

Preface

Religious life appears to be as old as other features of human symbolic culture and appears to be inseparably interwoven with human nature. Nevertheless, a naturalistic understanding of religiousness is still in the early stages of development. Whereas Darwinian Theory was able to inspire the “major issues” of Western philosophy and to foster an evolutionary epistemology, evolutionary ethics, and even evolutionary aesthetics, a comparable “boost” with regard to religiousness has not been observed to date. It appears to be the last bastion of the anti-naturalists and is gladly used as evidence that the project of naturalizing human mind and its achievements is ultimately destined to fail. Evolutionary anthropologists and psychologists do not to accept this, in their view an unsatisfactory situation, and instead are attempting to reconstruct how religiousness came into the world from an evolutionary standpoint. For this purpose, scholars from various disciplines met at the Hanse-Wissenschaftskolleg (HWK, Institute for Advanced Studies) in Delmenhorst in September 2007, in order to combine their perspectives from evolutionary anthropology, psychology, neurobiology, cognitive studies, religious studies, and behavioral genetics. Basically, the issue was to find out with which theoretical and methodological tool a naturalistic research concept of religiousness and its evolutionary roots could be advanced. Some of the chapters in this book are revised and extended versions of presentations made at this meeting. Other pertinent contributions have been added, and all authors have taken care to present their ideas in a manner accessible to a broad readership.

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