

Religious differences in temporal discounting: Calvinists, Catholics and atheists

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Previous evidence has revealed that religious systems, defined by explicit precepts, have specific effects on action control processes. The present study is aimed at investigating whether different religions also modulate choices that involve higher order knowledge. We tested Dutch Calvinists (DC), Italian Catholics (IC) and Atheists from both cultures (DA; IA) using an intertemporal choice task between an inferior immediate monetary reward and a superior delayed one. Resting on both the Calvinist theory of predestination and the Catholic cycle of sin-confession-expiation, we predicted a reduced delay tolerance, i.e. higher discount rate (*DR*), for IC compared to DC, and an intermediate *DR* for both DA and IA. Analyses on discount rates supported our hypotheses. We also found confirmation of a magnitude effect on temporal discounting, and further investigations on time latencies showed faster responses for large rewards than for small ones, regardless of the specific culture/religion. Different interpretations are discussed, arguing that the temporal discounting is specifically modulated by religious upbringing, and not by generic cultural differences.

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