

Journal of Psychology and Theology, Spring, 1991

A New Model of Integration

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All attempts at integration of theology and psychology either follow the Niebuhr model, which assumes that conflict occurs at the level of interpretation of the data base of human experience, or follows a more existential model of seeking application without proper interpretation. I believe a better way can be found to pursue integration.

Most attempts at integration begin with the data base of human experience, as accepted in secular psychology. The focus of integrative attention is on current issues, largely those identified by secular psychology. By analyzing the data base of experience, with the special issues in focus, psychology tries to develop a theory to explain truth in the area under discussion. As various issues are examined, more or less consistent theories are derived to explain these issues. When the theories are very consistent, the common elements are discernible, and it is possible to construct a system of psychology. This procedure is sketched in the following graph of an integration meta-model.

Systems: I II

Theories: A B C D E F

Issues: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Data Base: Experience

The starting point of human experience leads to defining issues, which in turn leads to construction of theories regarding behavior, learning, counseling, etc. The theories are then formed into consistent groups of ideas and become systems of psychology. Of course this assumes the best of procedures at all levels. At the second level, Issues, the investigation has begun to deal with interpretation. All higher levels are more and more general interpretations.

Sometimes a key element of psychology (usually a theory about human learning or development) is chosen as a presupposition and a system is built around this element. Then, theories are constructed and made to fit current issues and most experience. Experience which does not fit this deductive model is discarded as 'abnormal.'

From such an inductive system, when an attempt is made at biblical and psychological integration, most models assume that the data base of human experience has been properly identified (i.e., that all human experience is knowable and similar and has been well explained) and that the issues under discussion are the real (best) ones. The Christian integrator, armed with these assumptions, then attempts to formulate new theories, and perhaps a system, which are more compatible with the biblical content.

What is overlooked in this integrative procedure is that the very setting forth of the fact of human life, the choice of issues and the choice of relevant facts from the data base are not philosophically neutral. All these early choices are circumscribed by the world view of the interpreter.

If, for example, an interpreter does not believe that supernatural events occur, then he or she is unlikely to give the biblical assertions regarding miracles much weight. Similarly, if the Bible identifies issues differently from modern psychology, then an interpreter could easily miss some crucial biblical issues or definitions by only looking for the biblical statements on the current issues as defined by psychology. This, in turn, implies that the choice of a world view, the choice of a starting point, the choice and definition of issues and the selection and interpretation of historical facts are all very important and have systemic consequences (cf. Clinton, 1985 and 1987b for a discussion of issues in the selection of a world view).

But even if all the above is carefully and properly done, reconstructing definitions within a biblical world view, it would still not be sufficient. Two other steps are needed to proceed with proper integration. First, the Bible must be examined to construct a biblical world view. This world view will provide the starting point and the base from which to interpret facts.

Since we hold it to be true that truth discerned from any source is from God and will therefore be compatible with any other true statement, historical experience can be taken as a data base alongside scripture (remembering, of course, that the actual data is the historical event, not someone's record or account of the event). Thus, the Christian integrator has two valid data bases: the propositions (words) of the Bible and the facts of experience. From these bases a world view can be constructed.

From these bases the integrator can also define issues. Sometimes the historical events will seem important and felt issues can be defined and studied, using both data bases. In other cases the Bible will cast an attitude, action or practice in an important light and these issues can be examined using both data bases.

For example, the Bible may discuss relating to in-laws as part of an extended family network and some of the unique social and moral relationships which should exist. Until the late 1950's and early 1960's very few people discussed extended families in the U.S. Now there is a field called family systems therapy which study extended families chronologically (has anyone correlated the biblical data to this field?).

As each issues is fully examined in this back and forth process, a theory can be articulated which will provide useful information for application to life situations so that the issues under discussion can be resolved by living according to God's plan and desires for us.

Eventually, when many issues have been thus examined and various theories developed, it will be possible to discern the common elements in the theories and a general field theory (a system) can be defined.

The following graph illustrates this procedure as a meta-model, which I will call the Foundational Integration Model:

Systems: I II

Theories: A B C D E F

Issues: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

World Views: a b

Data Bases: Experience/the Bible

I reluctantly but realistically list more than one world view and more than one system. Until we have a 'God's eye' perspective on this whole process, we will probably continue to have significant differences, even operating within a similar theoretical approach.

This Foundational Integration Model does not mean that the theological or general theoretical conclusions of any given thinker are to be implicitly trusted. On the contrary, because theology is dealing with God's directly revealed truth, the method of approach, dealing with the text and its context, and the process of decision making in theology should be carefully examined for appropriate procedures. But, assuming that theology, whether practiced by professional theologians or by professional psychologists, is being carefully developed and is open to scrutiny, its conclusions have a limited priority over any other human discipline. Thus, a theology which is being carefully formed and is open to outside checks, while not itself inerrant, still must take precedence over secular psychology and philosophy.

However, because Christians also believe that God has revealed Himself through nature and because He gives us human experience (i.e., historical experiences, miracles, the resurrection) as a means of truth testing, we must not allow other disciplines, when carefully approached, to be denigrated as unworthy of a Christian or somehow necessarily false. Truth is obtainable, at least in part, in these realms also.

One function of good theology is to serve as a grid or screen to check the compatibility of various philosophical or psychological assertions. Crabb recognized this. "Christians are free to profit from the thinking of secular psychologists but must carefully screen and reflect on the concepts which depend upon humanistic presuppositions and contradict Scripture" (1978, p. 417).

Theology can also help by identifying sources of bias, untrue or incompatible presuppositions, or poorly formulated conclusions. It does not stand in judgment over the psychological facts of human experience, only over the intellectualized results of psychological reflection.

Farnsworth has proposed (in an area removed from his systemic existential proposal) that a new method of understanding is needed which is founded on a re-examination of the actual psychological data:

The most basic level of research is the data level. It is to this level, I believe, that the conflict must return (a) to prevent perversion of the data for the purpose of 'making' a point, (b) to permit a more accurate re-analysis of the data, and (c) to encourage consideration of an alternative methodology to more appropriately investigate the question being asked. (1982a, p. 314)

If we could add to this re-examination of the psychological data the data pool of scripture, then psychological

questions could be asked of a comprehensive set of data, namely, biblical, historical, and experiential. Traditional theology would serve as a partial check on this process, but probably also would learn from and be corrected by the process. Scripture would control, and might contribute some issues not being dealt with today, but which would enrich human life.

Based on the above discussion the scope of integration include all facts regarding humankind and our experience from revealed sources, from nature and from human experience. All theological and psychological theories and systems are looked at as theories of reality and tested using our standard test of truth.

The Need for a System

Facts are notoriously hard to interpret in a comprehensive way, so that a system is discerned. This complicating factor has led to there being only a few comprehensive field theories, i.e., systems of reality. But, it is equally difficult to articulate the meaning of a fact if one does not have a systematic context within which to interpret the facts. This difficulty illustrates, in a small way, the need for a comprehensive system, a total world view, which is based on an integrated knowledge of the facts and forms the base for all other interpretations.

One approach to this need for a foundational world view has been taken by DeVries:

If we seek a genuine integration of scientific knowledge it can only be found through a critical analysis of the contexts in which psychological and theological knowledge arise (Vander Goot, 1982) rather than a comparison between isolated facts and/or concepts. (1982, p. 324)

This method can be widened. Integration can take place only after an examination of the way in which any knowledge arises. This conclusion takes us to the level of basic epistemological analysis. Timpe agrees that the "separation of psychology and theology focuses on epistemological and definitional considerations rather than metaphysical ones" (1983, p. 24).

Thus, a system is needed which presents some answers to basic epistemological issues and is applicable to all disciplines.

In developing a system, one must proceed with caution. As Larzelere pointed out: "No psychological issue at any level can be considered adequately without also dealing with related issues at other levels" (Fleck and Carter, 1981, p. 57). Thus, in a system all the major parts will be mutually dependent. In addition, Virkler points out the common fallacy of over simplistic approaches on both sides:

Most theologians who attempt to integrate psychology and theology do so using very antiquated or simplistic psychological models. (We psychologists often do the same thing when we enter the theological realm). (1982, p. 330)

Even though much valuable work has been done, little progress in completing integration has been made since Narramore began in 1973. He said, "There are many Christian psychologists, but until we gain further data and refine our theoretical thinking, it will be impossible to have a systematic Christian view of psychology" (p. 29).

Two more recent proposals have been made. Shepperson, in response to Farnsworth's article, pointed out the need for a complete comprehensive system (1982) and listed some prior efforts--Rogers, 1981; Deschenes and Rogers, 1981; Morgan, Levandowski, and Rogers, 1981--at application of systems theory to integrative issues (1982). Farnsworth saw the need for this application and how it relates to the way life is lived. He comments:

I think the systemic approach cited by Shepperson is an excellent suggestion. I agree: that is how integration is in reality, in all of its complexity before one stops the process to try to take a look at it in its most reduced form. (1982b, p. 334)

Farnsworth did not see that this would not be possible in his positivistic, reductionistic, pre-reflective approach (Shepperson, 1982, p. 327; DeVries, 1982, p. 322). Thus, Farnsworth's position will not lead to the comprehensive system that is desired.

A second position has recently been set forth in greater depth by Kirwan (1984). He approaches psychological issues as defined in the secular literature and develops a biblical response to each issue. He avoids the proof-texting method (mostly) by focusing on a strong Calvinistic system of theology. It is a good effort at relating a particular theological system, as a system, to current psychological issues.

However, it falls short of what is desired in a number of particulars. First, even though it is one of the major options, the Calvinistic, covenantal approach is not widely accepted as most accurately reflecting proper major biblical emphases or hermeneutics. Second, he stops short of developing a consistently biblical view of anthropology, mankind's psychological nature, psychopathology, and therapy. Third, his system assumes far more to be true in both psychology and theology than it shows to be the case. Fourth, and most important, his philosophical assumptions are not adequately developed or even always articulated. We can draw the same conclusion Pascoe made regarding Larzelere and Farnsworth:

These models can be seen to fail to integrate in any fashion that might be considered basic rather than piecemeal. Each model takes the conclusions of present day psychology and theology and finds a way to yoke them together without restating the basic presuppositions of either. (1979, p. 17)

What is needed for an adequate system? Four aspects must be developed. First, an approach must include all relevant aspects of theory construction, namely the five elements given on page 12 above. While no one set of levels of theory construction are agreed upon, I suggest the following twelve sub-points:

1. metaphysical presuppositions
2. tests of truth
3. epistemological issues
4. methodology
5. area definitions

6. identification of relevant value issues (axiology)
7. survey of issues
8. survey of past attempts to define a system
9. review of data
10. factor analysis
11. theorizing
12. testing

Second, the task has often been biased, if not doomed, by assuming that either secular psychology or biblical anthropology already has something very much like the desired product.

I believe we often do our theology and psychology from within the constraints of the very system we are setting out to demonstrate. Vande Kemp has well said:

Thus, the task of integration is neither to construct a Christian psychology based entirely on biblical anthropology, which leaves out all the enriching aspects of the psyche, nor to construct psychologically sophisticated theology, which would still ignore the unique issues of psychopathologizing and genuine soul-making. Rather, it is to construct a model which allows the process of soul-making (or mental health), to meet in the depths with the processes of sanctification, leading to a person who is both spiritually and psychologically whole. (1982, p. 210)

By narrowing the scope of the inquiry too soon, the outcome is negatively limited. A full open search for truth, without dictating the terms of the outcome on the front end, is needed. Neither secular nor Christian psychologists have accomplished this. For the most part, theologians have not even been in the attempt.

Third, the Bible must stand as the base of the entire approach. And if a specific theological system is too confining or is thought to be excessively narrow or undefined in relevant areas, then at least a consistent Christian world view--worked out at a conceptual level--must serve as a grid or lens for the work (cf. Pascoe, 1979, p. 63).

This meta-theoretical base is called 'presuppositions' by most theologians and 'metaphysical' or 'epistemological' theory by philosophers. An excellent base has been worked out by James Collins (1967) in terms of defining the issues under the name of Theistic Realism (for an update see Clinton, 1985). A contemporary method is developed in depth by MacGregor (1973) and an analysis of the perception and knowledge issues by Lonergan (1977). The necessary biblical and hermeneutical problems have been worked on by Henry (1977-84) and Pannenberg (1974).

Fourth, much theology and philosophy still becomes piecemeal because an adequate starting point has not been developed. Shepperson saw this in part:

Heretofore much integrative effort has seemed to neglect the internal processes of perception, attribution, and interpretation of one's external experiences. God's truth and one's processing of that truth "objectively" seem synonymous. (1982, p. 326)

But the issues are even deeper than this. Christians need to deal with deep, extended issues in philosophical areas.

For example, Bernard Lonergan (1977) has done exemplary work in the phenomenology of perception and its relation to broad epistemological issues from a Christian point of view (cf. Clinton, 1987a). Putnam (1981), at Harvard, has proposed a version of philosophical realism under the discussion of foundationalism. Christians have only begun to deal with Putnam, but his position holds good promise for reflection in the future.

An analysis of the process of communication is needed from which both theologians and psychologists can draw application. It needs to start at the level of depth that Grinder and Bandler (1977) achieve and include all the issues identified by Engel (1979).

Until these and other similar issues are thoroughly developed and synthesized, we cannot talk about a comprehensive system of theistic realism. Until a comprehensive system exists, we cannot do thorough foundational integration. Therefore, all efforts at integration will continue to be vague, or piecemeal, until an adequate philosophical base and complete theoretical system have been constructed. Each of us and all of us must settle for this partial level of integration, or get on with the task of developing a system. Petty wrote:

We must press on with the knowledge that ultimately psychology is only horizontal theology and that when Christ returns we will learn and enjoy unified knowledge forever. Perhaps then it is time to move beyond the confines of the "integrates" model and see it as part of a process of thinking by which we reflect the very work of God in redeeming his creation. (1982, p. 68)

Narramore had something like this in mind when he wrote, "The evangelical church has a great opportunity to combine the special revelation of God's Word with the general revelation studied by the psychological sciences and professions. The end result of this integration can be a broader (and deeper) view of human life" (1973, p. 44). Integration must take place beginning at the data level, allowing both scripture and experience to set the issues and guide theorizing and system building.

Assumptions

At the foundation of a complete system of thought are found assumptions about the nature of three things: God, mankind, and the world. Everything else in a system is dependent on the assumptions one makes here (cf. Rahner, 1978, he has done the most thorough analysis of foundational assumptions from a Christian philosophical perspective to date).

These assumptions are often uncritically accepted and are often unarticulated. If they are developed, they can be accepted either as 'givens,' i.e., as uncritically accepted presuppositions, or as testable hypotheses. A system

using testable hypotheses can be constructed following the work of Carnell (1952, 1957), Henry (1984), Collins (1967), and MacGregor (1973).

Applying this discussion to psychology, DeVries was right when he said:

What is needed above all is a Christian philosophical perspective which can offer a framework in which Christian psychologists can be active in the full range of differentiation and integration between psychology and other disciplines. (1975, p. 61)

This was echoed by Collins in a more practical way:

The Bible does not address itself to all of the issues that concern psychology--or even most of them--but the Bible does provide us with a comprehensive and self-consistent world view into which we can begin to fit the facts of psychology as they become more available. (1978, p. 176)

This implicit system in the Bible needs to be made explicit. It will not be an easy task but it is a vital one for the future of Christian integrity in all academic disciplines. Similar comments have been made by Crabb (1978, p. 417), Carter and Narramore (1975, p. 52), Collins (1977, p. 115) and Ellison (1977, p. 427).

At bottom, this search for a foundation concerns philosophical issues (Pascoe, 1979, p. 28). The foundation's intellectual starting point has to do with mankind's reference point. Ellison said:

When modern man's reference point becomes the mechanical, material world, and he is also told by a naturalistic philosophy that he is simply a chance product of impersonal forces, he begins to lose the capacity to relate to other human beings in a growth-giving manner. (1977, p. 431)

Rather than this materialistic starting point, we need the sure foundation identified by Crabb: "I begin my model with the irreducible fact that an infinite personal God really exists. He is infinite, but I am finite. I am therefore a contingent being. He is personal and I too am personal, made in his image" (1978, p. 418).

The foundation also needs to deal with the nature and existence of mankind. Much work has been done here in the past. But only recently has systematic theology begun to catch up with modern philosophical and psychological descriptions (Hoekema, 1986; McDowell, 1984; Clinton, 1983, 1985).

Once the decision about the reference point is made, a view of the intelligibility of knowledge is necessary. Virkler wrote:

It seems that the essential characteristic of someone who espouses the Compatibility Model is the conviction that behaviorally-derived, phenomenologically-derived, and exegetically-derived interpretations of the data of God's world will ultimately be compatible. (1982, p. 332)

This view that truth is one is founded on the laws of logic and the necessity for a base for meaningful communication. But even here one must not be too quick to adopt definitive positions. A firm grounding in basic rationality, logic and perception is needed without falling into rationalism or epiphenomenological reductionism.

Work on the nature of identity is needed, and this has begun in the area of modal logic (see Plantinga, 1974). Biblical epistemology is firmly rooted in the logical laws of antithesis (eg., if A is true, non-A is false) which absolutely refuse to accept concepts which are in any way inconsistent with each other regardless of their apparent value (Crabb, 1978, p. 416).

Conclusion

Evangelical theologians, philosophers, and psychologists need to be enlisted in an organized drive to establish a Christian world view with an adequate philosophical base in theistic realism and a consistent, comprehensive methodology. Such a world view could lead all of us to do proper foundational integration of truth in our diverse specialities. This paper points to the need for a system; may it also serve as a call for the organization of a group of scholars to initiate this task.

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