# *Articles*

## THE SIXTEEN STRIVINGS FOR GOD

### *by Steven Reiss*

*Abstract.*     A psychological theory of religious experiences, *sensitivity theory*, is proposed.  Whereas other theories maintain that religious motivation is about a few overarching desires, sensitivity theory provides a multifaceted analysis consistent with the diversity, richness, and individuality of religious experiences.  Sixteen basic desires show the psychological foundations of meaningful experience.  Each basic desire is embraced by every person, but to different extents.  How we prioritize the basic desires expresses our individuality and influences our attraction to various religious images and activities.  Each basic desire is associated with a basic goal and a unique joy, such as love, self-worth, relaxation, or strength.  We do not seek to experience joys infinitely; we regulate joys, in accordance with our core values, to sixteen balance points (sensitivities) that vary based on individuality.  Religions help persons of faith regulate the sixteen basic joys by providing some images that strengthen joyful experiences and others that weaken them. We can strengthen our experience of self-worth, for example, by contemplating God in the image of savior; we can weaken our experience of self-worth by contemplating original sin.  The theory of sixteen basic desires is testable scientifically and suggests such philosophical concepts as value-based happiness.

*Keywords:*     Gordon Allport; Aristotle and psychology; god-images; intrinsic value; meaning of life; means and ends; Reiss Profile; religion and motivation; religion and personality; sensitivity theory of motivation; sixteen basic desires.

Human beings embrace religion for a number of reasons, according to previously published theories.  Religion can, for example, help individuals

Steven Reiss is Professor of Psychology and Psychiatry and Director of the Nisonger Center at The Ohio State University, 1581 Dodd Drive, Columbus, OH 43210-1296; e-mail reiss.7@osu.edu.

cope with fear and anxiety, especially the fear of death. This idea is expressed by the saying "There are no atheists in foxholes" (Argyle and Beit-Hallahmi 1975, 197) and explains why clergy are readily available in hospices and hospitals and near battlefields. Some religious teachings, moreover, are aimed at helping the faithful manage anxiety and experience inner peace.

Ritual observance has been suggested to be a significant source of religious motivation. Rituals are common in religious ceremonies; they help people cope with life's major events, such as birth of a child, child rearing, marriage, and death of a loved one. Sigmund Freud (1907) emphasized the significance of religious rituals, calling religion an "obsessive neurosis."

John C. Flugel discussed the significance of religion in helping persons cope with guilt. Religions teach adherents to atone for their sins through sacrifice to gods. "Men [hold] the primitive notion that their God . . . is appeased by human suffering" (Flugel [1945] 1961, 187–88). We inflict punishment and suffering on ourselves and hope that our gods will forgive us, much as our parents forgave us after we had been punished as children. Being forgiven reduces our experience of guilt and increases our fundamental sense of acceptance and salvation.

Freud thought that religion plays an important role in regulating sexual impulses. For example, religions ban incest, and Freud regarded such taboos as essential for the survival of our species. God images, according to Freud, are disguised father figures that help people manage their unconscious sexual desires.

Intellectual curiosity may motivate interest in religion (Allport 1961). We all wonder about life's larger questions—who we are and why we exist. Religions address our curiosity by providing explanations for the origin of the universe, the origin and purpose of human beings, and the nature of good and evil.

Religion can help people satisfy their need to find meaning in suffering and, thus, cope with poverty, illness, disappointment, and frustration. Karl Marx expressed this idea when he called religion the "opium of the people" (1964, 43–44). As Kenneth Davis put it, "The greater [one's] disappointment in this life, the greater his faith in the next. The existence of goals beyond this world serves to compensate people for frustrations they inevitably experience in striving to reach socially acquired and socially valuable ends" (1948, 532).

Recently, a number of psychologists have suggested that spirituality is a unique motive. Ralph Piedmont (1999) presents some evidence for this idea, proposing a trait he calls spiritual transcendence. Piedmont has validated the concept of spirituality in factorial studies and studies of peer ratings of religious behavior. He has shown that spiritual transcendence has some independence from five-factor personality theory. At least part of the appeal of religion may be to satisfy our need for spiritual experiences.

Scholars have ascribed these and other psychological motives for religious behavior. Anxiety reduction, fear of death, guilt reduction, enjoyment of rituals, and spirituality represent the most frequently cited.

THEORY OF BASIC MOTIVATION

My *sensitivity theory* (Reiss 2000a) holds that sixteen basic desires motivate much of our behavior, including religious behavior. In this essay I consider the main tenets of this theory and then apply the sixteen basic desires to understanding religious experiences.[1]

CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS.    Sensitivity theory represents an original combination of Aristotle's analysis of motivation ([330 B.C.E.] 1976) and Gordon Allport's concept of individuality (1961).[2]

*Desires are Reasons.*    These are motives, defined as reasons for engaging in behavior.

*Ends are Intrinsically Desired.*    Sensitivity theorists divide motives into means and ends (see Aristotle ([330 B.C.E.] 1976). Means are behaviors we engage in because they produce something else, whereas ends are desired for no reason other than that is what we want. When a professional athlete plays football for a living, the game is a means of obtaining a salary. When a professional athlete plays football to exercise, the game is its own end. An analysis of a person's behavior may identify a series of means followed by one or more ends that complete the behavior chain. For example, a person may attend medical school to become a researcher (a means), seek the cause of cancer because it has killed a parent (a means), and show loyalty to a deceased parent out of honor (an end).

*Automatic Nature of Ends.*    End motives occur automatically and cannot be deliberately chosen. As Aristotle observed, "Deliberation is about means, not ends" ([330 B.C.E.] 1976, Book III, iii, 79). We cannot choose whether or not we feel hunger, for example, but we can choose a diet to satiate our hunger. The idea of choosing an end is a self-contradiction: the ends are the criteria by which we make fundamental choices, and the means are the options that are chosen. As a matter of logic, any option we choose is a means to the criteria of choice and, thus, not an end.

*Ends are Associated with Varying Degrees of Self-Awareness.*    Self-awareness of our end desire—both what we want and how strongly we want it—varies considerably depending on individuality, experiences, and possibly the effects of culture on attitudes toward the desire in question. When we increase self-awareness we are better able to use our intellect to select appropriate and effective means.

*Basic Desires Exclude Certain Biological Needs.*    Basic desires (also called human strivings) are end motives, excluding those biological needs that have no relevance for psychology. For example, the need for constant body temperature is not considered a basic desire. As shown in Table 1, sensitivity theory recognizes sixteen basic desires.

*Genetic Origin of Basic Desires.*    Theoretically, the sixteen basic desires are regarded as genetically distinct sources of motivation. Culture and learning, however, play significant roles in the strength of a person's desires.[3]

*Basic Desires Imply End (Basic) Goals.*    Each of the sixteen basic desires is aimed at different ends, called basic goals because of their connections to basic desires. A person who is motivated by curiosity, for example, has a basic goal of acquiring knowledge, whereas a person who is motivated by idealism aims to improve society. Other basic goals are sound character, approval, and so on (see Table 1).

*Basic Goal Experiences Produce Joys.*    The experience of a basic goal produces a joy (an intrinsically valued psychological state), a different joy depending on which basic (end) goal is experienced. For example, the joy of wonderment is experienced when we obtain knowledge, and the joy of beauty is associated with the experience of sex. I argue that the sixteen joys cannot be reduced to a few global categories such as pleasure versus pain or intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation (Reiss forthcoming a). Aristotle observed, "As activities differ in kind, so do their pleasures" ([330 B.C.E.] 1976, Book X, v, 322). The pleasure associated with the joy of wonderment, for example, is qualitatively different from the pleasure associated with the joy of loyalty.

*Basic Goals Imply Core Values.*    The concepts of values and goals are closely connected. We value what we want and want what we value. Values connected to basic desires are called core or fundamental values; examples include family values, intellectual values, and humanitarian values. According to sensitivity theory, each basic goal implies its own core values.[4]

*Core Values Drive Personality Development.*    Values, not pleasure and pain, are the primary motivators of human behavior and personality development, according to sensitivity theory. We sacrifice for our children because we value them, not because we want to avoid the guilt associated with parental neglect. Soldiers throw themselves on exploding grenades and save their comrades because they value their honor even more than they value their life. People survived Nazi concentration camps because they found ways to express meaningful core values (Frankl 1984), not because they found ways to make their experience pleasurable.

## TABLE 1
## Religious Images and Sixteen Basic Desires

| Basic Desire | Basic Goal (Core Value) | Basic Joy | Religious images for ↑ joy/ express core value | Religious images for ↓ joy/ negate core value |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Acceptance | approval (inclusion) | positive self-regard | Savior, baptism, confession | original sin |
| Curiosity | knowledge, cognition (truth) | wonderment | omniscient, God as Reason | incomprehensible, ineffable God |
| Eating | food, sustenance | satiation | totem animals, Eucharist, feasts | fasts, dietary laws |
| Family | raise children (family values) | love | God in image of son/daughter | mythical gods of abandonment |
| Honor | sound character (morals) | loyalty | God in image of father; Ten Commandments | devil's temptations |
| Idealism | fairness (human condition) | compassion | social gospel, missionary work | God's tolerance of illness and natural disaster |
| Independence | autonomy (self-reliance) | freedom | God is self-sufficient | unity, Nirvana, attentive deities |
| Order | organization (precision, cleanliness) | stability | God's immortality; church rituals | impurity of body, soul; unclean food |
| Physical Exercise | muscle movement (strength) | vitality | God's infinite strength | Sabbath |
| Power | influence (leader-ship, glory) | self-efficacy | Almighty, Creator, Brahman | submission |
| Romance | sex (sensuality) | lust, beauty | holy matrimony | celibate, ascetic, Puritanical |
| Saving | collection (frugality) | ownership | religious relics, mementos | mythical gods of waste |
| Social Contact | friendship (groups) | belonging, fun | festivals | retreat, solitude, vows of silence |
| Status | prestige, stature (social class) | self-importance | Divine creation of humankind | human beings nothing compared with divinity |
| Tranquility | personal safety (prudence) | inner peace, relaxation | freedom from anxiety and guilt (the Way) | fear of God |
| Vengeance | retaliation (self-defense) | vindication | wrath of God; war gods | conflict avoidance ("turn cheek") |

*Basic Goals Experienced as Meaningful.*     Because the meaning of a behavior is its purpose or aim, and because basic desires aim for basic goals, basic desires and goals are experienced as psychologically meaningful. The sixteen basic desires are the key psychological foundations for meaningful experience, according to sensitivity theory. In contrast, unmotivated behavior such as reflexes and biological events are without purpose and are therefore considered to occur without conveying a psychological sense of meaningfulness.

*Organizing Role of Basic Desires.*     Under sensitivity theory, basic desires organize perceptions, values, cognitions, emotions, and behavior into coherent acts. Generally, we attend to stimuli relevant to our needs and desires and ignore irrelevant stimuli. We filter what we see through our desires and values. We want what we value, we value what we want, and we experience joyful emotions when we get what we want. Our values affect our attitudes, beliefs, and thoughts. A person with above-average motivation for status, for example, may pay a great deal of attention to prestigious versus less prestigious clothing labels, cars, residential neighborhoods, and so on; put on airs associated with high social class; wear expensive jewelry; dismiss lower-class persons as unworthy of attention; believe that one should not have to achieve in order to gain attention from others; believe that persons should associate with, and marry, within their social class; believe that those of high social class are more important than those of lower social class; be highly concerned with personal reputation; be careful to wear the "right" clothes; and be uncomfortable in the presence of lower-class persons or when visiting their homes or neighborhoods. In contrast, a person with below-average motivation for status tends not to notice the differences between clothing labels, cars, residential neighborhoods, and so on; may not value wealth or other marks of social class; may believe that social class is a trifle when selecting a marriage partner; may identify with working or lower-class persons; may feel uncomfortable when at a high-society gathering; and may dress sloppily, showing little interest in what others think about his or her appearance.

*Summary.*     Sensitivity theory puts forth sixteen basic desires that include both biological needs such as eating and psychological needs such as acceptance and status. Each basic desire motivates people to embrace basic goals and express the core values associated with basic goals. Table 1 shows some of the connections between specific basic desires, basic goals, and core values. Basic desires occur automatically, with varying degrees of self-awareness, and are assumed to have a genetic origin. They may be altered by significant life events, but generally we do not know how to deliberately change them. Our basic desires and core values motivate personality development by organizing perceptions, values, cognitions, emotions, and behavior into coherent acts and behavioral propensities. Under

sensitivity theory, the sixteen basic desires provide the key psychological foundations of meaningful experiences, because they determine what we care about and who we are.

EVIDENCE FOR SIXTEEN BASIC DESIRES.    Deep down, what do people desire?  What are the basic motives that drive our behavior and give psychological meaning to our lives?  To find out, Susan Havercamp and I developed a questionnaire, called the Reiss Profile (Reiss and Havercamp 1998), which was completed by more than ten thousand research participants.  The results of this work showed that sixteen specific desires guide much of human behavior.[5]

The research was conducted in three phases.  In Phase 1, we showed the "factorial validity" of the Reiss Profile questionnaire and the sixteen basic desires.  Factorial validity implies that if a person endorsed an item on one of the sixteen Reiss Profile scales, such as the scale for status, the individual (a) tended to endorse all other items on the same scale (such as all of the status items) and (b) did not necessarily endorse any item on a different scale (such as the items on the scale for curiosity or eating).

Phase 2 consisted of studies that assessed the psychometric properties of the questionnaire.  These studies showed that people self-report their basic motives similarly at different points in time.  They also showed that the results of the questionnaire were only minimally influenced by the social desirability bias factor (the tendency to respond in ways that make one look good).

In Phase 3 we validated the sixteen basic motives by showing that how people self-reported their motives on the Reiss Profile predicted significantly how they had behaved in their lives (such as choice of college major, interest in military or clergy), how they scored on psychological tests, meaningful aspects of romantic relationships and friendships, mental health diagnoses, and certain genetic developmental syndromes.

INDIVIDUALITY.    Sensitivities are about individuality in basic motivation and core values.  The concept is similar in meaning to that of an Aristotelian *mean*.  As Aristotle put it, "I call a mean in relation to us that which is neither excessive nor deficient, *and this is not one and the same for all* ([330 B.C.E.] 1976, Book II, vi, 100; emphasis added).

*Sensitivity* is the term given to how strongly a person is usually motivated by a particular basic desire.  Those who are strongly motivated by power, so-called dominant personalities, may be said to have a high (strong) sensitivity for power, whereas those who are weakly motivated by power, so-called submissive personalities, may be said to have a low (weak) sensitivity for power.  Inquisitive persons may be said to have a high sensitivity for curiosity, whereas noninquisitive people may be said to have a low sensitivity for curiosity.

One way to think about sensitivities (individual differences in basic motivation) is to consider each of the sixteen basic desires as a continuum of end motivation anchored by opposite basic goals. In Figure 1, for example, the basic desire of curiosity is shown as a continuum between the basic goal of spending no time in effortful thought versus always being engaged in effortful thought. All other possibilities lie between these extremes. Sue is happiest when she spends approximately 15 percent of her time in effortful thought, whereas Mary is happiest when she spends about 70 percent of her time thinking. If the average person desires to spend about 20 percent time in effortful thought, Sue has normative curiosity, and Mary has high (strong) curiosity.

Sensitivity theory holds that we go through life motivated to regulate each of the sixteen basic desires to individually determined balance points, called sensitivities. In the example shown in Figure 1, Sue is bored when her intellect is challenged significantly less than 15 percent of the time; the boredom motivates Sue to seek out intellectual challenges. When Sue is intellectually challenged more than 15 percent of the time, she experiences intellectual fatigue, which motivates her to behave mindlessly for a while. Mary experiences boredom when her intellect is challenged significantly less than 70 percent of her waking hours, and she experiences intellectual fatigue when her intellect is challenged significantly more than 70 percent of the time. Practically speaking, Sue will rarely experience boredom and often behave mindlessly, but occasionally she will want to think things through. Mary will easily experience boredom and be thoughtful about nearly everything, but on some occasions she will be motivated to behave mindlessly. Sue will likely embrace anti-intellectual values, whereas Mary will likely embrace intellectual values.

Figure 2 shows the hypothetical sensitivity points for Steve and Bob on the basic desire for independence. Bob places a higher value on self-reliance than does Steve. Sensitivity theory holds that whenever Bob and Steve experience more independence (self-reliance) than they desire, they experience an overwhelming sense of freedom and seek psychological support to moderate their experience. Whenever Bob and Steve experience less independence than they desire, they feel trapped and are motivated to behave in a self-reliant fashion. Because Bob and Steve are motivated to experience different degrees of independence, the same experiences can have opposite effects on their behavior. Suppose that Bob and Steve are
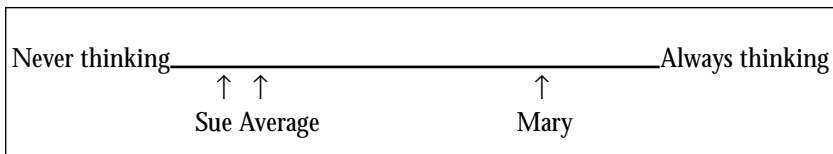


**Fig. 1.** The basic desire of curiosity (need for cognition) as a continuum.

businessmen competing against each other for a major new business contract each must have to stay in business. Bob should feel comfortable being on his own when competing for the contract, but Steve should prefer to confide in a partner or pray for divine assistance to experience psychological support and reduce the frightening feelings of being on his own.

*Desire Profile.*    Each of the sixteen basic desires motivates everybody, but to different extents. A Reiss Desire Profile is an individual's rank ordering of the sixteen basic desires, a display of an individual's sixteen sensitivities. Some military people may have a desire profile in which the basic motives of power, honor, and physical strength are highly valued, whereas some business executives may have a desire profile in which power and status are highly valued.

Generally, the motives most relevant to defining our personalities are those that are strong or weak relative to norms. People who are motivated by leadership, for example, show high (strong) power motivation relative to the norm and may show dominant, ambitious, authoritarian, or controlling personality traits. Those who are motivated to be followers show low (weak) power motivation relative to the norm and may show submissive, nondirective, and unambitious personalities.

VICARIOUS AND COGNITIVE EXPERIENCES.    We have the potential to express our core values and experience the sixteen basic joys through vicarious experiences, such as viewing shows, and through imagination and reflection. When we watch or imagine our favorite team scoring a goal, for example, we experience the joy of efficacy (which falls under the basic desire for power) similar to what is experienced by the player who scored the goal. The vicarious experience of power is so apparent at sporting events that some fans thrust clenched fists into the air upon viewing the achievement. Although sensitivity theory allows for the possibility that the power experienced by the player is of higher quality than that experienced by the fan—it may be more enduring and more readily reexperienced by recalling the achievement—sensitivity theory holds that both player and fan experience the same joy of efficacy.

The hypothesis that the sixteen basic desires motivate vicarious experiences should not be confused with catharsis. Like sensitivity theory, catharsis theory predicts, and the results of research studies confirm, that
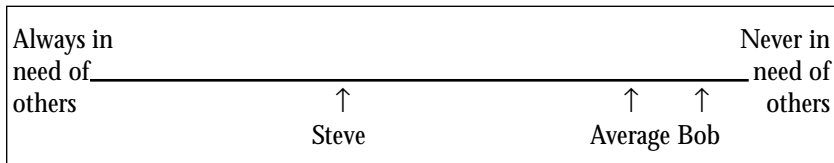


**Fig. 2.** The basic desire for independence as a continuum.

people are attracted to shows with content relevant to their basic motives and core values. Aggressive children are attracted to aggressive television programs (Huesmann and Eron 1989; Freedman 1984), sex-oriented people to programs with sexual themes (Greenberg and Woods 1999), religious people to religious programs, and curious people to television news (Perse 1992). Unlike sensitivity theory, however, catharsis theory predicts that basic motives can be satiated vicariously—that, for example, viewing aggression temporarily satiates the need to release aggressive energy. The available evidence does not consistently support this viewpoint; in fact, children who view aggressive models may imitate aggressive behavior rather than show satiation for aggressive motivation (Bandura and Walters 1965). If viewing aggressive models serves as an outlet for the viewer's aggressive energy, as predicted by catharsis, why are viewers no less aggressive after viewing violence than before?

Sensitivity theory does not predict that viewing aggression usually leads to reductions in aggressive behavior. Sensitivity theorists do not view aggression motivation as a pool of energy that can be released vicariously through viewing experiences; under sensitivity theory, the basic motive of vengeance expresses enduring personality needs to experience vindication frequently and at high magnitudes. Vindication is a joy, not a pool of negative energy awaiting release, for highly aggressive people.

To summarize, sensitivity theory holds that we have the potential to experience the sixteen joys through imagination, fantasy, and contemplative experiences that have content relevant to the sixteen basic desires. An aggressive person, for example, may experience the joy of vindication by watching a violent movie.

### THEORY OF RELIGION

We regulate, in accordance with our core values and sensitivities, how often and how intensely we experience each of the sixteen basic joys. Some people seek to experience a particular joy frequently and intensely; others seek to experience the same particular joy moderately; still others seek to experience this joy only infrequently and at low intensity. Intellectuals seek to experience wonderment frequently, the average person only sometimes, and nonintellectuals infrequently—and they also may behave mindlessly at times as a tactic for minimizing cognition. In each case, the individual is regulating the experience of wonderment to a desired level.

In order to regulate or balance the sixteen basic desires, we need two kinds of experiences: those that enhance each of the sixteen basic joys and those that block, impede, or reduce them. For example, we have the potential to experience the joy of vitality by playing a sport, and we have the potential to decrease our experience of vitality by resting. The balance we seek between physical exercise and rest depends on individuality—on our sensitivity to and our valuation of physical exercise.

We have the potential to express our core values and regulate the sixteen basic joys through both secular and religious means. Religious people aim to satisfy their needs through spirituality and nonreligious people through secular activities. Religious experiences are well suited to help us regulate these joys and express the associated core values.

Many god-images are "pure" expressions of core values. Throughout history, people have imaged gods of power, status, knowledge, order, vindication, acceptance, and so on, as outlined in Table 1. Human beings strive for power, status, knowledge, order, vindication, acceptance, and so on. Many religious images express the specific core values and produce the same joys as those associated with the sixteen basic desires.

The following comments are intended to show the relevance of religious experiences for the management of the basic desires. Although religious experiences address all sixteen, Judeo-Christian values are more relevant to the management of some basic desires than others. Because of space considerations, the discussion here is limited to those basic desires most relevant to Judeo-Christian values. Table 1, however, shows that sensitivity theory is potentially relevant for understanding spirituality, not only Judeo-Christian religions.

*Acceptance.* The desire for approval expresses the value of inclusion and produces the joy of positive self-regard. This desire forms a continuum between always seeking approval and never seeking approval. Psychological studies show that people regulate this desire. In laboratory experiments, for example, people given the opportunity to self-reward themselves for their performances usually choose moderate amounts of reward consistent with their self-esteem; people rarely give themselves maximum reward or no reward (Bandura 1977).

We have the potential to experience acceptance by imagining gods in the form of savior or redeemer. The Christian belief that Jesus died to atone for the sins of humanity increases feelings of acceptance and self-worth in the minds of the faithful. Roman Catholic priests forgive people who confess their sins, increasing their sense of acceptance and self-worth. Baptism is a religious ritual that atones for original sin, producing a sense of fundamental acceptance from God.

When we experience a level of acceptance greater than we desire, we feel uncomfortable and are motivated to reduce acceptance. At these times religious people may find themselves attracted to preachers who talk about original sin and the sinfulness or unworthiness of human nature.

*Family.* The basic desire to raise children expresses the value we place on children and child rearing and produces the joy of love. Adults vary significantly in how much time they want to spend raising children. Some do not want to have children, some have children but are not around to raise them, and some organize their lives around their children's needs.

We have the potential to vicariously experience parental love by worshipping God in the image of sons or daughters. Various ancient societies, including prehistoric people who left behind artifacts such as figurines and drawings, worshipped child gods (Armstrong 1993). Jesus Christ represents God in the image of a son. Although some mythical gods were antifamily (Cronus ate his children as they were born), mainstream institutional religions express family values. Persons who want to reduce time spent with family or express antifamily values probably will not be able to accomplish this goal through religious means.

*Honor.*    The desire to behave morally expresses the values of duty and responsibility and produces the joy of loyalty. Honor motivates psychological connections between ourselves and our parents and ancestors. This desire forms a continuum between absolute goodness (God) and absolute evil (the devil). Dutiful people obey traditional moral codes of conduct, whereas expedient people are quick to take personal advantage of any opportunities that may arise. Some adult children may feel guilt when they are disloyal to their parents or heritage.

We have the potential both to increase and to decrease our experience of honor through religious means. We can honor our parents by embracing God's commandments, or we can dishonor them by behaving immorally. We can choose to behave morally in most areas of life but expediently or unethically in others so that our overall experience is consistent with our individually determined balance (sensitivity) point for honor.

We can increase our experience of loyalty by worshipping gods in the image of father. We also can embrace the religious affiliation of our parents (Kendler, Gardner, and Prescott 1997). Loyalty can be experienced each time an adult child thinks about his/her observance of family religious traditions or his/her efforts to marry or raise children within the religion of the parents. We can decrease our experience of loyalty to religious parents by behaving immorally.

*Independence.*    The desire for self-reliance expresses the value of taking care of oneself and produces the joy of freedom. People normally aim for a balance point (interdependence) between absolute independence (never in need of others) and absolute dependence (always in need of others). In its extreme variant, absolute dependence implies a diminution of the sense of *I* to the point of unification with love objects. In love, we see some type of wish for loss of the sense of *I* and desire for union with the loved object.

We have the potential to increase or decrease our experience of independence by embracing various religious images and beliefs. We can increase our sense of independence by embracing god in the form of Reason. Using this imagery, many intellectuals believe that we have the potential to discover scientific principles (the rationality of the natural universe) and then apply those principles to increase our control over our destiny. We

also can increase our sense of independence by contemplating Descartes's philosophical concept of divine substance.

We can decrease our experience of being on our own by imagining attentive and supportive deities who care about us and listen to our prayers. When we imagine caring deities we tend to experience psychological support, which moderates the experience of independence. An especially discomforting aspect of dying, for example, is that human beings die alone (Malraux 1961). Persons who face death have the potential to moderate the feeling of being on their own through faith in gods who care.

*Order.*    The basic desire for organization expresses the values of precision, neatness, cleanliness, and perfection and produces the joy of stability. Order can be viewed as a continuum between the extremes of constant flux or chaos and unchanging form. Organized persons pay attention to detail, follow rules religiously, and enjoy rituals and planning. Spontaneous persons enjoy ambiguity and spontaneity, interpret rules flexibly, and dislike detailed plans and organization. Some spontaneous persons introduce ambiguity into arguments because they enjoy ambiguity more than they enjoy persuading others of their opinion. Others will mess up a neat and clean room just enough to feel comfortable.

We have the potential to increase our experience of order by embracing various religious images and beliefs. Immortality, a characteristic of many gods, conveys a sense of infinite stability and permanence. No matter what might happen in life, religious people believe that the Divine will be unchanged. Although the physical universe is in constant flux, divinity is stable and permanent. Stability also can be experienced through the practice of religious rituals and traditions. Nations may come and go, but certain religious rites and rituals have remained little changed since antiquity. Religions have put forth many rituals that express the value of cleanliness, which falls under the desire for order. Cleanliness is a form of perfection and organization.

Since antiquity people have worshipped gods who create order. The first gods of ancient Babylonia were organized structures that emerged from a primordial soup of divine substance (Armstrong 1993). These gods did not create the world and did not intervene in people's lives. They expressed the human beings' yearnings for permanence and stability. When Babylonians worshipped these gods, they experienced a sense of stability by contemplating the order in the universe. Further, the first sentences of the Bible describe an orderly creation.

Religious values favor order and cleanliness over flexibility and sloppiness. Religions have provided few images that decrease our experience of order. Religious services and ceremonies rarely encourage spontaneity.

*Power.*    The desire for influence expresses the values of leadership and achievement and produces the joy of efficacy. Individuals differ in

how much power they like to experience. Dominant personalities usually enjoy being in charge, giving advice, making decisions, and controlling things and may seek high levels of achievement (influential works). Submissive or nonambitious personalities usually prefer to be followers and to let others make decisions.

We have the potential to express our core values regarding power by embracing various religious images and practices. The image of god as Almighty Creator expresses infinite influence and conveys efficacy: Creation is arguably the greatest achievement human beings can imagine. We can decrease our experience of self-efficacy by imagining god in this form, as lord over all. When we reflect on this god's power over us, we feel powerless relative to divinity. A highly successful person, who may tend to look at his or her accomplishments and feel extremely competent, may experience humility through religious submission. Psychologically, humility moderates the experience of efficacy.

*Status.* The basic desire for prestige expresses the value of stature and produces the joy of self-significance. Individuals vary in how strongly they are motivated by status and in the level of status with which they feel most comfortable. People who are highly motivated by status are often concerned with their reputation and stature. They tend to seek wealth or popularity or social standing as means of gaining an impressive reputation. People who are weakly motivated by status care little about what others think of them and pay little attention to marks of social class, such as wealth and popularity.

We have the potential to regulate our experience of status by embracing various religious images and beliefs. The religious idea that gods created humanity and that they are aware of what happens to us implies that we are so important that we command attention from divine sources. The concept of a soul also suggests a special status for human beings. We can decrease our sense of self-significance by imagining gods who are too busy to pay attention to us.

*Vengeance.* The basic desire to retaliate expresses the value of self-defense and produces the joy of vindication. This desire can be considered as a continuum between the extremes of "seeks to experience conflict 100 percent of time" and "seeks to experience conflict 0 percent of the time." Vengeful people tend to be highly vigilant to signs of offense, may strike back quickly, and may value self-defense and aggressiveness. Conflict-avoidant people tend to look the other way when offended, strike back very slowly, if at all, and may value peacemaking.

We have the potential to use religious imagery and practices both to increase and to decrease our experience of vindication. Since the dawn of history, people have prayed to war gods for divine assistance on the battlefield. God has been invoked on both sides of the war in Iraq, for example.

Prayers for divine intervention may arouse images of battlefield victory, which lead to feelings of vindication. Hindus have the potential to experience vengeance by imagining and identifying with the destructive goddess Kali and the god Shiva, who is experienced in the image of destroyer. It is said that more temples have been built for Shiva than to God in the form of creator and preserver combined (Smith 1991). Christians can reduce the experience of vengeance by focusing on teachings of kindness and "turning the other cheek." Thus, we can regulate our experience of vengeance by imagining different aspects of divinity.

*Tranquility.*    This basic desire for personal safety produces the joy of relaxation and expresses the value of prudence. Individuals differ in how much risk they like to take. People with high tranquility tend to be cautious, risk-avoidant, fearful, and anxious, and they have a propensity to experience panic attacks (McNally 2002). People with low tranquility tend to be risk takers, fearless, and nonanxious.

Through faith we have the potential to overcome fear and anxiety and experience tranquility. According to Reinhold Niebuhr (1949), we become anxious when we realize how precarious our lives are. We develop fundamental fears concerning death and human insignificance. Niebuhr thought that faith offers the best opportunity to overcome such anxieties and experience tranquility. There is less of a tendency to panic over the possibility of death if you believe your soul is headed for Heaven.

Buddhism and Taoism offer religious paths for gaining tranquility and coping with anxiety, pain, and suffering. In Taoism, the Way is a state of complete contentment, tranquility, and harmony with nature (Smith 1991).

*Compound Motives.*    Much like all chemical compounds reduce to combinations from the chart of elements, sensitivity theory holds that many complex human motives are combinations of two or more of the sixteen basic desires. Some religious images, concepts, and experiences, therefore, may be related to the regulation of more than one of the basic desires. The religious concept of sin, for example, is multifaceted. Sin reduces our sense of honor and our experience of loyalty to parents, because it is a violation of our moral heritage; sin also reduces our sense of acceptance, because it represents an estrangement from God; and sin reduces our experience of order, because it is a violation of rules, giving impressions of impurity. The concept of sin, thus, is relevant to the regulation of at least three of the basic desires—honor, acceptance, and order.

### SCIENTIFIC STUDY OF THE HUMAN SPIRIT

Sensitivity theory is best viewed as a theory of behavior. Only years of research can establish the validity of these ideas, and I urge behavioral scientists, philosophers, and theologians to conduct future work in the

sensitivity theory of religion. I conducted an early empirical test of this theory by evaluating which basic desires play large roles in motivating religiosity—defined as how religious a person says he or she is. I asked 558 mostly Christian adults to complete the Reiss Profile questionnaire and then describe themselves as very religious, somewhat religious, or not religious. The results showed that how religious people said they were was strongly associated with the extent to which they said they were motivated by honor (see Reiss 2000b). I interpreted this result to mean that many people embrace religion to honor and show loyalty to parents and ancestors. The results also showed that religious people place below-average value on independence (self-reliance). The more religious a person said he or she was, the less the individual sought to be self-reliant. This result is consistent with the religious literature that emphasizes the significance of being absolutely reliant on God. Although religious people desired to be in need of God or others, they showed average desire for personal power or influence. Indeed, some religious people saw opening their hearts to God as a means of gaining power.

Self-reported religiosity also was associated with above-average motivation to raise a family, avoid conflict (low vengeance motivation), and experience order. These findings are consistent with Christian teachings on the importance of family and the concept of "turning the other cheek." Since self-reported religiosity was associated with order motivation, the psychological satisfactions of rituals may play a significant role in attracting people to religion.

Havercamp has studied preliminarily the basic desires that drive young adults to join the clergy. She administered the Reiss Profile to 49 students (26 men and 23 women) enrolled in one of three Midwestern Protestant seminaries and showed profiles of low independence, high idealism, and low status (Havercamp 1998). The significance of low scores for the basic desire of independence already has been discussed; it implies a desire for psychological support (as in submission to God). High scores for idealism suggested that the seminary students sought to improve society. The seminarians also scored more than a half standard deviation below the general population norm for status, suggesting that they should feel comfortable taking vows of poverty.

Although these initial studies have provided empirical support for sensitivity theory, they need to be replicated and extended with participants from more diverse religious backgrounds. Future research could determine which desire profiles are associated with various god-images and specific religious practices. I suspect that the world's major religions address the same basic desires but in different ways. Administering the Reiss Profile to large groups of people practicing different religions and comparing the results based on religious affiliation might produce interesting results.

Sensitivity theory expresses a number of ideas that would benefit from further analysis by philosophers and theologians. One idea is that basic desires are great equalizers (see Reiss 2000a). I believe that the child who overcomes a physical handicap to dribble a basketball experiences the same sense of accomplishment Michael Jordan experienced when he won his fifth National Basketball Association championship. The adult with mental retardation who prays to God experiences the same psychological support experienced by anyone who prays to God. Under the theory of sixteen basic desires, all people—rich and poor, smart and dull, handsome and plain, healthy and sick—have approximately equal potential to embrace their basic desires and experience life as psychologically meaningful.

I distinguish two kinds of happiness that I call "value-based happiness" and "feel-good happiness" (Reiss 2000a). Value-based happiness refers to a sense that life is meaningful, and feel-good happiness refers to the experience of sensual pleasures. Value-based happiness occurs as a by-product of experiencing basic goals (satisfying our strivings), whereas feel-good happiness occurs when certain senses are excited. Arguably, the study of value-based happiness, which is what the sixteen basic desires are all about, could be seen as a scientific study of the human spirit.

## NOTES

1. Sensitivity theory addresses the psychology of religious experiences and has no implications for the validity or invalidity of religious beliefs.

2. See Daniel L. Robinson's account (1989) of Aristotle's psychology, especially the discussions of self, for an overview of this subject matter. Sensitivity theory is an original theory that reflects the influence of Aristotle's work.

3. Under sensitivity theory, genetically influenced behavior is not necessarily unchangeable. Sometimes significant life events alter our fundamental desires and change who we are, but usually these are unplanned. Generally, psychologists do not know how to deliberately change their patients' basic desires and core values. For the most part, therapy is about changing means, not ends. Usually its goals are to teach patients effective means for satisfying their basic needs (such as teaching social skills to a person having interpersonal problems) or reducing conflict with regard to the means an individual has chosen to satisfy different ends.

4. For more than twenty centuries the scholarly study of human motivation was classified under the heading of "ethical philosophy" because we value what we want and want what we value. Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* ([330 B.C.E.] 1976) includes lengthy discussions of motivation and temperament.

5. Details of this research are reported elsewhere. See Reiss 2000a; Reiss and Havercamp 1996; 1998; Reiss, Wiltz, and Sherman 2001; Wiltz and Reiss 2003; Dykens and Rosner 1999; Engel, Olson, and Patrick 2002; Lecavlier and Tasse 2002; Reiss forthcoming a, b; Reiss and Havercamp forthcoming; Havercamp and Reiss 2003.

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