



Why Religion is Natural and Science is Not

By Robert N. McCauley

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The battle between religion and science, competing methods of knowing ourselves and our world, has been raging for many centuries. Now scientists themselves are looking at cognitive foundations of religion--and arriving at some surprising conclusions.

Over the course of the past two decades, scholars have employed insights gleaned from cognitive science, evolutionary biology, and related disciplines to illuminate the study of religion. In *Why Religion is Natural and Science Is Not*, Robert N. McCauley, one of the founding fathers of the cognitive science of religion, argues that our minds are better suited to religious belief than to scientific inquiry. Drawing on the latest research and illustrating his argument with commonsense examples, McCauley argues that religion has existed for many thousands of years in every society because the kinds of explanations it provides are precisely the kinds that come naturally to human minds. Science, on the other hand, is a much more recent and rare development because it reaches radical conclusions and requires a kind of abstract thinking that only arises consistently under very specific social conditions. Religion makes intuitive sense to us, while science requires a lot of work. McCauley then draws out the larger implications of these findings. The naturalness of religion, he suggests, means that science poses no real threat to it, while the unnaturalness of science puts it in a surprisingly precarious position.

Rigorously argued and elegantly written, this provocative book will appeal to anyone interested in the ongoing debate between religion and science, and in the nature and workings of the human mind.

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Why Religion is Natural and Science is Not By Robert N. McCauley Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #970086 in Books
- Published on: 2013-10-01
- Released on: 2013-10-01
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 6.10" h x .90" w x 9.20" l, 1.10 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 354 pages



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Editorial Review

Review

"*Why Religion Is Natural and Science Is Not* provides a powerful new paradigm to explore the relationship between science and religion."--*Journal of Religion*

"McCauley's book is a superb introduction to the problems of intuition, reflection, science, and religion, opening up an entirely new way of looking at the debates concerning science and religion from a cognitive perspective." --*Journal of the Cognitive Science of Religion*

"McCauley's richly illustrated and wonderfully accessible book is an intellectual treat. He brings the emerging Cognitive Sciences to bear on the issue of the cognitive awkwardness humans typically feel when trying to grasp the concepts of Theoretical Science, as compared to the cognitive naturalness we typically feel when contemplating the doctrines of Religion. Unlike others, McCauley has no particular doctrinal axe to grind here: he is simply concerned to understand a gulf that is familiar to all of us. This is a book that will engage everyone." -- Paul M. Churchland, author of *The Engine of Reason, The Seat of the Soul*

"Robert McCauley is a philosopher of science and was a pioneer in creating a cognitive science of religious thought and behaviour. No one could better explain what he calls the naturalness of religion and the unnaturalness of science. In the past, discussions of 'science' and 'religion' have been as sterile as they were poorly informed. McCauley re-examines this contrast in cognitive and evolutionary terms. He shows how our mental systems make religious belief so easy and scientific thinking so difficult, and explores the consequences of these divergent ways of thinking for the future of religious organizations and scientific knowledge." -- Pascal Boyer, author of *Religion Explained*

"*In Why Religion Is Natural and Science Is Not*, McCauley strikes a pleasing balance between erudition and precision, and between accessibility and sophistication. This is the best book I have read on the cognitive science of religion and on the cognitive science of science. McCauley makes an exciting contribution to each area and places the so-called science-religion debate on entirely new ground. " -- Justin L. Barrett, author of *Why Would Anyone Believe in God?*

About the Author

Robert N. McCauley is William Rand Kenan Jr. University Professor and Director of the Center for Mind, Brain, and Culture at Emory University. He is the co-author of *Rethinking Religion* and *Bringing Ritual to Mind*.

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