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Jonathan A. Lanman

In Defence of "Belief"

A Cognitive Response to Behaviourism, Eliminativism, and Social Constructivism

Abstract: The cognitive science of religion seeks to explain religious beliefs. Yet "belief" as a term has been criticised by many anthropologists, psychologists, and philosophers. The main criticisms of "belief" are that beliefs are unobservable, that they do not exist, and that the word 'belief' is a western construct unsuitable for comparative use. All of these criticisms may seem to render a "science of belief" naïve and mistaken. Utilizing the work of the cognitive sciences, and the philosophical view of functionalism that underlies them, I will offer a minimal definition of belief that will allow for a science of belief and withstand such criticisms.

Key words: belief, science of belief, cognitive science

Why do human beings, across space and time, tend to believe in supernatural agents? This was a central question for many of the "founding fathers" of anthropology, including E. B. Tylor (1871) and Emile Durkheim (1912). And while it may be the case that most anthropologists no longer attempt to answer such large and ambitious questions, opting instead to focus on historical and cultural particularity (Bloch 2006), a small but growing number of cognitive scientists of religion are addressing the question of supernatural beliefs again (Lawson and McCauley 1990; Boyer 2001; Atran 2002; Whitehouse 2000, 2004; Barrett 2004). These scholars are optimistic in addressing this question, believing that the findings of the cognitive and evolutionary sciences will allow us to move beyond the founding fathers.

Some may doubt, however, how far beyond the founding fathers cognitive scientists of religion are likely to get, given that, like their ambitious intellectual predecessors, they identify "beliefs" as objects of explanation. "Belief," as a scientific concept, has been subject to extensive criticism from anthropologists, psychologists, philosophers, and scholars of religion. The behaviourist perspective in psychology, the eliminativist position in philosophy of mind, and the social-constructivist perspective in anthropology and religious studies all call into question the scientific validity of the term "belief." If these criticisms are valid, the new science of religious beliefs is a doomed

enterprise, merely an exercise in playing with our biased categories. My intention here is to defend the possibility of a science of belief from these criticisms. By utilizing the functionalist perspective of much contemporary philosophy of mind and cognitive science, I will offer a minimal but productive definition of belief that allows for a science of belief and withstands the criticisms the term has engendered over the course of the twentieth century.

Criticisms of Belief

Unobservable Beliefs

One of the most common criticisms of belief, made by both psychologists (Watson 1930) and anthropologists (Needham 1972; Steadman and Palmer 1995), is that beliefs are unobservable. The argument is that, since observation is the foundation for all science, there can be no science of belief.

The criticism that beliefs are unobservable and therefore unscientific is central to the project of behaviourist psychology. While early psychologists managed to begin the scientific study the mind in the latter half of the nineteenth century, some of their methods, most notably the method of introspection championed by Wilhelm Wundt, were heavily criticized (Holyoak 1999). The behaviourist movement saw Wundt's introspection as too subjective and inconsistent, leading them to reject not only Wundt's work but all theories and frameworks postulating the existence of mental states such as beliefs, desires, and emotions in the explanation of behaviour. These states are not directly observable and therefore, according to behaviourists, not legitimate objects of scientific study. Instead of analyzing these unverifiable states, the purpose of scientific, behaviourist psychology was "to predict, given the stimulus, what reaction will take place; or, given the reaction, state what the situation or stimulus is that has caused the reaction," with no reference at all to internal states of the organism (Watson 1930: 11).

While most psychologists recognized the validity of "belief" as a scientific term after psychology's "cognitive revolution" in the 1950s and 60s, the criticism that beliefs are unobservable and, therefore, unscientific, has continued in the work of several anthropologists. Evans-Pritchard (1956) writes that ultimately, he cannot know the psychic attitudes of the Nuer regarding their beliefs in *kwoth*, and that such interior states are better left to the theologians," effectively removing such states from scientific analysis. Similarly, Rodney Needham relates a dream of working amongst the Penan in which he cannot find the proper Penan words to say "I believe in God" (1972). Upon awaking, he realizes that he has no way of knowing their psychic attitudes toward the deity Pesalong.

Perhaps most forcefully, Steadman and Palmer (1995) have argued that beliefs in supernatural agents are just as hard to identify and observe as supernatural agents themselves. They argue that, by accepting proclamations of "belief" as accurately reflecting the mental states of the informant, anthropologists and other scholars of religion are neglecting the very real possibility that informants, for whatever reason, are lying or misleading them. If one cannot reliably observe, identify, and verify the phenomenon under study, they reason, how is one to make any progress in understanding it? For Steadman and Palmer, the unobservableness of beliefs presents anthropologists with a problematic situation from which there is no escape. Consequently, a scientific approach to religion should not attempt to explain beliefs in supernatural agents, which are unverifiable, but rather the "communicated acceptance" of a claim involving supernatural agents, which we can readily verify by observing speech, writing, and behaviour.

Non-existent Beliefs

Another set of critiques concern not the unobservableness of beliefs, but their non-existence. These critiques originate from philosophers of mind, who are engaged in a long-standing conversation about the nature of our mental lives and how they are related to our physical bodies.

The notion that people have beliefs and desires and that these states explain their behaviours (e.g. John went to the refrigerator because he desires food and he believes that the refrigerator contains food for him to eat) is called *folk psychology* by most philosophers and cognitive scientists. It underlies a significant portion of our psychological science and nearly all of our everyday interpretations of how our fellow human beings behave; indeed, a significant body of research in the cognitive sciences suggests that we have a natural, pan-human tendency to interpret actions in this way (Baron-Cohen 1995; Callaghan et al. 2005). Folk psychology, however, is not accepted by all philosophers of mind and neuroscientists. For many, most notably eliminative materialists like Paul and Patricia Churchland, folk psychology is a mistaken theory of human cognition and behaviour. The Churchlands argue that, as neuroscience tells us more and more about how brains work, theoretical constructs such as "belief" and "desire" will make less and less sense as ways to conceive of human cognition (Churchland 1981; Churchland and Churchland 1999). For the Churchlands and other eliminative materialists, the classical, functional approach and vocabulary will be replaced by what has come to be known as the "connectionist" approach and vocabulary, which conceives of mental phenomena as patterns of activity amongst large numbers of interconnected neurons. For eliminativists, beliefs and desires will be re-

placed in our scientific ontology by different patterns of neuronal firings, just as the notion of phlogiston has been replaced by ideas about oxidation and combustion.

Socially-Constructed 'Beliefs'

Perhaps the best known critiques of "belief" for anthropologists, however, are the social constructivist critiques offered by Rodney Needham (1972), Malcolm Ruel (1982), and Jean Pouillon (1982). Needham, Ruel, and Pouillon outline the history of the term "belief" in western discourse, as well as the numerous connotations and associations it has built up over the course of that history, and consequently find it unsuitable as a comparative anthropological category.

Needham has subjected "belief" to the most extensive criticism, as he questions the utility and validity of the term in great historical and philosophical detail throughout *Belief, Language, and Experience* (Needham 1972). Needham's investigations lead him to conclude that while some of our psychological concepts, such as imagination, have a real phenomenological basis, our concept of "belief" does not (1972: 134-135). Needham concludes that, instead of resulting from a common human experience, our concept of "belief" results from the word itself and the linguistic conventions surrounding it (1972: 108).

Needham reaches this conclusion through an analysis of both the lexical and ideational history of the term "belief." Regarding the terms lexical history, Needham notes that both the Middle English *bilēven* and the Old High German *gilouben*, as well as other terms such as love and *lieben*, have their roots in the Indo-European *leubh-*, meaning "to love, want, desire" (1972: 41-42). Through a variety of socio-linguistic processes, *leubh-* has come to mean both "believe" in English and *libidine* (lust, or lewdness) in Spanish. For Needham, such relationships make plain the fact that "the general notion represented by the English verbal concept of belief is complex, highly ambiguous, and unstable" (1972: 43).

Besides this lexical history, Needham also outlines the ideational history of the concept of belief, tracing it to a combination of two distinct concepts in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible (the *Septuagint*), which was embraced by early Christians. From the Hebrew comes the term *he' mīn*, which translates as "to believe" and can be used in reference to either statements or people. In referring to statements, *he' mīn* means to accept something as true and to have the "proper" attitude towards that information (1972: 46). In referring to people, it means something quite similar to the English term "trust." This latter meaning is the primary one of the Hebrew Bible, as it is used to express the trust that people have in their reciprocal relationship with God. From the Greek comes the term *pisteúein*, which was used as the translation of the Hebrew *he' mīn.*

Being based on the idea of *pístis*, connoting trust, confidence, loyalty, and certainty, *pisteúein* was not used in relationship to gods in classical Greek but gradually came to be used so as it became an important term in the propaganda of a variety of proselytizing religions in the region, including Christianity (1972: 47-48). The Greek term took on new connotations in early Christianity with the writings of the New Testament, as the apostle Paul drew strong connections between belief and obedience and the term began to refer primarily to the acceptance of the *kerygma* or "message of Christ" (1972: 48-49).

Needham, along with Ruel and Pouillon, notes that nearly all of the connotations represented in the lexical and ideational histories of the term "belief" are present in contemporary usage. To say that one "believes" in a statement, especially a religious statement, is to not just say that one accepts the statement as factual, but to colour this acceptance with shades of emotion and loyalty and liken it to the type of love and trust between close friends or lovers. The key point that Needham, Ruel, and Pouillon make is that while some may view this mixture of acceptance, loyalty, and love as a universal human psychological capacity, it is clearly the product of a complex and specific history and unsuitable for comparative use; using the term "belief" in discussions of non-western peoples places the burdens of the term's history and associations on their mental lives, which may have quite different attitudes than our own. Such analyses appear to make a science of "belief" naïve and mistaken.

Belief in the Cognitive Sciences

Specifying the relationship between the mental and the physical has been a central concern for philosophers of mind for centuries. The twentieth century saw the growth of many different perspectives on the mind such as behaviourism, identity theory, and eliminative materialism. Arguably no perspective, however, has had the philosophical or scientific impact that functionalism has had, as it has become the most dominant philosophical perspective on the mind and forms the base for most research in the cognitive sciences (Block 1996; Malony 1999).

The premise of functionalism is that mental states, such as beliefs, desires, and emotions, are not to be defined according to their constitution (such as in the mental substance postulated Cartesian dualism or the brain states of identity theory) but instead are to be defined by their functional, causal roles in a cognitive system. Cognitive systems take in sensory inputs, perform a host of operations on those inputs according to a variety of rules, and produce the outputs of behaviour and, in some cases, conscious experience. Individual mental states are causally and functionally connected to other mental states, sensory inputs, and behavioural outputs (Block 1996), and these connections

constitute what it is to be a particular mental state. For example, by examining the work in the cognitive sciences and functionalist philosophy, we can define "belief" as: *the state of a cognitive system holding information (not necessarily in propositional or explicit form) as true in the generation of further thought and behavior* (Barrett and Lanman 2008). I will argue that this minimal, functional definition of belief allows us to pursue a science of belief and answer the above criticisms.

Functionalism itself, of course, has not escaped controversy. John Searle's Chinese Room argument (1980) and Hilary Putnam's Twin Earth thought experiment (1975), for example, have engendered extensive debates among philosophers about the viability of functionalism. Despite these ongoing controversies, functionalism remains the dominant philosophical position and the base of much of contemporary cognitive science, which continually produces strongly progressive "research programmes" (Lakatos 1978). Research in the functionally-based cognitive sciences has yielded a wealth of information about the mind, producing better and more useful understandings of numerous cognitive capacities such as memory (Schacter 1996) as well as cognitive disorders such as autism (Baron-Cohen 1995).

Our understanding of belief, and religious belief in particular, has benefited from the cognitive sciences in several ways, including the important distinction between implicit and explicit beliefs and the demonstration of the power of implicit beliefs (Barrett and Keil 1996; Chaiken and Trope 1999; Sperber 1997).

Most of us are familiar with our explicit, conscious beliefs. We may believe that the economy is in a recession or that one of our friends is more gregarious than another. Yet, as much research has shown, there are a multitude of beliefs guiding our reasoning and behavior that normally do not reach the level of consciousness, beliefs labeled implicit, nonreflective, or unconscious (Wilson 2002; Chaiken and Trope 1999). Developmental psychologists in particular have produced a large body of work on implicit beliefs by working with pre-linguistic infants, utilizing eye-tracking and facial observation technologies to monitor surprise-reactions and, consequently, to establish what expectations and beliefs infants have about the world (Spelke et al. 1992).

What makes much of the work on implicit beliefs so relevant to a science of religious beliefs is that they do not stay neatly separated from explicit beliefs. Instead, implicit and explicit beliefs are very much connected, and the main direction of influence is upward, with implicit beliefs doing much to determine our explicit beliefs and behaviors. Implicit beliefs, for example, serve as defaults for explicit beliefs when no explicit beliefs have been formulated about a topic, a phenomenon we recognize as a "gut feeling" or an "intuition." In addition, the plausibility of explicit beliefs is greatly affected by how well they match with our implicit beliefs. Developmental and cognitive psychologists, for instance, have demonstrated that human beings and

other primates possess a host of implicit beliefs about the nature and behavior of physical objects (Spelke et al. 1992; Povinelli 2000). And while it is the case that explicit concepts violating just one implicit intuition about physical objects enjoy a mnemonic advantage (Boyer and Ramble 2001), violating too many of these intuitions makes an explicit concept both less memorable and less plausible We can witness this implausibility in the difficulty that people have in learning quantum physics or embracing Paul Tillich's notion of God as "the ground of all being" (1973) instead of an agent located in space-time (Boyer 2001; Barrett and Lanman 2008).

The cognitive sciences, then, by assuming the philosophical position of functionalism, have generated a host of progressive research programmes that are continually giving us more and more information about how our minds work and why we find certain cultural ideas more plausible than others. Underlying this work is a minimal definition of belief as *holding information (not necessarily in propositional or explicit form) as true in the generation of further thought and behavior*. This definition of belief not only allows for progressive research into the functioning of the mind, but also allows us to escape most of the criticisms that the term "belief" has come under by psychologists, philosophers, and anthropologists.

Answering the Critics

Observation

In response to the psychologists and anthropologists who are troubled by the fact that beliefs and other propositional attitudes are not directly observable, I might first point out that the impossibility of direct observation has not stopped physicists from creating progressive research programmes, with many technological benefits, on the topic of sub-atomic particles, which are also not directly observable. Physicists can pursue a science of sub-atomic particles, just as cognitive scientists can pursue a science of belief, by examining the effects of these non-observable entities on the observable world, such as by using particle accelerators to infer the properties of quarks or by examining the eye movements and facial expressions of pre-linguistic infants to infer their beliefs about the physical world. And this is precisely what they have done, proving firmly that progressive science can be built on indirect observation.

The above allows the establishment and pursuit of a science of implicit, non-reflective beliefs. But what about the explicit, reflective beliefs that most social and cultural anthropologists are most interested in? First, as previously mentioned, implicit and explicit beliefs are not independent; they interact with one another, with most existing research indicating an important role for im-

plicit beliefs in the determining of explicit beliefs and behaviour. Understanding implicit beliefs, then, takes us some of the way towards understanding explicit beliefs. If we know an individual's implicit beliefs, for instance, evidence suggests that we can predict whether they would find a particular explicit idea compelling as well as how they would interpret some stimuli (Barrett and Lanman 2008). Indeed, Justin Barrett and his colleagues have demonstrated that implicit beliefs about agents, space, and time influence how individuals interpret ambiguous narratives about divine action to a much greater extent than those individuals' explicit, professed beliefs (Barrett and Keil 1996; Barrett 1998).[1]

Secondly, while the cognitive sciences' ability to help anthropologists verify informants' explicit proclamations of beliefs is still limited, it is currently possible for investigators to identify individuals who are more likely to profess beliefs that are socially desirable and, consequently, to take this into account when offering accounts of the "beliefs" of specified groups. This can be accomplished by administering a culturally specific social-desirability scale, a common psychometric questionnaire that rates individuals according to the extent to which they answer questions in socially desirable ways (Crowne and Marlowe 1960; Johnson et al. 2002). Administering a social desirability scale allows anthropologists, when constructing their accounts of what people in a given locale believe, to temporarily set aside the professed beliefs of those who rate highly on the scale and to give more weight to the statements of those who demonstrate little tendency to change their responses in socially-desirable ways.

Skeptical anthropologists can rightly object at this point that the problem of identifying whether or not an individual really believes a proposition at a conscious level has not truly been solved. This is true enough for individuals, but the utilization of social-desirability scales does make it more reasonable to say that many or most individuals in a given population have a certain belief. If most of the individuals who rate quite low in social desirability and have no obvious ulterior motives answer that they believe in the existence of ancestor spirits, for instance, there is less reason to doubt their professions.

While the social desirability scale is but a small tool, and one that admittedly does not accomplish the task of verifying whether or not individuals explicitly believe what they profess to believe, a cavalry that assuredly can accomplish this task is on its way. Sam Harris and colleagues have recently observed, using fMRI technology, the different brain states associated with

[1] Some cognitive scientists of religion, including Bering (2006) argue that implicit beliefs are what we really should be interested in, as they are the beliefs that determine behavior, but most cognitive scientists, and certainly most anthropologists, disagree, arguing that explicit beliefs are quite important to understanding human behavior and society (Whitehouse 2007; Laidlaw 2007).

explicit belief, disbelief, and uncertainty, demonstrating that beliefs in a variety of types of propositions all share a common neural profile, as do disbeliefs (2007). If these results are replicated, this procedure would allow neuroscientists the ability to present a participant with a proposition, such as "Do you believe that ancestor spirits exist?" and, by monitoring their neural activity, observe whether or not they believe the proposition, regardless of their verbal response. While such techniques are currently confined to neuroscientists with extensively equipped laboratories, there is little reason to doubt that such technology will eventually be available in a mobile form for use by psychologists and anthropologists.[2]

What I hope to have made clear is that it is unnecessary to abandon a science of belief because of their unobservability. When we can establish implicit beliefs through experimental procedures and, through empirically supported theory, connect those implicit beliefs to explicit beliefs, and when we can minimize the effects of less than truthful individuals on our accounts of the beliefs of a given group of people using a culturally-appropriate social desirability scale, and when we can observe beliefs and disbeliefs at the level of the brain using fMRI technology, we are very much engaged in a science of belief.

Folk Psychology and Eliminativism

The charges against belief, however, do not end with charges of unobservability and unverifiability; eliminativists argue that beliefs do not exist to be observed in the first place. For eliminativists, mental activity is to be explained by patterns of activation amongst networks of neurons, not by propositional attitudes such as beliefs and desires.

As outlined above, the cognitive sciences, based on the philosophical position of functionalism, have produced and continue to produce progressive and compelling research programs in a plethora of areas, from an understanding of infant beliefs about physical objects (Spelke et al. 1992) to the implicit beliefs concerning personhood that all human beings appear to share (Baron-Cohen 1995; Callaghan et al. 2005). For philosopher Daniel Dennett, this makes beliefs and desires very much like "centers of gravity" (1991). Centers of gravity, as Dennett relates, are abstract mathematical points "definable in terms of physical forces and other properties" and are important elements of strategy and design in domains as diverse as athletics and aeronautical engi-

[2] Ethical questions will inevitably arise with the development of such technology. The point here, however, is not to debate the ethics of such a technology but merely to note that such technology would allow us to confirm whether or not an individual actually believes an explicit proposition by examining non-voluntary neuronal activity.

neering. Yet, centers of gravity are not physical things to be isolated and observed; they are abstract points that are useful in generating improved understandings and technologies.

Dennett's position, like philosopher Lynne Rudder Baker's (2001), is that beliefs, like centers of gravity, are useful abstractions for understanding and predicting actions, even though they may not be physically real. Thus, even if, as eliminativists propose, neuroscience ultimately finds that beliefs are not brain states, a functional definition of belief can still yield successful predictions and research. This position, of course, is not without its critics, and philosophers of mind continue to debate how to best understand the relationship between mind and brain and the status of the propositional attitudes, including "belief" and "desire." The most important point for our purposes, though, is that whether or not beliefs are useful abstractions of neural activity or physically real brain states, the concept of "belief" has continuously demonstrated its value in producing new and useful findings and deserves to be a part of our scientific ontology. We have little reason to doubt that a science of belief is a philosophically valid enterprise.

Socially Constructed vs. Functionally Constructed Beliefs

A belief, according to work in the cognitive sciences, is *the state of a cognitive system holding information (not necessarily in propositional or explicit form) as true in the generation of further thought and behavior*. This definition of belief not only stands up to criticisms of its unobservableness and its non-existence, but also its cultural construction.

While the criticisms of Needham, Ruel, and Pouillon are the most historically and culturally nuanced of any of the critiques of belief, they are, in light of the definition above, the easiest to dismiss, as they are criticisms of a much more elaborated and culturally specific definition of belief than the one offered here. Needham, Ruel, and Pouillon deftly review the history of the term "belief" and outline its varied connotations and associations. They present "belief" as a term with extensive historical, philosophical, and theological baggage which weighs down all attempts to use the term in cross-cultural comparison. Evans-Pritchard realized among the Nuer, as Needham did among the Penan, that the common Western concept of belief, with its undertones of passion and dedication, is just not present in the lives of all peoples.

Fortunately for the science of belief, we are not bound by the connotations of terminology; we can use terms to designate specific phenomena in the world as long as we make our definitions clear. We can utilize the definition of belief offered above and pursue a cross-cultural science of belief with confidence, as, under this definition, all human and non-human animals have beliefs. All have

cognitive systems that represent the world in some way and act according to what they believe to be true about that world, and we can come to better know these beliefs by utilizing the tools of cognitive science and anthropology.

One may ask, however, whether or not it is intellectually honest and legitimate to retain the term "belief," and to argue that one is conducting a "science of belief," when one has eliminated many of the connotations that the term has built up throughout its lexical and ideational history. As philosopher of science Robert N. McCauley has argued, this is not only perfectly legitimate, but has been common practice in the history of science. Numerous precedents exist of changing the meaning of a term in light of empirical work for scientific purposes, including those of the terms *planet*, *evolution*, and *gravity* (McCauley 1986). Pursuing a science of belief, then, is not accomplished via a philosophical sleight-of-hand, but via a common scientific practice of updating definitions based on empirical evidence. As McCauley argues, "definitions" are never "definitive" when it comes to empirical matters; "wherever empirical science is introduced, there are no final words" (2004).

Conclusion

Cognitive scientists of religion, like the founders of anthropology in whose footsteps they follow, are engaged in an attempt to explain the existence and distribution of religious beliefs. In attempting a science of religious beliefs, they are assuming that beliefs, in general, exist as objective elements of the world for us to study. As should be clear at this point, this is not an uncontroversial assumption, as scholars from numerous disciplines have expressed doubt that "belief" is a proper term or phenomenon for scientific study. Some have argued that, because of our inability to directly observe beliefs, no science of them can be pursued. Others have argued not just for their unobservableness, but for their non-existence. Still others have argued that belief, as a constructed term, bears too much meaning from its long lexical and ideational history to serve as a cross-cultural category of human thought.

What I hope to have made clear is that, using the definition provided in this article, we can address all of these criticisms in a satisfactory way. Utilizing the minimal, functional definition of belief as the phenomena of a cognitive system holding information to be true in the generation of further thought and behaviour allows us to indirectly observe implicit beliefs, construct progressive research programs based on those observations, and avoid the connotations of the term belief that have kept it from being a suitable term for cross-cultural inquiry. With this definition of belief, we can indeed pursue a science of religious beliefs. In a world where religious beliefs are strongly tied to social identities and are involved to a significant extent in the actions,

both beneficial and harmful, of large numbers of people, establishing a science of belief can scarcely be more valuable.

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Džonatan A. Lenmen

U odbranu "verovanja": kognitivni odgovor bihejviorizmu, eliminacionizmu, i socijalnom konstruktivizmu

Kognitivna istraživanja religije pokušavaju da objasne religijska uverenja. Ipak, mnogi antropolozi, psiholozi i filozofi kritikuju koncepte "vere" ili "uverenja" kao takve. Osnovne kritike sastoje se u tome da se "uverenje" ne može posmatrati, da ne postoji, i da je sam termin zapadnjački konstrukt neupotrebljiv za poređenje. Ove kritike mogu da učine da "nauka o verovanju" deluje naivno i pogrešno. Oslanjajući se na kognitivnu nauku, i filozofski funckionalizam koji joj je u osnovi, ponudiću minimalnu definiciju verovanja koja omogućuje nauci koja se time bavi da odoli ovim kritikama.

Ključne reči: vera, uverenje, nauka o verovanju, kognitivna nauka.

Jonathan A. Lanman

En défense de la "croyance": réponse cognitive au béhaviorisme, à l'éliminationnisme et au constructivisme social

Les recherches cognitives de la religion tentent d'expliquer les croyances religieuses. Toutefois, de nombreux anthropologues, psychologues et philosophes critiquent les concepts de la "foi" ou de la "croyance" comme tels. Les principales critiques consistent à dire que la "croyance" ne peut être observée, étant donné qu'elle est inexistante, et que le terme même n'est qu'une construction occidentale non applicable ailleurs. Ces critiques en arrivent à rendre naïve et fausse la "science de la croyance". S'appuyant sur la science cognitive et le fonctionnalisme philosophique qui en est le fondement, je proposerai une définition minimale de la croyance qui permette à la science respective de résister à ces critiques.

Mots-clés: foi, croyance, science de la croyance, science cognitive.