INTRODUCTION

The Psychology of Virtue: Integrating Positive Psychology and the Psychology of Religion

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It has been almost a decade and a half since the field of the psychology of religion was appraised in the prestigious *Annual Review of Psychology* series (Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003). One of the themes these authors called attention to was the psychology of virtue. At the nexus of the psychology of religion, personality psychology, moral philosophy, and the psychology of emotion, virtue psychology was beginning to make a comeback in psychology. Partly responsible for this resurgence was the positive psychology movement (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), which sought to systematically classify human strengths and virtues into a comprehensive taxonomy (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Concepts such as forgiveness, love, hope, humility, gratitude, self-control, and wisdom appear as highly prized human dispositions in Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, and Hindu thought and are affirmed universal principles in world philosophies and ethical systems. Basic research as well as interventions to cultivate these virtues is well underway. Since 2003, additional virtues have appeared on the scientific scene, some of which are explored by contributors to this special issue.

Stepping back for just a moment, let's consider an early effort by Sandage and Hill (2001) to articulate an outline of the construct of virtue that drew on moral philosophy and social science research related to virtue. Sandage and Hill suggested six dimensions for the definition of virtue. These include the understanding that virtues (a) integrate ethics and health; (b) are embodied traits of character; (c) are sources of human strength and resilience; (d) are embedded within a cultural context and community; (e) contribute to a sense of meaningful life purpose; and (f) are grounded in the cognitive capacity for wisdom. Threads of each of these dimensions run through the papers in this special issue.

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The articles in this special issue underscore the centrality of mooring the positive psychological examination of virtue in religious and spiritual traditions. The psychological study of the sociomoral functions of religion has grown exponentially as researchers from a variety of approaches have begun to systematically study the psychological mechanisms by which religions "bind people together into cooperative communities organized around deities" (Graham & Haidt, 2010). Much of this research has examined how religion fosters the formation of virtues in people through individual and communal spiritual practices (e.g., prayer fosters gratitude; Lambert, Fincham, Braithwaite, Graham, & Beach, 2009), teachings and cognitions (e.g., priming religious cognitions increases honesty; Randolph-Seng & Nielsen, 2007), relationships (e.g., secure attachment to God increases ability to love; Granqvist, Mikulincer, Gewirtz, & Shaver, 2012), and experiences (e.g., mystical experiences occasioned by psilocybin leads to awe and openness; MacLean, Johnson, & Griffiths, 2011). Likewise, since the late 1990s, researchers in positive psychology have been investigating how intentional activities can promote the development of character strengths and virtues in efforts to promote happiness and eudaimonia in adults (e.g., Proyer, Ruch, & Buschor, 2012; Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005; Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009) and youth (e.g., Froh, Sefick, & Emmons, 2008; Gollwitzer, Oettingen, Kirby, Duckworth, & Mayer, 2011).

Despite their shared interest in understanding the development of virtues, researchers from psychology of religion and positive psychology have not always shared insights from their respective fields. Moreover, researchers from both fields have neglected to fully engage theological and philosophical perspectives throughout the research process; rather, they attended to them primarily during the development of constructs. Yet scholars in positive psychology and theological studies may have more in common than is normally recognized. Philosophical anthropologies of the human condition tend to support a balanced view of human nature, one in which persons are capable of great good and profound evil. Parallel to the development of positive psychology is the field of positive theology, a movement within theological studies that seeks to reorient the field from one that has been largely preoccupied with innate badness and pathology to a focus on well-being and flourishing.

We envisioned this special issue as fostering cross-disciplinary conversation that engages current scholarship in psychology of religion and spirituality, positive psychology, theology, and phi-

losophy around the theme of religion and virtue development. To accomplish this purpose, we asked contributors to (a) consider what a particular religious tradition (or traditions) teach(es) about a specific virtue; (b) provide a cutting edge review of the empirical literature on the virtue from both psychology of religion and positive psychology; (c) analyze connections and points of departure between secular and religious expression, formation, or consequences of the virtue; (d) propose a new model or testable hypotheses integrating current knowledge; and (e) consider new findings addressing the hypotheses they propose. We are pleased that the contributors to the 5 main articles were responsive to the five points we assigned them. In efforts to enhance the interdisciplinary content of the articles, we invited manuscripts from individuals trained in both psychology and theology/religious studies or teams including coauthors trained in psychology, theology, philosophy, or religious studies.

In some sense, humility might be considered the most religious of the virtues (Comte-Sponville, 2001), so we begin the special issue with the article by Davis, Hook, McAnnally-Linz, Choe, and Placeres (2017). Research on humility has accelerated rapidly in the last 5 years, and here the authors make a strong case for the virtue of humility as an integrative centerpiece across positive psychology, the psychology of religion and spirituality, and personality psychology. They distinguish between relational and intellectual humility, review the research base on humility and spirituality/religiousness, and then pose the intriguing question of whether humility can alleviate aspects of religious conviction that promote ideologically driven conflicts.

Van Cappellen (2017) proposes that self-transcendent positive emotions (STPEs) are the affective foundation of multiple religious and spiritual traditions. STPEs serve the purpose of transcending the self in order to achieve a sense of connectedness with the world and/or with God and to serve the greater good. She reviews experimental work on awe, gratitude, elevation, admiration, love, compassion, peacefulness, and joy. Van Cappellen also explores how general positive emotions are constructed in the Hebrew Bible and in the New Testament and discusses potential ways through which the knowledge accrued from that study can inform future empirical research on STPEs and their relation to religion. This work is reminiscent of the provocative claim made by George Vaillant (2013) that spirituality is simply another name for positive emotions and social connection.

Schnitker, Houltberg, Dyrness, and Redmond (2017) contend that it is essential to consider people's spiritual and religious meaning-systems to understand real-world manifestations of the virtue of patience. Patience had been absent from the psychological literature until recent examinations by Schnitker and her colleagues. Patience has been defined in the previous psychological literature as "the propensity of a person to wait calmly in the face of frustration, adversity, or suffering" (Schnitker, 2012, p. 263). In this article, Schnitker et al. argue that patience requires a self-transcendent narrative in which suffering has meaning or is explained. It is religion that provides narratives that make suffering, sufferable. One essential feature to narratives that value suffering is their transcendent elements, pointing the individual to something bigger than the self and the present circumstances. Understanding how humans conceptualize, relate to, and build narratives around the transcendent moves beyond the sphere of positive psychology and into the field of psychology of religion

and spirituality, providing an opportunity for cross-disciplinary fertilization.

One of the most neglected spiritual topics in the psychology of religion is grace, and Emmons, Hill, Barrett, and Kapic (2017) aim to remedy this vacuum. They define grace as "the gift of acceptance given unconditionally and voluntarily to an undeserving person by an unobligated giver." The critical feature being that the gift is given without regard to the worthiness of the recipient. They grapple with several big questions concerning the nature of grace, including the following: What is grace? In what ways is grace fundamental to human existence and well-being? How has grace been measured in psychology of religion research? How is it different from mercy, forgiveness, and self-compassion? After reviewing the small amount of empirical research, they hypothesize that humanly experienced divine grace has the capacity to profoundly enhance and elevate human flourishing, and they suggest several promising lines for future inquiry. The authors conclude that grace fits well within the field of positive psychology, particularly as it intersects with the psychology of religion and spirituality and theological conceptions of human nature in relation to the divine.

Another strong case for an understudied virtue could be made for chastity. Chastity, or sexual restraint, is a moral virtue because it maximizes individual and relational well-being when practiced. Yet historically it fell on hard times, even in Christendom, where C.S. Lewis considered it "the most unpopular of the Christian virtues" or when St. Augustine prayed ambivalently for it ("Give me chastity and continence, but not yet"; each cited in Labash, 2014, p. 100). In a hypersexualized culture, it is bound to be seen as quaint at best, and overly repressive, restrictive, and even pathological at worst. What do the data say? Hardy and Willoughby (2017) explore the theological, philosophical, and psychological/public health perspectives on chastity. They present data from several thousand adults on the connection between religiousness, abstinence, sexual behaviors, sexual satisfaction, and unhappiness and make a case for the place of religious communities to promote sexual chastity and positive psychosocial functioning through teachings about chastity and providing structures to motivate and enable people to live consistently with them.

The main articles are followed by responses from three commentaries, with respondents selected because of their expertise in psycho-theological understandings of virtue and its connection to empirical science. Kaczor (2017) carries on the tradition of philosophers as sticklers for conceptual clarity as he focuses on the definition of key terms within each of the main papers. Root Luna, Van Tongeren, and Witvliet (2017) point out ways in which virtue can serve as an overarching, even integrative concept in positive psychology and the psychology of religion and spirituality. In particular, they draw upon the *unity of virtue* thesis and argue for the fruitfulness of this approach in moving understanding forward. Lastly, Graves (2017) explains the need to position the study of virtue within historical, cultural, and religious contexts and warns us of the complexities of examining virtue experimentally in light of the long and complex history of constructs like grace and patience without sufficient appreciation of theological resources that may prove illuminating in the study of virtue as disposition.

Our hope is that this special issue will create a platform for vibrant discussions between positive psychologists, psychology of religion researchers, theologians, and philosophers concerning the

future trajectory of virtue research. We will let the readers decide if we have succeeded.

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