Religion as Parochial Altruism

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To Understand Religious Conflict, We Need to Understand that...

- Intergroup competition sig factor in human genetic & cultural evolution (e.g., Bowles, 2006)
- **Parochial altruism**: sacrifice for ingroup + hostility to outgroup
- Organized religions $\rightarrow$ cohesive, cooperative groups
- Same principle explains why religion unites and divides
Outline

- How religion unites
  - Cooperation & trust

- How religion divides
  - Religious prosociality is not universal
  - Supporting Suicide attacks: organized attendance vs. belief
How religion unites
Problem: Big Groups

Solution: Big Gods
Puzzle of Cooperation in Large Groups

- **Kin Altruism** (inclusive fitness)
- **Reciprocal Altruism** (reputation-driven)

- Cooperation among Kin
- Limited Cooperation among Dyads

Cooperation in large groups
Religious Prosociality
(Norenzayan & Shariff, 2008, *Science*)

- Moralizing Supernatural Agents (cultural)
- Supernatural Monitoring
- Extended Cooperation and Trust in Large Groups
- Costly Commitment
Pressure From Above
Shariff & Norenzayan, 2007; Norenzayan & Shariff, 2008
see also: Bering et al 2005; Pichon et al, 2007

God Concepts
Secular Concepts
Control

Measure generosity:
how much $ offered to anonymous other?
Self-reported Belief in God

median split by belief in God

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Non-Believers</th>
<th>Believers</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bottom half</td>
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<td>top half</td>
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Difference is *ns* at *p*=.75. *n*=50.
Study 2: Community Sample

Religious Primes ➔ Feeling Watched?

Public: Right now, I am concerned about what other people think of me
Religiosity in Trust Games
(Tan & Vogel, *J Econ Psy*, 2009)

Proposer
$10

Decision 1
$10 \times 3 = $30

Responder
$30

Decision 2
$15$15
Mean deviation of offer from baseline to Responders of each religiosity level by Proposers of different religiosity
How religion divides
Bin Laden vs. Gandhi paradox
Religion and Intergroup Conflict

» "Religious faith deserves a chapter to itself in the annals of war technology, on an even footing with the longbow, the warhorse, the tank, and the hydrogen bomb.”
   --Richard Dawkins

» “Religion is a remedy to help reduce the conflict and suffering in the world, not another source of conflict.”
   --The Dalai Lama
Universal or discriminate prosociality? (Shariff & Norenzayan, in progress)

Theological correctness vs Psychological plausibility

Christian ppts. play Dictator Game with Christian vs Muslim
Freethinkers as Freeriders?

“Surely you recognize the equal citizenship and patriotism of Americans who are atheists?” -- Rob Sherman

“No, I don't know that atheists should be considered as citizens, nor should they be considered patriots. This is one nation under God.” -- George H. W. Bush
Freethinkers as Freeriders?

“…those are not at all to be tolerated who deny the being of a God. Promises, covenants, and oaths, which are the bonds of human society, can have no hold upon an atheist. The taking away of God, though but even in thought, dissolves all”

(J. Locke, Letter Concerning Toleration, 1689)
Atheists Least Liked Group in America

“I would disapprove if my child married a member of this group” (2003)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Atheist</td>
<td>47.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>33.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>27.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian-American</td>
<td>18.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>18.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1. Gallup Data, Willingness to Vote for Presidential Candidates
Panel A

Feeling Thermometer

Atheists  Gay Men  People in General

Target

Panel B

Thermometer Rating (relative to People in General)

Distrust  Disgust

Trait

Representative US Sample (N=350)

(Gervais, Shariff, & Norenzayan, in prep)
Dislike: hostile, hate vs. kind, friend
Distrust: lying, dishonest vs. dependable, honest
Suicide Attacks

- Suicide attacks (SA): extreme form of “parochial altruism” (Choi & Bowles, 2007)
- Dramatic worldwide rise of SA since 2000:
  - 142 between 1983-2000 (Pape, 2005)
  - 500 just in 2006
- Most SA carried out by “religious groups”
- Groups need active and passive support
- Does “religion” encourage support for SA?
The Case of parochial altruism: Support for Suicide Attacks

- Devotional (belief) -- prayer
- Coalitional -- collective participation
- Empirical overlap (r=.4) but distinct constructs
- Different components of religion → different consequences?
Two Hypotheses

- Religious Belief Hypothesis (e.g. Harris, 2004)
- Coalitional Commitment Hypothesis
Support for Suicide Attacks
Ginges, Hansen, & Norenzayan, 2009

- Study 1: Muslim Palestinians (representative)
- Study 2: Muslim Palestinians (student sample)
- Study 3: Orthodox Jewish settlers in WB
- Study 4: Cross cultural sample

- Prayer frequency vs. religious attendance
- Demographic and attitude controls
A newspaper report of Mahmud Muhamad Shaldan which describes him as a “martyr ... sacrificing himself before the age of 18” while killing three Israeli soldiers in Gaza on the 2nd of December 2002.
Support for martyrdom attacks against Israel

Regular attenders 2.11 times more likely to support

$Wald = 12.11$, 95% CI for OR = 1.16--3.02, $P=0.01$

No independent effect of prayer frequency

Control variables: gender, age, economic satisfaction, education, refugee status, support for Oslo process*, support for sharia*
Agreement that “Islam encourages or requires martyrdom attacks”

Regular attenders 3.58 times more likely to support

\[ Wald = 14.45, \text{ 95\% CI for OR}=1.45--6.47, \text{  } P=0.004 \]

No independent effect of prayer frequency

Controls: gender, age, economic satisfaction, education, refugee status*, ID with Hamas & PIJ*, dehumanization of Israelis.
The tombstone of Baruch Goldstein which describes him as “murdered as a martyr of God”. On the 25th of February, 1994 Goldstein died while killing 29 Muslims at prayer, and injuring 60 others, in the “Cave of the Patriarchs”, a site holy to both Muslims and Jews located in Hebron, the West Bank.
Percent calling suicide attack "extremely heroic"

- Prayer Prime
- No Prime
- Synagogue Prime

P = .09

P = .04
10-Nation (BBC) Survey of Religious Beliefs

- Mexico (Catholic)
- Great Britain (Protestant)
- Russia (Orthodox)
- India (Hindu)
- Indonesia (Muslim)
- Israel (Jewish)

4704 participants
52.7% female
age 18 to over 55
Variation in SES & income
Major religious groups

Joint agreement with:
1) “I am willing to die for my God (beliefs)”
2) “I blame other religions for the problems of the world”
Odds of supporting combative martyrdom

Controls: age, sex, SES, education, human dev index

HDI* partly explains c-c variability
Alternative Accounts

- Self-selection of religious attendees; militant imams; recruitment & propaganda in mosques

- Not a counter-explanation
  - Controlled for support for political Islam, Hamas / PIJ
  - Controlled for support for peace process
  - Causal evidence in experiment with Jewish settlers
  - Cross cultural replication
Another Objection

- Prayer/meditation less predictive of religiosity / belief in God than religious attendance?
  - “Religion important in my life” (Palestinian sample)
    prayer 6.6 X; attendance null
  - “I believe in God” (cross cultural sample)
    prayer 7.4 X; attendance 2.6 X
Things you might have heard that I didn’t say…

- Religious attendance is bad
  - Many positive benefits (social capital, happiness, health)
- Political/historical context unimportant
  - Religious attendance can mobilize groups according to the context
- To be prosocial we need religion
  - Religion an old social technology; secular institutions are new but can be effective too
Conclusions & Implications

- Religious conflict and religious prosociality are two sides of the same coin
- Different features of religion → different outcomes
- "Reframing" group boundaries
Thank You!

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