

A Critical Analysis of Cognitive Explanations of Afterlife Belief

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Abstract : Religion is present in all human societies and has been for tens of thousands of years. What is noteworthy is that although religious traditions vary in different societies, there are considerable similarities in their religious beliefs. In all human cultures, for example, there is a widespread belief in the afterlife. Cognitive science of Religion (CSR), an emerging branch of cognitive science, searches for the root of these widespread similarities and the widespread prevalence of beliefs such as beliefs in the afterlife in common mental structures among humans. Accordingly, the cognitive architecture of the human mind has evolved to produce such beliefs automatically and non-reflectively. For CSR researchers, belief in the afterlife is an intuitive belief resulting from the functioning of mental tools. Our purpose in this article is to extract and evaluate the cognitive explanations presented in the CSR field for explaining beliefs in the afterlife. Our research shows that there are two basic theories in this area of CSR, namely "intuitive dualism" and "simulation constraint" theory. We show that these two theories face four major challenges and limitations in explaining belief in the afterlife: inability to provide a causal explanation, inability to explain cultural/religious differences in afterlife belief, the lack of distinction between the natural and the rational foundations of belief in the afterlife and disregarding the supernatural foundations of the afterlife belief.

Keywords : afterlife, cognitive science of religion, intuitive dualism, simulation constraint

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