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# A Counselor's Integration of Thomism with the Philosophies of B.F. Skinner & Albert Ellis

Leonard Alvey

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Alvey,

Leonard L.

1976

A COUNSELOR'S INTEGRATION OF THOMISM

WITH THE PHILOSOPHIES OF

B. F. SKINNER AND ALBERT ELLIS

Specialist Project

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Counselor Education

Western Kentucky University

Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Specialist in Education

by

Leonard L. Alvey

September 1976

A COUNSELOR'S INTEGRATION OF THOMISM  
WITH THE PHILOSOPHIES OF  
B. F. SKINNER AND ALBERT ELLIS

A. J. Robinson  
Director of Specialist Project

Ernest O. Burton

Carl W. Kinsler

Approved September 1, 1976  
Date

Elmer Gray  
Dean of the Graduate College

Approved 9-27-76  
Date



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION AND SURVEY OF LITERATURE . . . . .	1
Statement of the Problem . . . . .	4
Rationale for this Study . . . . .	5
Overview of the Project . . . . .	6
Definition of Terms . . . . .	7
Limitations of the Study . . . . .	9
Organization of the Study . . . . .	9
II. RELIGION AND COUNSELING: B. F. SKINNER . . . . .	10
Religion as a Controlling Agency . . . . .	11
The Counselee and Religion . . . . .	13
The Counselor and Religion . . . . .	16
Summary and Conclusions . . . . .	19
III. RELIGION AND COUNSELING: ALBERT ELLIS . . . . .	21
Religion . . . . .	23
The Counselee . . . . .	26
The Counselor . . . . .	28
Conclusion . . . . .	30
IV. RELIGION AND COUNSELING: THOMISM . . . . .	32
Thomistic Counseling . . . . .	33
Religion . . . . .	35
The Counselee . . . . .	36
The Counselor . . . . .	37
Conclusion . . . . .	39
V. AN INTEGRATION OF THOMISM, SKINNER, AND ELLIS . . . . .	41
Religion . . . . .	42
The Counselee . . . . .	44
The Counselor . . . . .	48
Conclusions . . . . .	50
APPENDIX . . . . .	54
REFERENCES . . . . .	57



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59 pages

Directed by: A. Faye Robinson, Emmett D. Burkeen, Carl Kreisler

Department of Counselor Education

Western Kentucky University

Religious counselors tend to neglect theorists who oppose religion. B. F. Skinner and Albert Ellis implicitly and explicitly criticize religion in their published writings. These criticisms are connected with their atheistic philosophies. Thomism is a theistic philosophy endorsed by the Catholic Church. Karl Rahner and Bernard Lonergan have integrated Thomism with contemporary thought. Their works serve as models for this research project--a counselor's integration of Thomism with the philosophies of B. F. Skinner and Albert Ellis.

A counselor can disconnect Skinnerian and Ellisian criticisms of religion from their atheistic philosophies. Viewing the same criticisms in the context of a theistic theory, a counselor can gain insights on religion and related topics--sin, guilt, belief in God, prayer, afterlife--as they apply to counseling. This writer hopes that this project will be an example to other religious counselors who attempt to integrate religion and counseling.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION AND SURVEY OF LITERATURE

Many people have recognized the need for an integration of religion with psychology. Paul Hauck, a clergyman involved in counseling, expresses this need when he says:

The time for a realignment between religion and psychology is not far off, and the effort will be made. Those who sidestep this movement will find themselves lost in the unfamiliar theological climate of tomorrow. (Hauck, 1972, p. 16)

In his book, Hauck (1972) tries to integrate the views of therapist Albert Ellis into a theistic approach to counseling.

Paul Tournier, a psychiatrist interested in religion, gives a personal witness to the need for integrating religion and psychology when he says:

On the one hand there was my interest in religion, and on the other my bent toward technique, invention, and biology and science generally. I was unwilling to give up either of these two interests. (Tournier, 1963, p. 4)

Although the viewpoint is different, Tournier senses the same need as Hauck--the need to integrate religion and psychology. Actually, there is an abundance of literature on the relationship between religion and psychology.

Although he does not explicitly discuss religion, Herbert Marcuse (1966) deals with a subject which has implications



for religion when he comments on Freud's Civilization and Its Discontents (1929). Marcuse speaks of surplus repression and says that the institutions of society sometimes excessively suppress the instincts of man. Religion could be considered one such institution. Marcuse also argues that there is a repression which is not excessive. The concept of surplus repression is similar to the idea of excessive control which Skinner speaks about in his work (Skinner, 1953).

Erick Fromm (1950) seeks to integrate psychoanalysis and religion. He singles out Judaism (1966) and Christianity (1955) for special treatment. Fromm's major contribution to the integration of psychology and religion is his interpretation of religious experience. He brings to the foreground unconscious factors which may be present in the religious believer's interpretation of religion: for example, the rationalization of prejudices, the suppression of desires, etc.

O. H. Mowrer (1964), a psychologist who is a religious believer, strongly advocates integrating theology and psychology. He says: "I cannot conceive a sound theology which is not congruent with a sound psychology; and the assumption that the two can be significantly divergent has surely been one of the most disruptive cultural elements of modern time" (Mowrer, 1964, p. 145). One area common to religion and psychology which Mowrer explores is the idea of guilt. He argues that there is a real guilt in human

nature that is not to be psychoanalyzed away but is to be used in a therapeutic situation.

Paul Tournier (1962) also treats the theme of guilt. He deals with guilt not as something real and helpful in therapy but as a sickness which needs to be cured by grace. He points out that in many unconscious ways we make one another feel guilty. He finds the answer to this situation in the coming of grace. Like Mowrer, he believes in the need to integrate religion and psychology in the alleviation of distress caused by guilt.

Rollo May and Abraham Maslow are two representatives of humanistic psychology who sense the importance of the relationship between religion and psychology. May (1953) argues that religion can be a healthy force in helping a person organize the self. He also expresses the religious dimensions of love (1969) and uses religious myth (1972) to help him in his discussion of the connection between power and innocence.

Maslow (1968) helps one understand better the contemplative side of religious experience. He talks about the knowledge and love of "Being" for its own sake. Maslow suggests that man reaches out for experiences which transcend the self and everyday living (1971). He reports that many people speak of their peak experiences, those moments when they feel they have all the meaning of life together. He argues that a genuine science of psychology



cannot afford to ignore this phenomenon simply because it cannot be measured.

Eugene Kennedy is a catholic priest and psychologist who combines psychology and the experience of the Roman Catholic Church. He integrates the insights of many modern psychologists in his thinking. For example, in his latest book, A Sense of Life, A Sense of Sin (1975), he discusses the meaning of a healthy sense of sin.

All of the cited literature is a recognition of the need to integrate religion and psychology. Most religious writers approach the integration by discussing psychological theories which are fairly compatible with religious viewpoints. Incorporating into religious beliefs the views held by the humanistic psychologists (such as Rollo May and Abraham Maslow) is a less formidable task than trying to integrate the views of B. F. Skinner and Albert Ellis, both professed atheists, into religion.

#### Statement of the Problem

This writer is a religious counselor who has a Thomistic background and who respects Skinner's psychological theory and Ellis' counseling theory. Thomas Aquinas is a theist, but B. F. Skinner and Albert Ellis are atheists. The problem in this study, then, is to integrate Thomism with the philosophies of B. F. Skinner and Albert Ellis.

Counselors who have integrated their religious beliefs with psychological counseling theory have tended

to neglect major theories which seem incompatible with religion. A religious counselor who disregards a theory because it appears to conflict with religion seems to be shunning a problem instead of confronting it. Skinner's Behavior Modification Theory and Ellis' Rational Emotive Therapy are two major theories which, even though they may appear to be opposed to religion, should not be neglected by religious counselors.

#### Rationale for this Study

An obvious reason religious counselors cannot evade the study of Skinner and Ellis is the reputation the two enjoy, Skinner in the field of education and Ellis in the area of counseling. Skinner is well known as a learning theorist, particularly in the field of special education. Ellis' reputation as a counseling theorist is growing. He is a prolific writer and a popular speaker--at the 1976 national convention of the American Personnel and Guidance Association, he attracted one of the largest audiences of any of the speakers. In addition, he and his co-workers at the Institute for Advanced Study in Rational Psychotherapy hold counseling workshops throughout the nation.

Reputation alone, however, would seem to be neither the only reason nor perhaps even a compelling one for studying Skinner and Ellis. A more important reason for selecting these theorists is their firm belief in science and its application to the solution of human problems. Indeed, when Skinner and Ellis criticize religion, they do so in



the name of science. If a religious counselor can integrate the philosophies of Skinner and Ellis into a religious framework, a counseling theory with a strong scientific basis will be the result.

Both Skinner and Ellis are directive--they believe that a counselor should actively intervene in a counselee's life. The controlling role which they attribute to the counselor is an added reason for studying the religious implications of their theories. A Skinnerian or Ellisian counselor, for instance, who is unaware of these implications might unconsciously generate in a client an anti-religious bias. An open discussion of Skinnerian and Ellisian religious philosophy will hopefully eliminate such a danger.

A final reason for studying Skinner and Ellis is to provide a model for other religious counselors. If a Thomistic counselor succeeds in combining the insights of Skinner and Ellis with his own religious beliefs, other individuals may be stimulated to integrate the techniques developed by Skinner and Ellis (and/or by other theorists) with their own religious viewpoints. Thus, other religious counselors may find useful the efforts put forward in this project.

#### Overview of the Project

An interpretation of the philosophies of B. F. Skinner and Albert Ellis and of Thomism will be presented before an integration of these views is attempted. The interpretation will emphasize the relationship between religion

and counseling. Since these thinkers have different interests and do not treat ex professo the relationship between religion and counseling, only those aspects of their theories which have a bearing on religion and counseling will be utilized. Criticism of the theories presented will be reserved until the end of the project when an integration of Thomism and the philosophies of Skinner and Ellis will be made.

This author will give his own interpretation of Thomism and of the beliefs held by Skinner and Ellis. Skinner and Ellis clearly express their convictions in their writings, and these writings will provide the material used in making the interpretation. Since Thomas Aquinas wrote in the middle ages, it is deemed necessary to interpret him in the light of the contemporary world, rather than against his own historical background.

Other authors, notably Karl Rahner and Bernard Lonergan, have also given a fresh interpretation of Thomas Aquinas. They--being representative of Thomism today--serve as helpful models for this project. Their viewpoints will be considered in the discussion of Thomism and in the integration of Thomism with Skinner and Ellis.

#### Definition of Terms

Certain words and phrases will be used throughout this study. For the convenience of the reader, an explanation of them is offered in this section.

Religious Counselor describes a counselor who believes in God, the efficacy of prayer, etc., even though such a



counselor may or may not be a practicing member of a particular denomination. This author, for example, is a practicing Roman Catholic but a counselor without a particular religious affiliation might still be considered a religious counselor.

Integration refers to the effort to combine elements from a variety of theories into one new and consistent theory.

Reinforcement refers to any factor in a person's environment which strengthens behavior. Reinforcement is positive when a pleasant event (words, gestures) follows behavior and tends to strengthen that behavior; it is negative when the avoidance of an aversive event strengthens the avoidance behavior.

Behavior Modification Theory is the view that behavior can be changed through the judicious use of reinforcers.

Rational Emotive Therapy is a counseling method based on the theory that people's disturbances are caused by irrational ideas.

Thomism is the effort to reconcile the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas (thirteenth century) with modern thought.

Philosophies is used to designate such general viewpoints as theorists' beliefs in the freedom of man, the existence of God, the finitude of the world, the immortality of the soul, etc.

### Limitations of the Study

Techniques of counseling which have been developed by theorists other than Albert Ellis and B. F. Skinner can be useful to the religious counselor. Since this study is limited to the philosophies of Skinner and Ellis, those philosophies provide the limits for the theory of counseling which will result from this project.

### Organization of the Study

A chapter each will be devoted to Skinner, Ellis, and Thomism. Each chapter will be divided into three sections: one section concerns the theorist's view of religion; a second section treats the thinker's picture of the counselee; a third section describes the theorist's beliefs concerning the role of the counselor. At the end of each chapter, there will be a summary of the significant ideas which flow from the counseling viewpoint presented.

The final chapter will integrate the findings of the other three chapters. A critical analysis of the viewpoints of Skinner, Ellis, and Thomism is reserved for this chapter. The results of this analysis will be synthesized in a religious counselor's integration of Thomism with the philosophies of B. F. Skinner and Albert Ellis.



## CHAPTER II

### RELIGION AND COUNSELING: B. F. SKINNER

Finley Carpenter (1974) says that whatever Skinner's personal beliefs are, his theory is not unfavorable to religion. The thoughtful reader of Skinner's major works will probably tend to agree with Carpenter. Understanding the religious philosophy of Skinner presupposes understanding him as a scientist as well as a philosopher. The student can obtain Skinner's view of science from his book Science and Human Behavior (1953) and his view of philosophy from About Behaviorism, which Skinner wrote in 1974.

As a scientist, Skinner contrasts his view of behavior with Pavlov's. According to Pavlov, a reinforcer is paired with a stimulus which elicits a behavior; whereas in Skinner's view, a reinforcer is contingent upon a response--a specific behavior (Skinner, 1953). For example, according to Pavlov the thought of heaven would stimulate a religious devotee to behave well; but according to Skinner, the promise of heaven would strengthen the good behavior already shown by a religious devotee. To distinguish his view of behavior from Pavlov's, Skinner uses the term "operant conditioning." Viewing religion scientifically, Skinner sees it as an institution which provides reinforcers for a person's behavior.

Skinner views religion less favorably as a philosopher than he does as a scientist. In presenting his view of philosophy, he concludes a description of the history of religion with the observation: "How much more we should know if the prevailing contingencies had been described rather than the feelings and isms generated by them!" (Skinner, 1974, p. 147). It would seem that, according to Skinner, religion is important not by reason of the feelings or philosophies of life it generates but by reason of the fact that it reinforces behavior.

#### Religion as a Controlling Agency

Skinner prefers to approach religion as a scientist working in a behavioristic framework. As a scientist, he discusses religion as one of many controlling agencies. The religious agency may be a single agency, such as a medicine man, or a well-organized group, such as a church; but Skinner, in either case, is interested in the techniques which the agency uses to control its devotees (Skinner, 1953). His explanation of these controlling techniques should be useful to counselors.

Skinner's view is that religion controls its membership the way any group or government does. Behavior is classified as "legal" or "illegal," "moral" or "immoral," "virtuous" or "sinful." Religion reinforces appropriate behavior with whatever means are available to its leaders. The reinforcers are both positive and negative.



Positive reinforcers are often verbal: for example, the words "heaven" and "eternal life." Religious education, however, associates the verbal reinforcers with non-verbal features of a person's environment. Skinner says that the non-verbal features vary from culture to culture but it is doubtful whether any well-known reinforcer has not been used (Skinner, 1953). For example, "heaven" is compared to a happy hunting ground, a perpetual banquet, or any other environment which is especially attractive to a particular class of people.

Skinner says that negative reinforcers are the most powerful controls religion exercises and he believes that it is unfortunate that they are used so often (Skinner, 1974). For example, since hell is the absence of heaven and those who sin go to hell, religious agencies generate a "sense of sin." One can escape sin only through expiation or absolution. Being in the aversive condition known as sin, the believer is like a hungry person without food. Returning to virtuous behavior, the believer is promised the banquet of heaven. Hell is a powerful negative reinforcer because, by behaving well, a person hopes to avoid the aversive condition of hell. Since the believer behaves virtuously to avoid hell, hell strengthens or reinforces virtuous behavior.

Religion may gain control of other variables in a person's life. For example, economics are used to control the behavior of religious adherents. Schools are set up to

impart a religious outlook on life. Religious leaders have been very intent upon the use of government control--to impose censorship, to eliminate the sale of alcoholic beverages, or in various ways to remove temptations to sin from people's lives.

Having discussed the way religion uses reinforcers and tries to manipulate variables in a person's environment, Skinner points out that religious agencies use another way to control their communicants. He says that they often control people not by manipulating contingencies of reinforcement in the environment but by using techniques of control similar to those of counselors and teachers (Skinner, 1953). These techniques will be mentioned in the section on counselors.

Skinner's purpose in describing religion's techniques of control is not to condemn religion but to help one understand how religion controls its communicant. "It is not the technique of control but the ultimate effect upon the group which leads us to approve or disapprove of any practice" (Skinner, 1953, p. 350). This statement supports the belief that Skinner's view is not unfavorable to religion; Skinner does believe, however, that the counselee who is a member of a religious group is often affected adversely by the techniques of control exercised by that group.

#### The Counselee and Religion

The counselee's freedom is an important issue both in counseling practice and in understanding Skinner's religious



philosophy. Freedom is important in the counseling situation because the counselor tries to encourage a client to make his or her own decisions. Freedom is important to a theologian because without freedom one cannot be held responsible for one's own behavior. Skinner (1974) recognizes that the traditional emphasis placed on individual freedom is at variance with his beliefs.

When Skinner wrote Beyond Freedom and Dignity (1971), he anticipated resistance to his views on freedom: "These are sweeping changes, and those who are committed to traditional theories and practices naturally resist them" (p. 19). Relevant to the counselee, Skinner says: "The critical condition for the apparent exercise of free will is positive reinforcement, as the result of which a person feels free and calls himself free and says he does as he likes or what he wants or is pleased to do" (1974, p. 54). Skinner even singles out a specific positive reinforcer which encourages an attitude of freedom: "What we may call the 'literature of freedom' has been designed to induce people to escape from or attack those who act to control them aversively" (1971, p. 27). Skinner's theory, therefore, would seem to justify a counselor's treating the counselee as though he or she were free.

A feeling of complete freedom is not deemed necessary by Skinner, however. Relevant to religion, he says: "A certain amount of external control can be tolerated. Theologians have accepted the fact that man must be predestined

to do what an omniscient God knows he will do, and the Greek dramatist took inexorable fate as his favorite theme" (1971, p. 17). With this statement, Skinner opens up the old religious dilemma, predestination versus free-will. He also suggests that his scientific determinism is a secular version of religious predestination. According to Skinner, then, the counselee can tolerate a certain amount of control by religion.

Whatever the solution to the theoretical dilemmas, Skinner's religious philosophy justifies the counselor's seeing the counselee as a free agent and letting the counselee set those goals he or she seeks to achieve. His religious philosophy also justifies the counselor's tolerating a certain amount of control by religion over the counselee.

Religion becomes aversive to the well-being of the counselee when its control becomes excessive or inconsistent. Superstition and magic are such forms of control. Skinner says that the terms superstition and magic are associated with exploitation or selfish purposes or with ineffective or poorly organized behavior (1953). The effectiveness of the counselee's behavior and appropriateness of the counselee's goals for behavior would seem to form Skinner's criterion for a tolerable level of control by religion.

In summary, Skinner's picture of the counselee and religion is that the counselee appears to be free as long as the cause of the behavior is unknown, and the counselee's feeling of being free can be reinforced by the literature



of freedom. The counselee tolerates control by religion as long as the control is not excessive or inconsistent. One implication of Skinner's reasoning is that religion can be a reinforcer for behavior in accordance with the goals of the counselee. For example, the counselor might say, "What you've done is the Christian thing to do!"

#### The Counselor and Religion

Skinner categorizes psychotherapy as a controlling agency and lists the counselor as a person who practices psychotherapy (1953). He says that religious control is often opposed by the control of the psychotherapist (1953). By implication, a counselor is an independent agent in the counselee's environment who sometimes, at least, has to oppose religious control.

The key question for the counselor is when religious control should be opposed. Skinner says:

The control exercised by the group and by religious and governmental agencies, as well as by parents, employers, associates, and so on, restricts the selfish, primarily reinforced behavior of the individual. It is exercised for just that reason. Certain by-products, however, are not to the advantage of the controller and are often harmful both to the individual and to the group. (1953, p. 359)

Skinner alerts the counselor to the "by-products" of religious control--fear, anxiety, anger, and depression. When these by-products are obvious to the counselor, religious control should be opposed.

When the control of religion is believed to be harmful, three techniques of countercontrol--escape, revolt, passive



resistance--are available (Skinner, 1953). The counselor, after leading the client to an awareness of the harmful nature of the control, can suggest these to the client under harmful religious control. Escape is probably the simplest of the methods. The counselee can be encouraged simply to escape the sphere of control of the religious agency. Skinner (1953) says that the controllee can physically escape or can simply "withdraw" without being physically separated from the group. He says that escape from religious control can be accomplished by simple disbelief or defection.

Revolt, according to Skinner, is a counter-attack on the controlling agency. "Religious revolt may be directed toward a specific agency, as in protestant reform, or against the theological system used in control, as in atheism" (Skinner, 1953, p. 360). Skinner may be self-referential--perhaps his own atheism reflects religious revolt, since he does depict atheism as one technique of revolt used to countercontrol religion.

Passive resistance, according to Skinner, consists in failing to behave in conformity with controlling practices. He does not give an example of passive resistance to religious control, but he does mention that religious agencies often react to the passive resistance of followers by intensifying their practices (Skinner, 1953). For example, the passive resister might get more frequent visits from the religious group.

The excessive or inconsistent controlling practices of religion which lead a counselee to use techniques of counter-control also give rise to emotional by-products--fear, anxiety, anger, and depression (Skinner, 1953). According to Skinner, the variables which induce these patterns of emotion belong to the environmental history of the individual. An illustration of Skinner's meaning might be parental concern about children's reading material. Religious parents disapprove reading material harmful to their children's faith or morals. This parental disapproval is a variable in a child's environment--a variable, however, which can induce in a child a fear not only of harmful books and magazines but of worthwhile reading material as well. In the case of such a child, religious parents are indeed achieving an appropriate goal--the elimination of harmful books and magazines from their child's environment; however, they are also inducing a harmful by-product, fear of reading. When a counselee with such an environmental history comes to a counselor, the counselor may be called upon to help the client cope with the by-product. For example, by encouraging worthwhile reading the counselor can help the client overcome the fear of reading.

Although areas of conflict often exist between the counselor and religion, the counselor can develop a philosophy which seeks to promote harmony between counseling and religion. Such a counselor would focus on those religious techniques of control which reinforce the behavior the



counselee desires to achieve. Skinner does not go into detail regarding the ways in which a counselor can promote this harmony. The ingenuity of the individual counselor is called for. The present project is an attempt to exercise such ingenuity.

#### Summary and Conclusions

The counselor can find many helpful points by studying Skinner's religious philosophy. Religion, according to Skinner, is one of those agencies which control the behavior of the counselee. Such control checks the counselee's selfishness--selfishness which can be self-defeating as well as harmful to various social groups. In this instance, Skinner's theory is favorable to religion.

When the control exercised by religion is excessive or inconsistent, the counselor can serve as an agency of countercontrol. Skinner's idea of excessive control seems to resemble Marcuse's idea of surplus repression. Marcuse (1966) argues that repression is not harmful to a person but surplus repression is aversive. Similarly, Skinner argues that control is not harmful but excessive control is aversive to an individual. The counselor who intervenes when there is excessive religious control would surely be serving not only the best interests of the client but also the best interests of religion itself.

Skinner's religious philosophy justifies a counselor's behaving as though the counselee were free. His problem with freedom seems to be a secularized version of religious



predestination versus free-will. As a scientist, Skinner seeks causes of human behavior, and the idea of freedom seems to block this search for the determinants of behavior. Nevertheless, his theory supports the counselor who reinforces the counselee's belief that he or she is free.

Skinner's quest is for human behavior to be controlled in ways which bring optimal advantages to the individual and to society. This goal seems to be indistinguishable from that of the counselee, the counselor, or religion. A counselee often feels out of control--that he or she is being controlled by some outside agency. One of these agencies may be religion. Skinner's religious philosophy helps a counselor determine whether that control is beneficial to the client or excessive and thus harmful. Organized religion can find a kindred spirit in Skinner in seeking the improvement of man and can learn much from Skinner's techniques of control.

## CHAPTER III

### RELIGION AND COUNSELING: ALBERT ELLIS

Although Albert Ellis is a confirmed nonbeliever in religion, he is not without respect for a religious believer in his professional field. He accepts those statements of religious psychologists which help confirm his own scientific hypotheses. Thus, he says about Magda Arnold:

And I continue to be pleasantly surprised when I discover unusually close agreements between my own views on personality and therapy and those of other hard-thinking psychologists--such as Magda Arnold (1960), many of whose positions are amazingly close to my own, although she is a fine physiological psychologist and fairly uncompromising Catholic, while I am a clinician, a social psychologist, and a confirmed nonbeliever. (Ellis, 1962, p. 36)

Obviously, Ellis accepts Magda's views as a psychologist even though he and Magda differ widely on the question of religion. Ellis would seem to be inviting the religious counselor to study his views for their psychological and therapeutic value.

Ellis' philosophy seems to be a stoic rationalism in modern dress. In fact, Ellis singles out stoicism as a major influence on his thinking (Ellis, 1962). A comparison of his list of irrational ideas with statements from the Stoic Epictetus reveals a striking similarity between Ellisian theory and stoicism (see Appendix). According to stoicism, what actually happens to people is not what



upsets them, but what they tell themselves about what happens is the upsetting factor, a key idea which Ellis borrows from stoicism. Actually, classical stoicism formed a philosophical background for the New Testament (Interpreter's Bible, 1951). The classical stoics believed in God and the immortality of the soul. Ellis, however, does not adopt these religious beliefs but uses only those stoic beliefs which fit his atheism and scientific rationalism (Ellis, 1962).

Ellis is probably even less favorable to religion than Skinner. He defines his rationalism as an opposition to those elements usually found in religion. He suggests that the term "rationalism" denotes "opposition to all forms of supernaturalism, spiritualism, mysticism..." (Ellis, 1962, p. 124). Ellis calls himself a "modern" rationalist (Ellis, 1962), but the term "stoic rationalism in modern dress" seems appropriate for his theory.

Originally, Ellis called his counseling theory "rational therapy" (RT). After using this name for a year, he discovered that Thomists had been using it and he began to call his theory "rational emotive psychotherapy" (RET), the name by which Ellis' theory is known today (Ellis, 1962). This information seems to indicate that there is at least some affinity between Thomism and Ellis' theory.

In discussing Ellis, the same organization is used as in the chapter on Skinner--that is, a section each on religion, the counselee, and the counselor. Key points in Ellis' theory of counseling are his views on religious guilt,



the self-worth of the counselee, and the very active-directive role given to the counselor.

### Religion

Since he uses science to criticize religion, Ellis' understanding of science is important to a student of his theory. Ellis believes in science and lists four articles in his creed. First, he tell us: "Reason and logic do not contain or convey scientific evidence or truth in their own right, but are most valuable tools for sifting truth from falsehood" (Ellis, 1962, p. 123). Second, he believes that scientific knowledge must be confirmable, at least in principle, by some form of human experience. He goes on to say, however, that "...theorizing that is limited only to generalizations inducted from empirical evidence is often not the best form of theory making; and the hypothetical-deductive method...may be more productive for advancing scientific research..." (Ellis, 1962, p. 123). Third, he believes in rationalism and is opposed to supernaturalism and any form of authoritarianism. Fourth, he believes that man can improve his living by improving his thinking, although he acknowledges that man does not live by reason alone (Ellis, 1962).

How Ellis applies his understanding of science to a criticism of religion can be seen by applying the four articles in his creed to four religious concepts--the authority of God, the concept of guilt, the reality of the supernatural, and the moral improvement of man. First,

Ellis uses reason to reject the authority of God. He says that the concepts "God" and "Godlessness" do not have any empirical evidence and he believes that such concepts give rise to authoritarianism in religion (Ellis, 1962). Ellis believes in reason as the tool for distinguishing truth from falsehood and does not believe in the authority of a God who reveals truth.

Second, on the question of guilt, Ellis takes a position which opposes that of Mowrer, who believes that the client's guilt should be used in the counseling situation. Ellis seems to be applying the second article in his scientific creed when he says:

My pronounced differences with all those who would advocate making patients more guilty than they are, in order presumably to get them to change their anti-social and self-defeating conduct, can perhaps be demonstrated by my insistence on a more precise and reasonably operational definition of the terms "sin" and "guilt" than is usually given by those who uphold this concept. (Ellis, 1962, p. 133)

An illustration of what Ellis seems to mean is the defining of "sin" as an "offense against God." This definition does not seem to be confirmable by human experience--i.e., it is not operational. Furthermore, such a definition would, according to Ellis, tend to lead one to classify a "sinner" as such by definition. An operational definition, to the contrary, would apply to the behavior rather than the person.

Third, Ellis by reason of his rationalism divorces human morality from any form of supernaturalism. He views sin as a problem which is solved by teaching new behaviors. He explains his solution to moral problems as follows:



The problem of all human morality, it must never be forgotten, is not the problem of appeasing some hypothetical deity or punishing the individual for his supposed sins. It is the very simple problem, which a concept of sin and atonement invariably obfuscates, of teaching a person (a) not to commit an antisocial act in the first place, and (b) if he does happen to commit it, not to repeat it in the second, third, and ultimate place. (Ellis, 1962, p. 135)

Instead of appealing to God to improve morality, Ellis suggests that the way to teach a person not to commit an antisocial act is to change the internalized conclusion: "If I do this wrong act, I will be a sinner, a blackguard," to this internalized conclusion: "If I do this act it will be wrong." Any conclusion concerning the nature of self is irrational, according to Ellis, who wants to eliminate the concept "sense of sin" (Ellis, 1962, p. 137).

Fourth, Ellis believes that man can improve morally without such concepts as heaven and hell but by living more spontaneously and rationally. He says: "Instead of having either of these sets of self-values (heaven or hell) it might be better if men and women would spontaneously, unmoralistically, and unself-consciously be" (Ellis, 1962, p. 158). Ellis objects to the concept of hell because he believes that it leads a person to the feeling of worthlessness. He objects to the concept of heaven because he believes that it leads one to behave well in order to get there rather than facilitating growth toward being a worthwhile person.

In summary, Ellis' belief in science leads him to challenge religion. He criticizes religion for authoritarianism,



its use of a concept of sin which leads to a low self-concept, the vagueness of its supernaturalism, and its failure in promoting the betterment of man. Ellis' criticisms challenge a religious counselor to develop a counseling theory which overcomes them.

#### The Counselee

Ellis' view of the counselee and the central theme of his theory are the same. He says:

The central theme of RT is that man is a uniquely rational, as well as a uniquely irrational, animal; that his emotional or psychological disturbances are largely a result of his thinking illogically or irrationally; and that he can rid himself of most of his emotional or mental unhappiness, ineffectuality, and disturbance if he learns to maximize his rational and minimize his irrational thinking. (Ellis, 1962, p. 36)

Ellis believes that man's disturbances are largely due to poor thinking and that rational thinking can relieve these disturbances. (Some disturbances, however, may have physical causes, in which case rational thinking would not be a cure.)

Ellis gives a simple "A,B,C" view of the counselee in Psychology Today (July, 1973). "A" stands for the activating event. "C" stands for the emotional consequence. Ellis says that usually a person believes that C follows A. Actually, however, C follows "B"--one's belief about an event. Ellis suggests that the upsetting factors are not the events but a person's beliefs about these events. For example, if one person spills water on another, the event of spilled water does not upset the dampened person. The emotional reaction is caused by the fact that the wet

individual tells himself or herself that it was done on purpose. By controlling thinking and self-talk, a person can minimize emotional upsets.

In order to control thinking and self-talk, an individual has to choose to do so. The ability to choose implies free-will. On the issue of free-will versus determinism, Ellis says that he takes a flexible, somewhat middle of the road position. Like Skinner, he acknowledges that human events and the workings of the universe are largely controlled by causal factors beyond an individual's will or efforts. Against Skinner, however, he takes the stand that "the human being is a unique kind of animal who has the possibility, if he exerts considerable time and effort in the present, of changing and controlling his future behavior" (Ellis, 1962, p. 125). The counselee has a degree of freedom and has the responsibility to exercise that freedom. On this issue, Ellis agrees only partially with Skinner.

Being free, the counselee decides which behaviors to change. Ellis (1962) points out that not all emotions are to be changed. Those emotions which are almost always unnecessary to human living--depression, anxiety, anger, and hostility--are the ones Ellis is interested in erasing. People have healthy emotions but Ellis is seeking to cure people of their neurotic emotions.

Ellis says that "neurosis essentially seems to consist of stupid behavior by a non-stupid person" (Ellis, 1962, p. 54).



Ellis assumes that the counselee is an intelligent person who seeks counseling to be cured of stupid behavior. Since the cause of the stupid behavior is irrational ideas, if the counselor exposes and refutes these ideas, the counselee will be cured.

#### The Counselor

Describing the role of the counselor, Ellis suggests that the rational-emotive therapist attacks "the disturbed person's illogical positions" by serving as "a frank counter-propagandist" who contradicts and denies "the self-defeating propaganda and superstitions which the patient has originally learned and which he is now self-instilling" (Ellis, 1962, p. 95). Encouraging, persuading, cajoling the client, the rational-emotive therapist sometimes even insists that the counselee engage in some activity "which itself will serve as a forceful counter-propaganda agency against the nonsense he believes" (Ellis, 1962, p. 95). "Counter-propagandist" seems to be the word which appropriately describes the role of the counselor for Ellis.

Being a counter-propagandist, the counselor supplies step D in the counseling process. "D" stands for disputing belief. As mentioned previously, the client has taken steps A, B, and C and has been made aware that it is B (belief about the event) and not A (the event itself) which causes emotional upset. The counselor supplies step D by contradicting, denying, and disputing the counselee's beliefs. "E" stands for the new emotional effect in the life of the

client. Once the counselee has changed his or her self-defeating beliefs, a new and healthy emotional effect takes place.

Ellis raises and answers some objections which he says are frequently raised against his view of the role of the counselor. One objection, according to Ellis, is that the counselor who uses RET becomes too authoritarian (a criticism of religion by Ellis, the reader may recall). Ellis admits that RET is directive and that there is a danger of the counselor's being authoritarian in a pernicious way. This problem, according to Ellis, is handled by the counselor revealing to the counselee the counselor's own value system. Ellis says that every counselor has values and will do well to be open about this fact rather than trying to hide it (Ellis, 1962).

Another objection Ellis says is raised against RET is that the counselee becomes too dependent on the counselor. Ellis says that the counselor "can keep reminding himself that the main goal of therapy is to help the patient stand on his own two feet and to become independent of the therapist as well as others" (Ellis, 1962, p. 367). Ellis seems to be making an important point in this statement. A religious counselor might reflect that religion may sometimes be a crutch for a client, in which instance it would be one of those "others" Ellis is talking about. Surely, the religious counselor, like Ellis, would want the client to stand on his or her own feet.



### Conclusion

Although Albert Ellis is a confirmed nonbeliever in religion, his philosophy has much to offer the religious counselor: he emphasizes the importance of reason in counseling; he challenges the religious counselor to have a precise concept and operational definition of sin and guilt; he forces the religious counselor to confront the problems of life here and now rather than escape into a vague supernatural realm; he upholds belief in the self-worth of the counselee. Of all the points which Ellis makes, this last one--the self-worth of the counselee--seems to be most important for a religious counselor. The religious counselor is actually challenged by Ellis to believe in and practice the distinction between sin and the sinner.

Science seems to be Ellis' religion. Yet, as a scientist, he believes in freedom as well as in determinism. Freedom, for Ellis, is not an easy matter but requires time and effort. Unlike Skinner, Ellis would argue that freedom is more than a cover for our lack of knowledge of the causes of human behavior. Ellis believes that individuals really are free to change their own behavior.

Ellis believes that counselors should not hide their own value systems. His belief is a support to the religious counselor whose values are strengthened by the religion he or she believes in. Surely, the religious counselor would agree with Ellis that one's values are present in the

counseling situation--either openly or in a hidden way--and that it is better to admit them to a client.

According to Ellis, the counselor is active and directive. Ellis seems to believe that one can be active and directive without yielding to authoritarianism. This would seem to be good news to a religious counselor because a religious counselor seeks guidance from religion and does not seem to want to fall into the trap of authoritarianism.

Finally, Ellis gives a handy definition of neurosis--stupid behavior in non-stupid people. The religious counselor can find in this definition a wholesome view of the client. Like Ellis, the religious counselor can view the counselee as a worthwhile person. Like Ellis, the religious counselor can attack those irrational ideas which cause stupid behavior. Studying Ellis' criticisms of religion, the religious counselor can even go beyond Ellis and draw on religion to help promote intelligent behavior in a worthwhile person.



## CHAPTER IV

### RELIGION AND COUNSELING: THOMISM

A counselor in the twentieth century who wishes to integrate Thomism with contemporary thinkers must first interpret Thomas Aquinas (thirteenth century). There are two main ways of interpreting Aquinas. One way, using the historical-critical method, is to interpret him against the background of his time in terms of the questions he raised and answered. A second way is to read his works in terms of the questions raised today. Although the first is not being ignored, the second way is the main route taken for this project.

Thomas Aquinas presented a synthesis of his views of religion, psychology, and what is now called "counseling" in a work called the Summa Theologica (Summary of Theology), which he wrote for novices in a religious order. This work is divided into three parts: Part One deals with the procession of creatures from God; Part Two deals with man, man's quest for happiness, man's virtues and vices, and man's states of life--for example, celibate, married, or members of a religious order; Part Three deals with man's return to God through Christ.

The structure of the Summa Theologica (abbreviated as ST) is carefully organized. Part Two, which serves as the

basis for this chapter, is divided into two parts. These are customarily referred to as part one of the second part (abbreviated as 1-2) and part two of the second part (abbreviated as 2-2). Each of these parts is subdivided into questions (abbreviated as q. 1, 2, 3, etc.). Each question is further divided into articles (Abbreviated as a. 1, 2, 3, etc.). For example, the section on counseling would be referenced "ST, 1-2, q. 14" which means the Summa Theologica, part one of the second part, question 14.

In addition to Thomas Aquinas there are two leading thinkers in the field of Catholic theology, Bernard Lonergan and Karl Rahner, whose writings are valuable in understanding Thomism in terms of contemporary thinking. Although both theologians have moved beyond an older approach to Thomas Aquinas, their background is Thomistic and Aquinas still influences them to the degree that justifies the applying to them the rubric of "Thomism." They, in their efforts to integrate Thomas Aquinas with modern thought, also provide models for this project.

#### Thomistic Counseling

Before a Thomistic view of religion, the counselee, and the counselor is presented, the counseling process according to Aquinas should be described. In the first part of Part Two of the Summa, Aquinas tells us that a person seeks counseling about those things he or she wishes to do. According to Thomas, there is much uncertainty about what to do because actions deal with individual matters which are variable as



opposed to universal principles which are unchangeable. A person, then, comes for counseling when he or she is undecided about the means which seem best for achieving a goal (ST 1-2, q. 14, a. 1).

Counseling precedes the choosing of a means to an end. According to Aquinas, the counselee chooses the end or goal and the counselor helps the counselee discover the means which seem most effective in reaching the chosen goal. Aquinas says that counseling pertains to both the human will and human reason: the counselee supplies the subject matter in counseling by presenting what he or she wishes to do (human will); the counselor suggests to the counselee plans for achieving the counselee's goals (human reason).

Aquinas says that the subject matter of counseling is limited by the field itself, by the importance of the problem, and by man's possibilities. The field of counseling is not concerned with the best way of proceeding in other disciplines: a writer, for instance, does not learn the rules of grammar from a counselor. Counseling does not deal with every petty detail in a counselee's life: when a counselee seeks counseling, the problem is important (at least to the counselee). Finally, counseling concerns that which is within our immediate power to accomplish: for example, one does not seek advice today on how best to fly to Jupiter.

The counseling process is, then, a community endeavor between the counselee and counselor, according to Aquinas. He says that the term "counsel" is closely related to

"considium" which means "sitting together." The counselee and counselor sit together to confer at the same time about a problem (ST 1-2, q. 14). The counselee comes to the process with a desire to achieve a goal. The counselor is trained in the skills of providing alternative means to achieve goals. These means are limited by that which is in our immediate power to use.

### Religion

Religion, according to Aquinas, is a moral virtue whereby a person worships God by such means as sacrifices, offerings, and prayers (ST 2-2, q. 81, a. 5). A religious person recognizes the rights of God and recognizes as well the rights of the state, individual human beings, nature, etc. As a moral virtue, religion is related to justice. Religion is not identical with justice since one cannot repay God what is His due. Religion, however, is an attempt to repay God (like piety towards one's parents is an attempt to repay one's parents) and, therefore, is associated with justice.

Aquinas says that moral virtue strikes a balance between extremes. Since religion is a moral virtue, one can have too much religion or too little religion. According to Aquinas, superstition is extremism in religion; he states that extremism in religion is determined by the circumstances of person, place, means, motive, manner, and time (ST 1-2, q. 7, a. 3). An example might be the religious magician, such as a rainmaker or faith healer, who uses religion to



make money. The person, means, and motive may make such practice superstitious. Another example might be the housewife who goes to church to the extent of neglecting her family: the place, time, and the manner might make her practice superstitious.

Thomism seeks to promote religion and eliminate superstition. According to the Thomist, a person cannot believe in, hope in, or love God too much but a person can, indeed, be excessive in the practice of religion. One can also be remiss in the practice of religion, according to Thomism; the reason for stressing excessive practice is that it can be easily overlooked. In short, the virtue of religion lies in a balance in the practice of religion.

#### The Counselee

Aquinas pictures the counselee as a person created in the image of God. As an image, a person reflects the God-like qualities of intelligence and free-will--the power to act on one's own (ST 1-2, Prologue). Being endowed with these qualities, a person is able to pursue a good life which is ultimately a God-like life. Hence, in the view of Aquinas, the counselee is endowed with a dignity and a value even beyond a merely human value. The counselee's destiny is to share in God's own life.

A good life is defined by Aquinas in terms of seven virtues: faith, hope, charity, prudence, justice, courage, and temperance (ST 2-2, Prologue). Faith, hope, and charity are technically known as theological virtues--having God for

their object. Since they presuppose a belief in God, they are less relevant to this discussion, which includes those who do not believe in God. Prudence, justice, courage, and temperance are technically known as moral virtues--having the betterment of man for their object. Presumably all men, whether believing in God or not, are interested in the betterment of man. Hence, the moral virtues are more relevant to this discussion.

In interpreting Aquinas today, this writer would like to speak less objectively than Aquinas about the virtues. Prudence, justice, courage, and temperance are not objective characteristics that one either has or does not have. Speaking more in terms of the individual subject, one can say that a person lives well by living prudently, justly, courageously, and temperately. This description presents a dynamic picture of the counselee.

This picture of the counselee does not contain any "shoulds." Rather, it contains reasons for the counselee's coming to a counselor. The counselee frequently wants to learn the prudent or fair thing to do. He or she is concerned about courageously conquering fear, anxiety, or depression and about temperately moderating desire or anger.

#### The Counselor

Bernard Lonergan (1972) suggests four precepts for any method which a counselor may use in a counseling situation. They are: 1) sensitivity to experience, 2) intelligence in understanding, 3) reasonableness in criticizing, and



4) responsibility in deciding. Applied to a counselor, these points mean that a counselor needs to be sensitive, intelligent, reasonable, and responsible. Most counselors would agree that counseling should reflect Lonergan's four points.

Lonergan's four points constitute what he labels "transcendental method"--transcendental in the sense of being presupposed by any particular method, such as a particular counseling method--cognitive, behavioral, directive, etc. Although Lonergan's precepts seem obvious, he points out that they are difficult to apply when he says:

Now in a sense everyone knows and observes transcendental method. Everyone does so, precisely in the measure that he is attentive, intelligent, reasonable, responsible. But in another sense it is quite difficult to be at home in transcendental method, for that is not to be achieved by reading books or listening to lectures or analyzing language. It is a matter of heightening one's consciousness by objectifying it, and that is something that each one, ultimately, has to do in himself and for himself. (Lonergan, 1972, p. 14)

Thomism is open-ended for the prospective counselor, that is, it offers no rules whereby one can become a good counselor. Each person has to develop a style of counseling suited to himself or herself. Developing into a good counselor is not simply a matter of reading books or listening to lectures.

The counselor can usually help a client, however, by using for a model the kind of behavior Lonergan refers to--by being sensitive, intelligent, reasonable, and responsible. The counselor can also point to those models in a client's environment who portray these features. Sometimes, it is

helpful to encourage the client to study a person, or the biography of a person, who has the desired features.

Although the Thomistic counselor is directive and has specific goals for healthy human behavior, such a counselor recognizes the freedom of clients to choose their own goals. A Thomist can only suggest to another person that behaving prudently, fairly, courageously, and temperately is beneficial. The Thomist can also point out means of achieving this behavior, but the client must make the decision to follow (or not to follow) the suggestion.

#### Conclusion

Thomism is an open-ended philosophy of counseling. A Thomist distinguishes religion from superstition: on the one hand, a person behaves religiously by seeking to be balanced in the practice of religion; on the other hand, a person behaves superstitiously by acting excessively in the practice of religion. One task of a Thomist is to encourage a balanced approach to religion.

The Thomist believes that the counselee is a free agent in the counseling situation and has inner resources with which to cope with problems. The counselee is pictured as one who is seeking to live well--to live prudently, justly, courageously, and temperately. Although this picture exists in the counselor's mind, the Thomist would not attempt to force these virtues on a client.

The Thomistic counselor seeks to be attentive and sensitive to experience, intelligent in understanding,



reasonable in criticizing, and responsible in deciding. At first glance, these criteria may look easy, but the difficulty lies in the fact that there is no magic formula for developing these desired features. Reading, attending classes, listening to lectures, group experiences, and studying models may all be helpful to the potential counselor, but, in the final analysis, a counselor probably achieves these elements through the integration of different types of material and experience.

## CHAPTER V

### AN INTEGRATION OF THOMISM, SKINNER, AND ELLIS

Although Thomism is theistic and Skinner and Ellis are atheistic, all three agree on the nature of counseling. The Thomist will agree with Skinner and Ellis that counseling is directive--that the counselor is playing an active role in the client's life by giving prescriptions which help the client achieve goals. Skinner arms the counselor with reinforcers, positive and negative. Ellis urges the counselor to attack irrational ideas held by the counselee. Thomism would have the counselor encourage the client to virtuous living.

All three also agree that counseling is empirical. Skinner, as a scientist, seeks a psychological theory which can be verified by observation. Ellis speaks of operational definitions--definitions confirmable by human experience. Thomas Aquinas says that counseling deals with variables and not unchanging principles. All three would encourage empirical research which can be used to improve counseling.

Thomists can learn much from Skinner and Ellis about the role of religion in counseling. Their outlooks on religion in human psychology contain helpful insights into the ways in which religion affects the counseling situation. A counselor's integration of these insights with Thomism



provides the subject matter for this final chapter. Consistent with previous chapters, the subject is discussed under the headings of religion, the counselee, and the counselor.

### Religion

Skinner views religion as an institution. Like any other institution, religion uses reinforcers to strengthen good behavior in those who belong to it. He observes that religion has frequently found its most powerful reinforcers to be negative; but, as a psychologist, he believes that it is preferable for religion to use positive reinforcers.

Since the Thomistic counselor's goal is virtuous behavior in a client, the Thomist would tend to agree with Skinner that positive reinforcers are preferable to negative reinforcers. The counselor, for instance, who praises an example of courageous behavior in a client would seem to be more effectively promoting the virtue of courage than one who is simply silent in the face of cowardly behavior. C. D. Batson (1976) has researched religion as a pro-social force and has concluded that religion helps society more when it is positive than when it is negative. Such research tends to support Skinnerian-Thomistic reasoning. With an integrated view of Thomism and Skinner, then, a counselor will seek from religion positive reinforcers--models of desirable behavior, for example--to encourage a client in virtuous behavior.

Ellis substitutes science for religion. For this reason, integrating his view with Thomism is difficult. However, he gives an opening to a Thomist on the basis of his belief in science. Although Ellis rejects the concept of "God" because it lacks empirical evidence, he has to accept the experience which the religious devotee claims. Ellis may believe that there is no foundation in reality for such an experience, but the experience itself is a fact which has been the focus of research efforts. For example, R. W. Hood (1975) has studied such mystical experience and tried to measure it. Since the client often brings religious experience to the counseling situation, the counselor cannot simply dismiss or ignore it.

Like Ellis, the Thomist believes in the value of logic and reason. What the Thomist rejects is the ascription by Ellis of an irrational and blind authoritarianism to all religion. The Thomist would distinguish between healthy and unhealthy religion or between authentic religion and superstition. Ellis' description of religion would more accurately fit superstition than authentic religion.

One concern of the Thomist who counsels with religiously-oriented individuals is the effect of religion on the counselee and the use of religion to help a client. The response to this concern depends on the situation of the counselee and the counselor's view of the counselee.



### The Counselee

According to Skinner, the counselee may believe that he or she is free, but such individual freedom is not supported scientifically. In reality, says Skinner, the counselee is controlled by various environments. One such environment, religion, sometimes aversively controls its devotees by reinforcement which is excessive or inconsistent. When religion uses excessive or inconsistent reinforcement, the counselor should intervene by presenting alternative reinforcers. An illustration might be a counselor recommending the literature of freedom to a client who feels oppressed by a legalistic and moralistic interpretation of the bible. Instead of opposing the bible, the counselor may wisely recommend other literature as an alternative reinforcer.

A Thomist recognizes with Skinner that the counselee is not completely free but disagrees with Skinner's belief that the counselee is controlled totally by outside forces. The Thomist believes that the client is able, to a greater or lesser degree, to control his or her own behavior. According to Thomism, a counselor will not only provide reinforcers but will also encourage a decision on the part of the client to modify his or her behavior.

Religion, when it is consistent and moderate, provides reinforcers which encourage virtuous behavior. Instances of such reinforcement are the examples of virtuous behavior in people like St. Francis Assisi, St. Clare, Siddhartha,

Confucius, etc.; the praise of authentically religious parents; and good sermons. The Thomist can expect from the client a free response to such reinforcers.

Ellis holds essentially the same position as a Thomist on the counselee's freedom, but he has another criticism of religion and its influence on the client. Ellis' main concern is that the client have a healthy self-concept. A healthy self-concept, according to Ellis, is that a client believe that he or she is a fallible human being--an essentially good person who is able to make mistakes and do some things that are wrong but who remains, nevertheless, a good person.

Religion, according to Ellis, negates a healthy self-concept since it teaches the client that he or she is a "sinner," that is, a blackguard or an evil person. Ellis, in the name of science, attacks the concept of "sin" by arguing that one cannot give an operational definition of sin in such a way that one can distinguish "sin" from the "sinner." Ellis' criticism of the traditional concept of sin seems to be one of his most challenging criticisms of religion.

Traditionally, Thomists have believed that one should distinguish between "sin" and the "sinner." However, Ellis' criticism of the terminology is well taken in that condemnation of sin seems to transfer easily to the person of the sinner, thereby diminishing the individual's self-concept. The theologian who believes in the self-worth of



each individual is, then, challenged by Ellis to clarify the concept of sin in such a way that it does not destroy a person's self-concept.

Karl Rahner, a Catholic theologian, says of sin that:

...man is not only commanded not to "judge" others, i.e. not to make absolute assertions about the real state of a person deep down and in the sight of God, but he also cannot and is not allowed to pass such an absolute judgement on himself and declare himself to be either absolutely justified or an absolute sinner, in the sense of declaring that a justifying or sinful act has certainly taken place here and now. (Rahner, 1963, p. 275)

Sin, as a theological concept, refers to the relation which exists between God and man. God alone can judge whether sin is present, and this judgement remains with God even though man can receive signs of God's forgiveness. Since man cannot judge with certainty the presence of sin, according to Rahner, neither self-righteousness nor self-depreciation are warranted. Judgement concerning sin is God's affair.

Since the concept of sin presupposes a belief in God, it is not surprising that Ellis, a confirmed nonbeliever, rejects it. The Thomist can only respond to Ellis by saying that a concept of sin need not imply low self-esteem on the part of the client. The Thomist could also add that if a counselee has a low self-concept because of the feeling of being a worthless sinner, such an individual may be misinterpreting the concept of sin. Ellis prefers to talk about wrongdoing, rather than sin, and offers an operational definition of wrongdoing.

Wrongdoing, according to Ellis, is antisocial or self-defeating behavior. He distinguishes between such behavior and the person performing it. If a person says that he or she has done something "wrong" and will do "right" the next time, this person is talking rationally. To the contrary, if a person says that he or she has done something "wrong" and is no good, this person is talking irrationally. The individual person is a fallible human being who sometimes does something believed to be wrong but who can anticipate changing his or her behavior the next time such circumstances occur.

The Thomist would agree with Ellis' viewpoint as far as it goes but would be concerned not so much with acts of wrongdoing as with habits of human behavior. Incidentally, what Ellis refers to as irrational thinking could be viewed by a Thomist as a bad habit. For example, one incidence of stealing would not concern a Thomist as much as would a habit of shoplifting. The opposite habit would be respecting property--the good habit or virtue of justice--and the Thomist would be concerned about promoting this habit.

Guilt is an emotion which can be devastating to the persons suffering from it. The Thomist will take a middle position between Ellis and Mowrer on guilt. If the guilt is irrational--having no basis in client behavior, attitude, or intention--the Thomist will use Ellis' techniques to eliminate the guilt. However, if the guilt has some foundation in reality the Thomist, like Mowrer, will encourage the client to face that which is causing him or



her to feel guilty. Guilt, for a Thomist, is ambiguous and the approach to it depends on the situation of the counselee.

The Thomist not only looks beyond the counselee's specific acts to the habits of behavior but also looks to the intentionality--the dispositions to act--of a client. Resentments, hostility, self-pity, prejudice, etc. constitute this intentionality. Such tendencies can be sources of guilt feelings almost to the same extent as wrongdoing itself. Since they represent obstacles to the development of good habits, they are impediments to virtuous living on the part of the counselee.

In summary, a counselor who integrates Thomism with the religious philosophies of Skinner and Ellis views the client as a person who is created in the image of God and is free to yield to reasonable control by religion and to reject excessive control by religion. Such a counselor will encourage a client to develop a healthy self-concept, to live virtuously, and to eliminate irrational guilt feelings. Although the client cannot be absolutely certain of justification from God, the client will be encouraged to recognize the signs of forgiveness in the religion of his or her persuasion.

#### The Counselor

The Thomistic counselor is not as directive as the Skinnerian or the Ellisian. The Thomist believes that God is present in the counseling situation and is helping direct the client. The Skinnerian and Ellisian recognize only the presence of the counselor and the counselee and recognize

only the power of the counselor to direct and control the counselee. The Skinnerian controls the client with reinforcers, while the Ellisian acts as a propagandist for rational thinking. The Thomist, even when borrowing these techniques from Skinner and Ellis, seeks the direction of God and helps the client choose those means which seem best for arriving at the goals set by the client.

As a model, the Thomist has the virtuous person--one who lives prudently, justly, courageously, and temperately. The Thomist hopes the client will make a free decision to become this kind of person. In seeking to help a client live more rationally, an Ellisian emphasizes only one of the qualities of a virtuous person--living prudently. The Thomist also believes in the importance of prudence--applying reason to the things to be done--but believes furthermore in the importance of the other virtues in that they integrate reason with the emotions. An Ellisian leaves the impression that emotions are pathological. A Thomist admits that such is sometimes the case but argues that the emotions are generally healthy--especially in the virtuous person who moderates fear by means of courage and desire by means of temperance.

According to Thomism, the counselor should become a virtuous model since the client often models the behavior of the counselor. Surely, Ellis himself provides an example of rational thinking. Also behind the counselor's being



a model is the idea that the counselor's belief in the theory should lead to its being exemplified in his or her own life.

Being a theist, the Thomistic counselor can not only use the techniques of Skinner and Ellis but can also reach beyond to God. Prayer can become an integral part of counseling. The Thomistic counselor will pray for and sometimes with the client. Although the Thomistic counselor will not force his or her piety on the client, praying in the counseling situation can be helpful if the client is a religious believer. Prayer sometimes helps a client to become more open to the counselor, since God's presence will be recognized as an active ingredient in the counseling situation.

The counselor who integrates Thomism with the theories of Skinner and Ellis will exhibit the qualities of sensitivity, understanding, reasonable criticism and responsibility. Since they constitute empathy, sensitivity and understanding are two very important qualities in a counselor. The importance of empathy in counseling is stressed by most professionals in the field. Rodney Goodyear discussed empathy at the 1976 meeting of the American Personnel and Guidance Association and called for further research in this area. The Thomist is in accord with this proposal.

#### Conclusions

A religious counselor can integrate Thomism and the philosophies of Skinner and Ellis into one counseling theory. Skinner and Ellis can provide insights into some of the most

effective means of achieving goals. Especially useful are Skinner's reinforcement theory and Ellis' discovery of irrational ideas which disturb behavior. These insights can be integrated with Thomism to provide a religious counselor with a stronger counseling theory.

Such an integrated theory sees virtuous living--living rationally and being emotionally healthy--as a dynamic model for counseling. The model is dynamic because what is virtuous to one generation or culture may not be to another. The model is also dynamic because each counselor in his or her uniqueness can provide a virtuous model. From Skinner, one can learn the value of positive reinforcers which encourage virtuous living. In Ellis, one can discover added support for the Thomistic belief that prudence is the queen of the virtues.

Dialogue with atheists, such as Skinner and Ellis, who are in the field of counseling can profit the theist. A theist who is willing to think through the atheistic criticisms against religion discovers a valuable ally in the promotion of authentic religion. Furthermore, agreement on the nature and techniques of counseling is significant in view of the fact that there is disagreement on so fundamental a point as the existence of God.

A theist, however, finds the atheistic perspective limited. If God is real, God can be a powerful help in the counseling situation. A theist finds it difficult, if not impossible, to convince an atheist that God is real.



However, a theist can point out to the atheistic counselor that many a client believes in the reality of God and, in such instances, even if God is not real to the counselor, God is real to the counselee. In Skinner's language, God can be labelled an independent variable in the counseling situation. In Ellis' thought, God--over and above the counselor--can be a propagandist for reason.

There is a basic agreement between Thomas, Skinner, and Ellis that counseling is empirical. Counseling today is empirical in two senses. In one sense, approaches to counseling are verified by the counselor's experience with various clients. In another sense, researchable questions open to the gathering of empirical evidence are raised.

A theistic counselor is using the empirical method in the first sense when he or she concludes that God and religion have helped the client to better behavior (Skinner), more rational living (Ellis), and virtuous living (Thomas Aquinas). A theistic counselor can use religion to advantage. The theistic counselor can always pray for the counselee and, when the counselee is willing, can pray with the counselee. Even an atheist can encourage a counselee to pray if it corresponds to the counselee's beliefs. Also, any counselor can draw on the scriptures of the world's religions as helpful reinforcers for a client.

A theistic counselor, using empirical method in the second sense mentioned above, can suggest to an atheistic counselor that researchable questions on the relevance of

religious belief to counseling can be raised. God is invisible but effects attributed to God can be observed, measured, and evaluated. Mystical experience has been measured. The effects of various religious denominations on people's attitudes can be observed and evaluated. An atheist can seek an hypothesis different from God to explain these effects; but if an atheist ignores the relevance of such phenomena to counseling, atheism becomes a severe limitation.

Finally, the theistic counselor is aware of the benefits of religious experience in his or her own life. And without seeking to influence the religious belief of clients, the theist can say at Morning Prayer:

There's not a plant or flower below,  
But makes your glories known;  
And clouds arise, and tempests blow,  
By order from thy throne;  
While all that borrows life from thee  
Is ever in thy care,  
And everywhere that man can be,  
You, God, are present there. (Watts, 1715)



APPENDIX

Ellis' Irrational Ideas and Epictetus

The following is a list of Ellis' eleven irrational ideas which frequently cause emotional reactions in people (Ellis, 1962). A quotation from Epictetus follows each idea. The quotations are selected in opposition to the irrational idea to show that stoic advice was given to minimize people's irrational thinking, a similarity between Ellis' theory and stoicism.

1. The idea that it is a dire necessity for an adult human being to be loved or approved by virtually every significant other person in his community.  
 "Bear in mind that it is not the man who reviles or strikes you that insults you, but it is your judgment that these men are insulting you. Therefore, when someone irritates you, be assured that it is your own opinion which has irritated you" (Johnson, 1974, p. 90).
2. The idea that one would be thoroughly competent, adequate and achieving in all possible respects if one is to consider oneself worthwhile.  
 "The following statements constitute a non sequitur: 'I am richer than you are, therefore I am superior to you.' But the following conclusions are better: 'I am richer than you are, therefore my property is superior to yours': or, 'I am more eloquent than you are, therefore my elocution is superior to yours.' But you are neither property nor elocution" (Johnson, 1974, p. 98).
3. The idea that certain people are bad, wicked, or villainous and that they should be severely blamed and punished for their villainy.  
 "Signs of one who is making progress are: He censures no one, praises no one, blames no one, finds fault with no one" (Johnson, 1974, p. 99).
4. The idea that it is awful and catastrophic when things are not the way one would very much like them to be.  
 "Do not seek to have everything to happen as it actually does happen, and your life will be serene" (Johnson, 1974, p. 88).
5. The idea that human happiness is externally caused and that people have little or no ability to control their sorrows and disturbances.  
 "It is not the things themselves that disturb men, but their judgments about these things. For example, death



is nothing dreadful, or else Socrates too would have thought so, but the judgment that death is dreadful, this is the dreadful thing" (Johnson, 1974, p. 88).

6. The idea that if something is or may be dangerous or fearsome one should be terribly concerned about it and should keep dwelling on the possibility of its occurring.  
 "If you wish to make progress, dismiss all reasoning of this sort: 'If I neglect my affairs, I shall have nothing to live on.' 'If I do not punish my slaveboy, he will turn out bad.' For it is better to die of hunger, but in a state of freedom from grief and fear, than to live in plenty, but troubled in mind. And it is better for your slaveboy to be bad than for you to be unhappy" (Johnson, 1974, p. 89).
7. The idea that it is easier to avoid than to face certain life difficulties and self-responsibilities.  
 "And if you meet anything that is laborious, or sweet, or held in high repute, or in no repute, remember that now is the contest, and here before you are the Olympic games, and that it is impossible to delay any longer, and that it depends on a single day and a single action, whether progress is lost or saved" (Johnson, 1974, p. 100).
8. The idea that one should be dependent on others and needs someone stronger than oneself on whom to rely.  
 "In the case of everything that befalls you, remember to turn to yourself and see what faculty you have to deal with it" (Johnson, 1974, p. 88).
9. The idea that one's past history is an all-important determiner of one's present behavior and that because something once strongly affected one's life, it should indefinitely have a similar effect.  
 "You are no longer a lad, but already a full-grown man" (Johnson, 1974, p. 100).
10. The ideas that one should become quite upset over other people's problems and disturbances.  
 "Somebody is hasty about bathing; do not say that he bathes badly, but that he is hasty about bathing. Somebody drinks a good deal of wine; do not say that he drinks badly, but that he drinks a good deal. For until you have decided what judgment prompts him, how do you know that what he is doing is bad" (Johnson, 1974, p. 99).
11. The idea that there is invariably a right, precise, and perfect solution to human problems and that it is catastrophic if this perfect solution is not found.  
 "Remember that you are an actor in a play, the character of which is determined by the playwright" (Johnson, 1974, p. 90).

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