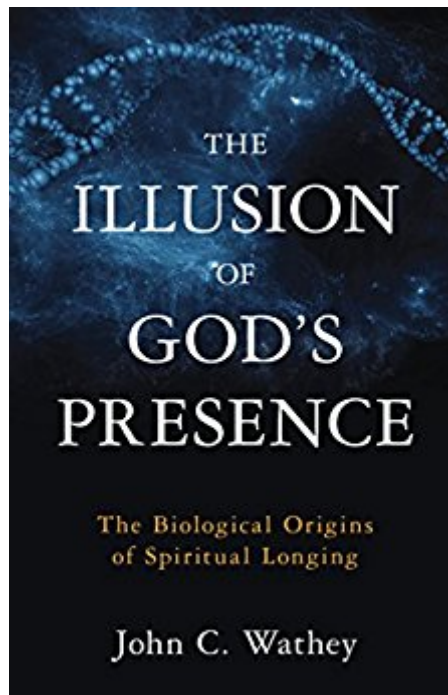


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The Illusion Of God's Presence: The Biological Origins Of Spiritual Longing



Synopsis

An essential feature of religious experience across many cultures is the intuitive feeling of God's presence. More than any rituals or doctrines, it is this experience that anchors religious faith, yet it has been largely ignored in the scientific literature on religion. Starting with a vivid narrative account of the life-threatening hike that triggered his own mystical experience, biologist John Wathey takes the reader on a scientific journey to find the sources of religious feeling and the illusion of God's presence. His book delves into the biological origins of this compelling feeling, attributing it to innate neural circuitry that evolved to promote the mother-child bond. Dr. Wathey, a veteran neuroscientist, argues that evolution has programmed the infant brain to expect the presence of a loving being who responds to the child's needs. As the infant grows into adulthood, this innate feeling is eventually transferred to the realm of religion, where it is reactivated through the symbols, imagery, and rituals of worship. The author interprets our various conceptions of God in biological terms as illusory supernormal stimuli that fill an emotional and cognitive vacuum left over from infancy. These insights shed new light on some of the most vexing puzzles of religion, like the popular belief in a god who is judgmental and punishing, yet also unconditionally loving; the extraordinary tenacity of faith; the greater religiosity of women relative to men; religious obsessions with sex; the mysterious compulsion to pray; the seemingly irrepressible feminine attributes of God, even in traditionally patriarchal religions; and the strange allure of cults. Finally, Dr. Wathey considers the hypothesis that religion evolved to foster reproductive success, arguing that, in an age of potentially ruinous overpopulation, magical thinking has become a luxury we can no longer afford, one that distracts us from urgent threats to our planet. Deeply researched yet elegantly written in a jargon-free and accessible style, this book presents a compelling interpretation of the evolutionary origins of spirituality and religion. From the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

This book has answered so many questions and is literally life changing! I was raised in a very religious household and community. I always had what I considered to be, basic and logical questions about religion and religious personal experiences and behaviors. Most science books and religious text I had read and researched just couldn't answer these questions for me in a way I could easily understand. This author has finally answered these questions (and many more I had not even thought of) in a science based, relatable, and easy to understand way! Whether you are searching for answers regarding religion, the meaning of life, or just generally interested in the topics discussed, this is THE BOOK to get! This book is so moving and thought provoking that many times while reading it I discovered I had even more questions than I did prior to beginning the book. To my delight, each chapter subsequently answered these steadily forming and pre-existing questions thus keeping this book a page turner for all inquisitive minds. For me, this book produced a deep intellectual level of examination of the religious experiences I have had personally and a self discovery that left me with some answers that finally made sense! The Illusion of God's Presence induced critical thinking and provided me with scientific hypotheses, evidence, and conclusions to evaluate that have in turn made me more compassionate human being. I am able to better understand and accept the reasons for my own perceived spirituality and the motivations of other religious people I come in contact with. Perhaps most importantly I received a comprehensive explanation of the likely causes of religious desires and experiences and its originated biology within the human brain that causes all these questions to begin with!

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