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## The concept of *homo religiosus* and its philosophical interpretations

The term *homo religiosus*, like other terms of this kind, the aim of which is to display various facets of human nature, conceals a certain thesis, namely, the conviction that man reveals a natural inclination for being religious. It is a philosophical term created in a similar way as the terms *homo sapiens* or *homo faber*. Even the very first acquaintance with this conviction enables one to notice its problematic nature. Among many aspects, it consists in the fact that there are people who are neither perceived of as religious by others, nor do they characterise themselves in this way. Moreover, irreligious people constitute a considerable part of the human population today<sup>1</sup>. Having performed an in-depth study of the history of this term, particularly in the trend of the research on religions referred to as the phenomenology of religion, as well as having followed the ways of giving reasons for the conviction that religiosity is typical of man, one might draw a conclusion that the conviction that *homo religiosus* exists is rather the result of speculation in faith than rational reasoning. At this point, I do not completely reject the cognitive value of the idea of *homo religiosus* presented in the works of such religion researchers as Mircea Eliade or Gerardus van der Leeuw. However, I am convinced of the fact that this value was limited because these ideas did not provide an answer to the question why man has the inclination to be religious<sup>2</sup>. As Martin Riesebrodt aptly noticed, from the point of view of such researchers as Eliade or van der Leeuw “it is the existence of nonreligious persons that needs to be explained, not the existence of religious ones”<sup>3</sup>. However, there is a possibility of reformulating the conviction concerning the religious inclination of man

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<sup>1</sup> P. Zuckerman, *Atheism: Contemporary Numbers and Patterns*, in: *The Cambridge Companion to Atheism*, M. Martin (ed.), Cambridge 2007, p. 55.

<sup>2</sup> S. Sztajer, *Homo religiosus a współczesne przemiany religijności*, “Przegląd Religioznawczy”, 2010, no. 2 (236), p. 17-26.

<sup>3</sup> M. Riesebrodt, *The Promise of Salvation: A Theory of Religion*, Chicago 2010, p. 52.

in such a way so as to both bring it together with the existence of irreligious people and to explain it based on the available knowledge about religiosity and its determinants.

The aim of this article is to prove that the concept of *homo religiosus* does not belong to the repertoire of obsolete concepts related to philosophy and religious studies, but instead it shows a cognitive value which makes it possible to be used as a category instrumental in explaining and understanding human behaviour. This concept gains new meaning in view of the contemporary cognitive research on religion, which not only introduces new empirical knowledge about the religiosity of man, but also gives an impulse to pursue a new philosophical reinterpretation of the concept of *homo religiosus*. The cognitive approach provides an answer to the questions why the human mind is susceptible to ideas of supernatural beings and what is the cause of the inclination of man towards religiously motivated behaviour.

From the cognitive perspective, some facets of religiosity, such as belief in supernatural beings, ritual behaviour, as well as religious experience, obtain support in the activity and mutual interaction of a number of cognitive mechanisms that constitute the natural architecture of the human mind. Although it is not so that these cognitive mechanisms generate religiosity, their existence makes it possible to a large extent for religious thinking to come easy, to be easily communicated and used in the everyday interpretation of the surrounding world.

Speaking in historical terms, the concept of *homo religiosus* used to be understood in several different ways. Among them, one can distinguish such a meaning according to which *homo religiosus* is simply a certain type of personality or, as Max Scheler puts it, a type of man "in whom there is unconditional but non-rational faith in regards to his personal and extraordinary links to deity"<sup>4</sup>. Under a different meaning, *homo religiosus* is identified with the man of archaic communities and contrasted with the modern man (*homo modernus*). The latter plays an important role in the works of Mircea Eliade, who believes that the spiritual universe of *homo religiosus* can be fully understood only when the religiosity of the man of archaic communities becomes the subject of research<sup>5</sup>. Lastly, the most significant meaning of the term *homo religiosus* – significant from the point of view of considerations presented here – can be identified with the thesis of the religious nature or the thesis of the religious inclination of man. For certain researchers, representing the trend of the broadly understood phenomenology of religion (e.g. R. Otto, Gerardus van der Leeuw, and Mircea Eliade), this inclination is a result of the "structure" of the human mind. It is understood as an *a priori* ability; however, it still needs to be stimulated and brought to perfection<sup>6</sup>.

The conviction of the existence of the peculiar religious inclination can be found in the works of many philosophers, both ancient and contemporary ones. It involves the

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<sup>4</sup> M. Scheler, *Problems of a Sociology of Knowledge*, New York 2013, p. 81.

<sup>5</sup> M. Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, San Diego – London 1987, p. 165.

<sup>6</sup> M. Riesebrodt, *The Promise of Salvation...*, op. cit., p. 49.

conviction which appeared in the works of various Christian thinkers, namely, that the knowledge of God, or the idea of God at least, is inherent. The concept of *sensusdivinitatis*, which can be found in the works of John Calvin, played a special role. Calvinists used this name to describe the peculiar "God-given capacity", i.e. the cognitive ability given by God and allowing man to get to know that very God<sup>7</sup>. Such a flair was supposed to be given to all people and underlie all religions, although not all people would have followed its voice. Calvin's statements suggest that "the awareness of God is natural, widespread, and not easy to forget, ignore, or destroy"<sup>8</sup>. This concept also appears in the works of Alvin Plantinga, who treats *sensusdivinitatis* not so much as a ready-made innate knowledge, but as an innate ability that makes it possible to gain knowledge of God, thus making a direct reference to Calvin. He defines it as "a disposition or set of dispositions to form theistic beliefs in various circumstances, in response to the sorts of conditions or stimuli that trigger the working of this sense of divinity"<sup>9</sup>. The weakness of the idea common to Calvin and Plantinga consists in that it postulates a certain set of cognitive abilities, the genesis of which it cannot explain. The statement that God equipped man with a peculiar "sense of divinity" does not explain much; quite the opposite, it makes the problem more complex to a large extent. Referring to a supernatural being as the source of examined processes replaces one problem with another, considerably more complex.

The idea of *homo religiosus* developed by some of the phenomenologists of religion, is exposed to similar accusations. According to them, religious inclination is *a priori* by nature and belongs to the mental endowment of man. This standpoint was adopted by both Rudolf Otto, who accepted the existence of a religious instinct, i.e. predispositions and propensities for religion<sup>10</sup>, and Mircea Eliade, who treated the sacred as an "element in the structure of consciousness", thus making the concept of *homo religiosus* a universal concept, instead of perceiving it as limited only to the man of archaic communities<sup>11</sup>. The ideas discussed here do not explain the origin of this inclination at all; it is only treated as an assumption which does not require any further substantiation.

By contrast, the cognitive perspective is a completely new one; it enables to substantiate the hypothesis contained in the term *homo religiosus*. Its distinctiveness with regard to the standpoints presented above consists, *inter alia*, in that it offers naturalistic explanations and is based on experimental research. Cognitive studies on religion and religiosity are conducted by researchers who come from various branches, as well as by interdisciplinary teams. They usually conduct experimental research. The aim of cognitive scientists is not only to interpret religious phenomena, but first and foremost to explain them. There are many researchers who propose a certain philosophical or

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<sup>7</sup> A. Visala, *Naturalism, Theism, and the Cognitive Study of Religion*, Farnham 2011, p. 186.

<sup>8</sup> A. Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, New York 2000, p. 173.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>10</sup> R. Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, Oxford 1958, p. 115.

<sup>11</sup> M. Eliade, *The Quest: History and Meaning in Religion*, Chicago 1969, p. i.

theological interpretation, while simultaneously presenting empirical knowledge about the cognitive foundation of religiosity.

Taking the cognitive approach to religion as a base, one can indicate a number of arguments in favour of the usefulness of the concept of *homo religiosus*. These arguments include: the conviction that religion is universal; arguments built on the base of the knowledge gained by developmental psychologists involved in religiosity and its conditions; the argument from an essentially intuitive character of religious representations; the argument from the existence of cognitive mechanisms that play a significant role in the creation of the representations of supernatural beings; and last but not least, the argument based on neuroscientific research on religious experience.

The first crucial argument in favour of the religious nature of man is the conviction that religious beliefs and practices are counted among cultural universals. It is difficult to indicate a community that would be completely devoid of religion. It has been aptly expressed by Paul Bloom: "There are no atheist communities and, as far as we know, there never have been. Even within the most secular societies on Earth, the countries of Western Europe, many people are religious to at least some extent, holding certain supernatural beliefs (such as life after death) or engaging in certain religious practices (such as prayer). And in the rest of the world – in Asia, Africa, and the Americas, for instance – religious rituals and ideas are at the core of people's day-to-day lives"<sup>12</sup>. Many anthropologists and historians of religion would agree with Bloom's statement<sup>13</sup>. The problem remains, however, of how this universality of religion is understood. For sure, it cannot be understood in such a way that this or any other form of religiosity is ascribed to every individual human being. The universality of religion is cultural by nature – all cultures known to science involve certain religious ideas or practices. The universality of religion indicates the existence of certain non-cultural and universal determinants for religiosity. They can include, *inter alia*, the structure and way in which human reason functions, as well as the features of both the natural and social world<sup>14</sup>. The cognitive scientists of religion focus on the way in which the human mind operates in the first place, and particularly on the cognitive mechanisms underlying religiosity.

Other arguments in favour of the existence of religious inclination, and thus in favour of the usefulness of the concept of *homo religiosus*, originate from research on the cognitive development of children. This research indicates the considerable ease with which children acquire some concepts that are crucial for religion, as well as the way in which they use them<sup>15</sup>. The environment in which a child grows up is of great importance to acquiring specific religious convictions; however, the ease with which small children learn some religious beliefs cannot be explained solely in terms of the cultural transmis-

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<sup>12</sup> P. Bloom, *Religious Belief as an Evolutionary Accident*, in: *The Believing Primate: Scientific, Philosophical and Theological Reflections on the Origin of Religion*, J. Schloss, M. J. Murray (eds.), New York 2010, p. 118.

<sup>13</sup> S. Atran, *In Gods We Trust*, New York 2002, p. 57.

<sup>14</sup> P. Boyer, *The Naturalness of Religious Ideas: A Cognitive Theory of Religion*, Berkeley 1994, p. 3.

<sup>15</sup> J. L. Barrett, *Why Would Anyone Believe in God*, Walnut Creek 2004, p. 76.

sion of specific religious content. The ease mentioned above concerns acquiring the idea of supernatural beings in the first place. Moreover, it has been observed that children have a tendency to perceive natural phenomena as based on an extra-human design. Deborah Kelemen, who studied this phenomenon, calls this ability the “intuitive theism”<sup>16</sup>. The answer for the question where does the ease of employing ideas of supernatural beings in children come from presents many difficulties. One of available ideas indicates anthropomorphism, a phenomenon typical of man from the very early stages of development, i.e. the inclination to perceive natural phenomena, including the postulated supernatural beings, in human terms. It can be substantiated with a theory proposed by Stewart Guthrie, who suggests an evolutionary explanation of the origin of anthropomorphism in general, including religious anthropomorphism in particular<sup>17</sup>. Justin Barrett proposes a different solution. In his opinion, acquiring and employing the ideas of gods are supported by mental tools that develop in early childhood<sup>18</sup>.

Developmental psychologist Paul Bloom also indicates a peculiar naturalness of religion. He notices a certain role of culture and the natural world in the creation of religious beliefs; however, he also points out the unlearned aspects of religion<sup>19</sup>. In the first place, it refers to a common-sense dualism which is present in early childhood and expressing what belongs to the body and what belongs to the mind as two substantially distinct beings. In Bloom’s opinion, such a dualism is “a natural by-product of the fact that we have two distinct cognitive systems, one for dealing with material objects, the other for social entities”<sup>20</sup>. This dualism underlies the widespread belief in the possibility that the soul exists independently of the body and, as a result, it also underlies the idea of an incorporeal god. Moreover, it constitutes an important ground for a belief in the existence of the soul after death. In children this manifests itself in such a way that they have a problem with imagining the possibility that mental processes cease, although they are able to represent the cessation of physical processes. Children in the pre-school age, who have been subject to experimental research, show an inclination to support the conviction that in spite of the symptoms of physical death, psychological processes (such as hunger, thinking and thirst) continue to last<sup>21</sup>.

Despite the fact that religious inclination or, to put it more precisely, a set of cognitive mechanisms underlying religion, does not seem to be innate, it appears at the early stages of a child’s development and in this way it can be treated as natural. In other words, naturalness simply does not mean that religious inclination is innate. Activities and

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<sup>16</sup> D. Kelemen, *Are Children “Intuitive Theists”? Reasoning about Purpose and Design in Nature*, in: *Religion and Cognition*, D. J. Slone (ed.), London 2009, p. 99.

<sup>17</sup> S. Guthrie, *Faces in the Clouds: A New Theory of Religion*, New York – Oxford 1993.

<sup>18</sup> J. L. Barrett, *Why Would Anyone Believe in God*, op. cit., p. 77.

<sup>19</sup> P. Bloom, *Religion Is Natural*, “Developmental Science”, 2007, no. 10 (1), p. 148-149.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 149.

<sup>21</sup> J. M. Bering, D. F. Bjorklund, *The Natural Emergence of Reasoning About the Afterlife as a Developmental Regularity*, “Developmental Psychology”, 2004, no. 2 (40), p. 229.

skills can be described as natural when the persons who perform them perceive them as habitual, non-reflective and automatic. According to Robert McCauley, it is possible to distinguish between two types of naturalness: practiced and maturational. Practiced naturalness is characteristic of such skills as writing or playing the piano. They have been invented at a certain stage of development of culture, are passed on by means of culture and mastering them requires practice, usually under the watchful eye of a teacher. They become natural only after they have been fully mastered. On the other hand, maturational naturalness is characteristic of such skills as walking or speech. They appear in early childhood in every culture, regardless of the pre-oriented support from adults. They do not require the existence of a special educational context and are not specific for a specified culture. "Unlike the practiced naturalness of cultural skills, maturational skills are so fundamental to human life that their appearance helps to define what counts as 'normal'"<sup>22</sup>. Their emergence is a result of biological endowment that developed in specific environmental conditions.

The religious inclination that makes it possible to describe man with the name *homo religiosus* can be defined as a maturationally natural inclination conditioned by the activity of cognitive mechanisms, which are of an adaptive character or used to have such a character in the environment of our ancestors. This statement does not mean that religiosity as such is an adaptive feature. The dispute over the adaptability of religiosity is multifaceted. In addition, this dispute is complicated by the fact that religions encompass a prolific repertoire of behaviour; for instance, a given behaviour might favour adaptation (e.g. religious rites that integrate a community in the face of danger), whereas another might not (e.g. ritual suicide)<sup>23</sup>. However, regardless of whether religiosity might be deemed as adaptation in a biological sense or a by-product of features that are adaptations, this dispute has no fundamental importance for the idea of *homo religiosus*. Both of these ideas, presenting the evolutionary sources of religiosity, can be brought together with the conviction of the religious inclination that is characteristic of man.

Another important argument that makes it possible to substantiate the conviction of religious inclination being ingrained in human nature refers to the way in which the human cognitive system operates, and the way in which this operation influences the emergence, support and spread of religious representations understood as representations of supernatural beings. A number of cognitive mechanisms is indicated, the operation and, in some cases, cooperation of which, plays an important role in the emergence of religious ideas and beliefs. First and foremost, it is pointed out that the character of cognitive processes is not only reflective, but also – what is extremely important in the study of religion – non-reflective (intuitive). Apart from conscious cognitive processes, the mind bases on unconscious operations which automatically and immediately offer

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<sup>22</sup> R. McCauley, *Why Religion Is Natural and Science Is Not*, Oxford – New York 2011, p. 25.

<sup>23</sup> Dissimilar stances in this dispute were presented in: *The Evolution of Religion*, J. Bulbulia (ed.), Santa Margarita 2008.

solutions for problems encountered in various branches. Students of religion have not paid much attention to these non-reflective beliefs, focusing on the declared beliefs, especially in the case of religions that have systematised doctrines.

What “tools of the mind”, mechanisms and cognitive processes underlie religiosity? It is impossible to present them here in an exhaustive manner, so I will limit myself to several examples. First of all, cognitive scientists point out three branches of non-reflective knowledge. These are: intuitive physics (tacit knowledge about the rules that govern the world of physical objects), intuitive biology (knowledge concerning living beings, which allows understanding and classifying the world of living nature) and intuitive psychology (the ability to attribute mental states to other people and understand those states)<sup>24</sup>. Due to the widespread prevalence of concepts involving intentional supernatural beings in the religions of the world, it is rightly assumed that intuitive psychology plays a special role in the emergence of religious beliefs; in particular, it is a naive theory of mind which allows representing and interpreting the mental states of other people. It is indicated that the theory of mind constitutes biological adaptation and any handicap or lack of it significantly disturbs the activity of an individual in the social environment, as is the case with autism<sup>25</sup>. Although the target domain of the theory of mind is the human world – particular individuals and social interactions – its actual domain is also the extra-human world, encompassing both objects and physical phenomena and man-made objects (e.g. ascribing intentions to physical phenomena and artefacts). Mental capacity, which evolved in response to problems related to living in a social group, is unconsciously used in order to understand the culturally postulated supernatural beings.

Another cognitive mechanism which can play a significant role in the emergence of beliefs concerning supernatural beings underlies the ability to perform a fast identification of agents around us. In the opinion of some researchers, this mechanism, like the theory of mind, contributes to explaining the human inclination to anthropomorphism, i.e. expressing the extra-human world in human terms. This hypothetical mechanism, or a set of cooperating cognitive mechanisms, is characterised by a hyperactivity which causes, especially in a dangerous situation, subjects to be detected also in the areas where there are none (e.g. wandering through a forest known for the presence of bears, we have an intuitive inclination for taking a rock for a bear)<sup>26</sup>. Some researchers perceive such a mechanism as an adaptation that allowed our ancestors to effectively avoid danger and make use of chances related to collecting food. It is probable that it plays a significant role in the emergence and support of religious beliefs concerning supernatural beings.

Religious inclination also manifests itself in the ease with which the ideas of supernatural beings are remembered and in the ease with which some of them spread across culture. Religious ideas, especially anthropomorphic representations of gods, are used

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<sup>24</sup> T. Tremblin, *Minds and Gods: The Cognitive Foundations of Religion*, New York 2006, p. 66-68.

<sup>25</sup> S. Baron-Cohen, *Mindblindness: An Essay on Autism and Theory of Mind*, Cambridge 1995.

<sup>26</sup> J. L. Barrett, *Why Would Anyone Believe in God*, op. cit., p. 42-43; S. Guthrie, *Faces in the Clouds...*, op. cit.

in order to interpret various events taking place in the world of everyday life; while it is true that their character is intuitive in principle, each idea of this kind simultaneously contains a representation of a violation of at least one intuitive assumption typical of a given ontological category. For instance, the idea of the spirit of an ancestor, categorised as a person, has features typical of persons for the most part and behaves like persons one is familiar with through everyday life. The idea is consistent with the intuitive knowledge concerning other persons inasmuch as it has these features and behaves accordingly. However, such an idea also contains features that violate intuitive assumptions (e.g. the spirit of an ancestor is invisible, which does not befit the common knowledge of other persons). In the opinion of P. Boyer, a researcher of religious concepts and simultaneously an anthropologist who studies the cultural transmission of religious concepts, the intuitive features of religious concepts cause them to be easily remembered and their sparse features inconsistent with intuitive knowledge distinguish them among other concepts<sup>27</sup>. Both phenomena resulting from the structure of religious representations cause these representations to be easily processed by human cognitive systems, e.g. they are easily noticed and remembered. As a result, they also stand a greater chance to be spread within a given culture.

Neuroscientific research on the functioning of the human brain may provide subsequent arguments in favour of the observation that religious inclination has its basis in the biological constitution of man, and in the functioning of the brain in particular. Throughout the last few decades, experimental research has been conducted, focusing on the religious experience for the most part, indicating the existence of a correlation between religious experience and processes taking place in the brain<sup>28</sup>. Some of the researchers involved in this issue agree with the statement that "religiousness is associated with a specific and consistent set of biological processes"<sup>29</sup>. There are various interpretations of the results of these research projects, ranging from the extremely reductionist one to religious ones. Regardless of the way in which these research projects contribute to the evaluation of the rationality of religion, it may be ascertained that the major part of them confirm the supposition that there is a neurological base for religious inclination. At the same time, it does not mean that the conviction that there is a certain "God module" in the brain or that some "religious" processes take place there is justified. Simple solutions to such a complex problem seem unreliable with regard to the fact that the research on the neurological correlates of religious behaviour presents many technical, methodological and interpretative difficulties<sup>30</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup> P. Boyer, *Religion Explained: The Human Instincts That Fashion Gods, Spirits and Ancestors*, London 2001, p. 91-93.

<sup>28</sup> U. Schjoedt, *The Religious Brain: A General Introduction to the Experimental Neuroscience of Religion*, "Method and Theory in the Study of Religion", 2009, no. 21, p. 310-339.

<sup>29</sup> P. McNamara, *Preface*, in: *Where God and Science Meet*, P. McNamara (ed.), vol. 2, Westport 2006, p. xiii.

<sup>30</sup> W. J. Wildman, P. McNamara, *Challenges Facing the Neurological Study of Religious Behavior, Belief, and Experience*, "Method and Theory in the Study of Religion", 2008, no. 20, p. 213.



All things considered, a belief in supernatural beings gains support from many cognitive systems that cooperate with one another. Despite the fact that while studying these mechanisms it is impossible to substantiate the conviction that they produce specific religious ideas and convictions known from particular religions, it is possible to suppose that specific religious ideas are conditioned by these mechanisms in a significant manner. From the philosophical point of view, it is important that all these mechanisms, and thus the postulated religious inclination they constitute, may be explained within the area of scientific research on religion. In other words, using this perspective to answer the question why man has a cognitive disposition that makes religious representations in their basic form appear intuitive to him (maturationally natural in the meaning defined above), there is no need to refer to any supernatural cause. The disposition in question may be explained on the basis of the theory of evolution, for instance in the field of evolutionary psychology.

How could one provide a philosophical interpretation of the fact that the human mind has a peculiar religious disposition resulting from the existence of a specific architecture of that mind? One of the fundamental interpretations is the understanding of this state of affairs in a spirit of naturalism. Such an understanding appears in the works of many cognitive researchers of religion, such as Pascal Boyer, Robert McCauley, Scott Atran or D. Dennett. They consider religion to be a natural by-product of ordinary cognition. The naturalness of religion in this approach may mean different things. For instance, it can be maturational naturalness in the sense proposed by McCauley, which has already been discussed earlier, but also naturalness understood as an antithesis of supernaturalism. The latter meaning is employed, *inter alia*, by Dennett, for whom the naturalness of religion means "that it is a human phenomenon composed of events, organisms, objects, structures, patterns, and the like that all obey the laws of physics or biology, and hence do not involve miracles"<sup>31</sup>. Inasmuch as this stance is limited to methodological naturalism, it does not imply a negation of the conviction that there are some supernatural sources of religious inclination. However, when it takes the form of ontological naturalism, it thus excludes the supernatural sources of religion. The religious inclination is then explained as a by-product of the operation of cognitive systems, the emergence of which can be explained in terms of the theory of evolution.

It is also possible to employ such interpretations of religious inclination which are indeed naturalistic in the methodological sense, but they do not reject the possibility of bringing together the results of research on the cognitive conditions for religiosity and the existence of a supernatural power. I will limit myself to only one example. According to Justin Barrett, whose reasoning refers to the epistemology proposed by Thomas Reid, if we rely on research projects conducted by cognitive researchers in order to assume that religious convictions are produced by normal cognitive processes and simultaneously assume that these processes usually produce credible knowledge, on which we can then

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<sup>31</sup> D. Dennett, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon*, London 2006, p. 25.

further rely in our activity, then we will not have any reasons for rejecting religious convictions. In order to illustrate his reasoning, Barrett compares faith in God with faith in the existence of other minds. It is impossible to prove the existence of God using scientific methods, as it is impossible to prove the existence of other people's minds. Man is convinced of the existence of other minds not because he has unquestionable arguments in favour of their existence, but because automatically operating cognitive systems produce beliefs that other minds exist and ascribe specific states to them. This belief seems indispensable in social life. The same applies to the belief in God. People believe in the existence of gods because normal mental processes produce and support beliefs of this type and make them intuitively satisfying. Both belief in God and belief in others' minds matches "non-reflective beliefs generated by a host of mental tools"<sup>32</sup>. Since we trust in other convictions produced by normal cognitive processes, we can also trust in religious intuitions – at least until we find rational arguments in favour of rejecting them.

However, it is necessary to emphasise that despite the fact that philosophical interpretations of the achievements of the cognitive science of religion proceed in two opposite directions concerning the issue of the rationality of religious convictions and actions, such discrepancy does not have to appear in the case of answering the question about the religious inclination of man. Regardless of whether religion is rational, the fact remains that it is counted among phenomena that occur in all cultures known to us. Therefore, it is justified to speak of the cultural universality of religion. In other words, despite the fact that religiosity is not typical of every man, religious people exist in all cultures. The existence of religious inclination may be brought together with both extreme naturalism and the supranaturalistic stance.

The conviction that religious inclination exists, however, still runs into a significant difficulty, which has been signalled at the very beginning. How to bring together the natural inclination towards religion and the existence of a considerable number of unbelievers? I have made an attempt to answer this question somewhere else<sup>33</sup>. Here, I will limit myself to just a few remarks. Explaining unbelief in the field of the cognitive science of religion comes down to several different proposals. One of them is to indicate socio-cultural factors that exert significant influence on the forming of religiosity. The social environment may both support and limit the spread of representations constituting a by-product of the operation of the human cognitive system. Despite the fact that man is predisposed to religion in terms of cognition, an appropriate social environment may prevent such predispositions from developing. An example of such an environment can be modern societies, in particular the societies of Western Europe. Phenomena that have been widespread here, such as the advanced development of science and technology, the important role of institutionalised scepticism in the functioning of science and other social institutions, or the development of elementary education, may significantly contrib-

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<sup>32</sup> J. L. Barrett, *Why Would Anyone Believe in God*, op. cit., p. 104.

<sup>33</sup> S. Sztajer, *Naturalność religii a istnienie niewiary*, "Przegląd Religioznawczy", 2011, no. 1 (239), p. 41-54.

ute to the limitation of the role of religious convictions and behaviour. Moreover, as Barrett indicates, such an environment may influence the cognitive systems that underlie religiosity<sup>34</sup>. Another hypothesis refers to the biological diversity of the population and indicates the possibility of the existence of differences in the functioning of cognitive systems that produce non-reflective religious beliefs<sup>35</sup>. Regardless of whether we indicate the biological diversity of organisms or socio-cultural factors, it is possible to bring together the thesis on the naturalness of religion with the occurrence of unbelief.

Conclusions that can be drawn from the cognitive science of religion enable to defend the conviction that the cognitive functioning of man favours situations in which he accepts beliefs concerning supernatural beings and undertakes actions motivated by faith in these supernatural beings. It does not mean that religiosity is innate, as some theologians and philosophers believe. Innateness usually means either the presence of a given feature at the moment of birth or that it is a part or product of one's biological constitution and appears independently of environmental factors. In the case of religiosity, none of these convictions is true: (1) religiosity is not present at the moment of birth and, moreover, (2) it is shaped under the influence of environmental factors, especially those which the socio-cultural environment is composed of<sup>36</sup>. On the other hand, however, it does not mean that religiosity is an ability that was created by culture and the existence of which depends solely on the efficiency of the operation of cultural transmission, as well as various socio-cultural factors. Religiosity may be treated as a natural inclination of a maturational character, and thus as an inclination which appears spontaneously as a result of the activity of cognitive skills, the source of which can be found in the biological constitution of man and which have a certain evolutionary history. Although being a natural inclination, it is not an anthropological necessity.

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<sup>34</sup> J. L. Barrett, *Why Would Anyone Believe in God*, op. cit., p. 116.

<sup>35</sup> B. Saler, Ch. A. Ziegler, *Atheism and the Apotheosis of Agency*, "Temenos", 2006, no. 2 (42), p. 24.

<sup>36</sup> K. J. Clark, J. L. Barrett, *Reidian Religious Epistemology and the Cognitive Science of Religion*, "Journal of the American Academy of Religion", 2011, no. 3 (79), p. 649.