Philosophical Naturalism and the Cognitive Science of Religion

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Philosophical Naturalism and the Cognitive Science of Religion

1. philosophical naturalism
2. maturationally natural cognition
3. religious forms as cognitive by-products
4. some implications: psychological and philosophical
part 1: philosophical preliminaries: naturalism in philosophy

1. continental vs. analytic

2. from natural philosophy to science

3. philosophical naturalism
part 1: philosophical preliminaries: naturalism in philosophy

1. Sellars’ manifest vs. scientific images
2. Quine’s assault on the analytic/synthetic distinction
3. Quine’s epistemology naturalized
4. Churchlands’ manifest vs. scientific images of ourselves and our minds
part 2: maturationally natural cognition: dual processing theories

reflective vs. intuitive

off-line on-line
conscious unconscious
deliberate automatic
slow fast
verbal non-verbal (mostly)
part 2: maturationally natural cognition: intuitive cognition

specific beliefs or actions that arise automatically and instantaneously and are held or done without reflection

1. general, commonsense notion
2. presumed sound, though underdetermined
3. declarative and procedural
4. two sources
cognition

- intuitive
  (cognitively natural)
- reflective
part 2: maturationally natural cognition: features

1. address basic problems
2. appear early
3. define normal development
4. do not depend on any culturally distinctive support
5. constitute domain specific systems at the end, if not at the beginning
6. engage automatically when triggered by distinctive cues
part 2: maturationally natural cognition: some candidate domains

language

face recognition
part 2: maturationally natural cognition: some candidate domains

language
face recognition
basic physics of solid objects
contamination avoidance
theory of mind
part 3: religious forms as cognitive by-products: religions as Rube Goldberg devices

1. ordinary components
2. disparate items
3. fascinating and complicated machines
4. simple functions
part 3: religious forms as cognitive by-products: examples

-- language
part 3: religious forms as cognitive by-products: glossolalia

1. Why does glossolalia have the phonological characteristics that it does?

2. Why does glossolalia manifest the prosodic forms that it does?

3. Why does glossolalia recur both within and across religious systems?
part 3: religious forms as cognitive by-products: examples

-- language

-- contamination avoidance
Administering Holy Communion with touching
part 3: religious forms as cognitive by-products: examples

-- language

-- contamination avoidance

-- theory of mind
part 3: religious forms as cognitive by-products: theory of mind

- myths are narratives
Da Vinci's Annunciation
The implausible becomes plausible, indeed certain. Give us a little story, a script, something born of our own imagination, and our own natural tendencies, cognitive or emotional, do the rest.

part 3: religious forms as cognitive by-products: theory of mind

- myths are narratives
- rituals are actions
- the gods are (mostly) like us
God makes the snake
part 4: some implications - psychological

1. misbegotten comparison
part 4: some implications - psychological misbegotten comparison

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>unrestricted use</th>
<th>restricted use</th>
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**reflective**
(off-line, conscious)

**maturationally natural**
(on-line, intuitive)
We have come to see that our minds spontaneously follow a sort of quick and easy shortcut, and that this shortcut does not lead us to the same place to which the highway of rationality would bring us.

Our spontaneous psyche is not a kind of ‘little’ or lesser reason, nor is it an approximate form of rationality.

part 4: some implications - psychological misbegotten comparison

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reflective (practiced naturalness)
maturationally natural
part 4: some implications - psychological

1. misbegotten comparison

2. inevitability of theological incorrectness
part 4: some implications - psychological inevitability of theological incorrectness

-- doctrinal religious systems (at least)

-- systematic codification of religious ideas

-- ecclesiastical hierarchies teach and enforce doctrines
2. Inevitability of theological incorrectness

Counter-intuitiveness on-line, automatic maturationally natural cognition

Use of agent explanation off-line, deliberate reflective cognition

Low to high counter-intuitiveness
counter-intuitiveness on-line, automatic maturationally natural cognition

use of agent explanation

off-line, deliberate reflective cognition

2. Inevitability of theological incorrectness
2. Inevitability of theological incorrectness
part 4: some implications - psychological

1. misbegotten comparison

2. inevitability of theological incorrectness

3. relevant disabilities will render religion baffling
part 4: some implications - psychological relevant disabilities will render religion baffling

-- regardless of intelligence
What, in fact, autistic individuals seem to lack... is... the specific capacity to set up representations sustaining propositional-attitude structures specific to the theory-of-mind domain.

Even autistic subjects with relatively high IQs fail false-belief tasks that normal 4- and 5-year-olds, and Down Syndrome children with much lower IQs, find easy.

part 4: some implications - psychological relevant disabilities will render religion baffling

-- regardless of intelligence

-- regardless of arousal in religious rituals
part 4: some implications - psychological relevant disabilities will render religion baffling

-- failure to make eye contact
-- failure to point for the purpose of sharing attention
-- failure to distinguish things with minds (mind-blindness)
-- failure to identify with conspecifics
part 4: some implications - philosophical

1. other species in the genus *Homo*

2. arguments relying on inference to the best explanation: facts and the theories

3. focus on religious experience

4. Reformed epistemology and the status of maturationally natural intuitions