This book is the report of a two-year project sponsored by the Pew Charitable Trust. The foundation asked psychology and seven other academic disciplines to compare and contrast the dominant models of human nature with a “Judeo-Christian view of the individual.” It is interesting that this book is published by APA, perhaps a sign of a growing interest in psychology in religion and spirituality.

Major contributors are all senior psychologists, mostly full professors at various American universities. Their chapters vary greatly in quality. Some are thin, others focus on the little empirical research that is relevant, and a few are thoughtful and interesting. There is only one reference to transpersonal psychology and five mentions of humanistic psychology. This is another indication of how little we have penetrated into the thinking of traditional psychologists, even those deeply interested in religion and spirituality.

There are five sections to the book: Foundations and Context; The Nature of the Human Person; Motivation, Virtues, and Values; Transformation, Change and Development; and Reflections. There are 15 chapters and they run about 20 pages in length apiece.


1. *Reality of Spirit.* Miller argues that the most important assumption is the assertion that there is more to live than the material world, that there is an “unseen spiritual dimension of reality to which humans are meaningfully related” (p. 16). And, the essence of this spiritual dimension is God, the creator of humanity.

2. *Not God.* The first assumption entails the notion that humans are not God, not the ultimate sources of morality. Miller asserts there is a natural law, an absolute standard of right and wrong, ultimate values—and these all apply to humanity.

3. *Sin.* Human beings often fall short of absolute standards, by our very nature. This is described in Judaism and Christianity as “sin.” This also implies that human nature includes the potential for both good and evil.

4. *Agency.* Human beings have the capacity for choice. Human behavior is purposive and influenced by our choices, and with our capacity for...
choice comes responsibility. The issue of free will is complex. From this perspective there are many determinants of our behavior, but our behavior is never fully determined.

5. *Spiritual Health.* Like physical health, spiritual health is not automatic; it can be promoted by spiritual disciplines such as prayer, fasting, meditation, service, and scriptural study. Before the emergence of modern psychology, there have been thousands of years of reflection and practical experience in cultivating spiritual health.

6. *Relational Responsibility.* We are not only responsible for ourselves but for our communities as well. In addition to seeking personal spiritual health, human beings are responsible for seeking social justice and working to develop a healthy community.

7. *Hope.* We do not have to rely on our personal resources alone. We can turn to the spiritual realm for help. “People exist in relation to that which is greater than and transcends material existence—a source of guidance, comfort, hope and aid for those who seek it” (p. 18).

8. *Transformation.* Human beings are capable of fundamental change. We are “redeemable,” and can experience personal transformation in spite of what appear to be insurmountable limitations and obstacles.

Miller closes this section with the conclusion that “any understanding of human nature is incomplete if it does not take spirituality into account” (p. 19).

One little gem I discovered in the book is a quote from James’ *The Principles of Psychology.* James wrote concerning the question of whether the essence of human nature is spiritual or material.

> The very core and nucleus of our self, as we know it, the very sanctuary of our life, is the sense of activity which certain inner states possess. This sense of activity is often held to be a direct revelation of the living substance of our Soul. Whether this be so or not is an ulterior question. (1890, p. 181)

Also of interest is a compilation of statistics from national surveys on religion and spirituality. For example, 94% of the US population report that they believe in God (Gallup & Lindsay, 1999). Among members of APA, less than half professed belief in God (Regan, Malony, & Beit-Hallahmi, 1980). Similarly, 72% of the population agree with the statement “My whole approach to life is based on my religion,” but fewer health professionals share this view. Psychologists (at 33%) have the lowest level of agreement with this statement (Bergin & Jensen, 1990).

**References**


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