No global *kumbayah* implied: Religious prosociality as an inherently parochial phenomenon

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In a recent critique, Martin and Wiebe (henceforth MW) address what they view as several fatal shortcomings in contemporary evolutionary approaches to religious prosociality. MW present an argument that 1) begins by accusing many vibrant research programs of an "untrammeled preoccupation with prosociality" that leads to a faulty prediction of a "global *kumbayah*" (p. 1), and 2) argues that researchers with a keen eye on history and current events would be able to easily overcome an obsession with prosociality and instead recognize the clear role of intergroup conflict that is endemic to religions. Furthermore, MW stress that researchers in the field claim that *only* religious prosociality can explain large-scale cooperation and that they ignore many other historical and political causes.

We wholeheartedly agree with MW that religious prosociality has not produced a global *kumbayah*. However, we think it would be hard to find a religious prosociality researcher who actually endorses MW's description of the field. While religions may promote cooperation among coreligionists, they obviously and frequently drive conflict between groups. Just as MW suggest that researchers broaden their focus to include history and conflict, we suggest that readers of MW should similarly broaden their focus to include the claims actually made by the proponents of religious prosociality. Namely, such a reading should include the large amount of empirical research and theorizing by religious prosociality researchers regarding history and conflict that, unfortunately, did not make the final cut of MW's critique.[4] We highlight two overlapping findings characteristic of the field, that 1) religions often foster ingroup cooperation, *and* promote outgroup enmity (i.e., parochial altruism), and 2) while it isn't the only binding force, many elements of religion make it especially good at promoting large-scale (within-group) cooperation.

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4. In a footnote, MW briefly mention Norenzayan's new book, which came out after they wrote their critique. Of the ten chapters in this book, three (chapters 5, 8, and 9) explicitly deal with religious conflict and between-group competition.

Religions practice what they preach: Parochial altruism

Which is most characteristic of religion: theological directives such as the "Golden Rule" or its opposite, "Eye for an eye"? The short answer is, both. Neither religions, nor any other factor proposed as a mechanism facilitating the rapid scaling up of human cooperation in some groups over the past twelve millennia promote universal helping behavior, nor should they be expected to (e.g. Atran and Ginges 2012; Atran and Henrich 2010; Graham and Haidt 2010).

In the evolutionary sciences, cooperation has long been seen as a particularly challenging puzzle. For cooperation to get off the ground, individuals must incur personal costs in order to provide benefits to others. Usually selfish strategies outcompete cooperative ones, except in special cases such as kinship or repeatedly interacting dyads. However, these mechanisms make poor candidates for explaining the recent diversity and flourishing of large-scale cooperation actually witnessed in *Homo sapiens* (e.g. Henrich *et al.* 2006). Just as cooperation rapidly increased in the last twelve millennia, so has the emergence and stability of religions endorsing big moralizing gods. These two puzzles may actually answer each other (e.g. Norenzayan 2013). The central premise of religious prosociality is *not* that religious people indiscriminately cooperate with others. Rather, it is that some religions may include features that were conducive to promoting *ingroup cooperation*, and as a result *outcompeted* rival religions over the course of cultural evolutionary history. In short, successful religions have had norms promoting ingroup cohesiveness and cooperation. In fact, many religious narratives instructing compassion and fairness were intended to apply only to the ingroup (e.g. "Love thy neighbor as thyself," referring only to other Israelites). Indeed, current research conducted within a framework that views religion as an inherently parochial promoter of altruism focuses specifically on conflict and cooperation as two sides of the same cultural evolutionary coin.

Within psychology, religion researchers have used a variety of methods to document how parochial altruism often leads to enmity and aggression towards outgroups. For example, participants exposed to religious priming display more implicit and explicit racial prejudice (Johnson, Rowatt and LaBouff 2010), show increased support for suicide attacks (e.g. Ginges, Hansen and Norenzayan 2009), show increased vengeful behavior (Saroglou, Corneille and Van Cappellen 2009), and show increased negative attitudes towards atheists, outgroup religions, and gays (Johnson, Rowatt and Labouff 2012). The case of anti-atheist prejudice is especially instructive, as the logic of religious prosociality was instrumental in making, testing, and ultimately supporting many hypotheses regarding this particularly puzzling form of outgroup enmity (e.g. Gervais, Shariff and Norenzayan 2011).

Importantly, a recent study has explicitly investigated the link between religiosity and discriminate prosociality (i.e., assisting the ingroup but not the outgroup). Preston and Ritter (2013) found that people were more likely to think that their religious leader would want them to help an ingroup family in need (versus an outgroup family) and, after having their religious identity activated were more likely to donate to an ingroup charity (versus an outgroup charity). This dual focus on cooperation and competition is not hidden deep within the religious prosociality literature. Indeed, the third sentence of Norenzayan and Shariff's article stresses how critical parochial altruism is to the evolution of religious prosociality: "Social science theories have long pointed to religion as a cultural facilitator of social cohesion and ingroup solidarity…*often at the expense of rival groups*" (2008, 58, emphasis added). MW point out that history reveals at least as much religious conflict as religious cooperation. A thorough reading of the current literature on the parochial nature of religious prosociality similarly reveals as much about religious conflict as religious cooperation.

It's the conflict that drives large scale cooperation

Almost everyone who ever lived has been religious, but up until about 12 millennia ago, religions lacked organized leadership, unified doctrine about supernatural agents, formalized costly rituals, and gods that proscribed behavior (Boyer 2001). However, our species' heavy reliance on intergenerational cultural learning, in combination with new ecological and social pressures, may have promoted the spread of prosocial religious norms that promoted large-scale cooperation *within circumscribed religious groups* (see Atran and Henrich 2010; Norenzayan and Shariff 2008). While the timeline of the emergence of "moralizing Gods," and the extent to which they may have facilitated large-scale cooperation can be debated (see Baumard and Boyer 2013; Norenzayan 2013), the success of some religions over others cannot.

While religion is not unique in its ability to garner ingroup cooperation, it is particularly good at promoting intergenerational transmission of its concepts by harnessing innate learning biases (Atran and Henrich 2010). These biases however, are insufficient in explaining how norms toward ingroup prosociality have become so intertwined with some successful religious traditions. *Competition* between alternative stable sets of norms across human groups creates conditions in which it may be culturally adaptive to generate and adopt ingroup prosocial norms (Atran and Henrich 2010). It's well noted that lethal and nonlethal intergroup competition appears to have been constantly present throughout human history and prehistory (Bowles 2006; Keeley 1996). Graham and Haidt (2010) argue that in this backdrop, cultures that were able to use religion to bind the

group together would have gained a significant advantage over less cohesive groups.

   Roes and Raymond (2003) tested this hypothesis by examining ethnographic data from a diverse range of human societies. They found that 1) more competition between societies existed in environments rich in natural resources, 2) that larger societies tended to occupy these areas, 3) that these larger societies experienced more intergroup conflict, and, critically, 4) that they more often had religions endorsing big moralizing gods. Of course, we expect that multiple components can promote prosociality (as MW do). Henrich and colleagues (2010) conducted three behavioral experiments across 15 diverse populations, ranging from Hadza foragers to Shuar horticulturists. They found that—in addition to belief in big moralizing gods—degree of market integration predicted norms about reciprocity and fairness, and that society size positively covaried with punishment in economic games. Religious prosociality does not imply *solely* religious sources of prosociality.[5]

Shared research questions

We believe that when the findings emerging from the psychological study of religious prosociality are cast in the appropriate light, their claims are well supported by both research and history. While *ingroup* prosociality may have been central to the cultural evolution of large-scale cooperative efforts, it did not culturally evolve without (often violent) competition with other religious groups. Oftentimes, it is the conflict between groups that creates the cultural selection pressures for cooperation within groups. This, in turn, selects for a religious psychology that can both espouse the "golden rule" amongst fellow ingroup members and concurrently promote outgroup aggression, xenophobia, divisiveness, and ethnocentrism.

   As a final thought, we'd like to turn readers' attention to the recently initiated *Cultural Evolution of Religion Consortium* based at the University of British Columbia and Simon Fraser University (http://www.hecc.ubc.ca/cerc/project-summary/). The consortium brings together researchers from a diverse range of fields (including history) and has a number of projects ranging from the creation of a database of religious history to addressing parochial altruism and outgroup hostility—all of which MW raise as points that religious prosociality researchers allegedly ignore. We'll leave it up to the judicious reader to critique the findings in the religious prosociality literature, but by reframing and correcting MW's brief characterization of religious prosociality, we hope that readers will

   5. That said, secular institutions and markets make poor candidates for explaining the origins of large-scale cooperation, since both institutions and markets require cooperation to exist in the first place.

see far more points of convergence than divergence in our research foci and goals. This will not promote global *kumbayah*, but perhaps it can promote a bit more *kumbayah* among researchers approaching big questions about religion, cooperation, and conflict from different disciplines.

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