

Mapping the World of Our Mind—Part One

World Views from Biblical Perspectives

The study of human nature has been—for much of human history—left to the scientist, the philosopher and to the cleric. Each has tried to discern what we are, how we are, and why we are, and yet not one of them has given us a means to explain the reason for our existence and the purpose of life.

People want to know more about human behavior. They want to know if we are destined to have a meaningful beginning and ending to our lives, and whether or not there is a purpose that explains our temporary existence and our future. People also want to know why we live in a world contrasted by good and evil, and why they cannot arrive at solutions to the troubles of humankind.

It is this questioning of our existence and the paradox of good and evil that has continually raised an important question.

What is humanity?

Now, it wasn't long after people set out to conquer the globe that they began to examine the larger and smaller worlds. Through the methodology of science, people looked at the stars to map the heavens, and they began to measure the world that lies beneath the oceans and count the things that can't be seen by the human eye alone. They also began carefully mapping the world of our mind.

This meant more than knowing the geography of the brain.

From the mapping of our thoughts came the formal study of psychology, which is just—in a general sense—the study of human nature, and a commonly accepted part of a modern education today.

Consequently, it became the quest of psychology to take the lead in describing the function and the structure of human nature, and perhaps shed some light on the reason for our existence.

But what has psychology given us?

In a book published in 1895 by Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud, they described a therapy that they had used on a woman known by the pseudonym of “Anna O.” This woman had many symptoms ranging from physical health issues to hallucinations, among other problems. In the course of her “treatment” it was learned that some of her past experiences were linked to her present conditions, and they learned that by working through these past experiences, her symptoms went away, and her overall condition improved.

This demonstrated the profound effect of the mind on the human body, and the treatment she received became the foundation and starting point for psychoanalysis.

Now, although the focus of psychology has changed back and forth over the years from the biological to the psychological causes of mental illness, there is one thing that became certain, and that is that some human illnesses could be attributed to the way

the mind worked, and to the way people used and stored their thoughts and memories.

What then did Freud and other psychologists of the time really discover, or perhaps we should say rediscover about the human mind?

Fundamentally, what Freud and other psychologists were looking at was the mechanics of the human mind from the materialistic and humanist point of view, and so what psychologists were finding in some cases was that some problems in human behavior could be resolved by exploring the way people think and store their thoughts, and by altering the condition of a person's thoughts they could cure some mental health issues. What Freud and other psychologists also recognized was that there were some unique and important attributes of the human mind, two of which we will simply call thinking and thought, a notion that had long ago been entertained by Greek philosophers and the ancients of the Fertile Crescent.

One is, in a sense, the creator of the other and distinct, and in another sense, they are absolutely understood to be the components of one mind and inseparable. Meaning that we cannot establish the existence of one without the other, which has in some measure been poetically summed in the words of King Solomon (Pro. 8:22-23).

Now, these attributes of the mind give us the capability of relaying information back and forth. We commonly refer to this phenomenon today as “talking to ourselves,” which makes us particularly significant among all creatures on earth. Even King

David was aware of this human ability when he wrote: “I have considered the days of old, the years of ancient times. I call to remembrance my song in the night: I commune with mine own heart: and my spirit made diligent search” (Ps. 77:5-6).

Some people assume that David was speaking of the “heart” as the seat of a person's emotions, but in this context David was referring to his thoughts, and the expression of his will regarding the direction of his life.

In other words, by speaking of the “heart” he was saying that a person's thoughts are pointed in a certain direction, and David used historical figures and events to consider his own direction, and so by his comment he admonishes us to consider the way our will is also directed. For in the works of Jeremiah we read that the heart of man can become wicked and deceitful, and thus our thoughts and their direction can—and certainly have—brought about a large portion of humanity's ills and troubles and conflicts.

Meaning that the thoughts of humankind appear to be continually influenced in a direction that is the opposite of the Creators thoughts, requiring us to commune with our own thoughts to examine if they are according to the will of God (Ps. 139:17; Eph. 2:1-6).

However, what Freud and others also did was to cause us to explore our “feelings” in preference to our thinking in order to explore the “unconscious mind,” and in a way of speaking, this approach redefined our understanding of the soul.

Today the word “feel” is nearly synonymous with “think,” and so we have come to believe that our minds should be ruled by feelings instead of properly guided thoughts, and the consequence is that we are allowing ourselves to be governed by our desires and the thoughts attached to them, rather than by a set of values, such as those that may be understood in the Ten Commandments.

Interestingly, modern psychology took its cue from some of the conclusions offered to us by the cleric and the philosopher, noting that within some religions and among some philosophies we are taught to look to ourselves for the answers to life’s questions, just as psychology has taught us to look within ourselves for the answers to life’s questions.

Clearly reflecting an evolutionary explanation for our existence, which is to say that by looking within we are assuming that there is nowhere else to look to explain our personal beginning and ending and the purpose for our existence, ignoring any recorded revelation that would explain our reason for being here on this planet, and the consequence has been the opening of Pandora’s Box.

Now, psychologists seek to describe the mind’s structure and its function, and they have left markers along the way to show what they find there in our minds— syndromes, incongruities, marvels, perplexities, maladies, and more—and all of this has been done in the pursuit to solve many of our problems. Psychology has also been able to dissect the

mind to some degree, but this study has really only been able to measure its rudimentary functions and its deficits, and it is not able to evaluate clearly its potential as say, for example, what is described in the Bible.

Simply, psychology cannot give us an explanation for the purpose of life.

Consequently, in societies where evolution has become the leading theory guiding scientific and medical research, psychologists have learned that they can work with the mechanics of thinking, and thereby they can attempt to alter a person’s thoughts—about themselves, others, and the world around them—and by doing so they attempt to influence human behavior, which has led to the belief that we can look within to solve our own problems. Leading people to then believe they can use the methods of psychology to eliminate their personal fears and worries, but by any reasonable assessment of human behavior, and even by looking at the acts of nations, we can conclude with confidence that people cannot look within to rid themselves of fears, worries and troubles.

Thus, the evolutionary basis for mapping our minds has brought some to believe that we can somehow come to a conclusion on what is “normal,” or socially “acceptable,” and even “politically defensible” regardless of the nature of the human behavior, even if it is in direct confrontation with religious beliefs—some of which are clearly expressed in the Bible. Meaning that if the values of right and wrong are thought to be found within ourselves, then the revelation of truth

expressed in Scripture holds little weight in guiding our thoughts—unless we should “think” to allow it to do so—causing some to conclude that Scripture is nothing more than a fabricated and codified body of thought produced by humankind, with no greater or lesser validity than any other composition of thought that we have produced during the short span of human existence.

Posing a challenge to the Bible.

And rightly so.

Because the validity of Scripture is only established by challenging what is recorded in its pages, for even the words of God are recorded as saying, “prove me now herewith,” and so this is what is required, but how to do this is the question. Leading us to examine further what is understood about the human mind according to psychology, and how that compares to what is explained in the Bible regarding the purpose for our human existence. (Continued in part two of this series.) 