

Have the Neurosciences Any Theological Consequences?

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Michael Persinger published in 1987 a study on the *Neuropsychological Basis of Human Belief*, where he claimed to have found a causal correlation between the frequency of epileptic seizures affecting the left temporal lobe of human beings, and the frequency of their religious experiences. More recently, Rhawn Joseph has argued along the same lines in *The Transmitter to God. The Limbic System, The Soul, and Spirituality* (2000). On the other hand, research on the neural correlate of religious experiences, such as Buddhist and Christian meditation, have become an interesting line of research. The fact that a neural correlation of every religious experience can be identified, has led some authors to put forward the thesis that religion is fully explainable in terms of neural activity. I will try, first, to clarify whether we are allowed to identify neural correlation of any human experience (its necessary condition) with its causation (or sufficient condition). Secondly, I will discuss the difference between internalist and externalist approaches in the study of the mind in general, and of the neural correlate of religious experiences, in particular. And thirdly, I will attempt to understand whether the neurosciences fully explain the complexity of religious experience.

1. Alfredo Dinis, “Implicações teológicas do evolucionismo biológico de Teilhard de Chardin”, in *Derivas 2005*, edited by A. Ferreira & P. Pereira (Universidade de Aveiro, Aveiro, 2005), pp. 61-88.
2. Alfredo Dinis “Has neuroethics killed moral philosophy? On Paul Churchland’s neurobehaviorism”, in *Analyses*, edited by S. Miguens *et al.* (Faculdade de Letras, Porto, 2006), pp. 80-90.

Alfredo Dinis graduated in Philosophy at the Catholic University of Portugal (1979) and in Theology at the Gregorian University of Rome (1985). He obtained an M.Phil. and a Ph.D. in History and Philosophy of Science from the University of Cambridge, UK (1986 and 1989). Since 1989 he has been lecturing in Philosophy of Science, Logic, and Cognitive Science at the Faculty of Philosophy of Braga (Portugal), where he is also at present the Faculty Dean. He is the President of the Portuguese Society for the Cognitive Sciences. His present research is centred upon the philosophical, ethical and theological consequences of recent developments in biology and in the cognitive sciences.