
Predisposition of the human mental mechanisms to accepting supernatural concepts in religion

In this essay I will consider Boyer's idea stating that religions are originated from ontological intuitions and selections from an evolved mind in response to social interactions. Nevertheless, as mentioned by Boyer, I contemplate on the statistical findings of the different categories in the classification of supernatural concepts. Additionally, I consider the implication of events recollection towards the concluded relationship of better attention and believes towards distorted and exquisite concepts.

Boyer suggested that religion concepts that exist today has gone through a selection process across generations. For a successful transmission, there are certain characteristics of religion that makes it more appealing to humans. In order to better understand the naturalistic features of religion that attract most humans, there is a need to understand how humans think. As human minds are equipped with intuitive ontology, unique features that distort from the norm like supernatural notions stands better chance to spread in the society.

Boyer indicated that humans mentally represent supernatural concepts by categorizing them into certain categories (ie., spirits as human, antelopes as animal, statues as artefact). These categories of supernatural concepts work through a specified rule that both violates intuitive expectations (ie., a spirit passing through walls) and also activates rules that do not violate intuitive expectations (ie., a spirit is equipped with a mind).

As thoughts and concepts are very abstract and not easily accessible, experimental methods are utilized to study how humans think. Boyer suggests that to demonstrate the strength of violations in representations, recalling task can be done empirically to demonstrate how violations are better represented by religion. An item being successfully recalled indicates chances for culture transmission. Boyer suggested on how certain type of categories of templates are further selected in terms of culture and religion. Cultures instilling people with a breach in physical and biological expectation, and artefact with transfer of psychological expectations are likely to be sustained and spread.

Other than the salient features of religion that prompts the spread of religion, the natural tendencies of humans as social interactors also contribute to the selection process of cultural transmission across generation. As formation of templates do not entirely explain things, the ways people think in terms of social interaction is suggested to provide the understanding on the belief in religion. Boyer suggests that through evolution, humans have constructed a mental machinery for social interaction which would rely very much on information about the external world, cooperation with others and the collection of information of others' thoughts. This survival can be seen evolutionarily as humans are socially intelligent, being able to evaluate potential co-operators and defectors, development of moral feelings, unable to false sincere feelings, easily self-deception by others' thoughts, and the interest to gossip. In the process of activating mental capacities that regulates cooperation, a person reacts to strategic or non-strategic information they present individually and also react in ways after perceiving others' strategic information. While the society belief that the access to these strategic information are imperfect, humans tend to believe that supernatural agents are full-access strategic agents that

could know everything especially of those involving moral events. The social interaction abilities in humans made concepts of religion which are naturally connected to moral understandings, group identity and emotional arousal a powerful spread.

As mentioned by Boyer, not all templates have been searched in terms of statistical evidence. Due to the abstractness of the human mind representations, there may be other representations or categories of templates out there in which the human mind constructs we are not aware of. Besides that, we have no statistical information on how each templates are represented in our mental mechanisms.

While Boyer implies that the ability to recall explicit intuitive supernatural concepts signifies better cultural transmission, it is still uncertain if successfully recalling an event would hence indicate believing a concept. An individual might easily take notice on a salient information, but different inference on the information seen can be made. Despite having a predisposition to acknowledge the God as the full-access strategic information agent and to link religion with moral values, the gap between recognising these information and devoting oneself the concept is still vague. Does recalling better supernatural concepts signify better cultural transmission across generation? In the case of being an atheist, they could have better recollection of certain events but might not believe on the events at all. It is possible that the positive effects of religion in providing comfort and reducing anxiety in people which allowed the sustainability of religion.

Furthermore, the experiments on recollection of supernatural concepts may also be influenced by confirmation bias in which individuals search for concepts which they themselves as individuals have already believed in mind. Therefore, there is a vagueness to conclude the causation relationship where the salience of supernatural concepts and predisposition mental mechanisms to distorted ideas to better recall supernatural concepts. It is perhaps possible that one has pre-existing believes in the supernatural concepts during the recollection of events.

In conclusion, Boyer suggests that features of supernatural concepts in religion that defers from norm and susceptibility of individuals to be receptive towards these concepts are the factors of religions being sustained and transmitted across generations. However, certain findings are not evidently supported statistically as mentioned by Boyer and I propose that individuals might be influenced by confirmation bias during the experiments on recollection of events which may influence results and hence impact this believe.