

Understanding Disciplinary Significance:
Allen Bergin's 1980 Article on Religious Values

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This chapter may differ from the other chapters of this book in focus and structure. First, the focus of this chapter is disciplinary significance rather than greatness. Although the analysis of greatness has obvious importance, few could ever hope to aspire to the works of psychology's greats, such as Sigmund Freud and William James. The student of psychology is more likely to write an article of significance than greatness. This focus also permits more contemporary works to be analyzed and allows access to crucial information (e.g., author interview) that a more historical work of greatness would preclude.

The second difference of this chapter is its narrative rather than analytical structure. The chapter basically portrays two narratives about significance. The first describes how we (the authors) came to understand the complexities of disciplinary significance. The lessons of this first narrative include issues of citation quantity and reception quality, pivotal elements in the recognition and understanding of significance. These lessons enabled us to establish criteria for the selection of a particular article of significance—Bergin 1980. The second narrative, then, is a story of the formulation, characteristics, and reception of this article. As we show in the final section, the lessons of this narrative entail ten practical guidelines for those who wish to write significant works.

Understanding Disciplinary Significance

We found the understanding of disciplinary significance surprisingly complicated. Unlike great works—which are often already recognized as such—recently significant articles

have not undergone the “test of time,” and so they are not as easily recognized. Great works are frequently marked by their role and survival through the various developments of history.

Recently significant articles, on the other hand, rarely carry such marks. This is not to say that they are not acknowledged as significant in some manner, but this acknowledgement is more subtle and complex.

Quantity of Citations. As an important case in point, consider how the simple quantity of citations does not necessarily denote a significant work. Although such quantitative measures are typically considered “relatively objective” (Sternberg, 1996, p. 70), they are not only contextless but also potentially misleading as an index of an article’s reception in a discipline. For instance, an article could be widely cited as the antithesis of quality or insightfulness. Also, as Douglas (1992) has described (himself the author of a highly cited article), many citations are simply incorrect, because the citation does not support its placement in the text—“as if the author had not read even so much as the [citation’s] abstract” (p. 407).

Another problem with a mere count of citations is that the most highly cited articles are routinely articles about methods and statistics (Douglas, 1992; Sternberg, 1992). Apparently, psychology’s “methodolatry”—its singular fascination with all types of methods—leads to this peculiarity (Danziger, 1990; Slife, 1998). In this sense, a high level of citations does not necessarily mean a high level of significance; citation numbers may indicate that everyone in psychology uses methods and statistics (and needs highly cited references to get their article through an editorial process). The high citation of method articles could also indicate a problem. When a discipline’s most cited articles involve methods and statistics rather than ideas and theories, it could indicate greater concern with style than substance (Slife & Williams, 1995).

With this context of citations, our criteria for article selection included not only a relatively recent contribution (with an author who was alive and active) but also a theoretical contribution that significantly advanced, if not revolutionized, the ideas of the discipline. This implied for us both the quantity and quality of citations. As problematic as the mere quantity of citations is, it would be difficult to consider a work truly significant if it were not highly cited. Although there are undoubtedly published works that are highly significant but not highly cited, we hoped to find an article that was acclaimed as well as incisive. As Robert Douglas (1992) put it, citations are a “blue-collar” index of impact, made primarily by people in the trenches rather than by the generals” (p. 405). However, we could not rely completely on numerical count because of its crudeness and potentially misleading nature. Therefore, we also needed some indication of the quality of an article’s reception in the discipline.

Quality of Reception. A good reception, we reasoned, would minimally imply three qualities, particularly for a theoretical contribution: positive recognition, dialectical opposition, and research stimulation. First, some members of the discipline, preferably important members, should explicitly recognize an article’s significance. This is not to assert that leading members of a discipline are the sole deciders of significance. Indeed, leading members may be entrenched in a paradigm that is giving way to “young turks,” as Kuhn (1970) has described. It is only to say that we preferred the article of our analysis to have some clear acclaim, rather than deciding the import of the article on our own.

At the same time, we would not expect the response to a theoretical article to be total acclamation. A significant theoretical piece should “stir the pot” more than “keep the status quo.” Our second criterion of quality, then, was a dialectical or oppositional response. That is, we expected a significant article to be controversial, and thus have its detractors as well as its

adherents. Particularly if the article had a revolutionary or paradigm-violating tone, it should not be received with total acclaim. It should have a number of leading thinkers in the discipline (presumably those with an investment in the prevailing paradigm) clearly and expressively challenging its conclusions. As Dr. Who once put it, “You can always judge a man by the quality of his enemies” (BBC, 2001). We believe a similar dialectic is also part of the judgment of an article’s significance.

With both positive and dialectical responses, how could such an article not be heuristic as well? How could these responses not lead to programs of research and new lines of application? Would not the innovations and controversies generated need to be explored and resolved? Here, we would envision not only the usual empirical research, whether quantitative or qualitative, but also well-reasoned theoretical contributions, looking at the assumptions and implications of the article in question. Ideally, an article of significance would be responsible for new lines of thinking and/or applications, or at least the reinvigoration or substantive modification of old lines. Either way, a significant article should lead to further disciplinary discussion and exploration.

Meeting the Criteria of Significance

With these qualities as our criteria, we selected Allen Bergin’s 1980 article entitled “Psychotherapy and Religious Values.” This selection was relatively surprising to us, because Allen Bergin is a (retired) colleague at Brigham Young University, the professional home of this chapter’s authors. We realized immediately that our selection could appear to be “home-grown” and thus our analysis discounted. We will admit that the convenience of interacting with the author occurred to us. However, this played no part in our selection, especially in view of recent

advances in academic communication (e.g., e-mail). As the reader will see, Bergin 1980 not only meets all the criteria we initially set forth, it surpasses them.

First, Dr. Bergin continues to be quite active in his scholarly pursuits (e.g., Richards & Bergin, 2000). In fact, he recently won two prestigious awards for excellence, including the “1998 Distinguished Career Award” from the Society for Psychotherapy Research and the “1998 Oskar Pfister Award” from the American Psychiatric Association—for outstanding contributions to understanding the interplay between religion and social issues. Second, Bergin 1980 is clearly a theoretical contribution. Not only is it distinctly nonmethodological, in the sense described above, but it is also nonempirical. Although Bergin discusses numerous empirical studies, he does not report an original empirical study in this article. Rather, he advances knowledge through critically examining the ideas and assumptions of the discipline, as well as proposing an alternative for empirical test.

We quote excerpts from the article’s abstract here, so our readers have some sense of the article’s main contents:

The alienation of therapeutic psychology from religious values is described and contrasted with a growing professional and public interest in religious experience and commitment. Six theses . . . are presented and documented [that] include a contrast between dominant mental health ideologies, defined as clinical pragmatism and humanistic idealism, and theistic realism, which is a proposed alternative viewpoint. . . . It is argued that until the theistic belief systems of a large percentage of the population are sincerely considered and conceptually integrated into our work, we are unlikely to be fully effective professionals. (p. 95)

The content of this abstract may be striking. Few people would assume that an article about religious values is relevant to psychology and psychotherapy. Moreover, at the time of its publication, most psychologists were quite satisfied to operate in an objective and a secular fashion, ignoring the issue of religious values altogether. However, part of the significance of Bergin 1980 is not only that it made religious values a topic of psychological study, but also that it facilitated, if not stimulated, an entire program of research on religion and mental health. As we will attempt to show, this article has met both criteria of significance: a high quantity of disciplinary citations and a high quality of disciplinary reception, including a high impact on related research.

Quantity of Citations. To interpret the quantity of its citations (see Table 1), some sense of the context or norms of citation numbers is required. Many psychologists are shocked at how few citations even top-rated articles receive. This reaction could indicate psychology's lack of general influence or, more likely, that few psychologists know what to expect regarding citation quantities. As it happens, citations are generally more rare than many professionals realize. After all, the article being cited has to be read (to some degree) by a fellow professional (a phenomenon that is increasingly rare) and then deemed sufficiently important to be mentioned in that professional's work (another relative rarity). We submit that this two-part filter makes the citation process particularly arduous, especially given increasing specialization and decreasing time to read. To be cited at all is no mean feat.

As a pertinent illustration, the tenth most cited article (Cronbach, 1955) in one of the premier journals of psychology, the Psychological Bulletin, was only cited on approximately 400 occasions (Sternberg, 1992). This number might seem impressive, depending again on one's expectations, but this number is the accumulation of citations over **nearly** a forty-year span of

time. This means that one of the top ten articles of psychology—in a journal we would expect to have generic and citable interest for the discipline—only garnered 100 citations per decade or approximately ten per year! Put in this context, the two-decade total of over 200 citations for Bergin 1980 is comparable (see Table 1).

Table 1.

Years	Citations
1980-1985	55
1986-1990	70
1991-1995	46
1996- Aug. 2000	44
Total: 20 years	Total = 215

As Table 1 indicates, Bergin 1980 appears to have considerable “staying” power—not diminishing much in citations after almost two decades. At this rate, Bergin 1980 could be comparable to Cronbach (1955), potentially another member of the top ten. Admittedly, this comparison is crude, but it is only intended as a way of putting the citation numbers in context. It shows how respectable, if not stellar, the citations numbers for Bergin 1980 are. As further support for this conclusion, we note that Bergin received over 1000 reprint requests for this article (Bergin, 1985a). Again, most scholars lack norms for this obviously high number. Still, it is safe to say that few scholars have even come close to receiving this many reprint requests. For example, after hearing about the number of Bergin 1980 reprint requests, leading psychotherapy researcher Sol Garfield made clear that he had never experienced such a flood of requests (Bergin, personal communication, March 19, 2001).

Quality of Reception. What about the quality of this article’s disciplinary reception? Although perhaps unlikely, one thousand reprint requests could have evidenced an intense

negative response toward Bergin's article. Many scholars could have been citing this article for its vices rather than its virtues. Recall that here we postulated three main characteristics of reception quality that should indicate an article's significance: positive recognition by leading scholars in the discipline, dialectical opposition by leading scholars in the field, and some evidence of a resulting program of research. How did Bergin 1980 fare in relation to these three criteria of reception?

Regarding positive recognition, Bergin has kept and published many of the letters he received with the requests for reprints (Bergin, 1985a). Even a brief scan of these letters reveals the number of disciplinary leaders who applauded and lauded Bergin 1980, though they did not always agree with the article. The high praise of Ellen Berscheid (at the time, Professor of Psychology, University of Minnesota) is representative: "I congratulate you for saying what I believe has needed to be said for a long time . . . I very much hope that this paper will, in retrospect, be considered one of the most important to have been published in the area in the new decade." Obviously, if our analysis is correct, Dr. Berscheid's hope has been fulfilled.

Consider the quality of the following commenters (with their affiliations at the time) as well as the quality of the brief excerpts from their letters:

"I commend you on your excellent article" (Karl Menninger, The Menninger Foundation);

"On the whole, I am very much in agreement although we may differ on some aspects" (Hans Strupp, Distinguish Professor of Psychology, Vanderbilt University);

"It is through writings such as yours that religious values will receive greater consideration in psychotherapy (Albert Bandura, Professor of Psychology, Stanford University/past president of APA);

“I don’t disagree as much as you might think . . . I do believe there is some kind of transcendent organizing influence in the universe which operates in man as well” (Carl Rogers, Center for the Studies of the Person/past president of APA).

Even someone with a relatively superficial understanding of psychology would instantly recognize the stature of these commenters. Berscheid, Strupp, Menninger, Sears, Bandura, and Rogers were widely acknowledged not only as leaders in the fields of psychology and psychiatry but also as the leaders at the time of these comments. The enthusiasm of the comments, often in spite of disagreements with Bergin 1980, surely fulfills the first (if not second) criterion of reception quality—the positive recognition of disciplinary leaders. As Bergin reports (Bergin, personal communication, March 19, 2001), one leading psychiatrist, David Larson (formerly with the National Institute of Mental Health and currently President of the National Institute for Health Care Research), confessed to being so positively moved by Bergin 1980 that he had “tears in his eyes” after reading it. Surely, few journal articles in recent psychology have spurred such an emotional and stellar response.

What about the dialectical and oppositional elements of this response? Here again, Bergin 1980 has met with a singular set of rejoinders and negative responses, signaling its controversial and perhaps even revolutionary nature for the discipline (which we will later explore). Perhaps the most prominent of these rejoinders was the response of Albert Ellis (1980), a leading scholar and therapist in the field. Ellis identified himself as a “probabilistic atheist” and contended that “human disturbance is largely (though not entirely) associated with and springs from absolutistic thinking—from dogmatism, inflexibility, and devout shoulds, oughts, and musts—and that extreme religiosity. . . called true believerism, is essentially

emotional disturbance (Ellis, 1980, p. 635). Bergin replied to Ellis and others in the same journal issue (Bergin, 1980b).

This “dialogue” between Bergin and Ellis played for almost two decades, with several conference encounters (e.g., Bergin, 1985b; 1996; Ellis, 1985; 1996) as well as reprints of this dialogue in psychological readers (e.g., Slife & Rubinstein, 1992; Miller, 1992). Other noted scholars have also published primarily negative responses (e.g., Walls, 1980), but, again, a sense of perspective is needed to understand this dialectic. Although published responses are routine in some journals (e.g., the American Psychologist), published responses are extremely rare for most other publications, particularly continuing responses (over two decades) from leading psychotherapists and researchers the caliber of Albert Ellis. Clearly, such responses meet our dialectical criterion.

Research stimulation. The only criterion of quality that remains is research stimulation: Did Bergin 1980 positively stimulate further disciplinary discussion and exploration? Again, this article seems not only to have met this heuristic criterion but also to have surpassed it. It is true that the research on psychotherapy values precedes Bergin 1980, going back at least as far as Rosenthal’s classic studies some 46 years ago (Rosenthal, 1955). Still, there is no doubt about the heavy and stimulating influence of Bergin’s 1980 contribution. The first author of the present chapter can attest to this influence because he had to review this rather voluminous research for two projects (Slife, Smith, & Burchfield, in press; Smith & Slife, in press). Bergin 1980 clearly figures prominently in all the modern phases of this research. In fact, researchers routinely cite this article first (chronologically), as if it is the primary historical stimulant for the modern phases of this research program (e.g., Chaddock & McMinn, 1999; Larson, Swyers &

McCullough, 1998; Shafranske, 1996; Shafranske & Malony, 1990; Watson, Morris, & Hood, 1989; Worthington, 1988).

The influence of Bergin 1980 is not limited to research on psychotherapy values. The import of this article can also be seen in a related and more popular literature—the burgeoning research on spirituality and religion in psychology. That is, Bergin 1980 was not just about values in psychotherapy; it was about religious values in psychotherapy. This article was one of the very first to explicitly address and explore the interface between religious doctrine and psychological “doctrine” concerning mental health (as recognized by the 1998 award from the American Psychiatric Association and the 1990 Williams James Award from the APA Division 36, Psychology and Religion).

Although religious affiliation had been used for years as an independent or a dependent variable, few psychologists had taken religious values into account (for an exception, see Collins, 1977). Almost no psychologist had taken seriously the rather stark contrast between these values and the secular values implicit in psychotherapy. In this sense, the heuristic influence of Bergin 1980 is better understood for the role it played in the coming torrent of research involving religion and mental health (Keating & Fretz, 1990; Richards & Bergin, 1999; Shafranske, 1996; Watson, Morris, & Wood, 1989; Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2000). In this arena, a number of investigators have explicitly honored Dr. Bergin and his most pivotal position statement—Bergin 1980. Most notably, Eric Swedin (1999) views Bergin historically as one of the main “characters” in the “integrating of modern psychologies and religion” (p. 13).

Bergin’s prestigious 1989 award from the American Psychological Association—Distinguished Professional Contributions to Knowledge—also evidences the crucial importance of the research begun by Bergin 1980. An excerpt from the award citation makes clear Bergin’s

pivotal role in the religion and values research: “Allen Bergin has established himself as a leading expert in psychotherapy research, and has challenged psychological orthodoxy to emphasize the importance of values and religion in therapy” (“Allen E. Bergin: Citation,” 1990, p. 474). With this recognition, it is apparent that Bergin 1980 was integral not only to the reinvigoration of values research in psychotherapy but also to the entire spectrum of investigations involving mental health and religion. Surely again, Bergin 1980 meets our criteria for facilitating, if not spurring, programs of research. In this sense, it surpasses all our criteria of significance.

The Narrative of Bergin 1980

How, then, do we go about understanding the meaning of this significance? Here we conducted a qualitative analysis of sorts. We used qualitative methods somewhat informally to examine pertinent documents (e.g., letters) and query the author about his experiences in writing Bergin 1980 (Kvale, 1996). We met Professor Bergin at his home for a two-hour interview, which we then transcribed and analyzed into what we would term “the narrative of Bergin 1980.” That is, we specifically asked Dr. Bergin to address the temporality of Bergin 1980—the relevant context that immediately preceded his writing of the article, his experiences in actually writing the article, and his experiences related to the article following its publication. We regret that space limitations prevent us from lengthy quotations, but the transcription is available from the authors. Needless to say, we are grateful to Dr. Bergin for his time and support of this project.

Before. Interestingly, Bergin felt strong emotions about the ideas of his 1980 article many years before the article was formally conceived. He reported experiencing a “kind of brooding feeling” that a large part of his professional desires and aspirations were “unfulfilled, frustrated, and wanting expression.” Although he believes that much of his training (MIT,

Stanford, Wisconsin) prevented this expression, he views several presentations and publications before Bergin 1980 (Bergin, 1977; Bergin, 1978; Bergin, 1979) as approximate expressions. In this sense, Bergin 1980 was “not a sudden thing,” because it had been brewing and brooding for a long while. However, these approximate expressions were frustrating because they lacked a “complete voice.”

One likely turning point in his struggle for full expression was Bergin’s move from Columbia University to Brigham Young University (BYU). BYU is the flagship university of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Bergin’s own religious affiliation. Although Bergin was very accomplished at Columbia—establishing himself as a Full Professor and one of the premier psychotherapy researchers of his day (e.g., Bergin & Garfield, 1971; Bergin & Strupp, 1972; Swedin, 1999)—the atmosphere surrounding values, especially religious values, was dramatically different at the two universities. Columbia University was the prototypical secular university; religious rhetoric, for example, was considered inappropriate in psychology courses. BYU, on the other hand, actively encouraged the comparison of the sacred and the secular—with sacred (religious) values actively discussed alongside secular values. In this sense, the move to BYU provided a local venue for Bergin to give free and full expression to his professional desires and aspirations.

The discipline at the national and international levels was another matter entirely. Psychologists generally maintained a staunch secular position on the issue of values, though they rarely viewed this as a “position.” Most considered secularism as a kind of value-free neutrality, which they assumed complemented the objectivism and scientism of the discipline (Slife, in press). Although this position was, from Bergin’s perspective, a “misconception” as well as an obstacle to his nascent project, he also saw many encouraging signs in the years leading up to his

1980 contribution. For instance, he took encouragement from the founding of the APA Division of Psychology and Religion (Division 36) in 1976 and the publishing of Collins's (1977) book on religion and psychology. These signs also emboldened Bergin. He found himself framing clearer and clearer statements of his own ideas, along with an increasing resolution to present them to his discipline.

Three elements seem to have played a major role in this increasingly bold and resolved stance: clarity of vision, sense of injustice, and willingness to take risks. Regarding the issue of clarity, the mid to late seventies was a time in which Bergin believed he finally saw that the "Emperor had no clothes." That is, he finally realized how the vaunted neutrality and objectivism of psychology was really an illusion or a sham. From Bergin's perspective, the seeming neutrality and secularism of psychology was actually a set of value-laden opinions about how psychology and psychotherapy should be conducted. Secularists, in this sense, were able to express their value-laden opinions through academic jargon (e.g., at Columbia University), as though it were scholarship rather than an ideological agenda. Why was he, a religious person, prevented from expressing his views in standard academic forums?

This led to Bergin getting his "Irish up," as he puts it. He sensed an injustice in academic psychology that had important consequences for its applied realms. For instance, the devout religious beliefs of clients were consistently being discounted in therapy (Richards & Bergin, 1997). Although most psychotherapists assumed that they valued these client values, regardless of their own beliefs, empirical research demonstrated otherwise (Richards & Bergin, 1997; 2000). Consequently, Bergin felt he had to address this injustice. Secularism had become its own unacknowledged brand of religion, with secularists attempting to "convert" religious people (Tjeltveit, 1999).

With his “Irish up,” Bergin found a new willingness to take risks as well as new approaches to address these issues. He “experimented” with this courage and these approaches in many university colloquia and national conferences. He remembers distinctly saying to himself at one point, “I think my academic career is over.” That is, he somehow realized that the only way he could even begin to give complete expression to his views was to face and overcome the possibility of professional death. As long as he was concerned about his professional reputation, he knew that he would never give full voice to what he felt was the injustice of his discipline.

At one point in 1977, however, he realized he had gone too far. He describes this presentation as “bombastic” and a “bridge burner,” and his startled audience apparently told him so. Sensitive to this reaction, Bergin immediately took stock. He resolved to take an evolutionary, rather than a revolutionary, perspective and look to the long-term for change in his discipline. This long-term perspective allowed him to feel less pressure, stow some of his indignation, and concentrate on “building rather than burning bridges.” Interestingly, his 1980 article was a direct result of this perspective. Bergin knew he had finally found the right tone for this article (and his entire project) when his erstwhile mentor, Carl Rogers, remarked upon reading Bergin 1980, “Allen, I’m so happy that you are finally speaking from your own gut” (Bergin, personal communication, March 19, 2001).

During. Bergin reports that the writing of his 1980 contribution was relatively easy. Indeed, the manuscript seemed to “write itself,” undergoing far fewer drafts than his usual papers. This ease, however, was no surprise. The ideas of the manuscript had been fermenting for many years, and he had a strong sense of his audience. Although he was keenly aware of the potential disciplinary opposition to this sort of paper, he somehow knew that there were “lots of

other people out there like me” who were “in the closet.” In this sense, he perceived the importance of the paper before it was written.

In terms of writing organization, Bergin believes (in retrospect) that he unconsciously adopted the writing style and content structure of his other most highly cited article—Bergin, 1966 (reprinted in 13 anthologies). He had long viewed the writing of his 1966 article as his most accessible and readable, though he had not specifically attempted to write in this manner since. The structure of the 1966 article has each main and secondary point outlined and bulleted, so that a reader can readily gain the primary concepts of the paper in two minutes and the secondary concepts in five minutes. Indeed, Bergin 1980 is so well organized in this regard that readers only need to read the “fine print” (supporting material) if they have a problem with a main point. Even here—in the supporting material—the prose is cogent enough to satisfy all but the most opposed of readers.

What enabled Bergin to write so accessibly and convincingly? Bergin considers his writing ability to be “God-given,” though he admits it was greatly enriched by the “uncompromising critique of others.” His own critique of the work of others, particularly his graduate students, also facilitated his writing skills. Bergin feels especially “blessed” by students because his “Irish was often up” on their behalf. “I love students,” he explains, “I felt they were often mistreated by the obfuscations and pedantry of very bright people who were massaging their egos with all those big words.” Bergin struggles with the torturous prose of many journal authors himself, having served on the editorial boards of 14 professional journals, so he especially empathizes with students. He also believes his religious convictions helped him avoid a “big ego” and put the emphasis in his writing where it should be—clarity of expression.

After. Following publication, Bergin reports that the response of readers to his 1980 contribution “blew” him away. Although he had some confidence that the article would be important, he clearly underestimated the degree of both positive and negative reactions from his professional colleagues. The first sign, of course, was the veritable flood of reprint requests and letters, numbering over 1000. He was surprised at the high quality and emotionality of the letters that accompanied these requests (see section above), many writers confessing their most privately held beliefs and convictions to him. Several published responses followed the reprint requests, along with numerous invitations to speak and discuss his proposals and conclusions.

At the same time, Bergin was a little surprised at the level of opposition that resulted from the article’s publication. Ellis’s (1980) response is perhaps indicative of this opposition: “Religiosity is in many respects equivalent to irrational thinking and emotional disturbance” (p. 298). In our interview with Bergin, however, he was struck more by his experience in presenting his ideas in Amsterdam, Holland. There, the level of opposition and even indignation at his presentation was unexpected. After all, from Bergin’s perspective he had “toned it down” and was in his “building bridges” mode. Unfortunately, even the modulated version of his ideas was met with utter (perceived) disdain, reminding Bergin of the disciplinary obstacles in his path. Subsequent debates with Ellis—a charismatic lecturer and debater—also drove a similar point home.

Bergin now sees that the 1980 article set a research agenda for many scholars, including himself. Still, he admits to some disappointment in what seemed like an inordinate delay in the initiation of this research. Although Bergin stated several clear hypotheses for subsequent research in his 1980 article, these hypotheses did not seem to be investigated until a few years later. In retrospect, this disappointment may have been due to his impatience about getting

things underway. In fact, the research “wheels” were probably rolling all the time, in terms of funding, organizational support, and experimental designs. Most importantly later in the decade, Sir John Templeton, Christian philanthropist, founded the Templeton Foundation for research on the religion/science relation, and David Larson organized the National Institute for Health Care Research in 1991 to investigate religion in relation to mental and physical health.

In the end, the article was reprinted six separate times, with many follow-up articles written by Bergin (Bergin, 1980b; Bergin, 1985a; Bergin, 1991). Bergin admits to some disappointment with the reception of a recent follow-up—the 1991 American Psychologist article. Despite its being published in perhaps the most visible and well-read journal of the discipline, its reception was “nothing” compared to the 1980 article. Bergin believes that its relatively bland reception indicates how far the discipline of psychology has come in accepting his 1980 ideas. No longer are they quite as scandalous or even as positive as they once were. The provocative context in which the original article was conceived is no longer present. Bergin truly feels that a new atmosphere, tolerant of research on spirituality and religion, is evident in the discipline.

The Lessons of the Narrative

What does this narrative have to offer us about the meaning of significance? Like many stories, it offers several “lessons” or “morals” that are not so much universal principles as they are rules of thumb or guidelines. Universal principles—if they even exist in this case—apply universally, regardless of the context. Lessons and morals, on the other hand, are more context or story dependent, though they are rarely context or story bound (Slife & Reber, 2001). That is, the application of a lesson probably requires modification to the particular context of its listener or reader, but a lesson is rarely only applicable to the original narrative context. What, then, is

the moral to the story of Bergin 1980? What do Bergin's experiences teach about what to consider in attempting to write a significant theoretical article?

1. Have a passion for the ideas. A genuine passion appears to help immensely. Too often, researchers write about intellectualized and specialized ideas in which they experience little personal or emotional investment. Bergin, however, had a strong sense of injustice about the privileged status of secular values, made personal by his compassion for students and religious clients. At Columbia, for instance, his students were imbued with secular values, often without their being labeled or distinguished as personal biases, and the secular therapists of New York City frequently discounted their religious clients' values. At BYU, on the other hand, many of Bergin's students were frustrated by the lack of spiritual perspectives in standard disciplinary readings. Recall that Bergin's "Irish" was up on many occasions, and he felt the need to right the seeming wrongs of the discipline. This passion provided him with the energy needed to develop and publish his ideas as well as the motivation to be as clear as possible.

2. Direct and refine the passion. Unfortunately, as Bergin learned, an unbridled passion can also obstruct his message. Passion must be harnessed in a hearable, respectful style. Bergin's Irish was only productive when he was building bridges to his audience rather than burning them. The opposition can be perceived as ignorant fools who lack your brilliance, or as respected colleagues who can teach you as you teach them. The former can result in a rhetorical style that is shrill and accusatory, whereas the latter can lead to a mutual dialogue, with lessons learned by all. Anyone who reads Bergin 1980—clearly a controversial stand on a controversial subject—will attest to its respect for the reader as well as its tough, yet conciliatory tone.

3. Develop an encouraging environment. A time and place are needed to formulate and develop ideas. Few truly significant theoretical contributions could be written without academic

freedom, in many senses. Controversial or revolutionary ideas rarely spring to the fore, wholecloth. They require time for their development (e.g., “brooding” and “fermenting”) and a place in which the author can feel encouraged to develop them. However, this encouragement appears to require more than simply academic freedom in the technical sense, which Columbia University surely provided Bergin. The development of truly controversial and revolutionary ideas may also require the presence of explicit encouragement.

4. Evaluate the environment’s practical constraints. The context of any institution carries with it informal parameters or limits about what is appropriate or inappropriate. Bergin, for example, did not feel it appropriate at Columbia to discuss explicitly Christian values in psychology classes, because psychology was considered a secular discipline. Columbia, in this sense, was a world-class bastion of secularism—participating in the same “injustice” and curtailment of (practical) religious freedom as the discipline of psychology. Interestingly, BYU has sometimes had its more technical academic freedom questioned (American Association of University Professors, 2001), whereas the technical academic freedom of Columbia University has never been doubted, as far as we know. Still, Bergin experienced greater academic freedom, in the practical sense, at BYU. His experiences at Columbia were integral to Bergin 1980 because they helped him see the reduction of practical freedom in secularism (i.e., the Emperor’s new clothes). The BYU experience, in this respect, served as a dramatic practical contrast.

5. Develop a clear sense of vision. With a bridled passion and encouraging work environment, an aspiring scholar is now ready to ask: What do I truly have to say? Too often, it seems, scholars do not ask this question and opt instead to “play the publication game.” Many readers may see this statement as unfair and certainly an overgeneralization. Still, it is difficult to read psychology’s journals without coming to this conclusion in some measure (cf. Sternberg,

1992; Tulving & Madigan, 1970). Bergin, on the other hand, was “blessed,” as he put it, with a strong sense of disciplinary vision. Although he needed time and an encouraging place to clarify and elaborate this vision, its seeds were planted long before he could remember. Could it be that all true scholars have such “seeds,” if they were to seriously seek and nurture them?

6. Risk disciplinary disapproval. Here, we believe one of the “morals” to the Bergin 1980 story is that these necessary conditions (points 1 – 5) are still insufficient and incomplete. Another crucial element is courage—the willingness to risk disciplinary disapproval in the development of a theoretical vision. As this story highlights, theoretical significance is often correlated with disciplinary controversy. Sternberg’s (1992) assessment of highly cited articles seems to concur: “behind almost all stunning successes in journal writing are risks and that these authors took a stand for what they believed and how they believed they should write about it” (p. 388). If controversial ideas were not enough, the author of such ideas must also fumble around—often through trial and error, often for many years—to find the right tone, vocabulary, venue, and rhetoric for the presentation of these ideas. New visions and new ideas, by their nature, require new frameworks, vocabulary, etc. Therefore, the courage needed to write significant articles involves not only the controversial nature of the ideas but also the sometimes humbling experiences one has in formulating and refining them.

7. Have a clear sense of audience. Given that writing is the medium of ideas, we cannot overlook how interconnected the content of an article is with its process. That is, the writing style and organization of a significant article is not inconsequential; it is integral to the message being presented as well as the follow-up expected from readers. Here, we believe, Bergin’s 1980 article is a model, particularly in this era of too-much-information-in-too-little-time. As the

narrative of Bergin 1980 shows, Bergin's composition began with a strong sense of his audience and a strong sense of caring for that audience.

8. Write clearly. Clarity of expression also appears to be vital to clarity of communication. Although this would seem to go without saying, any careful reading of psychology's journals shows how often this bears repeating. Recall that Bergin wanted to save his students from multi-syllabic vocabularies and strings of convoluted sentences. Unfortunately, journal editors are often perceived as encouraging such "specialized" writing and vocabularies. We believe that it is far easier for researchers to write to a more specialized than generalized audience. Moreover, complicated prose is frequently a cover for fuzzy thinking.

9. Allow the idea organization to mature. As important as clarity of audience and focus of expression are, the importance of article organization may even surpass these. The difficulty is that good organization almost always requires maturity of thinking. That is, the ideas frequently need to be, as Bergin put it, "brooding," "fermenting," and "crystallizing" for a long time before their organizational structure emerges. This is not to say that trial presentations and articles—intermediate to this emergence—should not be published. Indeed, without some sort of public distribution, vital feedback from colleagues would be curtailed. Rather, we are asserting that maturity of thinking is probably necessary for the organization of a truly significant article. Even a brief scan of Bergin 1980 will illustrate our point, particularly if it is juxtaposed to the run-of-the-mill theoretical article.

10. Make the organization easily accessible. Good organization also broadens an already overly pressed audience. Few professionals, these days, can truly peruse the entire "fine print" of an article, but many professionals can take in a few well-crafted main points. Consequently, if authors want an idea or point to stand out, they must make it stand out in the text, separating and

clearly demarcating main and secondary points from their supporting materials. Authors should never assume that readers will make this separation and demarcation for themselves. Similarly, authors should never assume that readers will know how to follow up the article's ideas. Bergin, for example, explicates nine hypotheses that can be investigated as a result of his ideas. The authors of significant articles must be explicit about how the reader can "join in" to the ideas presented.

Conclusion

We hope, in conclusion, that these ten points make explicit how the reader can "join in" to the ideas presented here—the narrative of Bergin 1980. These points cannot provide a recipe (or a set of principles) for writing a particular article of significance. There are too many other factors, such as professional culture and timing, that enter into the evaluation of significance. Still, these points can, we would hold, provide lessons for orienting one's scholarly life. Although many of them might be anticipated (e.g., clarity of writing), many seem to have been forgotten in today's psychology, such as bridled enthusiasm, professional courage, and practical constraints. Perhaps most importantly, there simply is no substitute for scholars to ask of themselves—sincerely and honestly: What is my passion? What do I truly have to say?

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