

(additionally) “counterfactual” (which is not a distinguishing property). Or again, A&N's discussion of “hair-triggered folkpsychology” (now more commonly referred to, following Barrett 2000, as “hyperactive agent detection”) seems to underplay evidence that the evolution of such mechanisms owed as much to the needs of developing hominid hunting and tracking techniques as to the avoidance of predators (see Mithen 1996).

3. Largely inspired by Sperber (1985).

4. Without disputing this argument, it may be noted that it could have been rendered more precisely. For example, how are nonrecoverable costs to be identified and quantified?

5. Obvious examples of agents assumed to lack any supernatural properties and yet whose teachings have evinced precisely the kinds (and intensities) of commitment that A&N restrict to the religious sphere, would be the 20th-century communist leaders of the USSR, China, Cuba, and elsewhere.

6. Ibid.

A proper faith operates with the acknowledgement of risk, and, hence, a true religion with that of sacrifice

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Abstract: The authors are working with a limited notion of religion. They have confined themselves to a view of it as superstition, “counterintuitive,” as they put it. What they have not seen is that faith does in a real sense involve a paradox in that it projects an impossibility as a methodological device, a fictive ploy, which in the best interpretation necessarily involves a commitment to the likelihood of self-sacrifice.

Atran & Norenzayan (A&N) are operating with a too narrow and, therefore, distorting concept of religion. A first sign of this is their restricting their definition of faith to virtually one of superstition, but to put the objection in such a form would ignore the error of their starting point. In relying on early 20th-century anthropologists and sociologists (e.g., Durkheim 1915/1976; Malinowski 1922/1961), they fail to see what Clifford Geertz has emphasized: the prior importance of symbolic action as regards religion (Geertz 1973). One can go further than Geertz in claiming that religion can be seen to arise from the very nature of language, that is, what makes us human. Though this claim would form a “commitment theory,” it does not fall to their criticisms that it cannot account for the “imperceptibility” of a deity nor for the demand for sacrifice (sect. 1).

It can be argued that the idea of a god as ideal guide and end of activity lies as a *presupposition* of the initial stance in an act of communication. Central to the latter is the notion of an ideal singular referent being projected intersubjectively as a guiding regulative idea (see, for example, the work of the psycholinguist Ragnar Rommetveit [1974, Ch. 4]; the sociologist Alfred Schutz [1962, pp. 3–47]; and the linguist Sir Alan Gardiner [1932, pp. 71–82]). This initial mutual act is required for the two partners in a communicative act to obtain what is only an *imperfect* coordination of their understandings (the logical subject of a statement), but it is one which allows enough of an overlap in understanding to allow a putative improvement of the hearer's perspective (via the provision of the logical predicate) upon the so-far-presumed-to-be-common “referent.” This constitutes the dynamism of the informative statement, far removed from the static world of the sentence. A simple example: A says to B, “You know that mat that we both know about in the same way?” – “Yes,” says B – “Well, we don't know about it in the same way, for it has a cat on it.” As Rommetveit puts it, because of the differences in our individual sensory and perceptual takes on the world, we must “take a *perfect* intersubjectivity for granted in order to achieve a *partial* one” (Rommetveit 1978, p. 31; see also Wright 1992).

The implication is that the “everyday world of readily percepti-

ble substances and events,” the “commonsense ontology” (sect. 1.1.), is only a convenient fiction that enables us to move our understandings around on the real. This is the “space of reasons” that Wilfrid Sellars proposed in which our concepts *move* (Sellars 1956/1997). It provides the human evolutionary advantage over other species, in that it enables the rate of adaptation to be increased throughout the species (for those lower down the evolutionary scale, the draconian device of the survival of the appropriate variation-by-mutation being the only mode of adaptation).

The further implication is that, when this act first occurred in evolutionary history, this initial coordination was achieved by chance, but this did not necessarily involve a *conscious* act of trust. The partners on the first and succeeding dialogues took it for granted that a *singular* entity was being sorted out mutually, for, when the statement had taken its course, the idealization of singularity could move on to its new position apparently seamlessly. Nevertheless, the act which looks for all the world like an act of trust (that A and B were both referring to the “same mat”) is only a pseudo-trust. This pseudo-trust can only become a proper faith when the partners acknowledge the risk of real contingency in whatever has been agreed upon in the act of communication. (A&N rely on an unexamined notion of “trustworthiness” [sect. 1.2].)

A proper faith, and this has been acknowledged in the best of religion, has consequently to accept the fact of risk, a stance which is at the opposite pole from superstition (Wright 2002). Again at its simplest: Each says to the other, “We are taking for granted that we are neglecting all that we consider negligible,” but to *take for granted* is not to know, because what A is considering negligible – that is, so not worth mentioning as to be ignored by her – may not be what B considers not worth mentioning. The risk in what is left unsaid cannot be discounted in the philosophical analysis, for the result, at its worst, could possibly be tragic, requiring the *sacrifice* that a true faith implies. Faith – and religion that inevitably comes to take account of its open paradox (“Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief”) – is therefore more than mere superstition and, significantly for A&N's argument, has its scientific origin earlier than they have characterized it.

Furthermore, it restrains them from using their keyword “counterintuitive” of what faith is, for, if it is a mutual hypothesis held merely as a regulative idea, a *methodological* ploy, it has an unreal aspect as an act of reciprocated imagination as well as a real one; and it is this that has misled them into seeing religion as centred on the unreal. It is clear that A&N are taking an unduly rationalist view of religion. Persons imagining something together and each knowing that they are doing it, are doing something perfectly “intuitive,” obviously real. This brings the notion of faith well within a scientific view which rejects the idea of a realist god and yet which sees an openly imagined goal of faith as a necessary performance for language as for society in general. Such a view, that of an *as-if* god, is being put forward by many radical theologians, of whom Don Cupitt is a notable example (Cupitt 1980), and an “as-if” god is an “imperceptible” one. Durkheim, typically, was quite unable to recognize the possibility of religion based on the imagination, specifically rejecting the notion as counterintuitive (see his castigation of Comte for proposing an “artificial religion”; Durkheim 1915/1965, p. 474).