


Book Review: Religion and Science as Forms of Life: Anthropological Insights Into Reason and Unreason by Carles Salazar and Joan Bestard

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Salazar, Carles, and Joan Bestard, eds. *Religion and Science as Forms of Life: Anthropological Insights Into Reason and Unreason*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2015. vi + 231 pages. Hardcover, \$90.00.

In the book's Introduction, co-editor Salazar—a Professor of social and cultural anthropology—hypothesized that the study of the relationship between *religion* and *science* is about to enter a new phase in contemporary 'knowledge societies.' To test this, the book assembled eleven, international specialists: anthropologists, sociologists, philosophers, religious scholars, theoretical workers, and field workers. Their task was to dissolve intra and interdisciplinary boundaries and analyze the relationships, consistencies and contradictions, between religion and science as forms of life. Co-editor Bestard—a professor of social anthropology—appeared to be familiar with the contributors' work from previous collaborations.

McCauley's chapter "Maturationally Natural Cognition Impedes Professional Science and Facilitates Popular Religion," Blume's contribution "Scientific Versus Religious 'Knowledge' in Evolutionary Perspective," and Sansi-Roca's chapter "The Religions of Science and the Sciences of Religion in Brazil," are all crucial for coherence through the collection. All of the book's contributors saw science and religion as products of socially and culturally situated, biologically evolved, human minds, and they concluded that religion and science are "totally asymmetrical cultural formations" (p. 8). Religion has existed for millennia, whereas science has only been prevalent in recent centuries. It appears that all human societies have had some form of religion; however, science is a historical oddity. In addition, religion is described as exploiting maturationally natural cognition, whereas science is seen as cognitively unnatural, that is, as unintuitive, abstruse, and dependent on costly, complex institutions that produce enough wealth to afford higher education and scientists. Humans' predilection for maturationally natural cognition supports popular religion and religious thought. Such thinking is fast, intuitive, mostly unconscious, and "carried out on-line in the basements of human minds" (pp. 26-27). Whereas religion is described as supernatural, science is described as empirical. However, the two are nonantagonistic in the sense that neither form of life threatens the life of the other.

The book offers intriguing anecdotes, accounts, and observations. The authors explained that when science defies common-sense categories, it tends to provoke popular resistance, but if discoveries of science are favored by common sense, popularizers tend to make them moral prescriptions. They added that if scientific protocols or civilized moral codes do not procure desired results, sorcery—or magic—promises people what they desire. The book's contributors also revealed that hybrid practices between science and religion abound, for example, spiritualism, charismatic or divine healing, and biomedicine. In addition, the authors presented thought-provoking ideas such as (1) sufficiently advanced technologies might be indistinguishable from magic, and (2) circularity and tautology may be at the foundation of any science, logic, or religion. Are these intimations of the new (or *next*) phase that Salazar

hypothesized? Could we consider political science as the precursor of that conjectured phase? In his Introduction, Salazar summarized Aristotle's views that natural selection did not provide humans with a brain attuned to production and assimilation of scientific knowledge, but nature did produce political animals. Interestingly, politics *is* adaptive and adequate to live by.

The contributors accomplished what they set out to do. They crossed disciplinary lines, exchanging and cross-referencing essays, while maintaining functionality in their own areas of expertise. The book produces an enlightening and fruitful conversation about religion and science as forms of life. It is especially recommended for academic classrooms to encourage critical reasoning and debate. Freshmen tend to be experienced with respect to religious thought; however, this may interfere with critical thinking and doing science. *Religion and Science as Forms of Life: Anthropological Insights Into Reason and Unreason* would be a suitable textbook—to be processed consciously and reflectively—to teach scientific reasoning and understanding. Time, however, will tell whether the contributors unveil a new phase in contemporary 'knowledge societies.'

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