Christianity And Cognitive Psychology

Christianity vs. Cognitive Psychology

Psychology is essentially the science of human behaviour and knowing more about human behaviour is very valuable to many trades, especially trades that involve interacting with humans. Such trades include the medical profession and religious institutions.

Cognitive Psychology

By cognitive psychology we are referring to processes that cannot be seen with the naked eye; they involve the learning process, intentional process, and some processes that we term ‘higher level cognitive processes’ that involve decision making and problem solving processes. Cognitive psychology is essentially all the skills that we relate to a thinking person, cannot really be seen with the naked eye but are really important to formulating our thoughts and carrying out our daily lives in a way that is meaningful.

Does Christianity Align with the Concept of Cognitive Psychology?

Christianity is all about interacting with God and humans; how they think and how they can become better christians and in this regard, similarities between cognitive psychology and Christianity can be narrowly drawn. From a theoretical perspective, Christianity does not align with the concept of cognitive psychology in that Christianity describes human behaviour and processes of faith and beliefs while cognitive psychology attaches these to other factors, such as the environment that humans are in. Christianity teaches that a person’s conflict only arise in the area of belief therefore conflicting with cognitive psychology’s understanding that a human’s cognitive functions and behaviours can be shaped by God, heredity and the environment.

The Christian Bible contains information that is thought to be superior and authoritative to humans so they can glean from other sources of information. The Bible’s teaching about humans is believed to be useful, determinative and reliable. A perfect example would be the case of a rape victim; cognitive psychology recommends the following processes to treat a sexual assault victim: “education about common reactions to trauma, relaxation training, imaginal reliving of the rape memory, exposure to trauma reminders, and cognitive restructuring” (Jaycox et al 2002). Christianity recommends a more spiritual approach: First, Deuteronomy 22:25-27 safeguards the survivor of sexual assault from being unjustly blamed or ignored. Secondly, the Christian Bible states that victims are not alone by stressing how extremely tender God is to the victims, He is close to the broken hearted and he saves those who are crushed in their spirit. Finally, the Bible advises prayer, fasting and counselling. These counselling sessions are always referred by the laws and teachings of the Christian Bible.

Christianity also has a catharsis for Christians who are in need of psychological guidance, I John 1:9 states 'If we confess our sins He's faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse

us from all unrighteousness' Therefore, by these standards, a person can still seek the help from a psychologist for support. Psychology encourages people to confront their deep seated issues by facilitating the investigations into their cognitive regions to determine the cause of their conflict while Christianity's approach is to seek divine intervention.

Cognitive Psychology on Christianity

When studying the concepts of cognitive psychology it becomes apparent that this discipline does not subvert the Christian belief but instead, deems Christianity or religion necessary to humans. One of the things that is implicit and sometimes explicit in the scientific study of religion is that religion is a human phenomenon that can be studied with the same psychological and physiological tools that are used to study other phenomenon. Religion uses the same cognitive, neurophysiological processes that every other human activity does.

Cognitive psychology posits the concept of "theory of mind" as something that humans need to fully function as individuals. This is the central concept of cognitive psychology that touches on how a human mind interprets other's intentions. When studying neurophysiological processes, studies have found that the parts of the brain that are activated when a subjects considers faith are those that are used for the interpretation of people's intention and interpretation of the world. According to these studies, these are the same cognitive parts that give humans more insight, unlike other animals. Studies further found that humans mainly use the same regions that divide feelings and intentions of others to interpret God's feeling and intentions.

Cognitive psychology postulates that religion is the human response to the divine, and because it is a human response, it is mediated through the cognitive system and encompasses our neurophysiology. Cognitive psychology agrees that religion is a fundamental intrinsic part of humanity that will continue to shape the way that people behave, their identifications, and their societies. Cognitive science by itself does not tell us whether the Christian belief is true or false or good or bad but pursues to understand the relationship between the mind and belief.

Bible Verses That Talk About the Mind

The Christian bible does not really offer us all the answers on how a human's mind works but it does offer some verses that I believe are the tools and knowledge that is needed for one to be cognitively sound therefore promote the human condition.

1. 'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord' (Isaiah 55:8 ESV).
2. 'Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths' (Proverbs 3:5-6 ESV).
3. 'All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness' (2 Timothy 3:16 ESV).

These verses indirectly explain the cognition of Christians when it comes to their belief. These verses advice against the following of one's understanding but encourage leaning on the teachings of God to promote the human condition. These verses introduce why some Christians feel threatened by the concepts of cognitive psychology, which are deemed as "your own

understanding”

Interesting Bible Character

From a cognitive perspective I would want to elevate King Saul who was believed to have been tormented by an evil spirit from God. This torment also brought waves of madness unto him. King Saul was the first King of Israel, and after repeated acts of disobedience “the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and a harmful spirit from the Lord tormented him' (1 Samuel 16:14). Saul’s advisors offered to find the king a person who could play the harp so that the music would chase away the evil spirit. This is when a young David was brought into Saul’s palace to play soothing music that restored his sanity. Then, after the kingdom started to favour David for his strength and war abilities, King Saul wanted him dead.

I am extremely interested in Saul’s mental inconsistencies as he got older. I would want to find out if his age was the central cause of his delusions or was it his jealousy and disposition. I would expect to learn that Saul was bi-polar or schizophrenic. Mental illness is not really articulated in the bible because the cultures of that time believed mental illness to be indicative of demon possession. Today, Saul’s episodes can be likened to schizophrenia, bipolar, or even manic episodes. Schizophrenia is a mental disorder that can affect a person’s behaviour, thought process and feeling. Such people appear to have lost touch with reality, as king Saul exhibited. Schizophrenia can be placed into three categories, ‘Negative’. ‘Positive’, and ‘Cognitive’. In these categories you find that the patient hallucinates, is delusional, and has thought disorders etc., as Saul was.

Conclusion

Cognitive psychology gives a clear picture of how people think, why they have feelings, why they feel the way they do when they think the things that they do. Cognitive Psychology has also explained the relationship between thought and emotion therefore can become very relevant to issues of Christianity. The Christian belief system essentially embodies a lot of things in the world like what is moral, what moral reasoning is like or is supposed to be like, and what is right and true. These two subjects can work in tandem because from a cognitive psychology point of view, religion is essential therefore, the fears that Christians have on this discipline are misinformed.

References

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