

Concerning the Truth About Ultimate Things

Edward F. Crangle

Abstract

As a hermeneutical device, this paper applies the dynamics of cognitive styles to some examples of the psychology of religion. The nature of reality is consensually agreed upon. Theory will change as the individual and collective world-view change to another level of social consensus, for whatever reason. The present, consensually agreed upon assumption of reality being pluralistic and exclusive appears to be moving (by small degrees) towards a wholistic and inclusive assumption of reality. This may be due to the necessity for us to rectify the shortcomings of civilisation: e.g. environmental degradation and pollution, overpopulation, etc.

Survival of the human species and stability are rewards, and rewards are anything that human beings will incur costs to obtain. When rewards are difficult to obtain, humans will accept an explanation as a compensator. To survive as a species, the making of an inductive leap from a pluralistic/exclusive world-view towards one that appreciates and appropriates a wholistic/inclusive theory of reality could be the compensator. The alternation from one such view to the other view loosens the bonds of our assumptions about reality and the subsequent forms we give them in language.

Introduction

Within the study of religion, the fundamental attitude and preferred cognitive style of the scholar to the basic data determine, to a degree, his or her methodology; this methodology then determines the extent to which examples of religion are understood as reconcilable and inclusive or *vice versa*. In an earlier paper (Crangle 1995), I argue that, in a continuum of cognition, two preferred modes of perceiving (named “analytical style” and “global style”)

... permeate the individual's entire psychological functioning to influence, among other operations, both intellectual tasks and motivational processes. When the dynamics of preferred cognitive styles are applied to the fertile field of Studies in Religion, researchers impose a conceptual order upon religious phenomena in accordance with their preferred cognitive style. That is to say, researchers who prefer the analytical mode of perception not only are motivated to look for diversity, but also perceive and find diversity in religious phenomena. Equally, the researchers who prefer the global mode of perception look for and recognise similarity or unity in religious phenomena. [Indeed,] ... cognitive styles demonstrate the creation of conceptual

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order from the phenomena of religion and religions. However, "the world as it is" remains independent of the researcher's mode of perception and its subsequent expression. In the creative formation and articulation of conscious experience, the view of "the world as it is" becomes refracted by the preferred cognitive style of the researcher into either a pluralistic [i.e. exclusive] view or globalistic [i.e. inclusive] view (or some synthesis of both).¹ (Crangle 1995: 23-25)

The article notes also that:

The hermeneutical application of the dynamics of preferred cognitive styles to my main area of research in eastern contemplative practices (Crangle 1994) reveals interesting possibilities for future research into preferred meditative styles and their associated world-views or religious traditions. (Crangle 1995: 24)

With the above in mind, this paper, by considering briefly some aspects of classic works on the psychology of religion, represents an incipient move in this direction.

The Problem

Researchers, in the psychology of religion, face one major problem time and time again: they are unable to provide a single, comprehensive, internally consistent explanation of the "religious experience" of human beings. Here, religious experience is:-

Something that happens to an individual in so striking and remarkable a way that he can distinguish it from other things that happen to him, and can talk and write about it, or express it in one of the forms of art that human beings have discovered ... and will want to communicate this feeling to others. (Bartlett 1950: 5)

This event occurs "... when the divine object of man's experience is recognized as the source and subject of his life." (Streng 1969: 51-52) Religious experience, however, is subject to a variety of distortions, as when experience is conditioned by belief, and belief, to some extent, is conditioned by the cultural and religious background of the experiencer (Badham 1980: 273) as well as his or her preferred cognitive style.

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This leads us to the *cause* of the problem that faces scholars of religion: not only is religious experience shaped by one's preferred cognitive style and cultural background, but the psychological theories pertaining to it, as well as the language constructs that articulate these theories, are likewise shaped, i.e. they tend to be biased. Hence, the psycho-social norm upholds reality. That is to say, research modalities and results of psychologists have been, and continue (in the main) to be, conditioned by philosophical assumptions of what reality *is*: that reality exists as a symmetrical relation between a subject and object; i.e. reality is pluralist and thus exclusionary. The individuals that make up our society consensually agree upon this for "... to be in society is to participate in its dialectic." (Berger & Luckmann 1967: 149) This pluralist or exclusionary view of reality is formed, within consciousness, in the primary phase of socialization and that "Primary socialization ends when the concept of a generalized other (and all that goes with it) is established." (Berger & Luckmann 1967: 157) Thus, a view of reality is set up, maintained and reflected in our language and theories.² That is to say, for most psychologists of religion, an analytical style of cognition becomes the *preferred* mode of perception which, by and large, constructs a language of exclusion that articulates a pluralist world-view.

Freud

Within the psychology of religion, consensualism represents the central value on which Freud built his system of psychoanalysis. (Nelson 1977) His primary concern was not to understand "religious experience" but to provide the answers to mental anguish. (Fromm 1971: 191) Freudian psychology was concerned with the medical discipline of psychotherapy, and psychoanalysis was to act as a substitute for the therapeutic role of religion. (Fromm 1971: 10) Freud saw religion as "... a reaction which acknowledges man's [his words] helplessness" and

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religious doctrines as "... incomparably important for the maintainance of society" (Freud 1962: 24-25); human development was the internalisation of external coercion.

Freud saw society as creating and structuring the world-views of children by the education programme. (Freud 1962: 44) Religion, while part of the education programme, excluded any cognitive function and was strictly associated with the particular feelings of submission and dependence. (Rieff 1965: 265-268) Thus, Freud's psychoanalytic/psychotherapeutic theories are based on his acceptance of a pluralist/exclusionary world-view of the individual living *in* but apart *from* society.

James

William James's theories reflect a similar metaphysic and understanding of the universe. According to James, religion generates many variable theories which, because they are variable are secondary. He suggests looking to the feelings and conduct of the experiencer to find more constant elements. (James 1960: 481) To him, the intellect plays a positive role in the experience and is, sometimes, even a necessary constituent. He attempts to characterise these feelings and searches for a "common nucleus" in which all religions appear to meet. (James 1960: 484)

Due to James's bias in favour of personal, solitary experience, however, the theoretical problem of attempting to provide a single, comprehensive, internally consistent explanation of the "religious experience" of human beings still exists: James "... understands human experience to become meaningful only as a result of the selective activity of an engaged consciousness". (Alexander 1979) That is to say, consciousness is engaged with an object of experience. In James's assumption of subject over against an object, reality becomes plural and exclusionary.

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James prefers to believe that "... the substance of reality may never be an all form at all, ... that some of it may remain outside of the largest combination of it ever made." (James 1909: 34)

The parts of an *all form* (or inclusive form) he sees as being essentially and eternally

"co-implicated" and not allowing the taking up and dropping of connections that he prefers.

(James 1909: 324)

It appears, however, that James's pluralist metaphysic is based on the religious demands of moralism: he believed that an individual selfhood was necessary for the possibility of moral or ethical action and so he joined the "... battle between pluralistic moralism and monistic [i.e. global/inclusive] religion." (Strout 1971)

Jung

Carl Gustav Jung, however, dealt with the problem of religious experience by attempting to accommodate so-called Eastern religious experience within his own theoretical constructs in order to realise (like Freud) a psychotherapeutic goal. In this instance, the goal is "individuation" in which a person becomes a psychological "whole". Nonetheless, Jung's therapy is based also on a pluralistic/exclusionary assumption of reality; the therapy "...is designed to bring about the personal adjustment and effectiveness within society of those who are out of step with it."

(Jones 1979) In other words, Jung's model is similar to Freud's. Jung attempts, however, to accommodate the differing ideologies of plurality and globalism, thus making his theoretical constructs quite elaborate.

Jung's treatment of religious experience relies particularly on his concept of the unconscious in which he conceives of "... the collective unconscious (as) the layer of unconscious common to all persons regardless of culture and personal differences." (Jones 1979: 148) He saw people as choosing either their internal reality or external reality as being absolute truth, but only by

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denying or sacrificing the other. (Jung 1961: 137) By pointing this out, Jung demonstrates his (and no doubt his culture's) fundamental dichotomous assumption about reality. Jung's accomodation of differing ideologies understands religious experience as a form of experience also common to all people, although the expressions of it may vary. (Singer 1969: 318) Religion is "... nurtured by the totality of man's collective experience, as well as being shaped and impressed by the custom and tradition into which it emerges." (Singer 1969: 318) Be that as it may, Jung's approach to the theoretical problem of psychologists of religion remains bulky and involved.

Capps

Donald E. Capps, by taking a wider view of research methods in the psychology of religion, hits the nail on the head when he points out that each theory, to date, is biased because it reflects a particular restrictive viewpoint. (Capps 1977) He suggests that we should try to understand the limitations of the psychological methodology used to research religious phenomena and so attempt to extend these boundaries to include all knowledge on the subject and so enable us to isolate and actually name various dimensions of religion within these boundaries. (Capps 1977: 49)

Capps calls one such area "the experiential dimension," where personal religion is shown by "experiences, moods, emotions and aspirations having religious salience." (Capps 1977: 50) This dimension gives life to the whole system. It has a special appeal to those psychologists of religion who prefer to examine exclusionary rather than inclusive levels of experience. This examination of the individual level represents a necessary first step before moving on to examine the general

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levels. It provides an acquaintance with the concrete and initiates the integrative process toward a general understanding. (Capps 1977: 41-52)

Capps is concerned for an appropriate balance between past and present contributions to the discipline by psychologists, bearing in mind that the philosophical assumption of multidimensionality (and thus exclusion) would shape the enquiry. This, while possibly being an improvement on all the previously mentioned approaches to the problem, does not offer a single, comprehensive, internally consistent explanation for the "religious experience" of mankind.

The Transpersonal Psychologists

Obviously, a change of tack seems necessary. This takes us to the researchers of Transpersonal Psychology; that is to say, workers such as Robert Ornstein, Charles Tart, Ken Wilber, etc., in the field of Altered States of Consciousness (ASC), who offer an alternative to our traditional view of *religious experience* by offering an alternative to our traditional view of *consciousness*. In 1969, the first issue of the *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* stated that

Transpersonal Psychology is the title given to an emerging force in the psychology field by a group of psychologists ... who are interested in those *ultimate* human capacities and potentialities that have no systematic place in positivistic or behavioristic theory ("first force"), classical psychoanalytic theory ("second force"), or humanistic psychology ("third force"). The emerging Transpersonal Psychology ("fourth force") is concerned specifically with the *empirical*, scientific study of, and responsible implementation of the finding relevant to, becoming, individual and species-wide meta-needs, ultimate values, unitive consciousness (etc.)....
 (Tart 1975: 2)

Transpersonal psychologists understand psychology to be, primarily, the science of consciousness: a lost perspective and basis of psychology that they aim to recover. Robert

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Ornstein states that "Its researchers deal with consciousness directly when possible, and indirectly, through the study of physiology and behaviour, when necessary." (Ornstein 1973: xi)

In his ground-breaking collection of essays entitled *Transpersonal Psychologies*, Charles Tart, on the one hand, attempts "to start bridging the gap between 'orthodox, Western psychology' and a number of transpersonal psychologies, psychologies that are integral parts of various spiritual disciplines". Tart states that "As Westerners we have little appreciation for the fact that there are many other psychologies." (Tart 1975: 5) With this in mind, Transpersonal Psychology aims for the restructuring of consciousness via the provision of aspects of demythologised Eastern and Middle Eastern religious psychologies and their therapeutic techniques; i.e. the restatement of unusual, religious notions of consciousness in familiar, psychological terms for therapeutic purposes.

Where Tart sees a multiplicity of psychologies, Ken Wilbur, on the other hand, perceives each major school of psychology, psychotherapy, and religion as addressing different, yet complimentary, levels of a pluridimensional consciousness. (Wilber 1977: 11) Wilbur, with some success, places "religious experience" within an attempted synthesis of the major psychological and spiritual approaches to consciousness; in this way, he aims for "a synthesis, not an eclecticism, that values *equally* the insights of Freud, Jung, Maslow, ... and other prominent psychologists, as well as the great spiritual sages from Buddha to Krishnamurti." (Wilber 1977: 11) Religious experience, according to Wilbur, is recognised within a developmental hierarchy leading to a stable realisation of multiplicity-as-manifestation-of-unity.³ As such, Wilbur's view of religious experience demands the acceptance of a completely opposite philosophical assumption about reality than is *generally* agreed upon in our world at this moment.

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While proponents of Transpersonal Psychology "... argue that we in the world must break the molds within which our views are formed ..." (Alexander 1980: 191), ASC research is accused of being monistic (i.e. globalist/inclusive), in contrast to the pluralist/exclusionary assumptions of the scholars discussed above. (Alexander 1980: 202) While this criticism of Transpersonal Psychology exposes, to some degree, the exclusionary bias of the critic, it nevertheless carries some weight. That is to say, transpersonal psychologists, in their research, presuppose that the origins of psycho-social "disorders" or problems (both individual and collective) lie in a false perception of reality, i.e. the dichotomisation of reality on all levels including the existential, biosocial, etc. Transpersonal Psychology aims for the resolution of suffering as a result of holding this view.

Nevertheless, the shift of philosophical assumption about reality, by the transpersonal psychologists, represents a budding transformation in the world-view and subsequent language forms of our culture. As our individual and collective world-views change to a level of social consensus, then so will the theory of religious experience change. Jung believed that "... every religion is a spontaneous expression of a certain predominant psychological condition". (Jung 1938: 108) Transpersonal Psychology, with its predominant psychological condition, runs the risk of functioning as a religious perspective in itself. (Alexander 1980: 203)

Towards a Solution

In history, one psychology replaces another psychology when identity appears as a problem which "... may arise out of the dialectic of psychological reality and social structure", and "... radical changes in the social structure ... may result in concomitant changes in the psychological reality." (Berger & Luckmann 1967: 200) Such radical changes have occurred in recent years, and continue to occur due to the explosion of our communications from a village

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to a global scale; our nervous system now spans the world. Consciousness altering (and hence reality altering) drugs are common social phenomena. Further, increasing numbers of people are becoming familiar with meditational techniques for altering consciousness: techniques which are oriental in origin and metaphysical in assumption. We observe "... the emergence of rival definitions of reality (with) the appearance of new experts in charge of the new definitions." (Berger & Luckmann 1967: 136) Social engineering of reality is the result.

At this moment, our new experts, the transpersonal psychologists, are alternating successfully between the two opposing world-views: they live in our conventional reality of plurality and exclusion, while experiencing, on occasion, an inclusive reality that is non-conventional and global. This creates some difficulty for a researcher when he or she posits a theory, about this reality, to colleagues who maintain the conventional, pluralistic, exclusionary world-view of our culture. The researcher attempts to articulate a view of the world that most may not have experienced. Further, one is bound by the scholarly mode of presentation: any other form of presentation may not be talking "conventional" language. Those who understand the researcher's theory do so: those who do not understand must try to.

Colleagues are asked to make an *inductive leap*: the *narrower* the leap, the better it is for all. The ability of the psychologist to alternate from a conventional world-view of exclusion to a non-conventional, inclusive world-view, with ease and dexterity, helps serve as a bridge for others to cross to the unusual view. Until the reality of the audience comes to be that of the researcher, his or her theory must involve two realities: in this case, exclusion and inclusion.

The researcher, in a sense, is teaching an audience the skills of neo-Freudian, regression in the service of the ego. For the moment, members of the audience must set aside their conventional ideas of reality (and so their belief of themselves as *subject* of the experience of reality) in order

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to appreciate the alternative view. Once insight is gained, there is a reversal and constructive resynthesis of the old world-view. That is to say, there is a shift from exclusion to inclusion and back to exclusion. I suggest that, in this instance, the work of the researcher represents the transitional stage of one theory of religious experience shifting to another theory, due to the gradually changing identity of the world. I suggest further that the present, consensually-agreed-upon assumption of reality (and so the religious theory) may shift eventually from an involved alternating, double-world-view to a single, comprehensive inclusive or globalistic assumption of reality.

That is to say, it may be *necessary* for humanity to undergo a regression of our *collective ego* in order to rectify the shortcomings of civilisation. Such deficiencies make themselves painfully felt in energy problems and the constant threat of profound ecological degradation (via large-scale exploitation and pollution) of our planet. The threat of destruction of our world via nuclear holocaust compounds further our exquisite awareness of such problems. For the individual to survive, it may be necessary for him/her to adopt a globalist or inclusive world-view; discrimination between inner and outer realms of reality would be merely for convenience and any *perceived division* would be considered illusory. Our language and cultural expressions would then aim to demonstrate an insightful appreciation that individuals identify with the planet and, as a consequence, are working for its welfare.

Freud has said that "... religious ideas have arisen from the necessity of defending oneself against the crushingly superior force of nature" (Freud 1962: 17): here, the crushingly superior force of nature takes the form of intractable pollution of our planet or nuclear disaster. Gordon Allport states that "... the social scientist argues that the function of religion is to produce social

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stability". (Allport 1950: 28) Such a tendency towards a inclusive, globalist view *may be* the incipient production of social stability.

Survival of the human species and stability are rewards, and "... rewards are anything humans will incur costs to obtain." (Stark & Bainbridge 1980: 115) When rewards cannot be quickly and easily obtained, humans often accept an *explanantion* as a *compensator* (Stark & Bainbridge 1980: 121); explanations can only be evaluated "... through a process that actually invests the *minimum* cost required to obtain the desired reward." (Stark & Bainbridge 1980: 120) In our existing situation, this would be the cost of making an inductive leap from a exclusionary, pluralist world-view to a inclusive, globalist view; the inclusive, globalist theory of reality (along with the way it is articulated) acts as the compensator.

A pluralist society contains competing religious organisations, and so *competing theories* of religious experience — *dis-integration!* When all members of society have a significant common interest, they tend to pursue this interest in a co-operative fashion and "... there will be a considerable consensus on such matters (to say nothing of the integrative function of the common interest)." (Stark & Bainbridge 1980: 126)

Survival of our globe is becoming increasingly (and with some urgency) our common interest; this, I repeat, could lead us to a change of view and thus to a new theory of religious experience. Necessity may insist that this theory evolve from one of "alternation" between exclusion and inclusion to a synthesis that articulates the realisation of "unification" via a process of integration. The shift from one world-view to another and back again loosens the bonds of our assumptions about reality, while acting as a the means to "unification".

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Should such a unified theory of humanity's religious experience become accepted as reality and is challenged, then people should ask if there is "... any better truth about ultimate things than the one that helps you to live?". (Jung 1938: 114)

Conclusion

To conclude, it was stated above that, in a continuum of cognition, analytical and global styles of perceiving impose a conceptual order upon religious phenomena in such a way that "the world as it is" becomes understood mainly as exclusionary and pluralistic, or as inclusive and globalistic. When applying the dynamics of cognitive styles, as a hermeneutical exercise, to some aspects of definitive works on the psychology of religion, the preferred cognitive style and cultural background of the researchers shape their psychological theories, as well as the language constructs that express these theories. That is to say, the analytical style of cognition, for most psychologists of religion, represents the preferred mode of perception which, by and large, constructs a language of exclusion that articulates a pluralist world-view.

The present, consensually agreed upon assumption of reality, being pluralistic and exclusive, appears to be moving little by little towards a wholistic and inclusive assumption of reality. This may be due to the necessity for us to remedy the major defects of civilisation for humankind to survive. As the individual and collective world-view change to another level of social consensus, psychological theories and the subsequent forms we give them in language will change also.

Notes

1. The cognitive styles are summarised as follows (Crangle 1975: 23):

-----Continuum of Cognition-----	
Analytical Style	Global Style
High differentiation	Low differentiation
Field-independent	Field-dependent
Strong ego-boundaries	Weak ego-boundaries
Sharp discrimination	Little discrimination
Emphasis on differences	Emphasis on identity
Pluralism	Wholism
[Exclusion]	[Inclusion]

2. An obvious example is observed in the variation of cultural acceptance of an individual's psychological resolution of a life crisis; the experience of the individual is positively valued in one society and negatively in another: differing value judgements such as these are based on the world-view of each society. (Silvermann 1967).
3. Wilber's work raises some hermeneutic and pedagogical problems by his reliance on secondary sources on which to base his restatement of other psychologies. That is to say, many of these translations tend to be loose and sometimes inaccurate. Hence, the restatement into familiar psychological terms tends to be loose and inaccurate also. However, the general principles of the spiritual psychologies appear to transfer intact.

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