

Changing (Dis)Course: Psychology and Theology in Light of Social Construction

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Abstract This paper examines the challenges that social constructionism presents to the field of pastoral counseling in light of the skepticism that the concept of social construction exhibits toward any kind of normative psychological theory of human beings and human development. The paper examines this challenge for two psychological theories commonly employed in pastoral counseling: psychodynamic psychology and narrative therapy. The paper moves beyond this analysis to argue that Christian theology provides a genre for thinking and writing that addresses this challenge—apophatic theology. The paper ends with a brief clinical example of the implications of apophatic theology for pastoral counseling.

Keywords psychodynamic psychology, narrative therapy, social construction, apophatic theology, negative theology

Introduction

In his description of the history of pastoral theology, John Patton (1993) described the change in the late twentieth century in the field as one from clinical to communal/contextual paradigms. At first glance, this change has led to two profound changes for contemporary pastoral theology and practice: 1) a move beyond clinical settings into other contexts in which pastoral practices can

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occur (e.g., new models of clinical pastoral education (CPE) that place chaplains in community based organizations and not merely in hospital settings), and 2) a method for theological reflection that moves beyond a two-way dialogue between psychology and theology to encompass broader social scientific research, critiques, and proposals. This paper will argue that the change Patton described is, in fact, even more far-reaching and that it has profoundly affected the field of pastoral counseling in ways beyond the two described above. Specifically, this paper will argue that the shift from the clinical to the communal/contextual in contemporary pastoral theology is the result of a broader epistemic shift in the scholarly research marked by a reliance on social construction theory and that this broader shift leaves pastoral counseling at a theoretical impasse. This paper comprises three short sections as it explores the implications of this claim. The first will describe the challenges that social construction presents to both psychoanalytic theories and the second will demonstrate the challenges it poses for narrative psychological theory; both of these theories are widely utilized in pastoral theology and pastoral counseling. The third and final section will argue that theology, although it faces a similar challenge, also has a genre at its disposal—the apophatic tradition—which allows pastoral counselors and theologians to speak, write, reflect, and practice in light of that challenge.

Psychology in light of social construction

Social construction theory presupposes that human attempts to understand the world around us are always mediated through systems of thought— languages, theoretical discourses, and complex practices. These systems of thought are products of their culture articulated at certain points in time. In other words, they are contextual and temporal; they change. An appeal to universal, unchanging truth is difficult (in fact, impossible) in social construction theory because the

systems of knowledge that stake a claim for articulating that truth are themselves contingent upon a particular cultural context at a particular point in time. Social construction theory demonstrates an epistemic revolution for research and theory. No longer can a scholarly discipline posit a universal and changeless hypothesis; rather, it must account for its context, self interests, and limitations.

This change has presented a tremendous challenge to psychological theory because psychology stands at the fulcrum of this epistemic shift. On the one hand, psychology assumes universal psychic structures, processes, and developmental phases for all human beings. On the other, psychology provides a theoretical framework for understanding the ways in which human beings develop in complex social networks. These two dimensions of psychological theory are both evident in the writings of various scholars. Sigmund Freud (2000), for example, spoke of the universal applicability of central psychoanalytic concepts, specifically the Oedipal crisis: “It has justly been said that the Oedipus complex is the nuclear complex of the neuroses, and constitutes the essential part of their content. It represents the peak of infantile sexuality, which, through its after-effects, exercises a decisive influence on the sexuality of adults. Every new arrival on this planet is faced by the task of mastering the Oedipus complex; anyone who fails to do so falls a victim to neurosis” (p.92).

Freudian psychoanalytic theory has been roundly and, in my opinion, rightly criticized for the theoretical and clinical limitations that grow out of an uncritical assumption that psychological health can only be achieved in a two-parent heterosexual family structure with strict, clear gender roles. The psychologically healthy human who develops through the psychosexual stages of human development will emerge with a normative gender identity (appropriately masculine for boys and appropriately feminine for girls) and sexuality (heterosexual). There are

important reasons to raise a critique to such a claim. If “every new arrival on this planet” must navigate Oedipus, then how does Freudian theory provide a coherent theoretical frame for that navigation in the particular lives of people who do not display the gender and sexuality norms it presupposes (and demands)? Social construction theory offers an important critical suspicion about Freudian psychoanalytic theory in response to such a question. It demands more of psychoanalysis than adjusting its theories to account for its limitations and biases. Rather, social construction theory raises a more fundamental challenge: it challenges the presupposition that psychoanalytic or *any* psychological theory contains a complete description of human development which is universal for all people.

In the generations following Freud, psychoanalytically oriented scholars and clinicians have responded to this critique by taking into account the inherent ambiguity and multiplicity contained within any discourse. For example, in *A Mind of One's Own* Robert Capers (1999) describes the purpose of psychoanalysis, namely the transformation of the psychotic elements of the unconscious into conscious rationality through psychoanalytic conversation and interpretation. Capers is clear that in order for such transformation to occur the analyst must be attuned to her or his own countertransference in order to recognize when the analysand is projecting psychotic, unconscious distortions into the analyst's unconscious. Such attunement is important because the analyst is especially prone to the seduction of this kind of projection, mirroring the analysand's externalized fantasy object rather than reality. In many ways, Capers' theory does share some strong parallels with social construction theory, specifically in its concept of unconscious distortions which characterize the limits of subjective ways of knowing and its understanding of the constructed nature of reality. And yet social construction finally

presents an important critique of Capers' model, not in terms of universal subjectivity but in the assumption that the psychoanalytic discourse floats free of distortion.

How does the analyst resist distorted projections and recognize the transformation of those distortions into analyzable consciousness? Capers argues that "one of the ways in which [the analyst] might know is connected to the fact that, while a pseudo interpretation [that arises when the analyst is in the throes of countertransference] has the propagandistic effect of making the patient feel that he should think or be a certain way, a real interpretation does not. It is nothing more than a bare, evenhanded description of the patient's unconscious reality" (p. 135). But what, exactly, is "unconscious reality" and how can we hope to access it? How can the analyst confidently offer a "bare, evenhanded description of the patient's unconscious reality" in light of her or his own potential unconscious distortions and the potential distortions of the social sphere? Capers' confidence that psychoanalysis can accurately ascertain unconscious psychotic distortions and interpret them correctly is unsustainable when one takes seriously the claim that distortions pervade our perceptions and contribute to a constructed notion of reality and truth.

Capers describes a one-way process by which the analysand projects psychotic distortions into the analyst; from a social constructionist perspective, the converse is also possible. Capers argues that the analyzable neuroses are created from unanalyzable psychotic distortions and that such transformation can occur because psychoanalytic conversations tie unconscious distortions into a connected signifying chain of conscious insights and language. These unconscious distortions can become meaningful because they have been brought into consciousness. Of course, distortions need not resolve after they become hooked into the connected signifying chain of consciousness; in fact the signifying chain of consciousness itself contains distortions. In response, Capers appeals to an *a priori* standard: "Ideas can be defined

in terms of how they fit in with other ideas... and their truth or falsity can also be evaluated by examining their connections to other ideas” (pp. 129-130)

And yet, Capers leaves an important question unanswered: what does he rely on for his evaluation? His description implies that somewhere *out there* among the connections is some objective standard of truth or reality. But each connection has within it the possibility of distortion because no element is free from such distortion and its effects. So how can we evaluate the truth or falsity of an interconnected element when the elements to which it is connected are themselves subject to distortions clouding any certain, clear conception of reality? For Capers, psychoanalytic discourse can be relied on to make such judgments. This, of course, necessitates the belief that distortions derive only from the analysand and that a skilled analyst, firmly relying on psychoanalysis to monitor her or his own countertransference, will be free of distortion. Such assumptions are necessary to Capers’ theory even as he claims that the analyst “makes no claim to omniscience” (p. 135). By limiting its understanding of distortions to the inter-subjective space between the analysand and the analyst, psychoanalytic discourse is blind to the social dimensions of its own perspectives.

Such dangers are not limited to the singular example of Robert Capers. Heinz Kohut (1996), the author of self psychological theory, describes the insights of Sigmund Freud as the quintessential example of scientific objectivity and claims that Freud exemplifies “the clear distinction between the observer and the observed” as he first quotes from Freud and then describes what he understands to be his genius:

“I have long surmised that not only the repressed content of the psyche, but also the innermost core of our ego is unconscious, though not incapable of consciousness. I infer this from the fact that consciousness is after all only a sensory organ, directed toward the outside

world, so that it is always attached to a part of the ego [in modern terminology: the self] which is itself unperceived.”

I consider this statement-- the statement of a man who had investigated his own inner life, including the countertransferences that can becloud or distort the vision of the psychological observer, more broadly and profoundly than any man had ever done before-- the perfect expression of the basic attitude of the scientist of his day. It is the statement of the man of the Renaissance, of the era of Enlightenment, of nineteenth-century science. It is the statement of the man who has become all vision and vision-explaining thought. It is the statement of the man of clear-eyed empirical observation whose mental processes are engaged in the service of his proud realism. It is a statement that is in fully [sic] harmony with the fact that one aspect of the basic stance of the classical nineteenth-century scientist was the clear distinction between observer and observed, or, to put my meaning more tersely, it is the expression in theoretical terms of the ideal of scientific objectivity (67).

Social construction theory demonstrates that distortions are present on the myriad social levels of contemporary culture. Psychoanalytic theory does not reside outside of those levels, but firmly within them as demonstrated by the biases embedded within its development paradigms. The psychoanalytic theorists who develop psychoanalytic perspectives do not reside outside of those social networks either. For social construction theory, “the ideal of scientific objectivity” is a dangerous fallacy in psychoanalytic theory or in any social science. The failure of psychoanalysis to ascertain the social dimensions of its perspectives leaves it vulnerable to theoretical error and clinical misuse. In light of this vulnerability, the social psychologist Paul Richer (1992) critiques psychoanalysis and its psychodynamic heirs: “We imagine that by avoiding objectification and medicalization, the hermeneutic psychodynamic trends in

psychology somehow transcend the job of social control that is explicit in other forms of psychology. Nothing could be farther from the truth. In the end, the prying interpretations of...psychodynamic approaches are far more efficient at normalizing than are either the anti-psychotic drugs of the medical approach or the shaping techniques of behaviorism. Psychology— all of it— is a branch of the police; psychodynamic psychologies are the secret police” (p. 118). Social construction theory presents an important critique to psychological theory precisely because it unsettles two psychological assumptions: the universality of psychological anthropologies and the idea that the psychologist can float free of her or his own subjectivity and social location.

Towards a narrative psychology

The “objectivity” of the modernist worldview, with its emphasis on facts, replicable procedures, and generally applicable rules, easily ignores the specific, localized meanings of individual people. When we treat people with this kind of “objectivity,” we regard them as objects, thus inviting them into a relationship in which they are the passive, powerless recipients of our knowledge and expertise (Freedman and Combs, 21).

Psychodynamic psychological theories become problematic in light of the notion of social construction. They provide narratives of human development to account for the origins of psychological derailment. Those origins are the result of universal—rooted in early childhood experiences which we all must face—and individualistic—taking little account of broader social and cultural perspectives. Narrative therapy provides another perspective because it pays attention to client’s stories. Obviously, all therapeutic theory and practice claim to do this, but narrative therapy makes a claim that it does so in a different way. Critical of the dangers and

distortions of psychological theories and practices, narrative therapy seeks to minimize the potential for those dangers by challenging the problematic perspectives described above.

Narrative therapy privileges the idea that knowledge and meaning are produced in the social sphere and constituted in language. The larger world around us tells us our story, marks the limits of language for telling it, gives us the lenses for understanding, and polices the acceptability of our interpretation. When people come for counseling, the problems they bring can be explored by thinking about the ways in which their problematic experience fails to measure up to the normative demands of the world around them. Narrative therapy reminds us that there are always alternative ways to tell our stories, alternatives that are often covered over or forgotten because they are illegitimate narratives in the culture.

Jill Freedman and Gene Combs, two prominent American narrative therapists, move beyond a theoretical claim of social construction and describe how this claim impacts their therapeutic work: “When we talk together about ‘codependency’ or ‘schizophrenia’ or ‘narrative therapy,’ it is important to remember that we are actively perpetuating the social construction of these concepts as real elements in the fabric of our daily existence. We all too easily forget that other typifications might lead to the perception of other possibilities. (Would you rather work with ‘that borderline’ or ‘the woman who is so angry about the way patriarchal, paternalistic staff members are treating her?’)” (p. 24). From this perspective, the words in psychological theories or in *DSM* axis I or axis II diagnoses are not merely descriptions; rather they contribute to the construction of a psychological and therapeutic reality *and* they cover up alternative understandings. For narrative therapists, words constitute and perpetuate our realities. The therapeutic response is to find ways to uncover preferred alternatives: “What is important here for psychotherapists is that change, whether it be change of belief, relationship, feeling, or self-

concept, involves a change in language. Fortunately (at least within a postmodernist worldview), language is always changing.... We see this inevitable mutability of language as useful. It makes our conversations with the people we work with opportunities for developing new language, thereby negotiating new meanings for problematic beliefs, feelings, and behaviors—new meanings that can give legitimacy to alternative views of reality” (p. 29).

Narrative therapy, then, allows for new ways of thinking and new ways of practicing beyond psychoanalytic discourse. And yet, narrative therapy runs up against certain limits in its capacity to tell a full and complicated story of our social situation. What if the preferred story in one part of your life changes the story in other parts in complicated ways? What if authoring a preferred alternative isolates you from the social spaces you rely on because you are now in conflict with its norms? By placing the problematic narratives of our lives within the social sphere, narrative therapists are able to move past the limitations of theories and practices that see the etiology of emotional problems in the individual experiences of our childhood. But in moving past psychodynamic perspectives, narrative therapy loses an awareness of the power of the unconscious, both in individuals and societies.

In her review of an anthology entitled *Narrative Therapy in Practice: The Archaeology of Hope*, British psychologist Wendy Hollway (2001) finds the lack of attention that narrative therapists give to psychoanalytic theory disappointing, particularly because she sees certain post-structural psychoanalytic theory sharing the same goals as narrative therapy: “For me, the attraction of post-structuralism was to challenge the asocial, bounded and unitary view of the individual. Out of a similar politics, these [narrative] therapists want to use the idea of subjects positioned by external discourses to take the blame off individuals for their distress, deconstruct the discourse by locating the problem in oppressive external structures and therefore restory

someone's life in a way that's empowering." But the problem, says Hollway, is that narrative therapeutic theory makes two contradictory claims about human subjectivity: on the one hand we are inevitably formed by broad social discourses and, on the other hand, we make our own meaning by authoring our own story.

Hollway is critical not because narrative therapists hold to both viewpoints, but because she believes that narrative approaches fail to acknowledge the tension: "As with all social constructionist theories the agency of subjects fails to be accounted for. Of course, it can't help but creep back in. Since its re-entry is surreptitious, the nature of this agentic subject is not problematised" (p. 322). In raising this point, Hollway asks important critical questions of narrative therapists: How does the counselor tell the difference between her or his efforts to encourage empowering alternative stories and unexamined participation in oppressive discourse? How does re-storying work if it is not just taking up a different subject position in a different social discourse? Hollway wonders why psychoanalytic perspectives are missing: "If I read between the lines of their assumptions about their clients' subjectivities, it seems that the post-structuralist critique has enabled them to posit a subject who is indeed more social and more multiple, but is as rational as if psychoanalysis had never informed post-structuralism. I think that psychoanalysis has not just been forgotten, however; it has been associated with an oppressive clinical practice that is rejected wholesale" (p. 322). As such, Hollway believes that narrative therapy suffers theoretically because it loses a hermeneutic that allows for insight into the complex dynamics of human beings' emotional lives and relationships.

The editors (2001) of the book responded to Hollway's review. They agreed with her that they rejected psychoanalytic language and theory but that they believed that other discourses could provide a full description of the complexity of our subjectivity: "Social constructionist

theory underpins [the narrative approach]. We read social constructionism as an epistemology, but one that signals a discontinuity with the discourses of knowledge production that underpin psychoanalysis.... We simply do not see the need for a psychoanalytic vocabulary to articulate the complexity of a person's biography. Indeed, we assert that one person will have many biographies, and it is precisely in this complexity that the possibility of both personal and social change resides.... So we see no need to posit a "rational subject" who is striving for a consistent story of self. The selves we work with are persons who are struggling to make their way in an uncertain world, a world where the help of experts, including psychoanalysts, has often been the basis of the occlusion of the possibility of agentic action on their own lives."

Above, I argued that psychological theory stands at the fulcrum between the modernist worldview that presupposes universality and objectivity and the rise of a postmodern worldview marked by the claim that our conception of reality is constituted by the discourses and theories that are produced in the social realm. Because they are situated at the site of this epistemic shift, psychological theories are marked by ambivalence. On one edge of this divide, psychoanalysis posits universal narratives of human development, exercises normative assumptions in regard to gender and sexuality that allow for clinical violence, and presupposes the capacity of the psychoanalytic researcher or practitioner to assume an objective viewpoint; on the other edge, in light of its appreciation of unconscious distortions psychoanalysis provides a rich theory of the complexity of human existence supports the particularity and multiplicity of social construction theory. Narrative psychological theory also straddles this epistemic shift. From the side of social construction, narrative counseling appreciates the pervasive power of the social realm to set the terms by which we understand the world around us and it develops clinical practices to help others develop new perspectives to resist that pervasive power. In doing so, however,

narrative therapy refuses psychoanalytic perspectives that could help to describe the complex multiplicity of distortions in life and paints a picture of human beings who seem to be able to navigate complex and contradictory social spheres with ease. In this flattening of experience and of discourse, narrative therapeutic theories echo modernist claims of a human capacity to avoid the messy entanglements of social discourses.

Negative Theology and the Limits of Discourse

Psychological theories are limited by a fundamental ambivalence—an ambivalence they continually seek to deny or minimize. This creates challenges in both theory and practice for practitioners utilizing such theories. Pastoral counselors, however, have another theoretical discourse at their disposal, a theological discourse. In making this claim, I am fully aware that theological discourse exhibits a similar kind of ambivalence to that complicating psychological theory. There is, however, a crucial difference for theology. There is a genre internal to theological discourse that provides a way for thinking about ambiguity, complexity, and the limits of human knowledge and language (including theological knowledge and language). In contrast, the challenges that social construction theory presents to psychological discourse are external to the discourse itself. In the Christian tradition, this genre of theological discourse is known as negative theology, or the apophatic tradition.

Apophatic theology reminds us that Christian discourse and the Christian God are distinct. As such, no doctrine plumbs the full depths of God because any doctrine is a product of language and language derives from human intellect and human social structures. No human discourse—including theological discourse—is adequate for fully narrating the fullness of God. The apophatic tradition negates the claims of any theologies, not because they are necessarily

false but because they will never be complete. Negative theology is integral to Christian theological language because it reminds us of our propensity for idolatry and self-interest. In making this point, Mark Jordan (2003) says: “Negative theology is neither a grammatical caution nor a fringe phenomenon. It is an event that rewrites Christian theology from scriptural exegesis through systematics to liturgy or pastoral care. It confronts the whole of Christian theology with the clear-eyed reminder that human languages cannot say who God is or what God does, even (or especially) when they are truly sanctified.”

Systematic theologians routinely analyze the apophatic tradition in light of the formulation of doctrine. In doing so, they describe negative theology as an afterthought to the systematic theology they have endeavored to articulate. For its earliest authors, negative theology exists not merely as a footnote offered in the midst of endless pages of systematic theological reflection. Rather, these authors wrote of the fundamental failure of language as the soul moved deeper and deeper into the presence of God. The genre we have now systematized as the apophatic tradition was first written as testimony to the mystery of God’s call. Negative theology, then, could be understood more as a spiritual practice than as a theological discourse; in that light, it is a practice of reflecting on God’s love that undoes the very language human beings have concocted to describe that love. It serves as contagion to the seeming fixity of any theological writing that forgets (or denies) its own contingency and historicity.

For pastoral counseling, reflecting on the call of God from an apophatic perspective reveals the ways in which a response to that call calls us past safety and security and certainty. Such a call, however, as unsettling as it may be, is also revelatory. When God calls us past the certainty and safety of what we know—the very frames of reference that block us from God—that call allows us to encounter God more fully. In such an encounter, when we literally come

back our senses, we are changed. Our language is different. Our understandings are different. Our sense of self is different. Our testimony of the love of God is different. An encounter with God changes us; pastoral counselors would do well to reflect on this capacity for change when they reflect on their pastoral practice.

From Theory to Practice

Negative theology can be revelatory for pastoral counseling because it provides a way for reflecting on and narrating one's experience of the divine, an experience that unsettles our vision of the world. In my pastoral counseling work with Jeffrey, we have employed negations on numerous occasions.

I have seen Jeffrey for weekly pastoral counseling for approximately seven months. Jeffrey is a devout Roman Catholic layperson in his mid-fifties. He struggles with symptoms of depression and compulsive thoughts. Jeffrey also sees a psychiatrist for regular assessment of his psychotropic medication regimen and the psychiatrist and I are free to consult in regard to our concerns, hunches, or insights. Over the course of our sessions, Jeffrey and I have established a strong therapeutic alliance—he never misses sessions and is invested in the process—and we are now moving from supportive therapy into insight-oriented reflection.

At various times over the last six months, I have asked Jeffrey about the place of negations as he struggles with loneliness, endeavors to resist the temptation to project a “happy façade” to others when he feels empty, and worries about meeting the various demands of his consulting business. Jeffrey came to see me, in part, because he could not make sense of his life from his own perspective. Psychological theory—specifically self psychological theory—has proven helpful in reminding me of the importance of an empathic attunement to encourage

Jeffrey to venture beyond his façade. Narrative therapy has proven helpful in providing Jeffrey with some concrete tools to understand the power he has over the problems he encounters. Jeffrey has explored deep places of grief in our sessions—his father’s illness and death during Jeffrey’s early childhood, his regret over deep passions and joys in his life that were deferred in order to “be responsible”, a long-term relationship of deep love and camaraderie that recently ended—and psychological theories have indeed been helpful in exploring these dimensions of Jeffrey’s life.

Spiritual reflection has also been invaluable in exploring the ramifications of Jeffrey’s life history. Jeffrey loves his tradition even as he expresses great sadness over the current state of the church and his own disagreements with official church teaching. At times, Jeffrey displays an intuitive awareness of God’s presence and speaks of it with genuine wonder; at other times, he feels alienated from God and describes the aridity of his spiritual life. The shift from the psychological to the spiritual occurs regularly with Jeffrey as we explore his past experiences, life today, and wishes for the future.

Three weeks ago, Jeffrey was angry and frustrated. He felt as if his depression were worsening and deepening and he was mad at his seeming powerlessness to stop it. He recounted an incident in which he inexplicably became enraged. As he pulled into an underground parking garage for an office building in downtown Atlanta, Jeffrey rounded a corner and found a woman facing him in his lane, sitting in her car. She motioned for Jeffrey to back up and he was able to read her mouthed words that there were no more spaces in that section. Jeffrey was furious. Why was she in his lane? How did she know there were no more spaces? He shifted the car into reverse, gunned the engine and retreated back down around the corner to another section of the garage. Jeffrey wanted to know why he was so mad at her when all she was doing was trying to

help.

As the session progressed, Jeffrey expressed more and more frustration. What wasn't he seeing? What did he need to do he wasn't currently doing? What was he doing wrong that he needed to fix? Why was he still lonely and what did he need to do to snap out of it? I asked Jeffrey if he might be asking the wrong questions (a risky move given his litany of wrong actions). It seemed to me that part of what Jeffrey was asking was not what he needed to do better but what he needed to give up. What was standing in the way? What kinds of anxieties contributed to his façade? What kinds of commitments in his work stood in the way of his exploring his deepest passions? What kinds of responsibilities took precedence over his finding delight and joy in God and in his life?

Jeffrey sat silent on the sofa for a minute or so. And then he said that he thought God was sitting in the middle of his lane, motioning him to back up and choose another route. There was no longer any space for him. "For so long I've thought that my faith was calling me to resist the things that bring me deep joy because they must be idolatrous. But the idol I've been worshipping is the god—a little "g" god—of empty responsibility and efficiency. The real God—the God I love and have forgotten—is calling me forward. But in calling me forward, God is calling me to give some things up. They are the things that are preventing my journey toward God."

There are undoubtedly psychological perspectives that could be utilized to interpret this conversation. For Jeffrey, however, the language that made sense—the understanding that allowed him to change course—was spiritual language, a language of moving past what he thought he knew, an apophatic experience. Pastoral counselors should utilize psychological perspectives to inform and interpret their work; they should also utilize the apophatic elements of

their own theological traditions.

Social discourses shape us; they shape our perspectives and our self-understandings. Modernist theories that served as a foundation for much contemporary pastoral theology are limited for helping us navigate those discourses. In response, pastoral theologians and practitioners have turned in increasing numbers from psychology to other social sciences. John Patton described that turn as a move from the clinical to the communal/contextual. That turn anticipates a fundamental shift in the nature of knowledge, an epistemic shift. The apophatic tradition in theology can assist pastoral theologians in navigating that shift.

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