# Science and Scientism

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Justin Barrett begins this issue with an introduction to the developing field of cognitive science and some of the insights and questions it may raise for Christian faith. In the next article, Robert Sears focuses, in particular, on what cognitive science says about how we know what we know, influenced by both religious experience and social interpretation. At the center of cognitive science lies the fact that humans look for agency. This is an important defense for survival that seems to be built into us from genes to brain. If one is living in a potentially hostile territory and sees a set of stones in a creek, spaced just about right to walk across, one would do well to consider if someone placed them there. That thought alerts the perceptive to watch for friend or foe. Just as innate for human beings is to imagine how other minds are thinking. Such is essential to the understanding and cooperation of a social world that is crucial to human survival. This skill is often called a theory of mind. Human beings have, built in, these two important interests and skills: agency detection and theory of mind. When these skills reinforce each other, humans creatively suppose gods from the Roman pantheon of Zeus and Apollo to the Nordic gods of Odin, Thor, and Freya. Some cognitive scientists then claim yet a further step, that such conjunction disproves any perception of God.

The parallel conjunction of built-in interest and ability is found in the way we learn language: language that we social creatures need to survive. We have the genetically designed brain to seek patterns in sound and to interpret them as the expression of ideas. All human beings have these two predilections and skills that enable us to seek and recognize the language of others. Combining them, can we create a language of our own? Early on, my twin daughters did. But can we also recognize the existing language of others to communicate and build relationships? Yes, and we should.

Cognitive science traces out an interesting story of how these vital abilities may have developed. However, determining whether what they may be perceiving is real, is beyond the discernment of cognitive science as a discipline. The ability to imagine a new language does not mean that every experience of language is imaginary. The ability to imagine creatively the presence of another, and to theorize how that person may be thinking, does not mean that every encounter of another, and every attempt to understand them, is an imaginary construction. Cognitive science may well trace the development of capabilities that enable us to recognize and to be in right relationship with the one God revealed in Jesus Christ. This does not mean that it excludes the reality of the God who was and is and is to come. The distinction here is another instance of the difference between science and scientism. Science is most insightful and useful if it is practiced with the modest recognition of both what it achieves, and just as important, what it does not.

In our next article, Philip Senter and Jared Mackey log the increasing tension in the publications of the Creation Research Society between acknowledging genetic degeneration and still resisting the recognition of vestigial structures. Sy Garte then considers whether the evolution that we observe must be as purposeless as is often assumed.

The book review section includes a critical review of a book by Patrick Franklin, who is in charge of our *PSCF* book review section. It is titled *Being Human, Being Church: The Significance of Theological Anthropology for Ecclesiology*. While Franklin would have been scrupulously objective in passing on the reviewer's critique, this review was neither commissioned nor edited by Franklin. Without Franklin's involvement, the reviewer has much that is positive to say about the book. A hearty congratulations and appreciation to Patrick Franklin for such an important contribution. ✠

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