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NATURALISTIC ASSUMPTIONS IN SCHOOL COUNSELING AND THE BAHÁ'Í PRINCIPLE OF THE UNITY OF SCIENCE AND RELIGION

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ABSTRACT

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The implications of naturalistic assumptions underlying current psychological and educational theories and methods related to the inclusion of religion and spirituality in comprehensive school counseling programs are examined and an argument is made for increased study of a holistic worldview that applies the scientific method to religious and spiritual phenomena using theistic assumptions that build on religious principles found in the Bahá'í Faith.

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Education is a topic that garners a great deal of attention in the United States. From federal and state policy debates to family dinner tables across the country, education is a central cultural concern of the American people. Agreement among Americans about education's importance, however, does not extend to agreement about its content, methods or purpose. Disagreements about these fundamental aspects of education betray even deeper disagreements about education's basic definition and, once defined, about the degree and nature of the government's appropriate role in its operation (DelFattore, 2004; Fraser, 1999; Miller, 1990, 1995; Popkewitz, 1991; Spring, 1991, 1994). The current government efforts to draft and implement a set of common core state standards for math and English across the country emphasize the importance of economic success, framed in terms of college and career readiness (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010;U.S. Department of Education Office of Planning Evaluation and Policy Development, 2010), while others experiment with alternative educational philosophies and methodologies to contemporary public schooling, many of which, while acknowledging the relative importance of economic considerations, nevertheless stress humanistic or religious dimensions of life as the fundamental purpose of a proper education (Miller 1990, 1995). Private schools, charter schools, and home schools serve approximately 8.6 million students a year (Aud et al., 2012; Planty et al., 2009), and the range of philosophies, values, structures and methods represented by these alternative education systems suggests deep differences of opinion, understanding and conviction with regard to the goals and objectives of education in society, in particular the appropriate role of goals and objectives related to religion and spirituality (Nord, 2010; Nord & Haynes, 1998).

School counselors serve a relatively unique purpose within this overall context of diverse views about education, counseling students regarding their "educational, academic, career, personal and social needs" (American School Counselor Association, 2010, p. 1) and encouraging the "maximum development of every student" (p. 1). Freed from responsibilities for the type of assessment of student achievement required of teachers and from meting out punishment for infractions of school discipline policies required of administrators, school counselors fill the need for an adult whose primary purpose is to understand students' problems, desires, aspirations, frustrations, and pains from a genuinely unconditional perspective. Furthermore, school counselors "respect students' values, beliefs and cultural background and do not impose the school counselor's personal values on students or their families" (p. 1). Although it is certainly true to acknowledge that teachers and administrators also strive to show as much respect as possible for the diversity of values, beliefs and backgrounds brought to school by students, the fact remains that schools are an inherently acculturating place (Fraser, 1999; Miller, 1990; 1995; Palincsar, 1998; Popkewitz, 1991; Spring, 1991, 1994), and acculturation implicitly requires the sacrifice of a certain degree of a person's existing schema of values and beliefs for those espoused by the school. Within such an environment school counselors have a fairly unique opportunity to assist students in the process of synthesizing each student's preexisting schema of values and beliefs with those imposed by the school's philosophy and mission, an opportunity that is not, however, without its own ideological assumptions.

Despite the relative freedom of school counselors to adopt a more unconditional stance toward students and their developmental tasks within the school setting, it is not

possible for them to remain entirely neutral toward the beliefs and values held by the students whom they serve. Although the ASCA's ethical standards explicitly state that school counselors "do not impose the school counselor's personal values on students or their families" (p. 1), it has been argued that such an objective perspective is not entirely possible (Corey, 2000) and that all counselors, of any type, bring their own worldviews to the counseling relationship in ways that unavoidably influence the nature of the insights that clients/students obtain from their involvement in counseling. The expectation that school counselors avoid imposing their values and beliefs on students is elaborated further in section E.2.a. of the ASCA code of ethics, stating that school counselors, "monitor and expand personal multicultural and social justice advocacy awareness, knowledge and skills," and that they "strive for exemplary cultural competence by ensuring personal beliefs or values are not imposed on students or other stakeholders" (p. 5). Psychologists and educators widely accept the idea that certain social relationships, such as those between counselors and their clients or teachers and their students, implicitly set up power relationships that, if left unchecked, inadvertently lead to a situation in which the client or student uncritically comes to accept the beliefs and values of the counselor or teacher. The processes involved have been studied and interpreted by psychologists and educators providing social constructivist accounts of learning theory (Palincsar, 1998), as well as by political sociologists (Popkewitz, 1991) and evolutionary biologists (Dawkins, 2006). Corey (2000), in his introductory textbook to the theory and practice of counseling and psychotherapy, explores the challenge of harmonizing the reality that counselors think and operate from their own system of values and beliefs with the reality of the professional value of client autonomy. The expectation that school

counselors expand their multicultural and social justice advocacy awareness, knowledge and skills, while simultaneously ensuring that their personal beliefs or values are not imposed on students or other stakeholders places school counselors in a challenging philosophical position. Personal beliefs and values are inherent properties of any epistemological system (Popkewitz, 1991; Richards & Bergin, 2005) and, as such, cannot be fully suppressed or separated from the act of cognition itself, let alone from the practices of school counseling (Corey, 2000; MacDonald, 2004). The argument that any approach to advocating for social justice can somehow occur without first resting upon and then asserting a particular set of beliefs and values is self-contradictory, for the concept of justice itself rests upon a complex system of values in which one set of attitudes, ideas, and behaviors toward others is considered wrong, while another is considered right and that efforts must be made to persuade or require others in society to abandon the wrong set of attitudes, ideas and behaviors and to adopt the right set.

Given that school counselors, therefore, cannot entirely avoid some degree of imposition of beliefs and values on students and other stakeholders as part of their work (Corey, 2000; MacDonald, 2004), it seems necessary to reassess the spirit of the ethical standard and to identify and work with the set of assumptions, beliefs, and values upon which it rests in order to understand the ultimate goal of the ethical standards related to multicultural awareness and understanding. An important goal of these ethical standards is to remain open minded and to reflectively combat the human tendency to form rigid biases and prejudices toward ideas, habits, customs, cultural practices, and beliefs that differ from our own. Expressed in active terms, one might propose that this is a different way of describing the need for school counselors to purposefully develop within

themselves an authentic capacity for "unconditional positive regard" (Rogers, 1961) and to faithfully adhere to philosophical standards of scientific decision-making and inquiry (W. Hatcher, 1980; Plous, 1993; Popper, 2005). Such an expression of counselor competence does not require the counselor to become less authentic about his or her own role as a whole individual within the dynamics of the counseling relationship. In fact, the development of such a competence itself rests upon a carefully considered and deeply integrated set of beliefs and values about human nature, about the acquisition of knowledge, the purpose and meaning of human relationships, and the ultimate objectives and purposes for which comprehensive school counseling programs are developed and implemented. In other words, the school counselor's *worldview*, which includes ideas about both physical and spiritual (i.e., supernatural, metaphysical, etc.) phenomena, is a critical component of his or her understanding of and approach to truth and truth seeking, both for him or herself and for the students whom he or she serves (Nowlin & Blackburn, 1995).

The purpose of this paper is to examine the influence that naturalistic worldviews have on the development and implementation of school counseling programs for our nation's public schools and to examine ideas from the sacred writings of the Bahá'í Faith that contribute to the growing dialog about taking theistic worldviews seriously in both counseling and educational settings (Nord, 2010; Nord & Haynes, 1998; Richards & Bergin, 2005). My approach is theoretical and philosophical, examining implications and assumptions inherent in both common naturalistic and theistic worldviews and highlighting ways that the religious principles of the Bahá'í Faith regarding the harmony of science and religion are supported by the kind of integrationist ideas about science and

religion described by Nord and Haynes (1998) and endorsed by a growing body of researchers. Although not specifically addressed to the practical, day-to-day concerns of implementing a comprehensive school counseling program, the paper does speak to the role that professional school counselors play as leaders and advocates of ethical practice in school counseling (ASCA, 2010) as well as to the need for professional school counselors to enhance their own knowledge and understanding of the ways in which different worldviews affect their own approaches to working with diverse populations (ASCA, 2010).

Rationale and Review of the Literature

Although debates about curriculum, standards, testing and instructional methods, and teacher evaluation and training tend to dominate public attention regarding education, debates about the proper role of religion and spirituality in U.S. public schools continue as well, with little sign of significant progress being made toward resolution (Berkman & Plutzer 2010; DelFattore, 2004; Fraser, 1999; Nord, 2010; Nord & Haynes, 1998). Furthermore, the issues of school and gang violence, poverty, depression, substance abuse and family dysfunction, the trauma and other consequences associated with widespread natural and economic disasters, and numerous other social stresses have created conditions in which the mental health of students in our public schools requires continued attention. The matter of students' mental health and its relationship to religion and spirituality have been the focus of a growing number of studies by psychologists (Cotton, Zebracki, Rosenthal, Tsevat, & Drotar, 2006; Davis, Kerr & Robinson Kurpius, 2003; Hall, Dixon, & Mauzey, 2004; Holder, Coleman & Wallace, 2010; Ingersoll, 1994, 2004; Pargament, Murray-Swank, & Tarakeshwar, 2005; Sink, 2004), and has gained the

support of politicians such as Tim Ryan (2012), who endorses mindfulness training across many areas of society as a scientifically validated spiritual practice for dealing with many of today's stress-related problems. When it comes to resolving society's numerous challenges, the majority of Americans continue to believe that "religion can answer all or most of today's problems" (Gallup Organization, 2011) which, it could be argued, includes problems associated with education reform. Despite this continued belief among many in the ability of religion to solve today's problems, only 44% possess a "great deal/quite a lot" of confidence in the "church or organized religion" (2011), whereas an increasing number of Americans are turning toward "'unbranded' religion" (Newport, 2012) in the form of nondenominational churches and congregations, suggesting increased disillusionment with traditional forms of religion that may also represent a growing openness to consideration of alternative conceptions of spirituality and its applicability to solving social problems.

The continued beliefs and values of most Americans regarding religion and spirituality also suggest the desire by many for counseling theories and practices to honor and respect religious and spiritual worldviews (Lake, 2012; Pargament, Murray-Swank & Tarakeshwar, 2005). Likewise, many Americans wish to include greater respect for and inclusion of religious and spiritual concepts and practices in public education (Berkman & Plutzer, 2010; Fraser, 1999; DelFattore, 2004; Nord, 2010; Nord & Haynes, 1998). Efforts to lay the groundwork for inclusion of religion and spirituality in school counseling have focused primarily on views of spirituality as a separate, albeit related, construct from religion (Hanna & Green, 2004; Ingersoll & Bauer, 2004; MacDonald, 2004; Sink, 2004; Sink & Richmond, 2004), and the codes of ethics of the American

Psychological Association (2003), the American Counseling Association (2005), and the American School Counselor Association (2010) all address, to varying degrees, the need for counselors to consider a client's/student's religious and/or spiritual beliefs as factors in counseling.

Despite awareness of the importance of the religious and spiritual dimensions of human life in psychology and school counseling, many efforts at integrating scientific and religious or spiritual ideas have relied on naturalistic assumptions (Richards & Bergin, 2005; Slife & Reber, 2009). Naturalistic assumptions frame consideration of religious and spiritual factors in counseling as issues of cultural pluralism (Hanna & Green, 2004; Holcomb-McCoy, Harris, Hines, & Johnston, 2008; Lonborg, 2004), cognitive adaptations acquired through evolutionary forces (Pyysiäinen, 2003, Pyysiäinen & Hauser, 2010) or neurological brain states (d'Aquili & Newberg, 1999; Newberg & d'Aquili, 2002), avoiding either philosophical or scientific engagement with the larger questions of the ontological status of spiritual/metaphysical phenomena. Such a perspective, while valuable as a bridge from the natural and social sciences toward religion and spirituality, must reach farther to complete that bridge. Questions regarding the ontological status of spiritual phenomena have significant implications for the epistemological approaches that researchers and school counselors take toward addressing the religious and spiritual concerns of students (Richards & Bergin, 2005; Mahner & Bunge, 1996; Nowlin & Blackburn, 1995). Ignoring such questions, Nord and Hayes (1998) argue, creates a climate in public education that is inherently hostile to theistic views about reality. "We must acknowledge," they contend, "that public schools do teach students to think about virtually all aspects of life in secular rather than religious

ways, as if God were irrelevant and those secular ways of making sense of the world were sufficient" (p. 6). Efforts to remain neutral or indifferent on the question of the existence or non-existence of spiritual phenomena, such as God, souls, and metaphysical ideals of virtues such as beauty, justice, and love, can compel school counselors themselves to adopt a form of methodological atheism when addressing the religious and spiritual concerns of students. It is important, therefore, to examine the philosophical assumptions underlying the methods and theories related to inclusion of religion and spirituality in school counseling, for it is upon the assumptions that we hold regarding the fundamental nature of existence that questions of a religious and spiritual nature ultimately rest (Nowlin & Blackburn, 1995).

The reasons that many might have for limiting attention to naturalistic assumptions are understandable given the cultural climate of politically and socially charged debate about matters of science and religion and the separation of church and state. The desire to avoid controversy associated with current interpretations of the First Amendment's religion clauses, on the one hand, while acknowledging and pursuing the growing body of research that positively correlates spiritual well-being with a variety of factors associated with both mental and physical health (Cotton et al., 2006; Ingersoll, 1994; Ingersoll & Bauer, 2004; Lake, 2012), on the other, makes it appealing to limit investigation to the areas in which some measure of agreement might be found. As appealing as it may be to avoid controversy and to approach the study of religion and spirituality through a naturalistic lens, such an approach fails to take theistic views of reality seriously and, in a sense, entails a reversal of the hegemonic relationship that the Protestant Christian worldview held during the formative decades of U.S. public

education (see Fraser, 1999). Such a reversal has not created government neutrality toward religion, scholars such as Nord and Hayes (1998) argue, but rather, it has tipped the scale in the opposite direction, relegating theistic worldviews to the periphery of intellectual development and social concern and has, thereby, failed to provide a truly liberal, democratic education for our nation's children and youth.

Richards and Bergin (2005) and Slife and Reber (2009) argue that the science of psychology contains an unintentional prejudice toward theism that carries with it significant implications for the ways in which psychological studies are conducted and their results interpreted and applied. Nord and Hayes (1998) analyze similar biases in every area of U.S. public school curricula and textbooks, biases that go beyond the necessary separation issue of not *practicing* religion in public schools to the unnecessary step of not even *considering* it. The sense among many conservative Christians that the naturalistic biases prevalent among scientists and the public school system have removed God and the divine from the public arena lies behind many of the issues at the heart of the so-called culture wars being fought in many areas of U.S. society, including its public schools (Berkman & Plutzer, 2010; DelFattore, 2004; Fraser, 1999; Nord & Hayes, 1998).

Furthermore, the general shift in scientific thinking over the past two hundred years from a mechanistic, reductionist understanding of the world to a more organic and holistic one (W. Hatcher, 1980; Khursheed, 1987; MacDonald, 2004; Medina, 2006, Richards & Bergin, 2005; Zukov, 2001) is an important aspect of the school counselor's responsibility to approach their work with students in a truly integrated fashion. Such a shift in scientific worldview casts doubt on 19th century assumptions that intellectual

activities can be compartmentalized and isolated from each other in the mind without influence on or from other areas. Given the influence of more holistic theories of mind and learning (Miller, 1990) and growing awareness of the interconnectedness of all the physical forces in the universe (Medina, 2006; Zukov, 2001), it seems significant to note that one of the central features of spirituality, as evidenced by neurological studies (d'Aquili & Newberg, 1999; Newberg & d'Aquili, 2002) is one's sense of connectedness and oneness of being in the world of existence. Such a sense causes us to ask, "So what?" of all of life's accumulated encounters. The goal of establishing educational standards, including those for school counseling programs, must include the goal of answering the question of "So what?" for each student. Without the motivation to sacrifice time, energy, attention, and comfort to the goal of reaching high academic standards, which for many students is a daunting challenge, the *why* that is necessary to leave no child behind may never be adequately examined or communicated to students themselves. Such existential components of religion and spirituality have been identified as important factors in dealing with life's problems and in helping at-risk youth (Carlson, 2003; Davis, Kerr, & Robinson Kurpius, 2003; Pargament, Murray-Swank, & Tarakeshwar, 2005).

Despite the legitimate concern of school counselors and other educators for avoiding controversy and for respecting the religious liberty of students, openness to examination of the entire range of human experience and the phenomena of total existence is needed if we are to pursue the goals of providing a liberal, democratic education (Miller, 1990; Nord & Hayes, 1998). It has been commonly assumed by apologists on both sides of the science-religion controversy that religious and spiritual phenomena are so completely contained within the scope of human subjectivity that they

are beyond the reach of scientific inquiry (W. Hatcher, 1980). Religion has been assumed to lack "any clearly objective content" (p. iii) and "with the continued development of science, religion has come to be regarded as an activity which deals essentially (and unscientifically) with the irrational, subjective, mythic, and emotional aspects of human life" (p. iii). The implications of this assumption extend deeply into the foundations of scientific research, especially the disciplines related to the study of the human mind and of human nature and its authentic and proper development. This assumption is being increasingly challenged from many quarters—scientific, philosophical, and religious (Nord, 2010; Richards & Bergin, 2005; Sheldrake, 2012; W. Hatcher, 1990). The philosophical divide that separates those who espouse a naturalistic worldview from those who espouse a theistic worldview may seem unbridgeable to some, but the bridge is already under construction, drawing on knowledge and resources from many disciplines. What is needed is a coordinating theory, an integrative paradigm that can identify and coordinate the elements of truth to be found in the diverse collection of society's knowledge of science, religion, spirituality and education. Without such a theory – a theory that can unite science and religion – the divide that currently separates naturalists and theists is likely to intensify and lead to continued conflict, and one of the central battlegrounds for this conflict will be our nation's schools.

The present lack of unity in the areas of humanity's ultimate concerns can be seen in a variety of issues related to education. The continued struggle over the teaching of evolution in school science curricula (Berkman & Plutzer, 2010), the controversy over certain elements of critical thinking proposed as part of the Common Core State Standards (Heitin, 2012; Republican Party of Texas Platform Committee, 2012), the

place of prayer in public schools (DelFattore, 2004; Fraser, 1999), and the continued existence of either parochial or public schools alike (Fraser, 1999). Less known to the general public are the extensive debates underway in the field of consciousness studies related to the neural correlates of consciousness and arguments over monist and dualist conceptions of mind (Searle, 2002, 2004) and the ontological status of transcendent or supernatural mental states such a libertarian free will, moral agency, and unitary consciousness (d'Aquili & Newberg, 1999; Goetz & Taliaferro, 2008; Newberg & d'Aquili, 2002; Nowlin & Blackburn, 1995). The rancor created by this disunity can have disastrous consequences for the collective search for truth, replacing it instead with a competition for power, specifically the power to define the social epistemology by which experience itself is interpreted and transformed into ideas about truth and falsehood (Berkman & Plutzer, 2010; Popkewitz, 1991). In any competition for power, there are always winners and losers, and in the current competition between naturalistic and theistic worldviews, a clear and decisive victory of one side over the other seems unlikely. What is needed, therefore, is the continued project of carefully re-examining old assumptions about both worldviews in a search for a new, more holistic paradigm that can successfully unite them.

Worldviews and Social Epistemology

A person's worldview plays a significant role in his or her perception of reality. One's worldview provides the intellectual framework upon which meaning is constructed from experience. Comprised of such factors as implicit assumptions, explicit beliefs and values, collected memories, and theories about the nature of total reality derived from rational reflection upon the entire system of one's collective experience, one's worldview

does far more than help make sense of the world; it provides the fundamental organizing principles of thought itself providing the cognitive ground upon which the figure of experience is perceived and comprehended to be one thing or another. A change in one's worldview can affect a large collection of related conceptions, ideas, values and beliefs, requiring a cascading reappraisal of significant portions of a person's cognitive schema.

The far-reaching implications of the philosophies of naturalism and theism suggest that their incorporation into a person's cognitive schema contributes significantly to interpretations about individual experiences and conclusions about total reality drawn from those experiences. Although it may be overreaching to describe these philosophies as worldviews unto themselves, their contributions as factors in the overall composition and function of a person's worldview are easily evident. Both naturalism and theism comprise significant sets of assumptions that provide the epistemological, ontological, and axiological ground upon which individuals construct meaning from their experience. Beliefs about the acceptable standards of evidence and knowledge seeking, a first cause, absolute versus relative knowledge of total reality, the range of phenomena classified as natural versus supernatural, the existence or non-existence of absolute ideals of morality, and the purposefulness or purposelessness of existent phenomena all depend upon the assumptions that a person holds regarding spiritual phenomena.

Some might argue that such questions are beyond the scope of what school counselors are expected or educated to handle. Thomas Popkewitz (1991), however, has examined the political sociology of education reform largely as a function of the breaks and continuities in various *social epistemologies*, which he has described, in part, as the manner in which a person's worldview comes to influence and shape their perception of

knowledge. Popkewitz (1991) has explained social epistemology as the relationship between deeply held assumptions and beliefs about knowledge and the social and political power that sustains, supports and perpetuates particular systems of ideas and policies. The dominant social epistemology in a society, therefore, largely determines the power relationships within that society. Popkewitz (1991) has defined social epistemology briefly as "the relation of knowledge, institutions, and power" (p. 31). The concept of power which he has developed, based largely upon the philosophical theories of Michel Foucault, "reverses the traditional belief that knowledge is power" (p. 30). Rather he has described "power as embodied in the manner in which people gain knowledge and use the knowledge to intervene in social affairs" (p. 30). In other words, "power, in this sense, is productive of social identity rather than instances of repression, violence, or coercion" (p. 31). Although Popkewitz's analysis of educational practices and reform efforts does not address the kinds of spiritual/existential questions put forward here, the model of social epistemology that he applies to the more general practices of education applies equally well to these more fundamental questions of knowledge and power relations. For instance, the degree to which a person believes in the worldview that reality consists entirely of physical phenomena and denies or ignores the existence of spiritual phenomena greatly influences the conclusions that he or she draws from scientific research related to the best practices of education and vice versa. Competing worldviews related to the existence or non-existence of spiritual phenomena contribute to further disagreements about such fundamental features of human nature as the existence or non-existence of free will, of objective moral standards, of consciousness independent of the physical forces centered in the brain and other parts of the body (e.g., an immortal

soul), and of the inherent nobility or depravity of the human being itself (Goetz & Taliaferro, 2008; W. Hatcher, 2002; Miller, 1990; Nowlin & Blackburn, 1995). These are not trivial questions created for the amusement of philosophers. Continuing scientific research in fields such as neuroscience, quantum physics, evolutionary biology, and psychology make them particularly pressing and important matters to address for the implications of the answers to these questions greatly affect our attitudes, beliefs, thinking and practices related to education.

Popkewitz (1991) emphasizes that a particular social epistemology does not remain a static thing, unsusceptible to change or modification. Rather he explores education reform in its historical context, searching for the "breaks, discontinuities, and ruptures in the institutional life" (p. 15) that reveal the ever changing and evolving nature of social relations. Within this framework, it is possible to conceptualize worldviews, not as rigid, dogmatic collections of creed-like pronouncements, but as continually shifting and changing phenomena that exist with some degree of solidity and influence for a time, but eventually undergo transformation and change. This has been true of both naturalistic and theistic worldviews, for; although I examine them here as objects of study, with a certain degree of specificity and defined categorical boundaries, I am not attempting to define either naturalism or theism as absolute, reified objects. Rather I examine them as systems or patterns of thought with relatively stable structures and boundaries that are, nevertheless, susceptible to transformation and adaptation.

Regardless of their specific features or their unique expression in the particular thoughts, beliefs, and actions of individuals, the common purpose toward which both of these worldviews are assumed to be directed is the discovery of truth and the alignment

of one's will and actions with the logical implications that follow from one's current understanding of truth. The cultural battles that surround people's deeply held convictions regarding matters of truth provide school counselors with an opportunity and a challenge to create environments in which the full expression of humanity's search for truth can be taken seriously. When one social epistemology is privileged over others, however, and taught to children and youth in an uncritical fashion, the result is more likely to constitute a form of indoctrination rather than liberal education (Nord 2010; Nord & Haynes, 1998). The difficulty of critically examining worldviews, especially one's own, should not deter us, however, from the effort to reflect upon those philosophical assumptions upon which various social epistemologies rest and their relationship to each other in the common work of moving humanity, as a whole, closer to the truth.

Concern for the truth or even a common belief in its existence is controversial to some. Concern for the truth, as I use the idea here, closely relates to the idea of faith explored by Paul Tillich (2001/1957) as the "state of being ultimately concerned" (p. 1). Naturalistic and theistic worldviews both operate from epistemological, ontological, and axiological assumptions that infuse every aspect of decision making, reasoning, theory construction, and value choice (Nowlin & Blackburn, 1995). Ultimately, these assumptions lead to what is perceived by individuals as the truth and the *object of their ultimate concern* (Tillich, 2001/1957). These perceptions give rise to values and the relationships between competing or contradictory values, which, in turn, become habituated thinking patterns deemed to be the *proper* way to see or do things. Faith in this proper way of seeing and doing creates the epistemological ground upon which life's experiences are interpreted, understood, and placed in some kind of meaningful system.

To the extent that one is convinced of the ontological validity of their proper way of seeing and doing, one is likely to extend either greater or lesser measures of axiological concern for those beliefs. In many cases, this combination of forces gives rise to the conclusion that one's adopted system of properly seeing and doing in the world is worthy of replication and emulation by others. Some, through the successful application of the various tools of power, establish their proper way of seeing and doing within the structures of an institution that, over time, comes to dominate the social landscape. The history of the struggle between the naturalistic and theistic worldviews and their traditionally conflicting views of the *proper* ways of seeing and doing in the world represents an example of the way in which competing social epistemologies vie for dominance, transforming themselves from an open-ended base of ideas for continued revision and exploration into rigid ideologies. When investigation of reality becomes reified into ideologies for defining and governing reality, the likelihood increases that the ideology assumes a greater value than the reality which it originally sought to discover (W. Hatcher, 1980, 2002). In place of the search for truth, faith in ideologies becomes, according to Tillich (2001/1957), a form of idolatry. According to Tillich (2001/1957), "everything which is a matter of unconditional ultimate concern is made into a god. If the nation is someone's ultimate concern, the name of the nation becomes a sacred name and the nation receives divine qualities which far surpass the reality of the being and functioning of the nation. The nation then stands for and symbolizes the true ultimate, but in an idolatrous way" (p. 50). According to W. Hatcher (2002), God is not only the object of humanity's ultimate concern, but is also the "ultimate source of all intrinsic values. . . for He is the Creator who has alone determined the inner structure and degree of

refinement of each entity in existence" (p. 1). At a basic level, the problems that continue to beset those searching for a proper education for our nation's children resolve to conflicts over assumptions regarding intrinsic values and to how people, both individually and collectively, should relate to and act upon these values.

Due to education's intimate association with issues related to the perpetuation of power systems, the social epistemology that best supports and sustains the existing power structures is likely to become the urgent concern of those invested in designing and implementing a proper education for society's children. In this manner, the dominant social epistemology itself both becomes and reinforces the power that shapes social relations (Popkewitz, 1991). When a particular social epistemology becomes the de facto standard for validating and understanding human experience, the tendency is to incorporate the unexamined assumptions of that epistemology into the various social institutions that both define and regulate social relations between individuals and institutions at all levels of society (Popkewitz, 1991). The social influence of naturalistic science, as a dominant social epistemology, appears in the hesitancy of counselors to directly address matters of the ontological status of religious and spiritual phenomena. Instead, counselors appear to limit attention to religious and spiritual concerns to a subjective, pluralistic status that does not subject religious or spiritual truth claims to the validation methods of scientific inquiry (W. Hatcher, 1980; Slife & Reber, 2009). Such a set of circumstances, while preserving the appearance of respect for individual and cultural differences, leaves school counselors in the untenable position of not being able to either confirm or deny the rational implications of statements expressed as part of

students' search for truth for fear that such confirmation or denial might unintentionally impose the counselor's beliefs on students.

Although naturalistic assumptions concerning the ontological status of spiritual phenomena contribute to this set of circumstances within the counseling profession in general and within the school counseling profession in particular, they are not the primary factors responsible for it. Combined with modern naturalistic assumptions, certain political ideals related to religious liberty strongly influence the social epistemology of permissible knowledge, methods of inquiry and the ultimate social uses for which knowledge can be applied. Ideas and values regarding religious liberty in the United States have a long and complex history and are vitally important to any examination of the relationship between public education and religion and spirituality. The philosophical and political aspects of the conflicts between religious ideologies during the formative years of the United States government arose largely within the context of a theistic worldview (Adams & Emmerich, 1990; Holmes, 2006). Within this worldview, however, based primarily on Protestant Christianity, many competing convictions, interpretations and conclusions regarding fundamental ontological, epistemological and axiological values existed, including the emerging ideas of early naturalistic philosophers (Adams & Emmerich, 1990; Holmes, 2006; Jacoby, 2004). The inability of theologians, ministers, politicians, philosophers and other influential intellectuals of the time to recognize and address the rigid ideological positions that each sect had evolved led some to the conclusion that religion itself was an inherently absolutist phenomena that must be separated and isolated from questions of public policy and democratic governance (Adams & Emmerich, 1990). In this connection W. Hatcher's (1980) examination of the

unity of science and religion found in the Bahá'í Faith lays a large portion of the blame for the conflict between science and religion at the feet of the religious authorities of the past. "A notable feature of the religion-science controversy as it has actually existed in our recent history," W. Hatcher (p. 2) explains, "is this: new science came into conflict with old religion" (p. 2). Speaking of the religious establishment and institutions of Europe during the time of the scientific revolution, W. Hatcher (1980) observes that, "even though it possessed strong political and social prerogatives, religion had long since assumed a position as champion of the *status quo*, a disbeliever in the possibility of genuine social evolution and progress in this life" (p. 2). "No wonder," he continues, "that 'religion' seems to have been so much on the defensive and so easy an adversary to discredit in the eyes of thinking men. There was nothing in their immediate experience, no analogy or example, which could easily allow them to view religion in any light other than that which its most volatile exponents chose to represent it: a reactionary social force" (p. 2). Consequently, those "thinking men" who devised the new political system for the United States operated within this overall worldview of religion and religious authoritarianism and sought a compromise that would allow the newly emerging worldview of freethinking to develop, protected from the weight and interference of reactionary religious dogma (see Jacoby, 2004).

The divide that separates naturalistic and theistic worldviews hinges upon fundamental ontological disagreements that both result from and are reinforced by epistemological and axiological differences. Both science and religion are collective terms for complex systems of human understanding. Both include a diverse collection of assumptions about reality upon which further deductions and inductions are made.

Naturalistic assumptions logically lead to a particular set of conclusions about the nature of total reality, whereas theistic assumptions logically lead to a different set of conclusions about this same total reality. Neither science nor religion, however, is necessarily tied to past or current sets of assumptions. Humanity has proven itself capable of revising its most basic assumptions and thereby of constructing entirely new worldviews to guide its further progress and development. Dogmatic persistence in the maintenance of traditional or conventional assumptions regarding total reality is a characteristic of fanaticism, whether that fanaticism is applied to naturalistic or theistic beliefs. Within the broader context of education as a whole, professional school counselors find themselves, more often than many others, faced with navigating the complex, multifaceted beliefs of students and other education stakeholders, including parents, business owners and investors, politicians, scientific and religious leaders, and other educators themselves. The assumptions that professional school counselors hold with regard to the ontological, epistemological and axiological claims of science and religion significantly affect the manner in which they approach this challenge (Nowlin & Blackburn, 1995).

Although the naturalistic worldview that has dominated the psychological and educational sciences for most of the past century (Miller, 1990; Richards & Bergin, 2005) has contributed tremendously to the knowledge that we have about the physical mechanisms that channel and influence thought, the answers that it provides to the existential and metaphysical questions posed by philosophers and the average person alike "provides an impoverished view of human nature" (Richards & Bergin, 2005, p. 44). When this impoverished view of human nature is taken as a datum of reality and

studied further under the microscope of the psychological, biological and neurosciences, the interpretive chain that gradually emerges and solidifies into theory leads to the considerable likelihood that those theories rest upon conceptions that would, if viewed from the perspective of a theistic worldview, lead to significantly different conclusions and implications for counseling theory and practice (Nowlin & Blackburn, 1995; Slife & Reber, 2009).

The long historical development of current social epistemologies regarding the relationship between science and religion and their respective roles in the development of educational policies and practices cannot be quickly or easily analyzed. The historical forces associated with the dynamic patterns of historical continuities and discontinuities mentioned briefly here involve many variables and factors. The purpose of this overview of naturalistic and theistic worldviews and of the related political principle of religious liberty in the context of social epistemologies has been to establish a clearer background upon which to draw the outlines of the implications of naturalistic assumptions in the research and development of counseling theories and practices.

Naturalism's Influence

While some might be tempted to dismiss discussions of epistemology, ontology and axiology related to naturalism and theism as the fruitless hair splitting of philosophers, the implications of these high level scientific and social dialogs reach farther than most people realize (W. Hatcher 2008, Nowlin & Blackburn, 1995), especially as scientific analyses of the human brain and its complex functions (d'Aquili & Newberg, 1999; Newberg & d'Aquili, 2002; Pinker, 2009; Ramachandran, 2004), along with ideas of evolutionary biologists (Dawkins, 2006) continue to reinforce naturalistic

beliefs about the fundamental reality of, not only human nature, but of all nature and of reality itself. In turn, these same naturalistic beliefs inform the assumptions of research and practice used by psychologists, counselors and educators at all levels of the professions and are reinforced and conditioned by the cultural theme of "restrained democratic ideology" (Miller, 1990, p. 17), exemplified in the political principle of the separation of church and state.

The foundation of any education system, including school counseling systems, lies in that system's assumptions and premises concerning human nature and the processes by which it undergoes progress and development. The methods and practices that the system develops and adopts follow from beliefs about the developmental needs of children and youth, the goals and purposes toward which their lives are directed, the degree of freedom and responsibility that is deemed to be morally justified, and the general sense of desiring the good for our children; in brief, they follow from the worldview held by those in control of administrating the institution (Nowlin & Blackburn, 1995; Popkewitz, 1991).

The importance of examining the naturalistic assumptions that give rise to a particular social epistemology depends on first establishing what is meant by the term naturalism. For the purposes of this paper, naturalism is defined as "the philosophy that *everything that exists is a part of nature and that there is no reality beyond or outside of nature*" (Goetz & Taliaferro, 2008, "Nature and Naturalism," para. 4). As Goetz and Taliaferro (2008) go on to explain, however, this definition can become problematic, depending on how one chooses to define nature. At various times in history, people have defined nature in a way that included spiritual phenomena or conceptions of the world in

terms of their purpose or function in relation to other purposes and functions, such as the nature of a plant being partly defined by its power to grow or its power to heal (para. 2). As 17th and 18th Century philosophers moved away from these earlier, value-laden and teleological definitions of nature, they came to define it in terms that more closely resemble today's common usage which includes only those phenomena clearly discernible as elements arising from the laws and principles governing the material or physical world (Goetz & Taliaferro, 2008).

Naturalism itself can be classified into separate viewpoints ranging from strict naturalism, which holds that "nature is all that exists and nature itself is whatever will be disclosed by the ideal natural sciences, especially physics" (para. 8), to broad naturalism, which allows leeway for inclusion of things such as consciousness and subjective experiences under the rubric of natural phenomena (para. 10) but still maintains that these phenomena are entirely explainable in terms of natural causation. Goetz and Taliaferro (2008) summarize the range of naturalistic beliefs, however, as being united in the rejection of theism. They cite Kai Nielson as a representative of the attitudes of naturalists in the philosophical literature, explaining that

> "Naturalism denies that there are any spiritual or supernatural realities. There are, that is, no purely mental substances and there are no supernatural realities transcendent to the world or at least we have no good ground for believing that there could be such realities. . . . It is the view that anything that exists is ultimately composed of physical components" (para. 13).

Although the philosophy of naturalism contains numerous nuances and shades of thought about its definition and meaning, the worldview which I examine for the purposes of this

paper relates to this common rejection of theism and its logical implications for the non-existence of spiritual (i.e., supernatural/metaphysical) phenomena.

Theism, in contrast then, is the view that "the origin and continued existence of the cosmos are explained by the basic or fundamental intentional activity of an omnipotent, omniscient, good being, God" (Goetz & Taliaferro, 2008, Chapter 4, para. 32). Richards and Bergin (2005) further clarify their definition of theism as *scientific theism*, asserting that "God exists and can communicate with human beings through spiritual means" (p. 97). They "think it is unnecessary to exclude God from scientific theories or from the scientific discovery process" (p. 97) and that "the most useful scientific theories and interpretations will provide insight into the role of divine intelligence in the origins and operations of the universe" (p. 97). Richards and Bergin (2005) also recognize the existence of "important differences between various theistic perspectives of science" (p. 97, 100) and thus do not claim to define the concept, in its numerous particulars, for all those who hold a theistic worldview. Furthermore, theism is distinguished from forms of spirituality that make references to spiritual realities that are "occult, pantheistic, or part of numerous popular spiritualistic movements" (Richards & Bergin, 2005, p. 100). This basic definition of theism closely coincides with similar ideas found in the Bahá'í Faith and is therefore useful as a starting place for examining the implications of naturalistic and theistic assumptions about the ontological, epistemological and axiological concerns of school counselors and comprehensive school counseling programs.

Ontological and Epistemological Implications

Ontology, the study of that which actually exists, and epistemology, the study of the methods of by which we come to know things that exist, are intimately related areas of philosophical thinking. Both are closely related to the generally recognized definition of science as a "body of knowledge and an evidence-based, model-building enterprise that continually extends, refines, and revises knowledge" (Duschl, Schweingruber, & Shouse, 2007, p. 2). W. Hatcher (1980), in his arguments for the unity of science and religion based on principles derived from the Bahá'í Faith, expresses a similar conclusion "that science involves at least two aspects, namely the process or method by which we judge statements to be true, and the collection of statements which results from this process" (p. 3). Each of these aspects of understanding reacts upon and influences the other in a reflexive cycle of knowledge building. Axiology, the third component of understanding addressed here as an important element of the worldview held by school counselors and researchers, is the study of value and the way in which humans ascribe value to things and ideas. Its relationship to the ideas associated with naturalistic assumptions in school counseling will be addressed in more detail below, but it is important to note here that it is also intimately linked with concerns of ontology and epistemology (Nowlin & Blackburn, 1995).

The chains of rational understanding that we create from our experience depend heavily on the often unconscious assumptions that we hold about the ontological structure of reality, assumptions that contain within their scope, both abstract and concrete dimensions. W. Hatcher (1980) explains the two essential components of scientific statements: those which are "experiential (or empirical)" (p. 3) and those which are

"logical or theoretical" (p. 3). The theoretical components of scientific statements result "in part from the use of *abstract* terms. These are terms which refer to entities or qualities not directly accessible to human observation" (p. 3). W. Hatcher (1980) demonstrates, in his explanation of the unity of science and religion, how highly abstract and theoretical statements in science, such as "e=mc2", are gradually built from other abstract, theoretical statements regarding such terms as "'velocity,' 'light', 'mass', and 'energy'" (p. 3). Such evolved scientific statements, although seemingly simple on the surface, are in fact possessed of such highly developed theoretical content that fully understanding their meaning requires years of study (W. Hatcher, 1980). Statements such as these, W. Hatcher (1980) explains, are "far removed from simple, direct physical observations like the whiteness of paper" (p. 3).

Although the direct physical observations of such qualities as the whiteness of paper are described by W. Hatcher (1980) as examples of concrete scientific statements, he points out that even a statement such as this paper is white "has *some* theoretical content" (p. 3) involving "abstractions which are not innately given to us and which develop in normal children only after several years of life experience" (pp. 3-4). All of this points to the idea that the conclusions we infer about the nature of objective reality often involve many levels of theoretical abstraction beyond the raw data of sense perception and that the notion of an idea being a *fact*, based on empirical observation, must be approached cautiously and perhaps more open-mindedly than many have previously concluded.

Scientists who adopt and promote a worldview based on the philosophy of strict naturalism deny the existence of all supernatural phenomena including the existence of a

separate, non-physical human consciousness capable of experiencing unique, subjective awareness of *qualia* (Goetz & Taliaferro, 2008), described as the subjective experience of "'what it is like'" (Audi, 1995, p. 666) to experience a particular phenomena. In the view of strict naturalists, the human experience of qualia can be reduced to the operation of physical forces in the brain that, when combined in complex patterns of operation, give rise to one's sense of consciousness and personal, subjective mental states (Goetz & Taliaferro, 2008). By itself, the question of whether or not qualia exist may not seem significant or useful to anyone, let alone to school counselors, but there are further implications of this question that begin to reveal its significance.

The existence of qualia implies the existence of conscious minds capable of perceiving them. A relationship is thus implied between a subjective perceiver and the objective phenomena that is perceived. If the ontological reality of the perceiver is, as naturalists argue, an information processing system assembled and organized from basic energy and matter according to laws of purely physical causation (Pinker, 2004), the experience of qualia may be experienced as subjectively substantial and real, and, for all intents and purposes, it would be, except for any axiological assertions of ultimate concern or meaning. If naturalistic explanations for the emergence of human consciousness from the laws and materials of physical matter are accepted at face value, even the mystical and spiritual experiences of those whom researchers such as d'Aquili and Newberg (1999) (see also Newberg & d'Aquili, 2002) have studied can ultimately be explained as the experience of qualia arising from the relationship between the information processing apparatus of the brain and the objective elements of physical reality. When researchers in psychology and counseling allow these assumptions to pass

unchallenged by remaining neutral toward competing theistic interpretations of qualia and their relationship to a transcendent human consciousness represented by the idea of the human soul, they are making an ontological commitment, however unintentional or inexplicit, to the naturalistic position regarding the non-existence of spiritual phenomena.

The relationship between qualia and consciousness represents only one example of the implications that naturalistic ontological and epistemological beliefs have for denying, whether implicitly or explicitly, the existence of a transcendent human soul. Another is the concept known as the *causal closure* of the universe (Goetz & Taliaferro, 2008). According to the causal closure argument, the only phenomena that have ontological existence are physical phenomena, and all physical phenomena operate according to the laws and properties of the natural sciences. Forces or phenomena that operate outside of the closed system of the physical universe, such as souls, spirits, or transcendental states of intelligent consciousness or awareness, are believed not to exist.

This belief in the non-existence of non-physical (i.e., spiritual) phenomena carries with it further implications for the development of philosophies and beliefs related to counseling and education. The first among these implications is the non-existence of a teleological purpose for human existence (Goetz & Taliaferro, 2008). Any purpose which human beings subjectively experience is said to be the by-product of adaptive functions evolved for survival through the forces of natural selection (Dawkins, 2006). If adopted as the true nature of reality, this assumption supports the view of incorporating religion and spirituality in counseling as nothing more than an adaptive survival tool--a useful fiction that human beings have evolved through the process of natural selection to accomplish the great feats of civilization that have allowed our species to thrive. But it

does not support the view of theistic counselors or students who organize and interpret their experiences according to the assumption that human life has an objective, teleological purpose ordained by God and toward which the forces of human development impel us both individually and collectively. By accepting the naturalistic assumptions, inherent in the status quo of today's psychological studies of religion and spirituality, theistically oriented counselors face a challenge to their sense of authenticity and congruence (see Rogers, 1961) in the counseling relationship. While not exactly going so far as to see spiritual and religious experience and beliefs as delusional or pathological, in the way that Dawkins (2006) and Ellis (1985) do, the acceptance of strict naturalism's ontological assumptions about scientific knowledge, explicitly or implicitly, leads to logical analyses and conclusions that deny or distort theistic or even humanistic conceptions of human purpose and existence.

The second significant ontological implication which the causal closure argument of naturalism carries with it is the non-existence of libertarian free will (Goetz & Taliaferro, 2008). In order for free will to exist, some form of consciousness must exist that transcends the deterministic forces of physical cause-and-effect which occur in the brain. Without such a form of consciousness, all of our thoughts and behaviors can be determined and predicted by the laws governing the natural sciences. The fact that we currently lack the ability to do so can be explained, in naturalistic terms, as a problem similar to predicting the weather; the complexity of the system, with its staggering number of variables and epiphenomenal functions, is simply beyond our current ability to calculate. Given time and sufficient computing power, however, models could be created that can predict and control larger areas of brain or climate operations.

The non-existence of free will brings with it numerous implications for the psychological sciences and for education, not the least of which is the meaninglessness of moral responsibility. If we are not free to make choices about our thoughts, words, and behavior, given the legitimate constraints of biology and environment, then how can we be held morally responsible for those choices? They are determined by the purely natural, causal forces operating in our brains. Likewise, this situation does not remove the reality that people *do* hold others responsible for their actions, so a naturalistic explanation is needed for this phenomenon, which can be reflexively provided by saying that those who hold others responsible for their actions are, similarly, not responsible for their actions, but are merely acting out behaviors that have been developed over the millennia through the forces of evolution.

Although these and other implications of the causal closure argument, which excludes consideration of all spiritual phenomena from scientific consideration, have been challenged by various scholars (Goetz & Taliaferro, 2008; Nowlin & Blackburn, 1995; Richards & Bergin, 2005; Sheldrake, 2012), the tendency to blur the lines between naturalistic and theistic assumptions and the implications of these assumptions allows the significant, and often startling, logical differences between them to pass unnoticed. Two broad themes emerge from this examination of the assumptions upon which theories and counseling practices associated with those theories depend. The first is that, as argued by Slife and Reber (2009), important naturalistic assumptions about reality, whether considered implicitly or explicitly, prejudice psychological and counseling research and practice against the basic premises of a theistic worldview. The second is that, as currently conceived, the worldviews of naturalism and theism are so fundamentally

opposed to each other that a power struggle between them seems inevitable and irreconcilable (Mahner & Bunge, 1996). These themes are present in the social relations that give rise to institutions and practices of all kinds, including school systems and the multitude of organizations and individuals, both political and non-political, involved with them. These social relations, in turn, depend heavily upon the fundamental worldviews of the individuals involved in their operation (Popkewitz, 1991).

Implications for Social Relationships

The claims of those who espouse naturalistic worldviews have wielded considerable power and influence over the social relationships involving the development of modern science (W. Hatcher, 1980; Richards & Bergin, 2005). Slife and Reber (2009) argue that this influence has become so pervasive that many psychologists who espouse belief in God nevertheless have unintentionally been trained to think and behave according to naturalistic assumptions in their day-to-day work as therapists and researchers. Many of these therapists and researchers, according to Slife and Reber (2009), consider naturalism to be neutral toward God, and that this neutrality has no effect upon the outcome of scientific research and practice in the various disciplines of psychology. Slife and Reber (2009) point out, however, that theistic assumptions can be viewed as either "add-on assumptions" or "altering assumptions" (p. 66). They explain that "add-on assumptions must be complementary to and/or independent of the common assumptions to which they are added. That is, add-on assumptions cannot change the meaning of already existing assumptions" (p. 66). Altering assumptions, in contrast, alter the "meaning of many existing assumptions. They are not self-contained ideas, but are better understood as parts of wholes, where the properties of parts mutually constitute

their very natures" (p. 66). Naturalism's conception of God as a construct of human invention versus theism's conception of God as an objective entity means that consideration of God as an assumption in psychological research and theory development must be viewed as an altering assumption, thus making psychological theories based on naturalistic premises incompatible with a theistic worldview.

When this incompatibility is acknowledged by scholars and researchers and its implications are addressed, a common solution is to reassert the division between scientific and religious worldviews (Mahner & Bunge, 1996; National Academy of Sciences & Institute of Medicine, 2008; Slife & Reber, 2009), employing a position on science and religion that Nord and Haynes (1998) describe as *independence*, in which "science and religion cannot conflict because they are incommensurable, autonomous endeavors, each with its own methods, each with its own domain" (p. 137). Some, such as Slife and Reber (2009), discuss the added dimension of arguing in favor of theism's place among the constellation of competing belief systems in a multicultural milieu (Slife & Reber, 2009) and others, such as Mahner and Bunge (1996), argue that religious education, especially at an early age, is harmful to the development of scientific understanding. Slife and Reber (2009) conclude that the current secular approach to psychology, with its assumptions of neutrality toward and compatibility with theism, constitutes a prejudice toward theism that ignores the altering assumptions that arise when psychological phenomena are investigated. Their answer to this prejudice is to acknowledge and accept the incompatibility of naturalistic and theistic worldviews and to propose that the dialogue between naturalists and theists focus attention on the areas in which significant differences exist, in hopes that the "conversation will be especially

fruitful because dialogue partners will inevitably expose themselves to important and clarifying contrasts" (p. 76). They emphasize that "true and meaningful conversation, however, needs to be two ways, with theistic meanings considered to be just as potentially informative to a naturalistic world of meanings as the reverse" (p. 76). Mahner and Bunge (1996), in contrast, hold that science and religion, although united in their common search for truth, nevertheless are so incompatible in their basic ontological assumptions that any common dialog between them is impossible. It is clear from Mahner's and Bunge's discussion of the phenomena of both science and religion that their firm adherence to the philosophy of naturalism as an undisputed worldview logically leads them to their conclusions about the incompatibility of science and religion and lends support to the conclusions of Slife and Reber (2009) that naturalistic assumptions inherently prejudice researchers against inclusion of theistic assumptions within scientific research.

Although Slife's and Reber's approach of asserting the equal legitimacy of theistic assumptions to scientific research is helpful to the process of reasserting the validity of spiritual and religious experience in a comprehensive analysis of human experience of reality, it does so by portraying the challenge of reconciling the conflict between scientific and religious worldviews as a debate between competing conceptions of reality from which some measure of compromise may be sought. Such an approach accepts the premise that the assumptions that separate naturalistic science from theistic religion are not, in themselves, to be challenged but rather are to be accepted as unexamined starting points in a good-natured epistemological competition. Regardless of the spirit of tolerance and respect that animates such a competition or the language used to describe it

as a "dialog" or "conversation", the final outcome of a competition can still only result in a single victor. Mahner and Bunge (1996) point out, for example, that "a clash between scientific theories and religious beliefs is bound to occur" (p. 108) when considering "questions concerning the evolution of the universe and, in particular, the evolution of life and *Homo sapiens*, the nature of mind, the existence of an afterlife, and the origins and social functions of religion" (p. 108). Such a clash, however, arises not from the phenomena of science and religion themselves, but rather from a limited conception of both science and religion by those who espouse naturalistic beliefs about the former and dogmatic beliefs about the latter. The religious principles of the Bahá'í Faith warn of the dangers inherent in both of these extreme positions and delineates ideas and practices designed to avoid them, ideas and practices that coincide closely with the position on the relationship between science and religion described by Nord and Haynes (1998) as *integration*, in which "science and religion are commensurable endeavors; they can conflict and they can reinforce each other, for they make claims about the same world. Neither can ignore the other, and neither automatically trumps the other; they provide, in effect, complementary methods for rationally pursuing truth" (p. 138).

Competition in the realm of ideas generally does not lead to the discovery of truth but only to the assertion of power. It may be that the ideas held by the victorious parties contain certain elements of truth, but it is equally likely that those ideas do not conform to the entire truth in every respect. The relative nature of truth and the process of its scientific discovery are well-established aspects of the scientific method (W. Hatcher, 1990; Mahner & Bunge, 1996; Popper 2005/1935). When ideas, especially highly abstract ideas, are placed in competition with each other, the tendency is for those

elements of truth contained in the ideas of the vanquished parties to remain obscured. Only when phenomena are fully investigated in a spirit of mutual cooperation, united in a common search for truth as a whole does a fuller picture of the complex dynamics of ontological existence come into clearer view. The religious principles of the Bahá'í Faith present this collective, unified search for truth as a process of *consultation* (see Smith & Karlberg, 2009). This religious principle of consultation, which resembles the description of responsible scientific dialog by leading scientists (Committee on Science, Engineering and Public Policy, 2009), is a vitally important element of the overall project to establish the unity of science and religion as a common enterprise of humanity's search for truth. So long as naturalistic assumptions regarding the ontological nonexistence of spiritual phenomena continue to dominate ideas about science and the scientific method, however, a full and comprehensive consultation about the data of human experience will remain impossible, leading to perpetual competition between scientific and religious worldviews for social epistemological dominance.

Given that school counseling and education generally rely heavily on psychological research, it logically follows that the same biases and prejudices toward theism discovered by Slife and Reber (2009) in psychology as a whole would find their way into school counseling and educational theories as well. Mahner and Bunge (1996) make their naturalistic prejudice in education explicit by arguing that religious education should not only be confined to the private sphere of the home but that "the aims of modern education clearly take precedence over religious interests and rights" (p. 120). They claim, "for instance, parents should not be permitted to remove their children from certain classes, such as sex education and evolutionary biology" (p. 120) and that even

private schools, if they are allowed to exist at all, should be required to conform to the same curriculum standards as the public schools, especially in those areas related to science education (Mahner & Bunge, 1996). Other writers and institutions are less explicit in the assertion of the implications of their naturalistic beliefs, but the epistemological, ontological and axiological implications of the conflict that Mahner and Bunge (1996) clearly address remain present in them nevertheless (Berkman & Plutzer, 2010; Dawkins, 2006; Smith, 2002).

Axiological Implications

The implicit influence which naturalism has on school counseling and education goes farther than the intellectual debates surrounding its epistemological and ontological dimensions. The question of human values (i.e., axiology), whether naturalistically or theistically derived, lies at the heart of what we consider to be human itself and gives rise to all of the activities that we strive to accomplish in life, whether individually or collectively. Values are closely related to desires and to beliefs about taking actions to fulfill those desires. This series of relations, cognitive scientists such as Pinker (2009) argue, forms the basis of human intelligence and consciousness. It also represents the thinking of theologians such as Tillich (2001/1957), who examine the dynamics of faith as the function of human perceptions and actions toward values that are given ultimacy.

Tillich's (2001/1957) examination of the dynamics of faith and his analysis of humanity's relationship to "ultimate concerns" provides a basis for developing an understanding of the axiological implications of naturalistic assumptions in psychological and counseling research and practice. Tillich (2001/1957) argues that the dynamics of faith are an essential and unavoidable feature of human experience and do not necessarily

require a theistic worldview to function. "Faith," he asserts, "is the state of being ultimately concerned" (p. 1). Whether our ultimate concerns center on political, economic, scientific, religious or even hedonistic ends, the manner of all related thinking, feeling, and behaving is shaped by and mediated by those concerns or values to which we ascribe ultimacy (Tillich, 2001/1957). The implications of Tillich's (2001/1957) analysis of the dynamics of faith closely resembles the conclusions of researchers such as Sink and Richmond (2004) that spirituality is an unavoidable element of human nature and human functioning, regardless of a person's worldview related to naturalistic or theistic assumptions. In each of these instances, we begin to see signs that, despite differences in language used to describe the activities of thinking that lead us to search for truth, a similar, if not identical, phenomena is being examined. The enterprise of science is, at its root, a human enterprise undertaken by human beings for human purposes (W. Hatcher 1980) and has, as one of its central aims, the discovery and explication of the authentic nature of total reality or, in other words, the truth. The desire that we feel to seek the truth and to recognize and avoid falsehood is one of humanity's most fundamental values, and the seeking of it, by both naturalists and theists alike, implies that, at some level, we are all involved in the exploration of metaphysical notions of absolute being (Nowlin & Blackburn, 1995).

From this shared value of the search for truth, however, the intellectual paths charted by naturalists and theists quickly diverge. The diversity of views among naturalists themselves to explain the experience of values involving the arts, ethics, philosophy, religion, politics and so on demonstrates the difficult challenge posed by a set of human activities that serve no apparent biologically adaptive purpose (Pinker,

2009). Some activities putatively identified with the spiritual aspects of human nature, such as experiences of beauty derived from nature or the arts, have been argued to be by-products of more basic, adaptive brain functions related to activation of the brain's pleasure centers in conjunction with those areas evolved for creatively ordering and shaping the environment for survival purposes (Pinker, 2009; Ramachandran, 2004). Such neurologically based explanations of certain human values, however, do not, according to Pinker (2009), sufficiently explain them all. For example, "theories of the evolution of the moral sense can explain why we condemn evil acts against ourselves and our kith and kin, but cannot explain the conviction, as unshakable as our grasp of geometry, that some acts are inherently wrong even if their net effects are neutral or beneficial to our overall well-being" (p. 561). Although Pinker acknowledges that difficult philosophical problems of morality and ethics "have a feeling of the divine" (p. 559) and that the "favorite solution in most times and places is mysticism and religion" (559-560), he persists with the naturalistic assumption of God's nonexistence and, thereby, glosses over the entire range of theistic contributions and considerations to resolutions of these questions, lending support to Slife's and Reber's (2009) conclusion that the naturalistic worldview prejudices researchers against theism and its altering assumptions concerning the search for truth.

Pinker's (2009) solution to this problem is to propose acceptance of the idea that these questions are fundamentally unsolvable. "Maybe philosophical problems are hard not because they are divine or irreducible or meaningless or workaday science," he states, "but because the mind of *Homo sapiens* lacks the cognitive equipment to solve them" (p. 561). Such an attitude reflects a significant shift in scientific thinking from the days when

all of the universe's mysteries were assumed to be accessible to use of the scientific method. Despite its apparent humility, however, Pinker's (2009) proposal remains an avowedly naturalistic one. "The hypothesis does not imply that we have sighted the end of science or bumped into a barrier on how much we can ever learn about how the mind works," he affirms (p. 563). In a statement remarkably similar to the claims made for the causal closure of the universe, Pinker (2009) offers an explanation of *cognitive closure*. "Humanly thinkable thoughts are closed under the workings of our cognitive faculties, and may never embrace the solutions to the mysteries of philosophy. But the set of thinkable thoughts may be infinite nonetheless" (p. 563). One of the significant implications of this hypothesis is the irrelevance of further investigation into the ontological existence of objective morality. Such questions would be considered beyond our grasp and, therefore, unimportant for the work of moving ahead with the practical matters of simply working with what we have and what we do know. This hypothesis represents a dismissive attitude toward humanity's most deeply held moral and spiritual questions that does not significantly differ from the arguments of the logical positivists that metaphysical questions and propositions are fundamentally meaningless (Nowlin & Blackburn, 1995). It reinforces the assumption that the objective existence of God is irrelevant to matters of axiological concern and implicitly asserts that faith in human cognition, as limited as it is recognized to be, is the proper object of humanity's ultimate concern.

Assuming that God will not go away, as neuroscientists such as Newberg and d'Aquili (2002) do, and that human beings are neurologically adapted for theistic belief, the axiological questions centered on belief in moral absolutes and values of ultimate

concern are not likely to be dismissed as irresolvable by the majority of humanity, regardless of the cognitive closure hypothesis put forward by scholars such as Pinker (2009). Despite this probability, the question of God's objective existence remains a central problem to be resolved, for a person can argue, as Voltaire (n.d.) so famously did, that "If God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent him" (verse 3), a philosophical assertion made by a theistic (albeit deistic) Enlightenment thinker who simultaneously denounced superstitious religious dogmas and pursued ideals of scientific understanding and religious tolerance. The value that people have historically placed upon belief in God and in the altering assumptions which such belief logically implies clearly suggest that existing standards of neutrality toward religion and their theistic assumptions require more careful consideration. Yet one of the major obstacles standing in the way of such consideration by researchers and counselors in the United States is a political value that Enlightenment thinkers such as Voltaire himself promoted as the answer to the preservation of religious liberty--the separation of church and state.

Separation of Church and State in U.S. Public Schools

When we consider the added controversies surrounding the separation of church and state in public schools, the ability which naturalism has to shape the dominant social epistemology becomes more evident. Politicians, careful to avoid discussion of religion in their search for solutions to improving U.S. educational achievements, have turned to those sciences most indicative of non-religious connotations or influences. Cognitive psychology, with its emphases on empirical measurements, operational variables, and continued adherence to principles of a scientific method derived from the philosophy of logical positivism, has provided an expedient solution to this political need. But, as the

following section of the paper demonstrates, the naturalistic assumptions tacitly accepted as inherent to the scientific method have both reinforced and themselves been reinforced by the political principle of the separation of church and state. Furthermore, it will be seen that continued, uncritical acceptance of these assumptions with regard to public education form a significant barrier to creating the type of holistic education implied by a postmodern paradigm of reality which includes the dimensions of religion and spirituality.

Perhaps more than any other single factor, the separation of church and state enshrined in the First Amendment shapes the nature of the dialog surrounding the appropriate role of theistic assumptions (see Berkman & Plutzer, 2010; Fraser, 1999), not only in education and school counseling, but in all of the social sciences in America in general. Those studying the social sciences, including psychology and education, are constrained by the practical limits of their own funding for research and the applicability of their findings to shaping public policy by the perception of how such research will be viewed by the courts. In order for a psychological theory or practice to find legitimate purchase within the realm of public education, it must withstand the various tests of government neutrality toward religion that have been devised by the courts over the years and applied with admittedly mixed and contradictory results (Berkman & Plutzer, 2010; Fraser, 1999; Mitchell, 1987). Combined with the growing encroachment of scientific theories upon topics and areas of concern historically regulated by religious beliefs and practices, the constraining effect of the separation of church and state upon the inclusion of theistic assumptions in the public arena creates a confluence of forces which

effectively, albeit perhaps unintentionally, precludes theistic assumptions, variables, and conclusions from serious consideration within the dominant social epistemology.

The framers of the U.S. Constitution understood the importance of religion to the democratic process. They expended a great deal of time and energy drafting and refining a political system meant to ensure and protect religious liberty and the free exercise of religious beliefs (Adams & Emmerich, 1990). They did not, however, appear to regard religion and spirituality as distinct constructs in the manner which psychologists and others in the social sciences do today (Holmes, 2006), and may, as a result, have held more conflated ideas about the dynamics involved in how society should properly handle this important but delicate matter. Furthermore, a number of the most influential framers, such as Jefferson and Madison, held deistic religious beliefs (Holmes, 2006; Jacoby, 2004), which many in their day and today regard as a form of functional atheism (i.e., naturalism) in terms of God's active involvement in the natural world (Slife & Reber, 2009). The reality of both Jefferson's and Madison's religious beliefs, however, reveal far more subtlety and complexity than such labels convey. Both believed in God as the Creator of the world and all existence, but beyond this, their attitudes toward theistic concerns varied considerably in places, while overlapping in others, revealing no simple solution to the intent of the framers of the Constitution regarding their own personal worldviews with regard to the relationship between church and state (Holmes, 2006). The diverse and often contradictory religious and scientific beliefs of the people involved in the long process of drafting and ratifying both the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights led to the beginning of the early intellectual compromises necessary to the political unification of the newly emergent independent states (Adams & Emmerich, 1990,

Jacoby, 2004). These compromises have been incrementally debated and reinterpreted by lawyers, politicians, scholars, and judges for more than two centuries, giving rise to social and political institutions, policies, and laws and to cultural norms and values that have radically departed from the theistic assumptions upon which Jefferson based the Declaration of Independence (Adams & Emmerich, 1990).

The advances in modern science and technology and the development of the social welfare state have involved government far more deeply in the lives of citizens than Jefferson and the other framers of the Constitution would have likely imagined. This level of involvement includes the development and continued expansion of mass schooling (Miller, 1990, 1995; Spring, 1991) and the role that social epistemology plays in the creation and reproduction of cultural norms and values (Popkewitz, 1991), including those related to religious and political ideologies (Fraser, 1999). In his defense of religious liberty and freedom of conscience, Jefferson assumed a far more limited role of the federal government in the regulation of public and private life than that which exists today, contending that "governmental authority extends only to regulating external actions injurious to others" (Adams & Emmerich, 1990, p. 24). The establishment and regulation of public education as we know it today would not, by this definition, have entered Jefferson's thoughts as a proper realm of interest or authority for federal government, and, therefore, the social epistemological problems associated in later decades and centuries with the relationship between the religion clauses and public education would not have likely entered his calculations. Some have since concluded that the combination of historical forces that have shaped American social and political philosophies about the separation of church and state, as it applies to education, amount

to a de facto establishment of the religion of secular humanism in U.S. public schools (Mitchell, 1987). Admittedly, such a conclusion relies on a broad interpretation of both education and religion, but whether or not one is inclined to agree with this conclusion, the question deserves careful consideration by those who advocate for a holistic educational model which includes the religious and spiritual dimensions of students' lives. Such consideration ultimately hinges on the worldview that one adopts with regard to the assumptions related to the ontological status of spiritual phenomena (e.g., God, spirit, souls, etc.)

Furthermore, religion and spirituality are not viewed in the same way today that they were more than two hundred years ago when the framers of the U.S. Constitution undertook the challenge of defining the proper place of religion in society. The religious conflicts of Europe during the three hundred year period from the 16th through the 18th centuries greatly effected thoughts about religion and its proper role in society. Against this background of constant struggle and bitter persecution, the framers of the U.S. Constitution sought a political means to keep the still deeply divided religious beliefs of the colonies from thwarting a political union (Adams & Emmerich, 1990) and to ensure that the leaders of no particular sect could coerce formal affiliation or demand monetary contributions by force of law (Adams & Emmerich, 1990; Holmes, 2006). In addition, the philosophical ideas associated with the newly emerging naturalism of the Enlightenment, provided a timely and accessible tool to effect the kind of political change that would achieve the goals of all those involved, even though there were still many who resisted these ideas and others who gave only reluctant or tacit agreement to them (Adams & Emmerich, 1990). Jefferson himself did not advocate for a complete removal

of religion from the realm of public policy but only from the imposition of federal control over matters of religious conscience. He continued to support the right of the states' governments to regulate religion (Adams & Emmerich, 1990).

When the social/historical structures and circumstances that combined to form the social epistemology of Jefferson's day became manifested in the Bill of Rights, the principle of the separation of church and state emerged as an expedient and philosophically justified way to address particular abuses of religious authority prevalent in the cultures from which he and his contemporaries emerged. Since then, this principle has stood at the center of many political, social and cultural debates, controversies and movements, including many involving education (DelFattore, 2004; Fraser, 1999). The particular model of relating the institution of state with the institution of church adopted by the framers of the U.S. Constitution does not adequately account for modern notions of science, religion, spirituality, and education. Although the political principle of the separation of church and state helped to mitigate some of the most intense forms of hostility and persecution that resulted from the religious conflicts of Europe, it did so, not by addressing the apparently intractable disagreements that gave rise to the conflicts in the first place, but by calling a kind of political cease fire in which people agreed to disagree for the larger sake of social order. Framed in the philosophical language and metaphors of Enlightenment concepts of natural law and the rights that the framers of the U.S. Constitution determined to logically follow from these laws, the separation of church and state appeared to them as both a morally logical and practically expedient solution to the obstacles standing in the way of creating a politically united country (Adams & Emmerich, 1990). For us to hold up this political principle today as a moral

absolute in light of more than two centuries of scientific and social progress is to deny the very basis of rational freethinking that inspired this novel and radical solution to the specific problems of a particular time period in human history. To consider the case and the conversation closed is to exclude from serious and earnest public discourse and scientific inquiry the most important source of questions regarding human life and the purposes for which we choose to educate our children in the first place.

The naturalistic assumptions related to the prejudice against theism noted by Slife and Reber (2009) in the psychological sciences can be equally seen in those related to the separation of church and state in U.S. society in general and, by extension, in those related to public education. The assumption that government can behave neutrally toward religion rests upon the kind of add-on assumptions about theism described by Slife and Reber (2009). As noted earlier, such assumptions assert that the beliefs and practices associated with naturalism are sufficient, in and of themselves, to determine the proper relations between individuals and government institutions and that any considerations of God's involvement in human affairs have, at best, a supplemental effect upon the arrangement and operation of these relations but are not intrinsically necessary to their successful operation. The set of epistemological relations created by these circumstances provides further evidence that the dominant social epistemology at work in U.S. public education not only affirms a naturalistic worldview but also implicitly prejudices the system of education against a theistic worldview (Nord & Haynes, 1998).

If we are to develop a proper education for our children that reflects a holistic view of reality in general and of human nature in particular, then it makes sense to include the entire scope of human experience (Nord & Haynes, 1998). Asserting the

separation of church and state as an unquestionable, *a priori* principle, however, places a dogmatic epistemological and axiological obstacle in the way of a unified educational experience for our children. This principle rests upon an assumption that complete separation of church and state is a requirement for the existence of religious liberty, which is the underlying objective of the principle in the first place. Religious liberty, however, can be protected in ways that do not require the state to attempt to remain neutral toward religion in general. Religious liberty can, for example, be legislated as a right in the same manner as any other cultural, racial or ethnic difference is protected from discrimination. Likewise, religious liberty can be protected today given a deeper and broader understanding of the social, psychological, and legal nature of religion itself. The definition of religion in today's pluralistic society, for example, has widened since the days of the mid to late 18th century. The fact that religion can be philosophically conceived of as a social and psychological construct, independent of its specific creeds, dogmas and rituals, allows modern society to revisit the basis for the form of protection with which the framers of the U.S. Constitution chose to defend religious liberty. Given a more flexible and pluralistic understanding of the phenomenon of religion itself, it becomes possible consider the anachronism of strict separation of church and state by comparing it to society's views about science. For example, the fact that people often disagree about the results and conclusions of various scientific studies does not lead them to coerce others to adopt their beliefs about them (at least not in principle), yet, we do not witness movements to create a separation of state and science to avoid the possibility that one particular group of scientists' findings will be established as the national scientific theory and forcefully mandated such that all believe and adhere to its findings. In the

present social epistemology of science, the distinct theories and conclusions that scientists develop are continuously subjected to further study, revision, clarification and, in some cases, outright refutation. People expect scientific knowledge to be progressive and relative to humanity's current understanding of it and, therefore, it would seem absurd to fear that one particular scientific theory would be selected from the entirety of scientific knowledge and enforced as a national science to the exclusion of all others, whereas people expect religion to be dogmatic and absolute with regard to its pronouncements about reality and the proper human orientation and response to those pronouncements. In the time of the framers of the U.S. Constitution, such a general view of religion would have been justified by the evidence of experience. But religion need not be regarded as an inherently dogmatic, absolutist phenomenon. The Bahá'í Faith, for example, makes the point of religion's progressive and relative nature one of its most important sacred principles, a point that will later be shown to be a critical factor in understanding the unity of science and religion.

If it is possible, then, to conceive of new ways to protect religious liberty, given humanity's new knowledge and social epistemology for relating to familiar and traditional concepts, then it seems reasonable to conclude that efforts to reform school counseling theory and practices can safely call into question the continued utility of the principle of the separation of church and state, as it is currently formulated, and, in the process of research and theory development, regard theistic assumptions about reality in a fair and unbiased manner. To be clear, I am not arguing in favor of completely abandoning the principle of the separation of church and state. Rather, I am making the case for not viewing it as an unapproachable or unassailable obstacle in the path of

developing a proper education for our children. It is an illusion to continue believing that a proper education can restrict itself to a narrow focus on a small subset of intellectual skills, such as reading and math--or even the broader goals of college and career readiness--while either ignoring or paying token lip service to the larger questions of the ultimate ends and purposes for which these skills are to be used in the pursuit of a genuine and authentically meaningful and happy life.

The point to be made here is not to exhaustively analyze the influence of naturalistic assumptions in the establishment and evolution of the political principle of the separation of church and state, but rather it is to highlight the existence of such assumptions and to elevate the question of their existence to a greater level of concern and interest in the eyes of school counselors and educators considering the need to reevaluate current approaches to working with students' religious and spiritual beliefs in schools and to promoting their overall spiritual well-being. The importance of the dynamic relationship between social epistemology and ontology and the ways in which they can become reified into language patterns and social institutions based on those patterns becomes more apparent as we examine the ways in which the terms science, religion, spirituality and education are currently used and how a different understanding of these terms can open the door to new ways of conceptualizing the relationships between them and of laying the groundwork for a more holistic worldview that sees science and religion as complementary elements of a single truth-seeking system.

Bahá'í views on science, religion, spirituality and education

Having considered a number of the implications related to the influence of naturalistic assumptions about reality in psychological and counseling research, theory

development and practice and their incompatibility with theistic assumptions about reality, I turn toward the examination of religious principles found in the Bahá'í Faith that redefine a number of key terms and questions related to the ongoing project of discovering a true harmony between science and religion. In any area of study, much depends on common definitions and understanding of the concepts or constructs under consideration. As each new study in an emerging field of inquiry evolves, a set of common usages for words gradually emerges allowing further theoretical and philosophical meanings to develop upon those shared assumptions. This process of shaping a social epistemology occurs along multiple lines and within multiple, interacting social settings (Popkewitz, 1991). Among scholars, definitions of science and religion continually shift and evolve, moving somewhat fluidly within the boundaries that form a loose consensus among certain segments of any given discourse community. These definitions have evolved over centuries through the collective work of thousands of scholars and researchers; consequently, the purpose here is not to attempt an exhaustive study or comparison of the numerous, multifaceted and highly elaborate models, theories and philosophies that scholars have devised over the centuries to describe these broad and abstract human phenomena. I focus attention primarily on examining the ways in which the sacred writings of the Bahá'í Faith approach each of these subjects, relying upon the reader's own knowledge of the more general usages of these terms as the basis for comparison. The intention is to illustrate how the particular manner in which the principles of the Bahá'í Faith reorganize these common and important facets of social epistemology and how this reorganization produces the possible basis for a reconceptualized, holistic approach to human development that harmonizes humanity's

knowledge of the natural world with its knowledge about the spiritual world. In particular, I rely and expand upon the work of the mathematician and philosopher William Hatcher (1980, 1982, 1990, 2002, 2008) whose investigations into the unity of science and religion are based upon principles and assumptions contained in the sacred writings of the Bahá'í Faith.

The lines of development that have given shape to much of the current discourse regarding the relationship between science and religion have, despite numerous variations and twists, followed the general tack of viewing science and the scientific method as a source of objective facts and practical theories about reality and of viewing religion and spirituality as sources of subjective experiences related to inscrutably personal and unique perceptions of reality (Goetz & Taliaferro, 2008; W. Hatcher, 1980; Richards & Bergin, 2005). Many within both scientific and religious communities have accepted these epistemological assumptions regarding science and religion, and, as a result, have built their studies and interpreted their findings based upon them (W. Hatcher, 1980; Slife & Reber, 2009). Definitions of spirituality commonly used when addressing its importance in the work of professional school counselors focus attention on its intrapsychic and sociocultural dimensions (Sink, 2004; Sink & Richmond, 2004). Furthermore, in his article outlining ideas for the inclusion of spirituality in comprehensive school counseling programs, Sink (2004) acknowledges approaching the subject with a "wider view of spirituality in such a way that most stakeholders with different faith traditions can generally support" (para. 4). While the desire to avoid controversy over conflicting ideas about religion and spirituality is both praiseworthy and pragmatic, it will hopefully be seen in the sections to follow that it ultimately leads to an

impoverished view of both religion and spirituality that tie it too strictly to the assumptions of a naturalistic worldview.

The problems of definition begin with the assumptions that individuals bring to their investigation of the phenomena in question. Assumptions are necessary for any process of logical thinking. As discussed earlier, the worldview that people hold with regard to the ontological status of spiritual phenomena represents a complex system of assumptions from which they derive many of the lesser assumptions that govern their interactions with the everyday world. The principles of the Bahá'í Faith include an understanding of the relationship between physical reality, on the one hand, and spiritual reality on the other, whose implications confirm many of the findings of current research about the positive effects of including clients' spirituality in counseling, while also challenging the naturalistic assumptions about the ontological status of the spiritual phenomena in question. These challenges arise, in large part, as a consequence of the patterns of language commonly employed in the study of religion and spirituality to define the principle concepts involved. Examining these terms in some detail, from the perspective of their use in a Bahá'í epistemology[1], will provide a context for understanding how these concepts are reconciled and harmonized in a more holistic paradigm that unites science and religion in the common goal of full and proper human development.

[1] The Bahá'í Faith does not contain within its sacred literature a formally detailed epistemology as such, and the use of the term here should not be construed to imply reference to an epistemology that would be recognized as such by any official body of the Bahá'í Faith or by the majority of its adherents.

Science

Bahá'u'lláh, the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, extols the work of scientists in His writings and enjoins the acquisition of knowledge upon all humanity. "Knowledge is as wings to man's life, and a ladder for his ascent" (Bahá'u'lláh, 1988, p. 51), He has written. "Its acquisition is incumbent upon everyone" (p. 51). "Great indeed is the claim of scientists and craftsmen on the peoples of the world," (p. 51) He furthermore affirms. "Unto this beareth witness the Mother Book on the day of His return. Happy are those possessed of a hearing ear. In truth, knowledge is a veritable treasure for man, and a source of glory, of bounty, of joy, of exaltation, of cheer and gladness unto him" (p. 51).

In his examination of the Bahá'í teachings on the harmony of science and religion, W. Hatcher (1980) examines the ways in which "both science and religion are human, social activities. As such, they cannot claim to be purer or more exalted than their ultimate influence on society" (p. 2) It has been widely acknowledged that science is a social enterprise, dependent upon the inextricable interrelationship between content knowledge and the scientific method itself (Committee on Science, Engineering and Public Policy, 2009; Duschl, Schweingruber & Shouse, 2007). The Committee on Science, Engineering, and Public Policy, of the National Academy of Sciences, National Academy of Engineering and Institute of Medicine (2009) published a guide for the training of professional scientists titled *On Being A Scientist: A Guide to Responsible Conduct in Research* that details the context and many social considerations in which scientific activity is conducted. They describe three sets of obligations that motivate the work of scientists: "*an obligation to honor the trust that their colleagues place in them*. . ., *an obligation to themselves*" (p. 2) involving a commitment to personal honesty and

integrity, and "*an obligation to act in ways that serve the public*" (p.2). These obligations and the emphasis that the committee places upon them in their description of the ethical responsibilities of scientific researchers highlights and supports W. Hatcher's (1980) claim about the social role of science and demonstrates the implicit adherence to axiological claims that situate scientific activity within that realm of philosophical imponderables which Pinker (2009) asserts should be bracketed out of meaningful inquiry.

W. Hatcher (1980) carries his emphasis on the social role played by scientists further, agreeing with a notion common among some that "scientists are increasingly assuming the function and role played by priests in earlier societies. They are the initiated, those who explain the great mysteries to the unwashed masses" (p. 1). W. Hatcher's point in making this comparison is not to cynically point fingers at scientists and to deride their roles in society, but rather it is to demonstrate the essential, unifying reality that underlies humanity's authentic attraction toward religious principles and practices by affirming that the social function of a class of professional knowledge arbiters did not disappear with society's transition into an era more heavily influenced by the social practices of science than those of religion. Rather, the religious impulse inherent in human beings (Tillich, 2001/1957) transforms the content toward which their faith (i.e., ultimate concern) is directed into the symbols and structures most conducive to supporting and transmitting the social institutions and practices worshipped by any given group of people (Tillich, 2001/1957). This phenomenon is similar to the formation of social epistemologies examined by Popkewitz (1991), who explained the relationship between the universal patterns of social knowledge formation and its institutionalization

within schemes of power that assign ultimate legitimacy or illegitimacy to any given view of total reality.

Popkewitz (1991) explains these phenomena in terms of their social epistemologies, in which the particular configurations by which a people distinguish true claims from false ones, are not objectively out there, but rather are socially constructed through the dynamic operation of cultural structures, institutions and individuals. The layers of these dynamics are often subtle, complex and expansive, meaning that they operate on such large historical scales as to make them as nearly incomprehensible to human prediction as the weather. That is not to say that they are entirely incomprehensible, for with improved methods, greater data and better technology, we gradually increase our ability to model and predict the weather. Rather it is to say that we must acknowledge the extremely limited scope of our current understanding and tools for conducting an analysis of historical forces. If anything, it supports the contention made by the Bahá'í Faith that religious truth, like scientific truth, is relative, based upon the comprehension and observational capacities of individuals and societies at particular times in history (W. Hatcher 1980, Shoghi Effendi, n.d.).

At a time when religion in Europe was dominated by forms of religious orthodoxy and traditionalism that emphasized emotional experiences of the sacred through various ritual practices, observances, and doctrines among the masses and a form of intellectual scholasticism among its clergy that emphasized metaphysical deductions largely uninhibited by empirical considerations, those who reacted to this unbalanced state of affairs enacted a kind of equal-and-opposite reaction (W. Hatcher, 1980; Khursheed, 1987). The tremendous success of science in discovering, explaining and harnessing the

forces of physical reality and of ushering in an age of increasing material prosperity, in opposition to the entrenched orthodoxies of the religious establishment, served to bolster the assumption that cognition, as represented by science, was superior to emotion, as represented by religion. As these relative positions became more solidified, the speculations, theories and conflicts which have ensued have led to the widespread, common sense assumption by many that science and religion represent inherently conflicting and contradictory worldviews. It is assumed that, whereas science concerns itself with matters of objective and verifiable reality, religion concerns itself with subjective, unverifiable phenomena not subject to scientific scrutiny (W. Hatcher, 1980). Such a state of affairs, W. Hatcher (1980) argues, is not a necessary one, but rather represents distortions of both the scientific method and of religious faith.

Science can be conceived of broadly as the combination of two elements: its contents and its methods (W. Hatcher, 1980). The content of science relates to its subject matter, the presumably objective phenomena of existence which it is the business of scientists to study, interpret, understand and, ultimately manipulate. The method of science involves those human intellectual procedures and systems through which the content of science is studied. W. Hatcher (1980) describes scientific method as, "the systematic, organized, directed, and conscious use of our various mental faculties in an effort to arrive at a coherent model of whatever phenomenon is being investigated" (p. 31). The application of scientific method need not be limited to purely physical phenomena, contrary to the view expressed by the National Academy of Sciences and Institute of Medicine (2008). When we consider that the practice of science is an essentially human activity involving human subjectivity at a fundamental level, we can

see that "the scientist must bring an essential aspect of creative hypothesis and imagination to his work" (p. 31). There is nothing, therefore, inherent in this broader understanding of science that precludes investigation of religious and spiritual phenomena, using all of the tools of human understanding available to us.

W. Hatcher (1980), in his examination of the Bahá'í principle of the unity of science and religion, analyzes the features and processes of the scientific method, categorizing the activity into two primary components: experiential and logical. Experiential components are empirical in nature and easily observed through use of the senses and are often thought of in "*concrete* terms" (W. Hatcher, 1980, p. 3), whereas logical or theoretical components result from the "use of *abstract* terms. . . . terms which refer to entities or qualities not directly accessible to human observation" (p. 3). "A statement with a high empirical component and a low theoretical component corresponds to the popular notion of a 'fact'" (p. 4). In terms of the disagreements and controversies evident in American society over the goals and purposes of education, those *facts* about which a certain degree of agreement can be discovered are those with a high degree of empirical content, hence the emphasis in educational research and policy development on studies addressing discrete skill development and information recall. Even the discussions of fostering critical thinking skills or higher order thinking skills focus primarily on those cognitive functions that can be most readily operationalized and subjected to standardized measurements. Although it can certainly be beneficial for a variety of reasons to operationalize and standardize certain features of education, the assumptions about the ultimate purposes for which these practices are used greatly affect their outcomes.

Although it might be tempting, for political reasons influenced by the separation of church and state, to limit consideration of religious and spiritual phenomena in school counseling to those areas with a high empirical component, W. Hatcher (1980) asserts that "often, but not always, the important statements of science are statements with a high theoretical component" (p. 4) for "what makes a statement important is not only its internal structure and meaning, but its relationship to other statements" (p. 4) and the implications which these relationships create. The study and arrangement of these systems of statements and their implications into models of reality is a central feature of science and the scientific method (W. Hatcher, 1980; Duschal et al., 2007). What are not always clearly expressed by current ideas about the scientific method, however, are the philosophical assumptions associated with the abstract nature of model construction. W. Hatcher (1980) points out that "whenever a model is involved in our study of a phenomenon, some of the statements of our science will be directly true not of reality but of the model. They become true of reality only when (and if) the model is properly interpreted in the phenomenon" (p. 5). To illustrate the importance which human interpretation of scientific models has for correct understanding of their relationship to reality, W. Hatcher (1980) provides the following example, which I cite in full:

> Thus, 1 + 1 = 2 is eternally true of adding numbers (our model). It is also true of reality if we interpret adding as "physically putting together" and the numbers are counting, say, stones or apples, but false if we interpret the numbers as counting piles of sand or drops of water (while keeping the same interpretation of adding). (p. 5)

Although simply and generally summarized here, this interpretation-based understanding of how we apply scientific models to examine the implied relationships between intellectual abstractions leads to a broader conceptualization of the meaning and application of the scientific method and helps us to understand more clearly that "observation and experimentation are not the only processes involved in discovering scientific truth" (W. Hatcher, 1980, p. 5).

Thus understood as a human, social activity involving the "systematic, organized, directed, and conscious use of our various mental faculties in an effort to arrive at a coherent model of whatever phenomenon is being investigated" (W. Hatcher, 1980, p. 31), scientific method can be as equally applied to questions pertaining to spiritual phenomena as it is to questions pertaining to physical phenomena. This unity of purpose related to the study of both physical and spiritual phenomena available to a broader conception of the scientific method opens the door to consideration of the ways in which religion can, thereby, be reconciled with science. The theses that W. Hatcher (1980) examines in more detail than I can adequately explore here are thus summed up as "(1) that the basic unity of science lies in its method of inquiry or epistemology, and (2) that the Bahá'í Faith consciously accepts this epistemology as its own, accepting in its wake whatever redefinitions of the terms 'religion' and 'faith' are consequent to it" (p. 3).

Religion

One of the most significant redefinitions of religion found in the sacred principles of the Bahá'í Faith is that of the relativity of knowledge (W. Hatcher, 1980), including religious knowledge. Such relativity, however, is not to be confused with the sort of moral or ethical relativism professed by some postmodern philosophers, but rather it

recognizes the limited scope of human understanding, similar in many respects to Pinker's (2009) discussion of cognitive closure described earlier, but with the critically important difference of its explicitly theistic worldview. One of the important implications of this religious orientation is that religious and spiritual phenomena are accessible to the process of scientific investigation and, as with scientific research, is a progressively evolving social construct. No one would reasonably argue that the understanding and application of the scientific method of the early 21st century is identical to the understanding and application of it in the time of Copernicus, and yet people often speak of the Copernican Revolution as an historical paradigm shift which helped to launch the Scientific Revolution of the 16th century. The changes that have occurred in scientific understanding since the days of Copernicus, not only in terms of the content of scientific knowledge, but in the epistemology of science itself, are not generally considered problematic. To the contrary, they are considered an important feature of science and one of the ideas that has traditionally distinguished it from religion. The fact that many religious thinkers and leaders of the past and present have reinforced an absolutist view of religion only points to a particular social epistemology related to religion and not necessarily to all ways of representing religion. As a modern religion appearing in the mid- to late-19th century, the Bahá'í Faith adopts a far more flexible and dynamic view of religion in general and sees itself as part of an evolving, progressive and historical process of refining humanity's understanding of religion. In a long, yet succinctly stated passage, Shoghi Effendi, the appointed head of the Bahá'í Faith and authorized interpreter of its sacred scriptures from 1921 to his death in 1957, wrote that,

> The Revelation proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh, His followers believe, is divine in origin, all-embracing in scope, broad in its outlook, scientific in its method, humanitarian in its principles and dynamic in the influence it exerts on the hearts and minds of men. The mission of the Founder of their Faith, they conceive it to be to proclaim that religious truth is not absolute but relative, that Divine Revelation is continuous and progressive, that the Founders of all past religions, though different in the non-essential aspects of their teachings, 'abide in the same Tabernacle, soar in the same heaven, are seated upon the same throne, utter the same speech and proclaim the same Faith'. His Cause, they have already demonstrated, stands identified with and revolves around, the principle of the organic unity of mankind as representing the consummation of the whole process of human evolution. This final stage in this stupendous evolution, they assert, is not only necessary but inevitable, that it is gradually approaching, and that nothing short of the celestial potency with which a divinely ordained Message can claim to be endowed can succeed in establishing it.
>
> The Bahá'í Faith recognizes the unity of God and of His Prophets, upholds the principle of an unfettered search after truth, condemns all forms of superstition and prejudice, teaches that the fundamental purpose of religion is to promote concord and harmony, that it must go hand-in-hand with science, that it constitutes the sole and ultimate basis of a peaceful, an ordered, and progressive society. (n.d.)

This statement, although long to cite in full, conveys a sweeping summary of many of the Bahá'í Faith's most salient principles and illustrates a number of the ways in which it

breaks with traditional conceptions of religion. The further implications for addressing the unity of science and religion which the principles of the Bahá'í Faith contain are examined in this section of the paper and briefly compared to some of the conventional or traditional conceptions of religion.

If religion is viewed as a phenomenon amenable to scientific discovery and embracing the scientific epistemology of the progressive evolution of human knowledge, then it logically follows that it would also be open to having its truth claims subjected to scientific tests of validation. This is also true of the Bahá'í Faith (W. Hatcher, 1980, 1990, Chapter 5). Although the process by which this happens is beyond the scope of this paper to describe, it may hopefully help to refer back to W. Hatcher's (1980) explanation of scientific method as a process involving the "systematic, organized, directed, and conscious use of our various mental faculties in an effort to arrive at a coherent model of whatever phenomenon is being investigated" (p. 31). Applied in this fashion, the scientific method allows us to examine and explore claims made by religious figures such as the founders of the world's religions who describe aspects of reality to humanity through their words and actions. As W. Hatcher (1980) points out, a large part of the problem that theologians, philosophers and social scientists alike have had throughout the centuries in scientifically establishing the truth claims of the founders of the world's religions is the relative lack of development of scientific method itself during the times in which the greatest amount of authenticated empirical evidence for the divine claims of the founders could be tested. With the appearance of the Bahá'í Faith in 1844, however, at a time when the scientific revolution was well underway and greater efforts could be taken to accurately document the phenomenon of religious revelation brought by a new

Messenger of God, the opportunity is now ripe for us to more rigorously test the truth claims made by the Founder of a major world religion (W. Hatcher, 1980). In keeping with the scientific approach to the individual investigation of reality held as a spiritual principle, W. Hatcher (1980) reminds us that,

> the Bahá'í Faith offers the *hypothesis* [emphasis added] that man's social evolution is due to the periodic intervention in human affairs of the creative force of the universe. This intervention occurs by means of the religious founders or Manifestations. What is most significant is that the Bahá'í Faith offers fresh empirical evidence, in the person of its own founder, that such a phenomenon has occurred. (p. 11).

This explicit inclusion of a theistic worldview and the operation of God's active and ongoing involvement in human affairs has been one of the greatest areas of controversy between science and religion for centuries. The Bahá'í Faith's claim to contain the resolution of this controversy is also beyond the scope of this paper to address, but an examination of certain of its principles and outlines can hopefully illuminate the point to be made here, which is that religion with a theistic worldview need not be categorically excluded from further study of its claims based upon a defensive posture toward the scientific method. One of the significant problems that many of today's definitions of religion share is the assumption that, like the related idea of spirituality, religion is an inherently subjective phenomena that cannot or, at least should not, be subjected to scientific tests of validation. Unless the fact claims of religion can somehow be reconciled, both among themselves and within the scope of observations of the natural world, however, religion runs the risks of eventually finding its claims

regarding ultimate reality relegated to a status no better than mere conjecture or cultural preference. Many may argue that this has already occurred and that ideas about spiritual phenomena, especially those associated with a theistic worldview, are irrelevant to the study of existent reality. Such an ontological stance establishes a type of methodological or functional atheism (Richards & Bergin, 2005; Slife & Reber, 2009) that moves theistic assumptions to the periphery of social concern, placing them among the collection of cultural artifacts, such as art, diet, and custom that, while important to the people who value them, are, in the final analysis, nothing more than accidental expressions of environmental conditions operating according to the forces of natural selection. The brief overview of some of the ways in which religion has been defined or described suggests the difficulty associated with any effort to restore its status as a central, altering assumption within the dominant social epistemology shaping society's expectations for a proper education for its children.

Durkheim (1915/1965) defined religion as a "unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden -- beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them" (p. 62). This definition is more inclusive than the standard dictionary definition of religion as "a set of beliefs concerning the cause, nature, and purpose of the universe, esp. when considered as the creation of a superhuman agency or agencies, usu. involving devotional and ritual observances, and often containing a moral code for the conduct of human affairs" (2001, p. 1041). Still others adopt a more functional approach to religion, focusing primarily on the functions that religion serves in the lives of individuals, without adopting an ontological stance on the existence or non-

existence of spiritual (i.e., non-material) phenomenon (Holmes, 2006; Shafranske, 1996). In the legal realm, the task of defining religion becomes more problematic. The U.S. Supreme Court has declined to clearly define religion for purposes of deciding cases related to First Amendment challenges and has, at times, included secular humanism as a form of religion that must also not be taught in public schools (Mitchell, 1987). Scientists, such as d'Aquili and Newberg (1999) define religion in terms of neurological origins, while others, such as Dawkins (2006), posit the idea that religion is a harmful by-product of other evolutionary forces that have been naturally selected in humans, such as the necessary gullibility of children in giving blind obedience to their parents and other adults seen as having authoritative knowledge of how to survive in the natural world.

These examples comprise a small fraction of the ways that people have defined religion. The lack of consensus about religion's definition constitutes an area of the science of religion that deserves continued investigation. The methods adopted for such an investigation should include all of those which human experience has determined lead to the discovery of ontological truths about the nature of total reality, including the methods of science. As shown in the previous section describing problems with the definition of science, however, the naturalistic assumptions of certain approaches to science must be more critically examined and adjusted to accommodate a more holistic understanding of total reality if the problems associated with the definition of religion are, in turn, to be adequately addressed as well. The Bahá'í Faith's approach to understanding both the phenomena of science and religion provides a model within which this critical examination can occur, steering a course through the problems of naturalism on the one hand and of superstition on the other. The ontological stance which the Bahá'í

writings take on a number of spiritual topics related to religion present a variety of challenges to the naturalistic assumptions contained in the current approaches to including religion and spirituality in school counseling.

The Existence of God

Many efforts have been made throughout history to analyze the evidence and organize the inferences needed for a solid *theory of God*, but they have typically run into the opposition of priests, theologians, philosophers and politicians who cling to age old ideologies and absolutist assumptions about God and about metaphysical concepts in general (W. Hatcher, 1980). As an explicitly theistic religion, the Bahá'í Faith directly challenges naturalistic assumptions about the ontological status of both spiritual phenomena and about God's existence and also challenges many prevailing theistic assumptions about humanity's ability to acquire absolute knowledge of God's existence through acts of willing belief. The continued controversy surrounding the existence of God is not, as W. Hatcher (1980, 1990) demonstrates, a result of the scientific indeterminacy of the question or the lack of empirical evidence, but rather it is the result of continued erroneous assumptions on the part of naturalists and theists alike regarding the nature of both science and religion and their existing social epistemologies about what constitutes sound evidence. If God and spiritual phenomena are to be shown to have ontological existence through scientific means, the types of evidence for establishing these claims must be as valid as the types of evidence used for establishing the many highly theoretical, abstract, and unobservable phenomena of the natural world (W. Hatcher, 1980). As with all relative understanding of the true nature of reality, scientific knowledge of the existence of God and of spiritual phenomena must rest upon a tentative

foundation of probabilistic theory development. In other words, the claims of science are not absolute claims, even those we hold as natural laws, but the evidence for their existence and operation tends to outweigh the evidence for their negation (W. Hatcher, 1980). If held to these same standards of scientific inquiry, sketched briefly here and in the preceding section, the total accumulation of empirical and theoretical evidence for the existence of God and of spiritual phenomena can be justly weighed.

Of course the Bahá'í Faith is not alone in its efforts to study the implications of a theistic worldview on areas of the sciences. Richards and Bergin (2005), for example, in their presentation of spiritual strategies for counseling and psychotherapy, make their theistic worldview explicit. They draw upon and develop scientific theories within the context of God's objective existence and the logical implications which this understanding has for their work. Naturally, a project of this scope represents a long-term scientific endeavor, and it is not the purpose of this paper to address the specific arguments and evidence for the existence of God. It is relevant and important, however, for the purpose of this paper, to acknowledge and address the Bahá'í Faith's relatively unique position on the existence of God within the context of the unity of science and religion and its implications for school counselors and comprehensive school counseling programs. The brief overview that I have sketched here of the manner in which the Bahá'í Faith's understanding of science and the scientific method provides a rational approach to the problems of spiritual phenomena, including God, hopefully illustrates the direction of avenues for future study and research.

The Nature of God and the Function of Revelation

Even if we could establish agreement upon the question of God's objective existence, the matter of His nature and actions would pose serious challenges to scientific inquiry. Definitions and conceptions of God are perhaps more numerous than debates about His existence. W. Hatcher's (1990, Chapter 3) cosmological proof for the existence of God, which builds upon and adjusts certain conclusions and premises of Avicenna's proof, is based upon mathematical logic and modern set theory. As part of its conclusions, it not only establishes the existence of God on a solid mathematical basis, but also gives us logically implied insights into His nature as well. Efforts such as these can provide avenues of further scientific research in conjunction with and in harmony with the claims of religion, which include explanations for the mechanisms by which God communicates His will to humanity.

Like many of the world's major religions, the Bahá'í Faith is a revelatory religion and, as such, defines religion more narrowly than scholars such as Durkheim, Shafranske, d'Aquili or Newberg. Bahá'u'lláh (1976/1939) relates the definition of religion to the process of divine revelation through the appearance of specially designated human beings which He refers to as Manifestations of God. These Manifestations of God reveal God's will to humanity through the establishment of their religious teachings and social practices. Whether recorded in writing or through oral tradition, the teachings of these Manifestations of God are referred to in the sacred writings of the Bahá'í Faith as the Books of God or as the Revelation of God. A significant reason (though not the only reason) for this arrangement of communication between God and humanity has to do with the nature of God Himself. According to Bahá'u'lláh (1976/1939),

> To every discerning and illuminated heart it is evident that God, the unknowable Essence, the Divine Being, is immensely exalted beyond every human attribute, such as corporeal existence, ascent and descent, egress and regress. Far be it from His glory that human tongue should adequately recount His praise, or that human heart comprehend His fathomless mystery. He is, and hath ever been, veiled in the ancient eternity of His Essence, and will remain in His Reality everlastingly hidden from the sight of men. "No vision taketh in Him, but He taketh in all vision; He is the Subtile, the All-Perceiving." (pp. 46-47)

Given the exalted, unknowable character of God's essence, Bahá'u'lláh (1988b) explains that God established a mechanism by which various aspects of His will could be communicated to humanity and, thereby, enable humanity to continually develop and advance in its purpose "to know God" (p. 268). The mechanism He created is a divine Being Who serves as a perfect reflector of the qualities of God and, through Whom, knowledge, wisdom and guidance is provided to direct the spiritual and material progress and development of humanity in the fullment of its primary purpose. As Bahá'u'lláh (1976/1939) explains it,

> The door of the knowledge of the Ancient of Days being thus closed in the face of all beings, the Source of infinite grace, according to His saying, "His grace hath transcended all things; My grace hath encompassed them all," hath caused those luminous Gems of Holiness to appear out of the realm of the spirit, in the noble form of the human temple, and be made manifest unto all men, that they may impart unto the world the mysteries of the unchangeable Being, and tell of the subtleties of His imperishable Essence. (p. 47)

These Beings, or Manifestations of God, are those responsible for the revelation of God's will to humanity and are the recognized Founders of the world's major religions.

Referring to the progressive nature of the appearance of these major world religions and to their essential unity, Bahá'u'lláh (1988a) has written that,

> the divers communions of the earth, and the manifold systems of religious belief, should never be allowed to foster the feelings of animosity among men, is, in this Day, of the essence of the Faith of God and His Religion. These principles and laws, these firmly-established and mighty systems, have proceeded from one Source, and are rays of one Light. That they differ one from another is to be attributed to the varying requirements of the ages in which they were promulgated (p. 13).

This view of religion as a periodic phenomenon in human history revealed by specially designated messengers or Manifestations who reveal the word of God to humanity blends and harmonizes elements of both traditional and progressive views of religion and spirituality, but fully embraces none of them. It claims that all of humanity's religious history has been part of a single, evolutionary process, ordained and directed by God, for the purpose of establishing an "ever-advancing civilization" (Bahá'u'lláh, 1976/1939, p. 215).

The sacred writings of the Bahá'í Faith contain detailed descriptions of the nature and functions of the Manifestation of God and of the rational, scientific means by which humanity can test the claims of anyone claiming to speak with such unique authority (W. Hatcher, 1990). Such a set of means is essential to any religion that claims to be scientific in its method. Again, the purpose here in raising this point is to briefly demonstrate the

consistent manner in which the Bahá'í Faith brings together the unchallenged legitimacy and power of science to rationally investigate reality with basic theistic assumptions to develop a system to test and verify religious and spiritual fact claims. Such an approach and model hold promise for researchers in all areas of the sciences, including, and perhaps especially, those concerned with the full and proper development of children and youth.

Purpose of God in Creating the Universe

Having first considered the existence and nature of God and the mechanism He has created for communicating His will to humanity through His Manifestations and the Revelations (i.e., religions) that they bring, we now consider the Bahá'í Faith's principles regarding the purpose of human life and the system which God has provided for our training and the full development of that purpose. A fuller understanding of the Bahá'í principles related to these questions leads us closer to the goal of seeing how the Bahá'í Faith provides insights and ideas for deeply and radically reconsidering the current trend in psychological and school counseling research of working from naturalistic assumptions.

According to Bahá'u'lláh (1988b), God created the universe and everything in it as an expression of His names and attributes. In one of His tablets, He explains, "Every created thing in the whole universe is but a door leading into His [God's] knowledge, a sign of His sovereignty, a revelation of His names, a symbol of His majesty, a token of His power, a means of admittance into His straight Path. . ." (Bahá'u'lláh, 1976, p. 160). The idea of God's attributes being found in nature is certainly not new to the Bahá'í Faith. In fact, it is a common theme found expressed by the majority of the world's religions, a

fact which further supports Bahá'u'lláh's explanation of religion as a single, progressively evolving phenomenon, rather than distinct and absolute creeds vying for dominance as the sole repositories of God's revelation to humanity. The relationship of this idea to understanding the work that school counselors do with students closely resembles the ideas of working with students' spirituality contained in much of the current school counseling literature on this topic; however, as will become more apparent in a moment, the implications of regarding this idea as an objective, ontological reality leads to far different conclusions about the degree of neutrality that counselors should assume when helping students to learn skills for interpreting their life's experiences.

Within the above context of creation, Bahá'u'lláh explains God's purpose in creating humanity, writing that "the purpose of God in creating man hath been, and will ever be, to enable him to know his Creator and to attain His Presence" (p. 70). He emphasizes that this has been God's purpose throughout time and across the various religions that have developed to institutionalize the expressions of this purpose. "To this most excellent aim," He writes, "this supreme objective, all the heavenly Books and the divinely-revealed and weighty Scriptures unequivocally bear witness" (p. 70). This purpose implies a number of logical associations between the universe as a whole and humanity's existence as an element of all that exists in the universe. Bahá'u'lláh (1975/1858; 1976) explains the relationship in terms of education and training in many of His works. In one example, speaking from the perspective of God Himself, Bahá'u'lláh writes,

> Out of the wastes of nothingness, with the clay of My command I made thee to appear, and have ordained for thy training every atom in existence and the essence

> of all created things. Thus, ere thou didst issue from thy mother's womb, I destined for thee two founts of gleaming milk, eyes to watch over thee, and hearts to love thee. Out of My loving-kindness, 'neath the shade of My mercy I nurtured thee, and guarded thee by the essence of My grace and favor. And My purpose in all this was that thou mightest attain My everlasting dominion and become worthy of My invisible bestowals. (p. 32)

Following the chain of reasoning, then, that God created humanity to know Him and to attain His Presence, and that the method by which He chose for us to accomplish this purpose is through our experiences of the natural world, it follows that science, as a phenomenon of human experience, is intimately involved in the fulfillment of God's purpose for human spiritual progress, as are all of the fruits of the various labors and studies undertaken in the name of science. From this perspective, then, it becomes clearer, that religion is not limited to being an avenue of cultural expression or the socially constructed outward form of a particular tribe's collective spiritual beliefs, but rather it is the organizing and general theory for the entirety of human experience. Such claims cannot be isolated within naturalistic models of cultural anthropology if they are to be taken seriously at all; they are, as Slife & Reber (2009) have pointed out, *altering assumptions* whose "inclusion alters the meaning of many existing assumptions" (p. 66).

There are many more implications such as these to be found in the religious principles of the Bahá'í Faith related to redefining our understanding of religion in light of its adoption of a scientific epistemological orientation. Hopefully the preceding, brief examples suffice to give an introductory overview of possibilities for working toward a more holistic integration of science and religion and of the significant changes that such

work would require in the naturalistic assumptions commonly held today. The religious implications addressed above regarding the purpose of human existence and consideration of the physical universe as the training ground in which we pursue that purpose lead naturally to the topic of spirituality and how it is also affected by the altering assumptions discussed here.

Spirituality

Psychologists today regard religion and spirituality as separate phenomena (Holder, Coleman, & Wallace, 2010; Ingersoll, 1994; Richards & Bergin, 2005), with spirituality conceived of broadly as a personal and unique capacity for making meaning of one's experience (MacDonald, 2004; Sink & Richmond, 2004). The definition can be so broadly construed that it leaves little out of its scope, making it nearly indistinguishable from a definition of life itself. Some might argue that this poses a problem for spirituality as a useful scientific construct; however, as the above discussion of religion, from a Bahá'í point of view, indicates, the claim of religion's and, by extension, spirituality's comprehensiveness actually strikes close to the mark. Defining spirituality for its use by school counselors, Sink & Richmond (2004) acknowledge that their definition is "too wobbly for some readers" (p. 291), and, indeed, the examples that they give as those indicative of spirituality in students appear somewhat arbitrary and stereotypical, such as "career decision making, deep reflection on a poem, choice of clothing, beliefs, sense of something 'larger' than oneself" (pp. 291-292) and so on. Other studies appear to regard spirituality in a similar fashion (Richards & Bergin, 2005), clearly distinguishing it from its expression in religious institutions and behavior. MacDonald (2004), in fact, makes the distinction between what he terms "religious and

secular" (p. 294) forms of spirituality. He describes religious spirituality as covering "all of the various forms of organized worship" (p. 294), whether numerically large or small. He describes secular spirituality, in contrast, as something "spanning all experiences, whether sacred or secular" (p. 295), seeing it as "a general ecological impulse for relationship and connection that expresses itself in more formal religious forms and in more informal secular forms such as friendships, interest groups, and political positions" (p. 295). Viewed in this light, spirituality is more easily adapted to and reconciled with the naturalistic assumptions prevalent in the scientific study of religion and spirituality, but it also loses its power to address those elements of total reality considered vitally important from a theistic standpoint, such as the nature and role of an objectively existent God in human affairs and the full and proper development of an immortal human spirit, as well as many areas of social relations which follow from metaphysical questions about morality and ethics. In his discussion of the secular form of spirituality, MacDonald cites H. Smith, from his book, *Why Religion Matters*, describing the "notion of 'God as a direction rather than an object. That direction is always toward the best that we can conceive. . . .'" (p. 295). The idea that our understanding of God includes the concept of absolute perfection and the human impulse toward its achievement is not problematic from the standpoint of understanding spirituality. What does become problematic, however, is the assumption upon which statements like these are based that God is a "notion" (p. 295). From the standpoint of a theistic worldview, God is no more a notion of human invention than the universe itself. Just as it is impossible for anyone to claim an absolutely objective knowledge of the universe, it is equally impossible to claim an absolutely objective knowledge of God, but neither statement necessarily implies the

refutation of their existence nor the necessity of considering them as foundational assumptions in our social epistemological systems.

Scientific support for this view is emerging from neurological studies such as those conducted by d'Aquili and Newberg (1999), in which they explore the neurological states associated with mystical experiences, and in their follow-up work studying the neurological effects of various forms of meditation (Newberg & d'Aquili, 2002). In their work, d'Aquili and Newberg do not make the hard distinction between religion and spirituality, but rather confine their focus to the neurological and physiological states associated with specific ritual practices. The results of these studies indicate that the types of mystical experiences reported by the practitioners of highly regimented forms of meditation and those of lay worshippers alike, activate specific areas in the brain related to the subjective experience of oneness with the total environment and an awareness of transcendental states of consciousness and being that are no less real, in terms of brain function, than our ordinarily operating senses (1999; 2002). What these altered states of perception do reveal, however, is that the depth and power of the reality perceived by any given individual depends upon their level of skill and experience with meditation. Such a circumstance strongly resembles one of the central teachings in the majority of the major religions that individual effort is required to develop spiritual perception. While God has provided each human being with the capacity to recognize Him, that capacity can only be manifested as the result of each person's own efforts. So long as the results of studies such as Newberg's and d'Aquili's are evaluated exclusively from the worldview of naturalism, however, their connection with such universal religious principles may either

remain obscured or considered to be irrelevant to developing a proper, holistic picture of human development.

Bahá'í Faith's View of Spiritual Reality

The preceding overview of the way in which spirituality is viewed in counseling literature contains elements that are both supported and not supported by principles and statements contained in the Bahá'í Faith. W. Hatcher (1982) summarizes the Bahá'í approach to spirituality as "the process of the proper development of man's innate spiritual capacities" (p. 9) This definition, though brief, resembles those frequently put forward by proponents of holistic education (Miller, 1990), but, as will be seen, differs in significant ways from them as well.

The first element of a Bahá'í view of spirituality that relates it to the questions of its inclusion in education is its relationship to religion. While recognizing and supporting the argument that views religion and spirituality as distinct concepts, the Bahá'í view sees religion, not as an entirely social construction arising from naturalistic laws of natural selection, but as one of the organizing laws and principles of nature itself. Implanted within each person, then, is the capacity to acquire knowledge and understanding of the organizing laws and principles revealed to humanity through the appearance of the Manifestations of God. Spirituality is a term that can be applied to this innate capacity of human beings to search for, discover, understand and relate to the infinite array of symbolic connections and associations with which God has infused the universe for the purpose of leading humanity toward the fulfillment of its divinely ordained purpose of knowing God and of obtaining His Presence.

John Hatcher (1987) explains this symbolic relationship between material and spiritual reality in terms of the metaphorical nature of physical reality and examines, in detail, the explanations made by Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá regarding this dynamic feature of creation and compares and contrasts it with similar depictions developed by others such as those in Plato's *Republic*, the *Book of Job*, Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*, and Milton's *Paradise Lost*. The common element that emerges from these studies and from the Bahá'í Faith's principles is the idea that spiritual reality is primary and material reality arises from it. Naturally such hypotheses regarding the ontological nature of reality carry with them far-reaching implications for how psychologists and school counselors approach their overall understanding of human nature and their interpretation of its diverse forms of physical expression.

Bahá'í Faith's View of Spiritual Development

If, as presented here, spirituality involves the development of the innate and latent spiritual capacities deposited within each human being by God, and, likewise, if the physical universe itself has been created for the purpose of training and developing this capacity such that each soul undertakes a journey toward obtaining the Presence of God, a question arises of how to actually identify these capacities and determine the optimal conditions and experiences in which they can be fully developed. The task of spiritual development does not simply happen automatically, although there are certain elements of it that are likely to occur in a fashion analogous to the stages of human physical development. The sacred writings of the Bahá'í Faith contain numerous explanations, descriptions, clarifications and examples dealing with the nature of the self and how it achieves optimal development, as well as how it suffers lack of development. As

indicated above, like most religions, the Bahá'í Faith teaches that the true reality of the human being is a spiritual reality.

Just as the spiritual reality of the Manifestation of God is an image of the names and attributes of God, the spiritual reality of humanity is an image of the names and attributes of the Manifestation of God (Diessner, 2007). In other words, to be created in the image of God is to reflect those qualities and attributes that are revealed and espoused in the life and teachings of the Manifestation of God. Bahá'u'lláh (1975) expresses this point further when He addresses all humanity, speaking in the Voice of God, saying, "Turn thy sight unto thyself, that thou mayest find Me standing within thee, mighty, powerful and self-subsisting." (p. 7)

Not only does Bahá'u'lláh assert that by reflecting inwardly on our spiritual nature we will discover the image of God revealed therein, but He also asserts the need for each individual to exert effort in order to fully benefit from the spiritual capacities latent in each of us. Bahá'u'lláh (1976), addressing a question put to Him about human nature, explains the relationship between each human being's inherent spiritual potential and the effort needed in order to develop and manifest it.

> And now, concerning thy question regarding the creation of man. Know thou that all men have been created in the nature made by God, the Guardian, the Self-Subsisting. Unto each one hath been prescribed a pre-ordained measure, as decreed in God's mighty and guarded Tablets. All that which ye potentially possess can, however, be manifested only as a result of your own volition. Your own acts testify to this truth. (p. 149)

This idea of potential implanted or contained within each individual is repeated throughout the Bahá'í sacred writings and, as the following pages will demonstrate, lie at the heart of the religion's ideas regarding human development and the role of education in nurturing it.

Education

The preceding discussion of the ways in which the Bahá'í Faith approaches problems with the definitions of science, religion and spirituality, seeing them all as mechanisms by which God has endowed humanity with the capacity to continuously improve its knowledge and understanding of itself and its relationship to its Creator establishes a context for next considering the implications of these ideas for education and for the work performed by school counselors within the system of education. Like the word spirituality, education can be applied to a wide variety of processes and activities. The shifting meaning of this word, applied in its usual sense to the work of schools, is explored in detail by Popkewitz (1991) in the context of the power dynamics created by the social epistemologies of school reform movements. It is, therefore, important that we resist the urge to reify the concept of education into something too narrow or so specific that we miss opportunities to see beyond the dominant social epistemologies and their underlying assumptions.

In any case, whether we refer to science, religion or spirituality, there is the matter, as described above, of some degree or type of content shared between them, some objective reality to which each term refers. It is in this area of the shared content between these concepts that Bahá'u'lláh and the sacred writings of the Bahá'í Faith have much to say that is relevant to questions of authentic, holistic human development and the role

that education should play in this development. When the search for this shared content rests upon the assumptions of naturalism, even when addressed to questions of religion and spirituality, important avenues of inquiry are ignored or overlooked. For example, studies of the origins of religion often assume that religions develop within societies based primarily, if not solely, upon evolutionary or historical forces of natural origin (Dawkins, 2006; Durkheim, 1965/1915). Rooted in the natural and social sciences of evolutionary biology, anthropology and sociology, these analyses of religion omit consideration of the active role of God in revealing Himself to humanity through mechanisms of divine revelation. They also deny, ignore or minimize the teleological implications of the existence of the human soul and its temporary association with the body during the period of life in the material plane of existence. By excluding these and other similar factors from their analyses and conclusions regarding religion and spirituality, these researchers, whether intentionally or not, are imposing a de facto naturalism upon their understanding of spiritual reality. This misconception of spiritual reality most likely follows naturally from the pervasive atmosphere of positivism and naturalism in which most scientists received their training, an atmosphere reinforced by contemporary interpretations of the separation of church and state. Despite recent studies that reveal that many scientists believe in God and consider themselves religious, spiritual or both (Ecklund & Long, 2011), the specific beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions which accompany a theistic worldview do not automatically denote a consistent or universal application of authentic spiritual laws and principles to matters of scientific inquiry. In order for an authentic understanding of spiritual laws and principles to be developed, we must first challenge and systematically abandon the long-standing

common sense view of education as a social process exclusively concerned with basic skills training.

Bahá'u'lláh (1988b, pg. 161-162), the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, provides a view of education in the broadest possible terms. Education, in His sense, is inclusive of life's many avenues of growth and development, including, but not limited to, those academic avenues traditionally isolated within the scope of formal schooling. The idea of a proper education, as defined by Bahá'u'lláh, does not preclude compartmentalization of certain content, such as that traditionally taught through formal schooling. It does, however, assert that every educational activity be regarded as an integral component of a much larger system of overall human growth and development that serves spiritually teleological ends. These ends or purposes are inherent in the nature of human development and can be discovered through both scientific and religious practices. Bahá'u'lláh (1988b) likens this system to the process of mining gems that already exist within the individual, a process that closely resembles that promoted by educators in the holistic education movement (Miller, 1990). Regarding the nature and purpose of a proper education from a theistic perspective, Bahá'u'lláh (1988b) writes,

> Man is the supreme Talisman. Lack of a proper education hath, however, deprived him of that which he doth inherently possess. Through a word proceeding out of the mouth of God he was called into being; by one word more he was guided to recognize the Source of his education; by yet another word his station and destiny were safeguarded. The Great Being saith: Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom. If any man were to meditate

> on that which the Scriptures, sent down from the heaven of God's holy Will, have revealed, he would readily recognize that their purpose is that all men shall be regarded as one soul, so that the seal bearing the words "The Kingdom shall be God's" may be stamped on every heart, and the light of Divine bounty, of grace, and mercy may envelop all mankind. (pp. 259-260)

As controversial as Bahá'u'lláh's claim here may sound, it does demonstrate an important area of agreement with many holistic ideas about a truly democratic philosophy of education seeking to draw forth the latent potential within each individual rather than seeking to mold and shape it according to a predetermined political or economic agenda created by others (Miller, 1990, 1995).

The heart of any educational system lies in that system's assumptions and premises concerning human nature and the ultimate meaning or purposes toward which that nature develops. The methods and practices that the system develops and adopts follow from beliefs about the developmental needs of children and youth, the goals and purposes toward which their lives are directed, the degree of freedom and responsibility that is deemed to be morally justified, the general sense of desiring the good for our children, the collective needs and values of society and a host of similar considerations that contribute to a sense of what it means to receive a proper education. The choice of curricula and the methods used to deliver them, in other words, do not exist independently of social purposes and goals for the proper use of that education (Nord & Haynes, 1998; Popkewitz, 1991). A proper education, in this sense then, refers to that ideal goal toward which our collective efforts toward education are directed. This ideal goal and the manner of education designed to ensure its achievement varies according to

the social epistemology held by those in control of the educational system (Popkewitz, 1991). Under these conditions, the ideas about a proper education held by society are socially constructed. If groups of people within society adopt conflicting social epistemologies and allow those epistemologies to solidify into unchallengeable doctrines, the eventual outcome will result in conflict, oppression, or both. Competing definitions of the ultimate purpose of human life will give rise to competing ideas about a proper education resulting in the perpetuation of ideological prejudices (W. Hatcher, 2002). The concept, therefore, of a proper education which the Bahá'í Faith promotes is an education that recognizes the relative nature of the human capacity for understanding truth, on the one hand, and that assumes the existence of ultimate truth, on the other. Recognition of this concept must apply equally to the scientific and religious spheres of life so that the continuous process of learning that involves the abandonment of earlier, less sophisticated or less complete conceptions of a given phenomenon, no matter how deeply cherished, for the adoption of a more comprehensive, more developed understanding of it can continually bring humanity closer together in a common understanding of total reality. This, at its core, is the nature of the scientific method and the foundation on which a universal ethic of the search for truth can be established as part of a new social epistemology and its associated educational system.

In order for any social epistemology to remain free from the danger of becoming reified into an ideology, however, two interdependent but separate thought processes must be maintained. The first posits the existence of an ideal of proper education toward which human effort can be applied. The second posits the need to express this ideal in the material world through the historical contexts in which a proper education becomes

manifested in the physical world. In other words, the ultimate ideal (i.e., spiritual) goals toward which a proper education propels us are, nevertheless, expressed in human actions that are historically situated but whose ultimate significance remain a function of their symbolic relationship to the ideal. All of the actions taken by educators, including school counselors, in whatever setting and for whatever immediately apparent purpose, are understood to be reflections of the spiritual reality underlying them. To use another analogy from the study of linguistics, the relationship between our actions taken in the material plane of existence and their meaning in the spiritual plane of existence is like that of the relationship between words and the objects to which those words point. It is well understood that words and the objects to which they refer are not the same thing. One is a sign representing the other to the mind. Likewise, our actions in this world can be seen to have meaning that points to an objective reality beyond the actions themselves. While this idea is not new or unique to the Bahá'í Faith, the point is important to raise here because of its often neglected implications in the development of truly holistic models of education.

Some might argue that such metaphysical considerations are inappropriate for consideration in the development of public education curricula and practices, but why should this be the case? If the answer remains because such ideas cannot be scientifically verified, then that answer continues to demonstrate belief in naturalistic assumptions about science and the scientific method. If the answer remains because such ideas would violate the separation of church and state, then this answer continues to demonstrate the debilitating effect which this human-made political principle has upon a free and open-minded scientific investigation of the many mysteries and questions of total reality. Of

course, there are those who consider references to metaphysical ideals or forms to be problematic or simply false, insisting on seeing only naturalistic relationships between social epistemologies within the context of historical structures as the true guide to understanding and solving practical social problems (Nowlin & Blackburn, 1995; Popkewitz, 1991; Sheldrake, 2012). On the other hand, there are those who hold the view that their particular understanding of a sacred text or personal experience of ultimate reality through religious practices provides an absolute guide to interpreting and solving life's practical problems. One approach emphasizes the relative nature of experience in the physical realm and the other emphasizes the absolute nature of experience in the spiritual realm. The approach of the Bahá'í Faith is to explain that both are correct to a certain extent, but that both must become willing to set aside long-standing prejudices and assumptions and to investigate matters with greater openness. Doing so, however, is viewed from a Bahá'í perspective as both a scientific and religious act, in the sense that the unity of science and religion necessarily implies that there is no disagreement found between the conclusions of one or the other of these two systems of knowledge about total reality.

Some might continue to argue that such considerations make it unnecessarily complicated to discover the proper system of education for any given historical circumstance and that, therefore, we should avoid concerns about the ultimate purpose of education and focus instead only on its immediate, material concerns. Unless we choose to leave our children in a feral state, however, we must face the fact that education is an inherently prescriptive act. Children, by their nature (whether considered materially or spiritually) are dependent upon others for their survival and development. Society's

choice to educate its children, regardless of the manner or philosophy underlying the process, presupposes a socially determined objective or purpose. While some holistic educators might argue that their philosophy involves respect for the unique and individual reality within each person, this admittedly laudable view does not exclude the axiological assumption that their philosophy is the *proper* one to which all children should be exposed and, therefore, acculturated. Examining a variety of philosophies of education from this standpoint of their concern for democratic ideals of liberty of conscience and critical thinking, Joel Spring (1994) argues that, so long as we maintain systems of mass schooling controlled and directed by the nation-state, we cannot hope to entirely avoid the imposition of some set of values upon children and youth. Spring's (1994) solution involves ideas such as further decentralizing public education, shielding it from the interests of large global corporations and the political climate that encourages and nurtures them, or else creating a system that "might jump across the borders of the nation-state and form worldwide alliances to counter the global power of corporations" (p. 179). These and other proposals, valuing as they do the development of critical thinking and reasoning skills in children and youth in order to challenge the assumptions of those in power over the culture, share the same goal of the Bahá'í Faith in fostering the "independent investigation of truth" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1978), but also recognizes the inevitability that education, by its nature, imposes the ideas of the educator upon the minds and hearts of his or her students. It asserts that the real challenge, therefore, is not to free education from any imposition of ideas and values but to continually reflect upon and investigate how well the ideas and values which we do impose contribute to the appearance of spiritual qualities in human beings, qualities such as love, justice, honesty,

compassion, mercy, and so on and how well the system, as a whole, fosters the development of peace and harmony within human society. In other words, the material test of how well a system of education is functioning is the empirical measure of how well it fosters the appearance and development of a spiritualized civilization.

Assuming that humans and human societies pursue education for chosen purposes and not as the result of chance configurations of neurological, evolutionary and sociological phenomena, we must decide, at the outset of any discussion of educational or counseling standards, to what degree we truly believe in the existence of teleological ideals of education toward which our efforts can aspire. Bahá'u'lláh (1988b) affirms the importance and relevance of carefully considering the purposes for which we educate children, when He writes,

> At the outset of every endeavour, it is incumbent to look to the end of it. Of all the arts and sciences, set the children to studying those which will result in advantage to man, will ensure his progress and elevate his rank. Thus the noisome odours of lawlessness will be dispelled, and thus through the high endeavours of the nation's leaders, all will live cradled, secure and in peace" (pp. 168-169)).

That the formal education system in the United States, in the form of state-sponsored and mandated public education, currently chooses to limit its view and scope of operation to the development of what are commonly called "academic" knowledge and skills does not diminish the fact that these objectives comprise a subset of the many skills, experiences, and understandings that combine to achieve the overall goal of a happy, meaningful life. The question of evaluating whether or not the current view and scope of public education is the best it can be cannot be answered meaningfully outside

of this overall context of the ultimate objectives of human life. The degree of success that any human enterprise enjoys is directly related to the theoretical framework of purposes and objectives for which that enterprise is undertaken.

John Dewey, one of America's foremost educational philosophers and theorists, also promoted an experiential view of the scientific method and related its features closely to the goals and methods of education. He challenged humanity to embrace individual experience of life, as it is lived and critically encountered, as the common ground from which to pursue social objectives (Miller, 1990). His scientific approach to drawing out the capacities latent in each individual, while, at the same time, acknowledging the social contexts and influences at work in that development, has influenced many of American society's ideas, assumptions and practices with regard to the education and training of children (Miller 1990, Chapter 6). Dewey's approach, however, as summarized by Miller, excluded consideration of the spiritual dimensions of human experience. He regarded spirituality as a form of sentimentality or magical thinking that could not be reconciled with the scientific method. Consequently, despite an optimistic orientation toward rigorously and systematically examining individual human experience, Dewey's principles and conclusions are inherently influenced and shaped by his naturalistic worldview.

To hear U.S. politicians and academics speak of "success", "progress" and the development of full human potential, the emphasis on material factors of civilization is clear. If politicians and academics speak at all of spiritual civilization, it is addressed cautiously using generalizations and platitudes. Little to no emphasis is placed, however, on committing energy and resources to the discovery and implementation of the spiritual

laws and principles that govern the advancement of the kind of spiritual civilization envisioned in the sacred writings, not only of the Bahá'í Faith, but of many of the world's major religions. If an individual's spiritual well-being is addressed at all, it is couched in the rhetoric of material prosperity, again employing the assumptions of those researchers, such as Dewey, who either consciously or unconsciously see primarily (or only) natural causation in the dynamics of full human development.

To begin to reconcile these opposing views of the scientific method and its application to a system of education and school counseling, we must achieve some degree of satisfaction on the question of whether or not science has any power to inform us of life's purpose and meaning. For, if standards of education are to be imposed on the impressionable minds of the nation's children and youth, those standards will implicitly, if not explicitly, be informed by some kind of teleological value system. Take education, itself, as a case in point. For what purpose or purposes do we, as a society, undertake the enormous task of creating and perpetuating a formal system of public education, and, not insignificantly, compelling all children and youth to either partake of it or some privately operated facsimile of it? Although the answer to this question varies widely from person to person and group to group, it seems absurd to think that this task serves no predetermined purpose at all but is simply the random product of chance forces operating within an evolutionary matrix. Human beings create social systems to serve social purposes and those purposes are determined by a complex, dynamic interplay of values and experience. While those who hold naturalistic assumptions assert that these social purposes arise entirely from evolutionary forces (Dawkins, 2006) and neurological processes (Pinker, 2009), these naturalistic assumptions stand in direct logical opposition

to the implications inherent in a theistic worldview. So long as the scientific method remains predominantly, if not exclusively, associated with the assumptions of naturalism and avoids serious consideration of those associated with theism, the goal of discovering a holistic worldview capable of unitedly searching for truth in the totality of human experience will continue to elude us.

Emphasizing the importance of reconsidering long-standing assumptions at the heart of conflict between science and religion, 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1979/1912), is noted as saying,

> Religion and science are the two wings upon which man's intelligence can soar into the heights, with which the human soul can progress. It is not possible to fly with one wing alone! Should a man try to fly with the wing of religion alone he would quickly fall into the quagmire of superstition, whilst on the other hand, with the wing of science alone he would also make no progress, but fall into the despairing slough of materialism. (1979, p. 143).

This metaphor of a bird and its wings illustrates the dynamic relationship that exists between science and religion and helps to clarify the meaning of their unity. From this metaphor, it is clear that, by unity is not meant congruence of identity; science and religion each maintain their distinct identities. But, in terms of their overall role and function in the life of the bird, they are united in their service to its flight. Although not explicitly mentioned in this example, the metaphor implicitly includes the need for intimate coordination of movements between the two wings. While it is true to claim that a separation exists between each wing, it would be false to conclude that this separation

requires each wing to operate independently and without a continuous and dynamic communication and responsiveness to each other's motions.

Growing support for Bahá'u'lláh's assertion that science and religion must go hand in hand, continues to emerge from many of the sciences themselves (Medina, 2006; Richards & Bergin, 2005; Sheldrake, 2012). The increasing number of studies that positively correlate spirituality with well-being and other positive health outcomes (Gartner, 1996) can be seen as empirical evidence that the claims of the Founders of the world's religious systems regarding these areas of life do, in fact, contribute to the betterment of human life. Across multiple scientific disciplines, evidence mounts to support the idea that science and religion operate in harmony and tandem with each other and that any apparent conflict which has emerged between them has been the result of misunderstandings or misrepresentations of the authentic nature of either or both of these distinctly human enterprises (W. Hatcher, 1980).

Conclusions

Although some school counselors might hesitate to consider it their role or responsibility to actively engage in these sorts of larger, philosophical controversies, the question then arises of whose responsibility is it? Politicians? Scientists? Voters? One of the dangers inherent to the process of professionalization is that it tends to create a diffused sense of responsibility (Popkewitz, 1991). Social roles become rigidly cast and the natural, democratic right of each individual to critically examine evidence and decide upon the truth of a matter becomes constrained (Miller, 1990; Popkewitz, 1991). If the individual analysis of naturalistic assumptions in school counseling theories, methods and programs leads to a wholesale reappraisal of current approaches to education in general,

school counselors who recognize the possibility of working toward the harmony of science and religion, should not feel constrained to remain silent, feeling that it is not their place to enter this larger cultural dialog. On the contrary, school counselors are uniquely positioned within the public education system to see the problems of human development, and by extension, social development, from a more holistic perspective and can bring the insights and knowledge gained from their unique vantage point to bringing about real and significant change, contributing to the growing recognition among many that the fundamental problems besetting U.S. public education are not technical ones but rather they are spiritual ones. They are rooted, not in whether or not children acquire the reading and math skills necessary to succeed in someone else's conceptualization of the ideal global marketplace, but in the ability of children to successfully develop their spiritual capacities, in whatever social, political or economic context they happen to inhabit. The search for better solutions to educating new generations of American citizens cannot ignore religion and hope to bring about this necessary shift to a more spiritual orientation, for spiritual development depends upon authentic, objective knowledge of spiritual phenomena, knowledge which it is the purpose and function of both science and religion, operating in harmonic unison, to provide. To the degree that material prosperity and worldly accomplishments occur within a religious context, the bird of human life finds balanced development and is able to fly toward heights of authentic, holistic success.

The ongoing competition between science and religion in American society requires a radically new approach to resolving if a resolution is, in fact, desired. The alternative is to persist with the battle for epistemological supremacy between the

increasingly polarized and socially powerful forces of science, on the one hand, and of religion on the other. Witnessing these signs of social conflict, a group of representatives from nineteen major political, religious, civic, and human rights organizations convened a conference to analyze the problem and call for greater civility in the cultural debate about these important issues. The conference sponsored a joint statement recommending "six ground rules for addressing conflicts in public education" (First Amendment Center, n.d.). The sixth principle succinctly expresses the need to find common ground upon which to build a constructive dialog about issues of religion in public schools, stating that "Personal attacks, name-calling, ridicule, and similar tactics destroy the fabric of our society and undermine the educational mission of our schools. Even when our differences are deep, all parties engaged in public disputes should treat one another with civility and respect, and should strive to be accurate and fair. Through constructive dialogue we have much to learn from one another" (First Amendment Center, n.d.). Such assertions, in themselves, constitute a body of value-laden objectives which, despite their feeling of common sense "goodness", depend upon certain epistemological, ontological and axiological assumptions for their power to convince – assumptions that point to the continued need to investigate the total scope of human experience and to gradually discover the principles of reality that unite material and spiritual phenomena. For the common ground necessary for a constructive dialog will not be found in the final victory of one side over the other; science and religion are both irrepressible expressions of human nature. Both lead humanity to search for truth, but both can also fall prey to mistakes, miscalculations, and misunderstandings as well as to human machinations, misuse and malice. The path toward a true and proper education for our children,

therefore, is not going to follow one or the other of these two powerful worldviews, but rather, it is going to require a new path, freed from centuries of prejudice and mistaken assumptions on the part of scientists and religionists alike.

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