Modes of religiosity and the history of Jewish rituals

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Overview

• Lawson and McCauley 1990 (revised): a model of religious rituals
• McCauley and Lawson 2002: unbalanced ritual systems, the “tedium effect” and “splinter groups”
• “Theologically correct” Judaism...
  ... and alternatives thereof.
Overview

• Lawson and McCauley 1990 (revised): a model of religious rituals

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Lawson and McCauley 1990 (revised): a model of religious rituals

- Cognitive science of religion: approaches religious phenomena as biological phenomena, viz. products of the human mind (instead of: historical phenomena, social phenomena, etc.)

- Religious phenomena = everyday phenomena with a twist.

- Rituals = actions with a twist.

- Twist here: CP superhuman agent present.
Lawson and McCauley 1990 (revised): *a model of religious rituals*

- **Cognitive science of religion:**
- Rituals = actions *with a twist.*
- Action representation system:

  ![Diagram](image)

  - **agent**
  - **patient**
  - **instrument**
  - **place, time, beneficiary**...

- Twist here: CP superhuman agent present.
Lawson and McCauley 1990 (revised): *a model of religious rituals*

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- **Cognitive science of religion** – motivation:
- Action representation system universally mirrored by human language:
  - Subject ≈ agent: wilful initiator of the action.
  - Object ≈ patient: passive undergoer of action.
  - Instrument: contributing to the result of the action without will.
  - Etc. *But in fact more complex than that…*
Lawson and McCauley 1990 (revised): *a model of religious rituals*

- **Cognitive science of religion** – motivation:

  1. John broke the window with the hammer.
  2. John broke the window.
  3. The hammer broke the window.
  4. The window was broken.
  5. The window was broken by John.
  6. The window was broken by the hammer.
  7. The window was broken with the hammer.
  8. *The window was broken with John.*

**Syntactic positions:** subject, object, etc.

**Semantic roles:** agent, patient, etc.
Lawson and McCauley 1990 (revised): a model of religious rituals

• Examples:

John broke the window with the hammer.

\[
\text{BREAKING EVENT} \quad \begin{bmatrix} \text{AGENT} & \text{PATIENT} & \text{INSTRUMENT} \\ John & \text{window} & \text{hammer} \end{bmatrix}
\]
Lawson and McCauley 1990 (revised): *a model of religious rituals*

- **Examples:** a prior, enabling action

  *A hammer, thrown by John, breaks the window.*

Biró (2013). ‘Is Judaism boring?’
Lawson and McCauley 1990 (revised): a model of religious rituals

- **Examples:** ritual = action with a twist

  - John feeds the child.
  - John offers food sacrifice to the local deity.

Biró (2013). ‘Is Judaism boring?’
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- **Examples from Judaism:**

  *Eating matzah on the 15\textsuperscript{th} of Nisan*

  \[
  \begin{align*}
  \text{EAT} & \quad \text{\underbrace{\begin{array}{c}
  \text{AGENT} \\
  \text{PATIENT} \\
  \text{TIME}
  \end{array}}_{\text{MOMENT IN TIME}}} \\
  \text{\underbrace{\begin{array}{c}
  \text{DAY} \\
  \text{ENABL.}
  \end{array}}_{\text{TALKING-ACTION}}} & \quad \text{\underbrace{\begin{array}{c}
  \text{AGENT} \\
  \text{UTTERANCE}
  \end{array}}_{\text{CPS}}} \\
  \text{\underbrace{\begin{array}{c}
  \text{Jew} \\
  \text{unleavened bread}
  \end{array}}_{\text{}}} & \quad \text{\underbrace{\begin{array}{c}
  \text{Nisan 15} \\
  \text{\textit{I shall eat \textit{m} on \textit{m}}} \quad \text{‘I shall eat \textit{m} on \textit{m}’}
  \end{array}}_{\text{}}}
  \end{align*}
  \]

Biró (2013). ‘Is Judaism boring?’
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- **Examples from Judaism:**

  *Immersion in the mikveh*

  \[
  \begin{align*}
  \text{IMMERSION} & \quad \text{AGENT} \quad \text{woman or convert} \\
  \text{AGENT} & \quad \text{INSTRUMENT} \quad \begin{cases}
  \text{WATER} \\
  \text{QUANTITY} \quad 40 \text{ seah} \\
  \text{SOURCE} \quad \text{natural}
  \end{cases}
  \end{align*}
  \]

Biró (2013). ‘Is Judaism boring?’

*Where is the superhuman agent?*
Lawson and McCauley 1990 (revised): a model of religious rituals

• Examples from Judaism: circumcision

Biró (2013). ‘Is Judaism boring?’
Lawson and McCauley 1990 (revised): *a model of religious rituals*

(Biró 2013, ‘Is Judaism boring?’ ; *and elsewhere*)

**Lawson & McCauley 1990 applied to Judaism:**

- requires references to time and place,
- requires negations for prohibitions
- requires *enabling states of affairs* (instead of / beside *enabling rituals*)
- prior narratives (enabling non-ritualistic past actions)
- ...

Many actions considered as Jewish rituals lack a superhuman agent in their structure!
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Types of rituals:

- Form:
  - special agent ↔ special patient
  - special instrument

- Sensual pageantry:
  - high ↔ low

- Frequency:
  - low ↔ high
Modes of religiosity:

- Fieldwork on Pomio Kivung in Dadul village (a cargo cult in Papua New Guinea)
- Observes a “splinter group outburst” with new high-arousal rituals.
- *Doctrinal modes versus imagistic mode.*
- “The Pomio Kivung ritual system is unusual in that it includes *no* special agent rituals.”
  (McCauley and Lawson 2002: 180)
Types of rituals:

- **Form:**
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Types of rituals:

- Form:
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  - low

- Frequency:
  - low
  - high
McCauley and Lawson 2002

The “tedium effect” and “splinter groups”:


“The consequences of excess conceptual control: deflated balanced system.”
The “tedium effect” and “splinter groups”:


“The tedium effect induces perturbations in the stable stage of unbalanced systems.”
Hypothesis

Judaism lacks a balanced ritual system, therefore:

• tedium effects?
• splinter groups?

Well, yes and no.

It is more complicated than that.
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“Modes of Judaism”

- Theologically (halakhically) correct
- Folk religion
- Popular interpretations of Judaism
- “Splinter groups”
- Revising the theory
The hasidic tish:

A high-arousal and special-agent GIVING-EVENT.

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:%D7%94%D7%A8%D7%91%D7%99 %D7%9E%D7%91%D7%95%D7%98%D7%95%D7%A9%D7%9B%D7%9F_%D7%91%D7%A2%D7%A8%D7%99%D7%90%D7%9F_%D7%94%D7%A9%D7%95%D7%9C%D7%97%D7%9F_%D7%94%D7%98%D7%94%D7%95%D7%9A.jpg
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The changing / re-interpreted role of the rabbi

- Is the rabbi a “Jewish priest”?
- Is the rabbi a “Jewish phd”?

- Priestly blessing pronounced by post-war non-orthodox Hungarian rabbis:
  - József Schweitzer (1922-2015)
  - Alfréd Schöner (1948-)
  - István Darvas (1974-)
Thank you for your attention!

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