

The Noetic Effects of Sin: A Review Article¹

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Introduction

This is a good and important book. It is a good book because it is clearly written, it is well documented, and it is in close touch with essential literature on its topic—the noetic effects of sin. It is important because its author, Steven K. Moroney, associate professor of theology at Malone Seminary, provides here the first book-length study of this topic. Thus, he can do what has not been done before: present an extended “historical and contemporary exploration of how sin affects our thinking” (note the subtitle). In the course of this exploration, Professor Moroney offers a critical examination of several “detailed models” for understanding these effects. Then, he offers his own “new model,” with which he seeks to build on the strengths of the earlier models and correct their deficiencies. With the new model in hand, he examines some currents of thought in contemporary theology and philosophy. Finally, in the last chapter, he enriches the “interdisciplinary” mix of these two fields with the findings of recent studies in social psychology. In spite of its many virtues, however, the book contains a few serious flaws, as I will point out. Still, no Christian theologian, philosopher, or psychologist who wishes to examine this topic in the future can do without this book, nor would wish to.

Moroney claims, “the most detailed reflection on how sin affects our thinking is found within the *Reformed* (or Calvinistic) tradition of Christianity” (27).² Theologians, both inside and outside the Reformed tradition, likely will agree that Moroney is right about this. It may come as a surprise, then, for both groups to learn from him that so little has been done by Reformed theologians, past and present, to examine and develop this topic—almost nothing in comparison to other topics such as “the natural knowledge of God, natural theology, natural law, and common grace” (1). He notes, for example, that in R. C. Gamble’s fourteen volume anthology, *Articles on Calvin and Calvinism*,³ “there is

¹Stephen K. Moroney, *The Noetic Effects of Sin: A Historical and Contemporary Exploration of How Sin Affects Our Thinking* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2000). Pp. vii + 154.

²Numbers in parentheses refer to pages in Moroney’s book.

³Richard C. Gamble, *Articles on Calvin and Calvinism*, 14 vols. (New York: Garland Publishing, 1992).

not a single publication on Calvin's view of sin or its noetic effects" among the two hundred some articles by Reformed scholars (17). How is this possible in a tradition that contains "the most detailed reflection on how sin affects our thinking"? Yet, it becomes evident from Moroney's book that there is not only a numerical paucity of articles devoted to the topic but also a substantial deficiency in the writings of some major figures in the Reformed tradition, including Calvin himself.

John Calvin

In any event, Moroney begins his book, appropriately, with a study of John Calvin (1509-1564).⁴ He presents what is very likely the most complete yet concise account of Calvin's ideas on the topic, culled not only from the *Institutes*, commentaries, and sermons but also from other writings and from recent and current Calvin scholarship insofar as it bears on the topic. Moroney observes, importantly, that Calvin develops his teaching on the noetic effects of sin within the "helpful framework" of creation, fall, and redemption, with which he "con-curs" (2, 14).

However, he finds three "problematic elements" in Calvin's more detailed account. First, Calvin's "most basic division between the knowledge of earthly things and the knowledge of heavenly things is insufficiently precise" (14). Calvin defines the former as "those which do not pertain to God or his kingdom, to true justice, or to the blessedness of the future life; but which have their significance and relationship with regard to the present life and are, in a sense, confined within its bounds." These include such things as "government, household management, all mechanical skills, and the liberal arts." By contrast, Calvin identifies "heavenly things" as "the pure knowledge of God, the nature of true righteousness, and the mysteries of the heavenly Kingdom." These include the revealed knowledge of God and his will and how we should live in accord with it (5-6).⁵

Moroney observes, however, that the earthly noetic endeavors that Calvin refers to here "*do* pertain to God's kingdom, and should not be categorized as 'merely earthly matters'" (14). That is certainly what Reformed people have thought for centuries, and they thought they learned it from Calvin himself. They are right in this, and it is a well-known, often-told story of a comprehensive world and life view of the kingdom of God that Calvin bequeathed the Reformed tradition. Calvin's distinction here is troublesome only if one ignores

⁴An appendix, "Calvin's Psychology" (115-23), might better have been included in this chapter; and another appendix, "Representative Teachings on the Noetic Effects of Sin in Christian Tradition and Christian Scripture" (125-33), might better have served as the opening chapter of the book to provide a historical orientation to the rest of the book.

⁵Quoted from John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols., trans. F. L. Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 2.2.13.

the context, as Moroney has done; for it does not contain Calvin's teaching on the kingdom of God but only his teaching on the noetic effects of the Fall. The question here is only, what can we and what can we not know as fallen human beings *apart* from redemption? We *can* know many things that pertain to the living of this life ("earthly things"); what we *cannot* know is what we need for salvation ("heavenly things"). Moroney himself notes the point and amply documents it (7-9),⁶ when he observes, "Calvin was exuberant over the accomplishments of . . . fallen reason as found among unbelievers, but his enthusiasm extended only to the application of such reason to 'earthly' subjects which did not yield 'spiritual' wisdom" (6).

Second, Moroney complains that Calvin ignores the corporate nature of sin, except for the transmission of original sin. What he ignores is how such *actual* sins as economic oppression, racism, and sexism are embedded in social and political structures, and not just in human beings as individuals (15). This shortcoming in Calvin, if it is one, may perhaps be explained by the ethos of his times. The Reformers shared and contributed to the individualistic concept of human nature that was developing in sixteenth-century Europe and were not as aware of how much communal structures are essential to human life as we have become, by reaction, four centuries later.

Third, Moroney shows that, as clear as he is on the noetic effects of sin upon human nature, Calvin is less clear about the effects of grace in the redemption of reason (15; 23-24). Here, perhaps, most of all, we must appreciate the importance of the biblical *framework* of creation, fall, and redemption, for that framework sets a parameter for all theologians, not just Reformed, such that the human *nature* God created has to remain essentially the same in its fallen state because grace and regeneration are intended to *restore* just what was damaged or lost in the Fall.⁷ Hence, a faulty view of the effects of sin on human nature must lead to a correspondingly faulty view of the effects of grace (the converse is also true). In other words, if we do not know what God created when he created us in his image and what happened to us in our fall, how can we know what it is to be redeemed? The topic of the noetic effects of sin, as of all its effects, is wedged tightly between the doctrines of creation and redemption.

Abraham Kuyper and Emil Brunner

In chapter 2, Moroney selects Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) and Emil Brunner (1889-1966), for the same reason that led him to begin his book with Calvin, viz., that "the most detailed reflection on how sin affects our thinking is found within the *Reformed* (or Calvinistic) tradition of Christianity" (27). Addi-

⁶Not only from the context in the *Institutes* but also from several of Calvin's *Commentaries* and a sermon.

⁷For an elaboration of this claim, see my *John Calvin and the Will* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), chs. 3, 5.

tionally, he claims, Kuyper and Brunner have “formulated the most detailed models of exactly how sin affects thinking about different fields of study”; they have also “strongly influenced the thinking of late twentieth-century Christian scholars” (27).

Moroney begins with Kuyper’s central “conviction that before there is any human thinking, there are human thinkers whose subjectivity influences their thinking,” and that these thinkers “may be divided into two groups: regenerate Christians and unregenerate non-Christians” (28). Moroney is happy that Kuyper affirms the biblical and Augustinian doctrine of the “two kingdoms . . . at war with one another in the cosmos” and that Kuyper avoids Calvin’s distinction between “earthly” and “heavenly” things. He is not entirely pleased, however, with Kuyper’s use either of “subjectivity” or of the “antithesis” to account for the difference between the thinking of regenerated Christians and unregenerated unbelievers and for its correlative difference between “two kinds of science” (29).

Although Moroney applauds Kuyper’s attention to “subjective influences on people’s thinking,” thereby exposing false Enlightenment claims for the impartiality of human reason in the sciences, he criticizes Kuyper for “a Romantic, expressivist view of thinking” that “overemphasizes the subjective nature of human thinking and underemphasizes the objective aspects of human thinking—how the object of study influences the outcome of one’s thinking” (30). Moroney offers no evidence for this criticism, however, nor does he help himself by suggesting, mistakenly I think, that Kuyper underestimates how much “human thinking is grounded in our common creation [as rational beings] and not solely in the presence or absence of people’s redemption” (30). His criticism tends to obscure the most important “subjective influence” upon Christian thinking, which Moroney otherwise approves in Kuyper, viz., divine regeneration. This activity occurs in the “subject” of science, that is, in the human mind and heart; it constitutes the “supremely important fact” about that subject, so important, in fact, that it “breaks humanity in two, and reveals the unity of the human consciousness” (28).⁸ This brings us to the antithesis.

Moroney complains that “Kuyper moved too quickly and without qualification from the fact that there are ultimately two kingdoms or dominions at war with one another in the cosmos to his claim that there are two types of thinking at war with one another which can be found with Christians on one side and non-Christians on the other” (30). There is too much agreement between Christian and non-Christian science, scholarship, and learning, and too much diversity within each of the two “kinds” of science, Christian and non-Christian, to warrant Kuyper’s making so sharp an antithesis *within the sciences* themselves.

⁸Quoted by Moroney from Abraham Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology*, trans. J. H. De Vries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 152.

Agreeing with Nicholas Wolterstorff's criticisms of Kuyper on this point,⁹ Moroney concludes that Kuyper "fails to account adequately for the many types of thinking which exist in the world and the tremendous complexity of agreements and disagreements within and between different groups" (31). Moroney notes that Herman Bavinck, Kuyper's colleague at the Free University, had already lodged this very criticism against Kuyper. For a corrective, however, Moroney turns to the Swiss theologian, Emil Brunner, who develops the Reformed view of these things later than Kuyper and independently of the Dutch Calvinist tradition.

Moroney also disagrees with Kuyper's exemption of mathematics and the natural sciences from the noetic effects of sin and of the regenerate and unregenerate thinking that produces them. This criticism is more understandable in today's world of a post-Kuhnian philosophy of science than it could have been when Kuyper was writing a century ago. This criticism, however, together with the others preceding it, hardly diminishes the significance of Kuyper's major contribution, which justifies Moroney's attention to him, viz., that he focused the question of the noetic effects of sin on the sciences in far more detail than any of his Reformed predecessors and even Calvin himself.

Finally, Moroney claims that, while "Kuyper did recognize a corporate element in the sanctification of believers' thinking, he . . . neglected the corporate manifestations of sin and the noetic effects of corporate sin" (29). This issue is of particular interest to Moroney (as we will see again), but Kuyper was not entirely unaware of it. He even offers a possible explanation for such neglect, viz., that before his own time, Calvinism had been "advocated only from a theological point of view," which he contrasts with Calvinism both as it originally arose and as he envisions it in his own day some 350 years later. It arose "not from an abstract system, but from life itself"; and although "it never was [even] in the century of its prime presented as a systematic whole," through a study of its nature and growth, there will be a "development of the principles of Calvinism in accordance with the needs of our modern consciousness, and their application to every department of life."¹⁰ One of these Calvinist principles, if not the central one, is the sovereignty of God in "every sphere of life," both individual and corporate. As an example of the latter, consider Kuyper's founding of the Free University of Amsterdam in order that Christians might oppose the noetic effects of sin in the *corporate* world of the increasingly secular modern university. Consider also Kuyper's involvement in the Christian anti-

⁹Nicholas Wolterstorff, "On Christian Learning," in *Stained Glass: Worldviews and Social Sciences*, ed. P. A. Marshall, S. Griffioen, and R. J. Mouw (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1989), 69.

¹⁰Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1939), 266-67. Hence Kuyper's reputation as the leader of "neo-Calvinism," which identifies him as attempting to recover Calvin's view that the Christian religion, and in particular, his own theological elaboration of it, has implications for *all* of human life, including its social, economic, and political dimensions.

revolutionary political party, which had the consequence of his becoming prime minister of the Netherlands.

Still, Moroney prefers Emil Brunner's approach to his topic to Kuyper's, especially because it "best explains the variability of the noetic effects of sin on different areas of human knowledge." As does Kuyper, Brunner exempts the more empirical sciences and mathematics from the noetic effects of sin, whether engaged in by believer or unbeliever; whereas in the more personal and social sciences, let alone theology, the effects of sin on human thinking are much more noticeable. However, although Brunner thus makes the same mistake as Kuyper, he offers a useful principle that explains the "variability" of those effects in the areas of human study; why, more precisely, they appear in different degrees, depending on the area of study. Brunner calls it the "'closeness of relation'" principle: "'The more closely a subject is related to man's inward life, the more natural human knowledge is 'infected' by sin while the further away it is, the less will be its effect'" (33)¹¹ Brunner's approach is also "superior to Kuyper's in that it avoids the exaggerated principle of antithesis and the excessively expressivist view of human thinking" (34).

However, like Calvin and Kuyper, Brunner is "inattentive to the noetic effects of corporate sin" (34). Here, however, Moroney ignores the lengthy accounts Brunner gives of the noetic effects, even if somewhat general and indirect, of both sin and grace on those human social (corporate!) structures Brunner identifies as the "created orders" of human life.¹² These include the family; the community of labor (the economic order); education, the arts, and the sciences (the community of culture); and the state. Says Brunner, the Christian knowledge of God "does not merely constitute a positive answer to man's question [about man's self-understanding], it is also a polemical, radically critical denial of man's natural [i.e., sinful] view of his own nature." In pursuing the will of God, "we have to do with the divine 'orders' within which alone our action can take place, and in accordance with which it ought to take place."¹³

"The main problem," however, that Moroney finds "with Brunner is that he too easily oscillates between discussing whether sin distorts human thinking in

¹¹The quotations are from Emil Brunner's *Revelation and Reason* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1946), 383.

¹²Perhaps because he limits his sources to Emil Brunner's *Man in Revolt* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1939), *Revelation and Reason*, and *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption Dogmatics*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1952) and completely ignores his *Justice and the Social Order* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1945) and *The Divine Imperative* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1947).

¹³Brunner, *The Divine Imperative*, 61; 93. Consider also: "Insofar as the state is the most comprehensive of institutions . . . it is doubtless a necessity lying in the God-created nature of man, an ordinance of the Creator. . . . Nothing which is necessary merely as a consequence of evil belongs to the order of creation. . . . From this standpoint the state presupposes evil and is, as a system of coercion, necessary on account of evil" (*Justice and the Social Order*, 71-72).

a particular discipline and whether a particular discipline is marked by disagreement between Christians and non-Christians.” He cites several passages from Brunner to show that he “moves, without qualification, from the question of sin’s noetic effects to the question of the distinctiveness of Christian thought in various spheres of knowledge” (34). These passages, however, merely apply Brunner’s “closeness principle.”¹⁴ Indeed, Moroney sums up the point of these passages with his own formulation of what turns out to be the principle itself in different words: “If a particular area of thought is *not* affected by sin (for instance, mathematics), then we should expect no systematic differences between Christian and non-Christian thought. Conversely, if a particular area of thought *is* affected by sin (for instance, ethics), then, we should expect noticeable differences between the thinking of Christians and non-Christians. The hidden premise, of course, is that the thinking of Christians is less affected by sin than is the thinking of non-Christians” (34-35).

If there is a “main problem” here, Moroney brings it on himself with what he calls “the hidden premise.” Brunner’s principle clearly implies that there will be a correlation (not an “oscillation”) between how much sin distorts human thinking in a science and how much agreement or disagreement there will be between Christians and non-Christians who pursue the science, depending on the science. When there is disagreement, for instance, in ethics (Moroney’s example), the disagreement will of course be profound. Moroney agrees with that, but the problem he finds arises from the ambiguity of his hidden premise. “While this assumption certainly contains an element of truth, it can also be dangerous in what it overlooks” (35).

The element of truth is that the thinking of Christians is less affected by sin, but only because their thinking is *also* affected by regeneration and saving grace, whereas the thinking of non-Christians is not. That is the way Moroney himself understands his hidden premise, as he explains in the next paragraph. There, he elaborates on the biblical teaching that believers have been set free from the bondage of sin, whereas unbelievers have not and concludes by agreeing with Brunner that “we might expect that if a discipline of knowledge is susceptible to the noetic effects of sin, the thinking of Christians will be less affected by sin and, therefore, different than the thinking of non-Christians” (35). Thus, the differences between Christian ethics and secular ethics (Moroney’s example), to say nothing of history, economics, law, and philosophy, will be deep and conspicuous in contrast to those among the natural sci-

¹⁴For example, here is one of the passages: “The nearer anything lies to that center of existence where we are concerned with the whole, that is, with man’s relation to God and the being of the person, the greater is the disturbance of rational knowledge by sin; the farther away anything lies from this center, the less is the disturbance felt, and the less difference is there between knowing as a believer or as an unbeliever” (quoted from Brunner, *Revelation and Reason*, 383 n. 20).

ences when pursued by Christians and non-Christians.¹⁵ This will be the case simply because, when unbelievers pursue the former disciplines, they lack the noetic effects of grace and regeneration that in the believer *counteract* the noetic effects of sin that would otherwise be equal to what they are in the unbeliever. So, here Brunner is certainly in Kuyper's company, affirming that regeneration and saving grace yield a significant antithesis in some areas more than in others.

What then is the danger? Moroney says that it is that "Christians are not immune to sin and its effects. Indeed, those who claim to be without sin may be described as self-deceived" (35). This "is precisely the crucial point that is overlooked in Brunner's analysis," but there is nothing in Brunner's *principle* that "overlooks" this point, nor can it be inferred from the principle that he or anyone overlooks it *in himself or herself*. All that the principle accounts for is the correlation between the difference between Christian and non-Christian thinking in those sciences *as sciences*, which are most affected by the noetic effects of sin. It says *nothing* to Moroney's worry that the Christians who *do* these sciences differently (and presumably more correctly) might overestimate themselves by forgetting that they are still "not immune to sin and its effects." If they do such a thing, it can hardly be attributed to Brunner's principle but rather to the fact that, in spite of their regenerate and sanctified status, Christians might still "think more highly of themselves, and of their scientific work, than they ought."

That is an entirely different point, however; but Moroney wants to make it. Unfortunately, he reaches it by attaching to Brunner's principle the ambiguous hidden premise. In a second sense quite different from the element of truth in the premise that we have already discussed, Moroney has it meaning that Christians can be *more* affected by the effects of sin *than they think they are*. He believes that Brunner is guilty of this because "nowhere does he speak of the noetic effects of sin on believers' thinking. Brunner's argument is always from the noetic effects of sin to the distinctiveness of Christian thinking" (35). I have already noted that Moroney fails to support this latter claim. It looks very much as if Moroney distorts Brunner's thinking, and (it would appear) for a rather dubious purpose. Let me explain.

Everything in Brunner's entire account of Christian theology, ethics, and social philosophy *does* presuppose, of course, that his account is different from (and more correct than) non-Christian thinking in these areas because it is shaped by his own Christian faith (otherwise, why would he write his books?). If this *account* falls short, for example, in neglecting the noetic effects of sin on believers themselves, this is one thing (which Moroney indeed believes he can support by not finding Brunner saying it in so many words). If, however, his

¹⁵As Brunner states it memorably: "It is nonsense to speak of Christian mathematics or of Christian physics; but most emphatically it is *not* nonsense to speak of a Christian anthropology, or . . . conception of marriage, of law, and of the State." Brunner, *The Divine Imperative*, 496.

account falls short, either in this respect or any other, *and* it falls short *because* Brunner ignores the effects of sin in his *own* thinking, that is quite another thing. It is actually a serious personal charge against Brunner's integrity and requires support of quite a different kind, for it does not follow from Brunner's principle by itself without the hidden premise Moroney attaches to it. Moroney provides no evidence from Brunner's writings that he *excepts* believers from the noetic effects of sin (which would, of course, be a major mistake for a Christian theologian to make). Nor does he cite even one passage that supports his universal claim that Brunner's "argument is always from the noetic effects of sin to the distinctiveness of Christian thinking."¹⁶

These are pretty serious flaws in Moroney's "critical evaluation" of Brunner, and they lead him to the following conclusion of his whole discussion of Kuyper and Brunner:

The great danger for Christians here is that of a Pharisaic finger-pointing at the way sin may distort unbelievers' thought without attending to how sin distorts their own thought. (Precisely this tendency has been manifested in the writings of Kuyper, Van Til, and others in the neo-Calvinist tradition). Brunner may unwittingly exacerbate this problem by his own failure to address the noetic effects of sin in the thinking of Christians. Such shortcomings in Brunner's model, as well as Kuyper's earlier model, highlight the need for a new model of the ways in which sin affects our thinking. (35)

Thus, the great danger Moroney worries about turns into an actual indictment of quite a few thinkers he believes have fallen into it.

And, they are all Calvinists! In a footnote (45, n. 61) Moroney adds the name of one more, Del Ratzsch. It looks as if Moroney is convinced that, although the Reformed tradition provides "the most detailed account of the noetic effects of sin," that same tradition is least aware, even today, of the noetic effects of sin *upon its own pursuit* of the sciences. Moreover, it is a serious charge and one that Moroney makes without the pertinent evidence. Yet, he makes it here as a springboard to advance a new model of his own. Moroney has indulged here in the hermeneutic of suspicion; he may be flirting with a "philosophical tar baby."¹⁷ It does not comport well with his far more circumspect discussion of the dangers of theology in a later chapter where he observes "that the noetic

¹⁶See note 14.

¹⁷As Alvin Plantinga, to whom I owe the figure of speech, points out when he warns religious inclusivists who charge exclusivists with intellectual arrogance: "These charges are a philosophical tar baby. Get close enough to them to use them against the exclusivists and you are likely to find them stuck to yourself." "A Defense of Religious Exclusivism" in *The Analytic Theist: An Alvin Plantinga Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 193. In plainer, prosaic, and more pertinent language from Merold Westphal: "It is easy to become a Pharisee in the process of unmasking Pharisaic hypocrisy" (*Suspicion and Faith: The Religious Uses of Modern Atheism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 285; see below, note 32).

effects of sin should be explored further not in order to judge others but to facilitate our own repentance” (83).¹⁸

A New Model

Readers may wonder why, at this point in chapter 2, Moroney introduces his own model for understanding the noetic effects of sin, *before* considering, much later in chapter 4, Calvinists such as Nicholas Wolterstorff and Alvin Plantinga, who have led the way in developing something called “Reformed epistemology.” The reason is that, although they continue the neo-Calvinist tradition that Moroney has just referred to, they also represent a recent “current of thought” that illustrates, Moroney believes, “the need for a more adequate contemporary treatment of the subject.” Hence, the presentation of his own model at this point divides the book between the two components in its subtitle: *A Historical and Contemporary Exploration of How Sin Affects Our Thinking*.

Moroney begins on his model by observing that “the noetic effects of sin vary according to the complex interplay of many factors” (36). His model has the virtue, lacking in previous models, of more explicitly identifying what these factors are. Although the model follows the division of these factors into the *object* known and the knowing *subject* reminiscent of Abraham Kuyper’s treatment, Moroney distinguishes within each of these two main kinds of factors *three levels* that correspond with one another. All *six* of these levels must be dealt with in any complete account of the noetic effects of sin. Moroney offers his model, then, as a guide to future discussion; indeed, as will become evident shortly, he has already invoked it as a guideline for his own critical evaluations of Calvin, Kuyper, and Brunner.

First, then, with respect to the object of knowledge, Moroney follows Brunner’s distinction between impersonal and personal objects but divides the personal into two further levels, human beings and God, for a total of three significantly different kinds of objects that human beings seek to know.¹⁹ He further agrees with Calvin, Kuyper, and Brunner that sin “disturbs human thinking in some [of these] areas more than others,” least when that thinking focuses upon the impersonal aspects of creation; more when on human nature,

¹⁸But notice how this advice tends to suggest, inadvertently perhaps, but mistakenly, that the theological exploration of just what is involved in the noetic effects of sin (a theoretical effort to understand these effects correctly) is less important than, or should be pursued only for the sake of, recognizing the noetic effects of one’s own sin for the sake of repentance. (There are two distinct pieces of moral advice here: not only that we recognize and confess our own faults but also that we not judge others, whether or not we recognize our own.)

¹⁹Thus, recalling the title of a well-known treatise in philosophical theology of an earlier generation, William Temple’s *Nature, Man, and God*, The Gifford Lectures of 1934 (London: Macmillan, 1953).

both individual and social; and most of all when on God (36). Nevertheless, against Kuyper and Brunner, Moroney does not wish totally to “exempt any area of study from the potential distorting effects of sin” (37).

Correspondingly (though he discusses them in reverse order), with respect to the factors that affect the individual knowing subject, Moroney follows Calvin, Kuyper, and Brunner by accepting as first and foremost the crucial act of divine regeneration, adding that the degree of sanctification that ensues will significantly affect how much the believer’s thinking will differ from that of the unbeliever. He complains that neither Kuyper nor Brunner explained just how these spiritual conditions “reverse the noetic effects of sin on Christians’ thinking” (38). Not that he adds a great deal more; but at least he points up a large question for theologians to explore. According to his model, he says, it is evident that the unregenerate person “is likely to have a more distorted knowledge of God than someone who is regenerated but immature in the faith . . . who in turn is more likely to misconstrue God’s nature than a person who is further along in the process of sanctification” (38). There may be some truth in his criticism of Calvin, Kuyper, and Brunner on this point, but it is hard to imagine that, even without benefit of his model, they would not agree with his elaboration here. Its truth, which seems pretty obvious, does not just flow from his model alone.

Surprisingly, Moroney limits his own discussion of the effects of the presence or absence of these subjective spiritual factors (i.e., of his own more complex model) to the *theological* thinking of believers and of unbelievers respectively, as in the sentence quoted. He does not go on to discuss how the presence or absence of regeneration and sanctification in scholarly people will differentially affect their pursuit of the other areas of science: human (psychology, sociology, economics, and political science) and natural (biology, physics, and so forth) and mathematical. Perhaps this is because he thinks Kuyper and Brunner have at least made a start on it.

In any event, he is certain that they and Calvin himself, as he sees it, almost completely ignored the remaining two (subjective) factors—social influence and individual difference. The first of these is “how people are influenced by the community in which they participate,” more particularly, by “the communal aspects of sin, including its concomitant noetic effects.” Hence, Moroney wants to “incorporate insights from recent scholarship on the communal aspects of human knowing” (38). For these insights, he quotes or cites some fifteen or sixteen recent and contemporary Christian theologians and philosophers but without identifying as such those who write from within the Reformed tradition. A conspicuous example is the following quote from Reformed theologian Cornelius Plantinga, whom he quotes in support of his own concern: “moral evil is social and structural as well as personal; it comprises a vast historical and cultural matrix that includes traditions, old patterns

of relationship and behavior, atmospheres of expectation, social habits” (39).²⁰ Perhaps he did not find in Plantinga’s discussion very much by way of the “concomitant noetic effects” of such “social and structural evil.” Then, however, he might have said so, as clearly as he says later that contemporary Reformed philosophers have not dealt significantly with any aspects of the noetic effects of sin. Still, Moroney here fulfills the promise of his preface, which was to give us “a new model . . . distinguished from preceding views by examining the noetic effects of corporate (not just individual) sin” (vii).

The other (and last) subjective factor in his new model, also neglected by Calvin, Kuyper, and Brunner, consists of the “marked individual differences” and wide variety of “personal interests” that affect human thinking. This subjective factor does not quite “correspond” to the *impersonal* character of the object area represented by mathematics and the physical world, but, although Moroney makes no point of this, the variety of physical, chemical, and biological factors contributes to the wide range of *personal* differences between the subjectivity of individual human beings, just as the variety of their interests and of the psychological and cultural influences does. Moroney points out that “individuals entangled in a similar sin may not experience similar noetic effects of the sin” largely because of such individual differences, even where certain communal and religious factors are very similar (40). Again, the examples he offers to illustrate this are drawn from the study of theology, and in particular, from people engaged in biblical scholarship. Again, it would have been helpful if Moroney had extended the list to include individuals engaged in some of the other intellectual disciplines.

Moroney is quick to clarify that although “some broad generalizations can be made with respect to the noetic effects of sin” his model does not make it any easier “to forecast exactly how sin may distort the thinking” of any individual scholar in any particular situation. If anything, “due to the complex interplay of [the] many factors” specified by his model, particular cases may defy even these generalizations (40-41). This cautionary note, which concludes Moroney’s proposal of his new model for examining the noetic effects of sin, supports an attitude quite different from the one expressed in his concluding discussion of the first part of this chapter where he engaged in some fairly unhappy generalizations about Kuyper, Brunner, and all those other neo-Calvinists.

²⁰Quoted from Plantinga, “Not the Way It’s S’posed to Be: A Breviary of Sin,” *Theology Today* 50 (July 1993): 184. This article prefigures Plantinga’s later book by that title (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995). As we have seen, Moroney is conversant with the Reformed tradition; why would he not identify the Reformed thinkers among those he cites on pp. 38-39 to show that at least some of these are alert to the corporate influences of sin? Also, why does he ignore Nicholas Wolterstorff’s *Until Justice and Peace Embrace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), Richard Mouw’s *Politics and the Biblical Drama* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976) and Herman Dooyeweerd’s *The Christian Idea of the State* (Nutley, N.J.: Craig Press, 1968)?

The Contemporary Scene

The three contemporary currents that Moroney selects for discussion in his last three chapters are located in three disciplines: theology, philosophy, and social psychology. Why these three? Moroney's answer (from his preface) is that we should not only "learn from past thinkers" and consider his "new model" but also look for "interdisciplinary implications of the noetic effects of sin" (vii).

When we look more closely at the "prominent current ideas" that Moroney selects for discussion in each of these fields (49), it seems as if the three disciplines and their ideas range from being very far apart to being very tightly integrated. As a consequence, Moroney's discussions in these three chapters, although detailed, well documented, and informative, are rather disjointed when taken as a whole. Here is a glimpse of the territory. In theology (ch. 3), Moroney discusses and largely rejects the "rationalist theology" of Wolfhart Pannenberg but discusses no other theologians; in philosophy (ch. 4), he lays out the "reformed epistemology" of Nicholas Wolterstorff and Alvin Plantinga, which is also a vigorous rejection, both theologically and philosophically, of the kind of rationalism Pannenberg tries to rescue; and in social psychology (ch. 5), he elaborates on the impressive empirical confirmation of "self-serving cognitive distortion" produced by research in this field, as well as on the deeper interaction and even conflict between social psychology and theology, though not Pannenberg theology or any other main theologian's in particular. Only in this last and final chapter does he explicitly examine the interdisciplinary implications of his topic, though only for theology and social psychology.

Wolfhart Pannenberg

As important as Pannenberg is on the contemporary theological scene, Moroney finds that "he neglects the subjective and personal components in human thinking, including, notably the noetic effects of sin" (56-57). He shows at great length why this, his "main criticism" of Pannenberg theology, both in its method and substance, is so serious (56-63). Pannenberg "never addresses himself in any sustained way to the sinful repression and distortion of the 'natural knowledge of God,' despite the fact that this is such a prominent feature of Paul's argument" in Romans 1 (57). "[H]e steadfastly refuses to make humans' fallenness, regeneration, and sanctification significant categories in his analysis of reason. . . . [Although he] acknowledges that Luther 'spoke of a renewal of reason by faith,' . . . Pannenberg himself rarely speaks of the need for reason to be renewed by faith" (58). Theology "'may not . . . make the subjective presupposition of faith the starting point of the argument. The force of the argument alone is what counts'" (51).²¹

²¹Moroney does not observe in his earlier exposition of Calvin that Calvin's failure is just the opposite of Pannenberg's. Calvin grants that the power of fallen reason is still very much intact for "earthly things," but unlike Pannenberg, he believes its range for "heavenly things" is seriously

Even though Pannenberg wants to distance himself from the Enlightenment view of reason, he clearly leans in a “rationalist” direction, when he makes “reason alone the final court of appeal for theological argumentation” and recognizes only the limitations imposed on it by its finitude (52). Moroney applauds Pannenberg unpopular emphasis upon the universality of sin but chides him repeatedly for neglecting “one of the important ways in which sin influences human existence, namely, the way in which sin influences human thinking” (58-59). Although he believes “Pannenberg is right that the will’s bondage leaves the power to choose intact, but reduces its range,” he faults him for not acknowledging “the parallel reality that when people’s minds are in bondage to sin, their power to think is left intact, but the range of their thought is reduced,” reduced so severely that “godly thinking is not possible apart from the regenerating and sanctifying work of the Spirit” (59).²² Finally, Moroney suggests that Pannenberg rejection of the traditional doctrine of original sin, erroneous as it is in itself, is also due to Pannenberg mistake of regarding the offensiveness of this particular doctrine as the reason why “the modern world” obscures the doctrine of sin in general.

Although Moroney does not *give* his reason for ignoring Pannenberg in his later chapter on theology and social psychology, the reason should be obvious. If a theologian, like Pannenberg, almost completely rejects the noetic effects of sin, he can hardly be interested in connecting with the research in social psychology that underscores it. That in turn suggests the larger question: Why would Moroney select Pannenberg for the topic for the one of his five chapters dealing with theology? Of course Pannenberg is a fine example of what happens when a theologian *fails* to do justice to the important first subjective factor in Moroney’s “model,” and perhaps this is, in its way, a useful point to make. That is hardly a theological exploration of how sin *does* affect our thinking though, which Moroney’s book is all about.²³

For that purpose, Moroney could better have selected Karl Barth, against whom Pannenberg theology is in large part a reaction.²⁴ Moroney then not

reduced; whereas when it comes to the fallen will, Calvin, unlike Pannenberg, tends to deny that its created powers (inclining to goodness and choosing good in the presence of evil) are left intact even for “earthly things,” so that he does not have to face the question of how the “range” of its powers has been seriously reduced (for “heavenly things”). I agree with Moroney, that Christian theology must analyze carefully the capacities and incapacities of the fallen reason and the fallen will in a “parallel” way. (See my *John Calvin and the Will*, chs. 3, 5.)

²³Perhaps Moroney ignores Barth because he falls outside Moroney’s decision to discuss in chs. 3-5 *contemporary* currents of thought. If so, his following this parameter so strictly is unfortunate, as I explain in the following paragraph.

²⁴David Holwerda gives a comprehensive account of this reaction in “Faith, Reason, and the Resurrection,” in *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*, ed. A. Plantinga, and N. Wolterstorff (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 265-316. Moroney is aware of this aspect of Pannenberg overall significance and of Holwerda’s article, for he cites it in his own discussion of that significance (56).

only would have taken account of (arguably) the most important twentieth century Protestant Christian theologian but also could have made the chapter an interesting and pointed study of two quite opposite approaches to the noetic effects of sin and, along the way, have highlighted what happens when a Reformed theologian *overemphasizes* the noetic effects of sin (as I see Barth's significance on the topic). However, Moroney only mentions Barth's name twice in the entire book, once to include him as one of Pannenberg's teachers (49), and once to note their shared opposition to "the religious subjectivism which lies at the root of modern Protestant dogmatics" (51).

Moroney also finds that Pannenberg "believes...there is a corporate or social dimension to sin" (53). As the second subjective factor of Moroney's "new model," this discovery illustrates the usefulness of his model for identifying one of the multiple factors for which Moroney wants to hold theologians responsible, when they deal with the noetic effects of sin. But if Pannenberg offers no significant elaboration of the point (which must be the case, since Moroney mentions it only to drop it), why, again, would he have selected Pannenberg as a major figure to discuss in a book that promises an "exploration of how sin affects our thinking"?

Reformed Epistemology

Similar questions arise in connection with chapter 4, more than half of which Moroney devotes to the "Reformed epistemology" spearheaded by philosophers Alvin Plantinga (a brother of Cornelius Plantinga, the Reformed theologian mentioned earlier) and Nicholas Wolterstorff. He rightly shows their dependence upon both Thomas Reid and the Reformed theological tradition, including particularly Kuyper and, of course, Calvin. Yet, Moroney makes nothing of the fact that these two thinkers are paradigms of the "interdisciplinary" influence on their thinking of their deep and distinctive theological tradition and their contemporary philosophical training. This is odd, as I noted earlier, given that Moroney calls for more attention to such interdisciplinary implications of the noetic effects of sin.

Perhaps this is because Moroney finds that "neither Plantinga nor Wolterstorff has devoted concentrated reflection to the workings of the noetic effects of sin" (78-79). Then the question becomes: Why should he consult their writings at all? What can be learned from them by way of his intended "contemporary exploration of the noetic effects of sin"? Perhaps it is because he wishes us to know that, where he most expected a contemporary development of his topic, he failed to find it, viz., between two prominent Reformed philosophers. He does not say this in so many words, but one can hardly avoid that conclusion. Consider, for example, that he marshals the criticisms of some five commentators on their Reformed epistemology in order to support this fact (78-79).

To be sure, Moroney gives both Plantinga and Wolterstorff "credit" for affirming the fact that "the concept of sin's noetic effects is one of the keys to a

comprehensive Calvinist or Reformed epistemology” (78). He is even “optimistic” over Wolterstorff’s assertion that Reformed epistemology will be “going beyond its original brush-clearing polemic” and Plantinga’s “promissory notes” to write more on the topic (79).²⁵ Yet, he also appears doubtful and hopes that his own “present study will encourage Plantinga and Wolterstorff to further examine the [noetic effects of sin] . . . or barring that, serve as a supplement to the work of these Reformed epistemologists” (79).

Moroney does not seem to realize that Merold Westphal, whose criticisms of Reformed epistemology he cites most frequently, is himself a Reformed philosopher. Perhaps this is partly because Westphal does not identify himself as a “Reformed epistemologist” or even as a fellow traveler; and he generally seems to evaluate Reformed epistemology “from the outside.” For example, Westphal notes that “it joins a variety of contemporary traditions in philosophy that see reason not as the neutral medium in which human reflection takes place but as one of the disputed subject matters about which human reflection debates” and asserts that its “great strength” lies in the “boldness with which its challenge to modernity’s foundationalism-evidentialism shifts the burden of proof” onto the question: What makes religious beliefs rational? Westphal is quick to add what he considers its “greatest weakness,” viz., that “Plantinga talks a great deal about the proper basicity of beliefs formed by *properly functioning* belief-forming mechanisms, and Wolterstorff talks about the rationality of beliefs produced by *innocent* belief-forming mechanisms,” without either of them asking the question, “Can we say that when it comes to belief in God we ever have any properly functioning or innocent belief-forming mechanisms?”²⁶ Without, in short, taking seriously the noetic effects of sin.

Indeed, Westphal has probably been their severest critic on this score. It does not appear that this is because he disagrees with what they have *done*, for he nowhere (that I know) objects to their epistemology *as such*.²⁷ Indeed, he

²⁵Moroney’s citations here, as for all of his contemporary Reformed sources, are all dated 1997 or earlier. It is particularly unfortunate that he does not comment on Plantinga’s *Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), ch. 7, “Sin and Its Cognitive Consequences” (especially 206-40) and chs. 8 and 9 on faith and the testimony of the Holy Spirit (241-323), even though he was aware that the book was forthcoming. It was not published until the same year as Moroney’s, but drafts of many of its chapters were widely available already by 1998.

²⁶Merold Westphal, “A Reader’s Guide to Reformed Epistemology” in *Perspectives* (November 1992): 13.

²⁷Not even in his essay, “Taking St. Paul Seriously: Sin as an Epistemological Category,” in *Christian Philosophy*, ed. Thomas Flint (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 200-226, where he first elaborated on his objections to Plantinga’s and Wolterstorff’s Reformed epistemology. There he begins by listing four ways in which their Reformed epistemology “seem[s] to prepare the way for taking Paul seriously” on the noetic effects of sin. He also asserts that their objection to foundationalist-evidentialist theories of theistic belief “is right as far as it goes, but that it falls short of capturing what Calvin is driving at” (212).

says that he is “grateful” that “Reformed epistemology has struck some mighty blows for Jerusalem in its ongoing battle with the secular side of Athens.”²⁸ That still sounds short of acclaiming the cause of Reformed epistemology as his own. My guess is that this is because Westphal so vigorously disagrees with what Wolterstorff and Plantinga have *not* done (in theological parlance, their “sin of omission”). Here is why he is so vigorous in his criticism:

the danger of triumphalism and complacency, usually a more serious threat to the church than secularism, inevitably accompanies such a moment [as striking some mighty blows for Jerusalem]. Nothing would guard against this danger more effectively than for Reformed epistemology to become more authentically Calvinistic by taking more seriously the noetic effects of sin (and not simply as an explanation of unbelief, since this would be a further invitation to triumphalism and complacency).²⁹

In his earlier article, he all but says in so many words that Plantinga and Wolterstorff have succumbed to this danger³⁰ (recall Moroney’s own hermeneutic of suspicion about neo-Calvinists). Perhaps Westphal is reluctant to join them because, though he could help them make their otherwise correct Reformed epistemology “more authentically Calvinistic,” he fears he may succumb to the same danger as he suggests they have done.³¹

I have discussed Westphal at some length because, as I suggested earlier, Moroney does not seem to appreciate his significance in making up for the neglect of the noetic effects of sin that he has called to Plantinga’s and Wolterstorff’s attention. Moroney could better have cited him in his chapter on their Reformed epistemology, not only as their critic but also as their fellow Calvinist who has taken a major step to make up where they have fallen short.³²

²⁸Westphal, “A Reader’s Guide to Reformed Epistemology,” 13.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰See the essay cited in note 27. For example: “for believers to draw a line between themselves and unbelievers and to find the noetic effects of sin only on the other side of that line [which he believes Plantinga has done] is closer to epistemological Phariseeism than it is to taking Paul seriously. For unbelief is not the only way of suppressing truth about God. It is only the most honest” (213-14). In a similar way, he distances himself from Wolterstorff (214-17).

³¹It seems that he has other reasons for avoiding an association with “Reformed epistemology.” He writes, for example: “I want to suggest a somewhat more ecumenical approach to the notion of sin as an epistemological category. For while it may be distinctive of Calvinism, it is by no means unique to that tradition” (“Taking St. Paul Seriously,” 202). He also disagrees with Plantinga and Wolterstorff over the interpretation of Calvin. Why should that, however, deter him from joining them in their effort, if only to do his part to make Reformed epistemology as “authentically Calvinistic” as possible?

³²Moroney refers to Westphal’s *Suspicion and Faith* once, and in a footnote in an earlier chapter. His neglect of this book is a serious omission of an unusual and provocative “contemporary exploration of how sin affects our thinking” (see note 17).

As it stands, Moroney concludes that Reformed thinking among philosophers today has simply fallen short of developing any important ideas on the noetic effects of sin.

The Impracticality Objection

The conclusion above is reinforced by the closing section of chapter 4. In this section, Moroney deals with what he calls the “impracticality objection” to the very idea of the noetic effects of sin. Although he brings us up to date on the recent discussion of the objection, he does not observe that it was first raised *and* answered mainly from *within* the “Reformed camp.” Perhaps he thought this was too obvious to note explicitly; still, its truth reflects his earlier observation “that the most detailed reflection on how sin affects our thinking is found within the *Reformed* (or Calvinistic) tradition of Christianity.” In any event, it is an important objection, and the discussion of it has begun.

The objection was first lodged independently by Jesse De Boer and George Mavrodes. Having quoted them, Moroney finds two elements in the objection, only the latter of which can be correctly labeled the “*impracticality* objection.” The first element is that “humans are much more inclined to apply the concept [of the noetic effects of sin] to others than to themselves” (80). This is a way of saying that the concept is actually *too* practical, for it offers a convenient explanation of catching the speck in our brother’s eye while not noticing the log in our own (Matthew 7:3 RSV). The difficult element is the second one: to apply the concept to ourselves. This is not only a moral difficulty but also a very special epistemological one. As Moroney formulates the latter: “no human exists and indeed no human faculty exists which is exempt from sin’s effects, and therefore it is impossible to identify, in a way which is itself undistorted by sin’s effects, exactly where the noetic effects of sin are present” (80).

Moroney’s answer to the objection is, in effect, that such an identification of one’s own intellectual sins must be possible, for it actually happens, in two ways: “through being self-critical and open to correction from others” (81). He quotes Caroline Simon, who was the first to reply to Mavrodes: “‘Isn’t one of the ways that we Christian philosophers, theologians, scholars, and preachers at least *should* acknowledge the effects of sin on our theorizing by *attending*, seriously attending, when someone else attributes a part of our theorizing to self-serving distortion?’” (81)³³ So here is an interesting phenomenon: When others point out our errors, whether they do this out of love or because their sin makes it easier for them to find the speck in our eyes than the log in their own, they provide us an opportunity to *disprove* the objection that there is something impossible about identifying the noetic effects of sin in ourselves with noetic faculties that are already damaged by sin. Of course, this opportunity is only the

³³Quoted from Caroline Simon, “How Opaque Is Sin?” *Perspectives* (February 1993): 8.

external condition; the objection concerns instead what it is in our mental (internal) constitution (the knowing subject, in the language of Moroney's model) that *explains* the possibility. Simon answers: "We have no epistemic faculty that has escaped the ravages of sin; however, by grace we are part of the Body of believers intended to build us up into Christ" (81)³⁴ To which Moroney adds the point that Christians also have the Scripture, which "serves as a mirror which brings correction by showing us our sinful ways" (81). It should be added further, of course, that divine grace, the influence of our fellow believers, and Scripture are *internalized* in us by the Holy Spirit.³⁵

Moroney also quotes the way in which I, perhaps more boldly, answer the objection: "Belief in the noetic effects of sin in their own faculties makes it *more* rather than *less* likely that believers will discover their mistakes and be on guard against making them" (83).³⁶ I should probably have qualified that claim with a *ceteris paribus*, for the *saving* grace that explains *weak* believers' being only weakly inclined to confess their shortcomings may still make it *less* rather than *more* likely that *they* will discover their mistakes and be on guard against them, than unbelievers with a lot of *common* grace (to invoke the important distinction in divine grace that Reformed people make).

This is the place to observe that there is a substantial philosophical literature on self-deception and self-criticism that has not been appropriated, as far as I know, by Reformed thinkers interested in the noetic effects of sin.³⁷ Besides the moral (and theological!) factors that affect these mental mechanisms, there is the intriguing theoretical question of just how these mechanisms *work*—whether they function properly or improperly (to invoke Alvin Plantinga's terminology). Both self-criticism (a conscious exercise) and self-deception (an unconscious one; would one *consciously* want to deceive oneself?) imply a kind of self-transcendence; but how can one's self *transcend* one's self? Is not that incoherent? How can such a self remain a single, identical self?

Moroney agrees, of course, that much remains to be explored. He is more interested in what the social sciences have to offer and the interdisciplinary implications between them and theology, his own field, than in the philosophical discussion of self-transcendence. He refers to the "rich tradition in sociology that emphasizes the value of intersubjectivity as an antidote to error and

³⁴Quoted from Simon, "How Opaque Is Sin?" 8.

³⁵See the two last paragraphs before my "Conclusion," below.

³⁶Quoted from Dewey Hoitenga, "A Futile Search for Sin?" in *Perspectives* (March 1993): 9.

³⁷See for example the rich anthology by Brian P. McLaughlin and Amelie O. Rorty, eds., *Perspectives on Self-Deception* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988). Closely related to self-deception is weakness of the will (Gr. *akrasia*), for which there is also an abundant literature; see A. R. Mele, *Irrationality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987) and Justin Gosling, *Weakness of Will* (New York: Routledge, 1990), which contains an extensive bibliography.

deception” (81).³⁸ He notes that “much the same intersubjective corrective mechanism is found in the requirement of the scientific method that experimental results be replicable” (81).

In closing this chapter and preparing us for the next one, Moroney reminds us (and theologians in particular) that, according to his proposed model, the noetic effects of sin “are especially evident in human thinking about God . . . [so that] theologians need to be especially self-critical and open to others’ corrections” (82). Then he offers three pages of admonition, concluding with two paragraphs of “scriptural reflections on what the noetic effects of sin imply for the work of Christian scholars.” One of these paragraphs singles out theologians for special attention (82-84).³⁹

Relationship Between the Sciences

In his last chapter (5), Moroney investigates the “relationship of theology to social psychology (the subdiscipline within the field of psychology which ‘seeks to understand how we think about and interact with others’)” (89).⁴⁰ In particular, he wants to show “that (1) social psychology has something valuable to offer to Christian theology, and (2) Christian theology has something valuable to offer to social psychology” (89). Because this chapter breaks some interesting and important new ground and deals more than the earlier four chapters with the relationship between the sciences, I will discuss it at considerably greater length than any of previous four. In particular, this will later require a substantial detour, which the next two paragraphs signal in advance.

It is noteworthy how differently Moroney sets up this chapter to see what theology and social psychology offer to each other and thereby what they “contribute to our understanding of self-serving cognitive distortions (the ways in which we think of ourselves more highly than we ought)” (89). In view of his interest in “the interdisciplinary implications of the noetic effects of sin for some prominent ideas in the fields of theology, philosophy and psychology,” I want to ask why in no previous chapter does he ask about the other two possibilities for mutual edification: theology for philosophy (and vice versa) and philosophy for psychology (and vice versa). As it turns out, it is clear from the examples of Plantinga and Wolterstorff that philosophers can be deeply influenced by their theological tradition, although Moroney did not make anything of it. Similarly, although he notes that Pannenberg theology is significantly

³⁸Quoting from R. Burwell, “Epistemic Justification, Cultural Universals, and Revelation: Further Reflections on the Sociology of Knowledge.” in *The Reality of Christian Learning*, ed. H. Heie and D. L. Wolfe (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1987), 96.

³⁹See note 18.

⁴⁰The definition is taken from R. A. Baron and D. Byrne, *Social Psychology*, 7th ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1994), 8.

influenced by the modern rationalistic philosophical tradition, he does not make much of that fact. Nowhere in his book does he discuss the mutual relationship of psychology and philosophy. It is a serious omission given the fact that “scientific” psychology does not get very far without raising philosophical questions or making philosophical assumptions, often quite unwittingly. Conversely, it is also a serious omission given the fact that philosophical reflection cannot possibly be fruitful without beginning with some basic facts about human behavior, opinion, and the human mind itself, a careful examination of which belongs to the province of psychology.

Of course the relationship between the sciences is a very old and deeply controversial question,⁴¹ which today includes the big question whether some studies formerly regarded as sciences are even sciences at all. For Plato, mathematics was the key prerequisite for the study of ethics and philosophy. Today it is the prerequisite for physics. For Aristotle, theology was part of physics and both were subordinate to philosophy, defined (narrowly) as metaphysics. For Aquinas, theology was the queen of the sciences and philosophy its handmaiden. Today neither philosophy nor theology is regarded as a science at all. According to the modern university, under the influence of Bacon, Hobbes, Kant, Comte, and John Dewey (to mention only a few names), there are only two kinds of sciences, natural and social (and, it should be added, only one scientific method); whereas philosophy and ethics are humanities. As for theology, it has quite disappeared into the seminaries, leaving behind in the university the quite amorphous field called religious studies. This sketch provides only a glimpse of the many issues surrounding the topic of the relationship between the sciences, let alone the prospect of *interdisciplinary thinking*. Moroney does not set up his chapter on theology and social psychology, however, let alone his book as a whole, with much of an awareness of these large issues as they bear on his aim of understanding “interdisciplinary implications for the noetic effects of sin.”

What Social Psychology Has to Offer Theology

Nevertheless, it will be instructive to look at Moroney’s account of each of the two directions of the relationship—what social psychology has to offer theology and what theology has to offer social psychology—in turn. In each case, he focuses his discussion on “what these two disciplines contribute to our understanding of self-serving cognitive distortions (the ways in which we think of ourselves more highly than we ought)” (89).⁴² So, the first interdisciplinary question

⁴¹For good reason, of course, since the sciences are an attempt to study *all* of reality; and the origin, nature, and scope of *that* is the ultimate controversial question.

⁴²Readers will recognize the Scriptural reference to Romans 12:3. They should be aware also that self-serving attitudes, beliefs, and behavior are a large theme in social psychology, which has generated a great deal of research; cf. David Myers, *Social Psychology*, 7th ed. (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2002), especially part 1, “Social Thinking” (chs. 2-4).

is: What does social psychology have to offer theology on this topic? Moroney's answer is, in short: "By specifying how and where our thinking is fallen . . . , it offers many helpful insights into how we slip into self-serving cognitive distortions and where they are most commonly manifested in our lives" (90). The questions immediately arise: Does not a biblical theology already do this? Cannot theologians specify from the Bible "how and where our thinking is fallen"? What helpful insights in addition to biblical examples and teaching can social psychology offer? Moroney's answer to these questions is less than satisfying.⁴³

Moroney acknowledges on the same page that "Scripture makes it plain that the thinking of unregenerate sinners is fallen . . . and that even the thinking of Christians needs to be renewed." Scripture does, however, much more than give us these two general teachings about the noetic effects of sin, and Moroney's book is full of specific details. Indeed, in an appendix (129-31), he presents some of these details from the gospel of John. For example, Jesus explains to his fellow Jews that they cannot recognize him for who he is (a serious noetic defect) because of their evil deeds (John 3:19-20) and because they do not even love God (John 5:42). Their sinfulness, moreover, is reinforced by the further "sinful communal influence," in their desire for "the praise of men more than the praise of God" (John 12:42) and by their love of lies instead of truth (John 8:44-46). This appendix also contains an index to "additional key passages of Scripture pertaining to the noetic effects of sin" to which he refers in his own book, including two lengthy sections from this very chapter (129).

I could not find any quotations from the social psychologists among Moroney's many references to them that specify these biblical accounts of the noetic effects of sin any further or that provide helpful insights into "how we slip into self-serving cognitive distortions." To classify the latter under two headings, self-serving attributions and self-serving comparisons (which we shall discuss presently) is useful, perhaps, but it does not really help a theologian understand *how* human beings fall into either kind, only *that* self-serving cognitive distortions manifest themselves in at least these two ways. This is hardly a very substantial contribution either to *theology*, the area of study where, on Moroney's new model, "the noetic effects of sin are expected to be most evident"; or to understanding the *knowing subject* about which theology teaches that "a person who is unregenerate and living in persistent rebellion against God . . . is likely to have a more distorted knowledge of God than someone who is regenerated." (37; 38). To be truly helpful to theology, it seems, Moroney would have to relate the ideas of social psychology explicitly to the fallen conditions of human beings *as they are theologically described*. This is what I think Moroney has not done.

⁴³This is partly due to his not explicitly identifying his view on the *relationship* between social psychology and theology, a larger issue that he postpones until after answering the question heading this section (of his book and of my review).

Why not? Perhaps the answer lies in the definition of social psychology, which studies “how we think about and interact with others.” Moroney is not careful to remind us that this might impose a limitation (if it does) on social psychology with respect to how such thinking and interaction is affected *by our relationship with God*, which is the theologian’s main concern here. Of course, psychological research, even if it is thus limited by this definition, can hardly avoid *ethics* for that area of study *also* examines “how we think about and interact with others.” Then must psychological research *abstract* from *theological* ethics when it offers theology its modern examples of self-serving attitudes and beliefs that parallel examples the theologians derive from the Bible in a *religious* context? If so, how can it really help theology? To ask questions like this is to open up the larger question, which I have already mentioned and to which we will have to return, about the Christian view of the relationship between social psychology and theology.⁴⁴

Turning now to the social psychology research on “thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought to think,” we need to examine Moroney’s discussion of each of the two categories, self-serving attributions and self-serving comparisons. With respect to the former, Moroney cites a great many studies that show that we “attribute our successes mostly to our own effort and ability (internal factors), but we explain our failures as the result of a difficult task or impossible situation (external factors)”; whereas “we typically blame others’ failures on their enduring personality traits” and do not “give enough weight to situational constraints on others’ [bad] behavior. In plain language, when I fail, it is because I was in an impossible situation, but when others fail, it is because that is just the sort of people they are” (90-91).

In addition and of considerable importance, researchers find that these attribution errors are well nigh universal; they show up in widely different social groups: children and adults, athletes and students, ministers, and divorcees. The explanation seems to be, in the language of one researcher, that “our very ‘cognitive-processing mechanisms impose filters on incoming information that distort it’” in favor of ourselves and in disfavor of others (91).⁴⁵ Some cultural factors seem to affect the degree to which these errors are manifested, for example, conservatives vs. liberals, privileged vs. underprivileged groups, indi-

⁴⁴If this abstraction is unwarranted, as Christian social psychologists might be expected to think, why would they not challenge interpreting the definition of their field with the foregoing limitation of it? Why would they not advocate a *Christian* social psychology—one that understands “how we think about and interact with others” as necessarily affected by our relationship to God? This question is implicit in the issue raised by Kuypers and Brunner, who held that, although there may be no Christian mathematics or physics, there certainly would seem to be a Christian ethics. In which of these two categories, then, is social psychology? Surprisingly, Moroney stops short of facing this question here.

⁴⁵Quoted from S. E. Taylor and J. D. Brown, “Illusion and Well-Being: A Social Psychological Perspective on Mental Health,” *Psychological Bulletin* 103 (1988): 17.

vidualistic (Western) vs. collectivist (Eastern) societies, males vs. females, and even people with high self-esteem vs. those with low self-esteem (90-92). Nevertheless, these differences (which loom large in contemporary consciousness) do not substantially affect the main conclusion. This conclusion is that “in the attributions we make, we are truly self-deceived . . . [and that] social psychological research indicates that most humans suffer more from pride than from low self-esteem” (92).

To judge from Moroney’s report on the research, there has been no study of attribution errors that compares Christian believers with unbelievers, either by non-Christian social psychologists or by Christians in the field (and Moroney clearly identifies a number of the latter). One would hope that there would be a significant *difference* between these two groups; thus supporting Moroney’s earlier claim that, as a generalization, “a person who is redeemed and is growing in sanctification through participation in a holy community will have his or her thinking less distorted by sin than a person who lives in persistent rebellion against God and participates in an evil community” (40-41). Perhaps in this earlier discussion Moroney has in mind only radically evil communities, like Nazi Germany or the Ku Klux Klan to which he there refers (39) rather than the host of other communities that, though composed of unbelievers, are still relatively good by common grace.

It should be fairly simple, however, to conduct a comparative study of the degree of attribution error that occurs across all three groups to confirm or disconfirm the theological claim that regeneration and sanctification make a significant difference, although in degrees, in this particular manifestation of the noetic effects of sin. If such a study confirmed the theological claim, that would be, it seems, a far more impressive “gift” (as Moroney once refers to the “help” social psychology can offer theologians[97]) than the generalized documentation of the human tendency toward self-serving attribution. What if such a study were to disconfirm the theological claim? Would this show that some “cognitive processing mechanisms” (at least) are beyond the reach of regenerating grace and sanctification? My worry arises from Moroney’s telltale inclusion of Christian ministers in the existent studies who appear to be no exception to the widespread error of self-serving attribution. If further studies along the comparative lines confirm that Christian believers generally are no exception to the conclusion that human beings just are self-serving attributionists, that would be a strange gift for social psychology to offer theology indeed.

The second category in which we think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think is that of self-serving comparisons. Again, the general conclusion from the research is that “when we compare ourselves with others on socially desirable traits, most of us report that we are better than average (an aggregate statistical impossibility)” (93). Again, this applies to a wide range of traits and abilities and across many different groups of people: safe driving; being ethical in business; high school student leadership ability and the ability to get along with others; college students in their likelihood “to have a drinking

problem, attempt suicide, contract a venereal disease, be fired from a job, contract lung cancer, be sterile, drop out of college, or not find a job for six months; college professors in their teaching quality and job performance in other areas; parent, spouse, and friend on their “performance” in these roles; how many other people agree with us; and even how morally good we think we are in comparison with others. Moreover, these self-serving comparisons are “widespread across many age groups and cultures” (97). Again, as with self-serving attributions, Moroney reports no studies that indicate whether Christians are distinguishable or indistinguishable from non-Christians in how they compare themselves with others. Such studies might be more relevant to theological claims than the generic studies Moroney cites across other groups.

What Theology Has To Offer Social Psychology

We turn now to the second half of the chapter, Moroney’s discussion of what theology has to offer social psychology. He states his answer simply enough: “Social psychology provides a helpful diagnosis of our cognitive woes, but provides little in the way of cure” (99). It is “precisely at this point . . . that Christian theology . . . offers five antidotes which may be beneficial in counteracting our propensity to engage in self-serving cognitive distortions” (101). Before discussing these theological “antidotes” (or correctives, as he also calls them), however, we must take an extended detour, as does Moroney himself. At this point in his chapter, he raises a larger question: How should a Christian view the relationship between social psychology and theology? Why Moroney does not begin his chapter with this more general issue but postpones it until he comes to answer his second question in this section is a bit of a mystery, which he does not explain. Yet, it would have been the proper thing to do, as we shall see; it might also have enabled him to give a more complete and consistent answer to both questions overall. Let me explain.

An Important Detour

As I noted earlier, the relationship between the sciences is an ancient and deeply controversial question. This is because, and I would argue, it is not really a psychological or even a theological question. Psychology and theology are what used to be called “special” sciences, each with its own aspect of reality for study. It also used to be the case that philosophy was regarded as the *comprehensive* science that dealt, among other things, with the larger question of their relationship; it was the “science of the sciences.”⁴⁶ It also had an object but one of a very different kind from each of the particular sciences. Sadly, philosophy so conceived has lost its pride of place in the modern university—just one more of the tragic losses to the university discussed earlier. The consequences are

⁴⁶As a classic in the field was entitled: R. Flint’s *Philosophy as Scientia Scientiarum and a History of the Classification of the Sciences* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1904).

manifest everywhere, both in the general confusion that reigns in university-level discussions of curriculum and in specific discussions by authors in the various special fields who need to discuss the relationship between the sciences. Now, Moroney is by training a theologian and is also well read in social psychology, but the sources he relies upon are largely Christian psychologists. Unfortunately, neither he nor they seem to be much aware of the philosophical nature of the question they must deal with.

Moroney finds in their writings that “the two Christian approaches most pertinent to the study of self-serving cognitive distortions are (1) the Parallels model of the Perspectivalists and (2) the Integrates model of the Christianizers” (98).⁴⁷ He also notes, importantly, that the two models *disagree*. However, that makes the question all the more urgent: Why did he postpone the choice he eventually makes between them until his discussion of the second question of what theology has to offer psychology? The only explanation for this that I can make out is that he does not fully understand this disagreement between the two models. He apparently assumes the former model in his answer to the first question (what psychologists have to offer theology) but explicitly invokes the latter model in his answer to the second (what theologians have to offer social psychology). This generates some inconsistency in Moroney’s overall account.

Moroney begins by quoting the following description of the Parallels model from Carter and Narramore:

Psychology and Christianity are two separate spheres of knowledge. The two spheres have their own sources of truth (scientific method and revelation), their own methods of investigation (experimentation and exegesis), and their own data (psychological principles and facts and biblical principles and facts). . . . “Both Christianity and psychology can be embraced without fear of conflict since they operate in different spheres. (98)⁴⁸

Moroney notes also that “this is the dominant approach of David Myers, arguably the most prominent Christian social psychologist” (98).⁴⁹ With termi-

⁴⁷Moroney draws here from at least four sources: John Carter and Bruce Narramore, *The Integration of Psychology and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979); Stan Jones and Rich Butman, *Modern Psychotherapies: A Comprehensive Christian Appraisal* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1991); L. Crabb, “Biblical Counseling: A Basic View,” *The CASP Bulletin* 4 (1978): 1-6; and David Myers (see notes 49 and 50).

⁴⁸Quoted from Carter and Narramore, *The Integration of Psychology and Theology*, 91, 98.

⁴⁹Myers is the author of a widely used textbook in the field. Here, from that textbook, is Myers’ view in his own words: “If all truth is part of one fabric, then different levels of explanation should fit together to form a whole picture. Recognizing the complementary levels liberates us from useless argument over whether we should view human nature scientifically or subjectively: It’s not an either/or matter. . . . Social psychology is *one* important perspective from which we can view and understand ourselves, but it is not the only one” (*Social Psychology*, 8). Still, in spite of his firm adherence to the Parallels model, it is pervasively evident from his book that Myers is a Christian; for it is improbable that a secularly minded scholar would use so much biblical and Christian materials to enrich his exposition of the field, let alone even be aware of them.

nology that Myers uses elsewhere,⁵⁰ Moroney summarizes: On the Parallels approach, “psychology offers theology parallels, support, reinforcement, echoes, and enlivening modern examples” of the noetic effects of sin, while “theology, in turn, offers religious anticipations, counterparts, and examples of modern psychological principles” (100).

When I argued earlier that Moroney does not really show, in his answer to the first question, that the ideas and findings of social psychology make a substantial contribution to theology, I could have expressed this negative conclusion in these positive words from Myers, which describe the Parallels approach. Moroney, however, does not seem to recognize that he is *assuming* the Parallels model in his efforts to show that social psychology offers helpful insights to theology (of course, he has not *introduced* the model yet). This is the model under which we can easily comprehend his concluding claim in that section that “social psychologists help theologians to understand some of the particular ways in which the noetic effects of sin are manifest, for instance, through our tendencies to engage in self-serving attributions and self-serving comparisons” (97), for, as I suggested earlier, the understanding Moroney refers to here extends at most to this twofold *classification* of our self-serving attitudes and beliefs, which has been developed by social psychologists. There may be other things of this nature that social psychology can offer theology, all of which may constitute helpful insights, but such contributions still fall under the Parallels model. At least Moroney does not give himself a chance when he introduces the two models only afterwards to show that they do not.

Why, then, is not this Parallels approach adequate now? Because, as we mentioned earlier, Moroney believes that theology has something far more important to offer social psychology than such parallels. With its parallels, “social psychology provides a helpful diagnosis of our cognitive woes, but provides little in the way of cure” (99), which is the more important thing that theology offers social psychology. In fact, theology offers it a range of at least three kinds of correctives. Two of them point up what social psychology lacks: both a prescriptive and a motivational cure for self-serving attitudes and beliefs. One of them goes further and points out that social psychology is even mistaken in its mixed evaluation of such attitudes and beliefs.⁵¹

However, that means Moroney cannot be content with the parameters of the Parallels mode, for that model is “unduly restricted” by focusing only on the par-

⁵⁰David Myers, “Yin and Yang in Psychological Research and Christian Belief,” *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 39 (1987): 135-39. Moroney goes on to cite some specific “parallels” given by Myers, for example: self-justifying bias in the Pharisee of Luke 18; the assumption of self-serving comparison in Paul’s corrective admonishment in Philippians 2:3; and others. Then he gives still more examples of his own (98-99).

⁵¹We still have to wait for an elaboration of these correctives until we come to the end of this detour.

allels (100). He cites Carter and Narramore, who agree with him and expose that model's limitations; then they go on to outline the Integrates model they prefer. The Parallels model, they say, assumes that psychology and theology

are two separate entities . . . and this assumption precludes true and comprehensive integration. This is its most basic fault. It cannot produce the broader unifying principles that are necessary for true integration because of its artificial separation of sources of truth . . . proponents of the Integrates model do not look at [these areas of study] as distinct fields of study that are essentially unrelatable. Instead, they assume that since God is the Author of all truth, and since he is the Creator of the entire world, there is ultimately only one set of explanatory hypotheses. While the methods and data of psychology are frequently distinct (and the distinctions need to be maintained), followers of the Integrates model are looking for unifying concepts that will broaden the understanding that would come from either psychology or theology in isolation. (100-101)⁵²

Two questions now arise. First, how does this description of the Integrates model *disagree* with that of the Parallels model? Second, why does one have to choose between them consistently to understand *both* relationships between social psychology and theology, that is, what *each* offers the *other*?

The answer to the second question depends upon the answer to the first, so let us begin with it. It might look as if the disagreement concerns only that the Integrates model *adds* something (integration) to the Parallels model without conflicting with it. Moroney's discussion of what social psychology offers theology reflects the Parallels model, as I suggested earlier. Note, however, that this is not the way Carter and Narramore take the whole point of the Parallels model. They regard the Parallels model as *precluding* their proposal to integrate the two sciences, and Moroney quotes them approvingly on this (100-101). If they (and he) are correct about this, Moroney cannot have it both ways, as he appears to do when he discusses what social psychology offers theology within the Parallels model (thus precluding integration) and then discusses what theology offers social psychology within the Integrates model (ignoring, in effect, the parallels). To be consistent, he needs to make a choice *between* the models before he discusses the mutual relationship between theology and social psychology.

Perhaps Carter and Narramore have misled him. Although they are fairly clear that, on the Parallels model, the parallels (and whatever they entail) are the *only* contribution that either science should make to the other; whereas they are less clear on the question of whether, even on the Integrates model these parallels may *also* be valuable to study *in themselves*, even though they are less relevant to the *additional* task of integration. Nor are they all that clear on whether the task of integration is significantly more than a mere *addition* to the parallels, which does something for *each* of the sciences that the Parallels model

⁵²Carter and Narramore, *The Integration of Psychology and Theology*, 100, 104.

cannot allow, that is, to *integrate* the ideas from both into something neither one can be in isolation from the other. What may this be?

For all that Carter and Narramore say to this point, a Parallelist Christian could reply: "Let the Integrationists *add* their integration to what we do under the Parallels model. Christians can work under either model or both; the disagreement between the models is only a *partial* disagreement over how much a Christian wants to do: work on parallels only, or integration only, or both." One could read Myers, the social psychologist, in this manner, and also Moroney the theologian, in the way he sets up this chapter by following the Parallels model first, then the Integrates. Each one might claim that his choice as a Christian is as legitimate as the other's. The disagreement between the two models, since it is partial, is just not that important.

As it turns out, however, Moroney is not at ease with this rather loose approach. I think he senses that the truly *Christian* model is made of sterner stuff than parallels; hence he calls for Integration. That is the right thing to do, though he does not quite say why. What he is aspiring to, without however saying it, is the very concept of a truly Christian social psychology laid out by Abraham Kuyper and Emil Brunner. The issue they raised is, in the terminology of the two models, whether there is a Christian social psychology or not, and if there is, whether the Parallels model is sufficient or needs to be replaced by the Integrates model.⁵³ Here is a clue to the deeper disagreement between the two models. Moroney opens it up when he cites the Integrates approach as formulated by Jones and Butman. They say that it "involves the explicit incorporation of religiously based beliefs as the control beliefs that shape the perception of facts, theories, and methods in social science" (101).⁵⁴ Moroney identifies this version as "the Christianizer approach," for it makes explicit that theological ideas will not only *appear* in a Christian social psychology but will also *integrate* with it by playing a controlling role. This is the point about the Integrates model that attracts Moroney, and rightly so.

The problem it raises, however, is how to defend giving theology the pride of place here over social psychology, which Moroney actually does, as we shall see when we come to the correctives that theology offers social psychology. But is this fair? Why not the other way around as well? Moroney does not face this question, but it has to be faced. That he senses it, however, is evident from his

⁵³Here is a good place to note that Christian *philosophers* do not themselves agree on this issue. An illuminating example of this can be found in the recent discussion between Ernin McMullin and Alvin Plantinga. McMullin's position compares with the Parallelist's approach, Plantinga's with the Integrates. See their interchange in *Christian Scholar's Review*, 21 (September 1991), and its continuation in Ernin McMullin, "Evolution and Special Creation," in *Zygon*, 28, no. 3 (September 1993): 299, and in Alvin Plantinga, "Science: Augustinian or Duhemian," in *Faith and Philosophy*, 13, no 3 (July 1996): 368-94.

⁵⁴Quoting Jones and Butman, *Modern Psychotherapies*, 20.

own formulation of the Integrates model, which he constructs immediately after quoting Jones and Butman. Here it is:

theological and psychological concepts are allowed to interact much more directly than in the Parallels model. The two fields are not conceived as separate but equal, but rather as mutually informative and reciprocally critical. Psychology may at times challenge fallible theological concepts or Scriptural interpretations, and theology may at times correct erroneous psychological claims.” (101)

This is a robust model indeed, and sounds more fair. But will it hold up? Notice that, whereas Jones and Butman limit the controlling function to theology over social science, Moroney opens the door to a “reciprocally critical” function between the two on which it appears that there are no holds barred either way. This poses a major objection, which is that his formulation provides no criteria for arbitrating the criticisms that it invites *either* one to make of the *other*. But Moroney does not address this objection; nor does he even appear to notice it. In his actual discussion, he simply restricts himself to the one-way influence of theology on social psychology identified by Jones and Butman, ignoring (as do they) the converse possibility.

How, then, can the one-way Integrates version of Jones and Butman, which Moroney actually follows in practice be defended consistently with leaving some room for the two-way, reciprocal criticism opened up by his formulation of the Integrates model? The answer lies in three parts: first, in their idea of “control beliefs”; second, in the uniqueness of Christian theology as a science, together with the ambiguity of “theological belief”; and third, in the light of these two, a reconception of social psychology. A control belief is one that governs other beliefs in such a way that, if they conflict, it requires the rejection, or at least a harmonizing modification, of the other beliefs.⁵⁵ The ultimate control beliefs for a Christian are religious in character—those that spring from an “authentic Christian commitment.” As Wolterstorff works it out, not *every* theological belief in the Christian scholar’s (in our case, a Christian social psychologist’s) religious commitment will have to function as a control belief; some of them will, however, and they will be *theological* beliefs.⁵⁶

⁵⁵I draw here from the elaboration of “control beliefs” by Nicholas Wolterstorff in *Reason within the Bounds of Religion*, 2^d ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), esp. chs.1, 2, 4, 10, and 11. This book, along with the references in note 53, is an example of the kind of philosophic sources Moroney has overlooked. None of them, nor any comparable sources, appear in his otherwise extensive bibliography (35-152).

⁵⁶Nor does every control belief have to be theological; it might be a lower level belief in the science under consideration, or even one on the same level; but it would need to be one that does not conflict with the theological one, to remain part of the science as the Christian wants to develop it.

Here we must be careful, however. What if one’s theological control belief in a given instance is mistaken, and one discovers this by coming to believe that some other nontheological belief that conflicts with it true? That is what happened when Christian theology gave up, after the development of the Copernican heliocentric theory, what had earlier been taken as a correct theological

Here a critical ambiguity arises in the meaning of *theological beliefs*. The term can refer to the beliefs that appear in theology, which is an area of study that consists of a systematic, organized body of theological propositions, or it can refer to the beliefs that form a component of one's Christian *faith*. Of course the same proposition can appear in both places, as when a Christian is also a theologian, but not all Christians are theologians; some, for example, are social psychologists, and some, (though probably very few) are both, like Moroney. Now Moroney does not honor this distinction sufficiently; his discussion tends to elevate the science of Christian theology to a pride of place over the other sciences. There is some truth to this; however, it is not what should be meant by identifying theological beliefs as the *control beliefs* in the thinking of Christians who pursue other sciences, say, social psychology, and in the course of that pursuit evaluate its ideas, both as set forth by oneself and as set forth by others, whether they, too, are Christians or not.⁵⁷

What could those control beliefs in the minds and writings of *non-Christian* scientists be, such that they could be *ruled out* by the theological control beliefs of the Christian? That is the all-important question here, and its correct answer requires a more detailed understanding of the Integrates model itself than we have developed thus far. Such beliefs will be those that *conflict*, explicitly or implicitly, with Christian theological beliefs, and at the same fundamental level. We need to add *implicitly* because not all control beliefs are explicit. The implicit control of some beliefs is often not recognized by a scholar pursuing a science nor by others who read and study what he writes. Sometimes, of course, an author's control beliefs are explicit, a way that no one could fail to notice. Consider a history of the world that includes an account of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Readers would judge immediately that its author's account of history was controlled by that author's theological beliefs. What about the majority of history books that ignore this fact—that in their account of Jesus ignore his resurrection, or at best report it as a belief held only by his followers, not a

belief, viz., that the earth was the unmoved center of the universe. (See Wolterstorff, *Reason*, ch. 1.) One important result of such conflicts is that some beliefs that were *thought* to be theological beliefs are not corrected but just abandoned, i.e., no longer even regarded as *theological* beliefs at all.

Now just this possibility is provided for in Moroney's own "robust" model, even though he does not explain why social psychology offers no correctives to theology, analogous to the Copernican case in which a nontheological science (astronomy) offered a *corrective* to theology. If *integration* works both ways, as called for by his model, theology may have to be as prepared to benefit as well as the nontheological science it is integrated with.

⁵⁷The element of truth in it was captured in the medieval claim that theology is the "queen of the sciences," which, in turn, are *ancillae theologiae* (handmaidens of theology). Thomas Aquinas conveys the idea when he argues for the *superior nobility* of theology to the other sciences (*S. T. I. Q. I, A. 5*). When Aquinas makes this evaluation of the relationship between theology and the other sciences, he is doing philosophy, in the sense defined earlier in this article, of its being the *scientia scientiarum*. But then he was arguably as much a philosopher as a theologian! Of course he was *Christian* philosopher; most modern non-Christian philosophers would no doubt disagree!

belief shared by the historian who writes the history? One explanation is that the author simply lacked this central Christian belief, but how can the mere *lack* of the theological belief that Jesus arose from the dead be in conflict with a Christian historian's affirmation of it? The answer is that this lack of belief may not be so simple an explanation, after all, of the difference between the two historians. Perhaps the non-Christian historian knows that Christians believe this fact but rejects it. That is quite important because there is likely an implicit control belief that has led the historian to this rejection. In these days, that control belief is very likely the naturalistic worldview that deeply conflicts with the Christian historian's supernaturalism.⁵⁸

Now it is only a *worldview* (in philosophical terminology, a metaphysics, defined as a set of beliefs about the nature of ultimate reality) that can really integrate the sciences into a coherent whole. The key assumption for a properly understood Integrates model here is twofold: first, that there are more than one of these worldviews available; and second, that they are in pretty deep conflict with one another, not only in their central claims but also in many of the more particular beliefs that follow from these.⁵⁹ Carter and Narramore miss the first point when they claim there is "ultimately only one set of explanatory hypotheses" and further that it is the Christian view (101).⁶⁰ Moroney seems to appreciate these two points but does not explain how to resolve the *conflict*, opened up by his own formulation of the Integrates model, that goes beyond Carter and Narramore's description.⁶¹ Jones and Butman solve this problem, as we have seen, but it is not clear from the little Moroney quotes from them that they fully recognize that the Christian psychology they authorize will be in conflict with a non-Christian one.

What Theology Has to Offer Social Psychology, Continued

Finally our detour is over. We can now examine the details of Moroney's answer to the second question, what has theology to offer social psychology?

⁵⁸What about those Christians, such as Myers, who opt for the Parallels approach in social psychology? Perhaps they believe that the arguments entailed by the Integrates model are "useless" or "subjective" (see note 49), or they just find it simpler or more congenial to "compartmentalize" their Christian worldview and their scientific pursuits. What is clear is that such social psychologists cannot produce a *Christian* social psychology in the Reformed sense of that term.

⁵⁹This is where we can see that the Integrates model begins to echo the antithesis, a concept first introduced into our topic by Abraham Kuyper, as we saw earlier. It also provides the warrant for Christian scholars producing a *Christian* social psychology, just as they might produce a Christian sociology, a Christian history, a Christian ethics, a Christian economics, and a Christian political science. This is not to say they have done each of these equally well or effectively or even (some of them) at all.

⁶⁰Quoted from Carter and Narramore, *The Integration of Psychology and Theology*, 104.

⁶¹See his formulation quoted above (101).

Recall that Christian theology, according to Moroney, offers five correctives or antidotes to social psychology. This must mean, of course, social psychology as he finds it generally practiced, not as Christians who adopt the Integrates model practice it; for the latter would conceivably have built in at least some of these correctives to Moroney's satisfaction. Unfortunately, he does not discuss any of these to show that they may have begun to pave the way he proposes they and all Christian social psychologists should go.

His list of five theological correctives of social psychology as he finds it commonly practiced can conveniently be divided into three kinds: the sinful nature of all self-serving cognitive distortions, the Christian prescriptives to overcome them, and the Christian motivations that assist in the effort to follow these prescriptions.

First, Moroney believes that Christian theology must reject "the mistaken notion that self-serving cognitive distortions should [sometimes] actually be encouraged and cultivated" (103). He cites two of this notion's leading proponents, Taylor and Brown: "The mentally healthy person appears to have the enviable capacity to distort reality in a direction that enhances self-esteem, maintains beliefs in personal efficacy, and promotes an optimistic view of the future . . . [so that] certain types of self-serving illusions should actually be viewed as 'adaptive for mental health and well-being'" (102).⁶² Moroney acknowledges that many social psychologists who defend this notion qualify it with obviously necessary exceptions and that others object to the notion even as so qualified (though he does not indicate whether they are Christian or not) (102-3). He expresses concern that so prominent a Christian social psychologist as David Myers is open to the claim (103). No wonder, for his own view is that *any* self-serving cognitive distortion is inherently evil—a noetic effect of sin. Thus, he objects to the utilitarian assumptions of those who believe that cognitive distortions sometimes pay off in better mental health, adjustment, and the therapeutic approach to the depressive realism of the mildly depressed (101-2). Citing 2 Corinthians 7:8-11 and James 4:9-10, he writes:

Psychological utility is not the final standard; self-reported happiness is not the ultimate authority. Realistic thinking, like conviction of sin which leads to repentance, may be uncomfortable, even painful or temporarily depressing, though ultimately it is in our best interests. . . . By contrast, Christian theology teaches us to name our self-serving cognitive distortions as sins—transgressions which should be confessed and opposed. (103)

This brings us to the prescriptions. Moroney had earlier observed how "striking" it is, "in reading the social psychological literature on self-serving cognitive distortions, to find such a helpful detailed *description* of the problems in human thinking but very little accompanying *prescription* for the need to overcome these problems or the manner in which to do so"; indeed, "social psychology provides a helpful diagnosis of our woes, but provides little in the way of cure"

⁶²Quoted from Taylor and Brown, "Illusion and Well-Being," 204, 193.

(99). However, Christian theology offers it at least three kinds of “admonishments,” each of which Moroney elaborates upon, with references to some relevant Scriptural texts, to show how they are the starting points on the way to the cure: We are “to be self-critical, open to criticism by others, and humble” (103).

Third, Moroney discusses the motivations, without which, of course, prescriptions and admonishments are useless. “Christian theology offers us the hope of eternal bliss in heaven, which may reduce our need to seek happiness through an inflated view of our earthly future,” to “adjust” to our culture, and certainly, to “seek our ultimate happiness in this life” (104). Moroney thinks such needs underlie Taylor and Brown’s approval of many cognitive self-deceptions. In addition, “Christian theology offers us grace, forgiveness, and a new identity in Christ that, if deeply embraced, reduces our need to engage in self-serving attributions and comparisons with others” (104). If these self-serving thoughts are indeed sinful without qualification, Moroney might more accurately have said here that divine grace, because it does more than merely *reduce* our need for these thoughts, essentially *frees* us from our need for them, in spite of our sinful persistence in them.

Finally, “Christian theology offers us a compelling motivation to strive for holiness in our thinking, to seek what might be called noetic sanctification” (104). Happily, Moroney spells out this motivation, even more clearly than the preceding ones, as an aspiration working from *within* us, to respond to the prescriptions that come to us from without, for it actually consists of the *indwelling* of the mind of Christ himself and of his Spirit, the Spirit of undistorted truth. Only with a profound inner change of mind and heart under the impact of divine grace will *any* prescriptions against the noetic effects of sin really work.

This is certainly a convincing note on which to close his discussion of what Christian theology has to offer social psychology, and, for that matter, to end the whole chapter. If Christian social psychologists would probe how these uniquely Christian prescriptions and motivations really do provide antidotes to the noetic effects of sin, they would respond, not only (or first of all) to Moroney’s call for interdisciplinary thinking but also (and especially) to the Kuyperian and Brunnerian (in fact, the Calvinistic) call to produce a *Christian* social psychology.

Conclusion

Moroney’s book, then, is an impressive study of a much-neglected topic: The noetic effects of sin. It brings together the work of Christian theologians, philosophers, and social psychologists, showing us what they have done and what they have left undone. It is a book with which beginners on the topic may well begin and with which theologians, philosophers, and social psychologists, who have already begun, may well continue their study. In either case, a careful reader can learn much, both from the book’s many virtues and from its flaws.

The publisher is to be complimented for producing a handsome hardcover edition and for a text that is nicely laid out. But the index is woefully inadequate, especially in its listing of names. While the works cited at the end contain writings by well over two hundred writers, the names of only twenty of these are listed in the index.⁶³

⁶³Many thanks to Professor Martin Bolt (Calvin College) for reading an earlier draft of this article and for his fruitful suggestions and comments. Of course any errors remaining are my own.