



2015

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Recommended Citation

Fox, Sheilagh (2015) "Intuitive Eating and the Gospel: an Exercise in Determining Compatibility," *Issues in Religion and Psychotherapy*: Vol. 37 : No. 1 , Article 11.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/irp/vol37/iss1/11>

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Intuitive Eating and the Gospel: An Exercise in Determining Compatibility

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Because psychotherapy is a “worldly healing art” (Oaks, 2010; Gleave, 2012), Gantt has strongly cautioned LDS therapists to be on their philosophical guards:

Should we commit ourselves (however inadvertently or unintentionally) to psychological theories or practices rooted in (and expressive of) human nature that deny or dismiss revealed truth, the Spirit will necessarily be limited or constrained in the degree of guidance it can provide us... Part and parcel of keeping our subject matter (i.e., the psychology of human beings) “bathed in the light and color of the restored gospel,” (Kimball, 1967)... is being willing to maintain a constant and critical vigilance regarding the intellectual foundations of our theories and practices. To do so requires a careful and sustained consideration of not only the contents of our psychology but also the doctrines of the restored gospel. (Gantt, 2012, p. 12–13).

It is in this spirit of constant and critical vigilance that I will attempt to determine if there is any philosophical inconsistency between the gospel and Intuitive Eating (IE), a theory that has some popularity in psychology. IE has inspired many studies investigating, among other things, its effectiveness as a health improvement intervention (Bacon, Stern, Van Loan, & Keim, 2005), its validity as a positive psychology construct (Tylka & Wilcox, 2006), and even two versions of a psychometric instrument attempting measure it (Tylka, 2006; Tylka & Kroon Van Diest, 2013). Furthermore, after enjoying several years of success,

authors Tribole and Resch released a second edition containing a chapter with a title that declares IE to be “the ultimate path towards healing from eating disorders” (Tribole & Resch, 2003, p. 214), a decidedly bold claim. Given its prevalence, is likely that many LDS therapists are using it to understand disordered eating behaviors as well as recommending it to clients. For this reason, I believe IE is worthy of a thoughtful examination of its underlying values and assumptions.

The thesis of IE is that hunger, satiety cues, and cravings can be relied upon to produce generally healthy habits, meaning the eating of appropriate serving sizes of a variety of nutritious foods while also allowing space for eating less healthy foods for pleasure in moderation. Negative patterns of health behavior occur when inner cues are obscured by a damaged relationship with food or body. Originally written by dietitians for laypeople, the 10 stated principles of IE are outlined as follows: (1) Reject the Diet Mentality; (2) Honor Your Hunger; (3) Make Peace with Food; (4) Challenge the Food Police; (5) Feel Your Fullness; (6) Discover the Satisfaction Factor; (7) Cope with Your Emotions Without Using Food; (8) Respect Your Body; (9) Exercise – Feel the Difference; and (10) Honor Your Health – Gentle Nutrition (2003).

In this paper, I will provide pertinent background information about the theories and cultural context that have shaped IE, analyze some of its hidden assumptions and values, provide a review of relevant

LDS teachings, and evaluate its compatibility with a gospel perspective.

Influences on IE

The nondiet movement and nutritional science

As acknowledged by Tribole and Resch, IE is a “bridge between the growing antidiets movement and the health community”, written because even though “the antidiets movement shuns dieting and hails body acceptance (thankfully), it often fails to address the health risks of obesity and eating” (p. xix).

Broadly speaking, the nondiet movement is a rejection of dieting asceticism, a value with a philosophical heritage that stretches back to ancient Greece. Plato, an idealist firmly committed to the superiority of the immaterial over the material, saw the appetite as something that was “bound... down like a wild animal which was chained up to man, and must be nourished if man was to exist” (Plato, trans. 1892, p. 492). He believed it would inevitably cause overindulgence in the absence of temperance as a counteracting virtue (Korsmeyer, 1999, p. 21). His immaterialism influenced later movements, including Neoplatonism and, ultimately, asceticism in Christianity (Gerson, 1996, p. 390). Certain aspects and practices of this Christian tradition of asceticism echo in modern Western culture in the form of dieting for a slim body (Twigg, p. 228–231; Bordo, 1993, p. 144).

For most of its history, nutritional science – the branch of the health community that Tribole and Resch are concerned with – was essentially chemistry applied to the body, an approach that more or less necessitated the body to be viewed as a biological machine. It was a discipline preoccupied with identifying components of food that were vital for life and the prevention of disease in the face of scarcity (Carpenter 2003a; Carpenter 2003b; Carpenter 2003c; Carpenter 2003d). Today, nutritional science is especially concerned with making food intake recommendations designed to prevent chronic disease (Gifford, 2002). Though the cultural context is different (i.e., scarcity is no longer the major problem in developed countries), the recommendations are still the product of a view that takes into account only the physical aspects of food and eating.

It is noteworthy in an examination of the philosophical underpinnings of IE that the fundamental objectives of its parent theories, the nondiet movement and nutritional science, coexist in a kind of dialectical tension. One seeks to reject control, and the other to gain it. One is a reaction to the distress caused by a culturally deep-rooted dieting asceticism, and the other is a biological science of mechanistic explanations and recommendations. They are ontologically and epistemologically dissimilar: the concerns of the nondiet movement exist primarily in the realm of individual and shared intangible feelings and meanings known experientially and relationally, and the concerns of nutritional science arise from tangible scientific materialism known through an empirical and rational scientific method. Without further theoretical framework, components of these theories cannot really meaningfully interact, consistent with the dualism of Rene Descartes. However, IE rejects mind and body dualism by borrowing a view of human nature from psychology which does allow for a more coherent integration.

Psychology

Although the transactional analysis of Berne is used to conceptualize the inner forces driving maladaptive eating behaviors and the rational emotive behavior therapy (REBT) of Ellis is eclectically used as a means to change those forces (Ellis & Dryden, 1997; Berne, 1961, p. 29–37; Tribole & Resch, 2003, p. 95–105), neither theory really describes what makes IE “revolutionary,” as the book’s subtitle proclaims. What makes IE revolutionary in the context of a culture that values a thin body and scientifically determined nutrition recommendations is the idea that a person can look within, rather than to external sources, to find out what will lead to optimum health.

Thus, despite the overt usage of transactional analysis and REBT and though unmentioned by Tribole and Resch, it is not difficult to make a case that the most important theoretical framework of IE actually belongs to Carl Rogers. In fact, in explaining the organismic valuing process concept of his theory, Rogers himself said that “the simplest example is the infant who at one moment values food, and when satiated, is disgusted with it” (Rogers, 1959, p. 210). To explain IE in a Rogerian nutshell, if a person has

self-experiences perceiving that significant others and society consider thinness and dieting behavior as more worthy of positive regard than eating behaviors resulting from his or her organismic valuing process, those expressions of positive regard make that person's self-regard contingent on body weight and eating behaviors, thereby compelling him or her to not follow the organismic valuing process and thus ultimately impairing the actualizing tendency to be physically and emotionally healthy.

All of the principles of IE are easily construed to reflect Rogerian concepts: (1) Reject the Diet Mentality, (4) Challenge the Food Police, and (8) Respect Your Body are principles designed to increase positive self-regard so that the organismic valuing process can function; and (2) Honor Your Hunger, (3) Make Peace with Food, (5) Feel Your Fullness, (6) Rediscover the Satisfaction Factor, (7) Cope with Your Emotions without Using Food, and (9) Exercise—Feel the Difference are principles that explain how to take direction from the organismic valuing process. Finally, (10) Honor Your Health—Gentle Nutrition largely explains the outcome of the actualizing tendency that is uncovered when the organismic valuing process is used.

This exercise in understanding theoretical origins illuminates IE's most fundamental assumption about human beings. For Rogers, the most basic and irreducible aspect of a human being was the actualizing tendency that drives a person to reach their potential on every level up to the point of self-actualization and transcendence. Tribble and Resch adopt this Rogerian view, though they focus only on the biological need for food (and, occasionally, for exercise). This assumption about the existence of the actualizing tendency – the “intuition” alluded to by the name *Intuitive Eating* – conserves the anti-dieting asceticism without requiring the sacrifice of health that would, according to conventional wisdom, result from following desire. In fact, beyond eliminating the dilemma, it actually ties pleasure and health together. This is the theoretical point where hedonism leads to health, and it is on this foundation that IE rests.

Relevant LDS Teachings

Human nature and the physical body

In LDS theology, the most basic and fundamental characteristic of a human being is moral agency. The prophet Lehi taught:

For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things. If not... righteousness could not be brought to pass, neither wickedness, neither holiness nor misery, neither good nor bad... if it should be one body it must needs remain as dead, having no life neither death, nor corruption nor incorruption, happiness nor misery, neither sense nor insensibility.

Wherefore, it must needs have been created for a thing of naught: wherefore there would have been no purpose in the end of its creation. (2 Nephi 2:11–12).

According to Williams, agency is an irreducible and inherent aspect of a human being and therefore a key issue of ontology. He said, “the position we take on the issue of whether we are moral agents determines to a great extent the positions we must take on most other questions of psychological and therapeutic importance” (Williams, 2005, p. 117). Debates in psychology about agency largely focus on the issue of whether or not people have genuine freedom to choose because “we often deal with questions pertaining to the degree to which our clients are free to exercise their moral agency.” For instance, “those... with explosive tempers, feelings of inferiority, mania, depression, eating disorders, or anxiety—do [they] have the capacity to think, feel, and act differently?” (Judd, 2005, 99).

Elder D. Todd Christofferson explained that the conditions for agency to exist are (1) alternative choices to choose between – good and evil and their respective consequences as defined by the laws of God, (2) understanding of these possible choices, and (3) the freedom to actually make these choices (2009, p. 47–49).

To elaborate on this third condition, while a purely deterministic view is incompatible with the gospel, it is also true that “genes, circumstances, and environments matter very much, and they shape us significantly. Yet there remains an inner zone in which we are sovereign, unless we abdicate. In this zone lies the essence of our individuality and our personal accountability” (Maxwell, 1996b, p. 21). In other words, agency is not the opposite of indeterminism because human actions

do have meaningful antecedents in that the context for choice is often externally determined (Williams, 2005, 125–126). However, though freedom to choose has real constraints, to be an agent means to have the capacity to do things that are not externally determined. These choices are then put into a purposeful moral context by the doctrine that “the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam [separation from God and receiving mortal bodies], and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man” (Mosiah 3:19). Thus, humankind exists in a fallen state and people desire things that they are supposed to – and are able to – actively resist.

The doctrine of the soul also addresses what human beings fundamentally are. That “the spirit and the body are the soul of man” (D&C 88:15) affirms the reality and necessity of both the body and spirit in LDS theology. This conception runs contrary to naturalistic secular views which hold that the spirit doesn’t exist, that the body is a biological machine, and that the subjective experience of mind is epiphenomenal. They also bear little resemblance to any philosophies derived from Plato-derived immaterialism that hold that the body is evil or less important than the spirit or mind (Madsen, p. 31–33).

Rather, the LDS view is a distinctive brand of materialism in which the body and the spirit are both types of matter. Though the spirit is often thought of as being opposite in nature to the body, “there is no such thing as immaterial matter. All spirit is matter, but it is more fine or pure” (D&C 131:7). In other words, Cartesian dualism—a philosophy that has historically exerted a considerable influence in Western thought, including on psychology, and which arguably half-survives in the form of a naturalistic assumption that completely cannot deal with the possible existence of anything “immaterial” or unobservable—is a false dichotomy (Madsen, p. 4, 33). Though to my knowledge there is no doctrinal explanation of how spiritual matter produces mind, the facts of spirit being matter and Joseph Smith equating spirit with mind (Larson, 1978, p. 203) do seem to imply that there is a kind of matter not presently observable that has the necessary properties to produce a genuine, non-epiphenomenal mind, thus bridging the gap between things traditionally thought of as material or immaterial.

Although they are not completely dissimilar, the spirit and the body do have different roles and capacities. The body, unable to operate independently of the spirit, is “the instrument of [the] mind” (Packer, 2003). However, without a body, the spirit is limited in its capacities and cannot receive a fullness of joy (D&C 93:33–34) because “the great principle of happiness consists in having a body” (Smith, 1976, p. 181). According to Elder David A. Bednar:

Our physical bodies make possible a breadth, a depth, and an intensity of experience that simply could not be obtained in our premortal estate... Our relationships with other people, our capacity to recognize and act in accordance with truth, and our ability to obey... the gospel of Jesus Christ are amplified through our physical bodies. (2010)

Morality and values

From an LDS perspective, the use and treatment of the body is a moral issue. In his first epistle to the Corinthians, Paul wrote, “Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price” (1 Corinthians 6:19). How this moral should affect eating behaviors in modern times, however, is more difficult to ascertain. The most modern scriptural instruction comes from the Word of Wisdom. While it is better known for cautioning against the use of coffee, tea, tobacco, and alcohol, a large portion of it addresses what people should eat:

All wholesome herbs God hath ordained for the constitution, nature, and use of man –

Every herb in the season thereof, and every fruit in the season thereof; all these to be used with prudence and thanksgiving.

Yea, flesh also of beasts and of the fowls of the air, I, the Lord, have ordained for the use of man with thanksgiving; nevertheless they are to be used sparingly;

And it is pleasing unto me that they should not be used, only in times of winter, or of cold, or of famine.

All grain is ordained for the use of man and of beasts, to be the staff of life, not only for man but for the beasts of the field, and the fowls of heaven, and all wild animals that run or creep on the earth;

And these hath God made for the use of man only in times of famine and excess of hunger.

All grain is good for the food of man; as also the fruit of the vine; that which yieldeth fruit, whether in the ground or above the ground –

...And all saints who remember to keep and do these sayings, walking in obedience to the commandments, shall receive health in their navel and marrow to their bones;

And shall find wisdom and great treasures of knowledge, even hidden treasures;

And shall run and not be weary, and shall walk and not faint.

And I, the Lord, give unto them a promise, that the destroying angel shall pass by them, as the children of Israel, and not slay them (D&C 89:10–21).

In this revelation the Lord gives some guidelines endorsing grains, herbs, fruits, and the sparing use of meat as food. By doing so, the spiritual and moral importance of eating habits into are assured, for “all things unto [the Lord] are spiritual, and not at any time [has he] given... a law which was temporal” (D&C 29:34).

It is true that He does not address every problematic health behavior in the Word of Wisdom, but that does not mean there are no other possible moral issues. The Lord also said, “it is not meet that I should command in all things; for he that is compelled in all things... is a slothful and not a wise servant... verily I say, men should be anxiously engaged in a good cause” (D&C 58:26–29). Furthermore, recent church leaders have given some general counsel relevant for people today. In reflecting in wonder about the body and the spirit, Elder Russell M. Nelson said that we should “control our diet and exercise for physical fitness” because the body is “a temple of our very own” (Nelson, 1998, p. 87). Elder Jörg Klebingat elaborated on Elder Nelson’s talk more recently:

Take responsibility for your own physical well-being... please use good judgment in what and especially how much you eat, and regularly give your body the exercise it needs and deserves. If you are physically able, decide today to be the master of your own house and begin a regular, long-term exercise program, suited to your abilities, combined with a healthier diet. (2014, p. 35).

Church leaders have also encouraged the exercise of moderation in behavior and ideals about what the body should look like. Elder Boyd K. Packer said,

“learn to use moderation and common sense in matters of health and nutrition... avoid being extreme or fanatical or becoming a faddist” (1996, p. 18), a statement consistent with King Benjamin’s counsel to act “in wisdom and order; for it is not requisite that a man should run faster than he has strength” (Mosiah 4:27). Elder Jeffrey R. Holland has also spoken on the issue as it pertains to body image:

We should all be as fit as we can be – that’s good Word of Wisdom doctrine. That means eating right and exercising and helping our bodies function at their optimum strength... But I speak here of optimum health; there is no universal optimum size (2005, p. 29).

While there are no specific commandments given, a general principle can be inferred. People have a moral duty to take care of their bodies, which “are God’s” (1 Corinthians 6:20). The values in this kind of pursuit of health are the body’s spiritual importance, stewardship, discipline, and moderation.

Compatibility of IE with LDS Teachings

Although I will argue that significant components of IE are incompatible with the gospel, it is important to note that they are compatible in at least one major way. Notably, mind and body dualism are rejected by both the gospel and IE. In IE, subjective experiences are just as real and as important as the physical body and they are very interconnected. Because this unity is not ignored, there is ample theoretical space for eating to affect both the body and the mind in meaningful ways. Though IE does not go as far as to affirm the existence of spirits, a person’s inner world is treated as being of paramount importance and legitimacy. Influence does not flow only unidirectionally from a biological need for energy to subjective experience of hunger or satiety. Because eating is more than responding to hunger and thirst—indeed, according to Tribble and Resch, it is “one of the most emotionally laden experiences” (p.146) to be had—influence can also flow in the opposite direction in a situation where eating is used to generate real feelings (p. 147) to fulfill an emotional need just as real as biological hunger. This is not incompatible with the gospel.

However, the assumption of the existence of the actualizing tendency (“intuition”), which implies that no one ever truly desires to eat unhealthily on a long-term

basis, has at least two major issues from an LDS perspective. First, it is deterministic because all unhealthy behavior is the result of outside negative influences that have been internalized as a damaged relationship with food or body. Second, it is hedonistic because it sets up pleasure as the ultimate good.

Human nature and the physical body

According to Tribole and Resch, “all [people] possess the natural intuitive eating ability” and longstanding unhealthy eating habits result when that ability has “been suppressed” (p. 16) by deprivation (p. 82–84), which is in turn the result of internalized values of thinness and self-control – or, to use Rogerian language, conditions of worth – from outside sources such as family and society in general (p.105–109). To reconcile a reliance on natural intuition with the recommendations of nutritional science necessitates that the intuition that guides a person to follow those recommendations really does exist and that it cannot guide a person to do anything else.

This assumption takes a very positive view of human nature. If the cause of maladaptive eating behavior is always the result of suppressed intuitive eating ability and deprivation, like an organismic valuing process floundering under the presence of conditions of worth, then there are no possible causes that are ultimately internal. It is strongly implied that agency is not an important cause, aside from its assumed involvement regarding the removal of intuition suppression. It is also subtly implied that a lack of suppression of intuition is the most important extrinsic cause of patterns of healthy eating behavior, which precludes the possibility that something else may be a more important factor, such as learning.

IE relies on two varieties of determinism to explain how intuition operates and malfunctions. The first determinism is that deprivation resulting from suppression of intuition causes unhealthy eating behaviors. The second determinism is that externally caused conditions of worth cause suppression of intuition and deprivation in the first place.

Reminiscent of Newton’s third law that every force has an equal and opposite force in terms of both magnitude and direction, “the more deprived you become from dieting and from specific foods, the greater the deprivation backlash” (p. 84). Therefore, “key to abol-

ishing the pattern of restraint and subsequent overeating is to give yourself *unconditional* permission to eat” (p. 85). Tribole and Resch support this idea by providing an overview of some of the biological mechanisms to increase food consumption that are triggered when the body is denied adequate food energy (p. 62–67). They also point towards a study in which men who cut their food intake in half for six months overate when they were allowed to eat according to their own will (p. 59–61). This provides a lot of support for the idea that long-term energy deficits trigger biological mechanisms to overeat. However, it is an extrapolation to extend this deprivation principle to situations where a person is not running an energy deficit or to specific foods.

Their explanation leaves no room in IE for any kind of beneficial deliberate action that goes against internal desire, and thus IE comes into conflict with agency because at no point does freedom to make choices exist other than following or not following the intuition. It would not be incompatible to suppose that overrestriction and energy deprivation could lead to reduced freedom to choose – as Elder Maxwell was referenced earlier as saying, biology and circumstance matter “very much.” However, the entire theorized chain of events leaves no space for what he called the “inner zone in which we are sovereign... the essence of our individuality and our personal accountability” (Maxwell, 1996b, p. 21). This hard determinism is incompatible with a gospel perspective.

The notion that values are externally determined also limit the compatibility of IE with an LDS view of agency. The primary suppressing influences discussed by Tribole and Resch are the internalized value placed on thinness (p. 165) and a self-control based on a kind of Puritanical denial (p. 134, 182, 196) originally held by society and family (p. 15, 107, 136). It is not problematic to assume that people are exposed to values from outside sources, but IE goes further than this. It seems to be taken for granted that dieting values are completely externally caused and that there is no active role played in internalization. Thus, this determinism also warrants exploration.

To approach this subject from a different angle, IE uses religious language on several occasions to describe the ways that people think about food and dieting. People describe food as “sinful” (p. 2) and feel “guilt”

(p. 4, 84–85) primarily because of the effects it has on appearance, as if appearance itself was a moral issue. Tribole and Resch note that people treat the scale as a “false idol” (p. 54) and food rules as commandments (“thou shall not eat past 6:00 pm” (p. 9)). This is insightful in that it describes the kind of devotion some people have for dieting. It also raises the question of whether or not people have any freedom to choose their values – particularly those that they uphold with religious zeal – in the first place. Similarly to the previous kind of determinism in which deprivation leads directly to backlash, this determinism concerning values is also incompatible with an LDS view of agency.

Morality and values

In IE, eating is taken out of a moral context altogether. This is not compatible with a gospel perspective because God has already set forth laws about what people should and should not consume (D&C 89:10–21) and modern leaders have specifically counseled members how people should take care of their “temples” (1 Corinthians 6:19), both of which imply that inner signals are insufficient to guide behavior. While IE absolutely does represent a rejection of dieting asceticism for the sake of thinness “idolatry” (p. 54), I would argue that it does so by turning to a different kind of questionable ultimate good: pleasure.

This basic underlying value of IE was largely borrowed from the nondiet movement’s rejection of asceticism surrounding food. Consequently, IE embraces pleasure and lack of pain as the ultimate good, a motif that appears throughout the text: “Intuitive Eating provides a new way of eating that is ultimately struggle-free” (p. xix); “your eating style [will] become a source of pleasure rather than an affliction... [and] you will experience nutrition and exercise in a different way” (p. 39); “you have a right to feel good – and that means not just feeling stuffed, but also satisfied with your food choices” (p. 163) are a small sample of such expressions.

Tribole and Resch are somewhat transparent about the hedonistic underpinnings of their theory – at one point, they call their approach to food an “enlightened hedonism, a balance between information and pleasure” (p. 195; Stacey, 1994, p. 214). That pleasure is the ultimate good is more implicit, but it does manifest itself at several points. For example, in describing

their initial reaction to the nondiet movement before developing their ideas about IE, Tribole and Resch said, “to disregard how the body feels in response to eating ‘whatever you want’ discounts the respect for one’s body that comes along with the gift of life” (p. xix). Though they convey a respect for the body, the central issue for them is a disregard for how the body feels. Hedonism may not be the first thing that comes to mind because IE clearly does not advocate eating only junk foods—“if you were to eat chocolate all day, there’s a very good chance you would experience [negative physical feelings]... if you listen to your body, it does not feel good eating this way” (p. 207)—but the rationale for not doing so is the discomfort that such behavior causes. Thus, IE is founded on a kind hedonism that casts moderation and lack of discomfort as the ultimate pleasure.

Because “hedonism has, in many ways, come to be identified with rational thinking” in psychology (including, interestingly, in Ellis’ REBT and Rogerian therapy (Gantt, 2005, p. 58–64)), it is not surprising that IE reflects a value of it. Even though it may be an “enlightened” (p. 195; Stacey 1994, p. 214)—or a somewhat Epicurean (Wiker, 2002, p. 31–33) rather than popularly envisioned—form of hedonism, it is not really possible to reconcile it with LDS values such as good stewardship, temperance, and especially discipline, all because the body is “God’s” (1 Corinthians 6:20). IE argues that respect for the body is manifested by being concerned with how it feels, that temperance is the byproduct of a type of hedonism that views the ultimate pleasure as necessitating moderation, and that discipline is therefore unnecessary. While the hypothetical ends may appear to be about the same, adopting the value of pleasure as the highest good philosophically dethrones virtue as the highest good, at least as far as eating is concerned. Thus, it is fundamentally philosophically incompatible with the gospel.

If it is true that eating behaviors have moral significance and that there are legitimate desires and potential habits that ought to be resisted, then the unpopular teaching of Jesus that “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily” (Luke 9:23) must be more carefully considered, even though “self-denial is portrayed by many as too puritanical and too ascetic” (Maxwell, 1996a, p. 15).

According to Gantt, one thing that results from “commitment to hedonism in psychology is... that human emotional, psychological, and moral suffering are often regarded only as obstacles to our attainment of happiness and the good life” (Gantt, 2005, 54). Rephrased to fit IE specifically, one result of this commitment to hedonism in IE is that doing anything other than what a person desires is viewed as an obstacle to satisfaction, as if bodily satisfaction were the ultimate end. This could be what drives Tribole and Resch to adopt a Rogerian view of human nature in the first place. By arguing that the pursuit of pleasure is the ultimate guide to health, they effectively paint a picture of human nature where “willpower does not belong” (p. 51) at all.

Considerations and Modifications of IE for Compatibility with the Gospel

Though there are a variety of opinions about how the gospel should interact with psychological theories (Gleave, 2012; Gantt, 2012; Williams, 2012; Anderson, 2012; Richards & Hansen, 2012) and this section could possibly be accused of “summing up the gospel in psychological terms or summing up psychology in gospel terms” (Kimball, 1967), it seems that determining the compatibility of a theory with the gospel necessitates an attempt to distill parts that could potentially be compatible. Otherwise, if Gantt’s call for vigilance is to be taken seriously, almost all theories would be thrown out for some reason or another. Thus, though IE does clash at some points with the gospel, I would argue that are aspects that could be compatible with some theoretical reframing.

Human nature and the physical body

Earlier I showed that IE is deterministic because of the relationships it postulates between deprivation and eating behavior, as well as between external sources of values and internalized values leading to deprivation. Both of these domains—the origins of behavior and values—are vital from an LDS perspective, which holds that agency plays a central role in both. While hard determinism is incompatible with the gospel, it could be true that the body has some inner cues such as hunger, satiety, comfort, and discomfort that could be helpful in deciding what and when a person should eat. This possibility does not require the existence of a

single driving intuition that represents the totality of a person’s true desires with any unhealthy behavior resulting from some kind of originally external disruption. Compelling external desires to eat unhealthily (restrictions on freedom) and internal desires to eat healthily could coexist with equally internal desires to eat unhealthily that are not predicated on any kind of external influence. It could also be true that overrestriction and energy deprivation could restrict freedom to choose by triggering deprivation backlash. However, not all resistance to desire necessarily has to result in diminished freedom to choose. It could be possible that certain kinds of deprivation only result in reduced freedom under certain circumstances or that only certain kinds of deprivation result in diminished freedom to choose.

Similarly, the values of society and family could absolutely represent a constraint on freedom. People not exposed to any kinds of values other than those associated with dieting culture may have no other choice. Furthermore, it is probably reasonable to say that if people were never exposed to dieting values that they would never adopt them. However, this necessary antecedent is not sufficient to cause all dieting asceticism and thinness zealotry from an LDS perspective because internalization of values must be agency-driven to the degree that there are there are different values to meaningfully choose between. If it is not, then the implication would be that values are externally determined, and that would be wholly incompatible not only with the doctrine of agency, but also principles such as faith and hope. These subtle yet significant differences could preserve a space for agency and potentially illustrate more fully how it operates within its bounds.

Morality and Values

Though IE and the gospel both promote moderation and the enjoyment of life, they have little overlap in regards to the philosophical foundations of their values. While IE, like the gospel, rejects dieting asceticism and thinness for appearance’s sake as virtue, its turn to concern for how the body feels as the highest good is arguably just as problematic. However, it is true that IE and the gospel both do not view pleasure as evil. As said by John Taylor, “God designs that we should enjoy ourselves. I do not believe in a religion that makes

people gloomy, melancholy, miserable and ascetic...” However, “we want to do it correctly” (1873, p. 760).

It is probably safe to say that holding any kind of pleasure to be the ultimate good is incompatible with the gospel. However, the principles of IE do not all require a value of pleasure as the ultimate good to be useful. A value of pleasure as a good among other potentially greater goods may be sufficient. For example, there is a chapter (“Discover the Satisfaction Factor”) that gives advice about how to enjoy food instead of being afraid of it, and another (“Feel Your Fullness”) that explains how to be aware of sensations of satiety. Much of the specific advice found in IE on these and other similar topics can fit into other value systems because a lot of the values are conveyed through the rationales for the practices advocated rather than from the practices themselves. An actualizing tendency does not have to exist in order for pleasure to be a good if there are other means by which health can be achieved.

Conclusion

This evaluation of IE shows, above and beyond any finding specific to IE, that the underlying assumptions and values of theories matter, and that their implicitness can hide them very effectively. Consequently, Gantt’s caution to “maintain a constant and critical vigilance regarding the intellectual foundations of our theories and practices” (2005, p. 13) is of critical importance. Theories that may initially seem devoid of philosophical issues may, in fact, have many.

This discussion of IE brings two important lessons to the surface. First, while psychological theories may contain truth and contribute valuable insights, components may need to be substantially modified (such as with the deterministic aspects of IE) or may be irreconcilable with the gospel altogether (such as with the value of pleasure as the ultimate good embedded in IE). Second, the mechanisms described by the theory and its values can be tied up in each other. For example, the determinism in IE leads to amorality, and the value of hedonism precludes the desirability of leaving space for morality in the first place. This should inspire caution for LDS therapists in adopting certain parts of a theory without deeper analysis of the model in its entirety.

“It matters deeply what sort of therapeutic practices we endorse and what conceptions of personhood we entertain and encourage” (Gantt, 2012, p. 13) because they have the potential to influence the ways that clients think about themselves as human beings. Thus, it is crucial to rigorously scrutinize all practices and theories. Even if time is taken to analyze a theory and it somehow has no conflict with the gospel – an unlikely prospect, given psychology’s secularism – meticulous evaluations of theories used and materials recommended to clients can only improve the intellectual foundation informing psychotherapeutic practice.

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