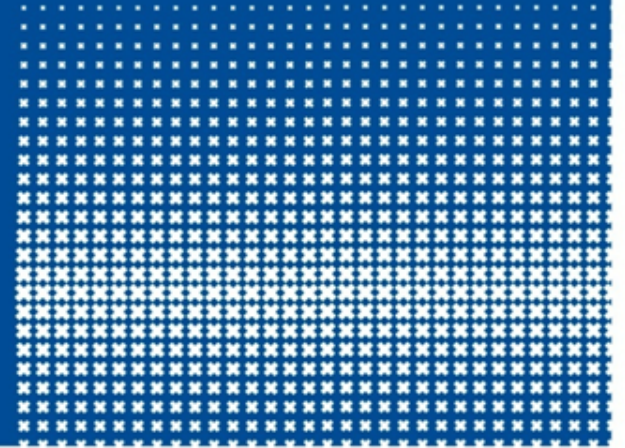




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Re-reflecting religion

Blessing rituals (?) in the Pentateuch and in Judaism

Lawson and McCauley: *Rethinking Religion* (1990, p. 125)

■ Prayers are not rituals in a technical sense:

“... the basic action structure of all religious rituals involves an object of ritual action. Religious rituals always do something to some thing or somebody. Religious rituals have an instrumental dimension [...] This is precisely the reason why concerns arise about rituals’ efficacy.

Participants perform rituals in order to bring about changes in the religious world. [...] It is worth noting that it follows on this view, that prayers are religious actions but not religious rituals.”

Key ideas on the previous slide:

- Basic action structure:
 - “... do something to some thing or somebody”
 - “... have an instrumental dimension”
- Ritual efficacy, bring about changes in the world
- Prayers as religious actions (not rituals)

Prayers (and blessings) not rituals??

- You are free to choose the definitions of your own concepts,

but:

Prayers (and blessings) not rituals??

- Prayers and blessings are integral parts of religious action systems, usually a.k.a. rituals.
 - including emotional arousals, etc.
 - incl. ritual efficacy, bringing about changes in the “world”.
- Where should we deal with prayers and blessings, if not within a theory of rituals?
- Why not include prayers and blessings into such a theory, if we can? → Rethinking “*Rethinking Religion*”

Overview: a cognitive approach to rituals and blessings

(in the Bible and Judaism)

- Representation in the mind/brain (“competence”)
 - of the action, of participants, of consequences
- Performance
- Parsing (observation)
- Learning (ontogeny)
- Evolution: historical scale and phylogenetic scale

Mental representation of ontology: and epistemological modalities

	ENTITIES	ACTIONS / EVENTS	STATE-OF- AFFAIRS
Real / universal for <i>Homo sap.</i>	Barack Obama, this chair	walking, speaking	The crop is good. It rains.
Culturally postulated	Zeus, electron	Reincarnation, short-circuiting	*
Fictive	Snow White	Time-traveling	Harry Potter is at Hogwarts
Hypothetical	Higgs boson	Big Bang	The universe is expanding
Counterfactual	The current king of France	Travelling faster than light	If I were a rich man...

* **Culturally postulated state-of-affairs**

(which may turn out not so much culturally postulated)

■ **State of being married**

- (Film about wedding among Berbers in Morocco?)

■ **Being halakhically Jewish / baptized Christian...**

- (Why is a Jew afraid of being baptized?)

■ **State of being blessed and cursed**

- (Why one cares about blessings and curses by other cultures?)

* **Culturally postulated state-of-affairs**

(which may turn out not so much culturally postulated)

■ National narratives, mythologies

- (Counter-narratives: e.g., the Talmud on Jesus.)

■ Having a religious duty. Being *yotze yedei chovato*.

- (The tolerant secular society accepts one's religious obligations, e.g. accepting that Saturday begins on Friday at 4 pm.)

Mental representation of entities

- Five (or more) ontological categories:
 - Human, animal, plant, artifact, natural object, etc.
- Ontological expectations for each category:
 - Folk-physics, folk-biology, folk-psychology, etc.
- Counterintuitive entities:
 - Violating ontological expectations.
- Ontological agents: will/volition/goal-directed

Mental representation of actions

- Roles → filled by entities
 - Agent: wilful initiator of the action.
 - Patient: passively undergoing the action.
 - Instrument: contributing to result of action without will.
 - Etc.
- Result → a state-of-affairs
- Etc.

Mental representation of state-of-affaires

- A combination of specific entities, actions/events, locations, time, etc.

Mental representation of rituals = actions with a twist

■ Roles

→ *a culturally postulated counterintuitive agent involved*

- Agent: wilful initiator of the action.
- Patient: passively undergoing the action.
- Instrument: contributing to result of action without will. Etc.

■ Result: real / culturally postulated

→ *ritual efficacy, temporary or super-permanent change.*

■ *Etc.*

Blessings (and prayers)

- Thank you to Risto for discussions about prayers.

Mental representation of blessings

- Roles:
 - Agent = speaker
 - Recipient = hearer
 - Patient/topic = text, utterance

- Results: real or culturally postulated, temporary or super-permanent change in state-of-affairs.

Mental representation of blessings: *God blesses Abraham*

- Roles: *(I believe, that's the original, basic structure)*
 - Agent = CP-CI-A
 - Recipient = human (Abraham)
 - Patient/topic = “I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.” (Gen 12,2)
- Result: culturally postulatedly super-permanent wealth.

Mental representation of blessings: *God blesses the humanity*

■ Roles:

- Agent = CP-CI-A
- Recipient = **many** humans (all humans/humanity)
- Patient/topic = “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” (Gen 1:28)

■ Result: culturally postulatedly super-permanent.

Mental representation of blessings: *Priests bless Israel's sons*

- Roles: *(I believe, that's where re-analysis began)*
 - Agent = **human**, although...
enabled and instructed by CP-CI-A (Lev 8; Num 6,23)
 - Recipient = human
 - Patient/topic = “The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.”
(Num 6,24-26)
- Result: temporary? Therefore repeated.

Mental representation of blessings: *Father blesses child(ren)*

■ Roles:

- Agent = human, **without** enabling fact/ritual
- Recipient = human
- Patient/topic = “The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.” (Num 6,24-26)

■ Result: temporary? Therefore repeated.

■ Where is CP-CI-A???

Mental representation of blessings: *Isaac and Jacob bless their son(s)*

- Roles:
 - Agent = human
 - Recipient = human
 - Patient/topic = Gen 27; Gen 48:15-16; Gen 49?
- Result: culturally postulatedly super-permanent.
(Cf. problems in the case of Isaac blessing Jacob.)
- Where is CP-CI-A? Why is it super-permanent?

Mental representation of blessings:

David blesses God

■ Roles:

- Agent = David
- Recipient = CP-CI-A
- Patient/topic = “Blessed are you, O Lord, the God of our ancestor Israel, for ever and ever.” (1Chron 29,10)

■ Result: temporary? super-permanent?

Mental representation of blessings:

Berakhot: over food, sights, news; Amidah, etc.

■ Roles:

- Agent = Jew
- Recipient = CP-CI-A
- Patient/topic = “Blessed are you, O Lord, our God, the King of the universe, who...”

■ Result: CP, temporary, and therefore repeated.

What is needed for a CSR model of blessings?

- The mental representation of speaking action.
- The mental representation of a CP-CI-A.
- The mental representation of results.

- Good news: *We have all of them for free from general cognitive science and CSR.*

Next steps

- 1) From mental representation to performance.
- 2) From performance to mental representation.
- 3) From observation to learning.
- 4) From learning to historical change.
- 5) From learning/historical change to phylogenetics

Next steps

- 1) From mental representation to performance.
- 2) From performance to mental representation.
 - Semantics ↔ syntax: how do roles map to positions?
 - Create a linear structure, a series of actions
 - Action grammars (e.g., Frits Staal; Ray Jackendoff)
 - Schemes (e.g., Victor Turner's separation / liminality / reintegration)

Next steps

3) From observation to learning:

- Principles and Parameters:
what is universal (innate or general cognitive capacity),
and what is culture-specific?
- Learning the culturally postulated modality (vs. universal)
- Observations → calibrate the culture-specific parameters.

(Learning: central to CS, ignored by CSR. But don't worry: Having related religious phenomena to everyday ones, CSR can rely on results in CS regarding the learning of everyday phenomena.)

Next steps

- 4) From learning to historical change.
 - E.g., iterative learning: imperfect learning leads to a (slightly) different mental model in the next generation.
- 5) From learning/historical change to phylogenetics
 - E.g., evolution of the universal principles, in order to optimize learning, performance, etc.

Gradual historical development of the concept of *blessing/prayer* in Judaism

- CP-CI-A blesses the human:
positive consequences for the patient.
- Human blesses human (involving CP-CI-A?) :
positive consequences for the patient.
- Human blesses CP-CI-A:
positive consequences for the agent?

Gradual “re-analysis”: due to “imperfect learning”?

Summary: Rethinking “Rethinking religion”

- Mental representation of ontology (entities, actions, state-of-affairs), including CP ones.
- The mental representation of blessings.
- From mental representation to performance (production), and back (interpretation).
- From interpretation to learning.
- From learning to historical change (to evolution).



Thank you for your attention!

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