psychology's effort to be "scientific," "objective," and more like the "hard" sciences

The Effects of the Decline

- Scholarly work drastically declined
- Continued in religious settings
 - complimented pastoral work
- Fear of discrimination and marginalization further limited scholarly work

Resurgence Period

- Growing interest in religion and spirituality in both the public and academic realms
- Scholarship has increased dramatically
- What are the factors in the field of psychology that have led to this “revival”?
- What are some factors that have led to the “resurgent” interest in the public realm?

Major Points

- Descriptive vs Explanatory Approaches
- The history is rich and often misunderstood
- Pre-modern Psych of Religion
- Three major “periods”:
 - Early, Decline/Disinterest, and Resurgence

Quiz

- “Religion” may be rooted in the word “legare,” which means what?
- (True/False) A functional definition of religion describes what religion does.
- Name 3 of the 5 dimensions of religious commitment?
- How many periods are there in the history of the psychology of religion?
- What are those periods (name or describe)?
- When a theory describes religion, as though from the inside, we call that a(n) _____ approach.
- Name one prominent psychologist in the early development of psychology of religion.