

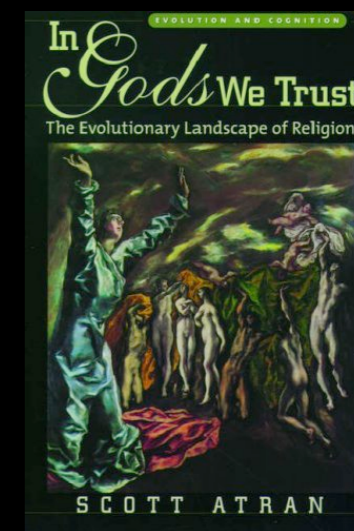
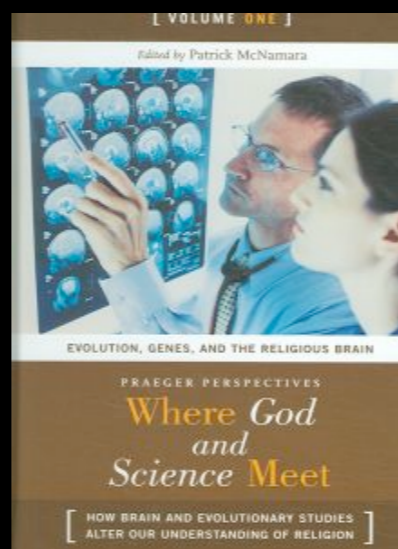
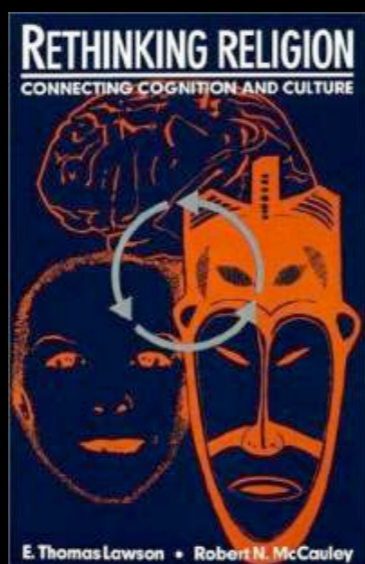
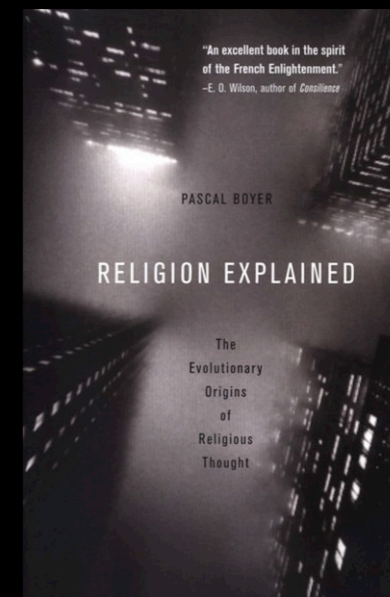
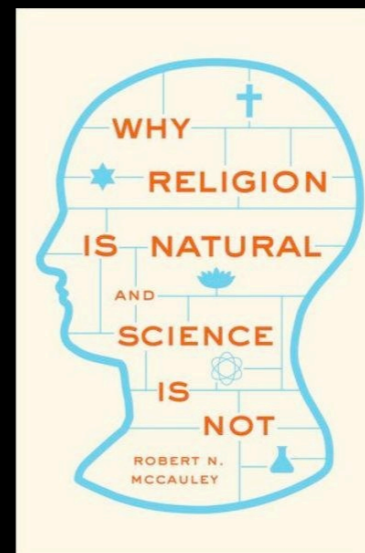
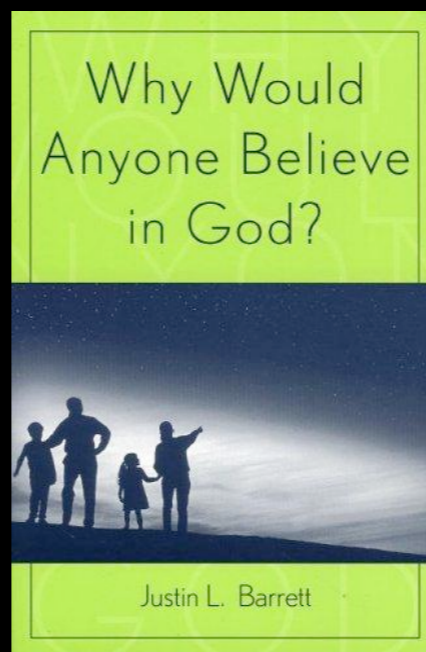
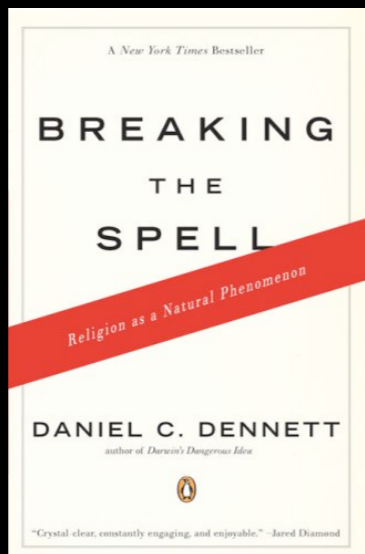
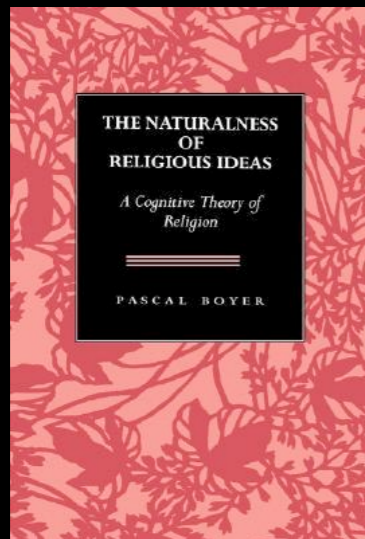
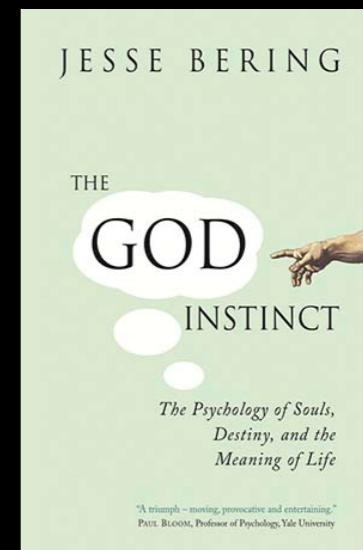
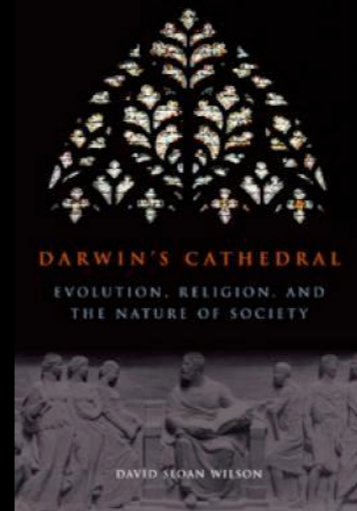
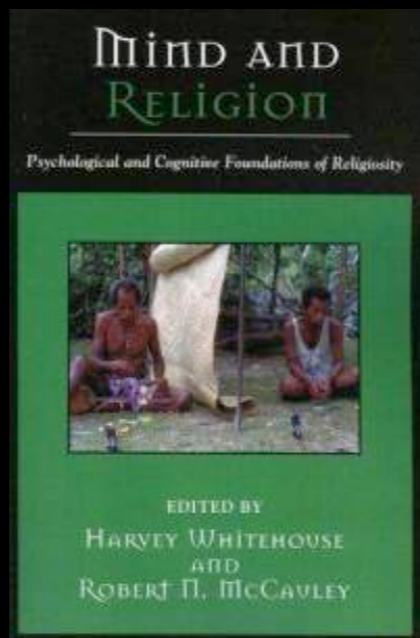
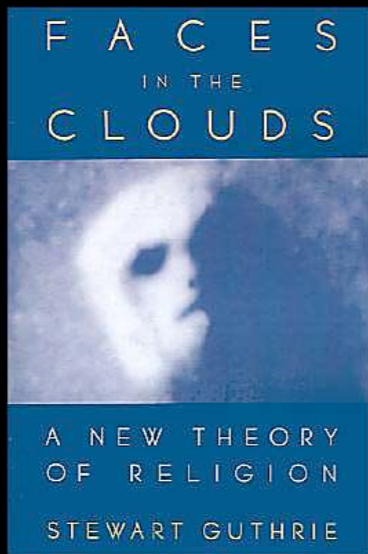
Is the cognitive science of religion
philosophically interesting?

Evolutionary Debunking Arguments, reconsidered

Jonathan Jong
Centre for Anthropology and Mind
University of Oxford

I have had no practice in abstract reasoning and I may be all astray. Nevertheless you have expressed my inward conviction, though far more vividly and clearly than I could have done, that the Universe is not the result of chance. But then with me the horrid doubt always arises whether the convictions of man's mind, which has been developed from the mind of the lower animals, are of any value or at all trustworthy. Would any one trust in the convictions of a monkey's mind, if there are any convictions in such a mind?

C. Darwin to W. Graham, July 3rd 1881



Causal premise. S's belief that p is explained by X
Epistemic premise. X is an off-track process

[where an "off-track process" is just one that does not track the truth of p or p-type beliefs]

Therefore

S's belief that p is unjustified

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[The genetic fallacy is] the error of treating items in the context of discovery as if they belonged to the context of justification.

W. Salmon, *Logic* (2nd Ed.), 1973

context of discovery	context of justification	e.g.
subjective	objective	Reichenbach, 1938

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subjective	objective	Reichenbach, 1938
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history of science	philosophy of science	Salmon, 1970

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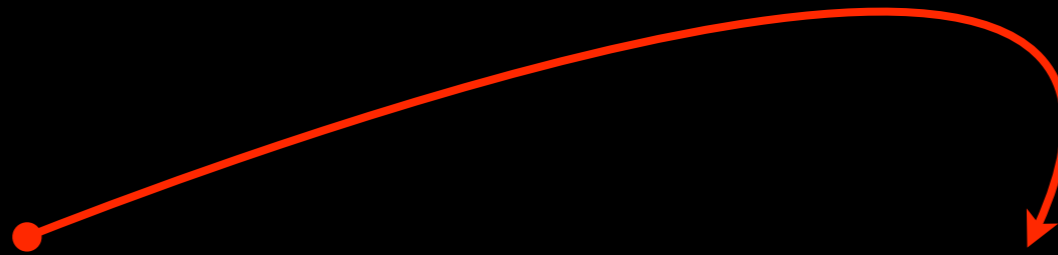
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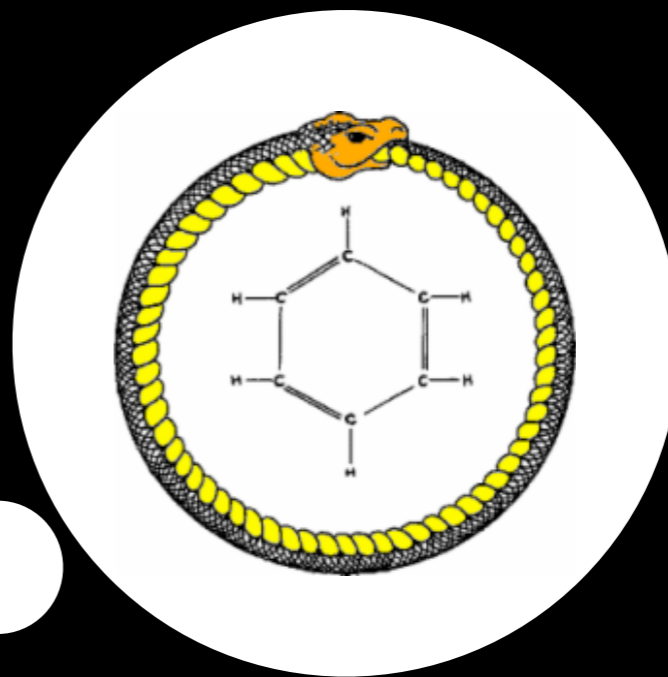
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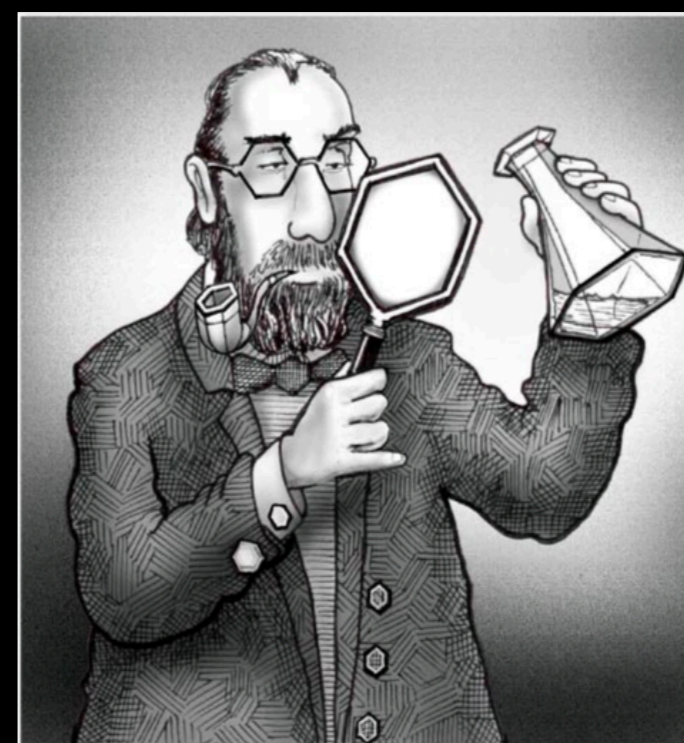
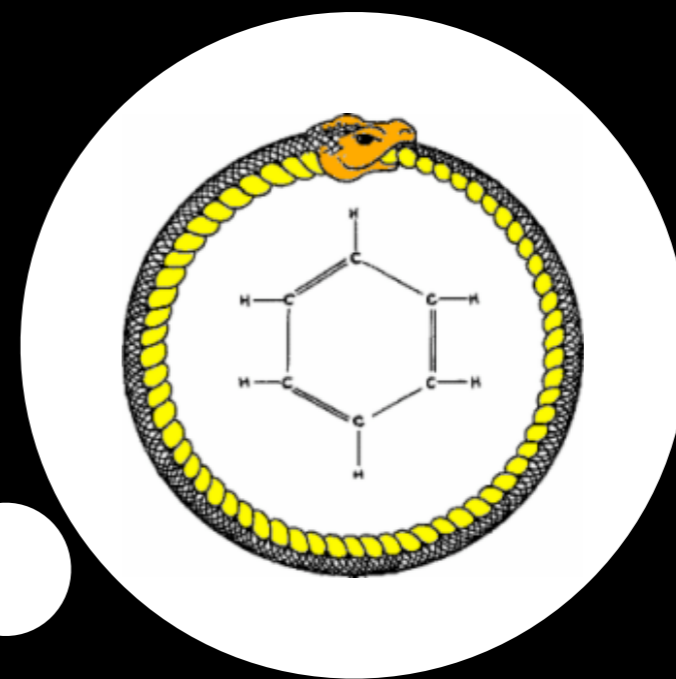
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$$\Pr(p \mid S \text{ believes } p) = \frac{\Pr(S \text{ believes } p \mid p) \times \Pr(p)}{\Pr(S \text{ believes } p)}$$

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Posterior probability of *not* p

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Posteriors

Likelihoods

Priors

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$$\frac{\Pr(\text{not } p \mid S \text{ believes } p)}{\Pr(p \mid S \text{ believes } p)} = 9000$$

Suppose that there were a pill that makes you believe that Napoleon won Waterloo, and another one that makes you believe that he lost. Suppose also that there were an antidote that can be taken for either pill. Now imagine that you are proceeding through life happily believing that Napoleon lost Waterloo (as, indeed, you are), and then you discover that at some point in your past someone slipped you a "Napoleon lost Waterloo" belief pill. ... Should this undermine your faith in your belief that Napoleon lost Waterloo? Of course it should. ... [It] is sufficient to place your belief on the dubious list. ... Knowledge that your belief is the product of a belief pill renders the belief unjustified (or perhaps shows that it was never justified in the first place, depending on one's epistemological tastes), demanding that unless you can find some concrete evidence either in favor or against your belief you should cease to believe this thing -- that is, you should take the antidote"

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It seems irrelevant whether these [Marx's] claims were causally shaped by ruthless ambition, a skin condition, or an unresolved Oedipus complex. To think otherwise, it would seem, would be to commit the genetic fallacy, to confuse causes and reasons.

As a general principle, it is true that when we consider a proposition someone has put forward, we should focus on the balance of reasons in its favour, not on our adversary's biography. But this point is compatible with the narrower and unremarkable claim that, when certain conditions are met, the causal origins of a belief can reduce or even remove its justification.

Kahane, 2011

It might be objected that even if the reasons Marx gave for his beliefs were themselves shaped by influences that are off track, these might still happen to be good reasons, even if they were not truly the (explanatory epistemic) reasons for his beliefs. We ought to engage these reasons directly. It is only if we can independently show them to be plainly bad reasons that the subsidiary task of explaining how anyone would come to endorse them might be of interest.

Kahane, 2011

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But if we conclude that the intuition that supports the belief has no epistemic force, why on earth should we look for an alternative justification?

But debunking is not disproving. If there are independent reasons for religious belief, their cogency is not removed by the fact that religious beliefs have evolutionary explanations.

Griffiths & Wilkins, forthcoming

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R. Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, 2004

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Deductive arguments =df. *[an argument in which] the premisses make the conclusion certain*

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