

# **A Biopsychosocial Interpretation of the Function of Religion**

## **Evolutionary Perspectives, Jamesian Principles, and Consequential Effects**

**By: Austin J. Avison**

### **Key Topics:**

#### **I. Evolutionary Theory applied to Religion:**

- A. Evolved Adaptive Changes.
- B. Survival and Reproduction.
- C. Environmental Demands.

#### **II. Terror Management Theory and Religion:**

- A. Evolutionary cerebral neocortical development.
- B. Fear and Anxiety of Death.
- C. Cultural Worldview Beliefs.
- D. Terror Management Function of Religious Beliefs.
- E. In-group/out-group dynamics.
- F. Self-esteem and Validation.

#### **III. Jamesian Psychology**

- A. Subjective Religious Experience.
- B. Evolved Mechanisms of Sense Perception.
- C. Evolution as source of Progression.
- D. Limits of Scientific Inquiry.

#### **IV. Psychosocial Effects:**

- A. Religious Orientations.
- B. Religious Beliefs have differential Psychological Consequences.
- C. Religion plays a paradoxical role in terms of overall psychological well-being.
- D. Correlated and Uncorrelated with Prejudice.

# Abstract

This article seeks to assess the psychological role in which religion plays within human emotion, behavior, and mental processes. Such will be undertaken by means of incorporating a variety of psychological theories. The aims of this research are to provide a psychological oriented basis for interpreting the function of religion within human operation and interaction. By assessing the psychological function of religion, we will better be able to assess the role in which religion plays within the dynamic scope of human experience. The function of religion within human emotion, experience, interaction, and behavior will be assessed in relation to the consequences that religion can be found to have within the world of human action. First, by incorporating contributions that have been made within the subfield of evolutionary psychology in assessing the evolutionary and adaptive basis in which religious cognition and experience emerged. Further, by addressing the theoretical contributions made within Terror Management Theory in accounting for a psychological function that religion serves. Third, by incorporating the ideas of William James in providing a means of interpreting the experience of individuals. Finally, an assessment is provided of the psychological outcomes that are found to be associated with religion. While interpreting the effects that religion and spirituality have in terms of its consequential functional outcomes.

# Thesis

- I. It is necessary to consider a holistic conceptualization of religion in terms of its historical and contextual emergence and in what necessitated its existence at all, while also considering the particular function in which it arose to meet. Where we consider religion in terms of evolutionary theory to conceive of what environmentally necessitated the emergence and continuation of religious cognition.
- II. This functional assessment of religion is drawn from psychological theory in which religion exists within the human psychological composition, and therefore requires examination of its presence and function within the interaction. Religion has emerged out of an evolutionarily motivated source, which serves a psychological function that can have both positive and negative effects in terms of prejudice, discrimination, and violence. Where it is necessary to consider the subjective experiences of individuals in determining the functional result that will stem from individual beliefs. We then find that the particular manifestation of religion results in different outcomes, with again both positive and negative effects.
- III. Holding therefore that religion has emerged out of the functional needs for such, and as such religion serves an explicit psychological function within human beings and society at large. Examined through insights provided by means of evolutionary psychological theories, the works of William James, and the established psychological effects of religion in conceiving a psychologically oriented interpretive analysis of the presence and function of religion. To assess the psychological source and function of religion by applying evolutionary theory coupled with the psychology of religion to understand how religion functions in the world.

# Evolutionary Theory and Religion's Origins

- The notion of evolutionary psychology is to address the role in which evolution and evolved mechanisms of adaptations play within the psychology of human beings (Bulbulia, 2004; Kirkpatrick, 2012; Lachmann, 2010; Dow, 2008).
- The evolutionary perspective approaches assessing human cognition, emotion, and behavior in terms of their evolutionary source, function, and necessity that gave the need for psychological mechanisms to arise (Bulbulia, 2004; Lachmann, 2010; Dow, 2008; Laker, 2015). The evolutionary perspective is one in which seeks to account for the basis of human evolved capabilities in terms of the evolutionary needs in which the environment necessitated the emergence of particular human capabilities (Bulbulia, 2004; Lachmann, 2010; Dow, 2008; Laker, 2015).
- The human propensity for religious cognition poses a unique question in terms of its evolutionary source, yet it can be seen that cognition functions as to aid organisms to deal with the complexity of the many environments in which human beings find themselves (Bulbulia, 2014).
- Psychological adaptations emerged out of an existing environmental need for such to emerge, where evolutionary adaptations emerge out of *a specific and particular environmental need for such human capacity existing* (Bulbulia, 2004; Lachmann, 2010; Dow, 2008; Laker, 2015; Boyer & Bergstorm, 2008). Differential outcomes in terms of survival and reproduction emerge due to the differences expressed genetically in terms of capabilities endowed the enable better adaptability to the environment (Dow, 2008).
- Further, adaptations that brought about the greatest outcomes in terms of survival of such genes in future generations are maintained due to the success that particular ability provided (Dow, 2008). Adaptations will thereby eliminate those in which do not hold the adaptive advantage (Dow, 2008).

# Evolutionary Origins of Religion

- The evolutionary origin of religion is conceived by considering the exact evolutionary origin of religious cognition, in which religion can be counted as either an adaptation in its own right, or a by-product of other evolutionarily cognitive adaptations (Bulbulia, 2004; Lachmann, 2010; Dow, 2008; Laker, 2015; Boyer & Bergstorm, 2008; Kirkpatrick, 2012).
- The adaptive view holds that religious cognition emerged out of a particular environmental need and religious cognition serves an explicit adaptive function, conferring relative human gains (Kirkpatrick, 2012; Bulbulia, 2004; Lachmann, 2010).
- Those viewing the psychological phenomenon of religion as a by-product, hold that religious thought and cognition emerged out of other cognitive mechanisms that biologically evolved with the growth of other brain functions (Dow, 2008).
  - Religion emerged as an accidental consequence of the evolutionary brain growth in accessing higher realms of conscious thought: religion emerged as a product of the evolution of thought (Dow, 2008; Bering, 2006).
- The idea at play here is to consider that evolved patterns of behavior exist within all species as a result of the natural selection of adaptive traits that were survived by the success that they provided, and such adaptations are in response to the environmental need for such (Dow, 2008; Bulbulia 2004; Kirkpatrick, 2012; Lachmann, 2010).
- If religion is, in fact, adaptive, from this perspective the capacity for religion must pose benefits to human survival, reproduction, and well-being (Dow, 2008).

# Evolution and Religion Cont.

- Therefore, evolutionary considerations pose that natural selection fashions both psychological and physical systems as solutions to *adaptive problems* (Kirkpatrick, 2012).
- Evolutionary psychological theory holds that any trait which brings negative outcomes by misperceiving reality would have been eliminated by natural selection (Bulbulia, 2004; Kirkpatrick, 2012).
- Examining the fact that today, religion is still present within the scope of human cognition, poses a question in terms of its evolutionary environmental necessity, which gave rise to and maintains the existence of religious cognition within the psychological composition of human beings (Kanazawa, 2010).

# Terror Management Theory (TMT)

- Terror Management Theory (TMT) is a psychological theory which holds that human beings, through highly adaptive changes in cognition, produced the knowledge of death; further, the knowledge of death serves as a psychological source of *anxiety and fear* (Vail et al., 2010; Hui, Chan, Cheung & Mok, 2014; Greenberg, Pyszczynski, Solomon, Rosenblatt, & Lyon, 1990; Juhl & Routledge, 2016).
  - Nearly 300 experiments have been conducted testing terror-management theory: showing death-related thought provokes various terror management defenses (Myers & DeWall, 2018).
- Such negative emotions are produced by means of accessing higher levels of thought cognition which can potentially limit human action and, in response, a psychological mechanism emerged in order to curtail the effects of human species knowledge of and fear of death (Vail et al., 2010; Hui et al., 2014; Greenberg et al., 1990; Juhl & Routledge, 2016).
- The human mind through highly adaptive changes has enabled higher levels of consciousness by the virtue of the mind's evolutionary growth to include the ability for higher-level thought cognition (Vail et al., 2010). The evolutionary emergence of such cognitive abilities consequently leads to accessing the knowledge of the inevitability of death, and the many things in which could suddenly end our lives (Hui et al., 2014; Vail et al., 2010).
  - Our knowledge of death produces fear and anxiety of death known as mortality salience: the knowledge of inevitable death (Juhl & Routledge, 2016).

# Terror Management Theory cont.

- The knowledge of death is unconsciously resolved by integrating psychological mechanisms that function to reduce the effect of fear and anxiety in relation to human death (Vail et al., 2010; Hui et al., 2014). One such social-psychological mechanism is the emergence of cultural systems or cultural worldviews of beliefs and organizations that aid in coping with the harshness of reality that is experienced within the human mind (Vail et al., 2010).
- Cultural worldviews act to mitigate the terror of death by constructing systems of beliefs that lessen the effects of death-anxiety (Vail et al., 2010; Hui et al., 2014; Jonas & Fischer, 2006). Cultural systems emerge in terms of systems of organized social beliefs, which provide individuals with cognitive tools to mitigate the ultimate fear of death (Vail et al., 2010; Hui et al., 2014; Jonas & Fischer, 2006).
  - Beliefs emerge as a result of an unconscious process of creating a psychological means of coping with the anxiety that our knowledge of death brings (Vail et al., 2010).
- Cultural worldviews are systems of ideas and beliefs that emerge to deal with the problem of death (Vail et al., 2010; Hui et al., 2014; Jonas & Fischer, 2006).
  - The knowledge of death leads to the creation of socially held beliefs in relation to death (Vail et al., 2010). These ideas and beliefs provide a psychological mechanism to overcome the problem of death by creating cultural worldviews that hold beliefs that life continues after death, that after the material life, some aspect of the person exists in a non-material continuation of existence (Jonas & Fischer, 2006; Vail et al., 2010; Hui et al., 2012).
  - One such prominent example is that of 'Religion' (Pyszczynski et al., 2004; Jonas & Fischer, 2006). Religious worldviews are typically strong associated with beliefs and ideas relating to death and existence thereafter (Greenberg et al., 1990; Pyszczynski et al., 2004).



# Terror Management Theory cont.

The theoretical contributions made by TMT hold that the human motivation to mitigate the fear of death, and thereby the denial of the finality of material death undertaken by means of cultural worldviews serve as an important source of understanding human thought, emotion, and behavior (Jonas & Fischer, 2006; Vail et al., 2010; Pyszczynski et al., 2004; Greenberg et al., 1990). Religious beliefs are held within cultural worldviews, where beliefs are systems of shared social meaning and practice in which are sociological in context (Jonas & Fischer, 2006). Beliefs held in common serve a psychosocial function in providing a perspective for human understanding of the world, and a basis of social interaction in which members are valued (Hui et al., 2014). Socially held and affirmed religious beliefs provide a basis of individual *self-esteem* and personal value in relation to one's membership within a social group (Jonas & Fischer, 2006; Greenberg et al., 1990). The socially derived validation that is provided to individuals is necessary for beliefs and worldviews to effectively mitigate the effects of fear and anxiety, which further provides positive psychological outcomes (Hui et al., 2014; Greenberg et al., 1990; Juhl & Routledge, 2016).

# Terror Management Theory cont.

In the construction and adherence to a cultural worldview, individuals are found to react more positively to those which share the same worldview and react more negatively to those who violate their worldview (Jonas & Fischer, 2006). Such group associations create in-group and out-group dynamics perceived by a respective cultural worldview, in which we more positively assess those who provide validation for our worldview (Greenberg et al., 1990; Jonas and Fischer, 2006). This poses consequences in terms of intergroup dynamics, especially in terms of in-group favoritism and more negative evaluations of groups outside of their own perspective (Greenberg et al., 1990; Juhl & Routledge, 2016; Jonas and Fischer, 2006). The idea is that groups will hold negative evaluations of other worldviews by means of the invalidation that holding another belief poses, and such acts in a way to further affirm our in-group, and more strongly oppose the out-group (Greenberg et al., 1990). Instances of heightened mortality salience will result in stronger in-group solidarity and more extreme measures of opposition and rejection of those outside the order of the individual's membership (Greenberg et al., 1990). The negative evaluations of non-group members are manifested in *intergroup violence, discrimination, religious extremism, prejudice, out-group derogation, and nationalism* (Greenberg et al., 1990; Jonas & Fischer, 2006).

# Terror Management Theory cont.

Religion becomes one of the most applicable cultural phenomena following this framework. Perceived threats to the validity of beliefs will be responded to by attempts to affirm the ‘correctness’ of one belief by means of derogating, converting, or inflicting violence on another (Greenberg et al., 1990; Jonas & Fischer, 2006). Where religious attachments explain acts of religious violence as defensive, adaptive reactions employed in dealing with the fear of losing the attachment bonds with a religious figure upon which identity has been formed (Counted, 2017). People are likely to defend their religious objects of attachment because their identity is shaped by the objects of religion (Counted, 2017).

# William James's Psychological Approach to Religion

James sought to assess the role in which religion plays within humans' operation (Radu, 2019; Blum, 2015). James would conceive of a new method of interpretation that would move beyond objective and subjective assessments and create a paradigm that assesses the function of the religious activity rather than the validity of such (Radu, 2019). James held that any psychological consideration of religion necessitates that the observer must recognize the validity of all religious manifestations as 'authentic' (Radu, 2019). For James, the aim of understanding religious activity was rooted in understanding the *function* of the activity for insiders' engagement (Ghosh, 2005). Where the function of activity is drawn from experience (Ghosh, 2005; Radu, 2019, Blum, 2015). The focus for James was on the experience, in which we consider not the beliefs of individuals, rather, experience is assessed in terms of its functional outcome (Blum, 2015)

# James' Psychological Approach to Religion cont.

- What matters in terms of the individual is derived by the function of religious experience, where the experience of religion, not the belief itself matters in terms of the psychological function of religion (Blum, 2015; Ghosh, 2005; Radu, 2019). James holds that interpreting the psychological function of religion requires approaching religion by means of assessing the function of experience for an individual, not approaching the particularity of religion (Radu, 2019; Wainwright, 2010). James presents an approach to assess the psychological role of religion in terms of the function that religious experiences play within human interaction, rather than assessing the validity of religion itself (Radu, 2019; Blum, 2015).
  - By beginning with experience, James presents the ability to interpret religious phenomenon by following what is actually given to and in experiences (Blum, 2015)
- James shifted from speculations regarding the transcendent or spirituality, and instead shifted to that of an analysis of discourse, by looking at what such religious engagements do, and what rhetorical function it performs (Coyle, 2008).

# The Evolutionary Perspective of James

- James hold that evolution can account for human capabilities, where religion can be assessed in terms of its evolutionary source and the functional need in which it arose to meet (Laker, 2015; Ghosh, 2005; Radu, 2019). William James holds with the evolutionary perspective that human capabilities have emerged as a result of the ongoing process of evolutionary change (Laker, 2015; Ghosh, 2005; Radu, 2019). Where human senses would have evolved to present an accurate representation of reality, where an adaptive advantage would accurately provide a true perception reality (Laker, 2015). Where religion and spirituality emerged as providing an evolutionary advantage by means of providing a means for individual transformation and progress (Laker, 2015). Where religion functions in terms of its biologically driven evolutionary source (Laker, 2015; Ghosh, 2005).
- While in this evolutionary source, James holds that the path of social evolution is towards a peaceful, non-interference, and democratic system of interaction (Pomerleau, 2019). While James holds that human beings have inherited violence within our genetic composition, maintained through our common evolutionary history (Radu, 2019; Pomerleau, 2019). That we have inherited through our ancestors' violent instincts of aggression, cruelty, and a warlike disposition (Radu, 2019; Pomerleau, 2019).

# The Evolutionary Perspective of James cont.

- While James held that we by means of intentional cultivation we have the ability to overcome the inherited dispositions provided through evolution by means of a social evolution, which occurs at a faster rate than biological evolution (Laker, 2015; Radu, 2019; Pomerleau, 2019).
- Where James agrees with TMT in that evolution provides a human motivation for survival, while holding that survival does not exist alone as the sole human drive (Goodman, 2017; Pomerleau, 2019; Vail et al., 2010).
  - Rather, James holds that the process of evolution has influenced the human motivation for survival, but also that evolution exists as the source of human progress, in *progressing humans toward happiness* (Goodman, 2017; Pomerleau, 2019). That the process of evolution is progressing human beings to increasing happiness and well-being, in which happiness functions as to motivate us further to act and endure in the face of reality (Goodman, 2017; Pomerleau, 2019).

# William James: The Relationship of Religion and Science

- James moved from speculations regarding the nature or existence of religious, spiritual, or transcendental forces to a different level of analysis by looking at what religious experiences and activities do, and what function they perform (Coyle, 2008). Much of human experience, particularly religious experiences are beyond the scope of scientific explanation and quantification (Coyle, 2008) Where many questions of religion are beyond the scientific framework of analysis and beyond scientific consideration (Coyle, 2008).
- For James religion could not be proven or disproven by scientific rationalism (Coyle, 2008; Ghosh, 2005). In that, the limit of science is the inability to fully comprehend the totality of human experience within scientific research (Ghosh, 2005). James considers science as only able to give partial answers and insights, especially in considerations of religion (Radu, 2019; Ghosh, 2005).



# Religious Orientations: The Extrinsic Orientation

## *The Extrinsic Religious Orientation*

What emerges within the literature is the necessity to differentiate between the particular means of religious expression for individuals as being found to result in differential disposition and behavioral outcomes (Silberman et al., 2005; Jonas & Fischer, 2006; Behere et al., 2013). Where the means by which an individual approaches the expression of religion in terms of an *intrinsic* or *extrinsic* religious representation has been found to have implications for human behavior (Jonas & Fischer, 2006; Behere et al., 2013).

This section will focus on extrinsic religiousness, as it has been found to be associated with more negative psychological and social implications (Jonas & Fischer, 2006; Behere et al., 2013). Extrinsic religious expressions are those which involve a utilitarian approach to religion (Jonas & Fischer, 2006) Where religion is used as a means to obtain other ends in safety, comfort, social standing, self-justification, and prevent transgression against oneself (Jonas & Fischer, 2006). Individual extrinsic religious orientations are utilitarian in that they seek non-religious security of the person both in social and biological need (Allport, 1966). Extrinsic religion is used as a means to preferred personal and self-interested ends (Allport, 1966). Such expression of religion provides the necessary basis of all forms of racial, national, political, or religious prejudice, discrimination, and stereotypes (Allport, 1966).

# The Extrinsic Orientation

- A positive correlation has been established between extrinsic religiousness and negative evaluations of an individual's characteristics by means of prejudicial and dogmatic assessments of non-members (Behere et al., 2013).
- Finding that extrinsic religion is not only compatible with prejudice, but positively correlated with prejudice; where it may be that extrinsic religious orientation is the context of prejudice (Behere et al., 2013; Jonas & Fischer, 2006; Allport, 1966).
- Finding that the extrinsic orientation is positively related to racial and ethnic intolerance, and also intolerance of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersexual gender identities and sexual orientations (Hunsberger & Jackson, 2005).
- Further, extrinsic religiousness is found to have a correlation with anxiety and to be more prejudicial than intrinsically religious individuals (Behere et al., 2013). A positive correlation is found between extrinsic religiousness and negative mental health outcomes (Jonas & Fischer, 2006). Extrinsically religious individuals have less self-regulation, personal adjustment, self-control, and a worse sense of well-being (Jonas & Fischer, 2006).

# The Extrinsic Orientation

- Further, extrinsic religiousness is found to have a correlation with anxiety and to be more prejudicial than intrinsically religious individuals (Behere et al., 2013). A positive correlation is found between extrinsic religiousness and negative mental health outcomes (Jonas & Fischer, 2006). Extrinsically religious individuals have less self-regulation, personal adjustment, self-control, and a worse sense of well-being (Jonas & Fischer, 2006).
- Individual extrinsic religious orientations are motivated by alternative political, social, and economic motives (Allport, 1966). Where extrinsic religion is for personal social motives and desires in life such as personal happiness (Allport, 1966).
- Prejudice enhances self-esteem by the security provided to the individual by the collective validation of belief, where prejudice provides a scapegoat to identify the source of threat resulting from outside threats to one's beliefs (Allport, 1966). Religion justifies and rationalizes prejudice on the basis of acting in the interest of the respective singular group (Allport, 1966). Self-esteem is derived from the nature of social verification and validation of beliefs in which adherence to communal beliefs provides psychological benefits (Vail et al., 2012).
- Such connects directly to the theoretical concepts posed within TMT in which religious worldview groups require social validation, and thereby social validation provides self-esteem, which must be maintained as valid (Vail et al., 2012). Where the existence of alternative religious or cultural worldviews poses a direct perceptual threat to the validity of one worldview (Vail et al., 2012; Vail et al., 2010). Where the perceived threats are resolved by employing intolerance, prejudice, and aggression against those who perpetrate the threat to belief (Vail et al., 2012). All of which acts as the basis of harmful in-group biases.

# Religious Orientations: The Intrinsic Orientation

## *The Intrinsic Religious Orientation*

The function of religion in terms of its ability to effectively manage terror is subject to the particular context of one's religious beliefs and practices in the particular orientation: of focus now is the intrinsic religious orientation (Vail et al., 2012; Jonas & Fischer, 2006). Intrinsic religiousness is characterized in terms of an individual holding a mature, earnest, and sincere religious conviction and orientation (Jonas & Fischer, 2006; Allport, 1966). Intrinsically religious individuals hold deeply internalized religious beliefs, in which the beliefs of individuals are deeply ingrained into an individual's sense of self (Jonas & Fischer, 2006). Such internalized beliefs act as the principal motive in which intrinsically religious individuals are guided by providing a framework of living with motivation and direction for one's life (Jonas & Fischer, 2006). Intrinsically religious individuals contextualize life in terms of one's religious beliefs (Jonas & Fischer, 2006). The function of religion for an intrinsic orientation is not as a means to an end, but rather religion as an end in and of itself, as a final sought end; not an instrumental tool for other motives or ends (Allport, 1966). Where the sole motive of religious participation for these individuals is exclusively religious and spiritual aims and desires (Allport, 1966). For these individuals, religious ideals are the supreme source of value, with faith as a value in its own right (Allport, 1966).

# The Intrinsic Orientation

- The intrinsic orientation is found to be less associated with prejudice, religious dogmatism, and authoritarian tendencies (Batson & Ventis, 1982; Allport, 1966; Jonas & Fischer, 2006). Such positive effects are contingent upon the extent to which a religious organization teaches and facilitates intergroup and interfaith tolerance (Batson & Ventis, 1982; Allport, 1966; Jonas & Fischer, 2006).
- Where religion helps aids positive social interaction and creates prosocial values (Allport, 1966). They take seriously religious ideas in action as necessitating the love of one another, and the need to not only care for the needs of oneself but also of others (Allport, 1966). Where religious belief and practice are coupled with universal humility (Allport, 1966).
- Intrinsically religious individuals rule out enmity, contempt, bigotry in which is incompatible with prejudice; such he claims is the matrix of tolerance (Allport, 1966). Finding no correlation between intrinsic religiousness racial prejudice (Allport, 1966; Jonas & Fischer, 2006).
  - Conversely, however, these same intrinsic individuals show a positive correlation of prejudice towards non-normative gender identities and sexual orientations (Whitley & Kite, 2010).

# The Intrinsic Orientation

- Further, intrinsic religiousness is found to be positively correlated with mental health outcomes of greater self-regulation, personal adjustment, self-control, and a sense of well-being and are more risk-averse (Jonas & Fischer, 2006). Those who scored on high intrinsic measures showed less frequency of death-related thoughts and therefore experienced less death-related anxiety (Jonas & Fischer, 2006). Suggesting that religion does play a protective psychological function in the management of stress, anxiety, fear, and terror (Jonas & Fischer, 2006). Where religious intrinsics were found to employ fewer defensive mechanisms following a reminder of mortality salience (Jonas & Fischer, 2006). Most importantly it appears that only those who are intrinsically vested in their religious orientation as the framework for one's life derive the terror management benefits from religious beliefs (Jonas & Fischer, 2006).
- It is not religiousness per se that confers terror management benefits nor that intrinsically religious individuals are quantitatively more religious than extrinsic individuals, rather, the different approaches employed in expressing religion account for its use as a means to manage terror (Jonas & Fischer, 2006). Finding that intrinsic religiousness is more effective than extrinsic in coping with uncontrollably adverse events and threats such as violent acts such as terrorism, severe illness, and death (Jonas & Fischer, 2006).
- The association that intrinsic religiousness is found to have as less prejudicial is contingent upon the fact that a particular religion teaches ideas that encourage prosocial, positive moral and ethical values (Allport, 1966). While it is necessary to note that intrinsic religious orientations contain both pious pacifistic views and also militarists approaches employed in seeking to realize one's religious ideals (Allport, 1966). They can be religious zealots and radicals motivated by seeking to realize and establish religious ideals on earth (Allport, 1966).

# A New Religious Orientation: The Quest-Based

## *The Religious Quest Orientation*

- A third religious orientation is proposed outside of the two classical orientations proposed by Allport in which religion orients itself around a quest for truth (Batson & Ventis, 1982). Where individuals with this orientation treat religion as not as a means nor end, but rather as a source of truth and knowledge (Batson & Ventis, 1982). Where they approach religion and religious practice by recognizing they do not know all truth, and probably will never know any absolute or final truth (Batson & Ventis, 1982). They are characterized in terms of their open-minded willingness to change by seeking truth wherever it presents itself (Batson & Ventis, 1982).
- Such orientation is found to correlate with low levels of prejudice (Batson & Ventis, 1982). Batson and Ventis conducted an experiment where they planted an individual of color posing as a confederate in both overt and covert conditions to test the correlation between religious orientations prejudice (1982). Finding that those who scored high in quest orientation chose to sit with the confederate person of color half the time in overt conditions and half the time in covert conditions (Batson & Ventis, 1982). Seeming to indicate a lack of prejudice and a lack of an attempt to appear unprejudiced (Batson & Ventis, 1982). The research literature seems to suggest that the quest orientation appears to be the source of *universal love and compassion* as the function of religion within human existence (Whitley & Kite, 2010; Batson & Ventis, 1982).

# The Significance of Religious Orientations

- The quest orientation is one in which moves beyond the scope of extrinsic and intrinsic orientations as one in which religion functions as a means of searching for knowledge, truth, and understanding (Batson & Ventis, 1982). Where religion functions as a source of the human search for knowledge and understanding of the nature of reality (Batson & Ventis, 1982). Where an individual acknowledges the limits of their own knowledge and the inability of an individual to contain the totality of truth and knowledge (Batson & Ventis, 1982). They are open-minded and are willing and able to change in their religious search for understanding in whatever manifestation knowledge presents itself (Batson & Ventis, 1982). Finding no correlation between the quest orientation and prejudice in any form while also lacking to appear non-prejudicial (Whitley & Kite, 2010; Batson & Ventis, 1982).
- The extrinsically religious individuals are positively associated with racial and ethnic prejudice, holding that extrinsic religiousness may be the source of all forms of discrimination, prejudice, and stereotypes (Batson & Ventis, 1982; Jonas & Fischer, 2006; Allport, 1966). While at the same time experiencing a higher level of anxiety; where extrinsic religion is found to have a negative impact on mental health (Jonas & Fischer, 2006). Further, it is found that extrinsic religiousness is found to provide overall better defense against all types of psychological threats, or whether there are forms of threat to self-esteem and social alienation (Jonas & Fischer, 2006).
- While the intrinsic religious orientation is one in which religion itself a final and ‘good’ end, not as a means to anything but religious ends (Allport, 1966). Rather they hold deeply internalized and mature religious beliefs that act as a guiding framework for understanding and living life (Allport, 1966). Intrinsic religious orientations were found to provide a more effective means in coping with uncontrollable and troubling events than extrinsic orientations (Jonas & Fischer, 2006).



# The Significance of Religious Orientations: Conclusion

The essential idea that emerges from religious orientations is that only those who are internally invested in their religion does religion confer terror management and defenses against psychological threats (Jonas & Fischer, 2006). The context of religious expressions confers terror management benefits is for those whose religion is a framework for meaning and value in life (Jonas & Fischer, 2006). Where it is not religiousness in itself that universally confers terror management benefits, but rather the differential variation of characteristics of particular religious orientations that are responsible for religions management of terror (Jonas & Fischer, 2006). Where it is the type of religiousness that matters in terms of the functional outcome of religion (Jonas & Fischer, 2006).

# Interpretation of Findings

- It is that the evolutionary perspective holds that human capabilities have emerged out of the totality of human existence, where organisms adapt to the presence of current environmental demands (Kirkpatrick, 2012; Bulbulia, 2004; Lachmann, 2010; Dow, 2008). Human capabilities have emerged as a result of the functional need in which the current environment posed, with capabilities serving explicitly functions in which our ancestral environment demanded (Dow, 2008; Laker, 2015; Boyer & Bergstorm, 2008; Kirkpatrick, 2012). In order to be considered adaptive, religion must confer benefits in terms of survival of the organism and reproductive success (Dow, 2008).
- While natural selection by the nature of increasing chances of survival and reproductive success will manifest in differential frequencies of characteristics expressed (Dow, 2008). Where those that confer the greatest adaptive benefit will continue to be expressed in larger frequencies within organisms (Dow, 2008). While it is that all capabilities that are expressed in greater frequency have been subject to the same forces which would have limited the frequency of expression if such did not confer adaptive benefits (Kirkpatrick, 2012; Bulbulia, 2004; Kanazawa, 2010). Where any characteristic or trait that disadvantaged an individual would be expressed in less frequency (Bulbulia, 2004). While it is that religion exists still today in great frequency that seems to indicate that religion has an evolutionary source and does confer adaptive benefits. That religion within the evolutionary perspective today exist must serve some adaptive and evolutionary advantage for its continued existence, in which religion serves a particular function, emerging out of environmental necessity for such human capacities (Kanazawa, 2010; Bulbulia, 2004; Kirkpatrick, 2012; Dow, 2008; Lachmann, 2010; Boyer & Bergstorm, 2008).
- It is in this in which we must consider religion as being one in which had conferred an evolutionary advantage, for if it had not it would not continue to be expressed in such great frequency. While today it is that still religion is expressed in great frequency; with nearly 84% of individuals totaling in 2010 of 6.9 billion being religiously affiliated (Pew Research Center, 2010). Since religion continues to be expressed in such great frequency and has continued to exist in our collective history indicates that religion has passed the test of natural selection.

# Interpretation of Findings

- Then we are able to conclude that religion exists because the environment has necessitated its existence, and religion emerged to meet the presence of an environmental need, in which such conferred greater advantages versus individuals who did not contain the adaptation of religion.
- Where it is that since the majority of individuals on earth are religiously oriented, we find that a minority of the entire human species is not religiously associated (Pew Research Center, 2010). Where evolutionary theory holds that since the majority expressed religious characteristics it seems as though religion has conferred a greater advantage due to the greater frequency of expression. Where the greater frequency of expression indicates that such does indeed have an evolutionary source, in which religion does not emerge in isolated or limited frequencies, but rather it is no-religion in which is expressed in less frequency.
- Where characteristics that bring negative outcomes by misperceiving reality will have been eliminated by natural selection (Bulbulia, 2004; Kirkpatrick, 2012). While it is that religion exists as bringing a perception of reality; where if such only held the ability to present an inaccurate representation of reality, such would not confer an adaptive advantage. Since religion is currently expressed we must from an evolutionary standpoint consider religion as having been subject to the evolutionary process, and that such has continued to exist because it does, in fact, confer an adaptive advantage by means of the management of terror.

# Interpretation of Findings

- William James also holds to this notion in trusting the ability of human sense perception, that such would not have evolved to present us with a misrepresentation of reality (Laker, 2015). Where human senses would not emerge to present us with a faulty sense of reality, but rather that our senses have evolved to present us with an accurate representation of reality (Laker, 2015). It is unlikely that the majority of the world, which is religious, is expressing and experiencing a mass misrepresentation of reality. It would be that the majority of the world is inaccurately perceiving reality. Where evolutionary science would hold that an inaccurate perception of reality of all existence unless it conferred benefits to survival, would not be the result of evolution and natural selection. Where evolutionary science holds that unless we are somehow conferred benefits by misperceiving reality, such would not take place, but rather those in which provide an accurate representation of reality would confer benefits to human beings.
- It is that religion has emerged as a result of a functional need for such cognition; in which our existence in the environment of the world necessitated its emergence. Humans have experienced an evolutionary expansion in cerebral neocortical development which has enabled higher-level conscious thought and awareness (Vail et al., 2010; Hui et al., 2014; Greenberg et al., 1990; Juhl & Routledge, 2016). The evolutionary adaptation of an increase in brain size has enabled an adaptive advantage by endowing conscious awareness of ourselves and our environment (Vail et al., 2010; Hui et al., 2014; Greenberg et al., 1990; Juhl & Routledge, 2016).

# Interpretation of Findings

Where religion poses benefits in terms of our ability to mitigate the immobilizing effects of our fear of death, while also posing harms in terms of intergroup relations. Where religion aids us psychologically in terms of deriving self-esteem, personal value, and social interaction; while also facilitating intergroup conflict and violence as a means of securing such benefits. While if it is the necessity to quell our fears, we must manifest prejudice against those who are not insiders as a means of maintaining and securing self-esteem, does the gain of one not pose a harm to another by the respective loss. Where prejudice enhances self-esteem but only by means of addressing an existing personal deficit; where religion justifies and rationalizes prejudices on the basis of self-interest (Allport, 1966). In which to derive self-esteem we must lessen the self-esteem of another is indeed not a desirable manifestation of religion. It is that religious worldviews can also impose positive standards and beliefs that cultivate peaceful and positive interactions between groups (Vail et al., 2012). Where religion also contains the ability for the cultivation of prosocial values of altruism, compassion, and discourage violence, prejudice, and discrimination (Vail et al., 2012). In which they can promote values of assistance, equality, forgiveness, and empathy which can conversely facilitate the forgiveness process, peaceful coexistence with other religious worldviews (Vail et al., 2012).

# Interpretation of Findings

- The wars of religion are precisely the out-group derogation and inter-group religious conflict that TMT speaks of. Where we most positively evaluate our group and therefore ourselves, and hold more negative evaluations of others due to their alignment with another set of seemingly opposed religious beliefs. Where we then seek to affirm the validity of our religious perspective by the minimization of another's. Such takes place by means of opposition, discriminating, employing prejudice, inflicting violence, conflict, and aggression. Such creates a dynamic in which facilitates inter-group conflict by means of escalation of already existing implicit biases present within the extrinsic expression of religion which is the religious orientation in which TMT speaks. Such is due to the need for validity that is required for religious beliefs to confers TMT benefits. Where the extrinsic religious orientation employs prejudice as a means of invalidating the beliefs of another as to secure the perceived validity of one's one beliefs. Religion cannot be exclusively accounted as the source of much of the world's conflict, but religion does, in fact, play an important function in inter-group conflicts.
- While it is that religion does influence the onset of intergroup tensions which acts as the creation of two seemingly distinct and separate and opposed groups. Where such can be considered in terms of the political theory of realism, where the existence of another actor seems to pose a threat to the power of another, and actions to increase power relative to another will be undertaken by the respective group.

# Interpretation of Findings

The importance of assessing religion is due to the fact that religion exists for many, and for many, it is a deeply important aspect of their lives. Religiosity is a common expression for the majority of individuals, and such entails the necessity to assess the function it plays. Religion, in fact, does play a significant role in the lives of many billions of individuals past, present, and is likely to continue into the future in whatever new configuration. Where it has been found that religion can have deep implications for the ability of society to function maximally well by the inclusion of all segments of society no matter the respective group in which one associates. Where religion can manifest itself in a variety of very different functional operations, which result in differential effects that result in differential psychological states due to one's respective worldview employed. Where the importance of considering religion presents itself not towards the validity of beliefs, but rather the function of the experience in which is derived from religious activity and experience. Where religious experience is the source of meaning and value in which guides individuals' lives.

# Conclusion

- The importance of assessing religion is due to the fact that religion exists for many, and for many, it is a deeply important aspect of their lives. Religiosity is a common expression for the majority of individuals, and such entails the necessity to assess the function it plays. Religion, in fact, does play a significant role in the lives of many billions of individuals past, present, and is likely to continue into the future in whatever new configuration. Where it has been found that religion can have deep implications for the ability of society to function maximally well by the inclusion of all segments of society no matter the respective group in which one associates. Where religion can manifest itself in a variety of very different functional operations, which result in differential effects that result in differential psychological states due to one's respective worldview employed. Where the importance of considering religion presents itself not towards the validity of beliefs, but rather the function of the experience in which is derived from religious activity and experience. Where religious experience is the source of meaning and value in which guides individuals' lives.
- Where it is necessary to assess religion in terms of the subjective psychological experiences of individuals in which constitute the emergence of psychological states. It is that religion matters to a great deal of individuals, and it is, therefore, necessary to understand the role it plays within human life. Whereby we are able to assess the function of religion in terms of its entire scope of influence on and within the human experience. In which religion has a profound effect on a whole range of human experiences that directly influence human beings and their lives. Where religion influences and affects human conduct in interaction, emotion, behavior, and mental processes. The aims of this research were to assess the psychological source and function of religion by means of applying evolutionary theory coupled with psychological research on religion as a means of understanding how religion functions within the world of human beings being religious.



## Conclusion cont.

- I. The call is to consider in what way our beliefs influence and determine the state of being in the world, and in what way religious beliefs and practices influence the psychosocial well-being of others in which we interact and engage.
- II. The call is to consider what religion does, and how it functions within the network of human relations which constitutes our social world, the world as we know it.

VOCATUS ATQUE NON VOCATUS DEUS ADERIT

"Called or not called, the god will be there."

Delphic oracle, Translation by Erasmus.

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