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NATURALISTIC FOUNDATIONS OF THE IDEA OF THE HOLY: DARWINIAN
ROOTS OF RUDOLF OTTO'S THEOLOGY

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Abstract: The very influential theoretical concepts proposed by Rudolf Otto in his 1917 classic *The Idea of the Holy* are often seen as examples of properly religious content that cannot be approached by any other means except religious. This conclusion is challenged by closer readings of Otto's writings on naturalism and religion where he, despite of being at times critical of some versions of naturalism, expresses his thorough commitment to naturalistic explanations. Otto's views are presented as compatible with recent cognitive-scientific theories of religion and as a constructive contribution to the scientific study of religion. Otto's theological position, because it is based on his naturalism, is a possible methodological framework for further studies in religion and science in general and cognitive science of religion in particular.

Key Words: Rudolf Otto, Religious Naturalism, Cognitive Science of Religion, Idea of the Holy, Darwinism, Evolutionary Theories of Religion.

Rudolf Otto and his 1917 classic *The Idea of the Holy* need no introduction in theological and religious studies circle.¹ His influence on Paul Tillich, Joachim Wach, Mircea Eliade and many others is undisputable.² A great number of studies were and still are devoted to it and some of the concepts introduced in it entered our scholarly, and to a certain degree even our everyday language. Some of the central ideas of the book are often seen as contentious and are bitterly disputed. Very rarely, if ever, is his book seen as being based on his earlier work on naturalism, namely, his 1904 book *Naturalism and Religion*.³ Despite the fact that naturalism played a key role in Otto's intellectual development and profoundly influenced his thinking in *The Idea of The Holy*, one has to go outside of the mainstream reception of Otto in order to realize that. Several scholars did discuss Otto in their writings on naturalism, e.g. David Ray Griffin in his *Religion and Scientific Naturalism*, to a certain extent Willem Drees in his *Religion, Science, and Naturalism*, and also Jerome Stone in his *The Minimalist Vision of Transcendence*.⁴ I will discuss Griffin's treatment of Otto briefly below. Stone compares Otto's views favorably with his own proposals but does not present Otto as influenced by naturalism.⁵ Drees also does not see Otto's theories as based on naturalism.⁶ Most religious studies scholars familiar with Otto are aware of his naturalism but practically none treat it as central in his works. Writings by Gregory Alles are exceptional in this respect and were important in the development of my argument in this paper.⁷

In this paper I am going to present some of the basic ideas of Otto in the light of his work on naturalism and religion. First I am going to bring out central concepts from Otto's *Idea of the Holy*, then I am going to relate those ideas to his work on *Naturalism and Religion* where I am going to argue that there is a considerable influence exerted on Otto's theology that came from his careful study of Darwinism. I am also going to briefly discuss recent observations in the literature concerning possible similarities between Otto's approach to religion and the cognitive science of religion.⁸

The Idea of the Holy

In his upbringing and his education Otto was deeply influenced by traditional religious ideas and practices. Several critical works on Otto's view of religion interpret it by claiming that his traditional worldview was challenged by his education in natural and historical sciences.⁹ There is a considerable amount of truth in that and *The Idea of the Holy* can be read as Otto's apologetics of religiosity in general. On the other hand, *The Idea of the Holy* itself does contain much more and his early writings on naturalism show that. Otto's main question can be stated as that of relevance of religion. Is there any place for religious conception of the world in the mind of those who describe their world through modern

natural science? For Otto we cannot sacrifice our scientific understanding of the world in order to interpret it religiously. Otto's theology is his attempt to give a religious interpretation of the world described by science. His solution was to postulate a distinctly religious domain and to nest that domain within what is described scientifically. Otto rejects descriptions of religious behaviors that are presented as complete but do not refer to anything outside of what can be described rationally. Otto opposes any reduction of religious phenomena to something else. According to Alles Otto has in mind Wilhelm Wundt and his 1900 book *Elements of Folk Psychology*.¹⁰ In that book Wundt treats religion as a social phenomenon and he arranges all religious traditions that he treats in a line of development that he sees as evolutionary. For Wundt religious behaviors are, in fact, the product of group fantasy. Among other scholars it was Emile Durkheim who was very impressed with Wundt and used him in his 1912 *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*.¹¹ In opposition to Wundt and others Otto insisted on a specifically religious component as a distinctively human capacity. It is often assumed that this means Otto postulated something supernatural and qualitatively different from everything else. That claim might have some support in Otto's writings, but it is not as clear as some have suggested. Otto does talk about a distinctively human capacity but there are strong reasons for us not to assume that he is extrapolating from that capacity to something supernatural or something outside of human beings.

In *The Idea of the Holy* Otto starts by contrasting what is rational in human behavior and what is non-rational or pre-rational. The subtitle of the book suggests a philosophical treatise on rationality but this is not really the case. The subtitle reads: "An Inquiry into the Nonrational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational." For Otto it is important to notice that much of what is commonly thought of as religious behavior does neatly fall under what he considers rational. He calls that the "bias to rationalization" within religion.¹² It is clear that Otto had no intention to dispute an important role of rationality. However, what he really wants to assert is that not all religious behaviors can be exhausted by what he takes to be rational. This debate puts Otto right in the middle of what was very important for a number of the Enlightenment and Romantic thinkers. If the reason is seen as a sole source of authority for human beings than any religious idea that falls outside of the reason is immediately perceived as highly suspicious. What Otto wants to do is to bring those pre-rational ideas back to what is considered to be the appropriate discourse of modernity. He wants to claim relevance for those ideas that are pre-rational. Otto is also clear that those pre-rational ideas have the same basis as those that are rational and it is that basis that he finds to be consistent with naturalistic descriptions of the world.

In order to name the non-rational or pre-rational religious content Otto introduces his famous term *the numinous*. *Numen* means *presence* and

it is for Otto a presence of the holy. Most scholars agree that Otto coined the word *numinous*. The holy as a noun was known to Otto, most probably from works by Wilhelm Windelband, an influential Neo-Kantian philosopher well known for his 1893 *A History of Philosophy*, who used word *the holy* in his writings before Otto.¹³ Besides the Neo-Kantianism of Windelband, philosophy of Immanuel Kant and Jakob Friedrich Fries influenced Otto significantly and he presented his project as an attempt to use Kant and Fries as a basis for his philosophy of religion. Otto's book *The Philosophy of Religion Based on Kant and Fries* came out in 1909.¹⁴

Numinous is a category of its own, *sui generis*, completely unlike anything else and irreducible to anything else. Otto writes:

"I shall speak, then, of a unique 'numinous' category of value and of a definitely 'numinous' state of mind, which is always found wherever the category is applied. This mental state is perfectly *sui generis* and irreducible to any other; and therefore, like every absolutely primary and elementary datum, while it admits of being discussed, it cannot be strictly defined."¹⁵

This part of Otto's thought is today often seen as highly problematic. Coupled with his famous statement that those who cannot recall any properly religious, but can recall other experiences, should not read his book further, this statement represent a kind of exclusivism and it is interpreted as Otto's apologetic mode. What is clear is that for Otto religion cannot be reduced to something else, and if it is reduced on something else, for example a social phenomenon, then effectively religion is explained away.

In explaining the constitutive elements in the numinous Otto describes a creaturely feeling of dependence and he credits Friedrich Schleiermacher with bringing this aspect of religion forward.¹⁶ However, Otto clarifies his position and qualifies Schleiermacher's view of dependence. For Schleiermacher the distinction between absolute and relative dependence was enough in order to differentiate between religion and other feelings. For Otto the religious feeling of dependence is qualitatively different from any other feeling and any other dependence and this is what he called the creature-consciousness. In addition to Schleiermacher's absolute dependence and the qualitative difference of the creature-feeling there has to be something that the religious feeling is a feeling of, and this is the numinous or *numen praesens*. In agreement with William James's *Varieties of Religious Experience* Otto says: "But this feeling of reality, the feeling of a numinous object objectively given, must be posited as a primary immediate datum of consciousness, and the feeling of dependence is then a consequence."¹⁷ Passages like this from Otto are almost universally perceived as contradicting naturalist views of religion

because he seems to insist on something ineffable and something that defies a naturalist mode of interpreting the world. Besides addressing the Kantian problem of the limits of the reason Otto seems to have provided a structure of non-rational or pre-rational feeling that it can be interpreted as properly basic and therefore not necessarily outside of what can be described naturalistically. The requirement that the numinous is something outside of the self that is perceived does not necessarily include any assumptions regarding the naturalness of it.

The numinous is for Otto both appealing and repelling. It is mysterious and wholly other in presence of which we are terrified into stupor but we are also compelled by it. Many authors have noted that Otto's descriptions of the *tremendum* far out power his descriptions of the *fascinans*. In that tripartite division of the numinous into *mysterium*, *tremendum*, and *fascinans* for all its constituents Otto maintains both an *a priori* and an *a posteriori* experience. Otto maintains that the numinous is a quality of both our experience and that which is experienced. Recently Owen Flanagan in his article titled "Varieties of Naturalism" in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Science* discussed naturalism in a way relevant for our discussion of Otto. One of Flanagan's observations is that what naturalism is taken to mean or imply is not dependent on our view of knowledge as *a priori* or *a posteriori* so long as "whatever kind of knowledge exists can be explained, as it were, naturalistically."¹⁸

For the most part Otto can be seen either as a Christian theologian who imposes his brand of essentialism onto various religious traditions or as being in opposition to a deep and important force within Christianity itself that would see precisely those forms of religion he finds suspect as central.

Naturalism and Religion

Otto's writings on naturalism predate his writings on the holy. It is precisely in those writings that Otto developed his views and founded his view of the holy to a considerable extent, if not completely, in naturalism. Otto's *Naturalism and Religion* is a book full of surprises for today's readers. A number of recent relevant books on religion proclaim naturalism to be their methodology of choice. Take for example Pascal Boyer's *Naturalness of Religious Ideas*.¹⁹ But in stark contrast to Otto, Boyer does not find religious conceptualizations of the world as a relevant source of information. All religious behaviors are based on category mistakes that are in themselves a byproduct of how our evolved cognitive mechanisms function.

In contrast to, for example, Boyer's view of religious ideas Otto writes in *Naturalism and Religion*:

No actually existing form of religion is so entirely made up of "feeling," "subjectivity," or "mood," that it can dispense with all

assumptions or convictions regarding the nature and import of the world. In fact, every form, on closer examination, reveals a more or less fixed framework of convictions, theoretical assumptions, and presuppositions in regard to man, the world, and existence: that is to say, a theory, however simple, of the universe. And this theory must be harmonized with the conceptions of things as they are presented to us in general world-lore, in natural and historical science, in particular sciences, in theories of knowledge, and perhaps in metaphysics; it must measure itself by and with these, and draw from them support and corroboration, and possibly also submit to contradiction and correction.²⁰

From this it is clear that Otto does not have any expectation for his readers to give up on naturalist, scientific descriptions of the world. Otto was deeply influenced by scientific descriptions of the world and he found them to be the best way of conceptualizing and interpreting our experiences. For Otto religious conceptions of the world have their own world pictures. Those conceptualizations of the world are of great importance because they represent the form in which the content of religion is presented. Those interpretations can be in conflict with other interpretations of the world and Otto goes so far as to say that religious conceptual schemes cannot be so flexible as to permit any possible conceptualization of the world. If religion would retreat into its own domain by showing the limits of scientific inquiry and limits of reason that can never be transcended then there would be no anxiety over other ways of conceptualizing the world and religion would dwell securely in its own realm. Otto recognizes that this is clearly not the case. Perhaps quite the opposite is what we have encountered throughout the history of modernity. According to Otto religion never rests and it always turns its anxious gaze towards the world of changes.

It would be a mistake to claim that Otto's *Naturalism and Religion* is a work that uncritically affirms the findings of Darwin and others. Otto is quite critical of numerous aspects of naturalism. At the same time Otto's *Naturalism and Religion* is not a work of apologetics and he is not undermining scientific theories presented there. *Naturalism and Religion* is that rare mix where scientific ideas are examined and criticized on their own ground and at the same time unleashed onto religion but with a purpose of helping us understand the role religion plays and the phenomena it gives rise to. Otto finds religion inescapable just as we have seen in his *The Idea of the Holy*. At the same time he finds natural sciences as capable of accounting for the true basis of religion without ever explaining it away. This becomes obvious when he describes what he calls "The True Naturalism." Otto writes:

But naturalism becomes fundamentally different when it ceases to remain at the level of naïve or fancifully conceived ideas of "nature" and "natural occurrences," when, instead of poetry or religious

sentiments, it incorporates something else, namely, exact natural science and the idea of a mathematical-mechanical calculability in the whole system of nature. "Nature" and "happening naturally," as used by the naïve intelligence, are half animistic ideas and modes of expression, which import into nature, or leave in it, life and soul, impulse, and a kind of will. And that speculative form of naturalism which tends to become religious develops this fault to its utmost. But a "nature" like this is not at all a possible subject for natural science and exact methods, not a subject for experiment, calculation, and fixed laws, for precise interpretation, or for interpretation on simple rational principles. Instead of the naïve, poetical, and half mystical conceptions of nature we must have a really scientific one, so that, so to speak, the supernatural may be eliminated from nature, and the apparently irrational rationalized; that is, so that all its phenomena may be traced back to simple, unequivocal, and easily understood processes, the actual why and how of all things perceived, and thus, it may be, understood; so that, in short everything may be seen to come about "by natural means."²¹

Here Otto defined what he means by the true naturalism and how is it different from the naïve naturalism. A few pages later he discusses those two types of naturalism again and he explains:

And if we try to limit ourselves to this, in order to find a basis for discussion, it spreads out before us all splendours (sic) of a great nature pantheism, including even the ideas of the good, the true, and the beautiful. One thing only it neglects, and that is, to show where its two very different halves meet, and what inner bond unites them. Thus if we are to discuss it at all, we must first of all pick out and arrange all the foreign and mutually contradictory constituents it has incorporated, then deal with Pantheism and Animism, and with the problem of the possibility of "the true, the good, the beautiful" on the naturalistic-empiric basis, and finally there would remain a readily-grasped residue of naturalism of the second form [the true naturalism

defined earlier], to come to some understanding with which is both necessary and instructive.²²

Otto further explains that this type of naturalism “is startling in its absolute poverty of ideal content, warmth, and charm, but impressive and grand in the perseverance and tenacity with which it adheres to one main point throughout.”²³ It is clear from this that for Otto there is no way of dismissing this type of naturalism. He dismisses naïve naturalism because he sees it as based on religion. From this it follows that Otto’s aim is to supplement true naturalism and to base his theories of religion on it rather than to dismiss it. Otto presents Darwinism, specifically the Darwinian concept of natural selection, as an example of this kind of naturalism.²⁴ Just like with the true naturalism Otto is critical but does not end up dismissing Darwinism. On the contrary, in his later writings, as quoted earlier, he insists on presupposing his studies of naturalism in his *The Idea of the Holy*. Even when critical of Darwinism Otto does not dismiss it but attempts to point at some difficulties he arrived at when incorporating it in his treatment of religion.

Otto is apologetic when it comes to claims of natural sciences for a comprehensiveness that excludes religion. For Otto it is clear that any scientific theory that claims completeness has to account for religion as well. The religious conception of the world cannot be defended, Otto maintains, by attempting to base itself in scientific descriptions of nature. In order for the religious worldview to do that it would have to be abandoned first and then recreated on a new foundation, that of science. This is definitely not what Otto has in mind. Most of his interpreters here extrapolate that this can only mean that Otto claims that there is another realm to reality that cannot be accessed through science. This again is not something one can find in Otto’s writings.

Otto’s use of science does not lead him towards any kind of natural theology. He does see naturalism of modern science as something distinctive and does not propose that religious ideas are based on that kind of naturalism. For Otto this would render religion obsolete. However, Otto does not dismiss religious views either, but at the same time he does not want to establish their validity through the undermining of naturalism.

Otto’s views of nature as described by science are peculiar for several reasons. He seems to be convinced that what science has revealed about nature is not as harmonious and it does not express its inherent wealth and wisdom. On the contrary, Otto maintains a view of nature found in modern science as that of what he calls “unmeaning, purposeless, confused, and dark.”²⁵ In his *Naturalism and Religion* when he discusses what is distinctive about religious outlook Otto quotes Martin Luther as saying “faith always goes against appearances.”²⁶ He acknowledges that faith cannot ever be derived out of general knowledge of things, or out of a scientific study of the world. Some authors have interpreted that Otto’s

naturalism is nested within supernaturalism. This is the interpretation that David Ray Griffin embraces. If, as Otto and many others maintain, “all events without exception are produced by means of secondary or natural causes, so that there are no interruptions”²⁷ then naturalism can be maintained even if some sort of “supernatural” is necessary for religion. Griffin is distrustful of Otto’s commitment to naturalism. Otto clearly rejects what is commonly understood as supernaturalism, what Otto calls lower supernaturalism, and introduces what he calls “higher supernaturalism.” That higher supernaturalism Griffin interprets as a purposive design of the universe as a whole. It is precisely in that “higher supernaturalism” that appears in Otto’s essay on Darwinism that many see Otto’s departure from naturalism. In Otto’s understanding any departure from naturalism would be a cause for theological concern. Lower supernaturalism “breaks the order of nature.” The order of nature theologically understood has to be maintained and it would not make any sense if it can be broken. Even more importantly, Otto observes that locating supernatural as a cause alongside other causes within nature would cause alarm for religious sense. For Otto the religious sense does not give us access to the supernatural. It is precisely in the religious sense that stays with what is natural that Otto locates what he calls higher supernaturalism. But that higher supernaturalism does not violate any of the laws of nature and natural causation. Griffin clearly understands what Otto is doing and he acknowledges that his position is very similar to that of Otto but at the same time he maintains that Otto brings back the supernatural. Griffin mistakes Otto’s critique of scientific reductionism for Otto’s supernaturalism. Besides that Griffin does not talk about the possible motivations and influences on Otto’s conception of the holy. It is precisely in dialogue and with clear grounding in naturalism in general and Darwinism in particular that Otto has arrived at his position. Griffin applies several labels to Otto and most of them are of only limited relevance. One such label is “Cartesian dualism of mind and body” for which Griffin thinks there is no solution in Otto. Griffin also labels Otto as a “dualistic deist.”²⁸ Here again Griffin seems to have forgotten that for Otto there is no causality that cannot be accounted in naturalistic terms. By naturalism Otto means the acceptance of a view that “everything may be seen to come about by natural means.”²⁹ This kind of naturalism Otto contrasts with the naïve naturalism that deifies nature. He sees those two naturalisms as mutually exclusive. It is true that Otto’s rhetoric contrasts naturalism and religion. This is obvious already from his very title. But at the very beginning of his book he reiterates his desire to remove this contrast and at the same time to maintain his naturalistic stance. Pointing out various contradictions within purely naturalistic descriptions of the world does not entail that Otto gave up on naturalism. It is in those contradictions that he finds the limits of what can be done by the reason applying the principles of naturalism, and in this he is a follower of

Immanuel Kant. But he is not sacrificing his naturalism when he wants to talk about possible sources of our experience of purpose in the world. At all times in his later works where Otto discusses what he calls “non-rational” or “supra-rational” he presupposes naturalism of his earlier works.³⁰ As stated above, Otto fully affirms the strictest variant of naturalism and denounces any attempt to bring back the naïve, poetic, and half mystical conceptions of nature.³¹ Otto does not leave much place for reverence and deification of nature. Naïve naturalism accused the true naturalism of being “unfeeling and unreverent, cold and mathematical dissection and analysis of the Great Goddess as a sacrilege and outrage.”³² The true naturalists reject the naïve naturalism as romantic and inconsistent.

Otto brings an interesting example for the interaction between various kinds of naturalisms. Otto describes Johann Wolfgang Goethe’s view of nature as that of a pure naturalist who venerates and deifies nature, and at the same time dismisses mechanicism and the absolute determinism of for example Newton and Laplace. For Goethe nature is not a piece of machinery that can be fully accounted in mathematical formulas. Goethe insisted on continuity of phenomena and abhorred any interruptions in what is observable. Breaking up analytically what belongs together misrepresents those complex wholes that we study. Goethe studied Johann Gottfried Herder’s writings on evolution and did his own research on topics as diverse as human morphology and color theory. Goethe often expressed his dislike of Newton’s theories. In his book on theory of colors that was widely read and used by numerous artists Goethe introduced a novel way of thinking about colors.³³ He realized that after looking at a given color and then closing our eyes we see another color. This lead Goethe to theorize about the effect our cognition has on color perception. These and other are remarkable achievements, but Otto sees them as not being based on true naturalism. Goethe’s ideas about evolution were based on Friedrich W. J. Schelling and Georg W. F. Hegel and not on Charles Darwin. By returning to his discussion of the two types of naturalism we are left hanging because Otto seems to be deeply inspired by Goethe’s views and at the same time he dismisses it as not being thoroughly naturalistic. Otto is distrustful of any attempt to combine the two kinds of naturalism. The poetic and naïve naturalism end in pantheism and the true naturalism “traces back to simple, unequivocal, and easily understood processes, the actual why and how of all things perceived, and thus, it may be, understood; so that, in short, everything may be seen to come about “by natural means.”³⁴ This is once again what Otto means by naturalism.

Where then does Otto’s view of the holy fit in? Here different interpreters of Otto diverge. His introduction of “intuitions of reality” and his discussion of Kantian antinomies seems confuse many into thinking that Otto renounces the true naturalism. From above arguments it is

obvious that that he does not. He does explicitly say that “nature” is a creature in Schleiermacher’s sense of dependence. Otto interprets dependence and defines creatureliness in terms of interconnectedness of everything. What everything, the totality of reality, depends on is the uninterrupted causal sequences all intricately related to each other. It is not that Otto thinks of the world as not depending on anything else, he does see the world as dependent on God, but at the same time he realizes that the world cannot be dependent on God if it contains interruptions in causal and naturalistic processes.

In the conclusion of his book on naturalism and religion Otto declares that the nature is strange, mysterious, and marvelous, indicating God, and in full naturalistic view points beyond itself. Otto thinks that scientific naturalism and scientific study of nature is as good as any religious tradition in finding that out. This definitely does not mean that science can prove God or anything similar. He says that religion is not directly deducible out of the consideration of nature.³⁵ For Otto figuring out the relationship of God and the world is not what religion does.

This point becomes even more obvious if we consider another important quote from Otto:

If we study the world unprejudiced by the naturalistic interpretation, or having shaken ourselves free from it, we are most powerfully impressed by one fundamental phenomenon of all existence: it is the fact of evolution.³⁶

He remains fully committed to naturalism and he deduces that “something more” or that what nature is dependent on from his understanding of evolution. Here he includes in that evolution much more than just biological evolution. He is talking about the cosmic evolution of a kind that Pierre Teilhard de Chardin also had in mind.³⁷ What religion is here to point out is the sense of the totality of nature and how everything somehow depends on everything else.

Cognitive Theories of Religion

In recent years without reviving any particular interest in Otto some of his central concepts became important in several broad areas of research. Gregory Alles noted this in his article on Otto.³⁸ One such area is the work of neuroscientists who use various methods to image brain activities underlying religious experiences. We can see this work as it develops from Eugene d’Aquili and Andrew Newberg to more recent studies done by Nina Azari and Patrick McNamara.³⁹ It would be interesting to see what Otto would think about those approaches. Their operating descriptions and definitions of what counts as religious experience resemble Otto’s descriptions in considerable detail and it is as

if all of them take his lead, or that of William James but this is where Otto and James are very similar, in determining the object of their study. At the same time their identification of mind and brain would puzzle Otto. How do we identify what can be scanned in our brain with the experience itself. This would be for Otto as if I would identify my reflection in a mirror with who I am. In many ways I am exactly what is reflected in a mirror but that reflection is at the same time something different. Those who see religious experiences validated by brain imaging would think that Otto is finally vindicated and that his insight was on the right track it just could not be fulfilled via those methods proposed by him. I think that Otto's methodology is fully compatible with any form of scientific study of religious phenomena. Brain imaging and other important developments in neuroscience all contribute greatly to our understanding of how religion works. However, there will always be that unbridgeable gap of interconnectedness that he saw as properly religious. Religion is what drives us to go beyond what we know today and that gap when bridged only opens up new horizons.

Another area where Otto's work is relevant today is the work of cognitive anthropologists and related religionists that congregate under the newly coined term the cognitive science of religion.⁴⁰ Immense development of cognitive sciences aided by both, novel philosophical and conceptual approaches to the subject of human knowledge, and neuroscience, enabled researches coming from different backgrounds to apply those research traditions to the question of cultural transmission of information in general, and religious behaviors in particular. Cognitive theories of religion are an instance of the application of various findings of cognitive sciences to our understanding of religion. Thinkers like E. Thomas Lawson, Pascal Boyer, Scott Atran, Stewart Guthrie and others.⁴¹ Their fundamental questions strongly resemble Otto's. They use naturalist methodology in order to identify universal structures of human cognition that give rise to the sense that there is something more in the world than the world itself. This parallelism is amazing if you consider that most of them clearly think that religious behaviors are ephemeral in William James' sense and a byproduct of those cognitive mechanisms that evolved for different purposes. Those cognitive mechanisms that give rise to religious behaviors are a product of biological evolution and are accountable fully through natural means, but they also give rise to religious ideas. As Boyer and others insist, religiosity comes naturally to humans.⁴² The question of is religion going to be explained away by science is answered similarly by Otto and by the cognitive science of religion. If our cognition gives rise to religious behaviors we cannot not be religious. There is no need to postulate anything outside of what is accessible to science and scientific naturalism in order to realize that. It really does not matter if those cognitive processes that give rise to religion are a byproduct of evolution or are actual adaptations since in both cases

they are fully embedded in that interconnected whole that makes up what we call nature. They also give rise to religion. For Lawson, Boyer and others symbolism plays a substantial role in religious representations and they would see that as a clear indication that their studies do not in any way verify religious claims. If we understand Otto, as I described him above, as saying that science does not have to verify religious claims in order for us to understand those claims as being fully embedded within the order of nature then we can say that the cognitive science of religion does verify Otto's claims.

Otto's theological ideas are fully embedded within his naturalism and they were deeply shaped by it. Most popular interpretations of Otto either fail to see that or they dismiss his naturalism and portray him as an apologist who did all he could in order to defend a properly religious domain. This properly religious domain depends fully and it is known fully through nature. Because of his naturalism and because of his insistence on religion being derived from that naturalism Otto's insights can serve as a live theoretical option within the study of religions in general and the cognitive study of religion in particular.

Notes:

¹ Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1917] 1923).

² Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, (New York: Harper, 1957), 14; Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and The Profane: The Nature of Religion*, (New York: Harcourt, [1957] 1987) 8-10; Joachim Wach, *The Comparative Study of Religions*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958).

³ Rudolf Otto, *Naturalism and Religion*, (New York : G.P. Putnam ; London : Williams and Norgate, [1904] 1907).

⁴ David Ray Griffin, *Religion and Scientific Naturalism: Overcoming the Conflicts*, (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000); Willem B. Drees, *Religion, Science and Naturalism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

⁵ Jerome A. Stone, *The Minimalist Vision of Transcendence: A Naturalist Philosophy of Religion*, (New York: State University of New York Press, 1992), 23-4.

⁶ Drees, *Religion, Science and Naturalism*, 164-6.

⁷ Gregory D. Alles, "Otto, Rudolf", *Encyclopedia of Religion*. Ed. Lindsay Jones. 2nd ed. Vol. 10, (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005. 6928-31); Gregory D. Alles, "Toward a genealogy of the Holy: Rudolf Otto and the apologetics of religion", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 69 (2001): 323-41.

⁸ Alles, "Toward a genealogy of the Holy", 323-41.

⁹ Alles, "Otto, Rudolf", 6928-31.

¹⁰ Alles, "Otto, Rudolf", 6928-31; Wilhelm Wundt, *Elements of folk psychology: outlines of a psychological history of the development of mankind*, (London: George Allen & Unwin LTD, New York: The MacMillan Company, [1900] 1916).

¹¹ Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Karen E. Fields trans., (New York: The Free Press, [1912] 1995).

¹² Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 3.

- ¹³ Wilhelm Windelband, *A History of Philosophy*, (New York: Harper and Row, [1893] 1958).
- ¹⁴ Rudolf Otto, *The Philosophy of Religion Based on Kant and Fries*, (New York: Richard R. Smith Inc. Publishers, [1909] 1931).
- ¹⁵ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 7.
- ¹⁶ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1799] 1996).
- ¹⁷ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 11.
- ¹⁸ Owen Flanagan, "Varieties of Naturalism", in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Science*, ed. Philip Clayton, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 431.
- ¹⁹ Pascal Boyer, *The Naturalness of Religious Ideas: A Cognitive Theory of Religion*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).
- ²⁰ Otto, *Naturalism and Religion*, 2.
- ²¹ Otto, *Naturalism and Religion*, 22-3.
- ²² Otto, *Naturalism and Religion*, 29.
- ²³ Otto, *Naturalism and Religion*, 30.
- ²⁴ Otto, *Naturalism and Religion*, 85-100; 139-42.
- ²⁵ Otto, *Naturalism and Religion*, 7.
- ²⁶ Otto, *Naturalism and Religion*, 14.
- ²⁷ David Ray Griffin, *Religion and Scientific Naturalism: Overcoming the Conflicts*, (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000), 61.
- ²⁸ Griffin, *Religion and Scientific Naturalism*, 64.
- ²⁹ Otto, *Naturalism and Religion*, 23.
- ³⁰ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, xxi.
- ³¹ Otto, *Naturalism and Religion*, 23-4.
- ³² Otto, *Naturalism and Religion*, 24.
- ³³ Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Theory of Colours*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, [1810] 1982).
- ³⁴ Otto, *Naturalism and Religion*, 23.
- ³⁵ Otto, *Naturalism and Religion*, 362.
- ³⁶ Otto, *Naturalism and Religion*, 362-3.
- ³⁷ Pierre Teilhard De Chardin, *The Human Phenomenon*, (Brighton: Sussex Academic, [1955] 2003).
- ³⁸ Alles, *Toward a genealogy of the Holy*.
- ³⁹ Eugene d'Aquili and Andrew B. Newberg, *The Mystical Mind: Probing the Biology of Religious Experience* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999); *Where God and Science Meet: How Brain and Evolutionary Studies Alter Our Understanding of Religion*. 3 vol. Edited by Patrick McNamara (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2006).
- ⁴⁰ Alles, *Toward a genealogy of the Holy*.
- ⁴¹ E. Thomas Lawson and Robert N. McCauley. *Rethinking Religion: Connecting Cognition and Culture*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Boyer, *The Naturalness of Religious Ideas*; Scott Atran, *In Gods We Trust: The Evolutionary Landscape of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Stewart E. Guthrie, *Faces in the Clouds: A New Theory of Religion*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).
- ⁴² Boyer, *The Naturalness of Religious Ideas*; Pascal Boyer, *Religion Explained: The Evolutionary Origins of Religious Thought*, (New York: Basic Books, 2001).

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