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Concepts of Divine Action for a Theistic Approach to Psychology

Brent S. Melling

Brigham Young University - Provo

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Concepts of Divine Action for a Theistic
Approach to Psychology

Brent Sladyk Melling

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Brent D. Slife, Chair
Edwin E. Gantt
Jeffrey S. Reber
Terrance D. Olson
James E. Faulconer

Department of Psychology

Brigham Young University

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ABSTRACT

Concepts of Divine Action for a Theistic Approach to Psychology

Brent Sladyk Melling
Department of Psychology, BYU
Doctor of Philosophy

Recent years have seen increased interest in using theism (the perspective that assumes that God is currently actively in the world) as a conceptual framework for scientific inquiry. This interest has built particular momentum in psychology where several scholars have expressed that traditional naturalistic approaches limit understanding and investigation of psychology's subject matter and thus are insufficient to fully account for human phenomena. Others have previously made the case for the consideration of theism as a legitimate alternative basis for psychological theory, research, and practice. This dissertation begins with that consideration and examines what would be required to move a theistic approach to psychology forward. In other words, if God is assumed to be active in the world (including the psychological world—theism), what difference would that make for the ideas, methods, and practices of psychology?

As the current activity of God is the foundational assumption of theism, clarity about what that activity would entail is especially essential for those seeking to develop a theistic approach to psychology and to describe how their discipline would be different from that perspective. Unfortunately, there is currently a lack of clear and explicitly articulated conceptions of God's actions in and for psychology.

This dissertation provides a conceptual analysis of the activity of God that synthesizes disparate approaches to divine action into a tentative conceptualization or taxonomic schema. This schema organizes the scholarly literature from across several major traditions into six major heads and elucidates multiple subordinate concepts. The conceptualization serves as an orientation to important issues such as strong v weak theisms, the limitations of naturalism, and practical theistic applications for psychology.

Detailed illustrations of these concepts as applied to psychological theory, research (both in the qualitative and quantitative modes), and practice further demonstrate the utility of such a conceptualization. These examples provide a specific focus on the unique contributions of a theistic perspective over and against those of naturalism.

Keywords: God, theism, theistic approaches to psychology, strong theism, weak theism, deism, dualism, interventionism, supernaturalism, naturalism, science, philosophy, physics, grace, invitation, theory, research, practice, qualitative methods, quantitative methods, psychology, divine action, worldview

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Thanks as well to the rest of my committee and other mentors and friends in the BYU community who have taught me by precept and by example that "to be learned is good if [we] harken unto the counsels of God" and to "seek learning even by study and also by faith." Their scholarly efforts have often helped "rupture" me over the years and help transform my thinking.

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Chapter 1: Toward a Theistic Approach to Psychology

Theistic religion and modern science provide the two most impactful worldviews of Western culture (Smith, 2001; Hart, 2009) but many assume that these two perspectives are (and should be) completely independent or are naturally antagonistic towards one another (APA, 2008; Alcock, 2009; Gould, 1997). Historically, this has not always been the case (see e.g., Nelson, 2006a; Reber, 2006) and many modern thinkers (e.g., Plantinga, 2011; Saunders, 2002) are re-assessing the relationship between religion and science. Particularly, a number of psychologists (e.g. Slife & Reber, 2009a; Nelson, 2006a, 2006b; Richardson, 2006a, 2006b, 2009) have argued for a theistic perspective in their discipline. As they point out, a majority of the consumers of psychology are themselves theists (see Richard & Bergin, 2005; Slife & Whoolery, 2006). Still, this movement is fledgling and much work needs to be done to fully explore theistic approaches to psychology.

Against those arguing for a theistic approach to psychology are voices that vigorously oppose the inclusion of theistic philosophies or ideas in scientific psychology (e.g., Helminiak, 2005, 2006; Hibberd, 2009; Alcock, 2009; Bargh, 2008; Wegner, 2008). As is shown (below) some of this tension comes from the conflict between theism and naturalism—with many psychologists believing that the latter is virtually synonymous with science (e.g., Bargh, 2008; Alcock, 2009). Still, critics have a number of reservations regarding theistic approaches to scientific activities like psychology.

One particular concern is the possibility that theistic approaches will be hostile to non-theistic approaches, and thus be dismissive of much of the good science that is currently being done (Hibberd, 2009). However, many of those who propose a theistic approach are advocating for an *addition* to current methodologies, not a *replacement* (see Slife & Zhang, in press). In this

way theistic approaches to psychology are envisioned as part of a pluralism of methods and strategies which complement others “in the marketplace of scientific ideas” (Slife, Reber, & Lefevor, 2012, p. 221).

Perhaps a more pressing concern comes from those (e.g., Hibberd, 2009, 2012; Helminiak, 2006, 2010) who feel that talking about God in psychology would render the discussion void of content, meaningless, vacuous, senseless, or unintelligible. These critics cannot fathom how God could be described academically or how theistic concepts could be of any practical import to psychological work. Understandably, there are theists who encourage the conception of God and His action as ineffable to some degree (see Tracy, 1984; Armstrong, 2009) or only speak about God in negative terms (see e.g., Coward & Foshay, 1992)—i.e., of what God is not or does not do. However, these are hardly the only theistic approaches, and several theists (some of them also scientists) have articulated specific and concrete conceptions of divine action (see, e.g., Plantinga, 2011; Pollard, 1958). Yet, these conceptions have generally not been applied to psychology.

To be fair, theism is arguably a new approach in modern psychology and only recently have journal articles and experimental write-ups conducted in this vein begun to gain mainstream traction (see Slife, Reber, & Lefevor, 2012). As such, there has not yet been extensive discussion of the varieties of God’s activity demonstrating the possibilities of concrete content as such might be applied to psychology. Indeed, this may be why committed theists may have significantly different understandings of what a theistic approach to psychology might look like (see, e.g., Nelson & Slife, 2006; Slife, 2011; Tjeltveit, 2011; see also Teo, 2009). The lack of a robust conceptualization is unfortunate as it evidences a missed opportunity for a theistic

approach to “demonstrate how theistic ideas can be productively used in the theory, research, and practice of psychologists” (Slife & Zhang, in press, p.2).

What would be beneficial to both critics and proponents of theistic approaches to psychology is an exploration of conceptions of divine activity. Rather than presuming God acts in a particular way or assuming that such action is indescribable by mortals, a comprehensive review of possible modes of divine activity would allow the various ideas and conceptions to be evaluated on their own merits. It may be that the critics are right and that some or all conceptions of divine activity would “guarantee contentless discussions” (Helminiak, 2006, p. 204). However, without a specific articulation of exactly what “God’s action” means, that sort of summary dismissal cannot be justified. Additionally, such specific conceptions of divine activity are surely essential to the continued development of a fully-fledged theistic approach to psychology. Furthermore, given the possibility of multiple conceptions of divine activity, a review of these various approaches is essential to orient *any* continuing discussions of God’s activity in psychology, whether arguing for inclusion or exclusion.

This chapter, therefore, details the justification and need for articulating an organizational schema or taxonomy of the main perspectives on the activity of God and their potential application to psychology. First, the foundational issues regarding a theistic approach to psychology are explored, particularly the assumptions of naturalism and theism and how these have been manifest in scientific thinking, both historically and in modern contexts. This includes distinguishing between strong forms of theism in which God acts (without limitation) as well as exists and weak forms of theism that make theistic claims about God’s existence but limit God’s action in the world. The former will be shown to have potential to contribute to novel perspectives in psychology and generate novel theory, research, and practice, while the latter is

ultimately functionally equivalent to naturalism. Then, after a discussion of the utility of conceptualizations of God's activity, a brief introduction and orientation to specific categories of these conceptions is presented. Finally, the scope of this dissertation is overviewed, outlining the topics of the remaining chapters: specifically, the in-depth review and organization of conceptions of divine action (Chapter 2) and the practical application of such concepts to psychological theory, research, and practice (Chapter 3).

Theistic Approaches to Psychology – Foundational Issues and Assumptions

Before delving directly into the details of a theistic approach to psychology, it may be helpful to review some of the foundational issues and background assumptions that color the discussions around this topic. In particular, there are many (e.g., APA, 2008; Alcock, 2009; Heliminiak, 2005; Hibberd, 2009) who feel that religion and science are so divergent as to be completely incompatible. Therefore, a brief orientation to the philosophic issues that ground the discussion will help us understand the source of this tension. Additionally, a cursory overview of the historical backdrop will suggest that far from being incompatible, religion and science have had much productive involvement with one another.

Historic Relationship between Theistic Religion and Western Science

Theistic systems and science have had a long history of productive engagement. It is only in our recent modern setting that they have been disentangled and set against one another (Plantinga, 2011; Hart, 2009; Reber, 2006; Nelson, 2006a; see below). That these two major worldviews and their corresponding institutions have gotten along historically may do something to justify our current project of doing a theistic science. Additionally, a historic review will set up our discussion of the current philosophical concerns regarding theism in science.

Alvin Plantinga (2011) is one who suggests that the seeming disconnects between science and theism are superficial and belie a deep concord. Part of his reasoning is the historical relationship between science and theism:

Modern Western empirical science originated and flourished in the bosom of Christian theism and originated nowhere else... [T]he fact is, it was Christian Europe that fostered, promoted, and nourished modern science. It arose nowhere else. All of the great names of early Western science, furthermore—Nicholas Copernicus, Galileo Galilei, Isaac Newton, Robert Boyle, John Wilkins, Roger Cotes, and many others—all were serious believers in God. Indeed, the important twentieth-century physicist C. F. von Weizsäcker goes so far as to say, “In this sense, I call modern science a legacy of Christianity.” This is no accident: there is deep concord between science and theistic belief. (Plantinga, 2011, p. 266)

Others (Griffin, 2000; Nelson, 2006a; Reber, 2006) have likewise suggested that religious theism and Western science are not only compatible, but have enjoyed a mutually beneficial historical symbiosis. David Ray Griffin (2000), after reviewing the deep theological commitments of Isaac Newton (even in his work on gravitation) notes, “the ‘modern scientific worldview...’ was adopted primarily for sociological and theological reasons” (p. 133). This insight leads him to suggest that “if we recognize that what has been called ‘the modern scientific worldview’ was in its origins significantly shaped by theological motives, the main basis is removed for assuming that this worldview should today be immune to philosophical-theological critique” (p. 110). And given that this was the case, he puts forth that “it is especially incumbent upon the theological community today to challenge this worldview” (p. 110). In other

words, theism and science are not grounded in radically different spheres and, therefore, it is legitimate for theism to be presently used as a frame of reference for science.

Still, a vocal segment in psychology has expressed strong opinions that theistic approaches have *no* place in psychological science. Among those resisting such perspectives being utilized in the discipline is the American Psychological Association itself. In an official proclamation on the interplay of religion and science they hold that faith traditions have “profoundly different methodological, epistemological, historical, theoretical, and philosophical bases [when compared to psychological science]” (APA, 2008, p. 432). For the APA, these profoundly different bases mean that theological traditions “have no legitimate place arbitrating behavioral or other sciences” (APA, 2008, p. 432). Others also express strident resistance. James Alcock suggests that “if one were to accept the premise that the world, including the psychological world, is ‘indissolubly connected to God...’ then science as we know it would be impossible” (Alcock, 2009, p. 81). Helminiak agrees that “God is hardly a useful construct for scientific activity” (Helminiak, 2005, p.72). Fiona Hibberd (2009) widens this critique noting several common points against theism, “[1] that it violates the rules and conditions of intelligible discourse; [2] that it is contrary to not only science and philosophy but also common sense; [3] that it cannot be reconciled with rational thinking; [4] that there are no grounds for a belief in God” (p. 96).

Such opposition to allowing “God talk” in psychology begs the question of the modern source of the at least alleged disconnect between religious theism and Western science. If the one grew out of the other, why do so many (including the APA) now insist on such a strict separation? The answer lies in the “currents and accidents in intellectual and social history” (Nelson, 2006a, p. 205) that have served to conflate science with a narrow conception of the

philosophy of naturalism (see, e.g., Griffin, 2000; Nelson, 2006a; Plantinga, 2011). Thus, to understand the current objections to theistic approaches to psychology, we must now turn to an exploration of naturalism and its role in modern psychology.

Naturalism and Theism

Naturalism is commonly understood to be the source of the current conflict between science and religion and the reason for the reticence of many scientists to accept theistic perspectives in psychological or scientific work (Richards & Bergin, 2005; Slife, Mitchell, & Whoolery, 2004; Griffin, 2000; Hunter, 2007). Indeed Leahey (1991), in his text on the history of psychology, observed that “science in the twentieth century [was] firmly committed to naturalism.... Naturalism is science’s central dogma” (p. 379). This is problematic for a theistic approach to psychology because the usual conception of naturalism has as a central tenet that God cannot play a role in the world (Collins, 1977; Johnson, 1997; Griffin, 2000; Plantinga, 2011; Richards & Bergin, 2005; Slife, 2004). This philosophic naturalism is sometimes referred to as “strong” naturalism, reductive naturalism, or materialistic naturalism (Griffin, 2000, p. 14), and, as such, stands apart from efforts to rehabilitate the term “naturalism” to be more inclusive of theological interpretations of nature (see, e.g., Stenner, 2009; Griffin, 2000). The first stronger understanding of the term “naturalism” is used throughout this work.

As Plantinga (2011) illustrates, naturalism is “a worldview, a sort of total way of looking at ourselves and our world” (p. ix). As such “it gives answers to the great human questions,” with naturalism giving the answer that “there is no God” (Plantinga, 2011, p. ix-x) and, therefore, no activity of God. Instead, naturalism holds that all phenomena “without exception results from the operation of natural forces” (Collins, 1977, p. 88). God is considered irrelevant to these natural forces which operate independently to govern the world (Slife & Whoolery, 2006).

Theism is the other great worldview of Western culture and, in its strong version, “implies that God is required for a complete understanding of the world because God is *currently* active in world events” (Slife, 2006, p. 6; see also Plantinga, 1997). The focus on God’s current activity is important because strong “theism makes little sense if God is currently passive or functionally non-existent” (Slife, 2006, p. 6). As a worldview, a strong or through-going theism holds that the inclusion of God is an all-encompassing “altering assumption” and not merely an “add-on assumption” (Slife & Reber, 2009b, p. 134; Slife & Reber, 2009a) and, as such, theistic ideas cannot just simply be tacked on to preexisting naturalistic interpretations.

Therefore, when understood as worldviews in their strong sense, naturalism and theism are in real conflict. It is hardly surprising then, given the deep equivalence many (see, e.g., Bargh, 2008; Wegner, 2008; see also, Leahey, 1991) draw between naturalism and science, that some feel strongly that theistic interpretive frameworks have no place in psychology. Still, many social scientists have sought to reconcile both their support of theism and their naturalistic brand of science. These attempts are sometimes referred to as deism, dualism, or interventionism and seem to offer theistic scholars the ability to do “science as usual” (i.e., in a naturalistic vein) without violating their theistic assumptions (Slife & Melling, 2006). Unfortunately, as shown below, these attempts at making these two worldviews (naturalism and theism) compatible ultimately fail, and, instead, demonstrate their incompatibility.

Deism, dualism, and interventionism. Given the strong pervasive assumption of the equivalence of science and naturalism, many theistically-inclined psychologists have attempted to formulate “compromise” approaches that might allow for both theistic belief and naturalistic tenets. If these approaches successfully reconcile naturalism and theism, then no further work needs to be done. Theistic psychology could be done without violating the philosophy of

naturalism. If not, however, additional philosophic analysis will be needed to develop a theistic approach to psychology.

Deism. A common tenet of most theistic religions is that God created the world, and some thinkers see this as the only act of God that should (or can) be appropriately integrated into scientific discussions (Wiles, 1986; Kaufman, 1968; see also Tracy, 1997, 1984; see Smedes, 2004, pp. 25-26; Saunders, 2002 pp. 23-29 for reviews). Typically this exclusive focus on God's initial creative act is referred to as deism. While most major theisms (i.e., Christianity, Islam, and Judaism) would also hold that God continues to act in creation in some way, "deism is extremely tempting [for psychological scientists] because it fits so nicely the naturalism of psychology" (Slife & Melling, 2006, p. 281). While "God created the order of the world that psychologists investigate... God is no longer involved in the world [as in naturalism], and psychologists do not need to take divine influences into account in their theories, methods, and practices" (Slife & Melling, 2006, p. 281). This understanding allows these psychologists to practice science exclusively in a naturalistic vein because they have no need to account for an active God. According to deism, God is functionally passive in the post-creation days, the days wherein their science is conducted. Unfortunately, because this approach sees God as (exclusively) active at the beginning (or before the beginning) of time and has naturalism dominant thereafter, it actually fails to reconcile theistic belief with naturalism – they are never active at the same time. Furthermore, while there may be some non-naturalistic implications of a God-created world, this approach does not allow for any *current* divine action within psychology, which is integral to strong theism.

Dualism. Similarly, another popular reconciliation tactic puts certain phenomena within the purview of God's action (e.g. faith, morality, subjective meaning) while other phenomena are

subsumed within the traditional order of naturalism (e.g. objects in motion, gravity, biological functioning). Schemas that separate events into one of two non-overlapping (and non-interacting) categories are usually known as dualisms, and there are many operating within psychology (e.g. subject-object, mind-body) (Slife, Reber, & Faulconer, 2012). As we have already seen, the APA suggested something of this dualistic view in its proclamation on religion: “Psychology has no legitimate function in arbitrating matters of faith and theology, and faith traditions have no legitimate place arbitrating behavioral or other sciences” (APA, 2008, p. 432). Similarly, speaking of the fact that religion and science are seen by some to be in conflict or at war with one another, Stephen Jay Gould suggested that “No such conflict should exist because each subject has a legitimate magisterium, or domain of teaching authority—and these magisteria do not overlap” (Gould, 1997, p. 19). More specifically, psychologist Donald Wacome (2003) has conceded that God is not currently involved in the natural world, but God may be involved in the social world.

Slife and Melling (2006) expand on the manner in which some psychologists take up dualisms when taking up God’s activity:

Many psychologists are also dualists... [They] basically assume that God exists and is active in some portion of the world – such as the subjective, the spiritual, or the soul – but God is functionally nonexistent and thus not active in some other portion of the world – the objective, the natural, or the material.” (p. 282)

Dualisms, however, suffer from a multiplicity of problems (see Griffin, 2000, p. 143-150; Slife, Reber, & Faulconer, 2012). For the present concern (a theistic approach to psychology), a dualistic solution is doubly problematic. While allowing God to be active in some realms (such as moral meaning and values) seems to have some entre into psychology, many psychological

scientists view these intangibles as reducible (or operationalizable) to the material (or at least natural) world (see Slife, Reber, & Faulconer, 2012) where, in dualistic schemas, God is never active. Even if both realms (or “magisteria”) are given legitimacy, the usual dualistic dilemmas remain. If such realms are so distinct how can they interact or even be part of the same world? While dualisms do not (typically) restrict God’s activity temporally, they do restrict that activity to a narrow set of phenomena – again, not the theism of most theists (see Slife & Zhang, in press).

Interventionism. A third common approach for attempting the integration of theism and scientific naturalism can be labeled supernaturalism or interventionism. Whatever the label, this view holds that God occasionally *interrupts* the normal flow of events, disrupting the natural causal order. However, as Plantinga (1997) points out, because a serious theism holds that God is “already and always intimately acting in nature” (p. 350), interventionism is not sufficiently theistic. In fact, there is a sense in which interventionism is a form of naturalism because it maintains that, for the most part, natural law universally rules events. Still, even the idea of rare and occasional supernatural interventions is untenable to many scientists who feel that the lawfulness of naturalism implies a universal consistency that will allow no exceptions (see, e.g. Bargh, 2008, Wegner, 2008).

Besides not being sufficiently naturalistic, interventionism, by virtue of its limiting God’s activity to rare and special occurrences (i.e., miracles), is also not sufficiently (or strongly) theistic. As we have already seen, strong or thorough-going theism implies that God is “already and *always*... acting” (Plantinga, 1997, p. 350, emphasis added), not “potentially and rarely” acting. Further, it is not particularly helpful in developing a theistic approach to psychology, because God would so rarely be involved in psychological events. In this system, God is neither

immanent nor important to daily life; God is only ever present as an exception to it. In these exceptions, natural laws are (temporarily) suspended or broken¹ and therefore, as with deism and dualism, theism and naturalism are never active in the same event and not genuinely integrated.

Incompatibility of theism and naturalism. As these attempts at compatibility show, theism and naturalism cannot be reconciled and still retain their basic assumptions. The failure of deism, dualism, and interventionism to be fully theistic has led some (Slife & Melling, 2006; Slife, Stevenson, & Wendt, 2010; Slife, Reber, & Lefevor, 2012) to label these attempts “weakly” or partially theistic. Slife, Stevenson, & Wendt (2010) give these labels definitional clarity:

understandings of God’s activity (or inactivity) allow us to distinguish between two forms of theism in psychology—weak and strong. The adjectives “strong” and “weak” do not mean “good” and “bad”; rather, they are philosophical or conceptual distinctions that indicate the extent or degree to which some assumptions or ideas are applied to the particular conceptual system. The adjectives “hard” and “soft” are frequently used in a similar manner, as in hard or soft naturalism (e.g., Griffin, 2000; Habermas, 2008). Deistic and dualistic psychotherapy approaches can be described as “weak” forms of theism, in that God’s active influence in the world is presumed to be relatively weak. Weakly theistic approaches limit God in some way in terms of time and space. These limitations are often a result of attempts to combine theism and naturalism. A strongly theistic approach, by contrast, would not automatically place limitations on God’s active influence in the world (p. 166).

¹ Additionally, holding that God occasionally “breaks” the natural laws that God (presumably) instituted at creation may be a self-defeater (see Wildman, 2004). It suggests to some that God occasionally works against God’s self – creating laws which do not prove sufficient to God’s intentions and that, therefore, there is some imperfection or impotency involved on the part of God.

Whereas strong or thorough-going theism assumes that God is “already and always intimately acting in nature” (Plantinga, 1997, p. 350), weak theisms make capitulations to naturalism that are incompatible with strong theism—for naturalism will allow for nothing (including and especially God) that occurs outside or interrupts the universal operation of natural law (Slife, 2005). For any event, time, or place, naturalism and theism cannot both be active and true. This general incompatibility illustrates the difficulty in attempting a theistic approach to psychology if psychology operates from within the worldview of naturalism.

If this incompatibility is true, then it seems fair to say that there cannot be a theistic approach to a naturalistic psychology. However, that does not mean that the project of a theistic approach to psychology itself is untenable—only a theistic approach to a narrowly *naturalistic* psychology is excluded. A theistic approach to psychology may still be valid, but it would have to apply to a more inclusive psychological science. Is it possible to conceptualize science without making it equivalent to naturalism? As shown in the next section, the answer is ‘yes.’

Naturalism not equivalent to science. As historians and philosophers of science have observed (above) the perceived division between science and religion actually stems from the conflict between naturalism and theism. This is problematic for a theistic approach to psychology insofar as the scientific perspective that undergirds the discipline is perceived as being equivalent to naturalism. Although this equivalence may be the dominant perspective in psychology today (Johnson, 1997; Leahey, 1991; Plantinga, 2011), such an equation is not without challenge (e.g., Hunter, 2007; Kuhn, 2000; Taylor, 2007). In fact, there are many who suggest that naturalism is just one of many plausible worldviews for a science of psychology and that it may not even be the best one (Bishop, 2007; Slife & Melling, 2008; Slife & Williams, 1995; Richardson, Fowers, & Guignon, 1999; Slife & Christensen, 2013).

When applied to psychological science, the worldview of naturalism makes assumptions about both ontology (what is real) and methodology (how reality should be investigated). Some theistic scientists recognize that a science that is ontologically naturalistic is in conflict with a theistic worldview (e.g., Bishop, 2009) but have suggested that a purely *methodological naturalism* might satisfy both theists and naturalists (for critiques, see Plantinga, 1997; Porpora, 2006; Larmer, 2012). In such a proposal, no denials of theistic realities (i.e., the existence of God) would be made, but methods would focus exclusively on non-theistic explanations. In other words, from the perspective of methodological naturalism, God could never be discovered to be involved in the world, because such activity would not, in principle, be observable by the methods of science, even if it existed. Critics of this approach, such as Porpora (2006) and Larmer (2012), hold that making such a commitment unnecessarily biases or skews research before investigation is even commenced and may ultimately be tantamount to unwittingly accepting a strong (ontological) naturalism. This is because methods themselves are undergirded by worldview assumptions (Slife & Williams, 1995; Slife & Melling, 2006, 2008, 2012). Therefore, the bracketing of ontology during investigation (methodology) is insufficient to address naturalism's challenge to theism—naturalism's pervasiveness in modern science must be examined at the level of worldview.

Naturalism as an assumptive worldview. “Naturalism is the system of assumptions or method worldview that psychologists acquired” somewhat without awareness (Slife, Reber, & Levefor, 2012, pp. 218-219; see also Plantinga, 2011). Indeed, “naturalism is itself a system of assumptions and biases—a worldview or an ideology” (Slife & Zhang, in press, p. 10), a worldview which is far from universally held (see O’Grady, 2008; Richards & Bergin, 2005). Although naturalism is just one particular assumptive prism for looking at the world, the

difficulty stems from the fact that “many seem to think naturalism or atheism is an inherent feature of the ‘scientific worldview’” (Plantinga, 2011, p. x),² rather than merely one possible way to do science. While it is true that “many psychologists are not aware that the discipline is even guided by a worldview... this lack of awareness is part of the problem” (Slife & Christensen, in press, p. 1). Still, this lack of awareness is why so many assume that science is somehow equivalent to naturalism. Although naturalism may be seen as “science’s central dogma,” a dogma is not the thing itself. Still, the equation of an assumption, such as naturalism, with an activity, such as science, is understandable when alternatives have not been widely known and thoroughly investigated (see Slife, Reber, & Richardson, 2005; Slife & Williams, 1995).

Thankfully, philosophers of science are helping scholars understand that “the overriding issue is that of *worldview*” (Griffin, 2000, p. xv). All human endeavors, including science, are undertaken from a particular set of assumptions or worldview (Slife & Williams, 1995). The problem is that naturalism is a worldview but is rarely identified as such; instead, it is just uncritically attached to scientific endeavors (Bishop, 2007). However, “To identify science with a particular epistemology and/or method worldview is to decide before investigation what philosophies work best. This position seems singularly unscientific” because it presumes an answer *before* the scientific inquiry, thus cutting off potential falsification and future discovery (Slife, Reber, & Lefevor, 2012, p. 221).

Conceptions of science. If science is not simply naturalism, as is often presumed, how should we understand science? Many answers can be given, of course, but a typical view is that “The hallmark of science is the investigation of ideas, with investigation and method allowable

² Plantinga includes in this number prominent thinkers such as Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, and Christopher Hitchens.

in a variety of forms” (Slife, Reber, & Levefore, 2012, p. 221). Robert C. Bishop notes that there are several ways to answer the question “What is science?” but, “What all of these conceptions have in common is that they are various expressions of the need to seek out explanations, patterns, or principles capable of bringing order, unity, and meaning to our experience of the world” (Bishop, 2007, p. 12). Plantinga (2011), likewise, notes several opinions on how to think about science but concludes that “science is a search for truth about ourselves and our world” (p. 266). He repeats, “science is at bottom an attempt to learn important truths about ourselves and our world. According to Albert Einstein, a proper scientist is a ‘real seeker after truth’” (p. 267).³ Note that this definition does not require naturalism or related assumptions. The point is that none of these explanations seem to hinge on a particularly naturalistic worldview; rather, they seem quite open to a variety of worldviews – the key to science is investigation and exploration about the world – an activity (incidentally) that just might be helped along by a multitude of views.

Alternative worldviews for science. Interestingly, a rising number of scholars suggest that naturalism may not be the best worldview for psychological science (Bishop, 2007; Collins, 1977; Faulconer & Williams, 1990; Gantt & Williams, 2002; Griffin, 2000; Kirschner & Martin, 2010; Martin, Sugarman, & Hickenbottom, 2010; Richards & Bergin, 2005; Richardson, Fowers, & Guignon, 1999; Slife & Christensen, 2013; Slife, Reber, & Richardson, 2005; Slife & Melling, 2012; Slife & Williams, 1995). Simply put, there are many who “believe that psychology was built upon and is currently guided by the wrong worldview” (Slife & Christensen, in press). In fact, one of psychology’s founding fathers, William James, suggested that overly dogmatic devotion to a worldview such as naturalism “would only stamp us as lacking in understanding of

³ A more colorful, but equally apt description of (pluralistic) science is “The scientific method is doing one’s damndest, no holds barred” (Holton, 1984, p. 1232).

our task” (1902, p. 30). James’s pluralism (1909) and radical empiricism (1907) illustrate an openness to a variety of worldviews for our psychology.

More recently, philosophers of science have argued that the biases of naturalism can be “detrimental [to] academic and clinical psychology” (Bishop, 2007, p. 8; see also Cushman, 1990; Hillman & Ventura, 1992; Fancher, 1995; Richardson, Fowers, & Guignon, 1999). The interpretive movement in psychology suggests a profitable alternative that is more in line with the study of meaning-makers (humans). One specific alternative worldview that stems from this tradition is the philosophy that endorses qualitative methods in the study of humans (see Slife & Melling, 2012; Wiggins, 2011). Other radically different conceptual frames include hermeneutics, radical empiricism, and phenomenology (Richardson, 2006a, 2006b, 2009; Gantt & Williams, 2002; Gantt & Melling, 2009; see also, Slife, Reber, & Richardson, 2005). While naturalism has been an advantageous assumption for many scientists, it is only one frame of reference or worldview within which science can be done. The advent of these various alternatives to naturalism as conceptual frames for science has opened a space for other alternatives such as theism to be used as a conceptual framework itself.

Theism as Conceptual Frame

Given the profusion of alternative worldviews for scientific psychology and the questioning of the suitability of an exclusive emphasis on naturalism for psychology (see above), several thinkers have proposed using theism, the other great Western worldview, as an additional conceptual lens for psychology (e.g. Slife & Zhang, in press; Richards & Bergin, 2005). In addition to being one of the most deeply and widely held historical worldviews, theism also has the advantage of contrasting fairly dramatically with naturalism (Slife, 2007), thus providing a true alternative to the assumptions and implications stemming from a naturalistic

framework. Indeed, the investigation of theistic topics in psychology of religion has often been the impetus to the exploration of alternatives to naturalistic methods (see Belzen & Hood, 2006; James, 1902/1997). These factors have led some to begin to develop theistic approaches to psychology.

Although the literature containing theistic approaches to psychology is still quite nascent, psychologists have begun to showcase a variety of strategies in the exploration of this worldview. Of course, much of this initial work has been exploratory, building a philosophical and theoretical foundation for the justification of theistic approaches (see Slife, Reber, & Lefavor, 2012; Slife, Stevenson, & Wendt, 2010). Still, some pioneers (O'Grady, 2012; Reber, Slife, & Downs, 2012; Richards & Bergin, 2004; Slife, 2012) have forged ahead and raised implications of a theistic approach for personality theory and therapeutic practice. Others have drawn upon the philosophic theistic work to establish methodological critiques of naturalistic research and propose examples of theistic research (Slife, Reber, & Lefavor, 2012; Reber, Slife, & Downs, 2012). While much of this literature on theistic approaches to psychology holds promise and demonstrates the viability of doing such work, important foundational issues about the activity of God and what that means for psychology still need to be addressed further.

It may be helpful to review the current state of the literature on theistic approaches to psychology. Such a review will illustrate the contributions of previous scholars to the project of a theistic approach to psychology as well as highlight the work that remains to be done. As will be shown, there are different ideas about what a theistic approach entails. Some theistically inclined psychologists appear to understand the activity of God and its application to the discipline in disparate, but unexplicated ways. The various avenues of scholarly work that have already been done on this topic may begin to illustrate the viability of a theistic approach to psychology. A

brief overview of the various current approaches is meant to orient the reader to the current state of the literature and suggest what the next steps in a theistic approach to psychology might be.

At present, the state of the literature is broad enough to be divided into a number of headings. The first section will review the variety of theistic approaches, showcasing a diversity of thought within the theistic tradition. As a detailed example of some of this diversity, the next section deals with theistic implications for psychological theorizing, specifically, conceptions of human nature. This is followed by a look at a pair of theistically informed research studies that have begun to stake out examples of empirical experiments that a theistic approach could generate. Next is a broad overview of theistic approaches in therapy and practice, along with some critical review of such. Finally, this discussion will end with a summary of general issues facing theistic approaches to psychology and their future.

Variety of theistic approaches. In surveying the current literature endeavoring to use theistic approaches for psychology, the diversity of the field is striking (see, e.g., Richards & Bergin, 2003; Nelson & Slife, 2006; Teo, 2009). For example, some focus their theistic lens almost exclusively on a distinct human nature (Jones, 2006; Beck & Demarest, 2005) and others discuss theistically inspired values (e.g. Miller & Delaney, 2005; Wacome, 2003; Roberts, 1992). However, some (Slife, Stevenson, & Wendt, 2010; Slife & Melling, 2006) have suggested that some of these various approaches are not strongly theistic.

A trio of special journal issues illustrate some of this diversity (Nelson & Slife, 2006; Teo, 2009; O'Grady & York, 2012). Siang-Yang Tan (2006) for example, highlights a “need to depend on the Holy Spirit” to appropriate psychospiritual truths (p. 264). Frank Richardson suggests a focus on hermeneutic meanings to bring theistic perspectives into dialogue with psychology (Richardson, 2006a, 2006b, 2009). Paul Stenner (2009) proposes a Whiteheadian

perspective on theism and naturalism that would expand psychology's purview of what is considered a legitimate object of study (see also Griffin, 2000). Other theists (Cooper & Browning, 2006; Jones, 2006; Willard, 2006; Bishop, 2009; Vande Kemp, 2009) contribute their own varied perspective on the issues. Even among those who acknowledge that the activity of God is the foundational assumption for theism, there is rarely a focused discussion on what that activity specifically entails.

Theistic approaches in personality theory. As mentioned above, in addition to the working out of basic philosophical issues arising from theistic approaches to psychology, some of the initial forays into this framework have centered on theories of human nature. Jones (2006), for example, suggests a focus on "an understanding of humanity as theists believe God made us" (Jones, 2006, p. 254). While acknowledging the activity of God, Jones (2006) draws particular attention to implications of theistically created humans:

Made in the image of God, humans must not be seen as reducible to material existence, must in some way be seen as capable of meaningful agency, and must be seen as creative and as actively meaning-making such that the search for [naturalistic] reductionistic laws to explain human behavior will always be incomplete. (254)

Others (see, e.g., Evans, 1984; Miller, 2005) likewise have zeroed in on the implications for theism in personality theory. While much of this work is non-naturalistic, with a focus on a "model of human nature that is more agentic than deterministic, more moral than amoral, and more holistic than reductive" (Slife & Melling, 2006, p. 281; see also Slife & Ellertson, 2004; VanderStoep, 2003) it is still often "thin" with regard to the theistic assumption of a currently active God (see Slife & Melling, 2006). As Slife (2012) has pointed out, even personality theories that embrace non-naturalism (e.g. humanistic or social constructivist perspectives) can

be hostile to, or at least unsupportive of, theistic perspectives. Certainly, there is still much work to be done to fully explore the implications of a theistic worldview for psychological theories of human nature.

Theistic approaches in research. Drawing on some of the philosophical groundwork that has been laid establishing the basics of a theistic approach to psychology, a few psychologists have made initial inroads in showing the implications for psychological research (see Slife & Reber, 2009; Slife, Reber, & Lefevor, 2012; Reber, Slife, & Downs, 2012; Melling, 2009; see also Smith, Bartz & Richards, 2007; O’Grady & Richards, 2008). Because all explanatory “theories are ‘underdetermined’ by the empirical evidence” (Griffin, 2000, p. 109), several theists have simply taken research data originally presented in a naturalistic context and reframed it from a theistic perspective (Slife & Zhang, in press). For example, Slife and Reber (2009) suggest that “theistic events and processes” (p. 74) might be involved in the development of research subjects’ images of God—in contrast to the singularly naturalistic explanations and interpretations given in the original study’s write up (see Cassibba, et al., 2008). Similarly, Melling (2009) suggests a theistic explanation may give a more satisfactory interpretation of many of the pro-social behavior (altruism) research results.

In addition to reframing research findings from a theistic framework, some psychologists have begun to draw on theism to help frame new research methods and studies (see Slife & Zhang, in press). Although much of this work is still in preliminary stages, several legitimate avenues of investigation are already underway (Slife, Reber, & Lefevor, 2012). For example, Reber, Slife, & Downs (2012) report on two empirical investigations undertaken with a theistic framework. In the first, they investigated participants’ images of God with a theistic measure (the God Attachment Measure or GAM). They found that “experiences with God are strongly

associated with theists' attachment to God" in a way that was not derivative of the naturalist's explanation, parental attachment (Reber, Slife, & Downs, 2012, p. 198). In a second study, Reber, Slife, & Downs, (2012) used a new version of the IAT (Implicit Association Test) to track changes in theistic attitudes throughout participants' education and found evidence supporting their theistic hypotheses. Although initial and exploratory, these studies and others like them are giving credence to the idea that theistic research can contribute "new knowledge and methods" (Slife & Zhang, in press, p. 6) to psychology.

Theistic approaches in practice. Perhaps because of practices such as pastoral counseling, there has been a more substantial tradition of theistic perspectives being drawn upon in therapeutic practice. Eck (2002), for example, discusses utilizing treatments including meditation, scripture study, and prayer while urging caution that these "should not be ripped from [their] spiritual heritage" (Eck, 2002, p. 317). Richards and Bergin (2004) demonstrate a plurality of religious and theistic perspectives for counseling and therapy in their casebook. O'Grady (2012), Johnson and Watson (2012), and others (see, e.g., York, 2009; Slife, Stevenson, & Wendt, 2010) likewise provide insights on clinical interventions and therapeutic implications stemming from theistic perspectives.

In addition to reviewing a strongly theistic therapeutic model, Slife et al. (2010) provide a caution in understanding theistic approaches to psychological therapy and practice. As they note, strong theistic perspectives (i.e., those perspectives in which God is "always and already" acting in psychology) have "rarely penetrate[d] very deeply into the theories and practices that are labeled theistic" (Slife et al. 2010, p. 163). Instead, many approaches using the label "theistic" are only weakly so – they perhaps make use of some of the flawed approaches to integration listed above (i.e., dualism, deism, interventionism). Slife et al. (2010) have categorized these

weakly theistic approaches to psychotherapy under three heads: “compartmentalized, peripheral, and inconsistent” (Slife et al., 2010, p. 169). The point is not to suggest any widespread failure of theistic approaches; rather the promulgation of weakly theistic accounts merely suggests the need for cautious careful consideration in applications and calls for clarity in our conceptions of divine activity.

Overview and summary of current theistic approaches. In conclusion, although still nascent, the varieties of theistic approaches to psychology have provided a provisional case that using theism as a conceptual frame is a legitimate alternative or supplement to naturalistic approaches. While much of this work is still exploratory, important issues (e.g. strong v weak theism) are being clarified (Slife, Reber, & Lefevor, 2010; Slife & Zhang, in press). Concrete research projects are underway (see Reber, Slife, & Downs, 2012; O’Grady, 2012) and implications for theory (Slife, 2012) and practice (Richards & Bergin, 2004, 2005) have been undertaken. Among theistic psychologists conceptualizations are occasionally unclear (see Nelson & Slife, 2006). Indeed, many of the participants in dialogues on theistic approaches to psychology appear to be talking “past” one another—perhaps because they are using different conceptions of divine activity (see Teo, 2009; Nelson & Slife, 2006; Slife, 2011; Tjeltveit, 2011). Furthermore, critics continue to raise objections (see, e.g. Helminiak, 2006; Alcock, 2009; Hibberd, 2009), unwilling to grant the possibility of God’s action in the world as a legitimate construct. One task yet to be addressed in these ongoing conversations is a detailed description of possible conceptions of divine activity that could justifiably be utilized within psychology. It may help advance these dialogues to articulate a specific understanding of these actions and how they might apply to psychological theory, research, and practice.

Conceptions of Divine Action

While the initial theistic literature reviewed above typically takes the activity of God seriously, it does not sufficiently or adequately delve into the specifics of *how* God could be acting in the various aspects of psychological research and practice. Of course, as much of that literature has been initial and exploratory, sketching out the parameters and possibilities of a theistic psychology, it is understandable that it has not yet addressed the specific questions of the *ways* of God's activity. However, if the project of a theistic approach to psychology is to move forward in a serious and robust way, a better sense of what the activity of God actually is, and what it might mean for psychological phenomena will need to be addressed. A discussion of these activities will allow a theistic approach to psychology to tackle the serious issues of theory, research, and practice. These grounding conceptions may enable psychologists interested in theistic approaches to conceptualize potential constructs, hypotheses, study designs, and explanations for their work and to be better informed with more clarity in conversations about the role of theistic approaches to psychology.

Need for and Significance of a Categorization Scheme or Taxonomy

Guide for thorough-going theists. Although thorough-going theists would want to include the activity of God in their psychological work, there is little extant literature on *how* exactly God could be active in the social sciences or on how psychologists could productively speak of divine action. A taxonomy of the various approaches to the activity of God (drawn from a variety of disciplines) would help theistic psychologists draw clear distinctions from naturalistic perspectives by illustrating the variety of possible theistic approaches to the discipline and providing concrete examples of what a theistic psychology might entail. In this way, such a project would be heuristically beneficial in that it may spur new theistic

conceptualizations of psychological theories, investigations, and practices. It may lead, for example, to new hypotheses of ways God might be active in psychology that are now overlooked. Additionally, a study of the conceptualizations of various activities of God could produce a linguistic and informational resource for those with theistic research or practice agendas that they could draw on for clarity and connection of their particular projects within the wider framework of theistic approaches.

Furthermore, as we have seen, individual theists may often have significantly differing conceptions of what a God's activity would entail. As many such conceptions may operate at an implicit assumptive level, an explicit discussion and review of various approaches may help theists navigate the landscape of their approaches to psychology and better understand others who may be operating from different perspectives. Thus a categorization and review of possible theistic concepts may facilitate dialogue among those on various sides of the theism debate and help scholars not "talk past" one another.

Content to answer critics. A collection of the possible conceptions of the activity of God in psychology would also help answer critics of theistic approaches who contend that "Implicating God and relationship with God in psychology guarantees senseless and ultimately contentless discussion" (Helminiak, 2006, p. 204) by demonstrating multiple viable types of content that include God in psychology. It may be that a significant source of the difficulties some have with a theistic approach (e.g., Hibberd, 2009, 2012) would be mitigated if God's activity were presented and applied to psychology in an understandable and logically defensible manner. Furthermore, by articulating specifics of how God could be active in psychological realms, much may be done to show that theistic conceptions are as functionally valid as naturalistic ideas.

Introduction to Specific Conceptions of Divine Action – Disparate Diversity

While a collection of the various approaches to divine action would be beneficial to psychologists interested in discussing a theistic approach, there is not currently an extant collection of such approaches. That is not to say, however, that there are not currently detailed discussions of God’s activities—indeed, across the centuries—but these activities have rarely, if ever, been gathered together or categorized, nor have their implications for psychology been explored. Furthermore, these conceptions are typically explored in isolation with little comparison between conceptions or evaluations of their relative merits. Consequently, it may be helpful to preview a sampling of these various conceptions to understand the depth and diversity of perspectives on divine action. Although the majority of this academic work on divine action in the Western intellectual tradition is influenced by the specifically Judeo-Christian perspective (Nelson, 2009), the implications of such observations apply generally to theistic approaches.

As one example, a multiplicity of scientists have suggested that God primarily acts in the world through determining the outcome of (seemingly) indeterminate quanta (Russell, Clayton, Wegter-McNelly, & Polkinghorne, 2001). Pollard (1958), for example, feels that theists should answer the question “Does God throw dice?” with “a very positive affirmative” (p. 97). He feels that only by equating “the will of God acting” with laboratory chance can a theistic world “be at the same time a world capable of scientific description in terms of natural law and natural causality” (p. 94-95). As Saunders (2002) observes, a major desire behind much of these proposals seems to be the integration of theistic activity in a way that does not threaten the presupposition of natural laws (naturalism) or, at the very least, those making such proposals do not seem to strongly divorce naturalism from science. A similar issue arises in other investigations of God’s activity by certain scientists who have proposed that God works through

chaos (Polkinghorne, 2012), complexity (Peacocke, 2004), or emergence (Clayton, 2012). Still, when distinguished from naturalistic commitments, these explorations on the activity of God may provide a rich source of material for psychologists.

In contrast, others discussing divine action point to a hermeneutic (meaning-filled) world with God active in imbuing this sort of world with meanings such as truth, beauty, morality, and love (see Griffin, 2000; Marion, 2000, 2002; Barth, 1963; Slife & Christensen, 2013). Such propositions, of course, carry with them very different worldviews than the thoughts on divine action coming from those immersed in the field of physics, and, therefore, may make different contributions to psychological science (see Slife & Christensen, 2013). However, these are not the only hypothesized actions of God.

Theologians, while sometimes referring to philosophy or physical science, more often draw on historical (and specifically eschatological) accounts to illustrate how God acts in the world (Wright & Fuller, 1957; Wright, 1952; Barth, 1963). To many of these thinkers the mechanism whereby God acts takes a backseat to both the fact that God acts and the intentionality behind these actions—specifically in the consequences for humankind—redemption and forgiveness particularly (Wright & Fuller, 1957; Griffin, 1997; Thomas, 1983a).

Still others point to God's increasing human capacity (James, 1902), rupturing human assumptions (Jung, 1961), manifesting transcendent experiences (and perhaps dreams) (Vande Kemp, 2009), operating through higher (spatial) dimensions (Smedes, 2004; Burton & Webster, 1980), sustaining human existence and agency (Polkinghorne, 1990; Plantinga, 2011; Peacocke, 2004), and calling humans to their "ideal aims" (Griffin, 2000), among others (Marion, 2007; Lewis, 1947, 1979). It should be apparent that the scholarly literature on the activity of God spans multiple disciplines and includes diverse conceptions. Still, these various approaches are

rarely (if ever) brought together in comparison or evaluation. Further, it is extremely uncommon to find a discussion of the implications of these conceptions for the social sciences.

Overview - Next Steps

The literature on divine action suffers from a significant lack of organization, evaluation, and application. Theistic approaches to psychology would be greatly benefited by a coherent categorized schema of different activities of God and explanations of how those might be applied to psychological science. In fact, a robust theistic approach to psychology would almost seem to require, in principle, a solid understanding of the conceptions of God's activity and their various implications for the discipline.

Chapter 2 synthesizes the disparate approaches to divine action into a tentative conceptualization of the activities of God in the world. This organizational schema distinguishes specific strongly theistic positions which enable a running evaluation of promising candidates for use in a theistic approach to psychology. Chapter 3 then illustrates the practical feasibility of these theistic concepts through an in-depth discussion of the application of select examples to psychological theory, research (in both the qualitative and quantitative tradition), and practice. Finally, Chapter 4 summarizes the main points of this dissertation and situates it within the wider literature.

Chapter 2: Conceptual Categories of the Activity of God

The previous chapter reviewed the movement to add a theistic approach to psychology to the pluralism of perspectives that currently exist in that discipline. This additional approach would entail novel contributions to theory, research, and practice. Chapter 1 detailed how efforts to incorporate theistic concepts into psychology have met opposition from critics who feel that God and Godly concepts cannot, in principle, be utilized in scientific enterprises. At the root of this critique was a dogmatic naturalism that infused scientific psychology. So pervasive was this philosophy that many who attempted to integrate theistic concepts into their scientific work ultimately failed, compromising instead on some sort of “weak theism” that made capitulations to naturalism by ultimately denying the foundational assumption of strong theism – that of God currently acting in the world.

In this sense, weak theisms are positions that affirm some theistic propositions (e.g., that God exists) but that limit or restrain God’s activity in the world (see Slife & Melling, 2006; Slife, Stevenson, & Wendt, 2010). As suggested in the previous chapter, because weak theisms share important assumptions with the worldview of naturalism (i.e., that God is functionally inactive or unnecessary for a full accounting of worldly phenomenon) those who adopt such perspectives can do “science as usual”—they have no need to adopt a theistic approach to psychology.⁴

Strong theistic positions, on the other hand, were shown in the previous chapter to be those positions that began with a fully theistic worldview, holding God as a necessary aspect for a full explanation or understanding of the world, including an understanding of the natural psychological events of that world. Therefore, as several have noted (see Griffin, 2000; Plantinga, 2011), those holding strongly theistic positions cannot be content with psychological

⁴ However, as Slife and Melling (2006) help distinguish, this is not to say those promoting weak theisms “are weak theists in their religious or theological positions, but we do want to acknowledge the temptation to compartmentalize issues, such as God’s current activity, for the sake of being a psychologist and a [theist]” (p. 282)

explanations rooted in the worldview of naturalism, for naturalism in its strong sense disallows any activity or existence of God. The movement to develop a theistic approach to psychology seeks to address this discrepancy between strongly theistic positions and current psychological explanations.

Further, the first chapter reviewed the current nascent state of the literature compromising theistic approaches to psychology. While of necessity, much of this work was preliminary—sketching out theoretical and philosophical space for a new approach—there were also concrete endeavors to develop research programs and apply theistic frameworks to therapeutic practice. Still, as noted, theistic scholars often seemed to have differing and often unarticulated conceptions of God’s activity (including weak theisms). This diversity of conceptions of God’s activity—the central premise for theism—evidences the need for a more comprehensive comparative analysis that could inform theistically inclined psychologists and serve as a response to critics who cannot see any clear conceptual content in theistic psychological approaches. Yet the wider literature on the activity of God is even more diverse and not currently organized in a manner that would be helpful for psychologists interested in developing a theistic approach to psychology to effectively draw upon it. This chapter addresses these issues by reviewing the literature on divine action and organizing it into a coherent conceptualization. After categories of divine action are established, defined, and reviewed here, Chapter 3 explores in-depth illustrations of how these concepts could be concretely applied to psychological theory, research, and practice. In that chapter, specific attention is given to the potential of theistic perspectives to make unique contributions. The final chapter then reviews the overall position of this work within the larger literature.

Toward a Comprehensive Schema

Despite a general resistance to the possibility of divine action among modern academic disciplines, a few scholars have continued to explore the issue of divine action in an intellectually rigorous manner (e.g., Collins, 2001; Plantinga, 2011). Their efforts represent a robust response to critics who resist the thought of theism in academic, scholarly, or scientific discourse (see, e.g., Helminiak, 2006, 2010; Hibberd, 2009, 2012). However, these thinkers also often demonstrate disagreement amongst themselves (see Tracy, 1994; Thomas, 1983b; Smedes, 2004; Saunders, 2002). Some of these diverse understandings among the theistic conceptualizers are understandable as the scholars hail from many disciplines—some as divergent as particle physics and phenomenology (e.g., Saunders, 2002 and Marion, 1997, respectively). But direct disagreements among theists of different opinions can also lead to fruitful dialogue as evidenced in a number of edited volumes (see Tracy, 1994; Thomas, 1983b; and Hebblethwaite & Henderson, 1990). Still, some of these scholars are working in disciplines so disparate as to seemingly disallow awareness of additional arguments about the activity of God, precluding possibly productive interaction. Rarely, if ever, have all the distinct perspectives been brought together into a conceptual review or comparative taxonomy.

This section begins at the diversity of thinking on divine action and notes the lack of comparative analysis and connection across conceptions. Exceptions are reviewed in more detail. Ultimately, the content of the current literature is shown to be somewhat insufficient for the project at hand—for there is not a currently articulated conceptualization or taxonomy of the activity of God that is sufficiently robust and inclusive to fully inform a theistic approach to psychology. To address this lack, this section concludes with the sketch of a comprehensive schema of the activity of God.

Organizational Schemas

When collections of conceptions of God's activity are compiled, they are often drawn from a limited number of traditions. Saunders (2002) and Smedes (2004) both touch on theological and philosophical insights, but the thrust of each of their works concentrates on contributions from physics. In his 1994 edited volume Tracy notes, "Clearly the time is right for an expanded conversation between philosophers and theologians" and proceeds to provide a platform for "a number of prominent contributors in these fields" to respond to one another on the topic of God's activity in the world (p. 4). Tracy concludes that more rigorous scholarly work will be needed at the intersection of these two fields. The Divine Action Project, a 20+ year collaborative effort to bring together the best thinking on divine action and science⁵, still glossed over certain approaches, such as the process view of Alfred North Whitehead, because it "appears unrelated to the natural sciences" (Wildman, 2004, p. 45).

Some have tried more explicitly to catalog and classify the varieties of conceptions of divine action, but have had varying degrees of success. C. John Collins (2001), for instance, provides a three-tiered taxonomy in which four major approaches to God's action in the world ("Atheism," "Deistic Naturalism," "Traditional Theism," and "Limited Theism," p. 19-22) are clustered and sub-divided into specific models (e.g., "Theistic naturalism," "Providentialism," "Supernaturalism," "Occasionalism," p. 20-22). While this structure is intriguing, it has some inherent limitations; because of theological commitments,⁶ Collins ignores all but three of his nine models (including leaving out the contributions of Polkinghorne and process thought, both of which he classifies as "Limited Theism" (Collins, 2001, p. 22-23).

⁵ What has become known as the Divine Action Project consists of an interdisciplinary series of conferences and edited volumes begun in the late 1980's and sponsored jointly by the Vatican Observatory and the Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences (see Russell, 2001).

⁶ Collins focuses almost exclusively on Christianity and equating "Traditional Theism" with "Christian Theism."

Others have suggested additional possible organizational frameworks for discussing the activity of God, but have not developed these suggestions into complete and coherent treatments on the topic. Herb Gruning (2000) briefly proposed a series of three two-dimensional matrices that could distinguish the majority of major categories or positions on activity of God. TeSelle (1990) helpfully summarized the historical theological tradition and organized it into three main categories: constitutive divine action, creaturely interaction (itself subdivided into four cases), and immediate relationship with God. While his categories do not directly reference the work of other scholars working on divine action, they still provide insightful nuances (see below). Psychologist James Nelson (2009) does reference the work of other scholars in his piece on science and religion, helpfully listing several categories of divine action including process philosophy, deism, supernaturalism, dualism, and various strategies from physics (p. 69-70) but does not develop them further. George Ellis (2009) likewise provides a helpful extensive list, but only develops a few of the items on it.

While helpful in their own way, these sources all fail to completely establish a conceptual taxonomy of divine action that could inform psychologists interested in theistic approaches. Some lack a particular breadth or range of coverage of extant possibilities. Often particularly lacking are insights that would be especially relevant to the experience of human subjects (and therefore psychology). Others lack a depth in their treatment, identifying and labeling concepts, but not developing or analyzing them. Few schemas extensively address worldview issues. In all the literature on divine action, it is rare to find an organizational schema adequate to the task at hand. However, Thomas (1983a, 1983b) is a notable exception; his work *God's Activity in the World: The Contemporary Problem* gets much closer to providing a comprehensive schema that could be of benefit in informing a theistic approach to psychology.

A Successful Schema

Owen Thomas (1983b) successfully provided a categorizational schema for organizing scholarly conceptions regarding God's activity in the world. His 1983 edited volume hosted a wide array of diverse modern perspectives from leading authorities which he then reviewed, analyzed, and explored in context of broader discussions of the activity of God. His review settled on "five distinct positions" which he labeled: "1. Personal Action... 2. Primary Cause... 3. Process... 4. Uniform Action [and] 5. Two Perspectives and Languages" (Thomas, 1983b, p. 231-232). For Thomas, some of these categories seem more legitimate than others for understanding divine action (e.g., he sees the last approach as "avoid[ing] the fundamental question at hand" (Thomas, 1983b, p. 233)). Still, he includes all proposed candidates into his conceptualization ensuring maximal coverage of the field of possible perspectives.

Thomas's five categories are definitionally broad and cover a lot of conceptual space. In brief they are as follows:

1. Personal Action: "God's intervention in the world through the interruption of the finite causal nexus" (Thomas, 1983b, p. 232). Or in other words, just as humans seem to be free agents occasionally interrupting efficient causal chains (when physical events are determined by their prior state), so too God may occasionally intervene in the natural order.

2. Primary Cause: "the traditional approach to God's activity in the world in which God as primary cause acts in and through all secondary causes" (Thomas, 1983b, p. 232). That is to say, God gets the causal processes started and then they proceed (in a determined manner) toward his ends. Thomas suggests that this category is broad and encompasses several variations (described below).

3. Process: By this Thomas refers to process theologians who suggest that “God acts in all events by influence or persuasion... God offers an initial aim to each emerging event, [an offer] which may be accepted in varying degrees” (Thomas, 1983b, p. 232).

4. Uniform Action: “This approach is similar to some versions of the primary cause view which emphasize the divine creation, preservation, and empowering of all finite causes” but is distinguished because “particular divine activity” is subjective; what is called God’s activity only *seems* or “appears” as such due to “human response” (Thomas, 1983b, p. 232). God’s action is “uniform and universal [but] it is not clear whether God is understood to act in natural processes” (Thomas, 1983b, p. 232).

5. Two Perspectives and Languages: “In this view [the scientific account and] God’s providential activity are understood to be two different ways of looking at the natural historical process” (Thomas, 1983b, p. 232). In this category “there is no relation, no interaction between the two perspectives. They are two unrelated ‘language games’” (Thomas, 1983b, p. 233).

Thomas expounds on his categories, their relationship to one another, and their limitations. He holds that “as theories or implicit theories [the five approaches] are mutually exclusive,” because, “for example, the first three views affirm particular divine action [while the] uniform action position denies it” (Thomas, 1983b, p. 234). Additionally, his “primary cause position involve[s] determinative divine action [while] the process view asserts influential or persuasive action” (Thomas, 1983b, p. 234). Still, Thomas is careful to note “at least some of the points being affirmed in the various [approaches] may be complementary” (1983b, p. 234).

While not formalizing it as additional category, Thomas invokes D. M. Baillie to expand his review to a discussion of the “paradox of grace” – a supplemental “action of God” (Thomas,

1983b, p. 239). After a brief discussion of grace Thomas concludes that, as an approach, the concept of grace is “similar to the process view” because it is compatible with human agency, but that ultimately, grace “is closest to the primary cause view” (Thomas, 1983b, p. 239). In this regard Thomas’s category of “Primary Cause” would include (among others) the original physical creation and instigation of the material world as well as the spiritual and emotional strength providentially bestowed on mortal creatures.

In additional works, Thomas (1983a, 1990, 2002) offers some supplementary thoughts on his categories of divine action. In a 1990 article update Thomas reviews additional thought on divine agency since his earlier review. While most of the new material in this article merely adds nuance to the categories originally proposed in 1983, he also elaborates on an approach suggested by thoughts from Dulles, Polanyi, and Rahner in which “God’s action in grace can be understood [as] the giving of divine reality itself by means of... formal causality... ‘God... makes himself [constitutive] of man’” (Thomas, 1990, p. 45). In his 1983 edition of *Introduction to Theology* he adds a distinction of God acting “without the modification of the laws of nature” but rather through “providential guidance of [chance] event[s]” – events which scientists such as Pollard (1958) see as indeterminate, “on the analogy of probability theory in quantum mechanics” (Thomas, 1983a, 115). Despite distinctions and elaborations such as these, Thomas does not add to or modify his conceptual categories at this point. However, this may be because his category of “Primary Cause” already functions as a sort of supra-category, encompassing a multiplicity of sub-perspectives (such as creation, preservation, fundamental cause, and grace) (E. Wondra, personal communication, April 3, 2013). In the 2002 edition of *Introduction to Theology* written with a co-author, Thomas and Wondra do label God working through quantum indeterminacy or chaotic dynamic systems as a sixth category, “the scientific-gap view” (p. 129).

Adapting Thomas – Coming to a Comprehensive Conceptualization

For the current purpose – articulating a taxonomy or conceptualization of the activity of God for use in a theistic approach for psychology – Thomas’s categories might be a profitable foundation. However, to provide a comprehensive review of concepts of divine action, it is necessary to modify Thomas’s schema to be sure to include the contributions of additional scholarly work (both his and others) published since his initial proposal. This modification also involves adapting and expanding Thomas’s labels to make contact with current terminology used by those advocating theistic perspectives in psychology, clarify the distinctions among the category labels, and ensure that additional perspectives may be easily incorporated into an expanded and extended conceptual framework. A comparison of Thomas’s original labels (1983a, 1983b, 2002) and the parallel more expansive terms from the current classification scheme are displayed in Table 1 (below).

Table 1

Comparison of Thomas and Current Categories

Thomas’s Original Category Labels	Labels for Comprehensive Conceptualization
Personal Action	Interventionism
Two Perspectives/Languages	Dualism
Uniform Action	Deism
Scientific-Gap View	Physical Acts
Primary Cause (Grace aspect)	Grace
Process	Invitation

At this point, it should be noted that any proposed conceptualization is, of necessity, tentative and preliminary – a snapshot of one possible organizational scheme. New developments in theology, philosophy, and science writ large will surely mean additions and modifications to this schema. Particularly, as the concepts are applied to psychology, there may be practical issues

that arise that suggest alternative conceptions. Furthermore, as noted above, there are several legitimate possibilities for organizing conceptual schema of God's activity in the world.

Despite its provisional nature, this proposed comprehensive conceptualization is neither arbitrary nor unfounded. It is based first and foremost on an analysis of themes extant in the current literature on divine action. This taxonomy and the conceptions contained therein reflect a broad range of disciplinary sources, ensuring an extensive scope for this project. The primary structure of the taxonomy (six major categories) is adapted and expanded from Thomas, one of the foremost scholars on divine action, and the revised and modified labels are informed by classifications used by other leaders in the field (e.g., Nelson, 2009; Wildman, 2004; Slife, 2005). Additionally, this organization allows distinctions to be drawn between weak and strong concepts of theistic activity.

A brief introduction to this revised taxonomy is given here. There are six categories, each incorporating a number of concepts of divine action. Table 2 (below) presents a schematic overview of all the various concepts and their corresponding categories, grouped by worldview of divine action (i.e., weak theism or strong theism). Each concept is expanded upon extensively later in its own section, but a brief overview might be helpful at this point. The first three categories, *Interventionism*, *Dualism*, and *Deism* are grouped under the heading Weak Theisms and have already been touched on in the previous chapter, but are taken up again in this chapter with additional nuance as categories of divine action with special focus on interruptions of natural law, subjective action, and creating (both initial and continuing) respectively. The remaining three categories refer to Strong Theisms. The first of these (and fourth overall), *Physical Acts*, comprises all activity in which God affects matter or physical forces. This includes quantum events, theories of chaos and complexity, and trans-dimensional force. The

next major conception is *Grace*. Grace is defined here as the providential acts of God in which God bestows on a person an unconditional gift. Often, these acts of grace have direct connection to psychological concepts. This includes concepts such as God granting life, emotional strength, rupturing intuitions, transforming hearts, manifesting visions, and so forth. The final conceptual category is *Invitation*. Invitations are God’s calls to persons persuading them to a particular telos or goal (future-oriented). These actions constitutively invite an agentic response. Invitation concepts include moral calls, invitations to meanings, vocations, and The Other.

Table 2

Concepts within Categories of Divine Action

Weak Theisms			Strong Theisms		
Interventionism	Dualism	Deism	Physical Acts	Grace	Invitation
Violations	Subjective	Creates Sustains Concurs Governs	Quantum Probabilities Chaos & Complexity Hyperdimensionality	Gives Life Grants Strength Transformations Ruptures Manifestations	Moral Call Meaning Vocation The Other

The remainder of this chapter explores the details of this revised conceptualization. First, the familiar weakly theistic (from Chapter 1) categories are again taken up as analogs for major modern conceptions for God’s activity. As described in Chapter 1, these are considered weak theisms because they limit God’s activity in the current world in some way, such as relegating God’s power to creation only (deism), a merely subjective realm (dualism), or periodic actions (interventionism). As Slife, Stevenson, and Wendt (2010) note, “These limitations are often a result of attempts to combine theism and naturalism” (p. 166), meaning that when or where God is not active—post creation, in the natural world, and between divine actions—the worldview of naturalism is the best description of the world, not the worldview of theism. These authors (Slife, Stevenson, and Wendt, 2010) further suggest that because these types of theisms assume that

God’s active influence in the world is relatively weak, they are not sufficiently different from naturalism to justify a new approach to psychology. As Slife and Melling (2006) express, “weak theism[s] ha[ve] given even religious psychologists license to ignore the possibility of God’s role in psychological events” (p. 282). They go on to mention how current psychological methods, theories, and practices built upon naturalistic foundations could be validly used with weak theism because weak theisms do not make the essential distinction of a thorough-going (strong) theism – “that God *does* currently matter in the events and topics of psychology” and world (p. 283; see also Plantinga, 1997; Slife, Stevenson, and Wendt, 2010).⁷

Weak theistic approaches are a contribution to the current comprehensive schema as they help make important distinctions between various conceptions of divine action that may be of interest to many. In this chapter, some parallels are also drawn between the weak theisms and Thomas’s categories—between *interventionism* and *personal action*; between *dualism* and *two languages and perspectives*; and between *deism* and *uniform action*. Examples of scholars who propose conceptions in each of these categories are also given throughout.

The remaining three strongly theistic categories (*Physical Cause*, *Grace*, and *Invitation*) are then each given their own major section. These conceptions are understood as strongly theistic because they each assume that God is currently active in the world without externally imposed limits (e.g., on time, place, or type of activity, see Slife, Stevenson, & Wendt, 2010; Slife & Melling, 2006) After a definitional review and context are given, these category sections are then broken into subsections, each offering an in-depth illustration of a particular theistic conception (e.g., *quantum probability*, *ruptures*, *moral calls*, etc.) within that category. As these concepts are drawn from strongly theistic perspectives, they are therefore built on a different

⁷ This is not, of course, to say that those arguing for these viewpoints are “weak” in their theistic belief or in some way non-theistic; it is only to say that (as defined for the present purposes) their particular brand of theism is not sufficiently different from naturalistic assumptions about the current world.

worldview than concepts drawn from naturalism (see Plantinga, 2011) and thus cannot be circumscribed by the theories, methods, and practices of a purely naturalistic science and psychology (see Slife & Melling, 2006, 2008, 2012; O’Grady, 2012). For example, *ruptures* may be similar to the concept of *insight* which is studied by a naturalistic approach to psychology (see Chapter 3), but this latter concept cannot, in principle, accept the possibility of God as its source and thus current concepts led psychologists to understand, explain, and develop theories and tests on similar phenomenon that (from the perspective of a strong theism) are partial and skewed at best (see Slife & Melling, 2006, 2008, 2012). Hence, it is in the clear conception of (strongly) theistic phenomena that the need for a theistic approach to psychology is most manifest. The concepts of this approach could make significant contributions as a source of new ideas and theories for psychology. Therefore, in addition to examples of scholarly work on these conceptions, the following sections also touch on issues of evaluation of each concept’s utility for psychology, including a preview of possible application to the discipline.

Weakly Theistic Concepts

Because of their similarities, this first major section will consider the first three of the six major categories of God’s action—the weak theisms—together. It may seem oxymoronic to label the first three categories of God’s action in the world “weakly theistic.” As the previous chapter repeatedly emphasized, theism, by definition, assumes that God is “already and always intimately acting in nature” (Plantinga, 1997, p. 350). Weak theisms, by contrast, make exceptions to this provision, limiting God’s action in the world. If these conceptions do not make a strong enough presumption about God’s activity to justify a theistic approach to psychology why include three types of weak theisms in a conceptualization of the activity of God in the world at all?

While this is a valid question, there are at least three reasons why such conceptions might be profitably included here: 1) Completeness. In this comprehensive conceptualization, there is benefit in maximizing the coverage of concepts to ensure that all possible aspects of God's action in the world are available and understood.⁸ 2) Distinction. Notwithstanding previous work distinguishing strong and weak theism (e.g., Slife & Melling, 2006), there are still many who refer to weakly theistic concepts in their discussions on the activity of God. This may be a desired approach for some individuals. Inclusion in this taxonomic scheme provides another opportunity to make distinctions between conceptions of God's activities that are limited and those that affirm "the concrete possibility of the practical or functional existence of God" (Slife & Melling, 2006, p. 282). 3) Clarity. There are important clarifications that must be made between very similar concepts, such as creating, sustaining, and preserving. God's action, particularly within the Deism/Universal Action category, would benefit from careful nuancing.

In this section the three major categories of weak theism are paired with parallel analogs from Thomas's conceptual categories. Examples of modern scholars who embody each perspective are provided and their relative relevance for a theistic approach to psychology discussed. The plan for this section is to start from the much maligned conception of interventionism (see Thomas, 1997; Wildman, 2004), continue through dualism which is commonly utilized, but also commonly criticized, and end with deistic conceptions and their analogs (such as initial creation and uniform action) that have wide traction but require significant nuancing.

Interventionism

The first of the six major categories of divine action (see Tables 1 & 2) is the weak theism category of Interventionism. Interventionism has reference to concepts of divine action

⁸ As Slife and Melling (2006) note, weak theisms are still theisms—they do acknowledge God's activity somewhat.

wherein God's act involves "abrogating, suspending, or ignoring [the] order and regularity within nature" (Wildman, 2004, p. 38). It answers to Thomas's category of "Personal Action" wherein God is hypothesized to act on creation independently of the natural causal processes analogous to how some have conceived humans agents acting willfully and freely upon the otherwise efficiently causal processes of the world. A closer look at examples of this concept will uncover variations of this conception that suggest the need to make careful distinctions before examining this category in terms of a weak theism.

Gilkey (1983) puts it bluntly, "God's acts," which must be affirmed in their strong ontological sense if they are to retain any meaning (that is to say God really did miraculous things attributed to him in the biblical narrative, it was not just peoples' subjective interpretations), "den[y] the reign of causal law in the phenomenal realm of space and time." (p. 30). And this reign of causal law is the presumption of the modern theologian and scholar; according to Gilkey (1983): "The causal nexus in space and time... is also assumed by modern theologians and scholars; since they participate in the modern world of science both intellectually and existentially, they can scarcely do anything else" (p. 31).

Dilley (1983) continues Gilkey's theme: "there are events in which God acts in special ways, events in which God in some sense "interferes" with the general order of things. When the activity of God is referred to, it is this active 'intervention' to which reference is being made" (p. 46). From this view, "God openly and obviously abridges the natural order" (Dilley, 1983, p. 51), "the causal order is broken at times," and science is insufficient to explain these special acts (Dilley, 1983, p. 52).

Thomas's main explicator of personal action is Frank Kirkpatrick who holds that "an agent [such as God] always interferes in nature because he must interrupt what otherwise would

be the natural, causal flow of events (Kirkpatrick, 1983, p. 173). However, Kirkpatrick emphasizes that in his view, God's interference is not a "violation of natural law but its employment by a dimension of reality which 'goes beyond' causal law" (Kirkpatrick, 1983, p. 173). He holds "the existence of causal laws, or laws of nature, need be no barrier to our acceptance of intentional acts" as long as the law "recognize[s] the limits of its application" (Kirkpatrick, 1983, p. 174). Speaking hypothetically of the miracle of God parting the Red Sea, Kirkpatrick (1983) holds, "God's decision to part the waters was a decision to intervene, as any agent must do when he acts, into the otherwise regular, predictable nexus of natural events. Like any agent, God's decision is free, transcendent of causal law but not in conflict with it" (p. 178).

Wildman (2004) and Thomas (1997), however, note that the usual use of the term "intervention" does put it in conflict with natural law as typically understood. Wildman (2004) notes that the participants in the Divine Action Project equated interventionist perspectives with miracles which were avoided in an effort to "maximize traction between theology and the natural sciences" for miracles were typically seen as a "suspension or abrogation of nature's law-like regularities" (p. 38). In a review of *Chaos and Complexity* Thomas (1997) points out the term interventionism is often "equated with transgression, manipulation, abrogation, interference, and violation and is characterized as violent, miraculous, outside, and extrinsic" (p. 75). In that volume editor Robert Russell (1995) noted that "God performs such acts by intervening in or suspending the laws of nature" (p. 10).

Against critics who insist that there can be no violation of that natural order, Robert Adams (1994) summarizes the interventionist perspective: "miracles, direct divine interventions in this world, make sense, and seem appropriate" (p. 37). He agrees with criticism (see Wiles, 1994) that the occasional nature of God's activity in this perspective is problematic. Still he

holds that there may be a future resolution of such problems, but admits that a complete solution would “probably [be] impossible for human understanding” (Adams, 1994, p. 37).⁹

In the cases reviewed above, God’s action in the world seems to interrupt (intervene into) the normal causal order of things. Some writers are quick to emphasize, however, that the natural laws have not actually been broken—they are still quite intact. Yet it is not clear how what some call a violation of natural law can be seen by others as compatible with natural law. The answer lies in a further important distinction that has additional implications for a discussion of weak and strong theism and naturalism.

Interventionism versus supernaturalism. While not a category in the comprehensive conceptualization (see Table 2), the term supernaturalism is often equated with interventionism (e.g., Nelson, 2009). However, those who use the term extensively (e.g., Collins, 2001; Lewis, 1970) understand the terms differently. These additional shades of meaning will also add insight to the discussion of natural laws and the perspectives of our various worldviews (strong and weak theisms and naturalism).

It seems inconsistent to many for God to create laws and then violate, break, interrupt or in other ways intervene in their operation (see Wildman, 2004). This has led to an “emphasis on constructing models of God’s action that are in harmony with modern science [in which] many scholars have tried to avoid theories that use supernatural types of explanation (Nelson, 2009, p. 70). Nelson (2009) uses the term supernaturalism as a synonym for interventionism noting that “[i]n **supernaturalism**, God acts in the world by suspending natural law, while contemporary theorists try to picture a way that God acts in the world while respecting laws that are presumably of divine origin (Russell, 1998)” (p. 70). There is general consensus among theists of

⁹ Wiles (1994), for his part, suggests “the concept of an event directly caused by God that conflicts with normally experienced regularities of the world’s working... is not only a null class but a logically incoherent concept... and should have no place in Christian theology” (p. 26).

all stripes that God created the natural order (see Wildman, 2004; Collins, 2001; Wiles, 1986; Lewis, 1947; Murphy & Ellis, 1996) but “the idea of God sustaining nature and its law-like regularities with one hand while miraculously intervening, abrogating, or ignoring those regularities with the other hand” seemed dangerously contradictory to most scholars involved with the Divine Action Project (Wildman, 2004).¹⁰

But this is not the intended implication of those who embrace the label supernaturalism (see also Plantinga, 2011). C. S. Lewis responded to a critique of his book *Miracles* with

[The critic, Dr. Pittenger] says that this book ‘opens with a definition of miracle as the “violation” of the laws of nature’. He is mistaken. The passage (chapter 2) really runs: ‘I use the word Miracle to mean an interference with Nature by supernatural power.’ If Dr Pittenger thinks the difference between the true text and his misquotation merely verbal, he has misunderstood nearly the whole book. I never equated nature (the spatiotemporal system of facts and events) with the laws of nature (the patterns into which these facts and events fall). I would as soon equate an actual speech with the rules of grammar. In chapter 8 I say in so many words that no miracle either can or need break the laws of Nature; that ‘it is ... inaccurate to define a miracle as something that breaks the laws of Nature’; and that ‘The divine art of miracle is not an art of suspending the pattern to which events conform but of feeding new events into that pattern.’ How many times does a man need to say something before he is safe from the accusation of having said exactly the opposite? (Lewis, 1970, p. 178-179).

Griffin (2000) likewise sees a need to distinguish definitions of supernaturalism that merely involve an exception to “some contingent law of nature, which simply describes the way in

¹⁰ Contrast Collins (2001) whose definition of supernaturalism includes God creating and sustaining natural laws but also being “free to work ‘without, above, and against them’” (p. 21).

which things... usually behave” on the one hand from those that involve divine acts that “would be a violation of one or more metaphysical principles” (p. 93; see also p. 50-52). From the first perspective, “Our ‘laws’ of nature... are merely description of the most long-standing *habits* of nature” (Griffin, 2000, p. 93).

The key distinction to be made here is regarding the ontological status of the natural laws that are (apparently) violated by an act of God. Wildman (2004) helpfully summarizes the two camps:

1. The laws of nature have descriptive status only; they refer to regularities and patterns that we discern in natural objects, relationships, events, and processes.
2. The laws of nature have ontological status; they refer to ontologically independent principles to which natural objects, relationships, events, and processes are subject. (p. 41)

In the first scenario, what are called laws of nature are habits (as Griffin put it) or patterns – regularities (see also Lewis, 1970; Plantinga, 2011, Knight, 2005). They offer a description of how the world has seemed (from a limited human perspective) to behave in our observation, but would not of necessity be universally predictive of all future experience – God could act differently. In the second case, natural laws are given an element of what Griffin (2000) called “metaphysical principle” (p. 92-93). In both cases, God is assumed to be the originator of the laws or regularities of nature, but in the second the laws have been further elevated to an independent status from which they then impose limits on God’s activity in the world. It might be said that the second framing makes the naturalistic assumption—that natural law is a metaphysical, ontological, or ultimate reality and, therefore, God is, in some regards, limited and bound by natural law. For the sake of clarity, the perspective that gives rise to concepts of God’s

activity operating within the first framework are labeled *supernaturalism* and conceptions with origination in the second framework are classed as *interventionism*. In this sense, *supernaturalism* might be considered a synonym for *strong theism*.¹¹ However, as discussed above, the term is often used more generally and somewhat indiscriminately (e.g., Nelson, 2009).

Interventionism as Weak Theism. Again, Interventionism is shown to belong on the weak theism side of Table 2, but how do specific concepts fair? Returning to the examples in the earlier section, by in large, the scholars cited assume naturalism—that natural laws *do* have some generally inviolate, intrinsic properties (Dilley, 1983; Gilkey, 1983). Their insistence that God acts in violation of these principles does not mean that they do not make the naturalistic assumption; rather it simply labels them as *interventionists*. Others who make the naturalistic assumption likewise fall under the definition of interventionism (see Thomas, 1997). Kirkpatrick (1983) seems to want to preserve the sanctity of natural laws, but at the same time does limit their scope. He does not fully embrace the naturalistic assumption; he refers to laws of nature as a “description” (p. 173). Still, he doesn’t clarify if these laws have their own ontological status (making Kirkpatrick an interventionist) or if they are expressions of God’s regularities in action (in which case Kirkpatrick would be better classed a supernaturalist). Additionally, given the difficulties in understanding how human free will interacts with the natural order (see Baer, Kaufman, & Baumeister, 2008; Baumeister, Mele, & Vohs, 2010), explaining divine action merely as an analogy with human action (Kirkpatrick’s strategy) may not be a particularly helpful for the current project.

¹¹ Slife and Melling (2006) clarify that while those advocating a strong theism or supernaturalism “must affirm... the concrete possibility [that God’s action makes a practical or functional] difference in the world or matter[s] in our lives, [m]aking a practical difference does not have to mean some miraculous or supernatural efficient causation [i.e. interventionism]. God could be inherent in the way in which the world reveals itself to us truthfully – more as a formal or final cause (Faulconer, 2005; Griffin, 2000; Marion, 2000)” (p. 282; see also *invitation to meanings* below)

Interventionistic conceptions of God's activity will make capitulations to naturalism and, thus, be untenable for a serious or through-going (strongly) theistic approach to psychology. Because this perspective assumes that (most of the time) God is (functionally) inactive, it is not a true or thoroughgoing theism and has little to offer an applied human science about the day-to-day activities of its subjects that would be in any way different from a fully naturalistic approach. On this conception, the most accurate way to understand psychological subjects would be by an appeal to natural laws and causal mechanisms. Only on rare occasions would God's activity have any direct impact on the subject matter of psychology. Interventionism is in these respects *weakly theistic*. Supernaturalism, by contrast can be classed as a strong theism because it does not make the naturalistic assumption—the orderly happenings in the psychological realm are part of God's regularities, not due to independent natural laws. Supernaturalistic (strongly theistic) conceptions are taken up in later sections. First, two other weakly theistic categories must be considered and reviewed. The insights from the discussion of interventionism provide a fuller understanding and appreciation of the distinctions involved in dualism and deism.

Dualism

The second of the three weak theisms is the category of Dualism. As noted in the previous chapter, a dualism is any system that bifurcates the world into two distinct realities or realms. For the present discussion, dualism restricts God and God's activity to one realm or perspective while separating out another realm for naturalistic processes apart from his influence. There are many varieties of dualism including mind-body, subjective-objective, and those that divide the world into two independent causal explanations. Some of these are similar to the dichotomies characterized in Thomas's category of "Two perspectives/languages." As a concept, dualisms are almost entirely eschewed—at least explicitly. Dualisms are, however, a common

“hidden assumption” – often made even by people who state that they oppose the philosophy (Slife, Reber, & Faulconer, 2012; see e.g., Compton, below).

Compton (1972), for example, proposes a model of divine action in nature that requires “two perspectives” (p. 37) delineating two distinct sources—one of a free actor and another of a causal chain of natural law. “Between these two perspectives there is no conflict whatsoever” (Compton, 1972, p. 37) because each perspective is independent and complete within itself. “Each story has a complete cast of characters, without the need for interaction with the other story, but quite compatible with it” (Compton, 1972, p. 39). The same event can be viewed from either perspective, and while the perspectives do not clash or conflict with each other (for they are independent), there is no interaction between the two accounts—their “compatibility” is the compatibility of incommensurability. Again, “the elements and laws of physical nature, although they are God’s, may be thought to be independent of him, and individual physical events may be viewed as independent of his actions” (Compton, 1972, p. 42). The advantage of this perspective is that it apparently allows God’s action to communicate “to the sympathetic eye [i.e. the theist]... at least a gestural language” (p. 40), while it excuses the naturalist from taking account of God at all; “Scientific analysis of physical nature and of human history has no more need of God as an explanatory factor than the physiologist needs my conscious intent to explain my bodily movements” (Compton, 1972, p. 39).

Dilley (1983) writes of the alluring temptation of a dualistic perspective that he sees many biblical theologians fall prey to. “Both theological and naturalistic explanations are true, religion and science do not interfere with each other, there is no problem of miracles yet there is activity of God, and everyone can be happy. What science understands, correctly as the product of antecedent natural causes, theology understands also correctly, as the act of God” (Dilley,

1983, p. 55-56). “Unfortunately,” Dilley (1983) concludes, “although this theory may be very attractive, it is impossible to make it really work” (p. 56). He suggests that both natural and divine causes could co-exist (in a unified world), but not as simultaneous sufficient causes in a bifurcated reality. Again the motivation for adopting a dualistic account of God’s activity seems to be keeping faith with the naturalistic assumption. In this framework, for the realms of science (including psychology) or matters of “objective” fact, persons are free to use naturalistic language and explanations and will have rendered a full explanation of phenomenon. Concepts of God’s activity in this scheme, however, are particularly thin in that they are cordoned off from objective reality—relegated instead to the merely subjective or socially constructed realms (see Gergen, 2009). In this sense these are also weakly theistic conceptions of God’s activity.

Deism

Deism is the third of the six categories of divine action and the last of the weak theisms. In deistic conceptions God is active in creating the initial conditions of the world (including the formation, preservation/sustaining, and governing of matter and natural laws) but does not currently intervene in worldly events. The parallel from Thomas (1983b) is the Uniform Action view in which God’s action is universal, indistinguishable in time or space, except, perhaps by human interpretation. This view can, however, emphasize “the divine creation, preservation, and empowering” (Thomas, 1983b, p. 232). Because of the overlapping implications of creation for through-going theists and deists, there are several important distinctions to make regarding this conception of divine action including specific conceptions of God’s action in creating, sustain, concurring, and governing.

Creates. The primary concept of God’s action within the category of Deism is creation. Maurice Wiles stands as a preeminent exemplar of this concept of divine action. In his 1986

book on the subject *God's Action in the World* he lays out an approach for conceptualizing God's action that resists interventionist interruptions into the causal order. The focus is on creation and "divine intention in such a case is of a very general kind" (Wiles, 1986, p. 34). "Energy and its physical expression constitute the basic building bricks out of which the whole universe... is constructed. So it is God's will that the physical elements should continue to be themselves and the energies to function in their own way. The divine intention... is uniform" (Wiles, 1986, p. 34). Wiles (1986) has no particular objection to the deistic label for his position (p. 35-36), although he wants to stress that he is suggesting an "ongoing creation of the world" as "God's free act" (p. 80). But for Wiles (1986) "there are no compelling reasons for the Christian believer to affirm any form of direct divine intervention in the natural order (indeed... there are good reasons for his or her not doing so)" (p. 69). This includes acts of God in experience of grace, conversion, forgiveness, inspiration, or enlightenment which only appear to be unique acts of God because humans freely construct different meanings from their experiences (Wiles, 1986, p. 69, 81). In summary, "God's fundamental act, the intentional fruit of the divine initiative, is the bringing into existence of the world. That is a continuous process, and every part of it is therefore in the broadest sense an expression of divine activity. Differences within that process... are dependent not on differing divine initiatives but on differing degrees of human responsiveness" (Wiles, 1986, p. 108).¹²

Gordon Kaufman (1983) parallels Wiles's approach with his view of God's "master act" (p. 149). "There are many natural processes... which, though originally set in motion by God's creative activity, now function as fundamental rhythms or orders that support and sustain the more complex processes of the teleological movements, thus giving the world a certain

¹² Because he emphasizes that God's continuing particular activity is only apparent in the *subjective* realm, Wiles could also be classed as a dualist.

consistency and structure” (Kaufman, 1983, p. 155). Such derivative action should not be considered new acts of God, even if they are sustained by him, but his earlier creative work can be seen as “relatively completed” (Kaufman, 1983, p. 155) and nature and the whole cosmos can be “comprehended within a single ‘act’” (Kaufman, 1983, p. 154). Thus, for all events derivative of initial creation, “all are grasped by us as natural events and processes. All are understood to proceed from natural causes and to lead to natural effects; in no case is it necessary to invoke the special action of God to account for such occurrences” (Kaufman, 1983, p. 138). This emphasis on a naturalistic interpretation is not detrimental, for “It is not out of some unbelieving perversity that the modern... thus thinks and writes; rather... this is the only way in which it is intelligible to us” (Kaufman, 1983, p. 140-141). Indeed, utilizing naturalism in explanation is seen as advantageous to Kaufman (1983), for “we have learned... that it is precisely by *excluding* reference to such a transcendent agent that we gain genuine knowledge of the order that obtains in nature, are enabled to predict in certain respects that natural course of events, and thus gain a measure of control over it” (Kaufman, 1983, p. 138).

Preserves, Concurs, Governs. Within the Deism category, several additional concepts of God’s action (preserving, concurring, and governing creation) are also typically affirmed (see Collins, 2001). These additional examples of God’s activity in creation add a gradation of meaning to this conception. In particular, Collins (2001) and Smedes (2004) both give an overview of generally agreed upon theological positions that can be affirmed by both theists and deists. They note that God’s provident action in creation includes *preservation* (i.e., sustaining the world in being), *concurrence* (consenting to all action in the world), and *government* (acting as ruler of the world) (Collins, 2001, p. 25-26; Smedes, 2004, p. 21-23). These are aspects of God’s ordinary providence (over and against his extraordinary providence, see *interventionism*,

above) also called continuing creation and, therefore, do not have reference to particular or special divine action (Collins, 2001; Smedes, 2004). Unfortunately these aspects of God's activity are generally taken up more as affirmations or articles of faith than as conceptions to be explicated (Thomas, 1983b, p. 232; see Johnson, 1997; Collins, 2001).

As these aspects of creation do not refer to particular or specific action, they do not necessitate a strongly theistic worldview and can thus be affirmed by deists (see, e.g., Wiles, 1986). Additionally, as Smedes (2004) observes, because this general or ordinary providence is understood to act “in accord with the laws of nature” (p. 24) it does not necessitate, on its own, any practical implications different from naturalism. Therefore, despite the label “continuing creation” (see Smedes, 2004; Collins, 2001) for these concepts of God's action (preservation, concurrence, government), they are ultimately weakly theistic concepts.¹³

Potential of Weak Theistic Concepts for a Theistic Approach to Psychology

This section has taken a fresh look at the three major categories of weak theisms (Interventionism, Dualism, and Deism). As Griffin (2000) demonstrates, all three categories are the subject of regular criticism on theological and philosophical grounds, yet there is a continued draw toward them and many scholars continue to employ some version of them. Furthermore, as discussed earlier, there is a strong temptation to utilize these approaches because they allow theistic scholars to continue to be part of the modern milieu of naturalism (see Slife & Melling, 2006), which seems inescapable in the current academic and scientific climate (Gilkey, 1983). This, as some have observed (Slife, Reber, & Richardson, 2005; Slife & Reber, 2009b; Slife, Stevenson, & Wendt, 2010; Thomas, 1997), may lead to professionals embracing these strategies as hidden assumptions—explicitly distancing themselves from the terminology of the weak

¹³ In contrast, if continuing creation was understood to imply that the world consists of non-subjective meanings that God has imbued throughout creation continuously (see invitation to meaning, below), then it could be considered a strongly theistic concept—such would not be concordant with the traditional understanding of natural laws.

theisms but incorporating implicitly add-on assumptions that allow them to maintain the naturalism of their disciplines even while incorporating some personal religious beliefs. As Slife, Stevenson, & Wendt (2010) have concluded, because of the incompatibility of naturalism and theism (as discussed in Chapter 1), such a compromise strategy will ultimately fail, allowing psychology to avoid theism altogether. Fortunately, as many have begun to note (see, e.g., Slife & Melling, 2006; O'Grady, 2012), weak theisms are not the only option available for those interested in applying theistic concepts to their professional and scholarly work. Strong theistic conceptions such as the final three categories from Tables 1 and 2 (Physical Act, Grace, and Invitation) provide alternative specific understandings of God's current activity in the world and will be covered in the next three sections.

Physical Acts

The first strongly theistic category of the six-category schema is Physical Acts. Physical Acts describe God's direct involvement with or manipulation of material objects within the world (objects as varied as atoms and weather systems). It subsumes one of the more extensive literatures within the topic of God's activity in the world and has been the primary focus of the Divine Action Project (Plantinga, 2011, p. 97). Unsurprisingly, this conception of divine activity has been the area of concentration for a majority of physicists (e.g., Pollard, 1958; Peacocke, 2004; Polkinghorne, 1998; Poe & Mattson, 2005; Saunders, 2002) as well as a number of philosophers and theologians (Clayton & Davies, 2006; Plantinga, 2011; Smedes 2002; Ward, 2012; Wildman, 2004, 2005). This category is most analogous to what Thomas and Wondra (2002) call the "Scientific-Gap View," emphasizing both the basis in natural science (primarily physics) as well as the unknown (the "gaps") (p. 129). This section on Physical Acts provides an introduction to three conceptions within this category and devotes a subsection to each of them

in turn. Specific examples are provided from theorists purporting each concept and brief analysis is made of the concepts' fit for a theistic approach to psychology.

Because this category deals extensively with physical matter and the philosophy of physics (and therefore the physical and natural sciences), some (e.g., Smedes, 2004; see also Plantinga, 2011; Griffin, 2000) have expressed concern that it may be susceptible to the naturalistic assumption. As was illustrated above there is certainly a desire among many scientists to discuss God's activity in a manner that does not interrupt or break the natural order. However, as described in the section on supernaturalism and interventionism, it is possible to conceive of the regularities observed in nature in such a manner as to be consistent with the activity of God as understood in strong theism (see Stoeger, 1993). This formulation of natural "laws" as descriptions of God's regularities rather than ontological or metaphysical realities is followed for concepts within the remainder of this chapter (unless otherwise noted).

The conceptions of God's Physical Acts have primarily come from modern conceptions of physics (see Russell, Murphy, & Stoeger, 2009; Russell, Clayton, Wegter-McNelly, & Polkinghorne, 2001; Russell, Murphy, & Peacocke, 1995; Smedes, 2004). The first and most prominent is probably God's action in quantum mechanics (Murphy & Ellis, 1996; Russell, 2009; Wildman, 2004). In this concept, God is typically thought to collapse the quantum probability field in some manner to affect outcomes on the macro world. The second is actually a related group of concepts with some distinct features and holds that God's action emerges (Clayton, 2012) holistically from the chaos (Polkinghorne, 2000a) or complexity (Peacocke, 2004) of the world. A third distinct concept is somewhat less common, but suggests that God acts upon the world through the exertion of a trans-dimensional force from outside the traditional

three spatial dimensions or the single dimension of time (Smedes, 2004; Burton & Webster, 1980; van den Brom, 1984).

Quantum Probability

The first specific concept within strong theistic category of Physical Acts is quantum probability. This concept is defined most simply as “God *acts at the quantum level*... [and] can cause quantum events” (Plantinga, 2011, p. 114). It has a significant number of proponents, but while there is a range of diversity in the applications of this concept (see, e.g., Russell, Clayton, Wegter-McNelly, & Polkinghorne, 2001), there is less variety in the conceptualizing of how God would act at the quantum level. For the most part, this view takes advantage of (at least currently understood) ontological indeterminacies in the quantum world (Plantinga, 2011; Wildman, 2004) holding that God works by manipulation of what seems (from a mortal or naturalistic perspective) to be chance (see Pollard, 1958). This perspective is complicated by a persistent lack of agreement on how quantum events should be understood (see Wildman, 2004).

While those conceiving of divine action at the quantum level generally agree that God somehow alters the involved probabilities to coalesce to the intended actuality, there are still variations in understanding the scope of God’s action. Wildman (2004) sees up to eight shades of distinction in specific proposals, differentiated by assumptions in type, scope, ontology, causality, and independence. Some of Wildman’s distinctions can be postponed for present purposes. For example, Wildman (2004) notes two process perspectives (“constitutive” and “non-constitutive,” p. 61) wherein God *persuades* or invites events (including quantum events) to action. Persuasive process perspectives are taken up in the section addressing the Invitation category (below). Wildman (2004) also raises the occasionalist perspective wherein “God is the only actor in reality” (p. 60), the sufficient cause of all action. Wildman (2004) suggests that

“Everyone in this debate wants to avoid the... view of occasionalism” (p. 60) and when others present it, they do so for contrast and then it is generally dismissed (e.g., Collins, 2001 Wildman, 2004). The remaining five theories identified by Wildman (2004) are represented by major theorists including Pollard, Murphy, Ellis, Tracy, and Russell and all deserve some comment. Each is described in turn, followed by an overall evaluation of these concepts as they relate to theism.

Pollard. Pollard presents the first case for the Physical Acts concept of quantum probability. Many reviewers (Plantinga, 2011; Thomas, 1983a; Wildman, 2004) point to Pollard as presenting an early and, perhaps, seminal case for God’s action in quantum indeterminacy in his 1958 book *Chance and Providence*. There he builds the case that indeterminacy on a quantum level (the level of molecules, atoms, and electrons) has real (if limited) applications for the macro-world—the most significant of which is that scientists encounter what they call randomness or chance in all fields and at all levels of analysis (Pollard, 1958, p. 52-61, 65). For Pollard (1958) the events which laboratory scientists can explain with statistical models are identical to manifestations of “the will of God acting in judgment or in redemption” (p. 94). Where the scientist sees probability fields (such as in the quantum structure), Pollard (1958) contends these are collections of “singular events” that are individually “responsive to God’s will” (p. 94).

In this conception, God’s action should not just be seen as “some sort of extra-natural spiritual force akin to an electro-magnetic field [on par with how p]erturbing forces in quantum mechanics change the probabilities of occupancy of the available quantum states in proportion to the strength and duration of the perturbations” (Pollard, 1958, p. 95). Pollard (1958) does *not* want to imply that “God manipulates probabilities” (p. 96). Rather, God ought to be seen as

acting directly to determine the outcome; the quantum result occurred not because it was more likely, but “because God willed that it should” (Pollard, 1958, p. 96). Further, unlike most phenomena observed in the laboratory, God’s action on (seemingly) probabilistic events can also be singular, unique, and non-repeatable (Pollard, 1958, p. 96, 117).

Murphy. Nancey Murphy adds an additional case to the Physical Acts concept of quantum probability. Murphy (2009) concurs with Pollard that “any adequate account of divine action must include a ‘bottom-up’ approach: if God is to be active in all events, then God must be involved in the most basic of natural events... quantum phenomena” (p. 265). Murphy (2009) likewise holds that God’s involvement on the quantum level has consequences “at the macroscopic level in general and the human level in particular” (p. 265). Her particular conception can be stated briefly: “The apparently random events at the quantum level *all* involve (but are not exhausted by) specific, intentional acts of God” (Murphy, 2009, p. 281). To this she adds two limiting caveats: 1) God is limited because he “respects the integrity of the [created] entities with which he cooperates” and 2) “God restricts his action in order to produce a world that *for all we can tell* is orderly and law-like in its operation” (Murphy, 2009, p. 281). This *regularity* of God’s action enables “an orderly system [perhaps] for the intrinsic beauty and interest of such a cosmos” (p. 289). Another “necessity for such order and regularity [is] so that intelligent and responsible beings such as ourselves might exist to ‘know, love, and serve’” God and so that such beings could make “intelligent use of cause-effect relations” (Murphy, 2009, p. 290.) The caveat of divine regularity is particularly important for higher order creatures because, “When the environment is taken to behave in a set (and therefore predictable) manner, we can make responsible choices about how to act within it” (Murphy, 2009, p. 291).

The former caveat is important for understanding God's action because it suggests that God is not "the sole actor at this level [but that] the entities (also) have their own (God-given) powers to act" (Murphy, 2009, p. 282). Whatever else continuing creation might imply (see below), it does not entail a "version of occasionalism" wherein "each sub-atomic event is solely an act of God" (Murphy, 2009, p. 282). However, God's act of (initial) creation—at any level—grants things created "some measure of independence and a nature of its own, including inherent powers to do some things rather than others" (Murphy, 2009, p. 282). God's involvement then comes as an "activating or actualizing... of the quantum entity's innate powers at particular instants, and... these events are not possible without God's action" (Murphy, 2009, p. 284). In this way, Murphy (2009) speaks of God's action as *cooperation*—God voluntarily limits himself for the sake of allowing created entities their identity. On this point of God's cooperation in acts with entities, Murphy has much in common with the process view (discussed below).

Ellis. Murphy collaborator George Ellis extends her position providing another instance of the quantum probability concept from the Physical Acts category. Ellis (1995) accepts the basics of Murphy's conception but places a stronger emphasis on the non-violation of perceived physical laws. "This view requires the essential action of God... who acts in a hidden way in every [for the] realization of such action to determine its outcome" (p. 342). Ellis (2009) holds that God's work is hidden in "detailed local interactions at the atomic or particle level, where quantum uncertainty and non-locality... conceivably provide a *modus operandi* without violation of any physical laws" (p. 342). Again, God's action "would not be recognizable through any violation of physical laws" (Ellis, 2009, p. 342).

Still, this action *would* have noticeable macro-world effects, "The supposition is that this quantum effect would be amplifiable through brain processes... to macroscopic levels where

they could influence feelings or thoughts. This is a wide enough channel to convey to us all that is needed for revelation” (Ellis, 2009, p. 342). But, Ellis (2009) maintains at this level God is not enacting strict deterministic fiats, “this would not mean that God in some sense calculates the effect of what would happen via specific neural stimulations” rather, God would plan “certain pre-images, emotions, or whatever” (p. 342). In this way Ellis feels that apparent physical law, human free will, and God’s action can all be reconciled.

Tracy. Thomas Tracy provides further concepts to the Physical Acts category, and, like those above, focuses on quantum probability. Tracy (1995) suggests a veritable smorgasbord of particular divine action in the world (as well as endorsing general action for God). He holds that God works: 1) directly on all particular events to sustain them in existence (see section on deism and creation), 2) directly on some particular chance events (this section), 3) indirectly through causal chains, 4) indirectly through free acts of person’s whose choices have been shaped by God’s activity in the world and interaction with that person (see invitation), and 5) directly to bring about events that are either a) undetermined on the finite level or b) outside the “prevailing patterns and regular structures of the natural order” (see interventionism/supernaturalism) (p. 319). Tracy (1995) sees these various types of actions as working together and affirms (after noting that indeterminacy and undetermined events can be termed ontological “gaps” in the world) that “*God is the God of the gaps as well as the God of causal connection*” (p. 320). “[O]ne of the ways God’s providential care engages the world is through these open structures in nature” (Tracy, 2009, p. 249).

While Tracy (1995, 2009) holds out for God acting in all events through sustaining their existence, he suggests that God only acts particularly in *some* quantum events. “God may act” Tracy (1995) posits, “by determining at least some events at the quantum level” (p. 318). He

would not do this “as a quasi-physical force, manipulating subatomic ‘particles’ as though they were determinate entities... Rather, God will realize one of the several potentials in the quantum system (the ‘wave packet’), which is defined as a probability distribution” (p. Tracy, 1995, 318). He notes that this explanation does not compete with or displace traditional finite causal explanations. On the quantum level, God acts without “interrupting the ordinary lawful operations of the natural order” (Tracy, 2000, p. 899)

To the possibilities already discussed regarding God’s activity at the quantum level, Tracy (1995) adds the possibility that God could also create a system that perpetuates some indeterminacy. In other words, in Tracy’s (1995) view, God sets up an entity or “linked systems of indeterminate proto-entities [suggested by] quantum mechanics... but leave[s] the success states of the entity (or system) up to probabilistically structure chance” (p. 321). Distinguishing him from other theorists, we could rephrase Tracy’s position as, “God not only works through seemingly chance events; God creates truly chance events.”

Russell. Robert John Russell provides additional details on the concept of quantum probability and the larger category of Physical Acts. Russell headed the Divine Action Project and connects his view of divine action on the quantum level to additional conceptions of God’s action as physical cause (see below). He suggested that

[T]he specific events we refer to as special providence in nature are the indirect results of divine action at both the subatomic and the cosmological levels, and those we experience as special providence/revelation are the combined result of bottom-up and top-down action in the complex matrix of the human person as psychosomatic unity (Russell, 1997, p. 65).

Still, his primary focus was on divine action on the quantum level. “My central thesis is that God acts in quantum events to bring about, or actualize one of several potential outcomes; the collapse of the wavefunctions occurs because of divine and natural causality” (Russell, 2009, p. 382). “The basic argument is that God acts together with nature to bring about a quantum event” (Russell, 1997, p. 58).

In terms of scope of divine action, Russell generally sides with those who hold that God acts providentially in all quantum events, not only some, but with some important caveats. “[I]n short, God causes all the processes of the ordinary world (general providence), but a few of them genuinely convey special meaning because the choices God makes in causing them, and not the other options available to God, bring them about” (Russell, 2009, p. 385). More particularly, Russell (1997) makes the unique suggestion that God’s special actions on the quantum level include steering genetic randomness to guide and direct evolutionary processes toward his purposes. In his own words, “God shapes and guides biological evolution providentially by actions whose effects occur within the quantum mechanical processes underlying specific genetic mutations” (Russell, 1997, p. 60). Additionally, Russell (2009) also suggests that once God has achieved his evolutionary aims (creatures with consciousness and, thus, free will) God withdraws his activity somewhat to allow their will to affect the quantum state: “God acts in all quantum events in the universe until the rise of life and consciousness anywhere” (p. 386).

Evaluating theism in the concept of divine action at the quantum level. Before considering additional possibilities within the Physical Acts category, some review of the quantum probability concept is in order – particularly as it relates to the meta-label of *strong theism*. Divine action on the quantum level seems to be one of the most promising and preferred candidates for understanding God’s activity in the world, particularly from a scientific

perspective (see e.g., Plantinga, 2011; Saunders, 2002). For many of the scientists involved in the discussion of God's influence in quantum indeterminacies, the motivations seems to be finding an account of divine action that does not conflict with naturalistic hypotheses (see Pollard, 1958; Russell, Clayton, Wegter-McNelly, & Polkinghorne, 2001; Russell, Murphy, & Isham, 1993; Smedes, 2004) or at least observed regularities. However, there seems to be some disagreement as to whether these regularities should be understood as descriptive or ontological laws of nature—as thoroughly theistic or as basically naturalistic (Wildman, 2004; see also Stoeger, 1993). As Russell (1997) expressed (after reviewing the case for God's activity at the quantum level), “One could say that we are presented with a choice between naturalism and theism: The same evidence from science is available to both, and the choice of presuppositions is crucial” (p. 58). For this reason Hedges and Burchfield (2004), note that “the data of materialistic (and empirical)” science is *underdetermined* (p. 113) and, therefore, the evidence from the material world and from previous scientific studies is insufficient to determine that naturalism is correct (see Reber & Osbeck, 2005, p. 71). Naturalism is just one possible interpretation of physical data.

One of the early advocates of the quantum approach, Pollard (1958), recognized the possibility for the quantum indeterminacy interpretation to be taken up in a naturalistic or a theistic vein and invoked Buber's I-it/I-thou perspective as a resistant hedge. Traditional science employs only I-it understanding (naturalism), but to understand God's activity in the world, a new perspective (such as the I-thou worldview) is needed (Pollard, 1958, p. 153-171). Only this latter worldview, according to Pollard (1958, p. 170), can account for divine (and human) free action, real relationality, meaningful morality, etc. and thus give a truer accounting of what seems to be chance and accident in nature.

Holistic Emergence from Chaos and Complexity

A second approach within the Physical Acts category involves looking at God's action on the whole world and emerging from the chaotic or complex systems within it. Rather than look at quantum level events *per se*, some thinkers (Peacocke, 2004; Polkinghorne, 2000a) suggest a more holistic model in which God is seen as acting on the entirety of the world. On this accounting, God's actions are seen as emerging (either bottom-up or top-down) through the processes in the system (e.g., the randomness in the weather system). Two major approaches, chaos and complexity, are taken up here in turn.

Chaos. The first perspective employed in understanding God's action on the physical world through emergence is *chaos theory*. Like the thinkers cited above, Polkinghorne (2000a) holds that "God must be active in the world not only as its upholder and ordainer but also as the God of providence active in cosmic history... God must be present in the chance as well as in the necessity of an evolving world" (p. 960). While Polkinghorne (2000a) also sees possibility in the indeterminacy of quantum events, his focus for God's action in chance is in the "substantial... unpredictabilities of chaos theory" (p. 960).

In what he refers to as a "bottom-up approach" Polkinghorne (2000b) holds that "God is able to act. The flexibility in what happens is not assigned to the operation of a mysterious psychic pole in each material event. Instead, it arises naturally from... the nature of physical process" (p. 939). God's actions, on this accounting are a part of nature, not an interruption of it or superimposition on it, thus it will not necessarily be obvious that God is acting. "God's acts will be veiled within the unpredictability of complex process" (Polkinghorne, 2000b, p. 939).

Even so, there is pattern and purpose with the chaos and complexity of the natural order of the world in which God acts. "Chaos theory was not a well-chosen name" (Polkinghorne,

2000b, p. 930) because there is order (“orderly disorder”). But Polkinghorne (2000b) holds that ontological chaos does demonstrate an underlying openness (possibility) in the world. For Polkinghorne (2000a) the epistemological unknowableness of chaos theory models a true non-determinacy of reality – “epistemology models ontology” is his assumption. This openness to possible order is susceptible to organizing information from a mind such as God (Polkinghorne, 2000b, p. 937). But “Because flexibility only arises within intrinsically unpredictable circumstances, the springs of the operation of mind would be inescapably hidden (“veiled”)” (Polkinghorne, 2000b, p. 937). In other words, “God might interact with [the world] in the form of information input... in a non-energetic way” (Polkinghorne, 2000b, p. 937-938).

Polkinghorne notes several examples of scientific application of this concept of divine action (2000c). As a particular promising future application Polkinghorne (2000c) identified “the region of the human sciences, particularly neuroscience and psychology. Clearly this is potentially a most important interface for exchange. Unfortunately, the landscape is [currently] shrouded in thick fog” (p. 948). Perhaps the time has come for theistic concepts to take their place for this “important exchange” and help clear up some of the thick fog that surrounds the human sciences.

Complexity. A second way of understanding God’s emergent action is through operation on the whole system through levels of complexity (see Polkinghorne, 2000c). On this account, while complex systems arise out of simpler ones (like biological systems arise from chemical systems) they are not reducible to them; “The whole is more than the sum of its parts” (Küppers, 1995, p. 94). On this view, the more complex whole *transcends* the simpler parts and determines their behavior (Russell, 1995; Küppers, 1995). Thus, some (Peacocke, 2004; Clayton, 2012) feel that God’s activity is better understood as emerging from the simple physical processes and then

transcending them to direct them in what they referred to as “top-down” or “whole-part” causation. Similar to the motivations in the chaos theory model, this perspective holds that God acts on or with the world without disruption. As advocate Arthur Peacocke (1995) explained,

God, by affecting the state of the world-as-a-whole, could, on the model of whole-part constraint relationships in complex systems, be envisaged as able to exercise constraints upon events in the myriad sub-levels of existence that constitute that ‘world’ without abrogating the laws and regularities that specifically pertain to them—and this without ‘intervening’ within the unpredictabilities [of quantum events and chaotic systems]. *Particular* events might occur in the world and be what they are because God intends them to be so, without at any point any contravention of the laws of physics, biology, psychology, or whatever is the pertinent science for the level of description in question (p. 283).

In this concept God acts holistically or through “whole-part constraint” sometimes also referred to as “downward/top-down causation” (Peacocke, 2009, p. 53). This activity is thus said to “emerge” out of the lower level processes of the world much in the same way human consciousness appears to emerge out of physical and biological matter (Clayton & Davies, 2006; Clayton, 2012; Ward, 2012).

Those advocating emergence through complexity emphasize this unity and compatibility with the natural order, even as God acts to ensure particular “potentialities” are achieved,

[I]t is by the “laws” and through the regularities of nature that God must be presumed to be working... [M]atter is of such a kind and the regularities which it manifests are of such a kind that creativity, in the sense of the emergence of new forms of matter, is a permanent potentiality whose actualization depends on circumstances... God [has] had to

intervene from time to time to help [matter] on to the next stage... for example, the transition from nonliving to living, or the special creation of individual species, notably man himself... God has been creating all the time through eliciting all the possibilities of the matter which he had brought into existence endowed with certain potentialities and governed by the laws of its transformations; and that this exploration of potentialities rests on the statistical coverage available to random events at the micro-level.”(Peacocke, 2004, p. 75-76)

Despite this divine activity being immanent in the “laws and through the regularities of nature” (Peacocke, 2004, p. 76), this is not to be understood as a deistic activity. “I would want to emphasize, with Kaufman and Wiles, that God’s action is on the world-as-a-whole, but to stress more strongly than they do that this maintaining and supporting interaction is a continuing as well as an initial one; and can be general *and particular* in its effects” (Peacocke, 2004, p. 20). Peacocke (2004) emphasizes that God can (and does) act particularly to bring about special events (such as the creation of man or the transition of matter from non-living to living) but it is still not a disruption or “contravention” (Peacocke, 1995, p. 283; Ward, 2012) of natural law. The issue here, as with other similar theories, is how natural laws are conceived (see Stoeger, 1993; Knight, 2005).

Hyperdimensional Activity

A third and final concept within the Physical Acts category is hyperdimensional activity. A few thinkers (van den Brom, 1984; Smedes, 2004; Burton & Webster, 1980; Abbott, 1885) have suggested that God’s action might best be understood as activity by means of higher dimensional operations. In this conception God would act in a higher (fourth or more) dimension of space to produce effects in the three-dimensional world (van den Brom, 1984, 1993). (This

concept would also apply to God acting from within a second (or more) dimension of time to produce effects within the typically conceived one timeline (see Smedes, 2004; Burton & Webster, 1980; Lewis, 1947).) By analogy, just as two-dimensional objects are contained within and subject to the rules and forces of a three-dimensional world, so to would our three-dimensional world be subject to influences and effects from higher dimensional activities of God (Smedes, 2004; van den Brom, 1984). To see why the “concept of a higher dimensional system also enables us to speak of God’s action in a more comprehensible manner” (van den Brom, 1984, p. 654) it may be helpful to look at specific examples.

Burton & Webster (1980) noted several “striking similarities between [higher] dimensional phenomena and certain incidents and descriptions found in... religious literature” (p. 281). In several of these incidents God causes his earthly representatives (angels, prophets, the resurrected Jesus) to suddenly appear or disappear, even from within a “closed room” (Burton & Webster, 1980, p. 287; see also Campolo, 2005, p. 141; John 20:19; Luke 24:13-39, 1:11,19; Acts 12:7). Smedes (2004) invokes a description from Edwin Abbott’s *Flatland* as an analogy for this type of event. In that story a sphere is able to “suddenly appear and disappear” in two-dimensional Flatland (and by traveling through a third dimension) the sphere can seem to enter into (what appears to Flatland residents to be) closed rooms (Smedes, 2004, p. 222; see also Abbott, 1885; Burton & Webster, 1980). The Flatland residents have difficulty explaining the mysterious actions and comings and goings of the sphere (Smedes, 2004; Abbott, 1885). Bringing the analogy back to God’s action, Smedes (2004) suggests his actions might be “events in our three-dimensional reality that cannot be explained, except from a higher dimension” (p. 222-223).

Van den Brom (1984) speaks explicitly to how the concept of God's activity from higher dimensions could directly physically affect matter. Against proponents of conceiving of God activity as a single solitary act of initial creation, a "master act" (see above), van den Brom suggests, "It is not necessary to speak of a spaceless first cause" (p. 654-655). By virtue of being "an extended being existing in the higher dimension space which includes our three-dimensional space" God is spatially omnipresent "at every point" (van den Brom, 1984, p. 655). Because on this concept "God then touches all places on all sides without having to coincide with them... it is possible for him to act in our three-dimensional space without limitations... This could even be understood as action by direct contact without having to appeal to telekinesis" (van den Brom, 1984, p. 655). In other words, God is adjacent to every physical thing simultaneously and can directly influence the brute physical matter through influence from a higher dimension.

As with higher spatial dimensions, these same scholars suggest God might also act through higher dimensions of time (Smedes, 2004; Burton & Webster, 1980; Russell, Murphy, & Isham, 1993; see also Campolo, 2005; Lewis, 1947). While this concept of divine action has not been explored as deeply as that of God acting through higher dimensions, thinkers have still suggested intriguing possibilities (Burton & Webster, 1980, p. 295). One consistent thread is that God's transcendence of the temporal dimension may help de-problematize certain theological issues that sometimes arise with God's alleged foreknowledge, creation and responsiveness, and human freedom (Smedes, 2004, Burton & Webster, Campolo, 2005). For Campolo (2005), this also allows God to act at one point in time with effects in another (e.g., in the Christian concept of salvation being accomplished by God on the cross (past) but salvation occurring *presently* as "we confess our sins" (p. 147). (In this regard, Campolo also cites the example of King David being cleansed—an event which *preceded* the Christian advent). Lewis (1947; 1970) points out

how this conception works with God's creative act(s). With illustrations of three-dimensional beings beholding a line on a page and again with novelists constructing a plotline he shows how God "from His vantage point above Time, can, if He pleases, take all prayers [and all occasions] into account in ordaining that vast complex event which is the history of the universe. For what we call 'future' prayers have always been present to Him" (Lewis, 1970, p. 79; Lewis, 1947). The relevance of this view of creation for a theistic conception of activity is taken up again in the section on invitation to meaning (below).

Hyperdimensional activity of God has several intriguing features. Like many of the concepts within the category of Prime Physical Cause, there are those for whom the prospect of attributing God's action to higher dimensions is appealing for it may allow scientists and scholars to, at the very least, ignore the possibility of violations of the Laws of Nature (see van dan Brom, 1993). They could, conceivably, extend the analogy and say that God's apparently *supernatural* acts were merely the operation of "certain laws in God's higher dimensional system" (van dan Brom, 1993, p. 294). However, this would alter the meaning of natural law from a strictly naturalistic framework. Furthermore, those postulating God's activity through higher dimensions see God's irregular activity as *supernatural* not *interventionistic* (van dan Brom, 1993; Lewis, 1947). Van dan Brom (1993) suggested that it was primarily a lack of *perception* that kept mortals from recognizing the actual difference that the hyperdimensional actions had on their world.

Lewis (1970) reframed Nature with an allusion to multidimensional conception. Referencing Schrödinger's desire for seven dimensions to explain an atom scientifically, he notes, "to pass beyond what we call Nature – beyond the three dimensions and the five highly specialized and limited senses... we should find a new Nature. There may be Natures piled upon

Natures, each supernatural to the one beneath it” (Lewis, 1970, p. 35). To be at that level or dimension where God is “may not mean being absent from any of these [lower level] Natures – may mean a yet more dynamic presence on all levels” (Lewis, 1970, p. 35).

There are other possible implications of the hyperdimensional perspective for God’s action, some that have rarely been explored. Van dan Brom (1993) suggested “God bestows upon those who believe in Him either conceptions or ideas (i.e. alongside their own thoughts) [and] God focuses [their] attention... which could inspire them to act” (p. 316). Burton and Webster (1980) likewise speak of visions and special perceptions that could come from God to mortals through higher dimensions. In addition to creation and sustaining, van dan Brom (1993) also mentions “re-creation” or God resurrecting the dead being a function of God endowing mortals with a trans-dimensional capacity (p. 316; cf. Lewis’s reference to being brought beyond Nature to the level of God; Ellis, 1995). In all, hyperdimensional perspectives represent a rich, mostly untapped, source for conceiving God’s action in the world.

Potential of Physical Act Concepts for a Theistic Approach to Psychology

The Physical Acts category shows some possible application to psychology. Particularly, a number of conceptualizers have suggested that God’s action on physical matter (particularly on the brain) may be causal in the initiation of new thoughts within the human mind (Murphy, 2009; Ellis, 2009; Polkinghorne, 2000b; Clayton, 2012). Still, overall, concepts in this category focus primarily on the *mechanical how* of God’s action in the world not the *meaningful what* of God’s activity. This category’s focus on physical causes and matter, as such, might limit the applications of its concepts to psychology (particularly as a science of mind and behavior), but there is some overlap with psychology’s sister discipline of neuroscience (the biology of the brain) (see Gantt, Melling, & Reber, 2012).

There are also a few who actually do connect their material and mechanical accounts of God's physical action in the world to ideas about his meaningful activities. Murphy extends her proposal of God's action at the quantum level to include neurons in human brains (p. 293) and suggests that God thusly affects human consciousness. "Such stimulation would cause thoughts to be recalled to mind; it could cause the occurrence of new thoughts" and would occur in context of the individual's other thoughts and emotions (p. 293-294). Peacocke (2009) also feels that on his model "it is intelligible how God could also affect patterns of neuronal events in a particular brain, so that the subject could be aware of God's presence with and without the mediation of memory" (p. 94)

Again, however, for the most part these descriptions are focused more on *how* God could accomplish his actions rather than *what* these actions in fact are. This may not be surprising given the concern the theorists reviewed here generally have for ensuring their concepts of divine action will not violate (or appear to violate) the observed natural patterns in the physical world (e.g., Peacocke, 1995; Russell, Murphy, & Isham, 1993). While they are an impressive working out of God's capacity to act in a seemingly mechanical world, they provide a theistic approach to psychology with very little specific explanation or concrete examples of what God would actually *do* in the world and, more importantly for present purposes, what God might do within psychology. Thus, the concepts reviewed here, while intriguing and possibly useful in supplementary explanations and peripheral fields (e.g., neuroscience, systems theory), do not seem to provide psychology with much in the way of specific understandings of particular phenomenon that could be used in theory, research, or practice (e.g., in prediction and hypothesis generation, therapeutic techniques, or explanations of human identity). These concepts instead focus on *how* other phenomena could occur. For example, if one of God's

actions is inspiring individuals with new ideas (see “ruptures,” below) then the concepts from the Physical Acts category might suggest that God does so through collapsing quantum probability fields or manipulating the hyperdimensional forces in an individual’s brain. However, while these actions of God are strongly theistic, they focus more to the method of action than the act itself. Even if these concepts developed more emphasis on the *what* of divine action, quantum mechanics, chaos and complexity, and hyperdimensionality currently have little traction with psychological science. Still, Physical Acts as a category ought not to be dismissed out of hand as advancements in the sciences might lead to profitable future crosspollination with psychology. With the failure of the three weakly theistic conceptions (Inventions, Dualism, and Deism) to contribute to a theistic approach and the present inability of Physical Acts to add significantly to the discipline, four of the six categories of God’s activity in the world make unconvincing cases for a move to a theistic approach to psychology. Fortunately, the last two categories (Grace and Invitation) focus more on *what* God does in the world and provide more applicable conceptions of God’s activity for use in the human sciences.

Grace

The second strongly theistic category (and fifth of six overall categories) is Grace. Grace is a common concept in many theistic traditions (e.g., Judaism, Christianity, Islam, see Burrell, 2011) for benevolent providential actions, particularly those that are unearned or given unconditionally such as the bestowal of life and agency (see also Thomas. 1983a, 1990; TeSelle, 1990). In Thomas’s categorizational scheme (1983b) he did not include a separate category for grace, but combined it with other “Primary Causes” since grace is a direct action of God. However, he and others (e.g., TeSelle, 1990) do use the term specifically to refer to a subset of actions of God that have particular relevance to and impact on human activity. Additionally,

Thomas (1983b) suggests, that the action of Grace should be understood less mechanically and less deterministically than other “Primary Causes” (p. 239).

Grace as a category here includes acts of God that can be construed as particular, unilateral gifts. Although some of the concepts reviewed below may phenomenologically occur more often under certain circumstances (e.g., when piety is developed or repentance and humility expressed) they all may be understood to be ways in which humans are blessed, benefited, and otherwise “done unto” by God. These graceful actions may (or may not) be a response on the part of God, but they are all conceived as coming by the will of God, in God’s manner, and according to God’s timing. As a category, grace involves a class of actions that is, on the face of it, much more psychological and less mechanical than that of the concepts contained in the Physical Acts category just reviewed (above).

This section considers a number of the most prominent conceptions of God’s activity that can be classified as grace. Conceptual candidates in this category include God’s giving life, granting emotional strength and energy, rupturing intuitions, transforming (changing) psyches, and manifesting perceptual stimuli. After these concepts are defined, discussed, and illustrated, this section concludes with evaluative comments about the feasibility of applying concepts from this category to psychological science.

Gives Life

The first concept within the strongly theistic Grace category is *gives life*. Beyond the creation of brute matter, there is an action attributed to God in the creation of (particularly human) life. This concept involves the creation of human life in general as well as the bestowal of (biological) life and all that that entails (freedom, consciousness, etc.) upon an individual. This is a particularly graceful action because it is bestowed without condition across humanity (indeed

as defining characteristic *of* humanity) and apparently upon all individuals at birth (although some aspects, such as consciousness, may arguably be bestowed later).

George Ellis (2009) attributes God's action to both general and specific life functions. Ellis (2009) sees an additional action of God in "enabling the functioning of the brain and mind [providing the] foundations of consciousness and free will; the foundation, in turn, of moral response" (p. 323). Others have come to develop similar concepts of divine action. Scholars from a variety of traditions (philosophy, physics, theology, and psychology) agree that in providentially granting life, God also gives humans conscious awareness, a moral conscience, and free will, all of which build upon one another.

Phenomenologist Jean-Luc Marion (1997/2002) puts it this way, "Man deserves the title mortal endowed with speech on condition that we understand 'endowed with speech' [as] having received the gift of speech" (p. 270). Our ability to comprehend "rational knowledge" and our identity itself are gifts from God (Marion, 1997/2002, p. 270, see 262-282). Schwöbel (1992) suggested that God's act in this regard could be considered a "disclosure of truth about the constitution of reality" (p. 34) and that this act of conscious awareness of reality was a prelude to a personal awareness of moral truth (p. 34-35).

This sense of moral reality that comes as a gift from God can be understood as a "conscience" (Beck & Demarest, 2005, p. 227). Lewis (1952/1996) says God "left us conscience, the sense of right and wrong" (p. 54). Warner (2001) holds that this sense is more relational than is usually presumed; "we call our sense of right and wrong *conscience*, though that name doesn't capture the way it arises from our living connection with other beings" (p. 21). But he does agree that "our sense of right and wrong come[s] from... God" (Warner, 2001, p. 21). The gift of a sense of moral distinctions enables a gift of free will (see Murphy & Ellis, 1996).

Theists commonly hold the conception that God acts by enabling persons with free will or agency (Barth, 1963; Plantinga, 2011; Jones, 2006); TeSelle (1990) puts it simply, referring especially to rational beings, “God gives to all beings their power to act” (p. 72). Polkinghorne (1990) sees the enabling of freedom as an action of God that is also a defining characteristic: “God has given freedom to the whole of his creation... the characteristic gift of love is to bestow freedom upon the beloved” (p. 3). Polkinghorne (1990) sees this grace as extended, “God’s gift of freedom is not just a gift to humankind, but a gift in an appropriate way to the whole of his creation” (p. 3).

While the conceptions of grace noted here do not detail the mechanics of God’s acts as prime physical cause concepts did, they do specify particular types of his action for human (and psychological) life. Additionally, all the concepts mentioned here are strongly theistic in the sense that none necessitate concessions to naturalism or limit God’s action. Whether or not God is accepted as the source of the gifts listed in this conception, the existence of human life and related concepts is a “stubborn fact” of reality and thus presents a compelling case for scientific investigation. These three aspects of bestowed life (consciousness, conscience, and agency) are also perennial psychological topics and these theistic concepts are evaluated in terms of their relevance for psychology at the end of the Grace section.

Grants Emotional Strength or Energy

The second concept within the category Grace refers to God’s action in *granting strength*. Among his other contributions, William James provided several helpful insights into conceptions of how God could be active in the world, including the granting of emotional strength and energy. This type of activity can manifest in a variety of ways but is distinguished from other concepts by its focus on the inward emotional state of the recipient. Aspects of this concept

could include phenomena such as persons being enabled to do difficult tasks (e.g., resist temptation, face challenges), being granted particular feelings (e.g., peace, serenity, calmness), being given a deeper or more holy experience of their current emotion (e.g., “godly sorrow,” deepening of joy), and receiving virtue (“saintliness” in Jamesian terminology).

James sources all of these experiences in God’s real activity. The mind “feels the divine presence... inflowings of help come in reply to his prayers [and it fills] him with security and peace” (James, 1902/1997, p. 368). James (1902/1997) calls these “*realities in the completest sense of the term*” (p. 368). He (James, 1902/1997) speaks of an “actual inflow of energy in the faith-state and prayer-state” (p.383) and again of “spiritual energy flow[ing] in and produce[ing] effects, psychological or material, within the phenomenal world” (p. 359).

James (1902/1997) mentions a variety of experiences of emotional gifts. Labeling this reception of grace “saintliness” James holds that one of the consequences is “*Strength of Soul...* Fears and anxieties go, and blissful equanimity takes their places. Come heaven, come hell, it makes no difference now!” (p. 203). He speaks of “increase of charity” (p. 203) or “love [and] Equanimity, Resignation, Fortitude, and Patience” which the faith-state brings (p. 211). Summing up the divine activity on emotions James (1902/1997) highlights an “assurance of safety and temper of peace, and, in relation to others, a preponderance of loving affections” (p. 359).

This inflow of emotional energy can also be an enabling power. Alston (1994) suggests that God sometimes acts directly through means of “an altered state of mind and capacity of certain” individuals (p. 45). James (1902/1997) holds “The highest flights of charity, devotion, trust, patience, bravery to which the wings of human nature have spread themselves have been flown... on the results of... the state of grace” (p. 193). He then invokes Sainte-Beuve, “the

phenomenon of grace must still appear... extraordinary... For the soul arrives thereby at... a state which is genuinely heroic, and from out of which the greatest deeds which it ever performs are executed” (James, 1902/1997, p. 193). This can lead to a “new zest which adds itself like a gift to life, and takes the form either of lyrical enchantment or of appeal to earnestness and heroism” (James, 1902/1997, p. 359). The gift to new life is taken up again in the section *transformations*.

Ruptures

As a third concept within Grace and parallel to God’s giving emotions, a multitude of thinkers (e.g., Marion, 2002; O’Grady & Richards, 2008; Bergin, 1980; James, 1902/1997) have also suggested that God on occasion grants novel thoughts or cognitions. These conceptions have been spoken of with a variety of labels (e.g., “surplus of meaning,” “affectivity,” “exteriority,” “alterity,” “unveiling,” “surprise,” “saturated phenomena,” and “interruption” see Slife & Whoolery, 2006, p. 226) but perhaps the best term is *rupture*. This concept is more than merely the suggestion of God bringing thoughts to an individual’s remembrance and, indeed, usually implies more than just adding an additional cognition to a current schema. Rather, the new idea comes from beyond and interrupts and disturbs the current contents of the mindscape that it ruptures.

No stranger to comparative theistic conceptions, Carl Jung experienced this concept himself: “God is the name by which I designate all things which cross my willful path violently and recklessly, all things which upset my subjective views, plans and intentions and change the course of my life for better or for worse” (reported by Sands, 1961). Lewis (1976) likewise reported a similar experience, “My idea of God is not a divine idea. It has to be shattered time after time. He shatters it himself. He is the great iconoclast” (p. 76). Marion (2002) also

attributes the phenomenon of cognitive rupture to God, “so much does man lack the ability to produce, from himself, the concept adequate to” grasp certain truths; they have to “come to him... only by ‘revelation’ from [God] the Father himself” (p. 148).

Marion provides additional helpful clarifications. This act of God, this rupture or revelation, is a “gift without measure” that can give an experience of being “overwhelmed, dazzled, and submerged by his glory” (Marion, 2002, p. 148). Part of the difficulty (and potential reward) of these particular gifts is that they are so transcendent, so beyond or different from an individual’s current paradigms; individuals cannot merely predicate the new intuition onto their old cognitive constructs or assimilate it into their existing schemas. It is what makes the phenomenon so striking and bedazzling (see Marion, 2000).

In fact, in discussing his conception of ruptures, Brent Slife (2005, 2006) makes a reference to the vast psychological literature on the ubiquity of confirmation bias, the tendency to resist new learning in favor of reinforcing cognitions and convictions already held. He even analogizes these tendencies to the advancement of science itself:

Historian and philosopher Thomas Kuhn (1970) called confirmation bias in science “normal science” because he believed it is the normal manner in which scientists proceed, solving the puzzles to which they already have answers. True paradigmatic change occurs only when the scientific community begins to sense the violation of their deepest assumptions and adjusts those assumptions accordingly. Although “paradigmatic change” has become a popular buzz term, Kuhn makes clear how truly rare this change occurs in science. Scientists constantly resist the recognition of assumption violations (research anomalies). Even when such violations or anomalies have been present for decades, they are often not “seen.” Again, the question should be posed: Why would we

ever, given these proclivities toward our own biases, notice their violation? (Slife & Whoolery, 2006, p. 226)

The answer is “that God is responsible for many of the ruptures that prompt us to change our theoretical and methodological assumptions and bring us closer to true understanding” (Slife & Whoolery, 2006, p. 226; see also Marion, 2008, p. 138).

As an additional experience with God’s grace, James (1902/1997) includes “perceiving truths not known before” (p. 184). James noted experiences with God can be a “direct perception of fact” (James, 1902, p. 314) and that such “genuine perceptions of truth [are] revelations of a kind of reality” (James, 1902, p. 55). In documenting the variety of religious [theistic] experience, James (1902/1997) also touched on the related conception of the mystic experience which has “*Noetic quality*... They are states of insight into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect. They are illuminations, revelations, full of significance and importance [and have] *Passivity*. [The recipient] feels as if his own will were in abeyance, and indeed sometimes as if he were grasped and held by a superior power...[it is always more than] interruptive” (p. 282-283). Although he did not label these experiences “ruptures” James (1902/1997) seems to be describing their paradigmatic case—a person being “done unto” by God and receiving new truth from beyond their “intellectual” horizon.

Transformations

Transformation, the fourth Grace concept, references a total change in psychological state. As Skalski and Hardy (2013) observe, this is more encompassing than a change in emotion or cognition or even the sum of both alterations (although both may be involved). In its maximal form, this conception could be stated as God gives *new* life – recipients of this particular grace feel born again, converted, forgiven, redeemed. Their hearts are changed and this change is an

act of God (Warner, 1983). Examples abound in folk conceptions as well as academic literature (see e.g., Richards and Bergin, 2004, 2005).

William James devoted two chapters of his *Varieties* to conversion. In them he emphasized, “The personality is changed, the man is born anew” (James, 1902/1997, p. 180). He cautioned against those who would seek to “exclude the notion of the direct presence of the Deity” in explaining these phenomena (James, 1902/1997, p. 180). Rather, James (1902/1997) suggested that divine “forces transcending the finite individual might impress him” through the “subconscious region” (p. 180-181). James (1902/1997) also ties conversion to the larger category of grace,

To be converted, to be regenerated, to receive grace, to experience religion, to gain an assurance, are so many phrases which denote the process, gradual or sudden, by which a self hitherto divided, and consciously wrong, inferior and unhappy, becomes unified and consciously right, superior and happy, in consequence of its firmer hold upon religious realities. This at least is what conversion signifies in general terms whether or not we believe that a direct divine operation is needed to bring such a moral change about (p. 142).

Lewis’s (1952/1996) version of this conception is that in this change God “will make the feeblest and filthiest of us into a god or goddess, a dazzling, radiant, immortal creature, pulsating all through with such energy and joy and wisdom and love as we cannot now imagine” (p. 176). He adds that the process will be “in parts very painful” (p. 176). With colorful analogies to a cottage being changed into a palace or a horse into a Pegasus, Lewis (1952/1996) emphasizes “the point that [this conception] is not mere improvement but Transformation” (p. 185).

Warner (1983), in a paper entitled “Transformations,” observed “the real source of [successful change] is the ever-available Spirit of Truth [or] God” (p. 33). These changes or transformations are all-encompassing and go beyond the rupture’s cognitive reframing, although that is an aspect of this transformative changes as well, for when

a ‘conversion’ is made, in which one’s entire operative outlook is transformed, new categories of thinking come into play... objects and events acquire new significance...

‘Reframing’ is a metaphor too weak to capture this profound transformation of outlook, in which not just the frame but the angle of vision, the lighting...—in short, every factor affecting the way we apprehend our world—all undergo change” (Warner, 1982, p. 26).

In addition to insights this change affects feelings and whole self: “It’s what you *are*, how you feel, that matter” (Warner, 1982, p. 29).

Warner draws upon several case studies to illustrate features of changes of this sort. They seem to happen “Suddenly... in a moment” (Warner, 1982, p. 29). One informant described what God did in this manner: “Right then, between that step and the next, my life was changed... in that moment my heart was completely changed... the suddenness of it... dazed me. It was like a lightning stroke that turned out to be the dawn” (Warner, 1982, 21). Warner (1982) described others having their “feelings changed miraculously” and moments that changed lives “permanently” (p. 21).

The profound change of psyche—changing the whole inner self—can only come by “the Spirit of Truth, which originates in but one Source and speaks directly to the heart, and, ultimately [enacts the] psychological miracle that in the scriptures is called the baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost” (Warner, 1982, p. 30). Warner (1982) also uses the religious term “born of God” for this change in state (p. 35). While this change is something God does, Warner (1982)

notes that the recipients need to “accept His gift” (p. 31) by “receiving and yielding to” (p. 30) the influence of God’s Spirit of Truth. In this manner Warner connects the divine action category of grace with the category of invitation (discussed more below). However, “even though we may muster a degree of emotional honesty in response to this Spirit, more is usually required” (Warner, 1986, p. 23). Men cannot do it alone or at their own insistence; it is still only through deity that individuals can “walk in newness of life” (Warner, 1982, p. 31).

Manifests Perceptual Stimuli

Manifestations are the fifth and final concept within the Grace category. To complete a review of Grace conceptions wherein mortals are “done-unto” by divine activity this section considers concepts in which God is understood to directly communicate to the perception of a mortal. This would include “visions, voices, rapt conditions, guiding impressions, and ‘openings’” or in James’s (1997) language, “Incursions from beyond the trans-marginal region” (p. 353-354). As we have already seen (above) there are some (e.g., Murphy, 2009; Ellis, 2009) who suggest God does communicate through the stimulation of neurons. This category, however, refers to a conception of more complete experiences of seemingly sensory stimuli (as opposed to novel thoughts, as in the rupture concept). There are, of course, numerous mytho-historic (e.g., scriptural) accounts of divine visions and similar manifestations (see Wright, 1952; Collins, 2001), but the focus here is on *current* activity of God (or conceptions of that current activity). In the modern era it is not a common conception, and even those who explore it suggest it is somewhat limited (e.g., Smedes, 2004). Still, for the sake of completeness, it is included here.

James, as usual, provides some of the most helpful insight and summary. “In none of these cases is the revelation distinctly motor;” while in some cases there is a motor element as well, for most, “the inspiration seems to have been predominantly sensorial” (James, 1902/1997,

p. 356-357). “The subjects here actually feel themselves played upon by powers beyond their will” (James, 1902/1997, p. 354). These “automatisms” give the “sense of being the instrument of a higher power” (James, 1902/1997, p. 354). James (1902/1997) also hypothesizes that this phenomenon was associated with the “transmarginal or subliminal region” of consciousness (although he was fine with calling it by another name) (p. 357). This subliminal region, James (1902/1997) held, was not only the source of these sensory automatisms, but also other mystical experiences and communications from God (as well as being associated with the usual psychological phenomena such as dreams, inactive memories, hypnotic states, unconscious prejudices, etc.).

Potential of Grace Concepts for a Theistic Approach to Psychology

This section on the strongly theistic category of Grace concludes with a review of the various conceptions within this category and their potential utility for a theistic approach to psychology. Grace has been a particularly fecund category for providing strongly theistic concepts of Gods action (i.e., giving life, granting emotional strength, rupturing, transforming psyche, and manifesting perceptual stimuli). William James (1902/1997), whose *Varieties of Religious Experience* provided examples for four of the five concepts in this category, finished that work with an explanation that the “supreme reality” and “higher part of the universe” that was responsible for the phenomena in the previous pages was “God [who] is a causal agent, as well as a medium of communion” (p. 381). In other words, it was God’s activity (without being bound by naturalistic assumptions, a point James (1902/1997) makes in the first chapter) that was responsible for the varieties of religious experiences reviewed. The other writers reviewed above likewise make strong theistic assumptions.

It is one thing for conceptions of God's action as graceful gifts to attain the label *strongly theistic*, but to be truly useful for the current project they should also have some utility for psychology and the human sciences. How does the category of Grace stack up in this regard? Across the board, the concepts within the Grace category relate surprisingly well to the discipline. The aspects of the gracious concept of giving life (consciousness, conscience, free will) are topics of direct interest to psychology, particularly the sub-discipline of cognitive psychology. Consciousness alone typically gets a full chapter in introductory psychology text books (e.g., Myers, 2010). Furthermore, it is a topic rife with potential for additional scientific exploration. As evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins (1999) noted, cognitive psychologist Steven Pinker “sets out the problem of subjective consciousness, and asks where it comes from and what's the explanation. Then he's honest enough to say, ‘Beats the heck out of me’... and I echo [his answer]. We don't know. We don't understand it.”¹⁴ Perhaps a theistic approach would provide some theories and hypotheses, the investigation of which could illuminate the problem of consciousness. There is also room for similar insights regarding emotional strength or exemplars of virtue in psychology as well (see Fowers, 2005; Walker, 2006).

Ruptures have a particularly promising potential for psychological application. Not only are profound cognitive changes an intriguing psychological phenomenon in their own right, but they also address one of the major challenges of human endeavors (including sciences itself)—escaping confirmation bias (see Slife & Whoolery, 2006; see also Marion, 2008, p. 138). Ruptures are also concepts that have already begun to be utilized by psychologists (James, 1902/1997; Slife & Whoolery, 2006; Smith 2010; Downs, Gantt, & Faulconer, 2012)

¹⁴ He does encourage scientists to keep working on it, perhaps theistic conceptions could be an aspect of the very “imaginative” thinking that Dawkins encouraged earlier in his remarks (although ironically, Dawkins saw this imagination as an aspect of science and pointedly *not* of religions).

Psychologists have also recently begun taking up Jamesian conversion (including the possibility of divine origins) as a serious research topic (see e.g., Skalski & Hardy, 2013). Miller and C' de Baca (2001) call it “quantum transformation” emphasizing the holistic nature of the change and likewise note the theistic aspect. Visions are similarly a soundly psychological phenomenon, and in the spirit of a Jamesian style empiricism could be considered (theistically) as legitimately originating from God (see Gantt & Melling, 2009). Overall, the category of Grace and the concepts within it hold significant potential for a theistic approach to psychology. Specific illustrations of how these concepts could contribute to ongoing theory, research, and practice within the discipline is taken up in the next chapter.

Invitation

The sixth and final category of God’s activity in the world in current taxonomy is *Invitation*. As a category, invitation or calling conceives of God as actively giving to a person (or an event) a goal, an aim, or a purpose. It is a *teleological* (final causal) conception in that an action of God is inviting to a purposeful, future occurrence or state. In some sense, God’s activity in this category is *co-activity* (see Slife and Richardson 2011a, 2011b).¹⁵ God still initiates action (and this activity *is* the invitation, whatever the response), but there is a sense in which an aspect of God’s activity in the world—God’s work—is left incomplete until another agent receives and responds to God’s invitation (see TeSelle, 1990).

God’s action through invitation or calls has been conceptualized by many thinkers across the years. As Thomas (1983b) notes, process theologians and philosophers have been particularly helpful in providing possible understandings of God’s action as a lure or aim. Russell (1995) comments how, on the process view, “God is seen as acting persuasively in all events, though never exclusively determining their character” (p. 7). As a category, therefore, *Invitation*

¹⁵ Faulconer (2003) suggests invitations make humans “passively active” or “receptive” (p. 6)

compares to an extent with Thomas's *Process View* (Thomas, 1983b). Particular concepts within the theme of invitation include: 1) moral calls, 2) invitations to meaning, 3) vocational calls and invitations to specific behaviors, and 4) God's presence as a Call of the Other (or The Other). These are considered here, in turn, followed by overall remarks about this category's potential application to psychology.

Moral Call

The first conception within the final category of Invitation is *moral call*. God's action in moral calling—invitation to ethical behavior—is perhaps one of the most common conceptions of God's active role in the world. As Russell (1997) notes that “our sense of moral obligation” has been long associated with God's activity (p. 46). Those making this conception (e.g. Olson, Peer, and Knapp, 2004) hold that these calls are contextually particular, not prescriptive, but could be as simple as “reading a bedtime story to your five-year-old or visiting your brother in the hospital” (Olson, 2002, p. 290) This concept is differentiated from the related concept of conscience discussed earlier in that the gracious bestowal of the gift of conscience merely entailed the *ability to sense* moral distinctions whereas the invitation category of moral call refers to the *actual moral prompt*—both are actions of God in the world, but they have a different fundamental character (by analogy, it is similar to the distinction between having eyes and having light).¹⁶ Moreover, because moral prompts are teleological invitations or calls they can be denied or resisted.

Ellis (1995) explicitly identifies God's action as “moral insight” and links that to a free response in humans (p. 381-382). Because these invitations to moral behavior are grounded in God, they are nonrelativistic (see also Olson, Peer, and Knapp, 2004) and call to the human mind

¹⁶ In a similar vein, this concept is also related to God's bestowal of free will or agency, but again this section focuses on the distinctions of the action through invitation particularly.

in a profound manner: “the deeper levels of ethics and morality... come through this revelatory channel as intimations of reality and ethical rightness” (Ellis, 1995, p. 382). Still, despite the reality of the moral rightness of this revelation, “this ethical understanding cannot—by its very nature—be mandatory. [It requires] the ability for free response” (Ellis, 1995, p. 382; see also Murphy & Ellis, 1996). Griffin (2000) likewise suggests persons receive from God “an urge toward the best possibility... This experience of God’s providential activity in us is also the ultimate source of our moral... ideals” (p. 97). The current activity of God, Griffin (2000) holds, gives us “a genuine moral sense and the power to act upon it” (p. 295).

According to Warner (1986, 2001) the moral calls we receive from God are not given as a set of propositions. Instead, they occur more as feelings or sensibilities and can be received or resisted (Warner, 2001). Although ubiquitous, these promptings do not have to be deliberative: “the light or guidance or truth that influences us exists only in living form... through God’s influence, that light spreads its moral illumination over our world. In most cases we have little or no awareness of where it is coming from, yet it guides our responses constantly and subtly haunts us for our misdeeds, calling us to reexamine our ways” (Warner, 2001, p. 215). Warner (2001) suggests that while this moral influence might be manifested through the example other people (even through their written word), still, “the ultimate source of that influence is God” (Warner, 2001, p. 320).

This view is a radically agentic view of the person wherein “life depends upon the choices we make, moment by moment, to do exactly what we sense is right” (Warner, 2001, p. 319). When we violate that moral sense of right we become what Warner (1982, 1983, 1986, 2001) calls *self-deceived*. It is difficult to escape self-deception and serious cases may require receiving a transformative change from God (Warner, 1986; also see “Transformations” above).

However, an important aspect of escaping self-deception is yielding to the moral call of an active God (what Warner (1982) here calls the Spirit of Truth):

people can abandon their victimized and self-deceiving feelings... only by receiving and yielding to the Spirit of Truth... people can shed many of their self-deceptions by yielding their hearts to do exactly as they feel they ought to do, obeying the Spirit of Truth, whether or not they recognize that it is God's Spirit (p. 30)¹⁷

Others (e.g., Olson, 2002) have also proposed conceptualizing God's activity in terms of a moral call. Lewis (1952/1996) suggested that man is "haunted" by senses of "ought... urging [them] to do right" (p. 27, 34). Williams and Gantt (2006) draw on the work of Emmanuel Levinas to argue for meaningful and moral psychology of religion. "For Levinas the absolutely Other is God" and the face of the Other "call[s us] into being [and] into the ethical" (Williams & Gantt, 2006, p. 7, 8; see below for additional concepts relating to God as Other).

Invitation to Meaning

The second concept of God's action within the strongly theistic category of Invitation is akin to the call of God to moral action, and involves God calling or inviting individuals to *meaning*. On this conception, the world (God's creation) is suffused (or saturated) with "thick" phenomenon, acts of God that are revealed in nature or, in other words, (at least some of) the occurrences of nature are revelations from God. The mere material world underdetermines human understanding and interpretation of the world; one of God's actions could be an inviting of particular (true) meanings of the world (revelation). As was noted earlier this is not to be understood as humans putting a subjective gloss over an objective reality (dualism). Rather,

¹⁷ Compare Marion's (2008) quote of Aquinas "Truth is loved, but in such a way that those who love something else would like it if what they love were the truth, and because they do not like to be deceived, they also do not want to be shown that they are deceived. And so they hate the truth for the sake of whatever it is they love instead of the truth. They love the truth insofar as it illuminates, but hate it when it turns its light upon them" (p. 140-141)

reality *really does* have particular meanings—the natural world has a true signification—and those meanings (and signs) are invitations from God.

This concept relates strongly to that of *rupture* discussed above, although these meanings have a somewhat broader emphasis (see Burner, 1990; Kirschner and Martin, 2010). As Bruner (1990) observes, meanings extend beyond the individual human subject and permeate a shared world. Charles Taylor (1980) indicates that meanings can be “signs made by God” (p. 282), which incorporates aesthetic and linguistic cognitions, but also extends to “stones, stars, mountains, [and] forests” (p. 282). These meanings occur less as an overwhelming gift and more as a resistible invitation—they could be interpreted alternatively (see Taylor, 1980). While God might extend these invitations to meanings broadly, not all will accept the invitation to interpret the world according to the invitation of deity (Lewis, 1970). Marion (2008) confirms this distinction noting some saturated phenomena “can no longer merely provoke a bedazzlement [a rupture]; rather, it incites a second-order resistance” (p. 140). Thus the phenomenon in question might “produce the recognition of its truth [or] the possibility of rejecting it” (Marion, 2008, p. 140) but the subject receiving God’s invitation must exercise their free-will (see also Marion, 1997/2002, p.310).

Ellis (1995) held that the major case of “extraordinary divine action in the already existent universe” was “revelation as to the nature and meaning of reality” (p. 379). Ellis (1995) further sub-divided this action into two parts, the general case (considered here) and particularly moral insights (discussed in the previous section) (see also Murphy & Ellis, 1996). Commenting on the more general case, Murphy and Ellis (1996) emphasize that this is not just a perception issue wherein there is no divine action outside of the inner mental experience of individuals; it is not “merely a human projection, merely a subjective search for meaning (p. 218). Rather God

actually acts to “make available visions of ultimate reality...allowing transcendent reality to make itself known, making available to us new patterns of understanding” (Murphy & Ellis, 1996, p. 217). Here, Murphy and Ellis (1996) use language that allows for the contribution of human agency—God “makes available” and “allows;” in other places they further emphasize that God’s action in revelation is “noncoercive” (p. 209) and that “sufficient evidence is given” to comprehend the meaning of the ultimate reality, but “this evidence is not overwhelming” and humans’ choice effects their ability to receive truth (p. 210-211).

Process philosopher/theologian Griffin likewise emphasizes the agentic aspect of conceiving of God’s action as invitations to meaning. “The divine power,” Griffin (2000) says, “is persuasive, not coercive or unilaterally determining” (p. 293). This persuasion tends toward meanings or “eternal forms” whether they are “logical, mathematical, geometric, moral, or aesthetic” (Griffin, 2000, p. 293). According to Griffin (2000), God, through divine persuasion, particularly seeks beauty of every kind, “music, poetry, scenery, food and drink [as well as the] intellectual beauty of seeking and discovering truth” (p. 294). In addition these persuasions “lure towards novelty” (Griffin, 1983, p. 126); they encourage or invite creativity in their response, thus meanings and understandings can be expanded and deepened. Because on the process view God is really giving to all events their “ideal aim” it is legitimate to see (all) events as “extraordinary acts of God” and “to receive them as special revelations of God” (Griffin, 1983, p. 129).

Others (Stoeger, 1993, Murphy & Ellis, 1996; Plantinga, 1997; Lewis, 1970; see also Wildman, 2004) have likewise insisted that natural events ought to be seen not as ontological realities, but as meaningful patterns—intended regularities, revelations, or communications (invitations) from God. Lewis (1970) pointed out that humans could resist these symbols: “There

is an activity of God displayed throughout creation... which men refuse to recognize” (p. 6). Still, some individuals could choose to recognize and make sense of the activity of God in the world. For these, the repeated patterns in nature became meaningful communication from God, specifically “some are reminders and others prophecies” (Lewis, 1970, p. 6). TeSelle (1990) further expanded on this concept including more traditionally conceived symbols:

Often forgotten as acts of God are word, declaration, address, symbolic presentation... God’s declared will which may or may not be fulfilled in finite events. This includes divine commands, threats or promises... intended to lead to human response and action. [It] is the modern notion that human beings in some sense ‘complete’ God’s creation, which has been left in some way ‘unfinished’ (p. 74).

The conception of God’s action as genuine invitation to meaning (including through the natural world) suggests the adoption of the perspective of hermeneutic realism (see Slife, Reber, & Faulconer, 2012; Slife & Christensen, 2013). This perspective escapes the problems of dualism (particularly in the split between subjective and objective realms) because it holds that what are most fundamentally real are “meanings ‘all the way down’” (Slife, Reber, & Faulconer, 2012 p. 472). Hermeneutic realism is thus more accommodating of spiritual or theistic realities (Slife & Christensen, 2013). In such a world, God “delivers the proper meanings and orders the intuitions according to the concepts missing up to this point” (Marion, 2002, p. 149). Given that everything is meaning, one could say that God “made the hermeneutic... of everything” (Marion, 2002, p. 149; see also Marion, 2008).

Vocation and Other Particular Actions

In tandem with God’s invitation to moral behavior and meanings is a third invitation, the concept of God’s activity as calling to vocation. Like moral calls, these are invitations to

particular actions, but like invitations to meanings, there is not necessarily a strong ethical component to this conception (other than the sense of the divine in the call). God may be asking a person to do a job or a task, but without a traditionally conceived or generalizable moral consequence for declining that invitation. For example, in this conception, God might call someone to go into the social sciences as a profession, but resisting this invitation would not be a comparable phenomenon to resisting the ethical obligation not to kill, steal, or lie. This concept has both a general case (vocation, calling) and specific instances (e.g., invitations to singular specific actions).

The call of God in the general case (vocation) also has several manifestations (see Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012). Many see God's action as calling them to a particular profession (e.g., Hall, 2004). Noting this popular view Kolden (1983) summarizes, "when one is 'called' to follow Christ one's occupations becomes the 'calling' in which one services God" (p. 382). Other views (from the Christian tradition) see "vocation as referring explicitly to churchly occupations" or "the general call to be a Christian" (Kolden, 1983, p. 382). Additionally (drawing on Luther) he suggests that "'vocations' refers not only to one's occupation but to all one's relationships, situations, contexts, and involvements (including, of course, one's occupation, if one is employed)" (Kolden, 1983, p. 385). God can give one person many callings; "Thus, at any given time one will have a vocation that involves many different offices or stations: child, spouse, parent, student, employer or employee, citizen, community member, etc." (Kolden, 1983, p. 387). Luther saw the relationship of marriage as a particularly theistic 'vocation;' God "is said to reveal to husband, wife, children, and others in the household that this state also is a calling from God" (Kolden, 1983, p. 387).

In a similar vein, but smaller scale, God is also conceived as calling humans to particular purposes. Representing the process view, Griffin (2000) states that, “Each experiential event in the world receives from God its ‘ideal aim,’ which amounts to prevenient grace, being an urge toward the best possibility open to it” (p. 97). However, on this view the “best possibility,” is not always necessarily a moral one (see Griffin, 1983); it may just be the best of the possible options available. Like moral calls and other invitations, these aims are not compulsory. All events are “influenced by the initial aim received from God, but... even apart from [occasions which have a particularly] significant degree of self-determining power, the divine influence cannot unilaterally bring about states of affairs” (Griffin, 2000, p. 309).

God as The Other

Although touched on above (see *moral call*), the fourth concept within Invitation, God as Other, has some additional important distinct features. In this concept, God’s “mere presence” is sufficient to act on humans, particularly in ways that constitute human being (especially in relationality; Levinas, 1982/1985). Like the aspects covered above (especially the calls to ethical action) God’s presence as an Other is also an invitation – humans can agentially respond by accepting (receiving/responding) or rejecting (totalizing) this presence (see Levinas, 1982/1985).

Thomas (1990) quotes Rahner as suggesting that God’s action on human beings is formal causal, “God in his most proper reality makes himself the innermost constitutive element of man” and this is done “without God ceasing to be infinite” (p. 45). This constitutive action invites or calls people to be what they are (human beings) and relates them to one another (see Marion, 1997/2002; Murphy & Ellis, 1996). For this reason hermeneutic realism (see above) is also sometimes referred to as ontological relationality, suggesting that the theistic world

“consists of relational meanings rather than isolatable objects” (Slife, Reber, & Faulconer, 2012, p. 472).

Invoking Levinas, Marion (2008) observes that the theistic activity that enables a person to “become a human being... makes a person appear who is essentially defined as the crux and the origin of his or her relationships. [However] If seeing a face implies reading a net of relationships in it, I will see it only if I experience ‘an idea of the infinite’ (Levinas), that is, this center of relationships, which cannot be objectivized or reduced to me” (p. 74). Marion (2008) notes that human beings have a choice in how they receive the sense of infinite otherness – they can see it for what it really is or totalize it to a mere extension of themselves. To do the former, however, Marion (2008) emphasizes the need for the activity of God (Revelation, specifically charity).

Potential of Invitation Concepts for a Theistic Approach to Psychology

As with the previous categories of divine action, Invitation concludes with a review of the utility of its concepts for a theistic approach to psychology. Like concepts within the category of Grace, those within the category of Invitation seem particularly well suited for application to the human sciences. Invitation concepts on the whole are activities of God that are directly aimed at humans. Additionally, they all presuppose human agency which places them squarely within a lively and on-going debate with current psychology (see Baer, Kaufman, & Baumeister, 2008; Baumeister, Mele, & Vohs, 2010). Furthermore, by introducing the theistic element, these concepts bring an additional perspective to the free will discussion that is often overlooked (see Dennett, 2008; Bargh, 2008; Wegner, 2008).

God’s callings are strongly theistic as they directly posit God acting in a particular way in a specific time and place and without restriction to special occasion. Unlike in deistic or dualistic

frames, God's calling is not restricted to actions that take place at certain times or only about certain matters—God's callings are conceived as continuous and without restriction to certain realms. For example, God could call someone to be more spiritual, but he could also call them to be an effective scientist, a good father, and/or an excellent chef. Further, the sense of conscience or "ought" also seems directly applicable to psychology because God's callings and moral prompts may be justifiably described as a thought or a feeling or experience, all with potentially manifested behaviors and thus legitimate psychological topics according to any particular school of thought. Particular concepts in this category may make contact with particular research programs such as moral psychology (Haidt, 2001, 2007) and hermeneutics (Martin & Sugarman, 1999; Kirschner & Martin, 2010). Additionally, as shown in the next chapter, these concepts also have a number of analogs already established in psychological theories.

Conceptual Categories Conclusion

This chapter has described a number of conceptions of divine action. From a disparate literature, six major themes emerged: Interventionism, Dualism, Deism, Physical Cause, Grace, and Invitation. The first three of these were found to be weakly theistic and thus unable to inform a truly or thoroughly theistic approach to psychology. The concepts within Physical Acts had some limited application. However, they focused on physical (mechanical) issues and, as of yet (see Polkinghorne, 2000c), had somewhat limited scope for a theistic approach to psychology. Still, several thinkers from this category suggested concepts that may be of use in neuroanatomy and in other areas in which psychology emphasizes material causes.

The Grace and Invitation categories identified activities of God that primarily affected human beings and thus seem to hold the most promise of having potential applications for a theistic approach to psychology. God was shown to directly act in Grace concepts, unilaterally

bestowing blessings, abilities, or other gifts that had a psychological impact on humans. These included sensations, perceptions, feelings, knowledge, and life itself. Invitation concepts emphasized God's calling to future (telic) actions that required human response. Concepts in this category included moral prompts, invitations to meaning, vocations, and God as Other. Again, these topics are of direct interest to psychology and are thoroughly theistic.

To demonstrate the viability of utilizing such theistic conceptions for psychology, the next chapter illustrates particular possible contributions from several exemplar conceptions taken from the two most promising categories, Grace and Invitation. These theistic concepts are applied to psychological theorizing (including issues involved in hypothesis generation and operationalization), research (in both qualitative and quantitative modes), and practice.

Chapter 3: Illustrations of Concepts for Psychology

At this point, some significant progress has been made in articulating conceptions of divine activity for a theistic approach to psychology. In addition to the clarification surrounding foundational conceptions and definitions in Chapter 1 (e.g., naturalism, theism (strong and weak), and science), theism has also been presented as a possible conceptual framework for psychology. However, that chapter also showed that the current psychological literature lacked a clear conceptualization of understandings regarding the founding assumption of theism (i.e., the activity of God) from which psychologists interested in this approach could draw upon. This deficiency was addressed in Chapter 2 with a fully-fledged taxonomy or schema of divine activity in the world. Still, to demonstrate the viability of this conceptual schema for the project of a theistic approach to psychology, more is needed—specific articulations of plausible applications of theistic concepts to psychological science. This chapter provides such articulations by providing practical illustrations of how these theistic concepts might be used in psychological theory, research, and practice, thus affording a kind of conceptual test by extension of the practical implications of theistic concepts to a human science. These illustrations are not intended to be exhaustive, merely to serve as possible examples of what might be done if psychology took these theistic concepts seriously.

In the previous chapter, two of the six categories of conceptions of divine action were found to have particularly promising potential application to psychology—the categories of Grace and Invitation. This chapter takes examples from these categories and fleshes out a few illustrations of how they might inform a theistic approach to psychology in theory, research, and practice. From the Grace category, the concepts of *ruptures* and *transformation* are illustrated. From the Invitation category, the concept of *moral calls* is used. This chapter ends by noting a

variety of other possible theistic concepts that also have potential for additional application and fuller development.

The following sections take up the three main exemplar concepts and follow a similar pattern in exploring various applications. First, theoretical issues are examined in a manner that compares and contrasts the theistic concept with possible analogs from the current social science literature (if any) and emphasizes theistic distinctions. Keeping with the pluralistic orientation to science (see Chapter 1), some research applications are then considered with specific examples from both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Additional issues arising from the quantitative tradition, namely hypothesis generation, operational definitions, and specific articulations of experimental design are addressed. Finally, possible applications to psychological practice (e.g., therapy) are examined. Throughout, where theistic concepts have already begun to be applied, these are highlighted.

Ruptures in Psychological Science

The concept of *ruptures* from the category of Grace is the first example of a theistic concept that is here applied to the scientific study of humans. A refresher of this concept may serve as a helpful (re)orientation as this point. Ruptures, as defined in the previous chapter, are those acts of God in which new ideas, concepts, or cognitions are impressed upon the mind in an almost shocking or overwhelming manner (see also Slife & Whoolery, 2006; Marion, 1997/2002). They are given by God in the sense that they are not considered the sort of thoughts that humans would have come up with naturally on their own or due to the regular operation of merely mundane circumstances. Here the emphasis is on a consideration of new ideas or concepts that seem to come forcefully, suddenly, or surprisingly. As such, *ruptures* may be particularly useful when compared with analogs from cognitive psychology and learning theory,

such as *insight*. The concept of insight also provides a fertile starting ground for research in both the qualitative and quantitative traditions. Ruptures likewise have application in therapeutic settings where their theistic elements suggest additional possibilities (such as a permanent access to a transcendental source of learning) not accessible from the current psychological concept of insight. A sample of a few of these possibilities will help demonstrate the value and unique contribution of theistic concepts for psychology.

Theory

As a theoretical construct, ruptures have many potential applications to psychology. In this section—as an illustration of the potential impact the concept of *ruptures* could have for the discipline—particular connections to and implications for learning theory and cognitive science are explored. In this way, ruptures can be seen as contributing a new conception of knowledge acquisition. While the idea of knowledge from God is not new to history, there is not a currently accepted epistemology for such an occurrence in modern psychology.

The modern expression of cognitive theory in psychology is dominated by learning theories largely based on the Lockean models of the behaviorists (Rychlak, 1981; Myers, 2010). In general, philosophers of psychology (Slife & Williams, 1995; Rychlak, 1981) note two major epistemic traditions, rationalism and empiricism. These hold (respectively) that humans are either born with innate ideas (or categories of understanding) or learn through the association of simple sensory impressions. Rychlak (1981) demonstrates that while theorists blend aspects of these traditions (and nuance them more than can be done here), most modern theories of learning and cognition have been largely subsumed within the empirical or Lockean mode (p. 528-529), leaving little room for God (p. 527).

As a contribution to psychological (specifically cognitive) theorizing, theistic ruptures might be understood as an additional (third) way of learning and knowing. In addition to innate knowledge (rationalism) and sensory input (empiricism), humans might be theorized as gaining understandings through ruptures from God. As was shown in Chapter 2, ruptures seem to come suddenly, grant additional knowledge beyond what was already possessed, and transform prior thinking. This sudden new knowledge and thinking may have a unique feel of “certainty” (Freeman, 2013) and ruptures reveal “quite a different zone or reality” that is experienced as more real and true than the instrumental reality in which humans typically live (Richardson, 2012, p. 8; see also Faulconer, 2012). On the face of it, this realization of these ruptures might be akin to what is sometimes described as a “Eureka!” or “Aha!” moment (Knoblich & Oellinger, 2006; Öllinger & Knoblich, 2009). With the *rupture* construct, however, the additional conception of God’s activity alters the way these moments of profound learning are understood (see Miller & C’ de Baca, 2001; O’Grady & Richards, 2011). Rather than collapse insights into the previously articulated ways of knowing (i.e. saying that insights are merely a fast operation of sensory association and rational categorization working either separately or in tandem, see Myers, 2010, p. 380-381; Haidt, 2001) ruptures could be a truly unique method of knowing.

There are several differences in theory between learning through God’s rupturing and other modes of learning that are understood from the perspective of naturalism. In addition to learning not being tethered to the physical environment or an individuals’ *a priori* capacity, ruptures from God are *transcendent* and *immanent*; they seem to be sourced in a being beyond the environment and beyond the person (Marion, 1997/2002) even as they meaningfully suffuse both (see Freeman, 2004). As Jung put it, “God is [the source of] all things which upset my *subjective* views” (Sands, 1961, emphasis added). In other words, learning from ruptures is not

itself a self-contained (subjective) mental process (Freeman, 2004; Richardson, 2013) as learning is often understood from the perspective of naturalism (Myers, 2010; Öllinger & Knoblich, 2009). While some psychologists already seek to avoid the atomism and subjectivity inherent in naturalistic theories of learning (see Slife, Reber, & Richardson, 2005; Kirschner & Martin, 2010) holding that the environment itself is saturated with meanings, with the concept of *ruptures* God is understood as at least a necessary condition for the meanings in the world/environment (Marion, 2008; Faulconer, 2012). As several thinkers (James, 1902/1997; Freeman, 2013; Richardson, 2013) have argued these ruptures do not occur as originating from an isolated, interior ego, nor do they appear to be sourced in radically transcendental ideal forms; they seem to be the result of a real Actor who is Other. Of course, God's actions as ruptures of understanding could be said to be "indwelling" (York, 2009), but this immanence is a transcendental immanence wherein God, who is beyond "all our concepts," is also the ground of our existence, in whom "we live and move and have our being" (Richardson, 2013, p.6; see below). Additionally, through ruptures, God could bestow learning from *beyond the environment* as well as beyond the encapsulated or egoistic self (transcendence) even as these ruptures are experienced "in a context" (immanence) (Richardson, 2013, p.3; Faulconer, 2012; Freeman, 2004).

A few scholars (Faulconer, 2012; Freeman, 2013; Richardson, 2013) have recently begun to explore the theoretical and philosophical foundations of these experiences. Freeman (2013), for example, emphasizes that a full investigation of the action of what Freeman (invoking William James) calls "higher energies... cannot be done within the confines of a purely naturalistic psychology" (p. 13). The problem is the "encapsulated self" (Richardson, 2013, p. 1) or "a psychology in which there exist firm boundaries between the human and the other-than-

human” (Freeman, 2013, p. 13). As Richardson (2013) suggests that a “true transcendence” requires a breakdown of such boundaries and reconceiving of ontology as “strongly relational” (p. 8). As discussed in Chapter 2, the Otherness of God constitutes (in part) human nature and being (see Faulconer, 2012; Freeman, 2013).

The difference of anchoring the conception of ruptures in a theistic reality of God’s activity has practical implications. If, for example, what are called scientific breakthroughs are often actually theistic ruptures (see Marion, 2008, p. 138; O’Grady & Richards, 2011) then the disciplinary wisdom on how to increase or maximize these breakthroughs might change. For example, scientists might be encouraged to seek out God in their own lives while working on their academic problems (see O’Grady & Richards, 2011).

The theistic concept of ruptures as a psychological construct for cognitive theory has application beyond scientists themselves. It would be a theory for all human learning, not just scientific investigation. As Marion (2008) has suggested, the phenomenon of revelation, although transcendent, might be “banal” or immanent (p. 125); ruptures might occur in everyday experiences that are “open to all” (p. 126). On some scale whenever humans learn something that does not fit with their preconceived cognitions they could be said to be ruptured by God. Faulconer (2012) notes that “Traditionally Jews and Christians [suggest] that the beautiful [an aspect of transcendence] can interrupt” (p. 166) the tendency to maintain an instrumentalist view of the world (see Freeman, 2013; Marion, 2008). This interruption “reveal[s] a prior, deeper truth” (Faulconer, 2012, p. 166; see also Richardson, 2012). Even a phenomenon as banal as being jolted by an unexpected meaning (a deeper or truer understanding) while reading a book could be considered God’s rupture (see Slife, 2007). If divine ruptures are also the source of

these types of experiences it would greatly expand the scope of this concept and make it an important, if not essential, psychological construct for further investigation.

Research

Considering the theoretical connections of ruptures to current psychological concepts lays the foundation for research in both the qualitative and quantitative traditions. Although some (e.g., Helminiak, 2010) have suggested that theistic concepts are, in principle, non-investigable, particularly using quantitative or traditional methods, as this section illustrates, this is simply not true. In fact, programs of research in both traditions have already commenced that take *ruptures* (and related concepts) seriously (see below). Still, these examples only represent a small fraction of what could be done from a strongly theistic perspective; nevertheless, a few instances are sufficient for the present purpose: illustrating the possibility of research with these strongly theistic concepts.

Qualitative Approaches. Kari O’Grady and colleagues (2008, 2010, 2011), for example, have already undertaken a qualitative research program that investigates ruptures theistically. O’Grady & Richards (2010) are explicit that their studies were conducted from a strongly theistic worldview wherein, “God exists... and there are... processes by which the link between God and humanity is maintained” (Bergin, 1980, p.99, quoted in O’Grady & Richards, 2010, p. 58)—processes including the ability of God to actually inspire professionals. O’Grady and Richards (2011) researched *researchers* in both the behavioral and natural sciences, investigating the experiences that scientists and scholars from a variety of backgrounds had with “inspiration... defined as divine guidance or influence” (p. 354). They used surveys to query a large data set of professional scientists and asked a number of open-ended questions regarding the participant’s experiences with God’s action (specifically guidance and influence) in their professional work

(O'Grady & Richards, 2011). O'Grady and Richards (2011) “used the principles of grounded theory research to qualitatively analyze the written survey responses” (p. 355) and developed a number of theistic themes based on this analysis.

From their analysis, O'Grady and Richards (2011) identified the primary mode of inspiration in these scientists' work as “insight,” their word for *rupture*. As O'Grady and Richards (2011) put it, “feeling enlightened by God... was experienced like a ‘flash’ of insight, a new understanding... or connections between ideas” (p. 357). These are ideas, one respondent emphasized, that they themselves “would never have thought of” (O'Grady & Richards, 2011, p. 61). O'Grady and Richards (2011) also note that while this experience can be described generically as a “breakthrough” (p. 354), a “shortcut to truth” (p. 360), a “eureka moment” (p. 357), “the ‘Aha’ moment” (p. 360), and “something completely new” (p. 357), the emphasis here is that it comes always “from a divine source that existed beyond the limits of self” (p. 360). The fact that O'Grady and Richards' (2011) divine ruptures come from beyond the limits of the isolated, encapsulated self and also come “unexpectedly without effort” (p. 354) and “suddenly” (p. 360), may indicate a further distinction from a naturalistic perspective—for from a naturalistic perspective insights have to occur sequentially, over time, as a result of internal (subjective or ontologically individualistic) “processing” (see Slife, 1993; Öllinger & Knoblich, 2009). O'Grady and Richards's (2010, 2011) qualitative studies on a theistic concept like inspiring ruptures, done from a theistic worldview, demonstrates promising potential for a theistic perspective using theistic concepts. While they (O'Grady & Richards, 2010, 2011) admit that there is much more work to be done in mining this rich concept, the data they have collected indicate that theistic ruptures are a robust psychological phenomenon, worthy of further investigation.

There remain a number of aspects about the phenomenon of *ruptures* that would be particularly amenable to further qualitative inquiry. Even the simple prompt: “Describe a time when you experienced an insightful or intuitive leap that came from God or exceeded your own innate capacities,” could be applied to a broader audience. As, O’Grady and Richards’s (2010, 2011) note, the question of how theistic ruptures might impact *atheistic* scientists has not been properly investigated, but would be informative and complementary to their work. Others (i.e., non-scientists) could also be studied. Additional qualitative research questions could particularly focus on the theistic element and ask respondents to describe experiences in which God (however they might conceive of this divine person) gave them the answer to a vexing problem or challenge or in which they feel that God taught them something that they did not know before.

Further qualitative work could draw on specific characteristics of theistic action. As one specific illustration, Marion (1997/2002), Freeman, (2004), Faulconer (2012), and others theorize ruptures from God might have a particular aesthetic quality—ruptures might reveal the Beautiful (in the sense of Real or True beauty), not just beautiful (in a subjective projection or contingent relativism). A qualitative inquiry into the process of artists (“the good artist at any rate” Freeman, 2004, p. 228) might illuminate new facets of ruptures not available in the naturalistic view such as the sense of “more” and “higher” versions of artistic excellence that impel artists to real excellence (Freeman, 2013). Similar inquiry could be conducted into the experience of God and the True or the Good in the same non-contingent or non-relativistic sense (see Freeman, 2004, 2013; Faulconer, 2012). In sum, these few examples of potential approaches illustrate that theistic qualitative work is possible, leads to productive findings, and is worthy of additional development (see O’Grady & Richards, 2011, p. 361).

Quantitative Approaches. As intriguing as it might be to consider from a theoretical or qualitative perspective, God acting on individuals through ruptures might be an objectionable conception for some critics entrenched in quantitative approaches to research. They may ask, “How can such an intangible conception be quantitatively measured or scientifically studied?” As we will see, however, there is nothing inherently more difficult about studying a theistic intangible compared with a host of other intangibles that psychologists routinely investigate (e.g. emotions, motivations, subconscious processes, moral cognitions, dreams, peak experiences, bias, temperament, perceptions, development, personalities, mental illnesses, or anything else that psychologists operationalize). To address this concern, this section will discuss various ways in which the *rupture* concept could be investigated from a quantitative tradition, including providing specific articulations of operationalizations, hypotheses, and experimental methods. Psychologists developed the concept of operationalization to specifically allow intangibles to be quantitatively investigated, and theistic intangibles, such as ruptures, can be operationalized as easily as non-theistic intangibles, such as generic (non-theistic) insight. For instance (as described in Chapter 1) Reber, Slife, and Downs (2012) used a measure called the GAM (God Attachment Measure) which used Likert scales to assess a theistic relationship and attachment (or relationship with the not-presently-seeable Divine). This measure was based on a similar (naturalistic) instrument, the PAM (Parental Attachment Measure) that also operationalized unseen relationships (i.e., the relationship between an individual and their not-currently-present (seeable) parents) (Reber, Slife, & Downs, 2012). In both the GAM and the PAM, not only are the objects (or others) of an individuals’ relationship not seen at present, but *relationships themselves* (“the betweenness”) is *never* seen (Slife, Hope, & Nebeker, 1999; Slife & Melling, 2008; Wendt & Slife, 2007). They are experienced, to be sure, but this relationship (or any

relationship for that matter) never falls on a person's retina, either of the study participant or of the study researcher. Theistic researchers could develop a similar measure for (unseeable) theistic ruptures. As one example of such a Likert-style question, participants might be asked to consider the past week and rate on a 7 point scale from "always" to "never" how often they felt guided, taught, or surprised by God [or Spirit or other term participant might use for the Divine or Holy]. This theistic measure of rupture would assume that it really was God bestowing the insight.

Other examples of possible operationalizations could help illustrate the differences between a theistic rupture and its naturalistic analog. Theistic insight (ruptures) could be identified as those insights that have divine qualities such as "awe" (Faulconer, 2012; James, 1902/1997), "passivity" (Freeman, 2004), "solemnity" (James, 1902/1997), "loving," or "intense connection" (Richardson, 2013, p. 8), or that lead to apperception of a deeper reality (see James, 1902/1997) of Truth, Beauty, or Goodness (Faulconer, 2012).¹⁸ While there are those who argue that operationalizing impoverishes the meaning of whatever concept is operationalized (Slife & Melling, 2008) (or indeed, does violence to them, see Faulconer, 2012), this concern has not prevented psychologists from operationalizing all sorts of non-observables (see above). Participants could fill out Likert scales for the any of these qualities (e.g., they could be asked to rate, on a scale of 1-7: "How solemn was your new insight (rupture)?" "How full of awe was your experience?"). Researchers could also develop scales for how Truthful, Beautiful, or Good the insights from these ruptures were for the participants. Research designers could combine these with a host of other similar measures (e.g., an operationalization of transcendent

¹⁸ In the theistic conception the learning of new truth, appreciation of beauty, or sense of goodness are not subjective projections (Freeman, 2004) but are real and persistent (non-contingent) meanings of which God is a necessary condition (see Faulconer, 2012; Freeman, 2013) and serve as a "context of contexts" across situations. Hence, the truths learned in a rupture can be "capital T" Truths (see Slife & Reber, 2005)

immanence, see Freeman, 2004, 2013) to construct an entire instrument to assess aspects of theistic ruptures. Additional similar measures and instruments could be developed as further research into divine activity is conducted.

After operational definition, a second concern for quantitative methodologists is hypothesis generation. An exploratory list of possible examples may help establish the viability of utilizing this concept in quantitative research. These hypotheses get at the theistic concept (or its operationalization) and are all, in principle, falsifiable. Provisional hypotheses regarding ruptures could include conjectures such as:

- Certain participant preparations (e.g., encouraging participants to keep an open mind [particularly to the Divine] or theistically pray and meditate) will increase their likelihood of experiencing theistic ruptures.
- Theistic prayer (i.e., prayer to deity, with real intent) will lead to better (i.e., more Good) psychological outcomes than nontheistic or naturalistic prayer (i.e., in Farrer's (1966) phrase "prayer to see if prayer will work"). Similarly theistic meditation will have measurably different outcomes than naturalistic meditation on the experience of ruptures (or, for that matter, on other theistic experiences, see *transformations* below).
- Certain locations have a theistic quality (i.e., they are a sacred space, e.g., temples, synagogues, mosques, churches, shrines, etc.) and will be rupture-maximizing compared with other locations.
- Ruptures that score high on rating of theistic characteristics (e.g., awe, solemnity) will be rated more meaningful when compared with those that do not. The insights given will be more profound and persistent (enduring).

- When enabled to give theistic explanations, participants will more often attribute profound changes in cognition to a theistic construct (such as Revelation) than to comparable naturalistic explanations.

In addition to components of quantitative methods such as operationalizations and hypotheses, concrete examples of experimental procedures would also help corroborate the viability of using theistic concepts in traditional approaches to science. Current experimental research on the psychological phenomenon of insight (see Myers, 2010, p. 371-372) may provide a jumping off point for future experimental investigation of the theistic concept of ruptures. While it may seem problematic to research a phenomenon from the category of Grace (i.e., one that is conceptualized as occurring at times and circumstances determined by God and not the principal investigator), the investigation of this sort of theistic phenomenon has methodological parallels with how insights are currently investigated (see Knoblich & Oellinger, 2006). As Knoblich & Oellinger (2006) observe, even naturalistic “Researchers looking for that answer [to what causes the “Aha” or eureka moment] face a daunting methodological problem: how to enable volunteers to systematically produce insights for investigation [because the phenomenon is so] haphazard” (p. 38-39). Still, researchers have managed to create a vast array of experimental laboratory conditions that they feel adequately generalize to those profound real world examples of sudden knowledge breakthroughs (see Knoblich & Oellinger, 2006; Öllinger & Knoblich, 2009). As Slife and Reber (2009b) remind critics, as “data are ‘underdetermined...’ data do not completely determine interpretations (findings)” and so these results of conventional studies on insight could also be understood with “a theistic interpretation of the data” (p. 133; see also Slife, Reber, & Lefevor, 2012; Reber, Slife, & Downs, 2012). In this case, the insights could be understood as ruptures.

Understood in this light, as ruptures, insights would be understood to be sourced in God, providing researchers with an alternative paradigm for understanding the frequency and origin of insight (ruptures)—two of the currently most vexing issues with this topic (see Öllinger & Knoblich, 2009; Knoblich & Oellinger, 2006). In other words, one of the reasons that insight might appear so “haphazard” to naturalistic researchers is that these types of learning are *not* predicated on individual actions or environmental factors, rather they come at the will of God. There still might be regularities to their occurrence, but these would be understood differently than the regularities of naturalism (Stoeger, 1993; Slife & Melling, 2012; Slife & Reber, 2009a). As understood as sourced in God, ruptures might be increased, not by atomistic efforts (Öllinger & Knoblich, 2009), but, perhaps, by appeals to the immanently transcendental Other (perhaps through prayer). Theistic aspects of the experience (e.g., feelings of awe, sanctity, sacredness, or holiness) might become major components of investigation. Researchers could, in such a case, attempt to record whether subjects seemed ruptured by divine insights more at their place of worship (i.e., church, synagogue, mosque, or temple) than in more profane locations.

Theistic conceptions could also suggest novel research projects. For example, given the connection that some have made between divine ruptures and art (Marion, 1997/2002; Faulconer, 2013; Freeman, 2004), quantitative research could be designed that utilized great works of art (e.g., paintings or pieces of music) to examine Godly ruptures. As a possible illustration of this, participants could be brought into the lab and exposed to great works of art and then given various instruments designed to measure the rupture experience. Another version of this study could involve participants being asked to complete challenging cognitive tasks that have been designed to require a rupture (even a “mundane” rupture such as using everyday objects in a new way to solve a problem) after exposure to “transcendental art” and the results

compared to a group without the transcendental art condition. A third variation could have participants attempt to *create* their own work of art after this exposure (see Freeman, 2004). Such studies could produce results that generate new understandings of the creative process that may not have been discovered had investigators limited themselves to purely naturalistic conceptions in their research.

To say all this in another way, in addition to reinterpreting naturalistic studies, “A theistic program of research... would explicitly consider the possibility of theistic factors” (Slife, Reber, & Lefavor, 2012, p. 226)—factors such as divine ruptures. Traditional experimental design, for example, might be helpful in investigating the regularities of ruptures and thus the conditions of rupture maximizing. As Reber, Slife, and Downs (2012) have demonstrated, original empirical research can be done with theistic constructs and variables as well as from a theistic perspective (see also Slife & Reber, 2009b, p. 133).

Practice

Having examined the utility of *ruptures* for both theory and research (above), this section turns to a few applications of this Grace concept to therapeutic practice. As a concept freed from naturalism, therapeutic ruptures sourced in God have already begun to be utilized somewhat within the discipline (see Slife, Mitchell, & Whoolery, 2004; Smith, 2010; Richards & Bergin, 2004). Smith (2010), for example, speaks of *surprise* as non-natural miracle and explicitly links it to encounters with God or the transcendent in therapeutic settings. Slife, Mitchell, and Whoolery (2004) review the practices of the Alldredge Academy, a therapeutic treatment center that encouraged clients to seek God as the source of all therapeutic change. These two cases present solid, if preliminary, illustrations of how *ruptures* might be applied to practice.

Smith (2010) sees the many references to God and infinity in the face of the Other and the potential for ruptures (she uses the terms “miracle” and “surprise”) as having a particular application to therapists.¹⁹ While “these surprises are the sparks of therapeutic miracles,” potential ruptures are sometimes “ignored, overlooked, and ultimately destroyed” (Smith, 2010, p. 82). Smith (2010) suggests that therapists’ training and professional saturation with naturalism may prevent them from recognizing and being open to ruptures because standard naturalistic practices encourage universal abstractions such as “standardized diagnoses” which “discount qualitative differences between and among clients” (Slife, 2004b, p. 48). As a naturalistic assumption, these abstractions are understood to be lawful in the sense of applying everywhere, at all times, to everyone.

However, Smith (2010) discusses a “saving grace,” a “humility” that allows for therapists to “maintain an attunement to *surprise*” (p. 82) or particular and theistic regularities that could include regular ruptures (regular *irregularities* one might say). Smith (2010) discusses a case study in which the therapist initially had labeled a client in a particular way and saw all his actions in terms of that label (p. 80). However, in Smith’s (2010) terms, as a result of a “supernatural disclosure,” the therapist was “absolutely stunned” and a “miracle” occurred (p. 81). The therapist-client relationship “was immediately transformed” and the effects of the rupture multiplied, for it “shatters the boundaries of our (intellectual) beliefs and expectations of the other and allows for the emergence of the unanticipated and the unexpected” (Smith, 2010, p. 81). Still, Smith (2010) cautions that while “Therapists can always invite miracles by creating a relational space that is characterized by therapeutic and relational openness and hopefulness... God, or the divine, can only stand next to us as an embodied other – as the client – if we allow

¹⁹ Smith (2010) notes that many thinkers (i.e., van den Berg, Levinas, Peperzak) use the term “God” for the source of the transcendental otherness that can rupture someone’s perceptions, but avoids explicitly endorsing this terminology in this particular article (p. 73)

the mystery and the sacredness to reveal itself, and this requires a stance that accepts a provisional, tentative, and incomplete knowledge of the client” (p. 82). In other words, the maximization of theistic rupturing experiences might require a humility before God and a corresponding resistance to abstract universals (and therefore an openness to alternatives)—even for therapists.

As Slife, Mitchell, and Whoolery (2004) note, in the case of the Alldredge Academy, a therapeutic community was created with the specific intention to be rupture maximizing—to violate expectations—in order to facilitate these “particular learning opportunities... in which clients are jolted from their typical ways of thinking and reasoning” (p. 40). As part of the therapeutic process, various conceptions of theistic action are described to clients and they are taught to recognize God’s activity in their lives (Slife, Mitchell, & Whoolery, 2004, p. 46-47). Slife, Mitchell, and Whoolery (2004) give the example of a particular client who received a “gift” from God that enabled her to overcome her preconceptions (p. 49). In this therapeutic model, even overcoming preconceptions are a type of *theistic* rupture for “God’s activity is conceptualized to be the center of therapeutic change; indeed, no change is possible without [it]” (Slife, Stevenson, & Wendt, 2010, p. 168). In fact, at the Alldredge Academy *all* therapeutic events, not just overcoming (rupturing) preconceptions, are understood theistically; “there is no intervention, however small or implicit, for which an active God is not considered necessary or even central” (Slife, Stevenson, & Wendt, 2010, p. 169).

These promising case studies illustrate that God-centric ruptures could be further utilized in therapeutic settings. As suggested by these examples, both therapists and their clients could potentially benefit from seeking out, being attentive to, and maximizing theistic ruptures. They might also engage in particularly theistic relational attitudes and conceptions, understanding

friends, family members, and co-workers in terms of a strong relationality (see Richardson, 2013). On the part of the therapists and counselors, it could help those administering services to not remain stuck in their current conceptualizations of a particular case but rather escape the totalizing of naturalistic abstractions (i.e., the reduction humans to labels rather than humans) inherent in diagnostic labels (Smith, 2010; see also, Slife, 2004b). Such ruptures of the naturalistic mode of perception (also, in this case, understood as the instrumental or technological view) could “interrupt any possible totalizing,” that act of violence in which clients (humans) “would cease to be human” (Faulconer, 2012, p. 161, 168). This is an example of “the gift of God... grace [that] turns out to be the mundanity of the world [as well as] it is the joy and surprise” (Faulconer, 2012, p. 168). In other words, the ruptures of the therapy room could be said to have an “immanent transcendence.”

For clients, ruptures have tremendous potential to aid in overcoming various forms of cognitive fixations (e.g., overconfidence, belief perseverance, functional fixation, confirmation bias, obsession, compulsion, etc.). In this sense, ruptures are somewhat related to the long-standing idea of *therapeutic insight*. However, unlike that traditional conception, ruptures are understood as originating from God and thus operate somewhat differently (see Slife, Mitchell, & Whoolery, 2004). As seen in the case of the Aldridge Academy, with God as the source of therapeutic insight and change, clients do not need to be tied to a particular setting or therapist to continue to make progress (Slife, Mitchell, & Whoolery, 2004, p. 48). In fact, God may be “the only part of the [client’s] therapeutic context that they will always be able to take with them” which could thus minimize the difficulties with transference of learning outside of the context of explicit treatment settings (Slife, Mitchell, & Whoolery, 2004, p. 48). This is because gracious

actions of God, like ruptures, are understood to be active without limitation in time, place, or circumstance (see Slife, Stevenson, & Wendt, 2010).

From naturalistic conceptions of therapy the transfer of learning is particularly problematic. Clients are construed as self-contained (atomistic or egoistic) units capable of only superficial relationships and reciprocal interaction (see Slife, 2004a). In this scenario, learning is environmentally contingent (and the environment itself is also bordered off, isolated entity) and it is problematic to conceive of how the changes in one context (therapy) are, in principle, transferable to another context (e.g., the client's dysfunctional home life). Boundaries exist between the learner (i.e., the client) and the teacher (i.e., the therapeutic environment, including therapist) (see Freeman, 2004). In contrast, theistic concepts such as ruptures presuppose a strong relationality wherein God (and relationship with God) is *constitutive* of the particular self (i.e., the client) and, thus, can directly affect him or her in *any* context (see Slife, 2004; Slife & Richardson, 2008; Slife & Wiggins, 2009).

In all, ruptures have the potential to be a powerful concept for therapy. All this is not to say that there may not be important caveats to how this conception could or should be taken up—O'Grady and Richards (2010) suggest, for instance, that therapists not impose their ruptures on their clients with the authority of a particular insight being “God's will” for that client. Likewise, there are surely additional impacts and understandings for therapy when considering ruptures theistically such as remaining humble and not foreclosing on additional ruptures from God—even ones that may reframe understandings of previous ruptures (O'Grady & Richards, 2010, p. 65; Freeman, 2013, p. 8). Here the point is merely to offer some suggestive potential applications.

Much more work would need to be done to fully apply ruptures (and the other theistic concepts) to psychology. The possibilities reviewed here have only been initial illustrations of the many possible applications. Still, even in their preliminary tentativeness, these suggested applications showed constructive distinctions between approaches incorporating theistic concepts and those advocating naturalism. For instance, theory was impacted by a different fundamental ontology (strong relationality) in which humans are not seen as isolated, bounded selves, but rather as co-constituted by God and others (see also Slife, 2004; Slife & Richardson, 2008; Slife & Wiggins, 2009). Theories of cognitive learning were likewise altered to account for a third epistemology, direct apperception of true reality (see James, 1902/1997). In research methods, taking theistic ruptures seriously led to a number of specific constructs, hypotheses, and research designs such as those that take into account True Beauty or Real Goodness. Furthermore, this concept allowed for uniquely theistic conditions (theistic prayer, sacred spaces) to be proposed as legitimate research concerns. Examples from therapy included therapists allowing for relational ruptures to resist totalizing their clients (i.e., seeing the client as an abstract and interchangeable diagnostic label instead of a human) and the possibility of a client having a Source for real learning transfer when leaving the therapeutic context.

Each of these is merely an initial proposal, the actual carrying out of a theistic research program or therapeutic practice is no mean feat. Furthermore, other examples in each of these areas could have similarly been proposed and explored (e.g., how the *passivity* of Grace concepts impacts the application of ruptures and the implications for human agency, the impact of a Will behind ruptures, the role of *perfection* as it relates limits of human capacity for receiving ruptures, etc.), but have been left for future development. Psychologists interested in additional

theistic approaches certainly do not suffer from a lack of work that could be done. However, as evidenced in this section, doing it is a possible and productive enterprise.

Transformations in Psychological Science

In addition to *ruptures*, a second Grace concept with potential utility for psychology is *transformation*, sometimes called conversion. In this concept, God enacts a transformative change upon an individual's whole psyche. This concept emphasizes a more holistic change than just cognitive reframing although the latter could be involved in this change as well (Miller & C' de Baca, 2001). In addition to cognitive changes, God is seen as giving recipients a new heart, signifying emotional changes as well as alterations in intentions, motivations, and disposition. Because these changes are given by God, they can occur instantaneously (without the passage of time) and abruptly (i.e. discontinuously) (see below). Yet, as discussed below, these transformations are also tied to a particular context (God) and can be non-subjectively good. Furthermore, God is able to enact, at once, a *comprehensive* change upon an individual to the point where it may be legitimate to say that the *personality* or identity is transformed (see James 1902/1997).

The grounding and sourcing of transformations in deity leads to a number of uniquely theistic features. Following James (1902/1997) many (e.g., Freeman, 2004, 2013; Marion, 1997/2002; Faulconer, 2003) have pointed to a particular type of *passivity* as one of the unique and prime characteristics of God's activity in Grace concepts, particularly transformations. The alterations of meaning involved in this theistic change and the transformation itself also have a quality of *deepness* or profundity that exceeds the capacity of naturalistic modes (i.e., the transformation leads to an experience of the world as realer than reality, truer than true). Additionally, theistic transformations can be distinguished from naturalistic and secular versions

of change in that the former can be said to be “objectively” (i.e., *strongly evaluated* as) good (or Good) (see Warner, 1982, 1983; Slife & Reber, 2009c). Furthermore, such transformations when sourced in God take part in Truth in such a particular way as to make those so transformed more *honest* and True, as well as Good (Warner, 2001). Such profound psychological transformations (although problematic from a naturalistic perspective) surely have significant potential impact on theory, research, and practice.

Theory

The first application of *transformation* is to psychological theorizing, in particular theories of development and personality. In developmental and personality theory, psychological change is of primary concern (Myers, 2010; Lerner 2011). However, the focus of the majority of current (naturalistic) perspectives is on slow, progressive, relatively stable, continuous, developmental change (Lerner, 2011; McAdams, 2006; Myers, 2010; Skalski & Hardy, 2013; Vandenberg & O’Connor, 2005). In contrast, some forms of theistic transformation of psyche seem to be particularly sudden—quick, abrupt, and discontinuous (Freeman, 2008; see also James, 1902/1997; Miller & C’ de Baca, 1994, 2001; Skalski & Hardy, 2013). These transformations seem to happen, “Suddenly... in a moment” or “between that step and the next,” and involve large-scale changes wherein respondents can say, “in that moment my heart was completely changed” (Warner, 1982, 21, 29). As Slife (1993) observes, this type of change is problematic from a naturalistic perspective of time which conventionally assumes events must occur across time, not instantaneously. However, from a theistic perspective, God is not limited or restricted to working within the presumptions of linear time (see also Poe & Mattson, 2005).

Because conventional developmental theories focus on continuities, even when they consider discrete stages of development (see Lerner 2011; Myers, 2010; Vandenberg &

O'Connor, 2005), some (Skalski & Hardy, 2013; Gibbs, 2003) have called for psychology to give greater theoretical consideration to *discontinuous* or *quantum* change—phenomenon that matches the description of the theistic transformations reviewed in the previous chapter (see also Miller & C' de Baca, 1994, 2001, McAdams, 2008). Interestingly, those who have reviewed cases of transformative change (Miller & C' de Baca, 1994, 2001; Gibbs, 2003) regularly note explicitly theistic themes associated with these alterations in personality, even when such themes were not originally explicitly theorized or probed for. Miller and C' de Baca (2001), for instance, distinguish two types of change: the first is the “insightful type,” the “grand ‘aha’” (p. 45) that seems on par with the concept of ruptures (above). The second is a broader change and especially theistic; “Type 2 change results from the acts... sometimes referred to as acts of God” (Miller & C' de Baca, 2001, p. 12).

Others (e.g., Gibbs, 2003) have likewise connected these transformations to God and added that the experience is one of connection and sensitivity to a “deeper reality” (p. 193-227). In reviewing cases of sudden, instantaneous, or abrupt holistic personality and life changes, Gibbs (2003) sees these transformations as particularly relevant to the psychological theorizing of moral development because this deeper reality is suffused with moral truths (p. 229). In fact, part of the change that occurs in the contact with the deeper, truer, more moral, and realer reality is a change in moral attitudes and behavior away from “the inadequacy of self-serving rationalizations and immature, egoistically motivated, eye-for-eye-and-then-some reciprocity justifications” (Gibbs, 2003, p. 224). Richardson (2013) articulated similar distinctions between a naturalistic world (i.e., that reality consisting of “largely instrumental activity set over against a neutral or indifferent universe”) and the experience of the real by those having theistic or religious experiences:

True transcendence would be more like a depth dimension of the everyday world, one in which one might not be able to help feeling something of the rich sense of belonging to everything that is and the tremendous sense of meaningfulness of which much religious experience speaks (p. 8).

The theme of deepness, of being open to and touched by a reality that is “more real” than the usual referent of the word “reality,” is a persistent theme among those describing specifically theistic transformations (e.g., James, 1902/1997; Freeman, 2004, 2008, 2013; Warner, 1982, 1983, 2001). William James (1902/1997) starts his lectures on conversion (“the reception of grace”) with this very concept; in divine transformations, “one may find one unsuspected depth below another, as if the possibilities of character lay disposed in a series of layers or shells, of whose existence we have no premonitory knowledge” (p. 142). Concluding his lectures on conversion, James (1902/1997) expands on this theme:

A third peculiarity of [this transformed] state is the objective change which the world often appears to undergo. “An appearance of newness beautifies every object...” This sense of clean and beautiful newness within and without is one of the commonest entries in conversion records (p. 184-185).

This newness and deepening is almost “Another world,” as Richardson (2013) observes, one “with another sense of one’s ‘true self’ in it” (p. 8). In these experiences, this new world and new self “is now paramount” (Richardson, 2013, p. 8); it is the *True* world.

The sense (and realness) of this deeper reality that is bestowed by God in transformative experiences makes contact with a number of other distinctly theistic features that could radicalize how changes and development are considered in psychology. Richardson (2013) notes such experiences stand in contrast to naturalistic conceptions in part because the former has a “strong

relationality” wherein “human agency is permeated by otherness” and individuals have an almost irresistible feeling of “belonging to everything” (p. 8). Warner (1982) observes that in this process people “become real to us” (p. 27). Freeman (2004, 2008) likewise highlights “the priority of the Other” in the experience of the “more real” and adds an individual also gains certainty in their convictions. Similarly Schwöbel (1992) explains “not only the... disclosure of the truth about the constitution of reality (revelation) is ascribed to God’s agency, but also the creation of certainty with regard to the disclosed truth about the constitution of reality” (p. 34).

These and other theistic characteristics of divine transformation could inform (and *transform*) current psychological theories of personality. Consider, for example, the unique sense of passivity found in this concept (see James, 1902/1997; Marion, 1997/2002; Faulconer, 2003; Freeman, 2004, 2013). Quoting Dupré, Freeman (2004) notes that

“the religious act certainly displays a distinct quality in the passive attitude that the subject of this act adopts with respect to its object. That object,” Dupré tells us, “appears as providing its own meaning rather than receiving it from the meaning-giving subject” and thus “resists all attempts to define its meaning exclusively as actively projected” (p. 215).

Faulconer (2003), invoking Marion, suggests that this passivity, does not obviate human agency (see also Richardson, 2013, p. 8). Instead, “The transcendental ego does not have a transcendental function and is not the ultimate foundation of the experience of phenomena; the ego no longer has any transcendental claim. It is neither active nor passive, but receptive: passively active” (p. 6). Warner (1982) likewise emphasized that true transformation cannot be accomplished by merely human (mortal) will; people *can* change, “but only by receiving and yielding to the Spirit of Truth [and] accept[ing] His gift, which includes having His pure love

within us for all creatures. [Only then can people] walk in newness of life” (p. 30-31). Again, all this is a far cry from naturalistic theories of personality which typically pit a free-will stance (active) against a deterministic view (passive) (see Engler, 2009) and source change within the self-contained, isolated, bounded ego or as an automatic response to the environment.

Still, despite this sampling of promising explorations, as Skalski and Hardy (2013) note in their call for additional research, from the current naturalistic perspective, “the psychological qualities of discontinuous transformation remain enigmatic, even though understanding and facilitating change and transformation is arguably quite fundamental to psychology” (p. 159).

Understanding psychological change and transformation from a theistic perspective, on the other hand, allows for some of this “enigma” to be clarified and understood. Godly transformations can be instantaneous, profound, and discontinuous because God action is understood to not be limited temporally (see Poe & Mattson, 2005) and is not subject to naturalistic assumptions like universalism or progressivism (Slife, 2004b; Vandenberg & O’Connor, 2005). Additionally, theistic changes can be seen as truly “good” changes—changes for the better—because unlike naturalism’s objectivism (see Slife, 2004b), theism allows for “strong evaluations” (Taylor, 1989) in which values are understood as meaningful realities, not merely subjective projections or preferences. God’s transformations might not always be to greater individual hedonistic pleasure (as may be the standard goal for “good” naturalistic changes, see Slife, 2004b; Slife & Reber, 2009c), but could still be considered “good,” particularly if they increase altruism, self-sacrifice, love, and other (non-naturalistic) goals “beyond human flourishing” (Taylor, 2007, p. 151; see above; see also Slife & Reber, 2009c). As Faulconer (2012) expresses it, human life does not have to see everything in instrumental terms, rather there are things that are intrinsically “good rather than a good-for-something” (p. 165).

Gibbs (2003) and Miller and C' de Baca (2001) emphasize that very transition in thinking (i.e., from selfish to altruistic; from seeking personal good for hedonistic pleasure to seeking ultimate good for the sake of others, goodness, or God) in those who have been at the receiving end of a transformation given by God. While these concepts of transformation may have some parallels to traditional (naturalistic) psychological change, their profound differences alter theory and impact research, and practice.

Research

Theoretical applications of *transformations* pave the way for a discussion about the various ways that this concept could be applied to research. In addition to James's seminal work (1902/1997), a number of researchers in recent years have looked at transformations from a variety of methods. Qualitative interviews about transformations often directly suggest God's involvement (see Miller & C' de Baca, 2001). Researchers have also developed quantitative methods that show how operationalizations of divine transformation can be investigated from that mode of inquiry. As shown below, *transformation* provides intriguing possibilities for both these traditions.

Qualitative Approaches. Research on God affecting changes in humans' psyches already has a bit of a history in the qualitative tradition. Particularly in psychology, William James (1902/1997) stands out as having done exemplary work on conversion which he conceived of as being initiated by God. Others (Miller & C' de Baca, 2001; Skalski & Hardy, 2013) have begun to reexamine this topic using qualitative methods. Despite the contribution of these studies, there is much more that could be done to investigate this phenomenon from within the qualitative tradition. Because of this method's inherent openness to alternative explanations (and willingness to take folk psychological reports seriously, see Bruner, 1990; Freeman, 2008),

the qualitative tradition has been more amenable to the possibility of God as the source of transformations (see James, 1902/1997; Warner, 1982). Still, this identification of a theistic source has not always been made explicit in psychological theorizing and explanation (see McAdams, 2008; Skalski & Hardy, 2013). Further studies that take the theistic aspects from implied to explicit would be particularly helpful, if not essential.

There are a number of further aspects of theistically sourced transformation that would be particularly well suited to qualitative investigation. A grounded theory approach might be utilized, for instance, to investigate whether there are consistent preparatory events that occur in individuals lives before God changes their lives, and if so, whether these *always* need to take place. For example, Skalski and Hardy (2013) noted that the participants they interviewed consistently seemed to experience a personality “disintegration” bordering on “traumatic” (p. 167) before experiencing a transformative change. Qualitative work could help answer if that is the typical pattern in divine changes or if there are a variety of transformative experiences. Additionally, qualitative inquiry could investigate if there is a specifically theistic mode and a nontheistic mode of these sorts of changes and what differences in meaning various participants make of these various modes. Aspects of theistic transformations identified above in the theory section (e.g., receptivity, deepening of reality, transitions to goals and motives beyond human flourishing, the particular strong relationality and connection to others, etc.) could provide the basis for rich avenues of qualitative research. Structured interviews guided by grounded theory might help inform additional particular questions.

Adapting and extending some of the numerous qualitative studies that have already been done could make immediate contributions to a theistic research program of explicitly divine transformations. William James’ qualitative review of conversions could be updated for the

modern milieu. It may be that the aspects of the experience of theistic change have themselves changed in the past hundred years (or not—hence the need for research). In his study, James (1902/1997) also focused primarily on extreme cases (p. 360). A rigorous qualitative investigation of theistic change concentrated on more typical cases may also be informative and allow for theistic transformation to be more broadly conceived and understood in more general contexts.

As another candidate for extension, Warner (1982, 2001) described many powerful instances of theistic transformation of the whole psyche in his investigations of self-deception (see Chapter 2). In Warner's (2001) conception, the phenomenon of self-deception was explicitly understood as a *rejection of or resistance to* divine truths and reality. Thus for Warner (2001) the transformation that defines the escape from self-deception is achieved by a yielding to or receiving of “love, the light or guidance or truth that influences us [t]hrough our relationships [and] through God... [Even if in] most cases we have little or no awareness of where it is coming from” (p. 215). A follow-up investigation as to the relationship between these two phenomena (escaping self-deception and theistic transformation) would be particularly enlightening (e.g., Are they always paired? Can individuals receive a transformation without first entering into a self-deception? What are the specific experiential qualities of receiving the Truth or Light or Love of God in the first place, before or without rejecting it?).

As another example of extending currently commenced qualitative investigation, there are promising starts from the narrative tradition within psychology (see Freeman, 2008). Miller and C' de Baca (1994, 2001) have collected a number of stories of what they label *quantum transformation* (see also Skalski & Hardy, 2013). Dan McAdams has also developed a line of research within narrative personality theory wherein he identifies “redemption stories” (2006,

2008). While some of these stories do involve God (see Miller & C' de Baca, 2001), the theistic component of these narratives could likewise be investigated on a deeper level. In addition to taking seriously God's action in the lives of participants (as reported by those who were transformed by it) such narrative research could take up in a rigorous manner theistic aspects mentioned above such as a deepened sense of reality (profundity) or receptivity (see also Freeman, 2008).

Quantitative Approaches. Although qualitative methods have provided the primary source of extant research on *transformations* it does not mean that quantitative approaches cannot also contribute meaningful understandings. While it is true that, like some theistic phenomena, whole psyche changes do not necessarily come at predictable or inducible times (rather as a matter of God's will) this does not make quantitative experimentation impossible. In the first place, God's will might itself be regular, and therefore somewhat predictable—not because of the constraint of a metaphysical law upon God, but rather for God's own particular reasons—e.g., God could be an upholder of promises and thus act in a very consistent manner. God might grant transformations, for instance, to individuals who humbly ask for them or who are in dire need of change. Both of these propositions could be turned into specific hypotheses and investigated and, indeed, on this conception a wide range of theological literature from a variety of religious traditions might become a rich source for hypothesis generation. Still it is important to maintain the distinction between God as an actor behaving in a regular manner (in which case these regularities are distinctly personal and also agentic—there could be unique cases in which God chose to do something irregular or unique, for example) and naturalistic law (which holds that the meaningless non-personal metaphysical principals operate absolutely, universally, and repeatably without variation). As examples of the possibilities for uniqueness

allowable in the theistic view of regularities against the naturalistic view of laws, many theistic religions take into account meaningful phenomena that have (and will) only happen once—for example: Christianity’s incarnation of Jesus, Islam’s calling of Mohammad as the last prophet, Judaism’s account of one day’s worth of temple oil lasting eight days. Various aspects of transformations are regular and could be subject to operationalization as some have already done (see below). From these operationalizations researchers could generate specific hypotheses about the impact of theistic characteristics of transformations on other measurable psychological phenomenon. By analogy with other currently investigated concepts, it is possible to see how concrete examples of possible experimental research on specifically theistic concepts could be proposed.

Theistic transformations could be operationalized by utilizing current quantitative measures of this phenomenon, adapting other, similar measurement scales, and creating new measures specifically aimed at addressing God-given changes. Like with other psychological phenomena, transformations of the psyche are not directly observable with the empirical senses. However, there already exists several means of operationalizing similar changes that translate aspects of the transformative change into numbers so that at least a portion of the meaning of the original event can be analyzed statically. In one case, Miller and C’ de Baca (1994), noted in their qualitative work that quantum transformations purport a significant change in attitude, priority, and values, and developed the Quantum Experiences Retrospective Interview (QUERI) to measure a cluster of personality variables for the purpose of making pre/post transformation comparisons.

McAdams (2008), as another case, has been able to operationalize what he refers to as the “redemption sequence” (p. 420-421)²⁰ in life narratives and correlated the results with standard measures of psychological well-being (see McAdams, Reynolds, Lewis, Patten, and Bowman, 2001). In this manner, McAdams (2008) and his colleagues concluded that those who had these types of transformative experiences in general, have more positive psychological outcomes than those who do not. McAdams’s research could be repeated with an explicit emphasis on changes that have come about as a result of God’s activity. A specific contribution that results from taking theistic concepts seriously is that these “redemption sequences” could be explained by taking God into account—that is, God instigated or gifted the change/redemption. As it stands now (in a naturalism-dominated psychology), most psychologists taking account of such transformations will mention that *participants* refer to God as the source of their change, but then typically stop short of taking up this attribution in their own explanations (Freeman, 2008; see McAdams, 2008; see also, Miller & C’ de Baca, 2001; Skalski & Hardy, 2013). Taking theistic concepts seriously could begin at the level of operationalization—utilizing divine characteristics of transformation (e.g., passivity/receptivity, profundity, Truth, Goodness) as legitimate topics for constructing psychological measures.

Other scales could likewise be developed based on similar operationalizations of related aspects of transformations. For example, there is a subset of transformations that emphasize religious conversions. This could be operationalized as switching adherence to particular faith tradition modeled off the currently extant scales for external religiosity. In addition to his qualitative investigation of conversion, William James (1902/1997) reported some statistical analysis of the phenomenon (e.g., 16% more of the women than men had experienced a decline

²⁰ While McAdams (2008) conceives of these experiences as more encompassing than those that are strictly theistic, he does note that they are an “especially powerful idea in all of the world’s major religions” (p. 420).

of religious enthusiasm; only 6% of cases of conversion involved a change in faith tradition (church sect); see p. 191-192). Additional, aspects of transformation theorized to be involved in theistic transformation, such as feelings of redemption or freedom from guilt, sin, and moral pain could easily be operationalized into a Likert scale.

Drawing on the theories discussed above, it would also be possible to generate and test a number of hypotheses regarding theistic transformations of the whole psyche. Based on the preceding, here are some possible hypotheses that could be investigated regarding transformations:

- God is more likely to bestow transformations when individuals are suffering from personal tragedy and despair—particularly those cases that result from an increased distance (i.e., alienation) between the individual and God.
- God’s bestowal of a transformation can be encouraged/increased in some conditions.
 - In cases of moral need (i.e., to relieve burden of sin)
 - When requested (e.g., in petitionary prayer).
 - Through “self-surrender” (James, 1902/1997, p. 154) or “a process of emptying, silencing, ‘unselfing’” (Freeman, 2004, p. 227).
- God’s transformations will take an individual from a life of hedonistic motivations to a life of altruistic motivations (regardless of personal benefit) and other theistic ends—i.e., beyond human flourishing.
- God’s transformations might be painful and unpleasant, but will ultimately be Good.

These hypotheses suggest that there may be some significant regularities to how God bestows regularities (e.g., to those that ask, to those that are in need, etc.) that could be investigated while

still being open to the possibility that these changes could occur with some uniqueness (see Slife & Melling, 2012).

In regards to specific experimental studies of *transformations* that might be undertaken from a quantitative perspective, there are multiple possibilities. One possibility is studies that try to induce change (like studies seeking the factors that maximize *ruptures* this would seek to increase the likelihood that God will grant this particular Grace). Such factors might include theistic prayer and meditation on the part of the individual, petitionary prayers for Godly intervention for the individual by the individual's friends and family, hearing or reading the accounts of others who have experienced theistic transformation, "unselfing," and so forth. Another method could include setting up the monitoring of a large sample to catch when these graceful events happen. This latter approach would be similar to longitudinal medical monitoring studies where experimental and control groups are assigned post hoc and has a built-in advantage of enabling evaluation of the duration of *transformations*.

As an example of the latter type of study consider the following parallel. If medical investigators were to examine whether patients who have heart attacks are then more likely to develop a second medical condition (e.g., diabetes), they are unlikely to randomly induce heart attacks in half a sample, rather they might track a large sample over time and select out those who happened to have heart attacks to compare to the group that did not. By analogy, transformation of psyche may be a similar major intervention that cannot be induced (in the heart attack scenario because of ethics; in the transformation scenario because its occurrence is dependent on the action of God). Of course in both cases even if the intervention of interest cannot be induced, there may be specific (ethical) actions that could be implemented to alter its likelihood of its occurrence (see above). In either case, numerous additional variables (see

above) could be monitored and tracked and then correlated with the target variable (i.e., transformation).

Practice

Having considered the contribution that the theistic concept of *transformation* could make to psychological theory and research, this section now looks at the role it could play in applied practice, namely therapy. The transformation of the psyche that is enacted by God, though it might be painful (see Lewis, 1952/1996), is nevertheless understood as a positive and healthy change. In this manner, it has much in common with the goals of therapy, particularly as both reference permanent, lasting, positive change. Still, the idea that various psychological pains (e.g., guilt, sorrow, suffering) might be involved and even healthy (Lewis, 1952/1996; Warner, 2001) contrasts sharply with the hedonism that is a key assumption of naturalistic perspectives on therapy (see Slife, 2004b). For example, “true altruism, real humility... the protection and nourishing of our relationships” all may be hard, difficult, and even at times painful, but essential to True (theistic) health which, in turn could be understood as living together in love and relationship with God (see Slife & Reber, 2009c). Additionally, as hypothesized by several scholars (see Warner, 1982; Lewis, 1952/1996; Miller & C’ de Baca, 2001), theistic transformations may occur particularly when individuals are encountering emotional and spiritual difficulties or are otherwise experiencing severe negative life circumstances. Again, this corresponds with the primary seekers of therapeutic services. The helping professions, therefore, might be greatly enhanced by enabling and enhancing (and, if not already, acknowledging) the role of God in transforming clients’ lives. As Warner (1983) observed, those in the helping professions may want to court transformations for themselves as well as their clients (p. 31-32).

While both naturalistic and theistic therapeutic approaches might seek to help clients experience positive changes and healthy lives, there are important distinctions involved in what, exactly would constitute a good or positive transformation. As Slife (2004b) notes, naturalism's presumption that hedonism is the root of human motivation and that "some version of happiness of self-benefit is a standard therapeutic goal" (p. 61) stands in stark contrast to possible theistic understandings (p. 61-64). From a theistic perspective on change, as Skalski and Hardy (2013) observe (echoing Miller & C' de Baca, 2001) the result of a transformation may be increased love and care towards others and a *forgetting* of the self and selfish motives, rather than the reinforcement of the same (see also James, 1902/1997; Freeman, 2008).

Another specific way in which practitioners could implement a greater sensitivity to a theistic perspective is by not rushing to alleviate the guilt or pain that might precede and, in fact, help induce a theistic transformation. As Skalski and Hardy (2013) suggest,

Disintegration and suffering often precede transformation, yet practitioners too routinely endeavor to ease client suffering. Practitioners that automatically aim to alleviate disintegration and suffering should carefully consider whether emotions related to traumatic experiences may bring about adaptive transformation. For example, White (2004) encourages therapists to avoid the superficial amelioration of quantum transformation's more disquieting aspects. This is difficult given that the notion of growth from some forms of trauma may seem absurd and even insulting to clients in throws of pain and suffering. (p. 175)

Of course, these are just a few possibilities that are suggested by a strongly theistic perspective on transformations; further study and theoretical work would be essential to more fully understand this and other aspects of theistic transformations of the psyche as well as other acts of

Grace as they might be applied to practical aspects of psychology. Nevertheless, the brief examples reviewed above (e.g., the deeper reality given in transformations, the process of inviting those experiences through self-emptying or receptivity, the possibility of genuine Good beyond (instrumental) human flourishing) serve to witness the viability and value of taking theistic concepts seriously in psychology. As with *ruptures*, the concept of *transformation* seems to hold possibly profound implications for psychology in therapeutic practice (for both the client and the therapist), qualitative and quantitative research traditions, and theory in general.

Moral Call in Psychological Science

Transitioning from the exemplar concepts drawn from the Grace category to the Invitation category, this section considers a third theistic concept, the *moral call* as it might be applied to psychology. As was reviewed in previous chapters, many thinkers see God acting in the world through his calling or inviting actors to specific moral behaviors—imparting a telic feeling of “ought” or obligation. This conception posits God as the source of the feeling of responsibility, sense of duty, and similar imperatives to act ethically, calls or prompts which individuals can choose (agentially) whether or not to follow.

This feeling of being called to a particular moral goodness aligns with the phenomenal experience of many humans who are more likely to describe their experience in these sorts of terms than in the terms suggested by a naturalistic framework (see Slife & Melling, 2008; Gantt & Melling, 2009). Consider an individual displaying care for a child that was not their biological offspring. Evolutionary psychologists would explain this behavior by reference to some sort of reproductive benefit on the part of the caregiver (or his or her genetic ancestors) whereas a psychologists using this theistic conception could simply accept the individual’s report that “it was the Right thing to do” or that they “felt called by God” to care for that child (see Gantt &

Melling, 2009, 2010). In part because of this divide, there are many psychologists (Christopher, 2005; Vandenberg & O'Connor, 2005; Gibbs, 2003; Gantt & Melling, 2010) who are interested in developing concepts of morality in psychology that meaningfully match up with the lived experience of the persons psychologists study.

Theory

In assessing the utility of *moral calls* to psychology, the first consideration is theory. There are current analogs of theistic calling in psychology as presently constituted. Some theorists, for example, speak of goals or motives that have a moral quality. Adler (1964) spoke of “social interest,” a striving for the good of others as a goal. Carl Rogers (1951) spoke of an “organismic enhancement” that operated as a master motive, a goal-directed activity that telically pulls individuals to actualize themselves. While these concepts are not specifically theistic and have a number of important distinctions from *God* exerting a call on an individual (the most notably being the theist’s unabashed requirement of God as a necessary condition to explain such calls), there are some notable similarities. Like Rogers and Adler’s concepts, God’s calling provides a *pull* (final cause) rather than a *push* (i.e., an efficient cause) toward action. God’s callings are seen as inviting morally good behavior that serves others (like Adler’s social interest). While these similarities add credence to the supposition that theistic conceptions can have relevance for psychology, it is in the differences that theistic conceptions make their contribution to the discipline.

One key difference in a theistic conception of these calls is that they originate from God (as an invitation to the individual to possible actions), rather than originating from the individual himself and herself (i.e., the encapsulated self). Unlike the secular versions of “oughts” referred to above, the theistic version situates the psychological subject in relationship to God and thus, in

a wider context that resists the individualism and atomism of most naturalistic theories (see Slife, Reber, & Richardson, 2005; Slife, 2004; Richardson, 2013). Instead of internal or individual (and perhaps, relativistic) moral prompts and calls, theistic callings connect psychological selves to an immanent and transcendent Other that can even serve to orient and ground human identity (see Slife & Reber, 2009c).²¹ This difference suggests (among other implications) that these calls may be a genuine surprise or a stretch or a leap from the individuals' personal historical or even natural behavior because the calls are not sourced within the encapsulated, bounded, naturalistic individual (see York, 2012). The Godly source of moral calls “precludes the notion that meaning is merely projected onto the world” (Freeman, 2013, p. 5) even while the characteristic immanence of such guidance may seem to manifest as one's own “cognitive/affective voices [or] thoughts” (York, 2012, p. 152). As Lewis (1952/1996) articulates it, the moral call is “put into our minds” by God (p. 37), not ourselves; “it is not mere fancy, for we cannot get rid of the idea... [It] must somehow or other be a real thing—a thing that is really there, not made up by ourselves” (p. 30). The sense of *ought*, “which none of us made, but which we find pressing on us [is] quite definitely real” (p. 30).

The grounding of calls in such immanent transcendence (other than the self, yet “indwelling,” see York, 2012) also addresses a tension between morality seen as relativistic on the one hand (i.e., mere projections of the bounded self), and prescriptivistic on the other (i.e., deontological moral laws or morality as a set of immutable propositional rules) (see Foryth, 1980). Richardson (2013) sees such “conventional morality” (i.e., moral prescriptivism) as mismatched with a true transcendence or real divinity. Truly theistic calls could be highly particular and changing yet also, in some ways, comparable across individuals. For example, what God calls an individual to do or be at one time in one situation may be different from what

²¹ In this sense, God's callings can also operate as a grounding “context of contexts” (see Slife & Richardson, 2008).

God calls the same individual to do or be at another time and place. Thus this action can be contextual and particular while still morally Right and True. This is not a particularity that is contingent upon the mere whims or projections of an encapsulated self, nor would it be solely reducible to social, historical, and cultural factors. Rather, it is a particularity based on a strong relationality. The moral call derives from relationship to a real being (God) and is experienced in a particular context (see Richardson, 2013). Nevertheless, there's a sort of consistency of context in that it is the *same* God who calls to various individuals or to the same individual at different times.

A further application of theistic moral calls to psychological theory could be to explanations of helping behavior. Naturalistic psychology has few, if any, plausible factors or mechanisms that could instigate truly altruistic behavior (Gantt & Melling, 2010; Gantt, Melling, & Reber, 2012). The conception of God calling individuals to moral behavior could fill this theoretical gap. As discussed in the section on transformations, key characteristics of theistic activity include their noncontingent moral tint and onus on mortals to good (i.e., selfless or altruistic) behavior. Altruism, in this theistic conception, is the agentic response to accept God's moral call. These different theoretical perspectives on personality and social psychology have unique implications for research and therapy (see below).

Research

As with other theistic concepts, God's action through moral callings and invitation could be studied through a variety of research methods. Although the intangible action of God on an individual might be an objectionable psychological construct for scientific research for some critics, these concerns are primarily methodological (Helminiak, 2010) even when theism is granted (see Bishop, 2009; see also Porpora, 2006). However, as with the other concepts

reviewed above (ruptures, theistic transformations), there is nothing inherently more methodologically difficult about studying this conception compared with a myriad of other intangibles that are part of traditional psychological investigations, even though theistic concepts like moral calls might entail more than traditional methods were designed to capture (e.g., meanings, morality, Truth, Goodness; see Gantt & Melling, 2009; Slife & Melling, 2008, 2012). Indeed, taking these theistic concepts seriously might suggest that rather than avoid researching theism, our traditional methodologies need to be expanded to properly take account of reality (see Slife & Melling, 2012; Freeman, 2013).

Still, as with other theistic concepts (see above), it would be possible (if not ideal, see Slife & Melling, 2008, 2012) to conduct traditional research while utilizing strongly theistic concepts. For instance, it would be fairly simple to construct a Likert scale of felt theistic call (see below; see also Reber, Slife, & Downs, 2012). Likewise, qualitative interviews with individuals regarding their experience with calls from God could shed significant light on this psychological phenomenon. Such an investigation could also lead to a clearer conceptualization and theory of callings, perhaps even suggesting contexts (e.g., in sacred places, in proximity of the face of the Other, after witnessing moral exemplars) in which these calls are felt more strongly or situations in which an individual is more likely to act on a felt prompt or, conversely, to resist it (e.g., when “self-deceived,” when thinking instrumentally; when the impact of actions can more easily be abstracted—i.e., when there is real or perceived distance between the actor and the acted upon; see below). In any case the application of this theistic concept could certainly be applied to personality and developmental theories in psychology (see above) and the resultant new insights would, in turn, suggest novel approaches to research and theory (see Slife, 2012). For instance, qualitative investigation could seek to get at the experience and meaning of

moral calls that were particularly relational (in the strong sense) seeking to clarify how the experience of the Other calls a subject to concerns that are “outside” him or herself (see below).

Similarly, moral calls could be applied to a number of research programs within psychology such as helping behavior and moral development. An ongoing concern for social psychology is how to explain helping behaviors or altruism (Myers, 2010; Reber & Osbeck, 2005). Perhaps individuals help because God prompted, invited, or called them to do so. If this conception were taken seriously, it could provide a powerful paradigm for research on helping behavior (see Slife, Reber, & Lefevor, 2012). For instance, participants might be conceived of responding to *real* moral Truths, not subjective moral preferences (see below for specific examples of how this implication could affect specific research designs). Additionally, instead of social psychologists struggling to reconcile their naturalistic (hedonistic) models of human behavior with the altruistic actions they observe, they could instead design studies that looked at the impact of callings and moral promptings on altruistic actions. Perhaps there are interventions that could enhance individuals’ receptivity to God’s call that could be profitably implemented to increase altruistic behavior. As will be examined in detail below, experiments could be designed, for instance, in which experiencing God’s call were maximized for one group and tested against a control group (similar to the rupture- and invitation-maximizing research referred to in previous sections). Qualitative work could investigate experiences where individuals feel God’s prompts to moral behavior more intensely. There are many possible applications of this theistic concept to psychological research; the following sketches out a few particular highlights.

Qualitative Approaches Qualitative investigations into helping behavior could provide psychology with particularly rich data when investigating *moral calls* as theistic realities. As an example, individuals who have been recognized for altruistic action could be interviewed to

ascertain their motives. Free from the tyranny of a single conceptual explanation of human motivation (naturalistic hedonism) the interviewer would be free to accept as legitimate other explanations such as “It seemed like the Right thing to do” or “It was God’s will for me to respond in that way.” Indeed, instead of ignoring these answers and zeroing in on a possible self-serving motives, the interviewer might “drill down” on this experience of “feeling the Right” (i.e., a transcendental and immanent ought) and explore how these sorts of responses meshed with other accounts of Godly moral calls. This isn’t to say that an individual will never be hedonistically motivated.²² A key component of this theistic perspective is that moral prompts are *invitations* not determinants—an individual could still act otherwise (i.e., reject God’s call) and be motivated by other ends (e.g., hedonistic ones). At any rate, this conceptual framework might get closer to an individual’s lived experience of helping behavior (see Slife & Reber, 2009c; Plantinga, 1997).

As a particular illustration of the contributions of specifically theistic concepts on qualitative investigation, researchers might take up examination of implications from the theory section (above). For example, qualitative investigators might consider the theoretical perspective that moral calls are thoughts or feelings that are nevertheless, not sourced in the encapsulated self. Basic questions could be asked of participants to articulate how they experience thoughts/feelings (i.e., the guidance of moral calls) as specifically *not* their own thoughts—or at least not originating from the bounded, encapsulated, naturalistic self. Questions such as, “Where do these thoughts/feelings/prompts seem to come from?” or “How is the prompt you experienced different from what you wanted to do?” might open up additional rich explanations of moral prompts not currently conceivable from naturalistic investigations. As an additional illustration,

²² In fact, given the pluralism mentioned above, theists would likely be open to a range of *naturalistic* explanations in addition to theistic interpretations.

researchers could explore the relational character theorized to distinguish theistic moral calls. Instead of focusing questions on the encapsulated individual, investigators might give specific attention to the role and experience of Others. They could ask, for example, for participants to describe moral prompts and choices made in highly contextual circumstances (i.e., while witnessing the face of the Other who would be impacted by the individual's choice) and compare those accounts to parallel instances in which the actor was abstracted away from those effected by his or her action (i.e., physically separate, emotionally/cognitively distant, or some combination thereof).

Qualitative approaches would also allow for a deep investigation of the particularly *theistic* component of this concept (see Slife & Melling, 2012; Gantt & Melling, 2009). The sense of God initiating moral prompts could, therefore, inform novel qualitative research questions as well as explanations. From this perspective participants could be asked to share about a time when they felt God inviting them to a particular moral action. They might be asked to share experiences when they felt “guided,” “inspired,” or “guilt” (York, 2012, p. 169). As some (Warner, 1983; Olson & Israelsen, 2007; York, 2012) have suggested, moral calls from God could be inquired about particularly in cases where the moral call was ignored. York (2012) offers what he sees as the paradigm sentence for getting at God's invitation when he suggests participants fill in the following blanks: “I know I should [or shouldn't] ____ but I ____” (p. 169). Qualitative analysis might provide intriguing findings on, for example, the different experiences of those who initially chose to follow the prompt and those who chose to resist (see Olson & Israelsen, 2007; York, 2012). Qualitative research is particularly well suited to get at how participants might differently construe the *meaning* of these moral calls from God. The rich context of this approach (see Slife & Melling, 2012) might further get at (and meaningfully

explore) the connection among this conception (moral calls) and other theistic concepts such as *rupture* and *transformation* (see, e.g., Skalski & Hardy, 2013).

Quantitative Approaches. From the perspective of traditional quantitative approaches, moral calls as a theistic concept can also provide intriguing possibilities for research. As with other concepts (above), even theistic moral calls can, in principle, be subject to operationalization, specific predictions about their impact can be hypothesized, and concrete examples of possible experimental research proposed. Moral calls as a theistic concept could suggest reconceptualizations of previous psychological research on morality as well as help generate novel studies.

Moral calls from God could be operationalized in a number of ways. As a *felt* obligation, moral calls (similar in some respects, to Haidt's (2001, 2007) moral intuitions) can be both counted (e.g., how many prompts did you feel in a given time period) and rated (e.g., on a Likert scale) on various aspects of the experience. For example, participants could be instructed to "Think of the last time you experienced a moral call from God," and answer items like the following on various scales: "How intense was this experience compared to other moral calls," or "How strongly did you feel that God was the source of this prompt?"

Other operationalizations could address additional theistic characteristics associated with moral calls. The strength of relationship(s) to Other(s) could be assessed in an instrument that includes a host of specific relational scales (e.g., rating how close someone feels to their family members or friends; having participants rank the top ten most valuable entities (i.e., persons, relationships, places, things, etc) in their life and counting how many specify relationships with other people). Researchers could specifically formulate such measures with explicit attention to the assumptions of a strong relationality (see Ostenson, 2009, p. 130). Similarly, "distance (or

abstraction) from the Other” could also be operationalized into some kind of numerical representation of that distance—e.g., a scale could range from 0 (no distance, the Other occurs with greater priority than the self; see Freeman, 2004) to 1 (the Other shares equal priority with the self) and on up through 10 (complete abstraction, the Other is not manifest as an Other, good-in-Themselves, but merely as an instrumental means to the ends of the self; see Faulconer, 2012).²³ Impoverished though the resultant numbers might be compared to the meaning of these relationships, they still have some value for conducting research in the quantitative mode.

Similarly, theistic moral calls could be useful in generating new hypotheses for quantitative research.²⁴ Possible hypotheses that could be generated regarding moral prompts include:

- Theistic moral calls are more recognizable in certain conditions (e.g., quieter circumstances, “holy” places, sacred spaces, when participants seek God’s will through theistic prayer or meditation).
- Moral calls are felt more strongly in the face of an Other. The greater the proximity/reality of the face, the stronger the moral prompt. In other words, God (and Godly action in moral calls) manifests less in abstractions and more in the concrete relational presence of another (e.g., an individual will be more likely to feel a call from God when he or she sees another individual in distress than when he or she just hears about the distress of another).

²³ Of course, a measure such as this would go through a series of refinements and tests of reliable before being utilized widely in research. The sketch here is only intended as an *in principle* illustration.

²⁴ Unlike many of the other theistic constructs, moral calls are typically understood as a fairly regular occurrence. This might make it easier to conduct experimental research with moral calls (compared to other concepts). Still, such moral calls are not to be understood as obeying abstract universal laws but rather God’s regularities.

- Moral calls from God are more likely to be manifested in true life scenarios than imagined hypotheticals; moral prompts are least likely to manifest in deceitful conditions.

Operating from the strong theism of *moral calls*, research on moral development may also be conducted differently. Consider the possibility of the final hypothesis in the previous list being true. If that is the case, then, rather than have participants read and react to bizarre moral conundrums, participants could be immersed in *real* moral situations. If moral prompts are sourced in God, previous research that (in part) tested participants' moral sensibilities might be fundamentally flawed insofar as that aspect of the experiment was faked or unreal. In other words, if a psychologist was investing whether participants would commit a moral transgression (e.g., harming an anonymous innocent other through, say, an electric shock) in service of another moral principle (e.g., obedience to authority), but that first moral transgression *was not really happening* then perhaps participants never experienced the moral call from God (as God, presumably, would see through the deception of the social psychologist and known that no innocent other was actually being harmed through shocks or whatnot). Therefore, any conclusions based on the assumption that moral calls are experienced the same when actions matter (i.e. are actually, not just presumably, real) as when they have been contrived to not matter is suspect, at best. The same principle might also hold in testing moral development. Rather than hypothetical and fictitious scenarios being used to discern moral development, it may be that only real situations can elicit true moral calls from God and, thus, provide actual understanding of moral development.²⁵

²⁵ Moral prompts being more likely to occur in true (as opposed to deceitful) settings can also be seen as an "empirical question" and used to develop additional hypotheses and research studies. For example, do the same percentage of participants donate to a worthy cause when presented with an *actual* worthy cause then when experimentally manipulated into *believing* a similar cause existed that did not (in Truth) exist?

In addition to altering current research programs in moral psychology, *moral calls* could also help generate original studies in the quantitative tradition. A brief experimental example might involve giving participants a generous compensation and then providing an opportunity for them to donate a portion of that compensation to a good cause. A Likert scale (see above) might then be given to assess if those scoring higher on “feeling Godly prompts” or related characteristic (e.g., deep relationality; non-instrumentalist thinking; sensitivity to the “Indwelling Spirit” (see York, 2012); etc.) gave more than those who scored lower on such measures. Like operationalizations in naturalistic psychology, these measurements would be presumed to be studying the actual phenomenon; God would be understood as the source of these prompts. Debriefing might include a further investigation of whether some individuals felt a prompt or call but ignored it and why (see also York, 2012). Additional experiments could introduce interventions hypothesized to increase an individual’s ability to feel (or respond) to Godly prompts (see above).

Practice

In addition to theory and research implications *moral calls* have applications to therapeutic practice. As one particular example, few therapeutic models have a rationale for encouraging “good” behavior. While many approaches (e.g. humanistic, behavioral, and cognitive therapies) have grounds for encouraging hedonistic self-fulfillment, there is little guarantee that such behavior will be morally good (Slife & Williams, 1995). Utilizing a theistic approach, therapists might encourage patients to listen for moral promptings or, in other words, God’s callings. By training clients to recognize and respond to God’s promptings, the therapists are providing their clients with access to a source of guidance that persists beyond the boundaries of their office (see Slife, Mitchell, & Whoolery, 2004). Furthermore, the striving to act on moral

insight may be more psychologically healthy and positive than either symptom reduction or hedonistic enhancement (see related discussion above in the practice section of *transformation* applications).

As “human nature is affected by God’s continuous spiritual promptings” (Slife & Reber, 2009c, p. 3) a theistic approach can contribute much to the therapeutic concern of the “good and flourishing life” (Slife & Reber, 2009c, p. 7) and even suggests a radical reconceptualization of this concern (see also, Taylor, 2007). Indeed, theism may suggest “a notion of our good which goes beyond human flourishing” (Taylor, 2007, p. 151). Theistic prompts may call humans beyond narrowly self-interested goals to goals such as “freedom, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control [as well as] true altruism, real humility, [and] the protection and nourishing of our relationships and communities (Slife & Reber, 2009c, p. 8). In fact, as Slife and Reber (2009c) suggest, it may be that the loss of relationship with the transcendental Other (God) “is the root of all our anxieties” (p. 8) and that the willful ignoring of theistic calls is a substantial factor behind much modern mental illness (see also Warner, 1982, 1983). If that is the case, then it only serves to underline the importance of exploring theistic approaches to psychology. In this sense, the theistic conception of callings from God, like other theistic concepts (above) could do much to illuminate new possibilities for therapeutic practice as well as theory and research.

Other Theistic Concepts in Psychological Science

The three concepts of God’s action in the world reviewed in this chapter (*ruptures, transformations, and moral calls*) and their application to areas of psychological theory, research, and practice represent only an initial and preliminary exploration that hardly exhaust the possibilities inherent in utilizing clearly articulated theistic concepts. While many more

illustrations could be provided and fleshed out, the above sections serve as a sort of “proof of concept.” Still, it is worth mentioning, if only briefly and in very general terms, a few other possible connections between theistic concepts from the previous chapter’s schema and current psychological thought. This section looks at these additional concepts and some of their possible analogs in psychology as well as relevant sub-disciplines that could be impacted by the adoption of these various concepts. A summary of the same is provided in Table 3 (below).

In addition to the concepts applied to psychology in this chapter (*ruptures* and *transformations*), the category of Grace might provide other theistic concepts that could make contributions to the discipline. The concept of *gives life*, for example, could suggest alternative theories and explanations about consciousness and agency and might make additional contributions to personality theory (see Jones, 2006). For instance, James (1902/1997) suggested that God acts to affect the human mind through what is sometimes called the subconscious region (p. 180). God’s action in *granting strength* could provide theories of emotions with a different framework of explanation (e.g., some emotions can come from an immanently transcendental other, not just from within one’s own subjective mind), which could impact the generation and testing of new hypotheses. Sub-disciplines that focus on emotions, such as positive psychology and health psychology, could be particularly enhanced by the inclusion of this theistic concept, particularly in their perception of the ultimate role and purpose of emotions. *Manifestations*—as a concept—could provide new avenues of exploring and understanding dreams and could help refine not only consciousness studies, but also issues in mental health. (At the very least, this concept raises the question as to whether *everyone* who reports some kind of vision is necessarily experiencing a psychotic or neurotic break with reality).

From the Invitation category, God inviting to *meaning* (as seen in the previous chapter) involves more than a subjective interpretation of otherwise senseless facts. Instead, God is part of a *hermeneutic reality* (see Slife, Reber, & Faulconer, 2012) in which humans directly and agentically participate. This concept could be analogized to various naturalistic conceptions of intuitions in which understandings (knowledge or meanings) are seemingly arrived at quickly or without conscious deliberation. However, similar to how *ruptures* were shown to be distinct from *insight*, theistic *invitations to meaning* as originating in a transcendently immanent source not reducible to the individual and/or the environment, could also provide a truly alternative reference framework for understanding the phenomenon sometimes called *intuition* (see Marion, 1997/2002). Rather than positing a “two-track mind” (Myers, 2010) to account for this type of perception, God’s role in the co-creation of meaning could be explored (see Slife and Richardson, 2011). Additionally, as Williams and Gantt (2013) have observed, meaningfulness is often an impoverished concept with psychology, even in sub-disciplines that emphasize it (e.g., positive psychology). As they (Williams & Gantt, 2013) argue, for psychology to be truly meaningful and aspirational, meaning would have to be more than merely subjective or contingent upon a self-contained (bounded, encapsulated) individual. Godly *invitations to meaning* could provide just such a larger context for the grounding of meaning that could enrich various psychological understandings.

Other concepts from the Invitation category might also make contact with current psychological concepts and make contributions to psychological sub-disciplines. *Vocations*, for instance, might be seen as related (in some ways) to personality typologies in psychology. With a strong theistic interpretation, this concept could contribute interesting alternatives to current industrial/organizational (I/O) psychology and how its practitioners conduct job testing and

training. The “best job” for an individual might be one in which they could give the best service, not one in which makes them the most satisfied (see Slife, 2004b; Slife & Reber, 2009c). The final concept of God as *The Other* could likewise make contact with (and contributions to) current psychology. Social psychology has often explored social facilitation, or the effect that the “mere presence” of another has on an individual’s performance (Myers, 2010). If God can be classed as an Other, then it is possible God’s *mere presence* could affect the psychological state of individuals engaged in any number of activities, even when it may seem that they are all alone (see Freeman, 2013). Additionally, God as Other has implications for studies of altruism (see Gantt & Reber, 1999; Freeman, 2004) and may also provide a fertile source of theorizing for the exploration in psychology of a relational ontology (Slife and Richardson, 2008).

Table 3

Analogs of Theistic Concepts in Traditional Psychology and Sub-disciplines

	Theistic Concept	Current Psychology Analogs	Relevant Sub-disciplines
Grace	Gives Life	Consciousness; Agency	Personality Theory
	Grants Strength	Emotions	Health, Positive Psychology
	Ruptures	Insight	Cognitive; Therapy
	Transformations	Conversion/Quantum Change	Developmental; Therapy
	Manifestations	Dreams	Consciousness; Mental Health
Invitation	Moral Calls	Moral Intuition	Moral Development
	Invitation to Meaning	Intuition; Hermeneutics	Positive Psychology
	Vocation	Typologies	I/O psychology
	God as Other	Social Facilitation (mere presence)	Social Psychology; Therapy

Additionally, the various theistic concepts of God’s action are not mutually exclusive. It is possible, and perhaps profitable, to combine several of them to specifically articulate a broader psychological theory. Warner (2001), for example, suggests that humans have a “sense of right and wrong, [a] *conscience*” (p. 21; see *gives life*) that recognizes God “calling us” (p.215; see *moral call*) and “arises from... connection with other beings” (p.21; see *God as Other*). From

Warner's (1982, 1983, 1986, 2001) perspective, yielding to God's callings allows persons to escape self-deception and be changed or *transformed* by God. Skalski and Hardy (2013) likewise illustrate the porous boundaries among concepts as they identify the confluence of *ruptures* and *transformations* and particularly note the changes these make in their participants responding to *moral calls*. O'Grady and Richard (2011) suggest in their review of scientists' experience with *ruptures* that many of the significant ones occurred as the result of some sort of *manifestation* (i.e., a dream or day vision) from God.

Furthermore, any of these concepts might occur in combination with concepts from the category of Physical Acts. As noted in Chapter 2, several of those advocating for approaches from the category of Physical Acts (e.g., Murphy, Ellis, Peacocke) have suggested psychological application through God acting directly on the brain. The primary purpose (from the perspective of these writers) seems to be the *communication* of divine thoughts and intentions to individuals. As such, these various approaches (hyperdimensional force, whole-part causation, quantum effects on the neuronal level) might be the avenue by which a number of other psychologically relevant acts of God (e.g., *ruptures*, *grants strength*, *invitation to meaning*, *manifestations*) operate.

This chapter has presented the feasibility of incorporating theistic concepts into a psychological science through illustrations in theory, research, and practice. From the category of Grace *ruptures* and *transformations* were shown to have analogs in the current psychological literature, but the theistic versions had distinguishing elements that suggested sometimes radical departures from traditional psychological constructs. Furthermore, both of these concepts (in their strongly theistic versions), had preliminary actualizations of qualitative research programs (see O'Grady & Richards, 2010, 2011; Miller & C' de Baca, 1994, 2001). As these research

programs are preliminary, there are still vast opportunities for exploring God's actions in the category of Grace. From the category of Invitation, *moral calls*, were also reviewed. Theistic moral calls lack the same actualizations in current psychological research, but do present a particular contrast to naturalistic parallels and as such could contribute conceptions that could seriously alter the landscape of research on morality in psychology (see York, 2012, p. 166). These three particular cases (*ruptures*, *transformations*, and *moral calls*) and the brief examples from them reviewed here do not exhaust the possible applications of theistic concepts to the human sciences (see Table 3, which, likewise, is not exhaustive). However, taken together these various illustrations do showcase the plausibility of utilizing theistic concepts within psychology.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

The purpose of the preceding chapters was not only to conceptualize divine activity for use in a theistic approach to psychology, but also to demonstrate the feasibility of the application of such concepts in psychological theory, research, and practice. The present chapter is an attempt to coalesce the arguments from the foregoing material and to bring them together into one whole. First is a brief overview of the background of theistic approaches to psychology and the need for clarity of concepts of divine action drawn from Chapter 1. Next is a consideration of the conceptualization of various approaches to divine activity taken from Chapter 2. Then, taking up Chapter 3's considerations, is a summary of possible and potential concrete contributions that could be made by theistic concepts. Finally, these various lines of reasoning are brought together in some concluding remarks.

Theistic Approaches & Needing Clear Divine Action Concepts (Chapter 1)

Chapter 1 begins with a consideration of the movement to develop a theistic approach to psychology. Those involved in this movement have expressed a concern that the dogmatism of naturalism could be “detrimental [to] academic and clinical psychology” (Bishop, 2007, p. 8) particularly restricting inquiry into religious and theistic experiences (Gantt & Melling, 2008; Slife & Melling, 2012). For this reason, some (Bergin, 1980; Slife, 2007; Nelson, 2006a) have suggested taking up theism as an alternative conceptual frame for psychological science. The resultant pluralism of worldviews would allow for the honest investigation of theistic phenomena and enable theistically-generated alternative conceptions to make contributions to theory, research, and practice.

Still, the preliminary exploration of explicitly theistic themes in psychology has only recently gained traction and needs additional clarification and development (Bergin, 1980; Miller

& Delaney, 2005; Tan, 2006). For example, as the “fundamentally distinguishing feature” of strong theism (Slife and Melling, 2006, p. 281), the current activity of God and how to conceive of the relevancy of this activity are of paramount concern for theistic approaches to psychology (see Slife, Stevenson, & Wendt, 2010). Helminiak (2010), a critic of these approaches, fears that current conceptions of divine activity are insufficiently “nuanced” (p. 47; see also Hibberd, 2009, 2012) and asserts that the movement toward including God’s activity in psychology has failed because proponents “have never succeeded in specifying it” (p. 58). This criticism is premature and overstated as those within the movement have specified several articulations of divine activity (e.g., York, 2012; Slife & Whoolery, 2006; Nelson & Thomason, 2012; O’Grady & Richards, 2010, 2011; Vande Kemp, 2009). Still, those contending for the possibility of theistic approaches to psychology (e.g., Slife & Melling, 2006) may agree that more conceptual clarity about the activity of God as applied to psychology is essential to forward movement on that project. Insufficient and weak theistic conceptions abound (Slife, Stevenson, & Wendt, 2010) and even among psychologists endorsing strong theism there may be significant (and often unarticulated) differences in their presumptions about how the activity of God ought to be conceptualized (O’Grady & York, 2012; Slife, 2011; Tjeltveit, 2011; Jones, 2006). As York (2012) observes, “many discussions[s] of theistic psychology [are] unclear about how God intervenes in human experience” (p. 152).

Conceptualization of Divine Activity (Chapter 2)

Chapter 2, then, presents a conceptualization that attempts to clarify and respond to this need for clear and concrete articulations of God’s action as it could be applied to psychology. It thematizes God’s activity into six major categories comprised of numerous specific concepts. Unfortunately, the first four major categories of conceptions lack sufficient distinction to make a

contribution to psychology. The categories labeled Interventionism, Dualism, and Deism are weakly theistic; concepts from these categories make claims about God (theism) but not claims that would distinguish practical differences from naturalistic perspectives (*weak* theism). The category of Physical Acts *does* postulate a God who currently acts in the world (through *quantum probability, holistic emergence (chaos and complexity), or hyperdimensional forces*) but these particular descriptions refer more to the *how* (the mechanical means) of divine action than the *what*. The primary focus on physical effects limits some application to broader, psychology in general, while still raising some possibilities for areas such as brain studies.

The final two categories of the schema developed in Chapter 2, Grace and Invitation, are strongly theistic and, as they refer to divine actions that particularly affect human persons, have direct application to psychology. These categories contain nine specific conceptions of divine action. Concepts within Grace are *gives life, grants strength, ruptures, transformations, and manifestations*; Invitation concepts include *moral calls, invitations to meaning, vocation, and God as The Other*. In Grace, God's actions are particular gifts that are bestowed unilaterally. In cases like *ruptures* or *transformations* these acts can seem sudden and discontinuous. Grace acts can come forcefully and willfully, rendering the receiver, in some sense, "passive" (yet still agentic— "actively passive" or *receptive*). Invitation concepts are classified as those acts of God that invite a future response (telic co-action). They are acts of God (promises, prompts, and calls) the completion of which is left "undone" (see TeSelle, 1990) until other agents respond. But what would such conceptions mean for a human science?

Illustrations of Concrete Contributions (Chapter 3)

These concepts from the categories of Grace and Invitation can only help advance theistic approaches to psychology if they have practical application or heuristic value. As demonstrated

in Chapter 3, these concepts can feasibly be used in psychological science and contribute novel insights in theory, research, and practice. For example, these new applications provide unique understandings not accessible from the perspective of naturalism. Theistic concepts such as *ruptures*, *transformations*, or *moral calls* point to a different interpretation of the self than the encapsulated, isolated, bounded self of most mainstream psychological theories. Instead theistic concepts suggest a self that is fundamentally and profoundly *relational*, constituted, in part, by God. Further implications of this idea suggest that the knowledge gained in a *rupture* or the morality involved in a *call* are not merely contingent qualities relative to an encapsulated self or its local social-cultural-historical milieu, but are grounded in a wider Reality—a context-of-contexts. Further, the Truths in these experiences are personal and particular Truths, not the truths of universal, autonomous natural laws.

As Chapter 3 further shows, such alternative perspectives inform alternative starting points for both research and practice. As one illustration, God’s activities in truly theistic conceptions are experienced as both immanent and transcendent. That is, a *call* or a *rupture* can be felt as an “Indwelling Spirit” or a sense of even “mundane” meaning (e.g., through books or mountains or other “stuff”) while at the same time connecting an individual to Truth(s), and Beauty, and Goodness that are beyond the encapsulated self or that could be said to have an *Eternal* quality. As an example of the impact of such concepts on research, if participants are able to sense the Truth of the situation, and be connected to a deeper reality, then investigations into moral development that rely on deception and contrived scenarios may need to be reexamined. As an example from practice, therapeutic insight, if sourced in God, may be eminently transferable outside the therapy room—provided the connection with deity is kept strong. Therapeutic practices might benefit by incorporating ways of connecting with God (e.g.,

truly theistic prayer or mediation, attending holy sites or sacred spaces). As illustrated in Chapter 3, these examples are just a few of many more possibilities (e.g., *transformations* away from an egoistic self to truly altruistic motives, *moral calls* inspiring clients to a view of the good life that exists “beyond human flourishing,” etc.) The point is simply that theistic concepts have many considerable potential uses in a variety of psychological applications.

Final Thoughts

The schema of divine action concepts (Chapter 2) and their applications (Chapter 3) enable the project of theistic approaches to psychology (Chapter 1) to move forward in a robust manner. The foregoing chapters provide a specific, articulable group of concepts for considering the activity of God and clarifying how the same could be applied to psychology. While theism and theistic concepts may still be met with strident voices critiquing their involvement in psychological science, those detractors can no longer legitimately criticize the movement on the basis that it lacks specific articulations of divine activity. Additionally, this schema enables theistically inclined psychologists to use a common reference frame for further discussions of divine action. These discussions could spark the generation of novel theories, research studies, and practices which all could function in a productive pluralism as true alternatives to dogmatic naturalistic perspectives.

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