PSYCHOLOGICAL AND RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVES ON EMOTION

by Fraser N. Watts

Abstract. This article is devoted to examining theoretical issues on the interface of the psychology of religion and the psychology of emotion, something which recently has been surprisingly neglected. The broad range of psychological components involved in emotion, and the importance of emotional processes in religion, make it a particularly relevant area of general psychology as far as religion is concerned. The first issue to be examined is the centrality of emotion (or *feeling*) in religion and the extent to which religion can be conceptualized as a kind of emotional state—an idea that can be found in different forms in Schleiermacher and James. Though both psychology and emotion are now seen as less private than previously supposed, the analogy remains potentially fruitful. The second issue arises from the notable tendency in the psychology of emotion to see emotion as functional, even rational, rather than disruptive. The view of Averill is endorsed that emotions can be psychologically creative when used appropriately. This leads to a review of attitudes toward emotional aspects of religion and religious attitudes to everyday emotions, where a positive but discriminating approach to emotions seems appropriate.

Keywords: attitudes; emotion; William James; psychology.

Many parts of psychology go their own way, paying little attention to what is going on in other parts of the discipline. That is always a matter for regret. One reason why we need a coherent and integrated discipline of psychology is that human nature is complex and multifaceted, and it can only be understood by a broadly conceived human discipline. The social, biological, cognitive, emotional, and motivational aspects of people all affect each other. To understand human nature, we need a broad

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human science discipline that includes every aspect of human beings and can study their interrelationships. That discipline is currently called psychology, and we need such a discipline.

Sadly, the psychology of religion, even more than most areas of the discipline, proceeds in a fairly self-contained way. It is one of a number of areas of psychology that have the opportunity to examine how various basic psychological processes manifest themselves in a specific context. In a similar way, developmental psychology looks at various areas of development, cognition, socialization, emotion, and so forth. Abnormal psychology also looks at how a broad range of psychological functions are affected in particular clinical conditions. In both cases, there are opportunities, which are generally well taken, to bring other areas of the discipline to bear.

The same opportunities arise in the psychology of religion, but the extent to which they are taken is rather uneven. The study of religious development is relatively well integrated with general developmental psychology, and good use is made of some other areas of general psychology. However, the integration of the psychology of religion with general psychology remains patchy.

One of the few books on the psychology of religion to be organized in terms of the topics of general psychology is Pruyser's *A Dynamic Psychology of Religion* (1968). The book is now somewhat dated, and its psychodynamic orientation makes it rather selective in its sources. However, the principles on which the book was based remain interesting. In the preface, Pruyser wrote:

> This book was written in the conviction that the psychology of religion, once a respectable preoccupation of some leading psychologists, has for some years been in an intellectual cul-de-sac. To put it very concisely, nearly all the classical texts in the field use religious phenomena as their ordering principle. . . . In contrast to this approach I have teased myself and my students with the idea of a psychology of religion which would order its data in terms of psychological categories. (Pruyser 1968, ix)

Where you start from is perhaps less important than how rich a dialogue exists. Sadly, there are many areas of general psychology that scarcely have any links at all with the psychology of religion. One of the most curious of these gaps, and the one on which this article focuses, is the interface between the psychology of religion and psychology of emotion.

However, before briefly reviewing recent developments in the psychology of emotion, there is one more introductory point that needs to be made. This article is conceived as part of a broad academic enterprise, better labeled psychology *and* religion rather than psychology *of* religion. There is scope within this for conceptual and theoretical dialogue on

psychological questions between scientific and religious thought. There is certainly an important place for taking religion as the object of psychological study, but it is not the only potentially fruitful point of intersection between psychology and religion.

The Psychology of Emotion

The psychology of emotion is an area that is currently undergoing something of a renaissance. Two recent emotion texts of different kinds, both excellent in different ways, are Frijda's *The Emotions* (1986), which provides a solid and balanced survey of current theory and research on emotion, and Oatley's *Best Laid Schemes* (1992), which represents much of what is new and good in the psychology of emotion. A broad survey of recent work can also be found in Lewis and Haviland's *Handbook of Emotions* (1993).

A particular attraction of the psychology of emotion is that it is in itself an integrative part of the discipline. Human emotions, more obviously than most aspects of people, need to be studied from different perspectives. All areas of psychology (biological, social, cognitive, etc.) are involved. However, this also raises interesting issues and tensions.

Because psychologists have an endemic tendency to regard what they themselves are studying as primarily important, there are repeated tendencies to claim "primacy" for one area of psychology or another. It is often not made clear what the criteria would be for regarding one area of emotion as primary to others. One possible criterion (see Watts 1989) would be that the area concerned affects all others but is not in turn affected by them. This criterion of unidirectional causation hardly ever seems to be satisfied in psychology. People appear to be complex interactive systems in which everything affects everything else. Normally, nothing is primary in a strong sense. Indeed, primacy theories in psychology are best regarded as a will o' the wisp that it is pointless to chase.

Biological psychology is perhaps particularly inclined to regard all other parts of the discipline as being of secondary importance. As is well known, there have been those, such as William James, who saw the biological changes associated with our emotions as so fundamental that he proposed that feelings arose from the perception of biological changes. There are also many recent claims for the primacy of the biology of emotion. The psychology of religion has been a little less beset with this kind of biological reductionism, though recent contributions to the biological psychology of religion can be found (Persinger 1987).

Others have argued for the importance of social aspects of emotion. Emotions characteristically arise in the context of social relationships. They depend critically on social assumptions and conventions. Indeed, the emotions we experience are shaped and molded by our public

language for describing them. The sociology and social psychology of emotion has become a vigorous area of research, and a "social construction" view of emotion is now well represented in the literature, of which Averill (1980) is one of the most sophisticated advocates. However, social views of emotion have generally been less susceptible to reductionism; it is not so often claimed that emotion is nothing but social construction.

A particularly vigorous area of recent work on emotion has been the cognitive area. In fact, there has recently been a family of cognitive approaches to emotion. Experimental research has made us increasingly aware of how emotion states such as anxiety or depression are associated with related processes of attention or memory, which can play an important role in maintaining the emotions concerned (Williams et al. 1988). The conscious thought processes associated with emotions are also important, and an important new generation of powerful psychological treatments—the cognitive therapies—have taken them as their focus (e.g., Beck et al. 1979). Other more theoretically oriented cognitive approaches to emotion have included the systematic study of the emotion lexicon (e.g., Ortony, Clore, and Collins 1988) and the computational modeling of emotion (see Oatley 1987).

The range of current approaches to emotion is one of the strengths of the field in a discipline in which narrowness of approach is all too common. Another way of making this point about the breadth of the psychology of emotion is in terms of the components of emotion. It would be generally accepted that an emotional reaction has multiple components. They would be enumerated slightly differently in different theories, but they might include appraisal processes, physiological reactions, subjective experience, thought processes, and behavior (e.g., Leventhal and Scherer 1987). There can be marginal cases of emotion in which only some of these are affected, but in paradigm cases of emotion, all are affected.

In this article, I look mainly at two rather different points of intersection between the psychologies of emotion and religion. The first is a purely theoretical question in the psychology of religion. This concerns how central emotion is to religion and whether emotion can serve as a theoretical "model" for religion. The second is a set of questions concerning religious attitudes to emotion, both specifically religious emotions and the emotions that arise in everyday life.

EMOTION AS A MODEL FOR RELIGION

In approaching the question of whether religion can be conceptualized as analogous to emotion, a useful starting point is looking at some twists and turns in the long and interesting debate about the relation between

religion and *feeling*. To what extent is religion similar to feeling, or based on it?

Schleiermacher, James, and Lash. The obvious starting point is Schleiermacher, who is often taken as marking the beginning of modern theology and whose views are set out most fully in *The Christian Faith* ([1821] 1928). To be brief, Schleiermacher saw feeling as being the essence of religion. Though religion also involves knowing and doing, he saw feelings as the source of religion and the best index of the extent to which a particular person was religious. The particular feeling from which he thought religion flowed was the feeling of what he called *absolute dependence*.

The attraction of this position for Schleiermacher was that it seemed to allow him to escape from the Enlightenment project of providing rational arguments for the existence of God. To this end, he wanted to emphasize the immediacy of feelings of absolute dependence; he saw them as a given, with no need to justify or explain. On this foundation, he wanted to build a systematic theology, but for this to be possible, he also required that absolute dependence should be at least latently cognitive and propositional. In Schleiermacher's work, there is always a somewhat uneasy tension in the need for feeling to be both a given and latently propositional. He sometimes tries to bridge the gap with the notion of intuition, which is an ally of feeling but somewhat more cognitive.

William James put forward a similar position in a more psychological form in his *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902). James, like Schleiermacher, wanted to emphasize the centrality of feeling in religion. It had the same kind of attraction for him as it had for Schleiermacher—it had immediacy and, at least subjectively, carried authority. Another argument advanced by James is that concentrating on the feeling component allows one to abstract out what is constant and culturally invariant in religion.

James's assumption about religious experience have been the focus of a good deal of recent discussion. I am much indebted to Levinson's (1981) excellent commentary. Also, James has been the subject of searching examination from Wayne Proudfoot (1985), a philosopher, and Nicholas Lash, a theologian. They make many similar points, but in this article, I mainly follow Lash's critique in *Easter in Ordinary* (1988). The first part of that book is an extended and closely argued critique of the role that James assigns to feeling and experience in religion. Lash made some good points, but I suggest that James's position can be recast to escape the worst of Lash's critique.

Lash was particularly uneasy about James's apparent idea that the public world of religion is built on the private experience of individuals.

He argued, as many contemporary social psychologists would argue, that the private experience of individuals is dependent in large measure on the public world of shared meanings, interpretations, and language. He argued against James that it is "the *public* world of culture and its institutions that is primary, not whatever 'private' world we make or suffer to be uniquely or incommunicably our own" (Lash 1988, 58). Lash is surely right in arguing for the dependence of private experience on the public world. However, remembering what I have already said about primacy theories, I believe it is going too far to suggest that the public world is primary.

Surely there is a "to and fro" between individual experience and the public world that makes any talk of primacy inappropriate. The public world reflects the private experience of individuals just as private experience reflects the public world—so much so that there is probably nothing that is wholly public *or* private. However, Lash was right to point out that James has a somewhat unbalanced position on this issue. He emphasized, for example, "the feelings, acts and experiences of individual men *in their solitude* [italics added]" (James 1902, 31) as the foundation for religion. However, it would not be too difficult to modify his position to allow for the role of public religion in shaping individual religious experience.

Lash implicitly assumed that once the key role of the public world in shaping religious experience is acknowledged, the analogy between religion and feeling will be less appealing. If religion is a social and cultural phenomenon, and feelings are private and individual, then that scenario seems to emphasize the gulf between them.

The term *feelings* here has quaint old-fashioned overtones to the ears of a modern psychologist, though the term may be taken to refer to, among other things, the experiential component of emotion. If so, feelings represent too narrow an analogue of religion. However, it can be argued that emotion, which is an altogether broader concept, may nevertheless still be a rather good analogue of religion.

Certainly, emotion is not subject to the same objection that Lash raised against feeling as an analogue of religion. Feelings may, in a limited sense, be private. However, as I already indicated, emotions have an important social component. Lash rightly wanted to emphasize the social embeddedness of religious experience. However, psychologists such as Averill have recently been emphasizing the social embeddedness of emotion. This seems to be a point on which the analogy between religion and emotion holds good, though in a different way from the old one which emphasized the private nature of both.

Lash also had another important complaint about James's general philosophical strategy of sharply *contrasting* "feelings" with "thoughts"

(Lash 1988, 46). In particular, he was suspicious of the idea that feelings are wholly noncognitive. This goes back to the unresolved ambiguity in Schleiermacher, who wanted feelings to be a given, but also to be the foundation for a systematic theology. Actually, I am not sure that James really wanted to make the sharp distinction between thoughts and feelings that Lash assumed.

As is well known, James saw emotional feelings as being an interpretative consequence of bodily states. However, feelings can also be associated with cognitions that have "intentionality" in the sense of being about something in the world. Now, for James, *religious* emotion is emotion that occurs in the context of religious reference. To return to the quote I gave earlier, but this time to continue it further, religion means "the feelings, acts and experiences of individual men in their solitude, *so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine* [italics added]" (Lash 1988, 31). It is this apprehension that makes a feeling religious.

James's position here is clearly different from Schleiermacher's, who thought that there was a phenomenologically distinct religious feeling characterized by absolute dependence. Religious feeling for Schleiermacher *felt* different from any other kind of feeling. In contrast, for James, it is the reference or *apprehension* (i.e., the cognitive content) that makes a feeling specifically religious. Religious love, religious guilt, and so forth are religious only because of the context of religious apprehension in which they occur. James does not really see religious feelings as noncognitive. By the time feelings have become specifically religious, they are no longer noncognitive.

Where I find James's position suspect is that there is not enough allowance for the role of cognitive interpretations in the genesis of religious feelings. He comes too close to a two-stage model in which feelings arise out of bodily states and then get hitched up to cognitions that make them more specific in their content. I argue, following contemporary cognitive theories of emotion, for the role of cognition in the genesis of religious feelings. I also suggest that there may be particular religious situations and frames of reference that have a role in the genesis of religious feelings.

It is not clear how much James would have actually disagreed with this. At least in *The Principles of Psychology*, James (1890) seemed well aware of the general point and made clear how much people's perceptions are shaped through processes of education. Though this emphasis is less marked in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* than it might be, James would presumably have had no difficulty in recasting what he said there so as to reflect more adequately his general theoretical position.

Theoretical Commentary. It can thus be argued that religion has a number of the same components as emotion. The kind of component approach to religion developed by Glock and Stark (1965) has obvious similarities to Leventhal and Scherer's (1987) component theory of emotion referred to previously. The Glock and Stark components are religious beliefs, practices, feelings, knowledge, and effects. Feelings and effects are two clear points of overlap. Less obviously, it could be argued that both emotion and religion are associated with a network of beliefs, partly individual, partly cultural. Physiological components would probably be regarded as more central in emotion than religion, but they are not irrelevant to religious experience. On the other side, ritualistic practices are less relevant to emotion than to religion, though—as Freud noted long ago—some emotional disorders involve anxiety-reducing rituals that bear at least a superficial similarity to religious ones.

Religion, like emotion, has cognitive construction and reflection as important components. Actually, there has recently been a good deal of controversy, initiated by Zajonc (1980), about how far this is true of emotion. Without going into detail about this labyrinthine controversy (see Leventhal and Scherer 1987), I think it would be true to say that emotions can sometimes occur prior to any *conscious* reflection, but not without at least some tacit cognitive construction of the situation that elicited the emotion. This also appears to be true of religion. There can be religious experience, as Schleiermacher and James emphasized, that is subjectively immediate. However, if it were entirely noncognitive, it could not be specifically religious.

One of the problems in discussing the relation between emotions and religion is that emotions are themselves very heterogeneous. One important distinction, though perhaps not as sharp as its advocates have sometime maintained, is between basic and secondary emotions (see Stein and Oatley 1992). A critical difference is that secondary emotions are more cognitively embedded than basic ones. It is probably a characteristic of a good deal of religious experience that it is often highly reflective. However, there are other secondary emotions, such as jealousy, that are also associated with a high degree of cognitive elaboration. Insofar as religion is like an emotion, it is closer to heavily cognitive secondary emotions such as jealousy. This is certainly very different from how some basic emotions such as disgust operate. Nevertheless, religious experience, on occasion, can have a degree of immediacy that is like that found in primary emotions such as disgust.

Despite the similarities between emotion and religion, an apparent difference is that emotions are often rather transitory, whereas religion is often stable and enduring. However, there are also some highly stable emotional states, which are often referred to as moods rather than emo-

tions. If this distinction is pressed, religion is probably closer to a mood than an emotion. This relates to the previous point about cognitive elaboration, in that long-term moods are often associated with a good deal of cognitive reflection. Indeed, it is arguable that this makes them long term; depression, for example, seems to be maintained by rumination (Nolen-Hoeksema 1991).

Other differences between religion and emotion come to light when the components of emotion are considered. Physiology has been seen as fundamental to emotion by many theorists. It is probably less fundamental to religion, though it would be wrong to think of religion as being disembodied. Certainly, the Judeo-Christian tradition has always emphasized the psychosomatic unity of the human being. There are also behavioral components to both emotion and religion, though the behavioral aspects of emotion are perhaps less deliberative. For example, the fight-or-flight reaction associated with threat is almost reflexive, whereas the transformation of lifestyle associated with religious commitment is much more deliberate and considered.

Thus, there are differences of emphasis between emotion and religion. However, they are both human states that affect the whole person, and they both involve all areas of psychology if an adequate account is to be offered. The similarities are at least close enough for the differences to be interesting to discuss. The idea that religion is in some ways like emotion should not, of course, be mistaken for the reductionist thesis that religion is nothing but emotion. The similarity of the psychological states and processes involved in religion and emotion is irrelevant to questions such as whether there is any validity to religious beliefs.

ATTITUDES TO EMOTION

A different set of issues arises concerning the attitude toward emotions in the religious tradition and the way in which everyday emotions may be affected by someone who has a strong religious commitment. This latter is of course essentially an empirical matter, though in the virtual absence of any relevant empirical data, it is nevertheless possible to set out a conceptual prolegomena to empirical investigation.

Emotions as Adaptive. It is part of our cultural inheritance to see a dichotomy between emotion and rationality, and this leads in turn to the assumption that emotions are irrational. Psychological theorizing has also often been heir to this common assumption that emotions are disruptive. However, the fact that this assumption is being abandoned is one of the interesting and important developments in current psychological theories of emotion. Emotions, it would now be emphasized, are often functional and adaptive. Examples of such arguments are found in De Sousa's *The*

Rationality of Emotion (1987) and Oatley's *Best Laid Schemes* (1992). I have discussed such views elsewhere, suggesting that it is actually more appropriate to regard emotion as functional or adaptive rather than irrational (Watts 1992). Emotions are functional in that they allow people to appraise situations very rapidly and to switch into a different and more adaptive mode of responding.

Another context in which the functional value of emotion has been widely recognized is psychotherapy. A good deal of psychotherapy is concerned with helping patients to get in better touch with their feelings and to identify them more accurately. There is also general recognition in psychotherapy of the value of emotional experience in producing psychological change. Interestingly, there is increasing agreement on this point across different treatment approaches (Greenberg and Safran 1987).

Nevertheless, emotions are not always rational, and it may well be a feature of emotions in the context of psychopathology that, unlike most emotions, they are not. One reason for this is probably that the appraisal of situations is too much distorted by maladaptive assumptions and excessive sensitivities. This is central, for example, to the disorders of thinking that Beck et al. (1979) saw as involved in depression. The result of such disorders is that the emotional reactions that arise belong to a different situation from the one that is actually occurring. Such emotions cannot be called rational.

Another factor that contributes to the irrationality of emotions in psychological disorders is that they are often so prolonged. For example, there are growing indications that one of the things that distinguishes abnormal depression from other episodes of unhappiness is simply the length of time that the depression lasts. The result is that the emotions rumble on when the situation that triggered them is long past. They lose their initial authenticity and become a response, not to the situation itself, but to a self-maintaining stream of ruminations (Greenberg and Safran 1987).

Attitudes to Religious Emotions. With this psychological background, let us now consider how emotions are perceived in the religious tradition. Are they seen as helpful or pathological? What ways are used to channel, control, or direct them? Many religious thinkers have subscribed to the view that emotions are disruptive, but in taking this view they are probably doing no more than reflecting the prevailing assumptions of the culture of their time. Indeed, this view is so common that interest focuses largely on religious thinkers who do not fully share it.

An interesting example is Jonathan Edwards's *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* ([1746] 1959), one of the most thorough theoretical treatments of emotion in the theological literature. His thinking differs

significantly from the much more conventional thinking of Thomas Shepard, a seventeenth-century Puritan who had influenced him considerably. Shepard, in Platonic style, remarked that "the eye of mind of man sits like the coachman and guides the headstrong affections" (cited in Smith 1959, 56). Edwards, although recognizing that passions can exercise excessive control over a person, also recognized the importance of affections, which involve an integration of understanding and emotion. Though Edwards began with the conventional three-fold framework of thought, emotion, and will, he moved toward seeing how these can work in an integrated fashion in a person, rather than emotions being in conflict with understanding and will.

Edwards ([1746] 1959) also tackled the question—ever present in revivalism—of how to regard strong emotions. Here, he set his face against extreme positions. Certainly, he had little regard for religion that does not touch the heart and involve the affections. He also saw the importance of examining religious emotions critically, though he dissociated himself from the more sharp condemnations of revivalism of his fellow New England theologian, Charles Chauncy. It would not have been consistent with Edwards's more integrated view of human nature to call, as Chauncy did, for the passions to be subject to reason. As Cherry put it,

> Edwards's view of the nature of man and of religious faith provides an altogether different definition of an authentic work of God. . . . Religious man is not one who subjects passions to the rule of reason but one whose reason is passionate and whose affection is intellectual. (Cherry 1966, 167)

There have probably always been two main schools of thought about the role of strong emotions in the religious life (see Watts and Williams 1988, chap. 6). One point of view sees strong emotion as being a hallmark of a strong religious life. Emotional power is a theme that runs throughout the Hebrew Bible. Early Israelite prophecy seems to have been associated with deliberately stimulated frenzy; the excitement of battle could also be identified with religious inspiration. Ceremonial music, dance, and oratory have long been important in contributing to collective religious experience. The charismatic movement in contemporary Christianity, of course, provides a context in which the combination of emotional excitement and religious inspiration can readily be seen.

Alongside this, there is an alternative tradition that puts emphasis on the calming of the passions. The growth of this approach can be seen throughout the Hebrew Bible. Gradually, the voice of Yahweh became less easy to hear, and it became necessary to be still and quiet in order to hear it (e.g., see Jaynes 1979). This emotionally quiet approach to religious experience is probably best developed in Buddhism. It was in the sixth century B.C.E. that the Buddha was teaching in northern India, and

it was possible that there was a fairly widespread change at this time in how people approached religious experience.

Religious experience through emotional quietness can also be found in the Christian contemplative tradition. Augustine Baker in *Holy Wisdom* wrote in his characteristically straightforward way about "unquiet passions" and "distracting images" as being "two general impediments that nature lays in our way to hinder us from attending to God" (Baker [1657] 1964, 334). Though the Christian contemplative tradition is well developed, it has never involved more than a small proportion of Christians, and it is probably not widely known that it exists at all. Most people in the modern Western world seeking a meditative tradition turn to something such as transcendental meditation.

The religious impact of these approaches to emotional regulation is a matter that is, to some extent, open to empirical investigation. One relevant study that serves as an example is Mallory's (1977) investigation of Christian mysticism in enclosed Carmelite nuns. A questionnaire was developed that distinguished between mild or positive ascetical views that emphasized the purifying effect of God's love on human emotions, and strict views that emphasized the importance of rejecting all desires except those for God. An empirical correlation was found between mystical experience and mild or positive views, but not with strict, negative ascetical views. There are indications here that too severe a doctrine of emotional quietness is an obstacle to religious experience rather than an aid to it.

The ideology of mild asceticism suggests a third possible view that would show religion as being associated with the refinement of the emotions and with greater emotional sensitivity, rather than with the control of emotion. This is an attractive position, though it is necessary to formulate more precisely what is meant by rather vague terms like *refinement* of the emotions. There is an interesting parallel with the argument in the recent book *Voyages of the Heart* by J. Averill and E. P. Nunely (1992). They made a general argument against a policy of either unbridled expression of emotions or consistent suppression of them. Rather, they argued for the possibility of using emotions creatively and learning from them, cultivating what might be called emotional intelligence.

This third way in the regulation of emotions would involve a degree of control of emotional expression. Uninhibited expression is seldom the most creative way of handling emotions. However, it certainly does not involve suppression of emotions. How can emotions be used creatively if we are not even aware of them? The prevailing counseling culture of our time often does not distinguish sufficiently clearly between *awareness* of emotion and *expression* of emotion. Freud's concerns were primarily about a lack of awareness, but he has been widely taken as supporting uncontrolled expression.

An interesting example of the sensitive discernment of emotion, often without expression, is the psychotherapist who uses emotional sensitivity cultivated through the countertransference to help the patient with awareness. Indeed, it is arguable that the strong expression of emotion may actually interfere with the subtleties of emotional awareness. Just as a therapist's understanding of a client can be enhanced by emotional sensitivity, so it is arguable that the religious person's awareness of God can be enhanced by emotional sensitivity. If this position on the role of emotion in religion is in any way correct, it has a good deal in common with recent theoretical views on emotion that have increasingly emphasized their adaptive value, rather than seeing them as a nuisance to be controlled.

Attitudes to Everyday Emotions. Alongside these issues about the role of emotion in the religious life itself, there is the question of the attitude of religion to the emotions that arise in the ordinary course of life, and how—if at all—these emotions may be affected by the religious context in which they occur. Emotions are so diverse that it is difficult to discuss religious attitudes to them in entirely general terms without considering different emotions separately. However, some connecting threads will occur. Religious attitudes to negative emotions are sometimes at least cautiously positive, albeit discriminating. In this, they have often been at variance with prevailing cultural assumptions. However, they have more in common with recent psychological theories that emphasize the functional value of even negative emotions. Anger, sadness, and guilt are each examined briefly from this point of view.

One of the emotions that has been most negatively regarded in the religious literature is anger, though it is interesting to note that this negative reaction has not always been undiscriminating. Back in the fourth century, Lactantius, a former Stoic who converted to Christianity, made a distinction in his treatise *The Wrath of God* ([313] 1965) between righteous and sinful anger. It was a welcome discriminating move, though his way of making the distinction probably owed too much to the idea that whether anger was acceptable or not depended on a person's position in society and that anger can be righteous when displayed by those in authority.

Twentieth-century psychologists such as John Bowlby (1980) and Eric Fromm (1973) have tried, in a similar way, to make distinctions between different kinds of anger, emphasizing that it can, under different circumstances, be either constructive or destructive. Also, empirical research, such as that of Averill (1982), has emphasized that anger is more often positive than might be supposed, and it usually does *not* lead to violence. Much anger is adaptive, and it can lead to a restoration of human relationships.

Another function of anger is as a source of personal insight. Exactly what makes a person angry depends on his or her assumptions about how people ought to behave and what can reasonably be expected. So, the more people really care about something, the more likely they are to get angry when their expectations are not met. Also, because people are more likely to get angry when their sense of inadequacy and vulnerability is touched, it often reveals them to be less emotionally assured than they might look from their behavior. All this forms a valuable source of self-knowledge.

Depressive feelings are generally seen, in contemporary culture, as something to be avoided if at all possible. The verdict on sadness in the Christian tradition is rather more subtle. Certainly, sadness can become excessive, but it is not difficult to find classic Christian writers who have emphasized the value of our tears and, incidentally, taken a rather negative view of laughter (see Kuschel 1994). Saint John Chrysostom ([c. 400] 1983) reminded us that we were not born "to give way to immoderate mirth, but that we may groan, and by this groaning may inherit a kingdom" (Homily VI).

In making sense of this, it may help to distinguish between constructive and maladaptive depressive feelings, as different kinds of anger have been distinguished. Depression may sometimes also be functional. The psychological literature contains a body of research on what is known as *depressive realism* (Dobson and Franche 1989). It seems that people with cheerful temperaments see things in a distorted, rosy way, whereas the perceptions of people who are depressed are actually more veridical. There needs to be a caveat that this has been investigated largely in a laboratory context. However, it may make sense of clinical experience with people who have depressive personalities. Sometimes, one encounters in such people a rationally based reluctance to give up depression. They point out that life really is bleak and that other people can fool themselves into being cheerful if they want, but they prefer not to. They seem to feel that to give up depression would involve a loss of integrity.

There are also different kinds of guilt, some of which are maladaptive, whereas others may play a constructive role in the religious life. Neurotic, imaginary, or inappropriate guilt is a very different matter from objective guilt after real offenses—a point made by a number of religious psychologists such as O. H. Mowrer (1961). It is a subject on which there has often been miscommunication between psychotherapeutically oriented psychologists and the religious community. The former have been mainly concerned with neurotic guilt and have seen clear clinical evidence of how harmful it can be. The idea that guilt is always harmful has also been fostered by Freudian theory. When this has been accepted at all by religious thinkers, it has all too often been accepted uncritically.

This of course is not to deny that there can also be guilt that is excessive and inappropriate. Also, the religious community has no interest in fostering neurotic guilt, though no doubt there have been cases of preachers encouraging it out of the misguided idea that it could be a support to faith.

Perhaps the key dividing line between healthy and unhealthy guilt is whether the guilt is an appropriate and authentic response to what has actually occurred or whether it becomes an overintense, excessively prolonged emotional reaction driven by self-absorbed ruminations. Another key point in an approach to guilt prepared to see its functional value would be to explore exactly what cognitive assumptions are revealed by particular cases of guilt. There has been increasing psychological interest in the difference between guilt and shame and an emphasis on the well-developed belief structures that underlie a self-evaluative emotion such as guilt. Part of the value of guilt, as with anger, is to draw attention to these basic cognitive assumptions and to expose them for review.

It is entirely in tune with contemporary thinking about the value of emotions as conveying "signals" to see guilt as sometimes indicating that there is an underlying problem of lifestyle. There is potential both in religious approaches to guilt and in contemporary psychological thinking about emotion to converge on a discriminating approach to guilt rather like the approaches previously outlined for anger and sadness. This has not yet been worked out in detail, but the potential for such an approach is clear.

A rather different but nevertheless important role of emotion is in supporting morality. Recent psychological work on morality has been dominated by Lawrence Kohlberg's Piagetian theory of the cognitive aspects of moral development. I suggest that the role of emotion in morality has been underemphasized. Current theories of emotion, such as K. Oatley's (1992), have emphasized the way in which emotions occur at key junctures in our plans. Very often, moral considerations require that a planned action sequence is brought to a rapid halt. That normally both requires emotions and, in turn, gives rise to them.

One specific emotion that has played a particularly important role in morality is disgust (Rozin, Haidte, and Mccauley 1993). There are many sources for our views about what is right and wrong. Some of these views are held relatively coolly, and others are held very passionately. It is a plausible hypothesis that when we believe passionately that something is wrong, it is often because it disgusts us. People often have stronger feelings about sexual morality than anything else. One of the likely reasons for this is that sexual conduct of certain kinds has a particular capacity to disgust us. This link of disgust and morality is something that the Hebrew Bible can help to illuminate. The key linking concept is

what is impure. What is impure disgusts us; it is also held to be morally wrong (Countryman 1988). On this approach to emotion, even disgust can be seen as an emotion that is potentially functional in morality, though there are dangers in a disgust-based morality being trusted to have a more rational basis than is actually the case.

Christians often take the opportunity presented by prayer to reflect on episodes of strong emotion, whether anger, depression, sadness, or another powerful feeling. Indeed, this might be seen as the distinctively Christian way of transforming potentially maladaptive emotions such as anger into something more adaptive and functional. I discussed elsewhere, in *The Psychology of Religious Knowing* (Watts and Williams 1988), the processes of cognitive reflection that characterize prayer. Many of these are likely both to contribute to the processing of emotions and to influence the likelihood of emotions being aroused in the future.

Particularly important here is the review of attributions that probably takes place in prayer. Indeed, research on attributions represents one of the most fruitful current meeting points between the psychologies of emotion and religion. Attributional analyses of emotion have been very successful, and it is clear that vulnerability to particular emotions is affected by attributions. For example, depression is more likely if the causal attributions of unwelcome events are internal; also, anger is more likely when frustrations are accompanied by an attribution of intentionality to those causing them. Such research is well reviewed in Lazarus's (1991) recent book on appraisal processes in emotion.

Attributions are also important in religion, and some of the relevant research is well presented by Spilka, Hood, and Gorsuch (1985). Attribution to God is an important feature of the distinctively religious mind, likely to have far-reaching implications. A particularly interesting issue here is whether an attribution to God should be seen as internal or external. I have suggested that it may in fact be a hybrid, though this would vary from one religious person to another. The closer a person's sense of relationship to God, the less an attribution to God would function as an external attribution. Indeed, it may be one of the emotionally significant consequences of attributing important events to God that it escapes the emotional consequences of either clearly internal or clearly external attributions. It would be predicted that this would tend to liberate the religious person from extremes of pride and guilt.

Conclusion

In this article, I tried to examine in detail some of the theoretical issues that arise at the intersection of the psychological study of religion and emotion and to indicate an approach to other related issues that it would

be fruitful to pursue in more detail. My hope is that it will be seen as an illustrative demonstration of the value of psychology and religion, establishing closer theoretical contact with general psychology. I have also tried to show the particular fruitfulness of the emotion as an area of psychology that has been surprisingly neglected in recent work on religion but which would repay greater attention.

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