2010

Faulconer Responds to Jackson, Fischer, and Hansen

James E. Faulconer
james.faulconer@byu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/irp

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/irp/vol33/iss1/6

This Response to Article is brought to you for free and open access by the All Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Issues in Religion and Psychotherapy by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.
Faulconer Responds to Jackson, Fischer, and Hansen

James Faulconer
Brigham Young University

I want to thank Aaron Jackson, Kristin Hansen, and Lane Fischer for taking the time to respond to me. I recognize that their doing so is a gesture of kindness, and I appreciate what they have done.

I am grateful to Jackson for recommending Kelly Oliver’s Witnessing: Beyond Recognition. One might understand my presentation as a description of how four Abrahamic religions understand themselves and their relations to each other. Oliver argues that the philosophical theme of recognition—a subject recognizing herself as a subject—is insufficient for understanding human personhood and, therefore, for understanding human relation. Since the early modern period, most Western philosophical thought has understood human relation in terms of recognition. But for all their talk of persons being face-to-face, because they understand the world in terms of subjects and objects those philosophies ultimately demand that persons prove themselves worthy of being-recognized: a person is an object of a certain worth, and anyone claiming fully to be a person must prove that she has that worth. The most that such views can give us is a view of human beings as in perpetual conflict that is ameliorated by the assertion of or demand for rights. In place of a theory of recognition, Oliver uses the work of Emmanuel Levinas as the foundation for her argument for a theory of witness: we do not demand or recognition of our selves or offer recognition of others, but we witness our relations with one another. Oliver provides a way of thinking about how persons of different faith traditions might “live together in love” (D&C 42:45) and adds a needed dimension to the story that I outlined.

Fischer is right that not all Mormons would articulate the relation between Mormonism and the law as I have. That’s one of the things I like about being a Mormon: we have wide bounds within which to stretch our minds, and we need not all agree about anything but the most central matters. In spite of that I don’t think that Fischer and I disagree much, though the clumsiness of my expression may have made it appear that we do. He argues that we must understand our relation to the law as but one aspect of our religion, with our relation to Christ, with whom we are yoked, as the other. Fischer deftly shows that this double yoke solves Heinz’s dilemma differently than would one nursed on a Kohlbergian understanding of moral maturity: Fischer’s response to the dilemma is that he cannot think about what should be done in such a case without taking into account both the law and his relationship to a person, namely God, and therefore also all other persons. I agree wholeheartedly.

I may require my writing students to read Hansen’s précis of my essay as an example of someone summing another’s work accurately. And she follows that summary with an excellent piece on perspective in psychology, using Rychlak’s thinking to address the question of whether and how it is possible to understand the perspective of someone else. According to Hansen I have dealt with the difficulty of teasing apart “the intertwining of process and content” and by doing so have shown
the value of an introspective perspective. But I have not recognized that "multiple perspectives [can] be valid independent of whether one is better than another," instead wanting "to claim that the introspective perspective is more valid than another."

As evidence Hansen takes up my claim that belief is not enough to understand a religion and argues that, indeed, there is a valid perspective from which one can distinguish between religions solely on the basis of belief. She then uses that argument to generalize about the place of third-person perspective in psychological theorizing, arguing that therapists sometimes "resort to the language of an extraspective perspective in their theorizing, reducing the client's challenges to biological and environmental causes." In doing so, "they undo the healing empathy they have given to clients whose problems, from an introspective perspective, could be said to stem from a history of being objectified and treated without empathy by primary caregivers." To that I say "amen."

My only disagreement with Hansen is a mild one. In fact, it is not so much a disagreement as it is a correction of what I said: I did not intend to argue that only the introspective approach is valid or even that it is better. Indeed, one can distinguish between religions by talking about the beliefs of each. Perhaps I became carried away with my rhetoric and made it appear that I don't value the third-person perspective. My view is that understanding a religion must go beyond understanding its beliefs. But I don't think that means that one can only resort to introspection, that one must understand what it existentially feels like to be a practitioner—though introspection is also a valid way of understanding. I believe that the understanding I was recommending was an extraspective one: understanding religion is more than understanding belief, it is also understanding such things as rites, practices, and social structures, all of which can be described from a third-person point of view and not only from a first.

Though I did not make the useful distinction between kinds of perspectives that Hansen points out, I think I have been more guilty of not recognizing the introspective than the extraspective. But even if that is true, there is a solid point to Hansen’s criticism: had I thought more clearly and carefully about the difference between the two perspectives, I assume that I could have more clearly explained the four approaches to the law without often appealing to the introspective and sometimes to the extraspective but not recognizing that I was depending on different perspectives and mixing them in a way that could give the impression that I favor introspection.

Thank you all.