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Matthew Kuan Johnson

Opportunities and Obstacles for Joy during Adolescence:
Perspectives from Cognitive Science

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Perspectives from Cognitive Science

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"We search for a self to be. We search for other selves to love. We search for work to do. And since even when to one degree or another we find these things, we find also that there is still something crucial missing which we have not found, we search for that unfound thing too, even though we do not know its name or where it is to be found or even if it is to be found at all…"
-Frederick Buechner, *The Sacred Journey*

Abstract
Adolescence is a critical period of life in which various neurological, psychological, and social changes create unique opportunities and challenges for an individual's searching for, and experiencing of, joy. In Part I, I suggest three areas of adolescence that are particularly relevant for joy: the search for an identity, moral decision making, and exuberance, and I explain the cognitive science work that has been done in these areas. Then, I will explore the vulnerabilities and obstacles faced by the current generation of American adolescents. Finally, I will suggest ways in which *sehnsucht* may be a helpful concept for understanding and exploring the concept of joy, and provide some brief thoughts on the limits of cognitive science's abilities to explore these two concepts. In Part II, I propose how these insights, in combination with those from other disciplines, can be applied toward programs for Christian youth groups.

Introduction

i. Some Preliminary Remarks

Before we begin in earnest, I would like to make a preliminary observation about the lay of the land, as far as the empirical work goes. These will hopefully serve to orient the reader, before we dive in.

Previously, the field of psychology concentrated primarily on the negative aspects of the human experience, and it was only in the last two decades that studying the positive aspects of the human experience (i.e. positive psychology) became a pillar of psychological work. Consequently, developmental positive psychology is an even newer field that has really only begun to come into its own in the more recent part of the last decade. With the frontier of knowledge so close, it remains to be seen how many aspects of certain models of adolescent psychology will hold up in light of crucial empirical work yet to be done. While the models discussed in this paper are those that are, generally speaking, the most widely accepted and best supported by the existing evidence, this section serves as a reminder to the reader that, as with any young field, fundamental and core commitments of developmental positive psychology may be shaken and revised in future years, once more empirical work has been done.

ii. The Adolescent Brain and its Environment

The cortex of the human brain has the amazing feature of maturing from the back to the front. This means that the most basic functions, which involve regions located further back in the brain, develop first (such as capacities for sensation, motor control, etc.), and the last part of the brain to develop is the frontal lobe, which is responsible for our high-level cognitive processes such as thinking, reasoning, planning, and emotion regulation. The frontal lobe undergoes the most development and change during late adolescence,[12] providing adolescents with many important new abilities. Development is not complete, however, until between the ages of 25 and 30, leaving adolescent men and women with certain characteristic vulnerabilities (the adolescent brain is only about 80% developed).[3]

Additionally, different pressures are placed upon adolescents by society, which affects their development. According to one theory known as "life-span psychology," an individual is faced with different developmental environments, at different ages, that place different environmental tasks upon them. The typical developmental tasks of adolescence include "achieving mature relationships with one's peers, acquiring a masculine or feminine social role, accepting one's physical appearance, achieving emotional independence of ones's parents, preparing for marriage and family life, preparing for a career, developing an identity, and achieving socially responsible behavior."[4]

<u>**Part I**</u>

<u>I. The Search for an Identity</u>

I.A. The Evidence

The aforementioned environmental task of "developing an identity" that is placed upon adolescents is one of the most central aspects of their development. Indeed, developmental psychologist Erik Erikson claimed that the identity task was the main task of late adolescence. In this task, youth try to understand their place in the world and become involved with various identities, ideologies, and ideals in their search for this understanding (see *Fig. 1*).[5] This model is supported by empirical evidence that has found that it is in adolescence an individual's efforts to

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[1] *Neural Correlates of Positive Youth Development* Lazar, S. (in Warren, Amy Eva Alberts., Richard M. Lerner, and Erin Phelps. *Thriving and Spirituality among Youth: Research Perspectives and Future Possibilities*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2012. Print.)

[2] Indeed, the reason why many mental disorders arise during adolescence is because of complications with how their brains develop during this period.

[3] Ruder, Debra B. "The Teen Brain." Harvard Magazine, Sept.-Oct. 2008. Web. 16 Sept. 2014.

[4] *What Works Makes You Happy: The Role of Personal Goals in Life-Span Development.* Nurmi, Jari-Erik; Salmela-Aro, Katariina (in Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly (Ed); Csikszentmihalyi, Isabella Selega (Ed), (2006). *A life worth living: Contributions to positive psychology.* , (pp. 182-199). New York, NY, US: Oxford University Press, ix, 253 pp.)

[5] *Self and Identity Processes in Spirituality and Positive Youth Development* Robert W. Roeser, Sonia S. Issac, Mona Abo-Zena, Aerika Brittian, & Stephen C. Peck (in Lerner, Richard Martin. *Positive Youth Development & Spirituality: From Theory to Research*. West Conshohocken, Pa: Templeton Foundation, 2008. Print.)

combine one's past, present, and future into a unified narrative truly begins.[6] Even further evidence for the suggestion that the events in one's adolescence are a unique time of formulating one's identity, comes from the "Reminiscence Bump": individuals older than thirty remember the events that occurred when they were adolescents or young adults more clearly than the events of any other time period of their lives, and when asked to recall their most significant moments, they recall events from adolescence and young adulthood with a disproportionately high frequency.[7] The results of these studies suggest that adolescence is when many of the events that have the most bearing on one's identity occur, and furthermore, since memories from this period are those that will remain the most vivid throughout an individual's life, the experiences that adolescents have during this period will have the greatest influence on their overall life story (even in later years).

Four Stages Along the Road to Maturity, According to Erikson's Psychosocial Theory	
Identity (late adolescence)	The quest for one's true character and proper role in society (Waterman, 1982)
Intimacy (young adulthood)	The quest for meaningful relations with others and also a life partner (Whitbourne & Tesch, 1985)
Generativity (middle adulthood)	The quest to help the young, create self-defining works, or leave public legacies (McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992)
Ego integrity (late adulthood)	. The quest for ego transcendence or for an understanding of one's place in the ultimate scheme of things (Peck, 1968)

Fig. 1. Identity as the Central Task of Late Adolescence on Erikson's Psychosocial Theory.[8]

Additionally, the task of "developing an identity" is made possible by the abilities that they gain from various changes in their frontal lobes. Included among these are improved capacities for abstract thought (necessary in order to consider abstract concepts such as selves and identities), long-term planning (necessary in order to have a coherent sense of a self that is unified across all time points in one's life) and reasoning (necessary in order to choose an identity).

I.B. How it works

Children generally unreflectively adopt the goals that have been given to them; however, this changes in adolescence.[9] A (highly simplified) description depiction of a child's decision making structure is as follows: young children receive some sort of input (e.g. child sees food),

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[6] *The Psychology of Life Stories.* McAdams, D. Review of General Psychology, Vol 5(2), Jun 2001, 100-122.

[7] Fitzgerald, J. *Vivid memories and the reminiscence phenomenon: The role of a self narrative.* Human Development, Vol 31(5), Sep-Oct 1988, 261-273.

[8] *Getting Older, Getting Better? Recent Psychological Evidence.* Sheldon, K. (in Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly (Ed); Csikszentmihalyi, Isabella Selega (Ed), (2006). *A life worth living: Contributions to positive psychology.* , (pp. 182-199). New York, NY, US: Oxford University Press, ix, 253 pp.

[9] *How Religious/Spiritual Practices Contribute to Well-Being: The Role of Emotion Regulation* Heather L. Urry & Alan P. Poey (in Lerner, Richard Martin. *Positive Youth Development & Spirituality: From Theory to Research.* West Conshohocken, Pa: Templeton Foundation, 2008. Print.)

which forms a desire in them (child wants to eat the food), that leads directly to a response (child grabs the food). While humans lack the ability to directly control which desires they experience in a given moment, adult humans, in contrast to children, are able to better reflect upon their goals and desires, and to decide whether or not to endorse these goals and desires. This provides them with the capacity for higher-order volitions, or metadesires.[10] An adult human, therefore, is capable of reflecting upon their desires and goals and deciding whether or not to act in accordance with them, rather than following the simple input-output structure that children generally exhibit. For example, an adult human will experiences a desire (e.g. adult wants to eat food) and then can reflect upon his desire (adult says to self, "I want to eat the food, but doing so will make me fat and I don't want to be fat"), then he can form a desire about his desire (in this case, he will chose not to endorse the desire in saying, "I don't want to desire to eat the food") and then can alter his behavior as a result of his reflection (he will not eat the food). This capacity for higher order volition frees adults from acting solely out of the immediate desires and goals of the moment. In order to endorse or deny one's desires and goals, some notion of identity is necessary, so that one can adjudicate between various desires and goals and choose one. In short, an identity is necessary in order to create the principles for oneself that one will live by. Consequently, the adolescent is capable of a high degree of autonomous functioning: as a child, biological and environmental influences largely determined her behavior, but in adolescence, she can live by the principles that she has adopted for herself.[11]

In the course of discovering one's identity, the adolescent is torn between two different psychological mechanisms: freedom and responsibility.[12] In freedom, the adolescent comes to realize the powerful new abilities that they have developed; in responsibility, the adolescent changes from having been primarily regulated by external factors (such as adults), into being regulated by their own self. "The integration of both trends…is the core of the adolescent crisis; it marks the person's ascendance into a new level of relating to the world, the level of autodetermination."[13] In sum, in searching for an identity, adolescents strive for the identity that will best balance their ability to give free expression to their desires and goals, with finding and remaining accountable to certain consistent principles of behavior, that will be conducive to their functioning well as an individual and in society. For teenagers, the difficulty in balancing these two mechanisms is seen most clearly in the realm of moral decision making.

II. Moral Decision Making

II.A. The Dualism of Practical Reason

For millennia, individuals have thought and written about what philosopher Henry Sidgwick referred to as "the dualism of practical reason": should one's principles of action be

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[10] Frankfurt "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," in Watson (1982), ed., 81–95.

[11] *Positive Personality Development: Approaching Personal Autonomy* Dmitry Leontiev (in Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly (Ed); Csikszentmihalyi, Isabella Selega (Ed), (2006). *A life worth living: Contributions to positive psychology.* , (pp. 182-199). New York, NY, US: Oxford University Press, ix, 253 pp.)

[12] Kaliteyevskaya. E., &Leontiev. D. (2004). When freedom meets responsibility: Adolescence as the critical point of positive personality development. In A. Delle Fave (Ed.), *Positive psychology* [Special issue *of Ricerche di Psicologia,* 27(1). 103-115].

[13] Ibid.

governed by a principle of self-interest or impartiality? Duns Scotus referred to the self-interest principle as the affection for advantage, which involves acting out of natural appetite and for one's own happiness. Additionally, Scotus referred to the impartiality principle as the affection for justice, and this involves giving each thing its due, impartially (Immanuel Kant had roughly the same two concepts as Scotus, calling the self-interest principle the *wille* and the impartiality principle the *willkür*). Kant believed that we are born with a tendency to rank the self-interest principle above the impartiality principle, but, with effort, can switch the order so that the impartiality principle is placed on top. This idea is consistent with both Scripture (e.g. Genesis 8:21 "…the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth."), and models of human decision making in social psychology that postulate a "hive switch," in which humans can get themselves into mindsets that help them to act more prosocially, placing their self-interest on the backburner.[14]

Paradoxically, adolescence is characterized by both a greater ability to consider possible courses of action and consequences of their behavior, and also by a greater tendency to give in to the natural appetites (regardless of consequences). In other words, the characteristic developments in adolescence provide greater abilities with which to choose between the two principles governing moral action, yet adolescence also involves other factors that make it hard for individuals to choose well. If is not yet sufficiently clear, I would like to note that when I refer to the "impartiality" principle, I mean this to include actions done out of caring about the welfare of others. This is an important point of clarification, as caring about others, involvement in causes greater than oneself, and prosocial action are some of the primary measures of positive youth development in the empirical literature, and believed to be one of the most important aspects of positive youth development.[15]

II.B. Faculties that Make it Easier to Choose Well

Theory of mind is the ability to infer the mental states of other individuals. The brain regions that contribute to this ability continue to develop throughout adolescence.[16] Additionally, it has been found that facial expression processing abilities and accuracy continue to develop throughout adolescence.[17][18] This is important because recognizing facial expressions is one of the main tools that we have for inferring the mental states of others. With a greater ability to infer and to feel the mental states of others, adolescents likely gain greater capacities with which to experience empathy. Additionally, emotional intelligence (the ability to track one's own emotions and the emotions of others) has been found to increase throughout adolescence, which

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[14] Haidt, Jonathan. *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion*. New York: Pantheon, 2012. Print.

[15] *Spirituality, "Expanding Circle Morality," and Positive Youth Development* Janice L. Templeton & Jacquelynne S. Eccles (in Lerner, Richard Martin. *Positive Youth Development & Spirituality: From Theory to Research*. West Conshohocken, Pa: Templeton Foundation, 2008. Print.)

[16] Apperly, Ian. *Mindreaders: The Cognitive Basis of "theory of Mind"* Hove: Psychology, 2011. Print.

[17] *Cooperative Behavior in Adolescence: Economic Antecedents and Neural Underpinnings* Tomáš Paus, Simon Gächter, Chris Starmer, & Richard Wilkinson (in Lerner, Richard Martin. *Positive Youth Development & Spirituality: From Theory to Research*. West Conshohocken, Pa: Templeton Foundation, 2008. Print.)

[18] Lawrence, K., Bernstein, D., Pearson, R., Mandy, W., Wade, A., & Skuse, D. (2005, submitted). Age, gender and puberty influence the development of facial emotion recognition.

likely provides additional evidence that empathic abilities increase throughout adolescence.[19] Experiencing greater empathy for others decreases the pull of one's own self-interest. As a result, it is likely the case that better developed theory of mind capacities enable adolescents to more easily disregard their own self-interest and to act more impartially (i.e. to act more prosocially). Many types of joy result from deep relationships, and better theory of mind capacities allow for much more intimate relationships. Indeed, the current model for how we understand the mental states of others is known as "simulation theory," which suggests that we understand others' behavior and mental states by simulating their behavior and mental states with our own neural pathways, using our own neural pathways as proxies for theirs.[20] As a result, if we view another person expressing sadness or pain, the same sadness or pain expression pathways in our own brains will become activated, such that we can understand theirs. Simulation theory, then, paints an oddly poetic picture of how our theory of mind capacities bind us to others in intimate ways.

Additionally, the abstract reasoning abilities that adolescents develop enable them to expand their moral circle.[21] Children have moral circles limited to those that they interact with; as a result, they only feel a responsibility toward those close to, and identifiable by, themselves. An adolescent, by contrast, is capable of recognizing a responsibility to others, whom she may not have physically interacted with, but feels a responsibility to on a more abstract level. For instance, an adolescent who reads about a famine in a country far away from herself, is capable of considering the pain being suffered by people there whom she has never met, and also of considering her responsibility to them. In this way, she is able to expand her moral circle beyond those that she has met. With the current level of globalization and the spread of media outlets, the potential moral circles of today's youth have are indeed quite large. The implications for joy are many, as youth can be troubled by the constant bombardment of images and information about atrocities carried out all over the globe, yet they also have the opportunity to expand their own moral circle, and to share in the joy that others around the globe experience.

II.C. Factors that Make it Difficult to Choose Well

"So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart."
                                                                    -2 Timothy 2:22 (ESV)

Adolescence is a time of life notorious for risky behavior: the main causes of death and injury during this period are the result of failures to control their behavior and emotions.[22] Neurologically, much of this is the result of the frontal lobe not having fully developed yet, which makes it difficult for adolsecents to inhibit risky behavior. Additionally, adolescents experience large changes in their hormone levels (particularly the hormones related to stress and sexual development), which, combined with the aforementioned difficulties in inhibitory control,

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[19] *Benefits of Emotional Intelligence* Daisy D. Grewal & Peter Salovey (in Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly (Ed); Csikszentmihalyi, Isabella Selega (Ed), (2006). *A life worth living: Contributions to positive psychology.* , (pp. 182-199). New York, NY, US: Oxford University Press, ix, 253 pp.)

[20] Apperly, Ian. *Mindreaders: The Cognitive Basis of "theory of Mind"* Hove: Psychology, 2011. Print.

[21] *Spirituality, "Expanding Circle Morality," and Positive Youth Development* Janice L. Templeton & Jacquelynne S. Eccles (in Lerner, Richard Martin. *Positive Youth Development & Spirituality: From Theory to Research*. West Conshohocken, Pa: Templeton Foundation, 2008. Print.)

[22] Dahl R. E. (2004). Adolescent brain development: a period of vulnerabilities and opportunities. *Ann NY Acad Sci.*

can result in impulsive behavior. One study found that adolescents experience less activation in the right ventral striatum and right amygdala (areas relating to emotion and reward) in adolescent compared to adult participants, during the moments in which the participants were awaiting the results of a gamble that they had made. The authors suggest that this indicates that adolescents experience less emotional reaction to risk, and so they pursue more extreme incentives and risks, in order to accommodate their comparably low emotional responses.[23] Another brain imaging study found that when adolescents and adults were asked to respond to whether particular scenarios were a good idea or a bad idea, adolescents took longer than the adults to answer on the "not a good idea" scenarios, and exhibited greater activation in areas of the brain related to reasoning, while adults exhibited greater activation in areas related to emotion and imagery.[24] The authors suggested that these results indicate that adults' responses were driven by a deeper, more automatic reaction to the outcomes, which involved mental imagery of the consequences, while adolescents' responses were driven by their reasoning capabilities. If the authors are correct, this would suggest that adolescent behavior is particularly impulsive because, while they may cognitively understand the consequences of their actions, they do not feel or experience the weight of the consequences on a deeper, more visceral level, and so these consequences have less cognitive pull for them. Furthermore, it could be that adults spontaneously generate thoughts about the consequences of the "not a good idea"-type actions, while this requires effort and the use of reasoning capacities in adolescents; consequently, adolescents may frequently fail to generate thoughts about the potential consequences of their risky actions. Difficulties in inhibiting risky behavior, problems with generating thoughts of potential consequences to particular behaviors, and propensity to seek extreme risks all contribute to the "youthful passions" which Paul warns Timothy to flee from. Additionally, Titus 2:5-6 urges both the young women and the young men "to be self-controlled." The pursuit of joy is only possible for those undivided against themselves, who are not torn between their impulsive natural inclinations and how they know they ought to act.

<u>III. Exuberance</u>
"The glory of young men is their strength."
-Proverbs 20:29

Adolescence involves a special type of physical and intellectual energy that, for this paper, we will term "exuberance." It is during adolescence that individuals are at their peak in terms of health, physical and mental abilities, and energy. Furthermore, the brain's ability learn reaches its peak during this period.[25] Indeed, the "exuberance" effect is present even in adversity: one study found that young men who encountered adversity were often able to grow from it, yet those who were older than 30 were less quick to recover and less able to grow from the

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[23] Bjork, J.M., Knutson, B., Fong, G.W., Caggiano, D.M., Bennett, S.M., & Hommer, D.W. (2004). Incentive-elicited brain activation in adolescents: Similarities and differences from young adults. Journal of Neuro-science,24, 1793–1802.

[24] Baird, A.A., Gruber, S.A., Fein, D.A., Maas, L.C., Steingard, R.J., Renshaw, P.F., Cohen, B.M., & Yurgelun-Todd, D.A. (1999). Functional magnetic resonance imaging of facial affect recognition in children and adolescents. Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 38, 195–199., 15, 1848–1854.

[25] Ruder, Debra B. "The Teen Brain." Harvard Magazine, Sept.-Oct. 2008. Web. 16 Sept. 2014.

experience.[26] The ease of learning and of resilience that characterize adolescence provide uniquely fertile ground for the pursuit of joy.

IV. Vulnerabilities

A. The Existential Vacuum and the Pursuit of Happiness

In previous times and in other cultures, adolescents received values and meaning for their lives from the values, worldviews, and religions of their particular culture. By contrast, youth in America today face an environment in which this is not the case. In the current culture, "God is dead," and consequently, religion is thought to have been debunked. As a result, any objective notion of human value, morality, and meaning are believed to be fictions. Increasing globalization has brought us in contact with cultural practices very different than ours, and yet we have no tools with which to adjudicate between which practices ought to be and ought not be practiced. As a result, a strong and complacent relativism has settled in, insidiously cached behind claims to "open-mindedness" and "cosmopolitan thinking." Additoinally, with fewer shared cultural values to bind us to each other, we lack the kind of orienting principles that provide us with meaning in our lives and bind us to each other. This leads to a sense of alienation, which sociologist Émile Durkheim referred to as *anomie*.[27] Additionally, a pervasive sense of reductionism from evolutionary theory and neuroscientific and behavioral research insists that free will is a myth. All of these contribute to what renowned psychiatrist and concentration camp survivor Victor Frankl described as "the existential vacuum." "The existential vacuum which is the mass neurosis of the present time can be described as a private and personal form of nihilism; for nihilism can be defined as the contention that being has no meaning."[28]

Frankl suggests that "the existential vacuum manifests itself mainly in a state of boredom."[29] Thus, perceiving our existences to be value-less and meaningless, we become bored with our existences, and cope with this boredom through distracting ourselves with pursuing immediate pleasures. Ironically, an unfortunate feedback loop is formed as our continual search for stimulation increases our boredom with life. This is because, similar to drug addicts, the stimulation seeker requires larger and larger amounts of stimulation as his brain quickly habituates to the high levels of, and frequency of, stimulation that he provides it with. Furthermore, stimulation is readily available in an age of Internet and cell phones. Kierkegaard called boredom "the root of all evil, the despairing refusal to be oneself." Indeed, stimulation seeking reduces human life to simple drive reduction, denying that life the higher, loftier, and more meaningful possibilities that it is meant for.[30]

In addition, our culture's obsession with pursuing positive feelings and happiness, actually creates obstacles to the possibility of experiencing real happiness. Edith Weisskopf-Joelson, who before her death was professor of psychology at University of Georgia, wrote that

[26] Elder, Glen H. *Children of the Great Depression: Social Change in Life Experience*. Chicago: U of Chicago, 1974. Print.
[27] Durkheim, Emile (1897) [1951]. *Suicide : a study in sociology*.
[28] Frankl, Viktor E. *Man's Search for Meaning*. Boston: Beacon, 2006. Print.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Kierkegaard, Søren. *Either/ Or*.

"our current mental-hygiene philosophy stresses the idea that people ought to be happy, that unhappiness is a symptom of maladjustment. Such a value system might be responsible for the fact that the burden of unavoidable unhappiness is increased by unhappiness about being unhappy."[31] Additionally, empirical work has found ways in which the pursuit of happiness actually makes people unhappy and feel lonelier.[32][33] Frankl describes the problem with the pursuit of happiness, "Don't aim at [it]…the more you aim at it and make it a target, the more you are going to miss it…happiness, cannot be pursued; it must ensue…as the unintended side-effect of one's personal dedication to a course greater than oneself."[34]

That happiness ensues, and should not be pursued, becomes even clearer when we consider evolutionary theory. Evolution has provided individuals with drives that are conducive to creating greater opportunities for that individual to propagate their genes, and not necessarily with the drives that are good for them. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, one of the founders of positive psychology, warns of the societal effects of not appreciating this distinction. Csikszentmihalyi wrote that "the 'liberated' view of human nature…accepts and endorses every instinct or drive we happen to have simply because it's there."[35] It is the idea that if something feels pleasurable, it must be the right course of action. Similarly, philosopher Simon Blackburn has observed that people care more now about their individual rights, while in previous times people cared more about considering what was actually good and right for them and for their societies.[36] Thus, the prevailing mindset, the "liberated view of nature," jealously guards its rights to pursue their own natural inclinations. The problem in making this a guiding principle of behavior is, as aforementioned, many of our drives are simply heuristics that were selected for because they were conducive toward spreading genes in some context, and are not necessarily conducive toward our well-being or flourishing.

One of the clearest examples of this is seen in how humans are driven to "conspicuous consumption." This refers to how humans often work hard to gain resources that allow them to exhibit their relative level of power and success (such as buying an expensive car), which conveys their fitness and resources to potential mates and competitors. While it was, in some context, evolutionarily adaptive to be wired to experience pleasure whenever one worked toward "conspicuous consumption," the problem is that we have not been wired to have an stopping point in our drives for success. Consequently, while succeeding in one area (e.g. buying a car) temporarily makes us happy, the happiness does not last, and soon we want even more. That this type of happiness does not last, and that we are driven to continually pursue it, is clear in countless examples of old executives who have more money than they will ever spend, yet who keep working into old age. This effect has been termed "the paradox of hedonism" or "the hedonic treadmill." The pull of the hedonic treadmill is particularly exacerbated in present day America, where industrialization and a booming economy have led to basic needs having been met for the majority of people, such that the push toward consumption of ever-new and unnecessary goods is pervasive in society.[37] Work by Robert Emmons has confirmed Frankl's

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[31] Frankl, Viktor E. *Man's Search for Meaning*. Boston: Beacon, 2006. Print.
[32] Mauss, I. B., Tamir, M., Anderson. C. L., & Savino, N. S. (2011). Can seeking happiness make people unhappy? Paradoxical effects of valuing happiness. *Emotion, 11*, 807–815
[33] Mauss, I.B., Savino, N.S., Anderson, C.L., Weisbuch, M. Tamir, M., & Laudenslager, M.L. The Pursuit of Happiness can be lonely, *Emotion, 12,* 908-912.
[34] Frankl, Viktor E. *Man's Search for Meaning*. Boston: Beacon, 2006. Print.
[35]Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly. *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. New York: Harper & Row, 1990. Print.
[36] Blackburn, Simon. *Being Good: An Introduction to Ethics*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001. Print.
[37] Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly. *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. New York: Harper & Row, 1990. Print.

suggestion that happiness must ensue; Emmons found that those who "dedicate themselves to a course greater than oneself," end up with greater levels of happiness than those who dedicate themselves primarily to success and wealth.[38][39] We are all subject to the nearly irresistible tug of the hedonic treadmill, and it appears that the only way to get off of it and to experience deeper happiness and well-being, is to find something greater than oneself to commit oneself to.

Kierkegaard told a beautiful parable of a king who falls in love with a peasant girl.[40] The king realizes that his riches and power will be useless in the attempt to win her love. The story reveals how our drive toward conspicuous consumption is not in our true interests: love cannot be bought or won through conspicuous consumption. All of the money or power in the world cannot compel another's love. Consequently, the king puts on the clothes of a peasant and goes to the house of the woman and wins her love through his actions of self-sacrifice for her. Thus, while the king's natural inclinations were toward success and conspicuous consumption, this would have precluded the possibility of his being loved. The king overcame the pull of the evolutionary heuristics, and demonstrated how love can only be won through service.

If there is any hope for adolescents in present-day America to have a shot at pursuing and discovering joy, we must instill them with both a sense of the possibility that human life does have value and meaning, and with assistance for overcoming the temptation of the readily available and all-pervasive sources of instant-gratification. In the second part of this paper, I will outline various programs and points of application that youth groups could use in order to address these two issues.

V. *Sehnsucht* and the Limits of Cognitive Science

"The center of me is always and eternally a terrible pain-a curious wild pain-a searching for something beyond what the world contains."
                                        -Bertrand Russell

"Apparently, then, our lifelong nostalgia, our longing to be reunited with something in the universe from which we now feel cut off, to be on the inside of some door which we have always seen from the outside, is no mere neurotic fancy, but the truest index of our real situation."
                                        -C.S. Lewis, The Weight of Glory

While the subject of our inquiry is joy, I believe that there is another phenomenon that deserves our attention, which may help to shed some light on the subject of joy. This is the feeling that Russell is referring to in the quote above, and which is beautifully captured by the German word, *sehnsucht*, which is a deep and pervasive, cosmic homesickness. It is a longing that we all experience, but without knowing what it is that we are longing for. I would like to suggest that since we are made in God's Image and by God for fellowship with him (Scotus refers to our ultimate *telos* as becoming co-lovers, or *condiligentes* with God), our entire being

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[38] Emmons, R.A. (1999). *The psychology of ultimate concerns: Motivation and spirituality in personality.* New York: The Guilford Press

[39] *Personal goals, life meaning, and virtue: Wellsprings of a positive life*. Emmons, Robert A. (in Keyes, Corey L. M. (Ed); Haidt, Jonathan (Ed), (2003). Flourishing: Positive psychology and the life well-lived. , (pp. 105-128). Washington, DC, US: American Psychological Association, xx, 335 pp)

[40] Kierkegaard, Søren. *Philosophical Fragments*. 31-43.

and all of our faculties are drawn to anything that reflects His Glory. In addition, our entire being and all of our faculties cry out for the deeper intimacy with Him that we are made for. Consequently, I think that many of the insights of psychology point to this truth. I am with Lewis, that the thoughts that many have that lead to a diagnosis of "depression" or "anxiety disorders" are "no mere neurotic fanc[ies], but the truest index of our real situation." In other words, underlying this psychological distress is a profound longing for God. Similarly, I believe that the things that we encounter in life that give us joy contain small fingerprints of God. The joy we receive from them involves our being and faculties experiencing uplift, out of a closer sense of intimacy with Him. For instance, when we enjoy a sunset, or a game of soccer, or even a quiet moment, we experience joy because our being perceives a greater intimacy with God. Paradoxically, I think these moments can also lead to the experience of a greater sense of *sehnsucht* at the same time, as one may simultaneously experience both a greater sense of intimacy with God, and a deeper appreciation for how separated from Him we really are. Some of the most important capacities through which we experience *sehnsucht* and joy may go beyond our rational and emotional faculties, into something like a spiritual faculty that we lack the proper metaphysics to understand or explain. Plantinga suggested something along these lines with his concept of the properly basic beliefs that are formed whenever God reveals Himself to us (Alston refers to them as M-beliefs, for "Manifestation [of God] beliefs").[41][42]

The point of this section is to put forth the idea that the negative aspects of the human experience that can be studied by cognitive science may aid our understanding of *sehnsucht*; conversely, the positive aspects of the human experience that can be studied by cognitive science may aid our understanding of joy. I do think that there are important limitations, however, regarding the insights that cognitive science can provide, both theoretically and in terms of empirical measurement. Cognitive science is limited to the realm of what is observable by our physical senses. Elisha prayed for his servant's eyes to be opened to the aspects of reality that we are unable to perceive with the capacities of physical sensation that we use (2 Kings 6:17), and I believe that there are aspects of *sehnsucht* and joy that lie outside of the spectrum of what a naturalistic field of inquiry, such as cognitive science, is able to perceive. Nevertheless, the aspects of *sehnsucht* and joy that do fall into the spectrum that we can observe through the lens of cognitive science are certainly worth pursuing.

In conclusion, the Bible, beginning with the banishment from Paradise, contains a plethora of stories of exiles longing to return home. I take this to serve as a metaphor for how the human being, who has the *Imago Dei*, longs to return to the greater intimacy with God that he was made for. I think that these stories reveal how the most fundamental and basic aspects of our nature yearn to return to God's presence, and any joy we may encounter involves these faculties experiencing uplift in recognizing (consciously or not) God's presence. On the other hand, any experience of *sehnsucht* that we may encounter involves these faculties lamenting their distance from God. In studying joy, therefore, the evidence, measurements, and theories that cognitive science concerns itself with will only be able to explain and to explore symptoms and certain features of joy, and will never progress to the deeper levels and to the must fundamental, underlying cause of it.

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[41] Alvin Plantinga, "Is Belief in God Properly Basic?," *Noûs* 15 (1981): 41-51.
[42] William P. Alston, "Perceiving God," *Journal of Philosophy* 83 (1986): 655-665.; P. 655

Part II: Applications

"Miroslav's critique describes a widespread culture that is offering our young a maladaptive account of human well-being, drifting away from the religious, philosophical, and artistic resources that previous generations had called on to equip their children to discern what makes life worth living. Without knowing how to discuss and answer for themselves that question, Volf asserts, our children remain ignorant of the purposes of life."[43]

II.A. Introduction

I suggest that insights from three areas: narratives, practical philosophy, and psychology, can inform certain practices in youth groups, and thereby provide resources to address the most fundamental needs and concerns of young people seeking and inquiring of truth and Christ. While all of these disciplines were previously united in the pursuit of truth and the life well lived, they gradually split apart during the late Scientific Revolution and early Enlightenment periods. Currently, each field is highly specialized and separate from the others; however, in recent years there has been much excitement over the concept of "interdisciplinary work" among these fields. Usually, however, such work has only involved two of the three areas. I suggest that all three areas are vitally necessary for pursuing truth and the life well lived.

II.B. Three Areas defined

By "narrative," I am referring to the formulation of one's "life story" in which one understands the particular societal context that one lives in, the rights and responsibilities that one's particular role in their particular society entails, and the beliefs and precommitments that their society has imparted to them. Straightforwardly, by "psychology," I mean any insights from cognitive science that may be relevant to flourishing for adolescents.

By "practical philosophy," I refer to the project of trying to work out one's worldview and values, and to resolve any dissonances and inconsistencies that it may contain. It may be helpful to note that I am borrowing the term "practical philosophy" from a movement that gained steam in the late 1990s, and which sought to break out of the mold that characterizes the vast majority of contemporary academic philosophy, which does not concern itself with questions of the good life, and to return to philosophy's roots in pursuing these questions. Additionally, it was founded with the idea that many of the psychological ills and uneasiness that people experience (and often seek psychiatric help for), are the result of not feeling secure in their worldviews. "Practical philosophy" was put forth as a kind of treatment, or counseling service, in which individuals would meet with professional philosophers and engage in dialectic, with the idea that if the patient could work out a coherent worldview, they would feel better about their lives. While "practical philosophy" as a movement fell out of the public eye in the early 2000s, largely as a result of in-fighting and divisions among its leading proponents, I think something about the underlying motivation of the movement is correct and ought to be taken seriously. It seems to me that many people have not been given the appropriate tools and opportunities necessary to be

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[43] Masback, H. *Twin Calamities: Declining Churches, Struggling Youth*

able to think rigorously about their worldviews and beliefs. Consequently, these individuals feel a significant degree of unease on account of the shakiness of their noetic structures.

II.C. The Necessity of Integration

While two of the three fields will sometimes intersect, it is rare for a project to engage all three levels. Human beings are deeply complex, and each of the aforementioned areas provides a different lens through which to view some different aspect of human nature. By engaging with all three disciplines, we stand the best shot at being able to see a clear picture of, and to engage with, the most important aspects of human beings. Indeed, each of the approaches has certain shortcomings and scotomas, that can be corrected for by the others.

For example, psychology is often pejoratively characterized as involving a "medicalization of the human condition." Psychology frequently reduces the human individual to a bundle of desires, drives, and neuroses, and fails to provide an account of freedom and autonomy. Conversely, philosophy goes too far in the other direction, overestimating the amount of autonomy that human beings have. This is because philosophy has traditionally viewed man through a rationalist framework, in which man's capacities for reasoning are trustworthy and his intuitions track some kind of deep metaphysical truth. Such a view also does not accurately track reality: the reasoning structures of human beings are often heavily subject to bias as they are constrained and influenced by certain evolutionary and biological facts. It may be worth mentioning that, recently, the field of experimental philosophy has arisen as a response to this problem. Experimental Philosophy (or ExPhi) concerns itself with exploring and explaining the factors give rise to and affect our intuitions on certain topics, and the factors that can affect and bias our reasoning processes.

Furthermore, Daniel McAdams, chair of the psychology department at Northwestern University, has suggested that there are three levels of personality.[44] These correspond, roughly, with the three areas that I have suggested. At the lowest level on McAdams' model are an individual's basic, underlying traits (which could be addressed through psychology), at the next level lies the values that one has adopted (which could be addressed through practical philosophy), and at the highest level is one's life story (which could be addressed through narrative).[45] McAdams suggests that there must be coherence and consistency among the three levels, in order for an individual to enjoy a flourishing life and a robust sense of self. As a result, I believe that it is crucial that youth groups provide opportunities in these three areas, so that this coherence among levels will be possible.

II.D. Narrative

I see three ways in which the role of narrative intersects with youth groups. The first is moral education. In *After Virtue*, Alasdair MacIntyre proposes that man is "essentially a story-telling animal," and that moral education is primarily imparted through means of narrative.[46] As a result, stories from the Bible, stories about faithful Christians, and testimonies from peers are

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[44] *The psychology of life stories*. McAdams, Dan P. Review of General Psychology, Vol 5(2), Jun 2001, 100-122.

[45] Haidt, Jonathan. *The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom*. New York: Basic, 2006. Print.

[46] MacIntyre, Alasdair C. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. Notre Dame, IN: U of Notre Dame, 1984. Print.

some of the best ways in which to impart and to deeply ingrain Christian principles. This is because, not only does it impart rational, head knowledge about good Christian behavior and how God relates to us, but the emotional responses that are evoked by stories ensure that the lessons sink in deeply. Psychologically, this occurs both through theory of mind capacities, and the phenomenon of "moral elevation" in which individuals experience intense positive affect from hearing stories about positive moral action. This experience of positive affect is thought to aid in their learning of prosocial behavior, and to contribute to their imitation of good behavior. This is especially important as many of the narratives that youth encounter now are not positive ones. Consequently, because media glorifies licentiousness and the pursuit of pleasure, and sensationalist stories are omnipresent, these must be counterbalanced by an appropriate moral education in a youth group setting.

Secondly, training in how to understand one's own life narrative and how God fits into it is one of the most important exercises in developing an identity. Being able to formulate these life stories, and having the opportunity to share them in order to be supported by, to encourage, and to inform others, is a vital part of developing a self-concept and also of healing. Psychiatrist Jonathan Shay found that having Vietnam veterans who were suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder formulate a narrative out of their experiences, and then to share their narratives (similar to testimonies), was one of the most effective rehabilitations for PTSD.[47] MacIntyre also suggests that we can only answer the question of what we are to do, if we first answer the question "of what story…do I find myself a part[?]"[48] Adolescents in present day America face a particularly strong example of "the paradox of choice," in which they have an enormous amount of possibilities in terms of opportunities that they can commit themselves to. For example, there are many possibilities in terms of leisure activities, and professional and academic fields have become highly specialized in recent years. While in previous eras, the life path was clear: adolescents would find a job and search for a mate; by contrast, in the present day, seemingly endless options appear to be open to the individual. This can be the source of much anxiety as youth often do not have the tools or framework with which to evaluate the different options or to choose among them. By prayerfully developing a narrative about God's plan for one's life, one finds oneself a part of God's story, and gains the kind of framework MacIntyre suggested was necessary for action. In conclusion, a youth group provides the perfect setting in which to provide assistance to adolescents in developing their own life narratives, and the opportunity to share them with a group of peers that they trust.

Finally, training in learning how to assess one's own narrative, and in particular, to be able to scrutinize the ways in which various elements of ones' life have had an effect on oneself, are also important because they help us to realize the biases and precommitments that we may have. MacIntyre calls this: "the virtue of having an adequate sense of the traditions to which one belongs or which confront one." If youth groups were to provide the tools for their members to acquire this particular virtue, individuals would be able to better diagnose how certain life experiences and contexts may have created deeply ingrained beliefs that serve as obstacles, or as particularly fertile points of contact, for the Gospel's taking deep root in their lives. Furthermore, the ability to apply this skill toward the narratives of the other individuals that one encounters, may have tremendous apologetic value when sharing the Gospel.

[47] Shay, Jonathan. *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character*. New York: Atheneum, 1994. Print.
[48] MacIntyre, Alasdair C. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. Notre Dame, IN: U of Notre Dame, 1984. Print.

E. Practical Philosophy

In many ways, what we will discuss in this section shares many points of commonality with the Life Worth Living project. The goal in this area would be to provide adolescents with the resources to evaluate and build up their core belief commitments. Just as Life Worth Living is hoping to soon expand into having online modules, I envision something similar here. Each module could contain lectures, readings, and suggestions for further reading (if the student is particularly interested in that particular topic). The first module would involve an introduction to basic topics in epistemology, geared towards equipping the student with tools that they could use to evaluate the various ideas and worldviews that they will encounter in later modules. The second module would involve basic systematic theology and Biblical hermeneutics, so that students would be equipped to start finding answers, for themselves, to many of their questions. The next module would involve Christian apologetics, so that the student, in learning the various arguments and evidence in support of Christianity, would feel more confident in her faith, and also have tools with which to "provide a ready defense" (1 Peter 3:15) for her faith. The last module would resemble the Life Worth Living project (or perhaps could even link to the Life Worth Living online course), in which various religions and worldviews would be presented to the student. This last module both has relational value, in that the student may come to understand others better (as they develop more robust understandings of the worldviews that others have), as well as apologetic value, in that the student would have tools with which to put Christianity and other worldviews in dialogue, and value in terms of personal faith, as many young people begin to doubt Christianity because they have never taken the time to explore the other options (and this would be a relatively easy way to receive exposure to the other options).

It seems that this type of online course could be extremely edifying and helpful since it would both provide a place for young seekers or Christians to look for answers, and also provide training in how to go about exploring these issues for themselves. Additionally, perhaps chatrooms or discussion boards could be added, in order to create opportunities for interfaith dialogue and exchange over thoughts and questions that the students might have.

In sum, I suggest that this kind of online course could be a very helpful resource for young seekers and Christians (and indeed, people of all ages), as it would provide resources, tools, and information that will help them in realizing and scrutinizing their core commitments and values.

F. Psychology

Philosophers, religious thinkers, and psychologists have known for millennia that rational activities and intellectual assent to beliefs (of the kind discussed in the previous two sections) are typically insufficient to bring about large changes in one's life: some kind of practice or discipline is necessary in order to change behavior. This idea receives widespread support in contemporary psychological models.[49] Thus, the religious practices and disciplines that a youth group can provide, such as activities of corporate prayer, worship, fellowship, spiritual formation groups, and pastoral care, along with the accountability that such a group can provide for one's

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[49] Haidt, Jonathan. *The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom*. New York: Basic, 2006. Print.

own individual (i.e. everyday) disciplines and practices, are of crucial importance. Only by combining the more intellectual activities of narrative and practical philosophy with these practices, can real changes start to develop for an individual.

It strikes me that it will likely also be helpful to integrate various tools from the field of positive psychology into youth group activities. For instance, distributing personality and strength finder questionnaires may help adolescents in their efforts to discern the areas in which God has gifted them. Additionally, various other measurement tools may be helpful when applied toward developing a profile of an individual's spiritual health. The measurement tools are still in the early phases of development, and spiritual health is a very difficult, and as of yet little explored, topic; consequently, the extent to which such tools can be helpfully integrated, will likely remain unclear for the near future.[50][51] Finally, it may be the case that adapting basic insights from areas of therapy such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy be helpful in providing youth group members with resources with which to self-regulate their thoughts, behavior, and emotions in ways that will honor God.

In sum, the concept at work here is that God has given us rational capacities, but that we are also embodied creatures, subject to various unconscious drives, emotions, and motivations. While our intellectual activities have a large effect on our walk with God, there are many areas of our walk that will only be able to be addressed (or will be best addressed) through various practices and disciplines.

G. Concluding Thoughts

"Human beings are a species splendid in their array of moral equipment, tragic in their propensity to misuse it, and pathetic in their constitutional ignorance of the misuse."[52]

In the second half of this paper, I have suggested reasons why an interdisciplinary approach to the activities of a youth group could be beneficial, and have suggested certain potential applications and possibilities. A truly interdisciplinary approach is necessary, in order to effectively deal with the implications of our reality of being simultaneously rational and free, and also embodied creatures (with the limitations that that provides). There are many pressures upon humans to think and to behave irrationally, but greater training in and exposure to narratives, theology, other worldviews, and philosophy will help adolescents to push back against falling into the traps of an untested worldview and poor noetic structure. Additionally, utilizing insights from the field of psychology will provide adolescents with greater abilities to change the harder to control, unconscious aspects of their respective walks with God. The degree of involvement and commitment to each of the three areas will likely vary with each individual, as different individuals have different strengths, weaknesses, and interests. It seems highly plausible, however, that some level of participation in all three is necessary for positive development. The current model for measuring positive youth development is the 6 "C's"

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[50] Lippman, Laura H. *Flourishing Children: Defining and Testing Indicators of Positive Development*. New York: Springer, 2014. Print.

[51] Moore, Kristin A., and Laura Lippman. *What Do Children Need to Flourish?: Conceptualizing and Measuring Indicators of Positive Development*. New York: Springer, 2005. Print.

[52] Wright, Robert. *The Moral Animal: The New Science of Evolutionary Psychology*. New York: Pantheon, 1994. Print.

involving "*competence* in domain-specific areas; a sense of personal *confidence* and self-worth; positive *connections* with individuals and institutions; *character*; and *caring and compassion* for others"; and *contribution* to something beyond oneself.[53] By establishing elements that address the three areas that I have suggested, youth groups would create opportunities for development in all of the six 6 C's.

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[53] *The Role of Spirituality and Religious Faith in Supporting Purpose in Adolescence* Jennifer Menon Mariano and William Damon (in Lerner, Richard Martin. *Positive Youth Development & Spirituality: From Theory to Research*. West Conshohocken, Pa: Templeton Foundation, 2008. Print.)

Introduction
In what follows, I flesh out the programs that were proposed in the original proposal. In the second part of the original proposal, I had suggested that in order to build programs that address all aspects of humans as psycho-spiritual-biological beings, three broad types of areas of development must be addressed; I had termed these areas narrative, practical philosophy, and psychology. It is worth mentioning that there is a fourth area, "spiritual practice and development," which I had subsumed under the "psychology" section in the original paper. For simplicity, here I will simply refer to this "Psychology" section as the "Practice and Development" section.

I. Narrative
"There are both theoretical and empirical reasons to believe that the centrality of morality to the self may be the single most powerful determiner of correspondence between moral judgment and conduct."[1]

A. Moral Identity
i. The Empirical Evidence
This quote comes from one of the foundational papers in the area of psychology that studies moral identity (the extent to which one takes pro-social action as being important to one's self-concept). Indeed, there is mounting empirical evidence that suggests that a stronger moral identity is correlated with a higher rate of performance of moral actions[2][3] and a higher rate experiencing moral emotions (such as guilt).[4] Furthermore, being "primed" with moral identity related traits (i.e. being exposed to these traits) makes individuals act more morally.[5] Crucially, an individual's rate of performance of moral action has a tendency to decrease when exposed to concepts related to self-interest, or when one performs many prosocial actions over time in the absence of any moral identity priming.[6] In other words, we have automatic schemas, or templates for action, that become activated in situations and make us lean toward particular courses of action. Furthermore, we have schemas for both self-interested action and for moral action that could become activated, and the extent to which one or the other gets activated is called its activation potential. Consequently, with greater exposure to moral identity-related information, the moral action schema will gain greater activation potential.

ii. Application

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[1] Aquino, K., & Reed, A. (2002). The Self-importance of Moral Identity. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 83*(6): 1423-440.
[2] Hardy, S. A., & Carlo, G. (2011). Moral identity: What is it, how does it develop, and is it linked to moral action?. *Child Development Perspectives*, *5*(3), 212-218.
[3] Aquino, K., & Reed, A. (2002). The Self-importance of Moral Identity. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 83*(6): 1423-440.
[4] Stets, J. E., & Carter, M. J. (2011). The moral self: Applying identity theory. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, *74*(2), 192-215.
[5] Aquino, K., Freeman, D., Reed, A., II., Lim, V. K. G., & Felps, W. (2009). Testing a social cognitive model of moral behavior: The interactive influence of situations and moral identity centrality.
[6] Ibid.

In order to provide the opportunities for young men and women to form a robust sense of identity, and to encourage the moral action schema to gain greater activation potential, youth groups meetings should involve some discussions of stories of moral exemplars. These could be drawn from stories from the Bible, stories of peers, stories of various Christian missionaries etc. One's moral identity and moral action schemas need frequent exercise and development to function well, just as our bodies do. In the event that these schemas are not activated, their activation potential decreases, and it becomes harder to act morally and to care about morality.

➔ Conclusion: The Center could assemble a database of stories of Christian moral exemplars, with discussion questions, that could be used by youth groups.

B. Testimonies
i. Theoretical Framework
Social psychologist Terri Apter has a model of adolescent development which suggests that because adolescents are trying to develop a sense of their own selves and identities, they need "mirrors," which are the people around them who can provide feedback about their behavior. Apter suggests that this is necessary because it aids us in "…assimilat[ing] our experiences and bodies into a sense of self. Without it, we don't feel real."[7]

ii. Application
For this reason, youth groups should provide settings in which individuals can share their thoughts and feelings to "mirrors," comprised of mentors and peers. This could happen both in the form of testimonies given in large group settings, weekly "check-ins" with opportunities for sharing and processing together in small groups, and "one-on-one" discipleship settings. The giving of testimonies is a core component of Christian practice; however, one major problem is that typically no training is provided in how to go about giving a testimony. When testimonies become opportunities to simply rehash, relive, and express how one has been hurt, it often becomes counter-productive. Indeed, much empirical evidence supports the idea that thinking about and expressing events in ways that achieve self-distancing from the event are often very helpful, while simply reliving events can have negative psychological (and even physiological) consequences.[8][9][10] Indeed, one of the fundamental principles underlying Cognitive Behavioral Therapy is the idea that in order to achieve healing, one should not solely rehash the events but should assess them from a more self-distanced perspective.

➔ Conclusion: The Center, drawing from Scripture and from Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, could create a pamphlet that provides help regarding how to go about formulating testimonies in such a way that will build up, and not create stumbling blocks for, the Body. There is a fine line between honest expression of what one is truly feeling, and what may be counter-productive for oneself and for the Body. Additionally, such a pamphlet could also include information regarding how to support and encourage those giving the testimonies (particularly regarding the information that had been shared).

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[7] Apter, T. E. The Myth of Maturity: What Teenagers Need from Parents to Become Adults. New York: W.W. Norton, 2001. Print.
[8] Kross, E., Ayduk, O., & Mischel, W., "When asking 'Why Does Not Hurt: Distinguishing Rumination from Reflective Processing of Negative Emotions," *Psychological Science* 16, no. 9 (2005): 709-715.
[9] Ayduk, O. & Kross, E., "From a Distance: Implications of Spontaneous Self-Distancing for Adaptive Self-Reflection," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 98, no. 5 (2010): 809-829.
[10] Ayduk, O. & Kross, E., "Enhancing the Pace of Recovery: Self-Distanced Analysis of Negative Experiences Reduces Blood Pressure Reactivity," *Psychological Science* 19, no. 3 (2008): 229-231.

II. Worldview/Practical Philosophy Section
Introduction:
In the paper, I had suggested that some type of online database that provides easily accessible information on various topics in Christianity and various worldviews and religions, would be a potentially powerful and helpful resource (and one that could easily be incorporated into the proposed Life Worth Living online course that the LWL team had proposed). I propose the following modules: Intro to Epistemology, Big Questions in Christianity, Evidence and Reasons for Belief in Christianity, Theology Basics, Spiritual Formation Resources, and Resources on Religions/Wordviews. In terms of a rough sketch of format, I think that each subtopic for each module could have a video or paragraph providing its main idea/argument, followed by a few paragraphs of objections, followed by a few paragraphs of replies. At the end it could link to resources/suggested reading/online lectures.

Preliminary Module: Epistemology
Introduction:
The preliminary module is an epistemology module, because I think it is important to provide individuals with the framework and tools with which they can more rigorously scrutinize both the various claims that the different worldviews make, and also their own intuitions and preconceptions. This section is meant to address questions such as: "What counts as evidence and what counts as a reason to believe?"
This section will start and finish with a directed exercise that will help individuals to realize and record the various intuitions and commitments that they take as axiomatic. The section starts and ends with this directed exercise, in order to help them to better evaluate how their guiding principles have changed as a result of the topics discussed in this section. The main points of this section are to

    a) Show that physicalism is problematic (as it assumes that only what we can perceive exists, and our capacities may be subject to certain limitations)
    b) Show that we may have spiritual capacities through which we gain knowledge about the spiritual world/reality (just as we have sensory capacities through which we gain knowledge about the physical world/reality)
    c) There may not be a demonstrable proof for either the existence or non-existence of God. In this case, we are best off if we explore all of the evidence (historical, philosophical, religious/personal experience, etc.) and choose the worldview that best explains the evidence that we have encountered.
    d) Some knowledge we can only gain through first committing to something (or to someone)

1. What counts as Knowledge?
-What sorts of things can counts as Justification/Evidence?
-Clifford's Ethics of Belief
2. The Problems with Physicalism (and with Clifford's Ethics of Belief)
-CORNEA/no-see-um Arguments
3. Religious Experience as Capable of Providing Knowledge

-Plantinga's "Warrant" of Theistic/Revelation Beliefs & Alston's M-beliefs
-2 Kings 6:17 Elisha's Servant and the Eyes of the Spirit
-Pneumatology & the knowledge that the Holy Spirit's workings impart (e.g. John 14:26)
4. The Role of Choice
-God is not a Person or a Proposition we assent to, but a Person of Whom we learn through relationship with Him
-Kierkegaard: Subjectivity is Truth (often we must commit in order to gain knowledge)
5. Inference to the Best Possible Explanation (IBE) and its role in choosing what to believe

Big Questions in Christianity
Introduction:
This section serves to provide answers to difficult questions in Christianity. In order to construct this section, 35 Yale Christian undergraduates were surveyed regarding the top issues in Christianity that they felt were the most important. I tried to arrange the questions with the most frequently asked first, while also maintaining a logical progression through the order of the questions.

1. The Problem of Evil/Suffering
2. Divine Hiddenness
3. Hasn't Science Disproven God, Miracles, and Immaterial Spirit?
4. Can't there be Multiple Right Paths to Truth?: Christianity's Exclusivity Claims
5. Why Can't I Just be a Good Person?
6. Could a Loving God send People to Hell?
7. Free Will and Predestination
8. End Times
9. Isn't the OT God different from the NT one?
10. Jesus Sometimes Doesn't Seem like a Moral Exemplar (this is Bertrand Russell's concern expressed in "Why I am not a Christian" [echoed by Peter Singer, and the New Atheists])
-e.g. passages about damnation and the unforgivable sin, "failed" prophecy of Second Coming (Mt. 16:28), sending the devils into the pigs, cutting of a hand/gouge out an eye, cursing the fig tree[11]
11. Canonization/Reliability of Scripture
12. The Problem of Exegesis: How much of the Bible is Meant to be Taken Literally?
13. If Jesus has taken away my sin, why don't I just go and sin freely?
14. Does Christianity Mean Giving up my Freedom/Autonomy?
15. The Euthyphro Problem/The Arbitrariness Concern
16. So Much Wrong has been done in the name of Christianity
17. Homosexuality
18. What Makes the Denominations Different?

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[11] Russell, B. "Why I am Not a Christian"

Reasons to Believe
Introduction:
This section provides arguments for the reasonableness of Christian belief.

1. Historical Evidence for the Resurrection
1. Cosmological/First-Cause Arguments
2. Design/Teleological/Fine-Tuning Arguments
3. Arguments from Consciousness/Qualia [acknowledging the existence of spirit/dualism may be the best way to bridge the epistemic gap]
4. Argument from Reason/Evolutionary Defeater Arguments [If physicalism is true, we are the products of blind evolutionary processes that have given us capacities that are conducive to reproducing and surviving, and not capacities that track the way the world really is → our trust in our capacities is rationally unstable in the absence of some benevolent guiding force that ensured our capacities provide us with reliably accurate representations of the way the world really is]
5. Moral Arguments for the Existence of God
6. Pascal's Wager
7. Argument from Religious Experience (See Religious Epistemology Section)
8. Documented Cases of Near Death Experiences that Can't be Explained by Neuroscience
-Journal of Near Death Experiences
9. Fulfilled Prophecies

Theology Basics
Introduction:
This is a basic systematic theology section.

1. Gospel Basics ("Four Spiritual Laws"-type Section)
2. Creation
3. Fall/Hamartiology
5. Christology
4. Resurrection/Soteriology
6. Pneumatology
7. God's Character/Nature/Attributes and His Knowability
8. Trinity
9. Revelation
10. Sacramentology
11. Biblical Authority
11. Ecclesiology
12. Eschatology/Judgment/New Heavens and New Earth

Spiritual Formation
Introduction:
Plantinga famously drew a distinction between the need for theodicies/defenses that do philosophical work for dealing with cases of abstract evil/suffering, and the "pastoral care" that is needed to help individuals who are dealing with their own, concrete cases of suffering. While

the "Big Questions" and "Theology Basics" section dealt with questions and topics in Christianity on an abstract level, this section is intended to provide resources that will help to encourage and build up believers in difficult times and situations.

1. Endurance in the Wilderness
2. Avoiding Jealousy
3. Overcoming Pride
4. Overcoming Apathy
5. Supporting Others in Difficult Times
6. Divisions in the Body
7. Developing Spiritual Discernment/Listening to God
8. How to Read Your Bible
9. Having a Deep Prayer Life
10. Sharing the Gospel
11. Fighting Addiction
12. Mental Illness
13. Dating/Marriage/Childrearing
14. Suggestions for Further Reading/Devotionals

Worldviews/Life Worth Living
Introduction:
I see this as an identical project to the proposed LWL online course; here, I have merely expanded the categories and added additional topics.

Religions
1. Christianity
1.1 Mormonism
1.2 Jehovah's Witnesses
2. Judaism
3. Islam
4. Buddhism
5. Hinduism
6. Sikhism
7. Shinto
7. Daoism/Confucianism
Jainism
Zoroastrianism
8. Paganism
6. Atheism & Agnosticism
7. Baha'i
8. Unitarianism

Worldviews
1. Consequentialism

1.1 Modern strands: Ethical Naturalism/Ethical Hedonism, Science of Morality, Josh Greene's "Meta-Morality"
2. Postmodernism
3. Absurdism
4. Nihilism
5. Pantheism

III. Practice and Development
Introduction:
This is the section formerly entitled "Psychology," and corresponds to spiritual exercises and tools from psychology that can be used to aid and to assess spiritual development.

A. Finding Spiritual Strengths
"We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully."
-Romans 12:6-8 (NIV)

Adolescents today are deeply affected by the "Paradox of Choice," in which they are faced with choosing between investing in a tremendous number of different possible opportunities and activities. I propose that the Center could assemble a series of personality assessments (AMPM Personality Profile, StrengthsFinder 2.0, Spiritual Gifts Inventory, etc.) in order to help adolescents in discerning the ways in which God may have gifted them. This would provide information that could be helpful in discerning which activities to invest in and the particular ways in which to serve in the church.

B. Spiritual Health Diagnostic Tool
In the previous paper, I had suggested that having a spiritual health or spiritual development inventory for assessing and tracking one's spiritual health may be very helpful. I had also indicated the challenges with using any of the current ones: "Additionally, various other measurement tools may be helpful when applied toward developing a profile of an individual's spiritual health. The measurement tools are still in the early phases of development, and spiritual health is a very difficult, and as of yet little explored, topic; consequently, the extent to which such tools can be helpfully integrated, will likely remain unclear for the near future."[12][13][14] Consequently, the Center could work with clinicians, pastoral workers, and academics to develop such a tool.

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[12] Lippman, Laura H. *Flourishing Children: Defining and Testing Indicators of Positive Development*. New York: Springer, 2014. Print.
[13] Moore, Kristin A., and Laura Lippman. *What Do Children Need to Flourish?: Conceptualizing and Measuring Indicators of Positive Development*. New York: Springer, 2005. Print.
[14] Johnson, M.K. "Opportunities and Obstacles for Joy during Adolescence: Perspectives from Cognitive Science"

C. Spiritual Disciplines and Practices

The following are all core and defining components of virtually all Christian youth groups, and so they likely need no discussion. It may be worth mentioning that section 6.2 (Spiritual Formation Groups) are one potential area for research for the Center. Here, the Center could explore the various possibilities for ways of structuring and of organizing such groups and their content. Finally Section 7 (Ownership) refers to how youth groups should be flexible enough in organizational and administrative structure, such that the students themselves are able to take leadership and service positions in the organization that can dictate its direction and future. This will allow these students to develop important tools of discernment and service, and also to create structures whereby needs in the Body can be identified and met in a maximally efficient manner.

1. Corporate Worship
2. Corporate Prayer
3. Sacraments
      a) Communion
      b) Baptism
4. Corporate Service
5. Instruction in Scripture
6. Fellowship
6.1 Discipleship
6.2 Spiritual Formation Groups for Mutual Support, Encouragement, Accountability
7. Ownership