

Introduction to Half Special Issue on Naturalizing Religion

Matthew P. Schunke

Published online: 1 April 2015

© Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht 2015

In July 2012, the Kazimierz Naturalist workshop gathered in Kazimierz-Dolny, Poland to discuss the topic Naturalizing Religion. A group of 16 presenters with backgrounds in philosophy, cognitive science, psychology, and religious studies gave presentations with a general focus on the burgeoning field of the cognitive science of religion (CSR). This included keynotes from Robert McCauley, Jesper Sørensen, Helen de Cruz, and John Wilkins (whose paper appears in this issue). The current special issue contains three of the papers presented during the 4-day-long conference. They represent the scope and variety of the presentations, addressing both theoretical and empirical issues in the discussions of the new science of religion. The first paper, ‘Reduction, Explanation, and the New Science of Religion,’ by Christopher Pearson and Matthew P. Schunke, is a theoretical exploration of the term reduction and the ways in which it is applied to the scientific study of religion. Pearson and Schunke examine various ‘meta-interpretive’ frameworks of explanations offered by the scientific study of religion and argue that no understanding of reduction directly supports one specific framework over another. The second paper, from Adam Green, titled ‘The Mind-Reading Debate and the Cognitive Science of Religion’ focuses on the relationship of how we understand other minds (mind-reading) and the ways in which this is co-opted to represent the extra-natural, with a specific focus on hyperactive agency detection device (HADD). Green shows that the nature of one’s understanding of mind-reading can have significant impact on the explanations of CSR. He then proceeds to demonstrate the impact various accounts of mind-reading have on our understanding of HADD. The final paper, ‘Gods Above: Naturalizing Religion in Terms of our Shared Ape Social Dominance Behavior’ by John Wilkins, shows the importance for any explanation of religion to clearly define its explanatory target. He then offers an explanation of religious social institutions based on the shared primate social psychology of African Great Ape clade. The three essays thus show the diversity of approaches that can be grouped under them of naturalizing religion, giving a sense of key issues in this still developing and emerging field.

M. P. Schunke (✉)

Philosophy Department, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, Edwardsville, IL, USA
e-mail: mschunke@siue.edu