

fractal attractor. This space includes neighboring solutions that represent counterfactual worlds similar to our own, some permissible and some not. This perspective resembles the multiverse hypothesis, suggesting the existence of separate realities that impact our own. Analogously, imagine a Mandelbrot fractal set with the gaps indicating prohibited solution sets. Palmer openly acknowledges that he has not fully developed the specifics of his hypothesis.

Palmer argues that reductionism, as an approach, falls short in addressing the profound questions of quantum mechanics. He advocates for unconventional thinking and the exploration of radically different solutions, as our understanding of quantum mechanics and its implications for the universe remains incomplete. In Palmer's view, the deterministic nature of the fractal universe offers an explanation for phenomena such as spooky action at a distance. He proposes a worldview in which elementary entities and the notion of reality possess certainty and definiteness, providing insights into quantum mechanics, gravity, dark matter and energy, and the expanding universe. Palmer expands his hypothesis to free will, consciousness, and the role of God. Ultimately, he applies the Lorenz model of chaos to understand the profound questions surrounding life and reality.

Palmer's speculative arguments from Part III follow from his philosophical naturalism, and seek to explain the grand inquiries within a worldview rooted in staunch physicalism. Consequently, his cosmogony is materialist, drawing from options in a cosmological state space, and he asserts that free will and consciousness are somewhat illusory. According to Palmer, our behavior, emotions, and thoughts can be traced back, through various scales, to the movements of subatomic particles.

Palmer's arguments ultimately rely on a false analogy. By conflating an observation from weather prediction to consciousness, free will, and God, he overlooks the crucial dissimilarities between these scenarios. He incorrectly assumes that what applies to one domain will inevitably apply to the others. A valid analogy requires relevant similarities between the elements being compared, justifying the comparison. Yet it is difficult to see how inanimate subatomic particles involved in weather patterns can be equated with traditional descriptions of God. Without these pertinent similarities, the analogy is flawed and may lead to erroneous conclusions.

Palmer's speculative and logically flawed exploration of options within state space is fundamentally a metaphysical response, substituting a "cosmological invariant set" for god. Nevertheless, I must acknowl-

edge the enjoyment and intellectual stimulation derived from reading his book, and commend Palmer for his innovative naturalistic endeavor to explain reality, even though it ultimately falls short of being the best and most plausible account of reality.

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## PSYCHOLOGY

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**THEOPSYCH: A Psychological Science Primer for Theologians** by Justin L. Barrett. Blueprint 1543, 2022. 176 pages. Paperback; \$19.15. ISBN: 9798985852004. Also, free download at <https://blueprint1543.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/TheoPsych-PDF.pdf>.

It is not often that one finds a book about construction written by a psychologist. However, Justin Barrett's *TheoPsych* is just that. The author imagines the theologian as a master palace builder in need of a collection of specialized materials and knowledgeable artisans to do specific modular work for the larger project. *TheoPsych* serves as a "specs sheet" for the potential contributions psychological science can bring to the project. The manuscript is designed not only to serve the interested contemporary theologian who already desires this input, but even more so, it seeks to convince the suspicious or disinterested theologian of the usefulness of the discipline. As such, "bridge builder" seems an equally fitting metaphor. In any event, intellectual efforts which suggest a unity of truth come freighted with hope for this reader because of the potential they hold to generate cross-disciplinary clarity.

Descriptively, the book features five chapters, the first of which argues for the theologian's need of psychological science, distinguishes it from the more general and potentially misleading term "psychology," and seeks to help the inquisitive theologian identify the types of questions in which the psychological sciences will be useful. Here, as in other parts of the text, Barrett gives form to the points being made by posing insightful example questions. For instance, "Why does it often seem so hard for people to grasp and hold onto the idea of Grace?" (p. 13).<sup>1</sup>

Chapter 2 further defines the psychological sciences by way of a quick trip through the history of experimental psychology, notes the mindset of the scientific psychologist (i.e., curious and skeptical), describes the demographically relevant features of this community of scholars, and briefly catalogs the various types of materials produced by its professionals. Additional care is taken to delineate the organizational structure

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of empirical papers and to clarify important discipline-specific terms such as evidence, hypotheses, effects, and effect sizes.

The third and largest chapter of the book maps out the many areas and subdisciplines the field has to offer. These include the biological basis for behavior, social psychology, personality psychology, cognitive psychology and cognitive science (it's more interdisciplinary cousin), developmental psychology, and a few others. The relative bulk of this chapter reflects space allotted within each area to draw out particular lines of research relevant for use in interdisciplinary collaboration. As in other sections, Barrett never strays too far from the book's stated aim, to serve the integrative needs of the interested theologian.

Interestingly, it is not until the penultimate chapter that implications related to emerging new paradigms and overarching themes are brought to the foreground. It opens with a description of the recent emergence of positive psychology and the current emphasis placed on cognitive anthropology and cultural evolution. These areas are followed by a section on evolutionary and comparative psychology. The chapter concludes with religion itself as a topic of study as viewed from four different vantage points: psychology, cognitive science, evolutionary studies, and neuroscience.

The last and briefest chapter addresses the thorny issue of methodological naturalism, noting its necessity to avoid supernatural explanations but also lamenting its inability to settle contentions regarding the relationship between human behavior and overarching metaphysical questions. This chapter also speaks to the problem of reductionism, arguing that psychological scientists oftentimes attack their topics of interest reductively. While acknowledging that many then blithely imply ontological reductionism in their interpretations, nonetheless Barrett suggests that "... most good psychologists do not forget the whole" (p. 140). The book concludes with one more call for theologians to incorporate the findings of psychological science into their work.

Evaluatively, the book has much to offer, including a very expeditious yet effective pathway forged through this broad and corrugated discipline. Additionally, the chosen areas of elaboration seem appropriate and properly suggestive of potential cross-disciplinary alignment. Complementing the helpful exemplar questions peppered throughout the summary sections are several text boxes highlighting examples of existing cross-disciplinary activity. For instance, one side-bar discussion features the work of theologian Christopher Woznicki, who argues that concepts in cognitive psychology can

be used to better give an account of the theological notion of *perichoresis* (pp. 81–82). Most importantly, the author's genuine desire to stimulate interdisciplinary collaboration readily seeps through the pages. Barrett has built a strong and winsome case suggesting theologians willing to interact with the psychological sciences will be well served in doing so.

The most substantial drawback has to do with what has been left out, namely, the soft underbelly of the discipline. For instance, there was no mention of the replication crisis now plaguing the psychological sciences.<sup>2</sup> Readers should be aware that there are challenging measurement difficulties that sit at the foundation of all scientific pursuits, especially those that aspire to contend with concepts such as anxiety, emotion, personality, and attachment.

Furthermore, although the book offers many helpful definitions, two critical ones were found missing. One is the construct of *religion*. The default post-enlightenment understanding is far from clear and directive when made the focus of study.<sup>3</sup> The other is *science* itself. In addition to enduring definitional challenges regarding both the term as a method and as a body of knowledge, there are also important sociological aspects of the concept that merit mentioning. That is, science as a community; a community that can succumb to the same "groupish" tendencies found in all social networks.

A more complete historical account would serve to support the "science as community" omission noted above. Perhaps outsiders should be made aware that the history of psychology is more than a clean handoff from Wundt to Watson to the modern psychological scientist. Freud, for instance, was dogmatic in claiming his system of psychoanalysis was anchored in the natural sciences.<sup>4</sup> But there were also the Functionalists and the Gestaltists—the "physics-minded" Gestaltists offering a nonreductionistic paradigm, by the way. Readers should know that psychological science has been governed by many paradigms over the past 150 years, each of them being considered properly scientific by their advocates.

There is also no mention of some rather dubious attempts by psychological scientists in the past to directly address (i.e., correct) theological concepts,<sup>5</sup> including offerings of updated understanding of Jesus in light of modern psychology.<sup>6</sup> In one sense there may be good reason for their omission. These bygone works reside firmly in history's dustbin, and unlike these previous efforts, *TheoPsych* is not trying to "do" theology, rather it is merely offering its services passively. Nonetheless, an acknowledgment of and distinction between this history and the current project might serve

to allay any misgivings a historically informed reader might have, especially when sections of *TheoPsych* could be interpreted as being somewhat assertive (e.g., Various Sciences of “Religion,” pp. 126–35). Greater lengths should be taken to avoid any impression that this is the work of a missionary from the land of facts sent to enlighten the backward residents of faith.

Finally, there is the influence of the current paradigm. The most popular option is evolutionary psychology. This approach is noted in the book; the promise of interesting connections being forged with biology, cultural studies, and anthropology is properly identified as clearly worthy of continued exploration. However, this is the third attempt to tie the science of human behavior to biological evolution, the first two (eugenics and sociobiology) having left a rather embarrassing legacy.<sup>7</sup> Evolutionary psychology has several major problems, and they are not particularly helped when partnered with the evolution of culture.<sup>8</sup>

In summary, this book would better serve collaborative efforts if the picture presented within were not so nice and tidy. In the long run, brutally transparent portrayals will be needed from all collaborators if there is to be hope for building cross-disciplinary theoretical structures that bring us closer to truth. Despite these criticisms, *TheoPsych* is unquestionably an impressive and important offering, one that is well positioned to advance the essential work of cultivating interdisciplinary syntheses. Now, if only more folk in the social sciences would care to understand what theology has to offer them.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>For example, Adam S. Hodge et al., “Experiencing Grace: A Review of the Empirical Literature,” *The Journal of Positive Psychology* 17, no. 3 (2022): 375–88, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2020.1858943>. Also, see K. I. Pargament and J. J. Exline, *Working with Spiritual Struggles in Psychotherapy: From Research to Practice* (New York: Guilford Press, 2021), <https://www.guilford.com/books/Working-with-Spiritual-Struggles-in-Psychotherapy/Pargament-Exline/9781462524310/contents>.

<sup>2</sup>J. P. Ioannidis, “Why most published research findings are false,” *PLoS Medicine* 2, no. 8 (2005): e124, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.0020124>. Erratum in *PLoS Medicine* 19, no. 8 (2022): e1004085.

<sup>3</sup>Peter Harrison, *The Territories of Science and Religion* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

<sup>4</sup>Sigmund Freud, “Some Elementary Lessons in Psychoanalysis,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1940).

<sup>5</sup>Raymond B. Cattell, *Beyondism: Religion from Science* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1987).

<sup>6</sup>Granville Stanley Hall, *Jesus, the Christ in the Light of Psychology* (New York: Doubleday, 1917).

<sup>7</sup>Paul A. Lombardo, *Three Generations, No Imbeciles: Eugenics, the Supreme Court, and Buck v. Bell* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2022).

<sup>8</sup>Edwin E. Gantt and Richard N. Williams, “The Triumph of the Will: Evolutionary Psychology and the Conceptual Incoherence of Enhancement,” *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 62, no. 5 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022167819899009>.

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**POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY IN CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE: Foundations, Concepts, and Applications** by Charles Hackney. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2021. 344 pages, index. Paperback; \$45.00. ISBN: 9780830828708.

There have been quite a few volumes over the last several years that have attempted to make sense of the relationship between the burgeoning field of positive psychology and the theology and practice of Christianity. Charles Hackney begins this volume by drawing upon the popular definition of positive psychology provided by Shelly Gable and Jonathan Haidt, “The study of the conditions and processes that contribute to the flourishing and optimal functioning of people, groups and institutions.” In so doing, Hackney sets the scene for a comprehensive and lively examination of how this booming field of psychology interacts with Christian faith.

Christians have been quite rightly interested in the field of positive psychology for numerous reasons. There is arguably a sense of common purpose between Christian aspirations and those of positive psychology. Both to some extent claim, or at least aim, to produce a flourishing and abundant experience of living, and thereby share an interest in outlining the kind of life that is likely to produce this sort of fruit. Over the last two decades, positive psychology has made its presence felt in almost every sphere of practice: education, business, health, politics, and spirituality, to name a few. Any field of scholarship that claims such a wide and all-encompassing remit will no doubt be of interest to people of faith, partly as a significant cultural phenomenon worthy of attention, but also perhaps as a potentially controversial competitor and usurper of faith.

Hence, while most treatments in the recent upsurge in Christian writing about positive psychology are largely (dare I say) positive, there is also a critical engagement with the field. There is both enthusiasm and disquiet in the secondary literature. It is a cause for celebration that many of the leading scientific contributors in areas such as humility, forgiveness, gratitude, hope, wisdom, and so on, identify themselves as Christians. Nonetheless,