

that rubric, and I have tried to construct my theoretical framework on that more recent research.

For this book, one of the most important insights I draw from the cognitive sciences is the influence of automatic and unconscious cognitive processes on our conscious and reflective cognition. In simpler terms, our subconscious thought precedes our conscious thought and can and does influence and even conflict with it. Within the cognitive science of religion, this insight is most commonly manifested in the concept of “dual-process cognition,” which is usually and unfortunately represented as a dichotomy that divides “intuitive cognition” (quick, automatic, linked to the mind’s “default settings”) apart from “reflective cognition” (slow, conscious, open to contextual influence; Evans and Stanovich 2013; De Neys 2014; Morgan 2014; White 2021, 39–41). Many scholars have identified a variety of cognitive processes underlying our cognition that can straddle both sides of this proposed dichotomy (Glöckner and Witteman 2010; Mugg 2016; Grayot 2020). My interest in this model is focused on the capacity for cognition to operate unconsciously, which has been demonstrated by an array of experimental data, as has the potential for such unconscious cognition to influence and to conflict with more reflective cognition (Kelemen, Rottman, and Seston 2013; Järnefelt, Canfield, and Kelemen 2015; Järnefelt et al., 2019). In cases of such conflict in a person’s cognition, they may apply reflective reasoning to the justification, explanation, or elaboration of the intuitive response (I refer to this as “rationalizing”), or they may employ reflective reasoning to revise or override it (I refer to this as “decoupling”).

This cognitive conflict again raises a rather significant impediment to the study of deity that was briefly discussed above, namely the widespread scholarly prioritization of reflective and emic explanations in reconstructing the fundamentals of thought regarding deity from the available texts.²³ The overwhelming majority of emic explanations of deity—past and present—represent reflective reasoning about deity. Such reasoning, however, tends to be influenced by identity politics and power structures, and it is less likely to be relevant to the origins of the deity concepts. One result of the centering of this reflective reasoning is an insistence on treating the conceptualization of and engagement with deities and divine images as something unique, transcendent, and/or ineffable.²⁴ This may

²³ This prioritization obviously extends beyond just accounts of deity concepts. Theological explanations for ritual also tend to represent rather ad hoc rationalizations that serve the structuring of power and often have little to do with the historical and cognitive underpinnings of ritual acts (cf. Whitehouse 2021, 40–46). As Claire White (2021, 40) notes, “belief is often a poor predictor of behavior.”

²⁴ Note Sommer’s suggestion that “an interpreter should first of all at least consider the possibility that we can understand a religious text as manifesting religious intuitions that are essentially timeless” (Sommer 2009, 97). The next chapter will demonstrate that these