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Examining Religion and

Well-Being across Cultures:

The Cognitive Science of Religion as Sextant

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Abstract

The Cognitive Science of Religion examines the naturalness of religious phenomena by identifying universals in the human cognitive apparatus and process, then exploring the nomological nets surrounding them. There is variation both within and across populations in these constructs and in their linkages, thereby enabling cultural examination of these religious phenomena that have so far been operationalized. We hypothesize that religious phenomena so approached occur within a social-psychological context characterized by affordances that channel their realization and enactments. A fuller understanding of any religious outcome-of-interest will be better understood by considering the characteristics of these contexts that may impinge upon the religious phenomena experienced by a given person. In this essay, we consider the available evidence supporting this hypothesis in multi-national data sets addressing religious beliefs and practices, particularly with regard to their implications for a person's subjective **well-being**. The available results support the notion that religion differentially matters to the life of an individual in different cultures. However, the data sets are few, their measures atheoretically conceived, piecemeal, and survey-derived. To encourage more thoughtful, culturally embedded research on the naturalness of religious phenomena, we conclude by exhorting colleagues to address these shortfalls and broaden their conceptual range and empirical reach in the scientific study of religion.

Examining Religion and Well-Being across Cultures:

The Cognitive Science of Religion as Sextant

“Man is the measure of all things,

Of what is, that it is;

Of what is not, that it is not.”

Protagoras

Religion matters, but how, for whom, and why? Our point of departure as psychologists is that answers to these questions should be grounded in human experience arising from human nature, and that religious experience and practice have been, are, and will be viable if they promote individual **well-being**, broadly assessed (e.g., Lun & Bond, 2016). This claim does not deny the supports for religious beliefs and practices arising from other social factors, such as group support for those beliefs and practices, since individuals are social creatures, responsive to social factors in becoming and being human (see Saroglou, 2014). It does, however, claim that, without a firm grounding in human nature – our cognitive orientations and capacities allied with our temperamental dispositions and motivational profiles – religious belief and practice will “wither away,” as Marx maintained about the state.

As Hornbeck has written, “If certain categories of religious expression are largely natural, the likelihood of religion simply disappearing - as various intellectual projects from the Enlightenment onward have predicted - seems small. At the same time, religion is often at the forefront of our species’ capacity to function in this world, moving us towards greater **well-being** in some cases, and towards immense suffering and destruction in others” (personal communication, Aug. 14, 2013). In this essay, then, we will attempt to address the following questions: 1) What characteristics of an individual seem to shape the impact of religious

experience on his or her life? 2) How do features of the context in which the individual person lives out his or her religious life relate to that individual's satisfaction with his or her life as lived to date?

Essaying the religious domain as social psychologists, we acknowledge that religious beliefs are different from religious practices: beliefs are internal components of the individual, only observable to an external audience if the individual articulates those beliefs in some way; and practices may occur in private and be unobservable, such as with voiceless praying, or be public, such as when the individual participates in religious ceremonies. These distinctions are important, because we assume:

1. that beliefs and practices are responsive to different cognitive and motivational factors;
2. that each individual has a different profile of these cognitive and motivational factors that channels his or her responses to life-in-progress;
3. that cognitive and motivational factors combine in sub-conscious ways to yield an assessment by the individual that his or her life has been more or less satisfying to date; and
4. that culture, which characterizes the normative expectations within which the individual develops and realizes himself or herself, matters in shaping how satisfied the individual becomes with his or her life to date.

This is a psychological approach to understanding an individual's religious experience and practice; it does not address the question of whether an individual's experience and practice are right or true, but rather how and why they work for the individual's well-being in a given cultural context. This essay, then, aims to understand one kind of psychological outcome,

namely an individual's degree of satisfaction with life to date. This is a pragmatic, functional approach to religion in all its various forms, using the current panoply of social scientific methods and assumptions as our *modus operandi*.

We will first consider the contemporary interest with life satisfaction in psychology, considering its cognitive and motivational underpinnings. Our next concern will be to explore what are some of these cognitive and motivational factors relating to religion and how they may be focused onto and manifested through the individual's religious experiences and practices. Then we will examine how aspects of a person's religious engagement have been assessed in ways that allow social scientists to draw conclusions about how they lead to a sense of satisfaction in life. These considerations will be illuminated by reference to the relevant cross-cultural studies to date.

The gaps in our understanding of even this limited agenda are many. We will point out these limitations as we proceed through our analysis and end by presenting our futurescape for multi-cultural studies of religious phenomena and their consequences from a psychological perspective. As such, it is one attempt to "science up' religious studies and the anthropology of religion without eliminating interpretive approaches" (Barrett, 2011, p. 229). Ours is then an interpretive approach to the social scientific understanding of how culture channels and moderates the human experience of and with religion in ways that promote greater life satisfaction.

Satisfaction with Life as the Fundamental Human Achievement

"Man is the only animal for whom his own existence is a problem that he has to solve."

Erich Fromm, *Man for himself*, 1947, p. 3

We concur with many others (e.g., the chapter authors in Wong, 2012) that the distinctively human problem alluded to by Fromm (1947) is the existential puzzle about the meaning of each person's life, the solution to which lies in how each of us realizes that meaning. As Bond (2013) has written,

...we are birthed, develop into a family that socializes us, and slowly move out into a larger social world where we continue to learn how to function effectively enough in the social niche we come to inhabit. We encounter the death of others close to us, and are terrified at the prospect of our own demise, coping with that primordial terror using the cultural and personal resources at our disposal to craft our "Oedipal project", our personal solution for transcending the specter of our death by imbuing our life with meaning (Becker, 1973). The meaning we attribute to our life will be informed by the cultures of our family, subsequent institutions, like school, and current social contexts, including the residential area we share with others, the organization where we work, and the community where we live out our lives. (p. 159)

This lifelong socialization channels the expression of our temperamental predispositions, cognitive architecture, and competencies into a sense of what constitutes a worthy life and how to achieve it within our *Lebenswelt*.

One of our distinctive capacities as humans is to "exist" [*ex stasis* – stand outside] and reflect on ourselves:

We are capable of self-reflection, able to consider ourselves as a social object in the interpersonal reality of others (meta-perception) and able to reflect on our personal history to date (retrospection). That reflection on our self as an object in social space

will include an evaluative dimension that enables each of us to consider and report on how well we are doing. (Bond, 2013, p. 159)

As psychologists, what can be a more fundamental and important outcome than to understand how any individual self-evaluates themselves?

Reports on this overall self-evaluation are garnering considerable attention from psychologists, especially since the positive psychology movement of the 1990's (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). It is also a matter of growing societal interest, as contemporary democratic governments consider the question of whether national progress should be assessed in non-economic, psychological terms. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), for example, regularly assesses and compares the average level of citizen well-being across its 36 reporting nations (2013).

According to the OECD (2013), "Life satisfaction measures how people evaluate their life as a whole rather than their current feelings. It captures a reflective assessment of which life circumstances and conditions are important for subjective well-being." This definition is apt for our present consideration, since it distinguishes between "life as a whole" and "current feelings." So, we are dealing with an overall self-assessment, not temporary mood swings, in response to contemporary events.

This definition also alerts social scientists to explore "which life circumstances and conditions are important for subjective well-being." Tay and Diener (2011) proposed that a given person's reported level of satisfaction with life may be explained in terms of how well that person has fulfilled universal human needs. This fulfillment is responsive to one's "life circumstances and conditions" which include the individual's psychological characteristics, like a chronic tendency to experience positive affect and negative affect (see Kööts-Ausmees et al.,

2013); one's profile on an array of human motivations, such as Ryan and Deci's (2000) big three of Competence, Autonomy and Relatedness; one's cognitive capacity, like intelligence (Deary 2001); or one's worldview (Lai et al., 2007).

The approach of assessing a person's subjective **well-being** in terms of needs fulfillment provokes a number of questions with respect to religion: Is there a pan-cultural need for religion, broadly defined? Or, does an individual take up religious beliefs, practices, and identities as a way for that individual to fulfill his or her profile of basic human needs (Nichols, 2004)? If these basic needs may be fulfilled in other non-religious ways, will the role of religious beliefs, practices, and identities "wither away" or perhaps never even be countenanced? What roles do an individual's cultural heritage and current societal conditions play in this process? Examining how life satisfaction relates to religion thus offers a useful point of departure for psychologists to look at the factors that contribute to both the individual and cultural variability in religious phenomena.

Cultures as Legitimatizing Contexts

In approaching culture as a construct of interest, we will be mindful that cultural contexts, be they national, ethnic, organizational, team, or family, may be characterized as plausibility structures, a term introduced by Berger (1969). Plausibility structures are the sociocultural contexts for systems of beliefs within which these meanings make sense, or are rendered plausible. Beliefs and meanings held by individuals and groups are supported by and embedded in sociocultural institutions and their inter-related processes. As Berger elaborates, "When we add up all these factors - social definitions of reality, social relations that take these [definitions of reality] for granted, as well as the supporting therapies and legitimations - we have the total plausibility structure of the conception in question" (p. 52).

Plausibility structures thus result from the interplay between historical legacies, institutional frameworks, socialization emphases and sustaining pressures from the reference groups of which the individual is a member. As Barrett (2011) points out, “Psychology of religion (in recent decades) has been more concerned about individual religious psychology than accounting for cross-cultural patterns in why people have the type of religious beliefs or practices that they have” (p. 234). Our mandate as social psychologists of religious experience, then, is to articulate the relevant features of this complex of influences on an individual’s religious thoughts, feelings, and practices arising within a given cultural system.

Social Beliefs about Religion across Cultures

“No one believes anything unless he first believes it to be believable.”

Saint Augustine

Previous chapters have demonstrated that what we typically think of as “religious” phenomena may be natural to our species. But do we really find religious concepts *everywhere*? “The ‘naturalness’ of religion and the assumptions of naturalness theory receive distinctive endorsements from the now two-decade long, multicultural study of **social axioms** by Leung and Bond” (Hornbeck, personal communication, Aug. 14, 2013). In the 1990’s, these cross-cultural researchers began what was to evolve into a 41-nation survey of **social axioms**, which they later defined as,

... generalized beliefs about people, social groups, social institutions, the physical environment, or the spiritual world as well as about categories of events and phenomena in the social world. These generalized beliefs are encoded in the form of an assertion about the relationship between two entities or concepts. (Leung & Bond, 2008, p. 198)

Leung and Bond began this research enterprise by selecting beliefs in daily use from their

search of printed media, analyses of proverbs, and focus-group interviews in both Hong Kong and Venezuela. This inductive approach was supplemented by adding a few selected items from three volumes of survey instruments which included over 300 scales (Miller 1991; Robinson et al. 1991; Stewart et al. 1984). An 82-item, **Social Axioms** Scale was thus created and distributed to colleagues from the USA, Japan, and Germany to administer to student samples comparable to those used in Hong Kong and Venezuela (Leung et al. 2002). The study range was later extended to 36 other national groups (Leung & Bond, 2004).

A five-factor solution emerged, with five independent dimensions of variation named Social Cynicism, Social Complexity, Reward for Application, **Fate Control**, and Religiosity. This five-dimension structure was reliably found whether the researchers worked at the individual level pan-culturally (Leung & Bond, 2004), across the 41 cultures at the national level (Bond et al. 2004), or within a given culture using a representative sample from the population of that country (Guan et al., 2010). A robust pattern of variability across both the peoples and the nations of the world thus emerged across five empirically derived measures of what people believe to be true about the material, personal, social, and spiritual worlds. The nomological net characterizing each of these five dimensions at the individual level of analysis has subsequently been described in a collection of papers (see Leung & Bond, 2009), and an improved **Social Axioms** Scale has recently been constructed and validated (Leung et al., 2012).

Drawing from a functionalist perspective, we suggest that **social axioms** provide answers to the “how” questions in the sense that they offer guidance “to people in meeting and working with the difficulties and challenges of everyday living” (Leung & Bond, 2009, p. 2). This inductive, multi-cultural approach to the content of human beliefs provides a bottom-up framework for considering which functional considerations are made by which persons to

negotiate the world that confronts them. It should be noted that each person develops a profile across these five dimensions of belief, endorsing or rejecting a position along each of these five dimensions of understanding the world, representing a person's current solution to the puzzle of life. Two of these five dimensions that Leung and Bond unearthed seem especially relevant for the CSR approach to understanding religious phenomena, namely, **Religiosity** and **Fate Control**.

Religiosity. As described by Leung and Bond (2009), "The fourth factor was initially labeled *spirituality* but subsequently renamed **religiosity**, because its constituent items endorse not only the existence of a supernatural being but also a complex of beliefs about the beneficial social functions of religious institutions and practices" (p. 3). Of the five dimensions of belief, **Religiosity** showed the greatest amount of variation in endorsement across their 41 national samples. Indeed, the variation across and within populations in the endorsement of religious values, beliefs, and practices is notable and perhaps their most challenging feature to a position advocating religion's naturalness, (see e.g., Guan et al., 2010; Kimmelmeier & Saucier, 2013). The items defining the dimension of **Religiosity** are:

There is a supreme being controlling the universe.

Religious beliefs lead to unscientific thinking. (Reverse coded)

Belief in a religion helps one understand the meaning of life.

Religious faith contributes to good mental health.

Religion makes people escape from reality. (Reverse coded)

Religious people are more likely to maintain moral standards.

Belief in a religion makes people good citizens.

This complex of beliefs includes claims (as well as denials) of ontological, epistemological, personal, and social truths associated with religion. These claims about aspects of religion cohere

and do not constitute psychologically distinct facets. As thus revealed through this social scientific lens, **religiosity** constitutes a pan-cultural axis of individual difference. Individuals are impacted differently, with some individuals embracing **religiosity**, others maintaining indifference, and still others rejecting its constituent beliefs; there is no “natural”, invariant embracing of **religiosity**. How a given person adopts his or her position along this dimension of belief is an important question to answer, though parental socialization appears to be part of the equation (Boehnke, 2009).

For instance, we have found that women show higher levels of **religiosity** across all national groups studied (Leung & Bond, 2004); less educated persons show higher levels of **religiosity** within a given nation, as do less wealthy persons and older persons (Guan et al., 2010); and **religiosity** is higher in nations lower in human development indices that characterize the nation, namely greater poverty, lesser education, and lower longevity (Bond et al., 2004).

Bond (2009) characterized the empirically demonstrated psychological functions of **religiosity** in this way,

...it buffers one's anxiety about death (Hui et al., 2007), negatively predicts support for freedom from restriction in political ideology (Keung & Bond, 2002), and relates both to one's stage of moral development (Comunian, this volume) and one's endorsement of different love styles (Boski et al., this volume) Religiosity is a strong predictor of constructs leading to the crystallizing of behavior intentions in various domains, especially that involving religious behavior like praying (see Liem et al., this volume). It predicts the use of styles for conflict resolution, including both competition and accommodation (Bond et al., 2004). Consistent with the social implications of these previous findings, a higher religiosity predicts

the rated effectiveness of both assertion and relationship-based strategies in exercising organizational influence (Fu et al., 2004). (p. 337)

This is an extensive package of functions, suggesting the importance of the **Religiosity** dimension in an individual's cognitive and behavioral architecture.

However, although the dimension itself is salient, ubiquitous, and multi-functional, as a CSR approach would suggest it must be, a given individual's position on this dimension is, naturally, varied and particular. Are individuals who endorse **religiosity** more satisfied with their lives? Contrary to the implications of Marx's assertion that religion is the opiate of the masses, higher levels of **religiosity** are not associated with greater subjective **well-being**, at least in some segments of Chinese and American societies. Mak et al. (2010) found that there was no significant relationship between **religiosity** and life satisfaction, either in American or Hong Kong Chinese university student samples. Of particular interest is that this finding remained the same even after the authors separated the belief item, "There is a supreme being controlling the universe," from the rest of items defining the **Religiosity** dimension in the analysis. In other words, neither the belief in a supreme being controlling the universe nor the belief that religion is beneficial to human life correlated directly with life satisfaction in the samples. If we take a needs satisfaction approach to predicting subjective well-being, it seems that the needs determining one's subjective **well-being** can be met regardless of one's position on the belief dimension of **religiosity**.

It is perhaps worthwhile to consider the item, "There is a supreme being controlling the universe," the most theological-ontological of the **Religiosity** complex, at greater length. As written, it connects to the premises of assuming intent and attributing agency that constitutes the way the naturalness theory describes the development of thinking in children. Also, the

presumption of design follows from the action of “controlling the universe” that characterizes the “supreme being.” This item describes a single, active, omnipotent agent, external to the human drama, but involved in affecting its outcomes. These outcomes appear to be beneficent, given the positive association of this item with the others in the **Religiosity** dimension; it also subordinates the scientific quest for human control over this-world outcomes to this agent of ultimate control.

As such, this item seems to reflect a view of God as transcendent but involved in human affairs. It would be rejected by those with the theological position of a transcendent, “hands-off” God, those with the “Godless” worldview of many Buddhists, or by those with a “multi-godded”, animistic worldview lacking a supreme god. So, that item does not provide an adequate coverage of “religious phenomena,” and consequently does not provide an adequate test for assessing naturalness theorizing about design and agency. As Barrett (2007) has remarked, “I regard the experienced quality of relationships with gods as being an exciting point of potential collaboration between psychology of religion and CSR” (p. 234). In effecting such collaboration, we will need to include a fuller panoply of possible gods acting as agents and shaping the design of life in our multi-cultural, multi-religious psychologizing. We must cast a wider net.

Fate Control. The inadequacy of too few agents may be addressed by the second pan-cultural dimension of **social axioms**, **Fate Control**. Bond (2009) describes this dimension of “general beliefs about the world” thusly,

Fortune, destiny, luck and fate are real forces to be contended with in the minds of many. However, fateful forces may be opposed by humans who observe certain practices that counteract the impact of impersonal influences. Intriguingly, to the extent that any individual acknowledges the influence of fateful forces, that same individual endorses beliefs in practices designed to neutralize or amplify those

forces to the individual's advantage. So, the item, "There are methods people can use to alter their fates" also factors together into the construct of **fate control**. As one might expect with humans striving to maximize their outcomes in a contingent world, the outcomes believed to be controlled by fateful forces are themselves influenceable through individual practices. Such a conflation of belief types into the ambiguous construct of **fate control** may seem illogical, but is nonetheless "psycho-logical". **Fate control** is not merely control by fate; it is control of that fate through one's practice's. One's fate is perceived as negotiable (see Au et al., 2008, for a scientific exploration of negotiable fate). (p. 335-36)

This fundamental dimension of human belief would thus seem to complement the **Religiosity** dimension in considering CSR theorizing about design and agency.

In its most recent operationalization (Leung et al., 2012), **Fate Control** is separated into two facets, Fate Determinism and Fate Alterability. Fate Determinism is constituted by the following items:

Fate determines one's successes and failures.

Fate determines a person's success in life.

Matters of life and death are determined by fate.

The people whom a person will love in his or her life are determined by fate.

Major events in life have nothing to do with fate. (Reverse coded)

People's wealth is determined by fate.

Fate has nothing to do with the tragedies of life. (Reverse coded)

These items clearly reflect the psychological search for explanations beyond the human in order to account for major events in our lives. This belief system emerges in the course of human

development, as each person confronts a growing awareness of hedonically relevant events that are beyond their capacity to influence. Everyone must suffer what Hamlet referred to as “the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.” As CSR theorizing maintains, this confrontation seems to be pan-cultural (Leung & Bond, 2004). However, each person arrives at his or her own solution to the challenge of explaining what is responsible for life’s important outcomes: while some endorse a position of control by fate, others reject it.

The rejection of being controlled by the “the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune” is the second facet of **Fate Control**, Fate Alterability, which is measured by the following items:

Luck can be enhanced by certain tactics.

Individual characteristics, such as appearance and birth date, can reveal one's fate.

There are ways for people to find out about their fate.

There are certain ways for people to improve their destiny.

Individual characteristics, such as appearance and birth date, can affect one’s fate.

There are certain ways to help us improve our luck and avoid unlucky things.

Major events in people's life can be predicted.

There are many ways for people to predict what will happen in the future.

An individual’s degree of belief in Fate Alterability is moderately and positively associated with his or her degree of belief in Fate Determinism – these facets are associated, albeit distinguishable. The human need to understand what is affecting one’s outcomes throughout the course of life is thus complemented by the need for answers that may be elicited by exploring various avenues and adopting tactics for changing those outcomes. Textured examinations of cultural traditions and practices reveal such tactics, which vary from prayer and dance to amulet

wearing and targeted food intake. One can likewise influence the outcomes of others through similar, culture-informed tactics, varying from voodoo practices to burning paper funerary objects for the use of the departed. here

Both facets of a person's level of **Fate Control** seem to be grounded in basic human needs. One is reminded of the need for safety posited by Maslow (1954), Murray's (1938) needs of defence and harm-avoidance, Langer's (1983) need for control, and the prevention focus of Higgins' (1997) regulatory focus theory. A person's position on **Fate Control** appears to be the belief component corresponding to his or her level of concern about avoiding harm, disturbance, and disruption. So, it appears as if **Fate Control** is a pan-cultural concern enjoying an established lineage in psychological theorizing and research, compatible with naturalness theorizing about the human condition.

As with **Religiosity**, however, CSR must contend with individual variability in the endorsement of **Fate Control**. This variability is associated with a variety of crucial individual outcomes, cognitive and behavioral. As Bond (2009) summarized:

Fate control is associated with reports of greater anxiety surrounding maternal attachment (Mak & Bond, 2008), death (Hui et al., 2006-7), a preference for freedom from regulation in the political ideologies of Chinese respondents (Keung & Bond, 2002), and relates to the individual's attributional processes in self-serving ways (see Hui & Hui, this volume). These include **fate control** relating to one's estimation of how effective the three basic organizational strategies of assertion, persuasion, and relationship-management are likely to be (Fu et al., 2004). The strength of the relationship between **fate control** and the rated effectiveness of these strategies varied across cultures, however, as Pepitone

(1994) has warned would be the case, and this varying degree of **Fate Control's** impact remains to be explained.

Fate control also has behavioral implications, as one would expect from its role in interpreting and predicting life events - it predicts behavioral intentions (see Liem et al., this volume) and relates to one's coping style, with those Chinese higher in **fate control** likely to report wishful thinking and distancing (Bond et al., 2004). It also predicts higher levels of suicidal ideation, over and above the prediction provided by the respondent's level of depression (Lam, 2008). So, it is a belief dimension rich with possibility and promise in predicting and explaining life outcomes and therefore in guiding the individual's engagement with life. (p. 336)

Interestingly, one of the outcomes for a person's endorsement of **Fate Control** is *not* greater or lesser life satisfaction (see e.g., Lai et al., 2007). However, this research only involved Chinese undergraduates and may thus be a culture-specific finding, anchored in the varied religious context of Hong Kong university life. Alternatively, an individual's satisfaction with life may be a combination of their profile of need satisfactions together with their position on **Fate Control** (and **Religiosity**). Perhaps needs and beliefs must fit into a pattern to matter for a person's subjective **well-being**. Multi-cultural research with more representative samples will probably yield findings that link measures of **Religiosity** and **Fate Control**—perhaps in combination with needs satisfaction—to life satisfaction, as suggested by the research discussed in the following.

Socialization for **Religiosity**

“So was it when my life began;

So is it now I am a man...

The Child is father of the Man”

William Wordsworth, *My heart leaps up when I behold*, 1802

How does one become religious? We propose that the specifics differ across countries characterized by various, broadly defined religious traditions. Becoming religious in each nation may be a consequence of specific religious heritages in so far as the children of that nation are socialized to emphasize that religion as a feature of their lives. This emphasis will be inculcated through the goals for socializing children that characterize a given nation.

To explore this logic, we (Bond Lun, 2014) examined responses to the following question in Wave 5 of the World Values Survey (2009):

Here is a list of qualities that children can be encouraged to learn at home. Which, if any, do you consider to be especially important? Please choose up to five!

- Independence
- Hard work
- Feeling of responsibility
- Imagination
- Tolerance and respect for other people
- Thrift, saving money and things
- Determination, perseverance
- Religious faith
- Unselfishness
- Obedience

We analyzed valid responses to this question from representative samples of more than 78,000 persons from 55 nations. A factor analysis of the preferred goals for the socialization of children at the national level yielded a two-dimensional solution according to which the 55 constituent nations could be arrayed. The two dimensions that emerged were labeled “Self-directedness versus Other-directedness” and “Civility versus Practicality”:

For the Self-directedness versus Other-directedness dimension, qualities such as independence and imagination marked the Self-directedness end, which goes opposite to the Other-directedness end consisting of qualities such as religious faith and obedience. For the Civility versus Practicality dimension, tolerance and respect for other people and unselfishness marked the Civility end of the dimension, whereas the quality of thrift, saving money and things marked the Practicality side of the dimension. (p. 13)

These two dimensions may be used to position the 55 nations on a “longitude and latitude” of socialization emphases, as shown below:

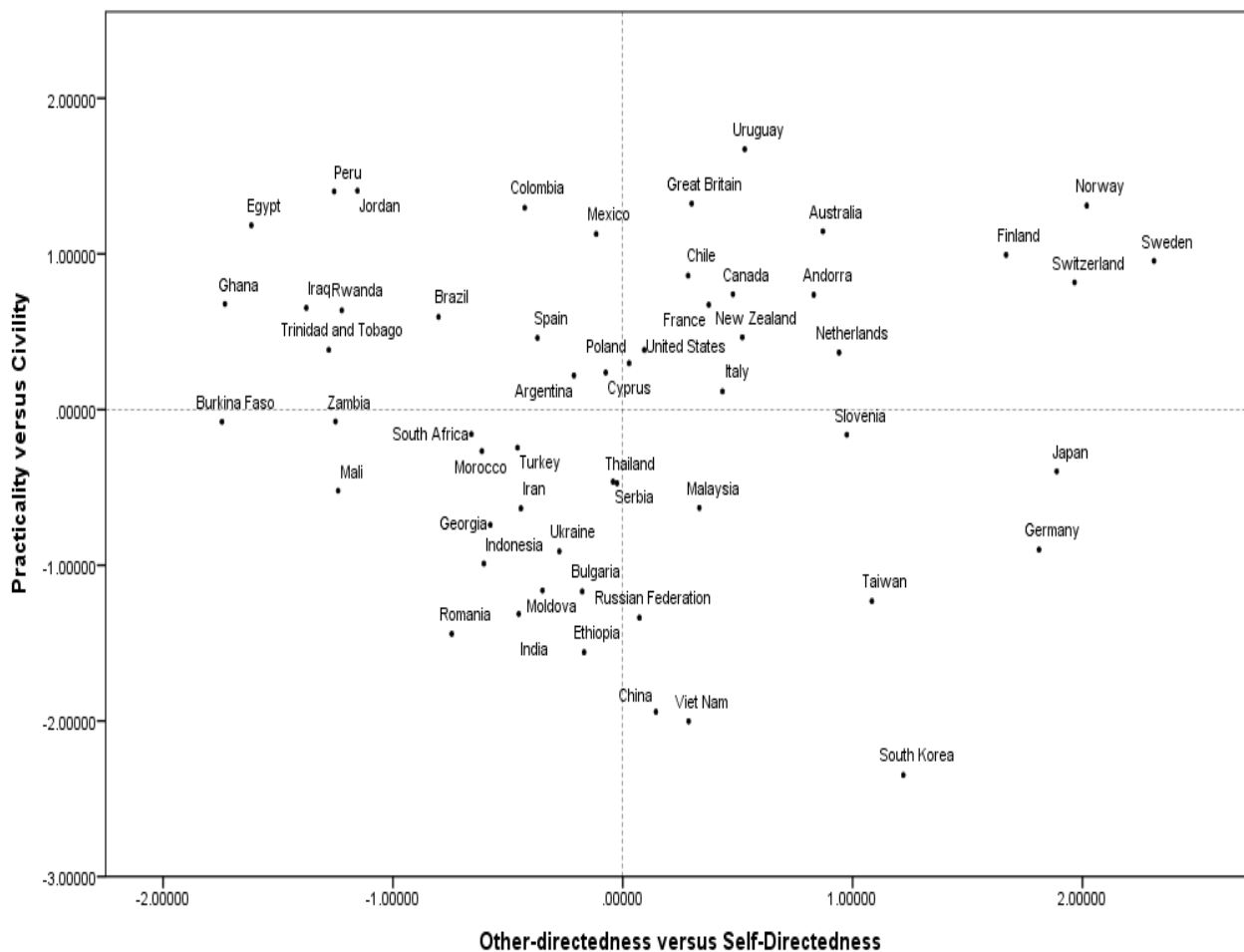


Figure 1. An analysis of 55 nations along two dimensions. Adapted from Bond and Lun (2014).

Self- versus Other-directedness is of obvious relevance to our present interest in the cultural context of religious phenomena. Other-directedness is defined by a national emphasis on socializing for religious faith, however religion is locally understood. Unsurprisingly, it is joined with obedience as a goal for the socialization of children and anchors one end of a dimension for national culture similar to differently operationalized measures of collectivism-individualism (Bond & Lun, 2014).

These national positions on both Self-directedness and Civility relate to sensible features of a nation, like its Gender Empowerment Measure. More to the present point, we argue that

these national emphases on socializing children for Self-directedness and Civility will provide a cultural context in which the strength of the constructs and the processes related to naturalness theorizing about religion will be realized in a nation's population and how those constructs will relate to the satisfaction with life of each citizen in that nation.

There will be other features of a person's national-cultural context that likewise embed individual psychological processes involving religious phenomena. So, greater educational provisions promoting a more scientific and secular worldview, governmental restrictions imposed on religion, the manifested social hostility against religious groups, and so forth may be expected to amplify or modulate the individual religious experiences of a nation's citizens. However, these features of national context are more distal to the individual's psychological development than socialization goals. Indeed, these socialization goals reflect these more distal features of this national-cultural context, as we have demonstrated previously (Bond & Lun, 2014). Therefore, we propose that the aforementioned 2-dimensional framework of socialization goals will serve as the most developmentally relevant contextual consideration for examining the various effects of national environment on religious phenomena.

Religious Beliefs, Values, and Practices promoting Satisfaction with Life

“Religion...is the opium of the people”

Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, 1843-4

The World Values Survey (WVS) includes questions asking respondents to rate their endorsement of various religious beliefs and practices. These include: (1) *Belief in religious authorities*, measured by the respondent's answer to the question, “Generally speaking, do you think that the [churches] (or “religious authorities” in non-Christian societies) in your country are giving adequate answers to (a) the moral problems and needs of the individual; (b) the

problems of family life; (c) people's spiritual needs; and (d) the social problems facing our society"; (2) *Value of God or the gods*, measured by the respondent's answer to the question, "How important is God [or are the gods] in your life?"; (3) *Value of religion*, measured by asking the respondent to rate the importance of religion in his or her life; (4) *Religious identity*, measured by asking the respondent to indicate his or her membership in a church or a religious organization; (5) *Spiritual practice*, measured by the respondent's answer to the question, "Do you take some moments of prayer, meditation or contemplation, or something like that?"; and (6) *Social-religious practice*, measured by respondent's answer to the question, "Apart from weddings and funerals, about how often do you attend religious services these days?" All of these questions are phrased in religion-general ways that enable interviewees from any specific religious heritage to answer, making them ideal probes of religious phenomena from a CSR perspective.

However, these questions are also an eclectic and haphazard collection of items, opportunistically culled from the WVS. Our purpose in collecting them was to exploit the affordance provided by the WVS in order to assess the impact of various religious beliefs and practices on a representative population's satisfaction with life across a wide geographical span of national cultures and their associated religious heritages. That is, we were attempting to discover if the pan-cultural quality of the link between any religious belief or practice and life satisfaction might be qualified by the national cultural context informing the lives of citizens from those nations. If that were the case, then the naturalness of the role played by religious phenomena in promoting a more satisfying life would need to be supplemented by a consideration of culture, the social-developmental context for each individual's experience and practice.

In order to verify this idea, we entered the Human Development Index (United Nations Development Programme 2010), the Social Hostilities towards Religion index (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life 2009), and the socialization for religious faith index from the WVS into our analysis to account for the religious context of each nation. Analyzing the responses of 49,943 participants in 42 countries, we found, that at the individual level, *Belief in religious authorities*, *Value of God or the gods*, *Value of religion*, and *Religious identity* each positively related to a respondent's satisfaction with life, but *Spiritual practice* and *Social-religious practice* did not (Lun & Bond 2013). At the national level, apart from the usual positive link between a nation's level of development and its citizens' average satisfaction with life (see Diener et al., 2011), the other two religious, national indicators did not show significant correlation with citizens' average life satisfaction.

National culture surrounding individual religious phenomena was then entered into the predictive equation to provide a fuller picture of how these religious beliefs and practices inform a person's satisfaction with life. As we concluded from our multi-level analysis,

In national cultures in which socialization for religious faith is more common, spiritual practice was positively related to subjective **well-being**, whereas in cultures where religious socialization is less prevalent, the relationship between spiritual practice and subjective **well-being** was reversed. In nations where social hostility towards religious groups is more intense, the positive association between belief in the authority of religious leaders and subjective **well-being** was stronger than in nations where such hostility was weaker. Different measures of religion and spirituality thus have varying relationships with measures of subjective **well-being** in different national contexts (relevant for religion). Future research must

accommodate this variability in conceptualizing the interface between cultural contexts and the psychology of religion and spirituality. (Lun & Bond 2013, p. 304)

A particularly important yield from this study is the *reversal* of the link between spiritual practice and **well-being** depending on the national culture as characterized by socialization for religious faith, one aspect of the socio-religious context for spiritual practice. Here, the national-cultural context matters dramatically, presumably by providing a plausibility structure for one's personal communing with the transcendent. Had research on this linkage with life satisfaction been conducted in a particular national group, it could have yielded positive, neutral, or negative results. The inclusion of many national groups in this analysis enables social scientists to discover shifts in psychological reality depending on the respondent's national culture of socialization. One must thus broaden one's perspective to see the full pattern of factors impacting psychological truth.

Interestingly, the value an individual assigns to religion shows a pan-cultural, positive relationship with that individual's satisfaction with life to date; and as we found (Lun & Bond 2013), this relationship is robust across different variations in the target of socio-religious features of national culture. Of course, there are variations in the degrees of importance attached to religion itself both across persons and nations, which need to be understood and explained using the procedures of social science. But, the way that the self-assessed importance of religion fits into the life of individuals to yield satisfaction with life appears impervious to the religio-cultural contexts examined so far. There seems to be a kind of naturalness in the *process*, but variation in the *components* of the predictive equation. These components also show variation with a "naturalness" that needs to be explored by social scientists keen to understand the psychological unity within the diversity of religious phenomena across cultures.

Conclusion and Futurescape

Home is where one starts from. As we grow older
 the world becomes stranger, the pattern more complicated
 Of dead and living. Not the intense moment
 Isolated, with no before and after,
 But a lifetime burning in every moment
 And not the lifetime of one man only
 But of old stones that cannot be deciphered.

T. S. Eliot, *East Coker*, 1941

Religion, broadly and generously defined from a human perspective, is a multi-faceted, trans-historical, and cross-cultural phenomenon of fundamental importance. Accordingly, we have taken the eclectic approach characterizing CSR to explore the “naturalness” of religious experience as evidenced in the relevant multi-cultural data sets available. For us, “naturalness” is revealed by the variation discovered in the feelings, beliefs, and practices associated with religious experiences as well as the processes leading to these feelings, beliefs, and practices. These variations are “the case to answer” for social scientists. There is no one natural position that persons adopt on religious questions and practices. Variation in the motivations, cognitions, and behaviors associated with religious phenomena just *is*, arising from variations in the profile of genetic temperaments and constraints of the socialization experiences characterizing any individual.

The range of variation in these phenomena is highlighted by multi-cultural studies that embrace a wider legacy of religious traditions than is available in mono-cultural studies. Although we have focused on national culture, it is important to recognize that culture is a shared

and enforced meaning system embraced by members of any functioning group. However, a nation is only one such group and distal to the individual. Families, both of origin and of creation, are more proximal, as are religious groups and other communities of which the individual is a participating member. We hypothesize that these various cultures will each exercise a moderating influence on the interplay among the motivations, cognitions, and behaviors associated with religious phenomena.

In this essay, we have attempted to indicate the role of culture in this interplay by using putatively relevant features of national culture. In future studies of religious phenomena, we hope that social scientists will incorporate culture as a conceptual and operational variable in their research designs. When studying individual religious phenomena, we would hope that a person's religious heritage within a given nation, such as Atheist, Buddhist, Hindu, Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, Baha'i, and others, along with their majority/minority religious status within their political unit, could be examined as a factor leading to greater or lesser subjective well-being depending on cultural context.

Previous research on religious phenomena has been piecemeal, tendentious, and opportunistic; there is a yawning need for more sensitive and comprehensive measures of religious phenomena, as Barrett (2011) has signaled in his review of CSR research. Here, for example, he discusses the fundamental interpersonal domain of prosociality-cooperation:

...what aspects of religion (e.g., beliefs, existential security, moral teachings, social identification, ritual participation) encourage prosocial attitudes and actions, and why? What are the boundaries on this prosociality? For instance, it may be that only particular types of religiousness or particular levels of religiosity bear these prosocial marks (see, e.g., Blogowska Saroglou 2011), or differentially apply to

various classes of others (e.g., my own religious group, all of humanity, all living things). (p. 235)

Further in this vein, Emmons et al. (1998) have written,

Initial research into the effects of religiousness was served satisfactorily by a rudimentary conception of spirituality. However, further progress requires advances in the measurement of spirituality, reflecting more refined ideas about what spirituality is and what role it plays in the lives of individual persons. (p. 392)

Emmons' (2005) work on spiritual strivings is a case in point. He writes,

Spiritual strivings refer to goals that are oriented toward the sacred. They are those personal goals that are concerned with ultimate purpose, ethics, commitment to a higher power, and a seeking of the divine in daily experience. By identifying and committing themselves to spiritual goals, people strive to develop and maintain a relationship with the sacred. In other words, spiritual strivings are strivings that reflect a desire to transcend the self, that reflect an integration of the individual with larger and more complex units, or that reflect deepening or maintaining a relationship with a higher power. Strivings are coded as spiritual if they reflect concern for an integration of the person with larger and more complex units: with humanity, nature, with the cosmos (“to achieve union with the totality of existence”, “to immerse myself in nature and be part of it”, “to live my life at all times for God,” “to approach life with mystery and awe”). (p. 736)

Emmons et al.s' is a welcome conceptualization in the study of religious phenomena because of its sympathetic penetration to the core of what many thinkers have identified as the essence of non-sectarian religiousness in human life:

...spiritual strivings contain both conventional religious themes as well as more personalized expressions of spiritual concern. Although my focus in this article is primarily with “religious spirituality,” it is certainly the case that other, nonreligious, humanistic versions of the concept can be detected in personal strivings as well. Coding strivings in this manner allows for greater inclusivity than do many existing measures of spirituality or religiosity and is sensitive to the diversity of spiritual expression in a religiously pluralistic culture. (2005, p. 736)

Emmons provides a catalogue of 11 other strivings, culled from the motivational literature. As strivings, they have a goal-oriented focus on social as well as personal enactments that enable social scientists to appreciate their relative roles in influencing the individual’s outcomes from living. This contextualizing of spiritual strivings within a broader framework of human strivings enables Emmons to conclude that, “the correlations between the proportion of spiritual strivings and well-being measures were stronger than any other type of striving that has been studied, exceeding those for intimacy, power, or generativity” (Emmons et al., 1998, p. 410). Thus, he is able to assess the impact of spiritual strivings relative to a comprehensive array of other human strivings. Against this backdrop, spiritual strivings are revealed as a powerful feature of an individual’s being-in-the-world.

Furthermore, Emmons et al. (1998) found that,

The proportion of spiritual strivings within the person’s overall striving profile was significantly associated with rated importance of religion, attendance at religious services, frequency of prayer, and measure of intrinsic religiousness (Gorsuch & McPherson, 1989). With respect to SWB [Subjective Well Being], spiritual strivings tended to be related to higher levels of well-being, especially to greater

purpose in life and to both marital and overall life satisfaction. Spiritual strivings accounted for significant variance in **well-being** outcomes above and beyond the religious variables of attendance, rated importance, and prayer frequency. (p. 410)

This network of findings surrounding spiritual strivings suggests their centrality in human life, reinforcing the claimed importance of religion in the lives of individuals, as seen in Tillich's (1957) designation of spirituality as "the ultimate concern."

However, it is important to note that Emmons' ambitious and demanding research program was conducted with American college students, who fall within the WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic; Henrich et al., 2010) contributors to the majority of research on religious phenomena, but who constitute a narrow slice of our planet's inhabitants experiencing religious phenomena. Multi-cultural research awaits us, using Emmons' and others' more sensitive and less ethnocentric conceptualizations of religious phenomena.

For a further union, a deeper communion
 Through the dark cold and the empty desolation,
 The wave cry, the wind cry, the vast waters
 Of the petrel and the porpoise.
 In my end is my beginning.
 T. S. Eliot, *East Coker*, 1940

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