

The Two Faces of Faith: A Study on Spandrel and Fitrah

İnancın İki Yüzü: Spandrel ve Fitrat Üzerine Bir İnceleme

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Abstract: A study on the two concepts of spandrel and fitrah, which appear to have the same meaning but are interpreted differently due to differences in perspective. Both concepts recognise the existence of certain innate faculties in humans and posit that these faculties predispose humans to belief. Spandrel posits that these innate faculties are a by-product of adaptations that enable us to survive in the evolutionary process, whereas fitrah asserts that these faculties are bestowed by God. The impetus for this study is the recognition that human beings are creatures of faith. The prevalence of belief in supernatural powers across all periods, geographical regions and cultures throughout human history, coupled with the existence of common features in all such beliefs despite formal differences, demonstrates the necessity for further research in this area.

Keywords: Philosophy of religion, evolution, cognitive science of religion, spandrel, fitrah.



Introduction

It appears that science has become a pervasive force in nearly every aspect of life. It is increasingly seen as having a legitimate role not only in the domain of facts but also in many matters of value. Moreover, it is widely accepted as an authority by a vast majority of people. As a consequence of the advancements and shifts in thought that have occurred in the West throughout history, science has become a primary means of verification and decision-making, and is now regarded as the preeminent source of knowledge for humanity.

The scientific method and human beings engage in a mutual process of interaction. The scientific method is a construct of the human mind, and in turn, it helps us to comprehend the intricacies of life. However, it also imposes certain limitations on our perspective. The fact that humans are social creatures and are unable to detach themselves from social values and assumptions has a significant impact on the scientific method they have developed. Conversely, the scientific method has also influenced how humans perceive and understand the world around them. This raises the question of whether science can be considered a field that provides universal truths, objective results and an objective point of view. This is because the scientific method is also formed from a specific point of view, which is inherent to the human approach to objects. In light of Karl Popper's emphasis on deduction in his works, it is irrefutable that humans possess pre-suppositions in their endeavours to comprehend and make sense of their surroundings, including scientific research (Popper, 1998, 2013). Individuals perceive and interpret life experiences through the lens of their totality, which encompasses their religious and ideological beliefs, among other factors. These interpretations, formed on the basis of the whole, are referred to as paradigms.

Throughout history, humanity has devised systems and paradigms based on its collective understanding of existence, knowledge and value, and has constructed a coherent narrative of life in alignment with these paradigms. Cultural perspectives influence the ways in which different societies perceive the world and the afterlife. Such perspectives are manifested in their endeavours to comprehend and rationalise phenomena. Indeed, the act of knowing is an endeavour to comprehend. Conversely, understanding



is an activity that is undertaken with the assistance of the pre-existing schemas that are present within the mind. This conceptual schema is referred to as a “paradigm” by Thomas Kuhn (1996). The same object may be perceived differently according to the paradigm under which it is viewed. The aphorism “Every culture looks at its own sky, every look creates its own sky” offers an apt illustration of this phenomenon. Some of these paradigms have been dominant in human thought at specific points in history. The current paradigm, which has its origins in Western civilisation, has become the dominant paradigm in the global context since the 17th and 18th centuries. This paradigm, which has its roots in the Enlightenment, Renaissance and Reformation, is indicative of the growing distance between Western thought and religion. When humans examine existence and attempt to comprehend it, they do so with a value-laden perspective, perceiving what they believe to be true. This reality, which is essentially a human condition, has been observed throughout history.

The objective of this study is to demonstrate that data pertaining to the Cognitive Science of Religion (CSR) can be evaluated from a multiplicity of perspectives. The argument will be made that the data pertaining to this idea, which evaluates what exists from a naturalistic perspective, can also be interpreted on the basis of religion.¹

1. The Source and Epistemic Value of Religion

Religion has existed in every society throughout history, and it has been a fundamental aspect of social structure in every case. It can therefore be stated that the institution of religion has existed throughout the entirety of human history. Since every human society is an attempt to construct a world, religion occupies a distinctive position within this endeavour (Berger, 1969).

It is challenging to propose a definition of religion that is universally accepted, given its long historical existence. As is the case with those who adopt a positive or negative approach to religion, it is challenging to find a unified definition among those who adopt a positive stance. This is due to the fact that each individual attempts to describe what they perceive from their own perspective. This is analogous to the scenario depicted in Jalal al-Dīn Rumi’s narrative of individuals attempting to identify an elephant

¹ For a more extensive study on these issues, see: (Çifçi, 2023).



in the absence of light by solely relying on their tactile perception (Calāl-ad-Dīn Rūmī, 2015, p. 350). As is the case with the definition of the elephant, which is dependent on the individual's tactile experience, so too is the definition of religion subjective and context-specific. It may be possible to arrive at a consensus definition of religion by identifying common characteristics. This process is analogous to the act of assembling descriptions of elephants in order to create a representation of the animal in its entirety. While it is not without limitations, it can be assumed to be more comprehensive. In light of the aforementioned, an examination of extant religions reveals the presence of four common features (Arslan, 2021, pp. 296-297). In light of these common features, it can be proposed that religion is best defined as an institution that provides information, demands faith in the information it provides, proposes a lifestyle and promises salvation. Those who adhere to a religious belief system perceive religion as an indispensable institution for human beings to realize their humanity in the best way possible, to live an honorable life, to demonstrate moral actions, to act in accordance with their nature and not to deviate from their essence, and especially to obtain accurate information about the metaphysical field. Those who adhere to a religious belief system, based on the information provided by their religion, believe in the existence of a sacred being, invisible to the eye but possessing transcendent powers. Such individuals not only espouse the aforementioned beliefs but also engage in arduous worship of the aforementioned holy beings, share their possessions with others, and even risk death for those beings. Such actions are considered typical for those who adhere to the teachings of a religion. Nevertheless, for those who adopt a critical stance towards the institution of religion or who do not align themselves with any particular religious tradition, these assumptions present a significant challenge to comprehension and require elucidation.

The gradual reduction in the influence of religion on human beings and society, as a result of the rise of Enlightenment thought and scientific developments, has led to an attempt to fill the gap left by religion with science. The assumption that human beings have only one set of answers to the questions of how and why, and that these can be found exclusively in science or religion, has led to the necessity of science answering the



question of why being revealed. Subsequently, numerous endeavours have been undertaken to elucidate the nature of religion and the rationale behind its adherents' beliefs, employing a scientific methodology.

These explanations, which were shaped by the naturalistic perspective, rejected metaphysics, addressed the institution of religion and belief on a factual basis, and attempted to elucidate the source of religion and the sentiment of belief in a manner that was not contingent on a transcendent existence. The desire to examine religious claims from an objective standpoint persisted with the advent of reform movements, which viewed religion as a cultural phenomenon.

These views acknowledged the significance of religion in human history but eschewed metaphysical justifications for religious institutions, instead offering intellectual and functionalist explanations. In these explanations, which were largely influenced by the naturalistic perspective, religion was either regarded as an institution that emerged as a result of the lack of scientific advancement, or as an institution that benefits human existence due to its functions.

The initial intellectual explanation of the genesis of religion was posited by David Hume. Hume regarded religion as a product of human nature and posited that its explanatory power was a key factor in its emergence. In the absence of scientific explanation, people sought refuge in religion as a means of understanding natural phenomena. In the view of Edward Burnett Tylor and James Frazer, religion is inextricably linked to human nature. In the period preceding written history, people sought to comprehend the natural world through the lens of their limited knowledge and formulated theories in accordance with their capacity for reasoning. Religion represents the collective outcome of these explanatory endeavours, assuming the role of explanation previously occupied by magic and sorcery and now entrusted to the domain of science. As scientific knowledge progresses, the necessity for religion will diminish, ultimately leading to its dissolution (Pals, 2006, pp. 45-46).

In contrast, functionalist explanations of religion posit that religion emerged as a result of human, economic, social, and psychological factors. In contrast, they argue that the content of religion is meaningless and invalid. Nevertheless, the rationale behind its continued existence can be



discerned from its function. As long as it continues to serve a purpose, it will persist, despite the absence of logical coherence. The psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud attributed the existence of religion to the emotions and contradictions of early childhood (Pals, 2006, p. 77). The French sociologist Emile Durkheim viewed religion as a social phenomenon, suggesting that it exists to satisfy the social desires of human beings (Pals (2006, p. 182) or Karl Marx's (2006, p. 139) view of religion as a tool developed and used by the dominant class to exploit the lower classes exemplify this type of explanation.

These naturalistic explanations of religion are no longer considered meaningful and are subjected to criticism from atheist and naturalist circles due to their reductionist approach (Bloom, 2005b; Visala, 2011, p. 1). Nevertheless, naturalistic attempts to elucidate the genesis of religion and to provide a scientific account of its emergence persist, as do efforts by evolutionary and cognitive psychologists to do so. In particular, evolutionary theory and cognitive psychology, which treats the human mind as a computer, provide a supportive framework for these efforts.

The suggestion that the process of biological evolution is responsible for the emergence and universal spread of religion is a relatively recent phenomenon. Alexander Gallus posits that the source of religious ideas is the brain, which has evolved to facilitate survival. He posits that religions are adaptations that have emerged because they contribute to human survival and reproduction (Dow, 2006, p. 68). Following this study, which may be regarded as the inaugural instance of the utilisation of biological evolution in the elucidation of religious beliefs, anthropic theories of religion founded upon biological evolution commenced to emerge. While these explanations diverge on the question of whether religious beliefs are adaptive or a by-product (spandrel), they concur that the human mind has a structure that produces religious beliefs in specific and predictable ways (Murray & Goldberg, 2009, pp. 183-184). The "costly signal and commitment" theory, which posits that religious beliefs are adaptations, asserts that religions possess both rational and irrational aspects. Furthermore, the rational aspect of religion also indicates that it addresses an adaptive problem. Religions play a role in socialisation and increase productivity by ensuring



group cohesion. The irrational aspect is that they require belief in supernatural beings (Dow, 2006, p. 70).

The second explanation of the origin of religion, based on biological evolution, posits that religious beliefs are not adaptations, but rather spandrels (by-products). This explanation posits that while religion may confer social benefits that enhance group cohesion, these are not the primary drivers behind the emergence of religion. Religion emerged as a by-product of the most basic cognitive adaptations that contribute to the survival of humans in their evolutionary environment. This is the perspective of the Cognitive Science of Religion (CSR), which is the focus of this study.

These discussions on the origin of religion lead us back to the ancient debates on the relationship between human nature and knowledge. Two principal perspectives exist regarding the acquisition of knowledge by humans. The first perspective posits that knowledge is innate, whereas the second asserts that it is acquired through experience. Plato was the first to present a systematic argument for the innateness of knowledge. In his view, human beings comprise a body and a soul. All rational activities are associated with the soul. Furthermore, knowledge is defined as the recollection of that which the soul already possesses (Plato, 1999, pp. 42-51). During the Middle Ages, the tenets put forth by Plato were widely embraced, with the assertion being made that human beings are born with innate knowledge and cognitive faculties that enable them to gain further knowledge. Descartes, regarded as the founding figure of modern philosophy, posited that these faculties in humans constituted evidence for the existence of a perfect God (Descartes, 2020, pp. 47-80).

The Enlightenment saw the replacement of the idea that humans have innate knowledge with the idea that knowledge is acquired through experience. The concept of innate knowledge was subsequently dismissed on the grounds that it would imply the existence of a supernatural power that had bestowed this ability upon all humanity. This understanding posits that human beings are born with an empty mind, and that knowledge is gained through experience. This perspective, espoused particularly by John Locke and David Hume, contested the notion that innate knowledge undervalued individual endeavour and potentially afforded some individuals intellectual authority over others. In subsequent periods, the assertion that



knowledge is acquired through experience was accepted as the foundation of scientific thought and became the foundation of naturalism (Samet, 2008). This perspective, which gained prominence until the 1950s with the advent of the behaviorist school of thought in psychology, posits that humans are fundamentally physical beings. Such a concept has no metaphysical basis and cannot be defined as a soul. Furthermore, there are no clear-cut boundaries that differentiate him from other living organisms.

With the advent of new studies in the field of evolutionary psychology, the assertion that human knowledge is dependent on experience and that there is no innate knowledge began to be replaced by the acceptance that knowledge is innate. However, in contrast to the views of Plato and Descartes, this concept of innate knowledge does not involve the attribution of a supernatural entity, such as the soul. This view, which is physicalist in structure and contains naturalistic claims, posits that adaptive solutions that contribute to human life in the evolutionary process lead to the formation of certain abilities in the human mind. These abilities result in a universal nature in humans. It is similarly proposed that the source of religion should be sought in the innate abilities of human beings.

At this juncture in our investigation, it would be beneficial to examine whether knowledge is attainable by human beings, how the veracity of knowledge can be ascertained, and the discourses surrounding the epistemic value of religious knowledge. The epistemic value of a claim is contingent upon its correspondence with reality. In the context of Platonic epistemology, knowledge was defined as 'justified true belief'. Consequently, the determination of epistemic value was contingent upon the justification offered for a given proposition.

The question of whether knowledge is possible for human beings was already a topic of discussion prior to the formulation of Plato's definition of knowledge. The Sophists, the most prominent proponents of skepticism, asserted that humans are incapable of attaining knowledge. Those who advocated the possibility of knowledge, however, were divided into different schools of thought according to their views on the means of achieving justification. Some of these thinkers posited that sensation, experience, and reason and the mind were the foundations for justification.



While true belief is an absolute prerequisite for the existence of knowledge, it is insufficient for knowledge to be regarded as such in and of itself. In order for a belief to be regarded as knowledge, there must be evidence to justify it. While the aforementioned currents concur on the possibility of knowledge, they diverge in their views on the requisite evidence for justifying it (Moser, 2002, p. 4).

The question thus arises as to whether all beliefs that are accepted as true require evidence in order to become knowledge. Is it possible to trace the necessity for knowledge to become knowledge back to its fundamental origins? The question of whether every belief should be based on evidence represents a central topic of debate in epistemology. Some of our beliefs require evidence in order to be considered true. The question thus arises as to whether this can be accepted as true of all our beliefs. This would be a challenging assertion to make. Such a demand would result in an infinite regress. It follows that there must be fundamental beliefs on which all other beliefs are ultimately based, but which themselves are not based on evidence. This assertion gives rise to foundationalism, which is among the perspectives that uphold the potential for knowledge. This perspective posits that there are two distinct categories of knowledge: Two categories of knowledge are distinguished: foundational and inferential. Foundational knowledge is defined as a set of beliefs that are considered to be self-evident and therefore do not require any form of justification. Inferential beliefs, conversely, are those that require substantiation through evidence and are reached through reasoning (K. Clark & Barrett, 2010; K. J. Clark & Barrett, 2011). The acceptance of foundational beliefs gives rise to the question of which beliefs should be accepted as such and on what basis.

In responding to these questions, it becomes evident that those who espouse the view of foundationalism offer two distinct responses. Those who espouse classical foundationalism, as exemplified by Descartes, maintain that any proposition A can serve as a fundamental belief for an individual S only if A is unfalsifiable or self-evident. The proponents of modest foundationalism, particularly Plantinga in the present era, maintain that a foundational belief is the justification for an individual S accepting a belief p as a foundational belief under condition C (Plantinga, 1981). In this variant of foundationalism, the necessity for a basic belief to be self-evident or



unfalsifiable is waived; however, the provision of appropriate conditions for its existence is sufficient.

In the context of foundationalism, particularly modest foundationalism, Thomas Reid is a key figure to be referenced. He posits that human beings are capable of attaining knowledge and that some foundational beliefs are indispensable for the determination of religious knowledge through reasoning. He endeavors to substantiate their epistemic value. The influence of Reid's ideas can be discerned in Plantinga's foundationalism, as well as in the work of Justin Barrett, a proponent of the Cognitive Science of Religion (CSR) (K. J. Clark & Barrett, 2011).

Reid identifies basic beliefs based on the concept of common sense and refers to these as the 'common sense principle'. He argues that these beliefs emerge non-reflectively and that people have cognitive faculties that enable their emergence. He maintains that the beliefs produced by these cognitive faculties should be accepted as true unless evidence to the contrary emerges. Fundamental beliefs cannot be reached through reasoning and do not require evidence (Clark & Barrett, 2011; Reid, 2008). These beliefs inform our thinking and shape our daily actions. These principles are innate, preceding both experience and reasoning. All of our reasoning and experiences are ultimately based on these beliefs. Any actions or thoughts that are in opposition to these beliefs are regarded as absurd and incoherent (Reid, 2008, p. 249). From this perspective, it is evident that Reid ascribes the origin of religious beliefs to these innate cognitive faculties.

The epistemic value of religious beliefs has also been a topic of debate throughout human history. At times, religious propositions were regarded as an irrefutable form of knowledge, whereas at other junctures, they were not ascribed epistemic value. Following the Enlightenment, the epistemic value of religious beliefs was once more the subject of debate. Some parties considered them to be mere propositions that did not merit serious consideration or reflection.

In establishing the epistemic value of religious knowledge, foundationalism emerges as a coherent explanatory paradigm. Given that the notion that all knowledge must be substantiated by another knowledge would result in an infinite regress, it is necessary for individuals to possess



fundamental beliefs upon which to base their knowledge. Religious beliefs can be explained through these fundamental beliefs, and thus epistemic value can be attributed to the knowledge they provide. It is not our intention to propose that all religious beliefs should be regarded as fundamental; rather, we suggest that they can be supported by fundamental beliefs.

The two concepts presented in the title of this study have emerged from two distinct perspectives. The concept of “Spandrel” is supported by the naturalistic perspective, whereas the Islamic perspective defends the concept of “Fitrah”.

2. The Cognitive Science of Religion (CSR) and the Concept of Spandrel

In their 1979 paper, “The Spandrels of San Marco and the Panglossian Paradigm,” Gould and Lewontin discuss the concept of Spandrel in the context of evolutionary biology. In their 1979 paper, “The Spandrels of San Marco and the Panglossian Paradigm,” Gould and Lewontin employed the term “spandrel” in evolutionary biology to signify “random by-products of natural selection.” In the field of architecture, the term “spandrel” is used to describe a gradually tapering triangular structure formed by the intersection of two round arches. Spandrels are triangular spaces with a pointed shape, formed by the intersection of two round arches at right angles. The fact that these spaces are beautifully ornamented and appear to be a necessary part of the architectural work does not necessarily indicate that they were built for this purpose. In the event that a dome is to be mounted on round arches, the resulting by-product will be spandrels. The term is used to describe the spontaneous gap between the arch and the dome in architectural contexts. In other words, this gap is not an integral component of the design, but rather a consequence of the design choices that have been made.

Gould defines the spandrel as any geometric configuration of space that is an inevitable and necessary consequence of architectural decisions. He posits that this concept would obviate the issues that arise in evolutionary biology when explanations are based on adaptation alone. The explanation of adaptive products that do not contribute to survival and reproduction with adaptation is detrimental to the theory of evolution. In this regard, the concept of spandrel represents a more perspicuous and



efficacious nomenclature that may be employed in lieu of adaptation. Accordingly, this concept has been employed to delineate potentially indispensable yet advantageous transfers that cannot be classified as adaptations due to their lack of efficacy in addressing adaptive challenges (Gould & Lewontin, 1979).

This perspective is also accepted by the Cognitive Science of Religion (CSR), which posits that religions and beliefs in supernatural beings are not adaptations, but rather spandrels. In other words, although their existence appears to be necessary, meaningful, and obligatory from an external perspective, they are phenomena that have emerged as a result of evolutionary design, yet could have manifested in alternative ways. To elucidate further, spandrels are products that are a necessary consequence of placing a dome on a round arch, but are not a requisite element in any other architectural design. The existence of these phenomena is contingent upon architectural (evolutionary) choices and is therefore accidental. Religions and supernatural beliefs are a natural phenomenon, but their existence is contingent on evolutionary preferences.

Stewart E. Guthrie is regarded as a seminal figure in the development of Cognitive Science of Religion (CSR) due to his influential article, “A Cognitive Theory of Religion.” In this work, Guthrie draws upon the ideas of prominent thinkers such as Bacon, Spinoza, and Hume to advance the argument that CSR is a natural extension of existing philosophical traditions. In this article, Guthrie defines religious thought as anthropomorphic, in alignment with the perspectives of Spinoza and Hume (S. Guthrie et al., 1980). In opposition to the distinction between religious and secular thought, Guthrie posits that all thought is the product of a singular cognitive structure. The emergence of certain universal cognitive faculties in the course of human evolution has resulted in the tendency to perceive events and objects in nature as personal entities.

The symposium, held at Western Michigan University in 1996 and entitled “Cognition, Culture and Religion”, saw the participation of a limited number of scholars who had previously engaged with the field of Cognitive Science of Religion (CSR). This event proved pivotal in the emergence of the Cognitive Science of Religion (CSR) (Barrett, 2011a, p. 230). Since the early 21st century, the Cognitive Science of Religion (CSR) has



emerged as an area where atheist arguments have found a source, although the field also includes theist scholars. Currently, this concept, which has numerous research centres and undergraduate departments in Europe and North America, is not yet regarded as an independent discipline or theory. Instead, it is viewed as an interdisciplinary field where scholars from diverse scientific backgrounds converge on specific topics (Visala, 2011, p. 10). This is the reason why our study places a particular emphasis on the concept of thought.

The fundamental premise of the Cognitive Science of Religion (CSR) is that the genesis of religious beliefs should not be attributed to a supernatural entity, but rather to inherent human characteristics. As previously stated, this perspective serves as the foundation for the beliefs of those who hold particularly negative views towards religious beliefs. The Cognitive Science of Religion (CSR) postulates that religious beliefs are universal and innate. In accordance with this assumption, research is conducted with the objective of elucidating the underlying reasons for this phenomenon. The Cognitive Science of Religion (CSR) posits that the cross-cultural prevalence of beliefs indicating the existence of religion can be attributed to the functioning of the human mind (Barrett, 2011a, p. 231).

While the Cognitive Science of Religion (CSR) provides an explanation for the existence of universal religious beliefs in the human mind, it does not accept the notion of a “sensus divinitatis.” As previously stated, this perspective maintains that all responses must be perceived as “natural.” Consequently, hypotheses are proposed regarding the formation of religious beliefs in the human mind. These theses are predicated on the assertion that religion is a “spandrel” (Murray & Goldberg, 2009, pp. 182-183). The assertion that religious beliefs are a form of spandrel implies the absence of any adaptive function. In other words, it is to assert that religious beliefs do not exert a direct influence on human survival, the improvement of living conditions, or reproduction. Boyer provides the example of musical talent to illustrate this point. The possession of musical talent is not an adaptation in the sense that it does not directly facilitate human survival, ease of living, or reproduction. The auditory system is an adaptation, and musical talent is a by-product of this adaptation (Boyer, 2001, p. 132). The notion that religious beliefs are regarded as spandrel implies the



absence of a distinct domain of religious cognition within the human mind. If we accept that religious beliefs are adaptive, it follows that there is a system of religious cognition in the mind, analogous to the auditory system. This perspective posits that religious beliefs, which lack a discrete cognitive system within the mind, are a by-product of our cognitive abilities that we utilize in our daily lives and do not possess a unique status (Visala, 2011, pp. 9-27).

The spandrel explanation of the origin of religious beliefs also precludes the possibility of intellectual and functionalist explanations. This thesis posits that religion does not provide an adequate explanation of natural phenomena, in contrast to explanations that seek to identify the source of religion in intellectual endeavours. Conversely, this perspective posits that such occurrences are intricate and opaque. It can thus be concluded that religious beliefs did not emerge as a result of efforts to understand nature (Boyer, 2001, p. 14). The same can be said of functionalist explanations, which posit that religious beliefs emerge as a result of the useful functions they provide. The functionalist perspective posits that religion exists as a solution to the fear of death, a source of emotional support, and a means of making life more bearable. Those who posit the notion of religion as a “spandrel” assert that: Atran and Norenzayan (2004, p. 716) posit that religion produces more anxiety and fear than it treats.

The most significant aspect of the spandrel thesis proposed by the Cognitive Science of Religion (CSR) is its reductionist approach. To reduce human beings to physical beings in a reductionist manner and to view religion as a consequence of the functioning of the human brain, and to assert that religion can be understood through empirical methods in a scientific manner, represents a highly unsatisfactory explanation. This thesis fails to consider the numerous theological, environmental, cultural, psychological and social processes that gave rise to the advent of religion. Furthermore, it attempts to subject the metaphysical claims of religions to empirical investigation. Consequently, these proponents may characterise religion as an “airy nothing” (Boyer, 2001, p. 330) or as an institution that emerged fortuitously in the evolutionary process (Bloom, 2005b). This approach, which posits that religion does not exist because it is a spandrel, comprising baseless beliefs and emerging by chance in the evolutionary



process, appears to have overlooked the fact that, from the same perspective, our scientific thinking is also a spandrel. It is erroneous to assume that scientific thinking is an adaptive product for survival or reproduction. Such phenomena may also be considered spandrels of our cognitive faculties. If religion is regarded as baseless and superfluous on the grounds that it is a spandrel, then consistency would dictate that our scientific thinking should be treated in a similar manner.

The investigation of cognitive faculties in the search for the source of religious beliefs has given rise to debates concerning the formation of knowledge within the mind. Given that positing religion as a natural structure would entail the conclusion that religious beliefs should also be natural, scientists engaged in the Cognitive Science of Religion (CSR) have sought to demonstrate that religious beliefs are also natural. In this way, they have distinguished between two categories of knowledge: reflective and non-reflective, according to the manner of its emergence. This distinction constitutes the fundamental premise of the Cognitive Science of Religion (CSR), a position that was also espoused by Thomas Reid as a tenet of common sense. He differentiates between intuitive knowledge, which cannot be obtained through reasoning and experience, and knowledge that can be attained through reasoning and experience. Reid (1981, p. 260) posits that the act of “swallowing” is an example of intuitive knowledge, whereas the act of walking represents the other type of knowledge.

The Cognitive Science of Religion (CSR) posits that reflective knowledge emerges as a result of reasoning and learning, whereas non-reflective knowledge is defined as knowledge that emerges suddenly without reasoning. Non-reflective knowledge is derived from the intuitive system of categories that exist within the mind. The existence of this information is not contingent on our awareness; it is nevertheless present in our minds and informs our relationship with the world. To illustrate, we possess the understanding that a ball propelled from an elevated position will inevitably collide with the ground, irrespective of the tenets of physical science (McCauley, 2013, p. 14). Non-reflective knowledge is acquired naturally as a result of maturation. Natural knowledge, which is acquired through ontological patterns and predispositions from an early age, is considered “natural” because it is formed rapidly and intuitively, without any



conscious effort on the part of humans. This knowledge manifests in all individuals over time, irrespective of cultural and temporal boundaries. If the non-reflective knowledge generated by our intuitive system does not contradict the reflective knowledge generated by our reasoning system, or if our reflective knowledge has not been contradicted by our reflective knowledge, we tend to accept this knowledge without questioning the accuracy of the non-reflective knowledge (Barrett, 2011b, pp. 46-47).

In the field of Cognitive Science of Religion (CSR), it is proposed that this innate knowledge and predisposition to acquire it is the source of the formation of religious thoughts. It can therefore be seen that this information, which is not processed by the reasoning system, can be challenged and contradicted by the reasoning system. This reinforces the argument that religious thought does not have a unique structure (Boyer & Bergstrom, 2008, p. 112). The assertion that religion is natural entails the claim that it is utilitarian and intuitive. However, this assertion also implies that religious beliefs lack a foundation and cannot be trusted because they are based on intuition.

The assertion that religious beliefs are devoid of epistemic value is predicated on the premise that intuitive knowledge is inherently unreliable. Nevertheless, numerous experiments in the field of Cognitive Science of Religion (CSR) have revealed the intuitive presence of theism in children prior to the onset of acculturation. In other words, humans are readily amenable to religious explanations. From a naturalistic perspective, this can be regarded as a fallacy or a by-product of unexplained coincidences. Conversely, from a religious standpoint, it can be perceived as a universal gift from God.

The Cognitive Science of Religion (CSR) acknowledges the role of intuition in the formation of knowledge and thus assigns it a significant function in the durability of human thought processes. Some scientists who contribute to this field of study posit that thoughts that are only minimally contrary to our intuitive beliefs are retained and transmitted. The notion that a ball launched from an elevated position will descend is a concept that aligns with our intuitive understanding. However, the ability of a dog to engage in verbal communication would not be perceived as intuitive. It can therefore be posited that permanent knowledge will be that which is



intuitive and minimally incompatible with our intuition. Religious beliefs, and in particular the conviction in the existence of a deity, are deemed to be both enduring and transmissible due to their minimal incompatibility with intuitive processes (Boyer, 2001). This thesis can be challenged on the grounds that the concept of God is too inherently counter-intuitive to be classified as such, yet it is a concept that endures and can be transmitted. It could be argued that a significant proportion of minimal counter-intuitive ideas are not enduring. To illustrate, the concept of a flying cat contains a minimal counter-intuition. The concept in question is defined by a single element that is in opposition to intuitive understanding. The concept of flight. Nevertheless, it is not anticipated that this concept will be enduring and transmitted from one generation to the next.

In response to this criticism, the field of Cognitive Science of Religion (CSR) posits that minimal counter-intuitive concepts must act as agents in order to be enduring. In the view of the aforementioned scholars, these agents may take the form of humans with minimal counterintuitive properties or beings with human properties (Barrett, 2000, p. 31). The human species has evolved an adapted system for identifying agents. Religious ideas, and in particular the concept of God, can be seen as a spandrel of this human agent identification system. As posited by Guthrie, who introduced the concept of agency into the field of cognitive science as it relates to religion (CSR), the attribution of a feature similar to human agency to non-human beings is the reason for the emergence of religion (S. E. Guthrie, 2015, p. 284). The plethora of stimuli that stimulate our system, which is adapted to detect perpetrators, also causes the system to frequently generate false alarms. The search for a perpetrator in the absence of a situation necessitating such a figure represents an instance of this system's failure. However, as creatures with a survival instinct, we have chosen to posit the existence of a perpetrator rather than posit the absence of a perpetrator and risk our lives in the evolutionary process (S. E. Guthrie, 2015, p. 288).

In accordance with Guthrie's thesis, Justin Barrett proposed the Hyperactive Agent Detection Device (HADD) theory (Barrett, 2000, p. 31). The Hyperactive Agent Detection Device (HADD) theory posits that HADD causes us to non-reflectively attribute causality to an agent in cases



of uncertain motion. This non-reflective response is a vital component of the evolutionary process. The perception of rustling in the vicinity, particularly if this is interpreted as an imminent threat, prompts an immediate response which is beneficial for survival. It is also possible that the rustling was caused by the wind. Nevertheless, in the event that the rustling is caused by a tiger, the human will have taken the necessary precautions as a result of HADD. The CFS, which is not always accurate due to its hypersensitivity, is a vital survival mechanism, prompting an immediate and intuitive response in the presence of a potential threat (Barrett, 2007, p. 772). The rationale behind the notion of a divine entity emerging from this system is attributed to its propensity for erroneous alerts. The human being, who is constantly warned by the HADD but unable to identify the perpetrator, will begin to hypothesise the existence of invisible agents. From this, he will then be able to infer the existence of invisible perpetrators. This situation, which is minimally counter-intuitive, will become a permanent part of our collective knowledge. The repetition of the narrative from other sources serves to reinforce the belief in invisible agents. In such cases, intentional beings are conceptualised as agents (Barrett, 2000, pp. 31-32). This is the manner in which our HADD system facilitates the conceptualisation of the divine.

It is evident that this theory attributes the formation of belief in God to false stimulation. The belief in God is regarded as an unintended consequence of an unreliable system that consistently provides erroneous signals. This phenomenon is not explicable within the framework of evolutionary theory. If our HADD system is to be accepted as an ineffective system that consistently generates erroneous signals, it will not be regarded as a successful evolutionary adaptation and will not be selected for by evolutionary theory. In light of these considerations, it appears that this system does not contribute to human survival and is therefore at odds with the principles of natural selection (Green, 2015, p. 63). Nevertheless, if it is asserted that this system exclusively generates erroneous signals with regard to belief in God, it is imperative to elucidate the underlying rationale. The system's other warnings are accurate; however, in regard to religious beliefs, there are naturalistic assumptions rather than an adequate explanation for the system's shortcomings. In accordance with the tenets of naturalism,



which unequivocally repudiates the supernatural, this faculty, which also furnishes intuitions regarding the existence of invisible entities, is deemed to emit erroneous signals. From a theistic perspective, this capacity in humans can be regarded as a divine endowment, bestowed upon them for the purpose of survival and the discernment of divine signs.

Justin Barrett, a theist thinker who produces ideas within the field of Cognitive Science of Religion (CSR), posits that the HADD theory is an important cognitive faculty that enables humans to conceptualise the existence of God. However, in response to critiques of this theory, he sought to defend the naturalness of belief in God with a new thesis. His new thesis is entitled the 'Theory of Mind' (ToM). In accordance with this thesis, following the identification of the agent by HADD, the Theory of Mind (ToM) in human beings is engaged, thereby determining the characteristics that the identified agent should possess. Consequently, a comprehensive concept of the perpetrator is formed, comprising specific qualities and boundaries (K. Clark & Barrett, 2010, pp. 178-179). Theory of Mind (ToM) represents the most significant mental predisposition, providing the foundation for religious thought. The Theory of Mind (ToM) provides intuitive knowledge about perpetrators and their characteristics, which is the most important cognitive system used to make sense of the world (McCauley, 2013, pp. 82-83). This thesis posits that CFS and ToM operate in concert to identify typical agents and their characteristics, as well as to elucidate the concept of the deity in theism. In accordance with Barrett's thesis, the deity discerned through these two systems is predominantly conceived as a being endowed with a mind. This is because the most significant quality ascribed to other beings by humans is that of the mind. Given that humans possess a mind, they anticipate that other beings will exhibit mental abilities such as sensory perception, thought, desire, belief, goal-setting, and emotion. Such expectations emerge without reflection (Clark & Barrett, 2010). In support of this thesis, Justin Barrett posits that a complete conception of God is contingent upon certain conditions. The conditions he sets forth provide the foundation for a theistic conception of God. He posits that the concept of God must first be counter-intuitive. This condition will ensure that the concept of God does not align with human expectations and is not perceived as supernatural. By challenging intuitive beliefs,



this condition helps to establish a more enduring understanding of the divine. Secondly, the entity to which the concept refers must possess intention. It is not feasible for humans to conceptualise a being with a mind that is devoid of purpose and intention, and whose demands remain unknown. Thirdly, the concept of God must point to a being with strategic and important knowledge that is beyond the reach of humans. With regard to the concept of God, it can be observed that people are not reflective in their understanding that God is in possession of such knowledge. This is a fundamental attribute of the concept of God. These characteristics of God render him a being worthy of prayer and worship. The fourth condition is that the entity to which the concept refers is capable of exerting a significant influence on the world of human beings. This condition serves to demonstrate that the conditions set forth by Barrett align with the characteristics ascribed to the God of theism. A deistic God, by definition, does not intervene in the world. However, a God who does intervene in a significant way is regarded as possessing divine qualities. In his view, the term “agent” denotes an entity that engages in action. It is not possible to designate a being that does not act in a distinctive manner as an agent. In order for the concept of God to be applicable to the concept of an agent, it is necessary for God to perform visible acts. He asserts that if it were not believed that God has a tangible effect on people in the world, there would be no God worthy of belief. Ultimately, the entity to which the concept pertains must possess the capacity to motivate behaviors that enhance people’s beliefs. A perception of God that does not anticipate behavioural change and is indifferent to human behaviour is unlikely to inspire long-term belief. The concept of a God who expects and commands positive behaviours from people is a more enduring and communicable concept for our cognitive system (Barrett, 2008, pp. 150-154; Boyer, 2001, pp. 154-158; McCauley, 2013, p. 170).

Similarly, as in the ontological argument, Barrett requires cognitive science to articulate the properties of an a priori concept. He proceeds to enumerate the concept of God that exists in his mind and its associated properties, which he posits as the necessary and sufficient conditions for the concept of God to be complete. In the absence of a belief in God, it would be challenging for an individual to enumerate such properties.



Moreover, atheist thinkers who contribute to the field of Cognitive Science of Religion (CSR) have not identified and documented these conditions, nor have they concurred with Barrett's perspective on this matter.

There are scientists within the field of Cognitive Science of Religion (CSR) who align with Justin Barrett's perspective and assert that children are born with theistic beliefs, despite their own naturalistic worldviews. The aforementioned claim is supported by an understanding of agency formed by HADD, purposiveness formed by ToM, and a tendency to perceive order in nature and to anticipate order from an intelligent agent.

The results of studies conducted with children indicate that they begin to provide teleological explanations about beings from a very young age. From an early age, children demonstrate a strong inclination to perceive the natural world in terms of purpose. This predisposition is not limited to the physical world but also extends to the biological realm. Children consistently demonstrate a preference for purposeful explanations regarding animate and inanimate entities, as well as man-made tools. Creationist explanations for the origin of things appear to be a natural fit for children (Kelemen, 2004, pp. 295-296). Furthermore, irrespective of whether their parents espouse atheistic or theistic beliefs, children, up to a certain age, tend to gravitate towards creationist explanations over those based on evolutionary theory (Evans, 2000a, 2000b, 2001).

Additionally, Paul Bloom, a distinguished naturalist within the field of Cognitive Science of Religion (CSR), has also identified indications of intuitive theism in children. Bloom posits that humans are born with the capacity to differentiate between minds and bodies. In other words, the belief that the mind and body can be separated from each other and that disembodied beings can exist is a faculty that humans are born with (Bloom, 2005a, pp. 155-230). From a naturalistic perspective, he posits that this faculty represents the spandrel of two discrete cognitive systems, which enable the comprehension of physical and social entities (Bloom, 2009, p. 123).

In light of the aforementioned explanations, the arguments put forth by the Cognitive Science of Religion (CSR) can be summarized as follows: The cognitive faculties that emerge during the evolutionary process and are regarded as spandrels give rise to beliefs such as essentialism, dualism,



teleological thinking, and the inclination towards intelligent agency, which collectively facilitate the existence of religions. Although these beliefs appear to be at odds with contemporary scientific understanding, they nevertheless play a vital role in human life. These beliefs are essential for human beings to comprehend life, ensure their survival, recognise their environment, socialise, prepare for future dangers, identify the expected behaviour of others and adhere to certain moral values. Notwithstanding the provision of special education and guidance that these beliefs are scientifically false, they continue to persist in the human mind (Evans, 2000a; Smedt & Cruz, 2011, p. 106). The continued assertion of creationist claims in the face of the theory of evolution and the persistence of creationist tendencies even among scientists serve to illustrate this point (Bloom, 2005b, 2009, pp. 121-122).

This paper will attempt to reinterpret the thesis of the naturalness of religious beliefs, as put forward by the Cognitive Science of Religion (CSR), which is often devalued as a spandrel. In order to do so, it will consider the *fitrah* inherent in human beings.

3. Fitrah

It can be defined as the creation of beings with certain abilities and predispositions, an attribute inherent to all beings at the moment of their first creation. The term is derived from the root “fatr,” which signifies the act of splitting, dividing, or creating. Given that the initial creation is conceptualised as the division of nothingness and the genesis of existence from it, this is reflected in the choice of terminology. In light of the etymological meaning of the term, it can be posited that the concept of *fitrah* encapsulates the fundamental structures and characteristics of beings at the moment of their initial creation, prior to any external influences. This assertion is supported by the works of Hökelekli (1996) and Okumuşlar (2002). The term “nature” is referenced on a single occasion within the Qur’an. Nevertheless, it is notable that nineteen other words, also derived from the same root, are also found in the Qur’an. The concept of *fitrah* and words derived from the same root as *fitrah* are also frequently referenced in hadiths. The initial verse that comes to mind is the verse that reads, “Turn your face to religion as a Hanif, to whatever nature Allah has created mankind with” (Rum 30/30). With regard to the hadith, the initial concept that



arises is that of a hadith which states: “Every human being is born with a nature; then his parents make him a Jew, a Christian, a Magi or even a polytheist” (Bukhari “Jenaiz” :79, 80, 93; Muslim “Qadar”: 22-25).

The prevailing interpretation of fitrah within Islamic thought conceptualises it as the state of human beings at their creation, characterised as neutral. This interpretation posits that the fundamental nature of the human being is the inclination to acknowledge their Creator, a faculty bestowed upon them at the moment of their initial creation. It further suggests that this inclination encompasses both positive and negative faculties and predispositions inherent to the human condition. This interpretation, which is based on Surah al-Shams Verse 8², bears resemblance to the concept of *sensus divinitatis* (Calvin, 1975), which was introduced by John Calvin. This concept posits that nature does not encompass a concept of God as revealed by religions; rather, it is a predisposition to believe in a God who creates, gives order to, and designs all things. This is contrary to Alvin Plantinga (Plantinga, 2000), who argues that human beings are predisposed to believe in the God of Judaism and Christianity based on Calvin’s concept and that this belief should be accepted as the basic belief. However, fitrah does not express the direct existence of belief in God. This is not to suggest that the existence of belief in God is a given, but rather that there is a predisposition to believe in God (Akçay, 2011, pp. 162-166; Hökelekli, 1996; Okumuşlar, 2002). This approach, which can also be expressed as ‘creation as capable of religion and morality’ (Akçay, 2011, p. 162), is, in accordance with Hökelekli’s observations, the most plausible of the views on fitrah and the one that has received the most attention (Hökelekli, 1996).

The concept of fitrah posits that human beings are born with the belief in an omnipotent supernatural power that organizes and designs. The hadith indicates that this belief may be suppressed by the influence of the environment. The Cognitive Science of Religion (CSR) acknowledges that human nature is dualistic, comprising both a psychological/spiritual aspect and a physical aspect (Bloom, 2005b, 2007, 2009). This aspect renders human beings capable of belief.

² “Who placed in him the ability to do good and evil...”.



Ibn Taymiyya, a prominent figure in Islamic thought, also offers significant insights into the nature of humanity. In his view, human nature is so inclined to recognise and accept a creator that no effort is required to instil this belief in children. The positive aspects of children's nature and the removal of any factors that might impede this predisposition are sufficient for this belief to emerge (Hökelekli, 1996). Ibn Taymiyya (1978, p. 418) argued that the proofs of God's existence put forward by thinkers who lived before him were unnecessary and criticised them for various reasons (Ibn Taymiyya, 1978, p. 4). In his 1987a, pp. 114-115, Ibn Taymiyya identifies the most important proof of God's existence as nature. Ibn Taymiyya, who refers to the capacity that God has bestowed upon humans from birth to discern right from wrong as *fitrah*, asserts that as a result of this faculty, humans are born in a state that not only acknowledges the existence of God but also affirms His supremacy over all things (Ibn Taymiyya, 1978, p. 397). To illustrate this point, Ibn Taymiyya cites the example of a child who has been struck on the head without any fault of their own, in order to make this view more comprehensible. Following the impact to the head, the child will seek to identify the perpetrator and inquire as to the cause of the injury. If a child is informed that the individual who struck him is not responsible for the injury, it is unlikely that he will accept this explanation (Ibn Taymiyya, 1987b, p. 265). This is because even a child of tender years is aware that if an action is performed, there must be an agent responsible for it. This provides evidence that humans are innately inclined to believe in a higher power (Çifçi, 2015).

Conclusion

In epistemology, which, together with ontology and axiology, constitutes one of the three pillars of philosophy, the various types of knowledge are discussed in five sections. The following categories of knowledge are distinguished: everyday knowledge, technical knowledge, philosophical knowledge, scientific knowledge and religious knowledge. In considering the relationship between scientific and religious knowledge, it becomes evident that there are two principal attitudes. The first approach assumes that the data presented as scientific knowledge is absolute, generally valid, and unchanging. This approach regards religious knowledge as reliable to the extent that it is corroborated by scientific data, and those that



contradict scientific knowledge are either rejected or interpreted. Such an attitude can be observed in numerous instances throughout the history of philosophical thought. Ptolemy's theory of the universe, which was regarded as an absolute truth within the prevailing paradigm, informed the cosmological approach of Christianity. Similarly, Fahreddin Razi, an Islamic thinker, interpreted the verses of the Qur'an in his Tafsir ul Kebir based on the same theory of the universe. These examples illustrate this point of view.

The second attitude is that scientific data is evaluated based on religious knowledge. This stance acknowledges that scientific knowledge offers an accurate representation of reality, provided that it is contextualised within the limits of its own paradigm. As evidenced by Ptolemy's theory of the universe, when the paradigm shifts, it becomes evident that the data accepted as truthful does not offer absolute insight. Consequently, this perspective does not endorse the notion that scientific knowledge is absolute, universally applicable, and unchanging. Nevertheless, this does not imply any devaluation or dismissal of these perspectives. The second position asserts the necessity of verifiable religious knowledge within the current paradigm for the convincing of people about religious knowledge.

The objective of this study is to provide evidence in support of the existence of the code of creation, which we refer to as fitrah, within the context of the current paradigm. Thomas Reid identified the necessity of basic beliefs for the freedom from doubt and the elimination of uncertainty regarding the external world and one's own existence. To this end, he delineated the principles of common sense as a means of overcoming these doubts. At this juncture, we concur with Reid's perspective that a foundation of fundamental beliefs is a prerequisite for the initiation of reasoning. The dependence of scientific knowledge on the acceptance of causality, despite the lack of empirical proof, exemplifies the necessity for fundamental beliefs.

Similarly, we concur with Reid that the foundation of fundamental beliefs must be expanded. Nevertheless, in contrast to Alvin Plantinga and the reformed epistemology thinkers who followed him, we do not propose that religious beliefs should be regarded as basic beliefs. The argument put forth is that, as Reid and the concept of "nature" indicate, there are



fundamental beliefs that permit the establishment of religious beliefs through reasoning. Humans, who are born with cognitive faculties inclined to believe, can attain religious beliefs, particularly belief in God, through reasoning that employs these existing fundamental beliefs.

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Öz: Bu çalışmanın başlığında yer alan iki kavram, aynı anlamları ihtiva ediyor görünmelerine rağmen, bakış açısı farklılıkları nedeniyle farklı yorumlanmaktadır. İki kavram da, insanda var olan ve insanın doğuştan beraberinde getirdiği bazı yetilerin olduğunu kabul etmekte; bu yetilerin insanın inanmaya yatkın olmasını sağladığını iddia etmektedir. Bu kavramlardan Spandrel, doğuştan beraberimizde getirdiğimiz bu yetilerin evrimsel süreçte hayatta kalmamızı sağlayan adaptasyonların bir yan ürünü olduğunu savunurken; fitrat, bu yetilerin Tanrı tarafından verilmiş olduğunu söylemektedir. Bu çalışmanın ortaya çıkmasını sağlayan temel saik insanın bir inanç varlığı olduğunun kabul edilmesidir. İnsanlık tarihi boyunca her dönem, coğrafya ve kültürden insanın doğaüstü güçlere inanıyor olması ve şekilsel farklılıklara rağmen bütün inançlarda ortak özellikler bulunması, bunun araştırılması gereken bir konu olduğunu göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Din felsefesi, evrim, cognitive science of religion, spandrel, fitrat.

