
Fixing the reference of " God " with the Cognitive Sciences of Religion

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Résumé

Consider two philosophers of religion, Teo and Ateo, who are having a disagreement about the existence of God. Suppose Ateo gives an argument against the possibility of an omnipotent, omniscient and benevolent being... and suppose that, surprisingly, Teo concedes : " that's true, but God still exists, it's just that he isn't omnipotent ". Ateo is dissatisfied with this move : he says Teo is changing the subject and turning the dispute into a verbal, not a genuine, disagreement.

The classical solution to this problem is to say that, in order to make the debate about God's existence a *genuine* debate, we need a shared " concept " of God (Morris 1991; Michon 2006; Schmitt 2013).

This solution is too narrow : for suppose that " God ", instead of a description, were a proper name, in the sense of a Kripkean direct reference theory (Alston 1988), then the disagreement between Teo and Ateo could still be genuine without there being a shared " sense " or " concept " – this is so because there would still be a shared " reference-fixing mechanism " (though, in *that* case, it would *not* be a concept).

In neutral terms, then, the preliminary question for Teo and Ateo is : what could count as a *shared reference-fixer* for the word " God " ?

In this presentation, I will defend that the word " God " is systematically ambiguous between two reference-fixers : one is a Kripkean reference-fixer, which is historically specific to the Abrahamic religions (equivalent to the name " Yahve ") ; the other one – the one relevant for philosophy as a *universal* enquiry – has to be fixed through the fundamental descriptive concepts of human religious cognition, as they are uncovered by the Cognitive Sciences of Religion (Barrett 2012; Boyer 2015).

(299 mots)

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