

**Challenges for Christians  
in the academic culture of psychology  
and the cognitive sciences**

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# How the Bible shapes my approach to Psychology

background details online:

[www.basden.salford.ac.uk/sarb/papers/DB-Paper2circulate\\*](http://www.basden.salford.ac.uk/sarb/papers/DB-Paper2circulate*)

on C-A-N- 2014 Conference page: updated after the Conference

## How the Bible shapes my approach to Psychology

### **(2) Humanity made in order to represent God on earth**

“Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule ... over all the earth ...' Male and female he created them.” (Genesis 2:26-27)

Scientific study of human life brings us closer to the general workings of the Lord's decrees for the creation, while history and the creative arts grapple with the particularities.

## How the Bible shapes my approach to Psychology

### **(3) Human life rooted in both society and biology**

“... male and female ... God ... said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and ... rule over [it] ...’”

“The Lord God, said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. ... For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united with his wife, and they will become one flesh.’” (Genesis 1: 27-28; 2:18, 24)

The plan is that initiatives by individual members of God's appointed species and society should build families that spread around the globe.

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#### **(4) Human life is political and physical, and mental**

“[God] stretches out the heavens like a canopy ... and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing.” (Isaiah 40:22-23)

“... the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart ... (Jesus, in Matthew 15:19)

Views of human nature that dominate the Bible

Down-to-earth: mundane, realistic

Permeated by what God wants: what we can be -

in God's grace through the Spirit

in God's mercy through Jesus Christ

## My start in Psychology (1955)

	Philosophy [love of wisdom]	Psychology [soul-knowing]
etym.		
cutting edge	'Conceptual Analysis' / 'Linguistic Philosophy'	'Experimental Psychology' (UK) later 'Cognitive' Psychology (USA)
key figure(s)	Cambridge The <u>later</u> Wittgenstein (refuting his <i>Tractatus</i> )	1930s Sir Frederick Bartlett, ( Craik), Broadbent, 1980s Baddeley,
what I learnt	"Psychology consists of experiments and conceptual confusion" (re: American behaviorism)	Mechanisms of conscious <u>and</u> unconscious mental <u>performance</u> - NOT introspected experience
Non-Psych.	Critical Realism e.g. Lakatos ( <i>versus</i> Kuhn); first W.W. Bartley ~1960 Formal Ethics cp. Kant's 'categorical imperative'; first in Birkbeck degree	

# Challenges within Psychology

(but in many other disciplines too, in some form)

## Reductionisms

### Biological

specifically to neuroscience (or hot spots, hormones etc.)

also to genetic determinism (or 'evolutionary' Just-So stories)

### Ideological / political

Environmentalism (anti-genetic in reaction to Eugenics)

Radical Behaviorism (Skinner: 'reinforcement' by environs)

## Culture-blindness

e.g. language is solely in the mind, not a societal activity

## De-personalisation

premature grouping of data from individuals

mental process assumed, not tested by interviewer/experimenter

## Bandwagons / lack of systematic causal theory

e.g. decade of work on a striking experimental effect

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# Challenges within Psychology

(but in many other disciplines too, in some form)

## Some responses (biblically oriented)

Each human mind is built from both biology and society –  
- embodied and acculturated.

Each thing we do or think starts from and contributes to  
what we are.

*Study mechanisms of individuals' lifelong development*

Each basic mental process can take in and put out  
material and/or social  
information.

Put physical and social influences/effects on same footing  
(e.g. same unit of measurement of causal strength).

*Study each person's mental interactions in a situation*

.... ?

## Challenges within Psychology (but in many other disciplines too, in some form)

Some responses (biblically oriented) - *continued*

Often the battle is between good and evil reasons,  
not between rationality and emotionality

Responsibility ('free will'):  
acting from one's own reasons

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## More detailed treatments

David Booth (2013). Religious Roots to the Understanding of Information-Processing Systems: an Illustration from Basic and Applied Research into the Human Individual (a Soul). Paper for Workshop on *Scholarship & Religious Belief*. <http://www.basden.salford.ac.uk/sarb/papers/DB-Paper2circulate>\*

An updated version is mounted next to these slides in C-A-N- Conf '14 papers

## Technical

### enABLE:

Booth, D.A. & Booth, P. (2011). Targeting cultural changes supportive of the healthiest lifestyle patterns. A biosocial evidence-base for prevention of obesity. *Appetite* 56, 210-221. DOI:10.1016/j.appet.2010.12.003

### Co-Pro:

Booth, D.A., Sharpe, O., Freeman, R.P.J., & Conner, M.T. (2011). Insight into sight, touch, taste and smell by multiple discriminations from norm. *Seeing and Perceiving* 24, 485-511, 639.

DOIs: 10.1163/187847511X588773 and 10.1163/187847611X603774

## Challenges for Christians in the academic culture of psychology and the cognitive sciences

Cross-cultural mission for Christ in academia requires the Spirit's power, prayer, and support and inspiration from fellow-Christians. All that will come to nothing, however, without intellectually expert hard graft in research and/or teaching (including the research-based academic training of service practitioners).

I took up the academic discipline of Psychology from graduate backgrounds in both the natural sciences and the humanities. Initially this was an effort to inform my wing of the Church of what had been learnt about human life within a feared and hated hotbed of atheism. I slowly learnt from the Lord that this was the mission field into which He had sent me to promote a biblical understanding of the richness of the workings of a human life across the cultures of the biological and physical sciences and the philosophical and literary/political humanities.

My team's research over the decades has yielded two key innovations. One is a theory and method for working out from a few careful observations what is actually going on in a person's mind, consciously or not. The other is a way for 'ordinary' individuals to use their own and others' experiences ~~with~~ **to** ~~improving~~ wellbeing by changing what they regularly do, as well as for services to support them more effectively (to which the 'mind-reading' contributes).

So the mission turns out to be to all the people, not just to the academics - gaining better understanding of the lives of members of another culture (or one's own), and pushing back the Enemy's kingdom of ill health, material poverty and personal misery.