

8 Natural Nonbelief in God

Prehistoric Humans, Divine Hiddenness, and Debunking

Matthew Braddock

8.1 Introduction

Consider the problem of natural nonbelief (Marsh 2013). Prehistoric humans apparently did not believe in God. Why is that so, if God exists? The problem is difficult because their nonbelief was “natural,” or rooted in evolutionary, cognitive, and cultural factors beyond their control. According to the cognitive science of religion, the human mind naturally disposes us to believe in various supernatural agents, not just the God of theism. According to the cultural evolution of religion literature, religious concepts had the following historical trajectory: “beginning, roughly, with ancestor spirits, animism, polytheism, henotheism and then eventually moving on to theism, at least in some regions” (Marsh 2013: 363). The “concept of a High God appears to be a relative latecomer in the cultural history of religion” (Marsh 2013: 356). The empirical literature thus seems to indicate that prehistoric humans failed to believe in God because they were naturally restricted by their mind and cultural environment to concepts of highly limited supernatural agents. But why would a loving God design their mind and place them in their environments only to “hide” from them? The natural nonbelief of prehistoric humans is much more surprising given theism than metaphysical naturalism. Thus, it constitutes strong evidence that theism is false, or so Jason Marsh (2013) has argued.

The problem of natural nonbelief is an interesting debunking argument that invokes the origins of religious belief to cast doubt upon theism. Marsh (2013) takes his genealogical story to be empirically confirmed by the cognitive science of religion, the cultural evolution of religion, and the ethnographic record. From this story he derives the skeptical conclusion about theism by relying on premises from the divine hiddenness literature. Like all debunking arguments, Marsh’s argument can be tested by examining its genealogical claims and their alleged skeptical implication. In this chapter, we put it to the test and argue that it falls short on both counts. First, we argue on empirical grounds that it is not clear that natural nonbelief was prevalent: the empirical jury is still out on what prehistoric humans believed about gods. Second, we argue that even if natural

DOI: 10.4324/9781003026419-10

nonbelief was prevalent, it would not be very surprising given theism: any shock would be diminished by a minimally inclusive form of theism and the fact that prehistoric humans plausibly had access to an implicit relationship with God. We conclude that natural nonbelief presents no problem for theism. We also turn the tables and suggest that the real problem in the neighborhood is the problem of widespread belief in God (or common consent), which is a problem for naturalism.

8.2 The Problem of Natural Nonbelief

In this section, we explain the problem of natural nonbelief. Marsh encapsulates it here:

The problem ... is that the kind of mind we possess, along with the way in which our religious concepts have evolved, has contributed to much nonresistant nonbelief throughout history. ... [M]illions and millions of people have, in many cases naturally, failed to believe in a theistic or theistic-like God.

(2013: 357)

To understand the problem, we must clarify terms. *Nonbelief* refers specifically to the nonbelief of *prehistoric humans* in a theistic or theistic-like god. A *theistic god* is the God of theism, an “unsurpassably powerful, intelligent, and loving God” who has “designed the world” (Marsh 2013: 351). A *theistic-like god* is a similar “high god” but is less specified. Marsh does not define what a high god is, but his usage shows that he is working with the standard definition in the empirical literature, which is sociologist Guy Swanson’s classic definition.¹ Swanson reviewed the types of gods found in simple societies and defined a *high god* as a supreme “spirit who is said to have created all reality and/or is reality’s ultimate governor” (1960: 209–210). Of course, to create or govern all reality, this supreme god must be super-powerful and super-knowing, so high gods are understood to possess these attributes to a high degree.

Marsh contrasts high gods with “highly limited” supernatural agents who are “only a little more powerful than man” (2013: 356). For example, “some spirits affirmed in certain regions of Africa want to eat people’s children but can be outsmarted if parents refer to their children as ugly” (Marsh 2013: 358). The empirical literature also contrasts high gods with “small gods,” highly limited supernatural agents who lack creator status. Belief in a high god often coexists together with belief in small gods such as demons, angels, souls, ancestor spirits, and spirits inhabiting the natural world. Belief in a primary high god can also coexist with belief in lesser (low to intermediate) gods whose superhuman powers fall somewhere along the spectrum. Belief in a high god is thus compatible with animism and polytheism.

Marsh's important distinction between a *theistic god* and a *high god* shows an understanding that concepts of God can be thicker or thinner and that prehistoric nonbelief in the highly specified "omni" God of theism is not the problem for theism. That is, the problem is not that prehistoric humans naturally failed to believe in a creator god who is strictly speaking omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly loving (and omnipresent, omnibenevolent, eternal, necessary, and so on). For theists, as Marsh observes, would affirm that such conceptually sophisticated beliefs about God are not necessary for humans to have a relationship with God (Leech and Visala 2011: 310–311). Consider an analogy: a small child can believe and trust in his father without knowing much about his father. So, too, is there a distinction between *knowing God* and *knowing about God* (what God is and what God has done). Even if a child, an isolated indigenous person, or Abraham did not know much about God initially—even if they had some mistaken beliefs about God—they could still have known God. A relationship with the God of theism requires something conceptually thinner and more inclusive than full-blown theistic belief, something like "belief and trust in a high moral God" (Marsh 2013: 357) or "an underlying inchoate sense of Him" (Leech and Visala 2011: 311).

However, Marsh claims that prehistoric humans lacked belief in a high god and even the concept of a high god. Instead, their religious concepts were restricted by their minds and cultural environments to highly limited and sometimes mean supernatural agents. Their nonbelief was *natural* and *nonresistant* "in the sense of being built into the physical or biological structure of the world, and being generally outside the scope of human agency and control" (2013: 355). Marsh argues that *naturalism*—"the claim that no supernatural agents exist" (2013: 351)—predicts the natural nonbelief of prehistoric humans much better than theism. Thus, natural nonbelief provides strong evidence that theism is false.

Marsh formally describes the phenomenon of natural nonbelief here:

Natural Nonbelief (NN)

For a variety of biological, cognitive, and environmental reasons, early humans ... originally lacked a concept of God and were religiously restricted to concepts of limited, and sometimes mean, supernatural agents. As a result, many early humans ... failed to believe in God or in anything like God. The nonbelief in question was both naturally occurring and nonresistant.

(2013: 359)

Notice an ambiguity. Is Marsh claiming that the concept of a high god was (i) *nonexistent* or (ii) *extremely rare* among prehistoric humans? The overall textual evidence favors (i), but his argument could also run on (ii).

However, neither claim (i) nor (ii) is empirically confirmed, or so we argue in the next section.

Marsh formally presents the problem of natural belief (i.e., his main argument) as follows:

The Problem of NN

- (P1) We know [NN] to be true (or at least [NN] is very plausible).
 - (P2) Naturalism has much more predictive power with respect to [NN] than theism.
 - (P3) Naturalism starts out at least as plausible as theism (i.e., naturalism is at least as probable as theism independent of all evidence).
 - (C) So, other evidence held equal, theism is very probably false.
- (2013: 359)

Marsh takes the evolutionary, cognitive, and cultural origins of religious belief to indicate that prehistoric humans were naturally restricted to concepts of highly limited supernatural agents, belief in a high god came much later in cultural history, and thus theism is probably false. The problem of NN is thus a type of debunking argument against religious belief.

Debunking arguments invoke the origins of belief to cast doubt upon it. The “debunking” category is vague. What is debunked or undermined? The justification of the belief, the truth of the belief, or what? The debunking literature distinguishes between epistemological and metaphysical debunking, with the former dominating the discussion (Wielenberg 2010: 442).² *Epistemological* debunking arguments invoke the origins of belief to cast doubt upon its epistemic status as justified or knowledge by indicating that such beliefs are not reliable, truth-tracking, sensitive, safe, or otherwise epistemically kosher. For example, in Braddock (2016), we developed the debunking argument from false god beliefs, which invokes the origins of religious belief to cast doubt upon the reliability and justification of our (non-inferentially formed) theistic beliefs. But justification and truth are two different matters: showing that my belief in God lacks justification does not show that my belief in God lacks truth. *Metaphysical* debunking arguments invoke the origins of belief to cast doubt upon its metaphysical status as true by indicating that such beliefs are false or that their purported referent (e.g., God) does not exist. For example, various empirical theorists and philosophers have invoked the cognitive science of religion to cast doubt on theism; however, their arguments are not well developed (Leech and Visala 2011: 308–310, Van Eyghen 2020: chap. 4). Marsh’s argument is also a metaphysical debunking argument, which invokes the origins of religious belief to cast doubt on theism. However, unlike extant debunking arguments in this genre, his argument is well developed.

Like all debunking arguments, Marsh's argument needs premises to bridge the gap between his genealogical story and the debunking conclusion. He relies on divine hiddenness considerations to bridge that gap (see also Leech and Visala 2011: 310).³ Why think that (P2) is true, that naturalism better predicts NN? Marsh's answer is that "a perfect God would desire to enter into a divine-human relationship with early humans" and thus "naturalism makes [NN] comparatively much more likely than theism" (2013: 359). Naturalism is indifferent regarding whether prehistoric humans would believe in a high god. But if the loving God of theism exists, then presumably he would desire a relationship with prehistoric humans and make such a relationship possible for them during their earthly lives (not just in the hereafter). But this relationship was made impossible for them, not because they resisted it but because their minds and environments prevented them from acquiring belief in or even the concept of a high god (2013: 354–355). And it is impossible, Marsh claims, for humans to have a relationship with the God of theism without at least having the concept of a high god (2013: 367). So, the puzzle is this: why would a loving God design their mind and place them in their environments only to "hide" from them? Their NN is much more surprising given theism than naturalism.

To understand Marsh's hiddenness argument, we must make two observations. First, Marsh is not arguing from nonresistant nonbelief in general; rather, he is focusing on a specific type of nonresistant nonbelief delineated by historical and temporal boundaries, namely, the *natural* nonbelief of *prehistoric humans* during the course of their *earthly* lives. Second, Marsh's hiddenness argument is not deductive like Schellenberg's (1993) classic argument, that is, he is not arguing that God's loving character and nature *entails* the absence of NN. Rather, he is advancing an evidential version of the argument: God's loving character and nature would lead us to *expect* there to be no NN.

We have explained the problem of NN as a metaphysical debunking argument against theism, which relies on premises drawn from the divine hiddenness literature. Marsh motivates the existence of NN by drawing from the empirical literature. Next, we explore and critique his empirical case.

8.3 Was NN Prevalent Among Prehistoric Humans?

Marsh's debunking argument can be tested by challenging its empirical claims about the genealogy of religious belief. Marsh claims that "a concept of a High God appears to be a relative latecomer in the cultural history of religion" (2013: 356). Was NN prevalent among prehistoric humans, with the concept of a high god coming much later in cultural history? Marsh says "we know" this to be true. Other philosophers and empirical theorists have made similar claims about prehistoric nonbelief (Norenzayan 2013, Peoples et al. 2016, Goldman 2019: 170–174,

De Smedt and De Cruz 2020). Confession: *mea culpa* (Braddock 2016: 272–273). Claims about the original form of religion and its evolutionary sequence have a long history (Sharpe 1986), and many academics and ordinary people have uncritically accepted the story that religion began with a rudimentary belief in animism or small gods. But could this evolutionary story be a myth, a story told and retold so many times that everyone “knows” it to be true?

According to Marsh “the testimony of scientists and religious scholars combined with our knowledge of how cultural evolution works supports [NN]” (2013: 359). Marsh appeals to the cognitive science of religion, the cultural evolution of religion, and the ethnographic record (2013: 354–358). However, a closer inspection of the empirical literature reveals that they do not confirm NN: the jury is still out on what prehistoric humans believed about gods.

8.3.1 *The Cognitive Science of Religion*

Does the cognitive science of religion (CSR) confirm NN? Marsh invokes the following passage from Justin Barrett, a leading CSR theorist:

Commonly scholars in the cognitive science of religion (CSR) have advanced the naturalness of religion thesis. That is, ordinary cognitive resources [for e.g. agency detection devices, theory of mind capacities, creationist biases, dualist biases, and a tendency to recall and spread minimally counterintuitive or MCI narratives] operating in ordinary human environments typically lead to some kind of belief in supernatural agency and perhaps other religious ideas. Special cultural scaffolding is unnecessary. Supernaturalism falls near a natural anchor point.

(Marsh 2013: 356)

Marsh interprets Barrett to be saying that according to CSR “the human mind is naturally disposed to believe in various forms of supernatural agency and not just theism” (Marsh 2013: 356). This interpretation is accurate: Barrett and the CSR literature claim that we are not disposed to believe in one and only one type of god. However, the problem is that this claim does nothing to support NN. Even if we are not disposed toward high gods *only*, we could still be disposed toward high gods. Moreover, even if we are not disposed toward high gods whatsoever, it would not follow that prehistoric humans lacked such concepts, for they could have acquired them from experience and cultural-historical sources (e.g., culturally transmitted information).

In fact, the CSR literature indicates that humans are naturally disposed toward high gods or at least very similar supernatural agents, which suggests that prehistoric humans may have possessed such concepts too. To be clear: our natural bias toward high god concepts would not prove that

prehistoric humans possessed such concepts, but it would boost its probability.

According to CSR, the human mind is naturally disposed to believe in the existence of supernatural agents but not just any supernatural agents.⁴ Rather, we are disposed to believe in supernatural agents with certain attributes rather than others. Our disposition is *content biased* rather than content neutral. How should this content bias be characterized? Justin Barrett's (2011, 2012b) review of the CSR literature is useful. He summarizes much work in CSR when he identifies 13 religious beliefs or "core natural intuitions" to which we are developmentally and cross-culturally disposed. He calls this set of beliefs *natural religion*, the "religious thoughts that naturally developing cognition encourage people toward" (2012b: 322). More than half of them concern supernatural agents or "gods." In effect, the content of these beliefs helps characterize the content bias of our disposition to believe in supernatural agents. Barrett's useful summary runs as follows:

- (A) Elements of the natural world such as rocks, trees, mountains, and animals are purposefully and intentionally designed by someone(s), who must therefore have superhuman power (Kelemen 2004).
- (B) Things happen in the world that unseen agents cause. These agents are not human or animal (Guthrie 1993).
- ...
- (E) Immoral behavior leads to misfortune; moral behavior to fortune (Jose 1990; Hafer and Bègue 2005).
- ...
- (H) Gods exist with thoughts, wants, perspectives, and free will to act (Guthrie 1993; Barrett 2012a).
- (I) Gods may be invisible and immortal, but they are not outside of space and time (Barrett and Keil 1996; Barrett 1999).
- (J) Gods can and do interact with the natural world and people, perhaps especially those that are ancestors of the living, and hence, have an interest in the living. This interaction with the world accounts for perceived agency and purpose in the world that cannot be accounted for by human or animal activity (Barrett 2008; Bering 2006, 2002; Boyer 2001).
- (K) Gods generally know things that humans do not (they can be super-knowing or superperceiving or both), perhaps particularly things that are important for human relations (Boyer 2001; Barrett and Richert 2003).
- (L) Gods, because of their access to relevant information and special powers, may be responsible for instances of fortune and misfortune; they can reward or punish human actions (Bering and Johnson 2005; Johnson 2005; Boyer 2001; Bering and Parker 2006). (Barrett 2012b: 322)⁵

The content bias of our disposition to believe in supernatural agents can thus be described as follows:

humans are disposed to believe in non-human, invisible, disembodied, immortal, super-powerful, super-knowing, super-perceiving, infallible, morally interested, punishing/loving, causally active, and minded agents (with beliefs, desires, intentions, character, and free-will) who possess creator or designer status.⁶

Although some of these attributes are not the maximal attributes of the God of theism—who is *all*-knowing, *all*-powerful, and *omnipresent*—this cluster of attributes is still recognizably *theistic-like*: these attributes approximate to a significant extent the attributes of the God of theism and other high gods. Barrett (2012b) makes this point salient when he juxtaposes the 13 beliefs composing *natural religion* with 13 basic doctrines of Christian theism. He suggests that basic doctrines of Christian theism are “only small elaborations” of natural religion. These doctrines include “The Creator of the cosmos is God,” “God is invisible and immortal,” “God knows everything,” “God punishes immoral behavior and rewards moral behavior,” “God, angels, and demons are persons with minds,” and “Some happenings in the world are caused by God, angels, or demons” (Barrett 2012b: 323).

Rather than being naturally disposed toward atheism, agnosticism, apatheism (indifference to gods), or only to supernatural agents like ourselves, much of the CSR literature indicates that humans are disposed toward supernatural beings with this rather odd theistic-like cluster of attributes that we find nowhere in the natural world. Humans seem naturally bent toward a high god, which could help explain why around 90% of the global population currently believes in a high god.⁷

To be clear: the CSR literature does not say that humans *inevitably* will believe in a high god, for two reasons. First, our cognitive dispositions do not *by themselves* produce religious belief: some environmental or cultural input is necessary, although it need not be a special experience or extensive teaching. Second, countervailing influences such as cultural factors can work in the other direction and lead humans to alternative religious beliefs or worldviews that do not affirm a high god. The contingency of high god beliefs is evidenced by the fact that cultures have gone in different religious and secular directions. But CSR does indicate that humans are naturally *disposed* to believe in high gods.

To sum up, the cognitive science of religion not only fails to confirm NN but appears to disconfirm it. The point is rather straightforward and shouldn't get lost in the details of a literature review. For instance, Deborah Kelemen's (2004) work shows that humans find intuitive the idea that the world was created or designed by a super-powerful god (see also Petrovich 2019). Is it so hard to believe, then, that prehistoric humans

with the same cognitive dispositions might have also believed in a high creator god?

8.3.2 *The Ethnographic Record and Ethnographic Analogy*

Next, turn to the ethnographic record. For support, Marsh refers to the ethnographic record as analyzed by sociologist Rodney Stark (2007). Marsh claims that NN is supported by the fact that most of the cultural groups examined by Stark do not acknowledge a high god (2013: 358). Does the ethnographic record or Stark's analysis of it support NN?

The *ethnographic record* refers to the descriptions that we have of pre-industrial cultural groups from across the world, which were mainly written in the 1800s and early 1900s by travelers, anthropologists doing observational fieldwork, and their informants. Some empirical theorists like Stark take this contemporary record to give us evidence about what prehistoric humans were like during the late Pleistocene period before the agricultural revolution about 10,000 years ago. The relevant modern groups are picked out in different ways by different theorists, but the presumption is that they are analogs of prehistoric humans because they share a similar material environment, social structure, and/or subsistence economy (e.g., a hunting and gathering way of life). If certain attributes are prevalent among the relevant contemporary groups, then some theorists conclude by analogy that they were probably prevalent among prehistoric humans too (Rossano 2010: 62–63; Peoples and Marlowe 2012; Norenzayan 2013: 121–123; Johnson 2016: 51; Sanderson 2018: chap. 6, 249–250). This speculative inference is called an “ethnographic analogy,” and its use is controversial among anthropologists, archaeologists, and other empirical theorists, *especially* with regard to attempts to infer the content of prehistoric ideological or religious beliefs, such as what prehistoric humans believed about gods (Hodder 1982, Hayter 1994, Currie 2016).

Consider two reasons for doubting that ethnographic analogies can establish what prehistoric humans believed about gods. First, the analogy is weak. Just because groups are similar in some respects does not mean that they are similar in other respects. The analogy's strength depends on whether the alleged similarities between contemporary humans and prehistoric humans are empirically confirmed and relevant to the content of their god concepts. It is difficult to confirm similarities because we know so little about prehistoric humans and our ethnographic data are limited. And it is not clear that the alleged similarities are relevant. For instance, even if we could confirm a similar material environment, social structure, and subsistence economy, it is not clear that contemporary humans and prehistoric humans are likely to share the same god concepts, unless we suppose (implausibly) that such socio-economic factors robustly determined their content. Second, consider the context-sensitivity of religious

beliefs: religious beliefs can easily change over time in response to changes in cultural information (e.g., background beliefs), socio-political conditions (e.g., who has power over cultural transmission), and the individual and collective actions of human agents. This context-sensitivity is evidenced by the fact that cultural groups have historically gone in all sorts of religious and secular directions. And we know that contemporary groups, including hunter-gatherers, have arrived at their present condition through various cultural pathways, often involving a complex history of interaction with outsiders (Lee and Daly 1999: 3). Since the content of religious belief is fairly context-sensitive, it seems we cannot reliably infer what prehistoric humans believed about gods from what contemporary humans believe about gods.

Empirical theorists who use ethnographic analogies to infer prehistoric religion justify their inferences by suggesting that the relevant modern groups are the *best analogs we have* to prehistoric humans, and we don't have much else to rely upon (Rossano 2010: 62–63; Norenzayan 2013: 121–123). For instance, Stephen K. Sanderson writes:

With respect to the evolution of technologies, economies, and politics, the archaeological and historical records are full enough so that comparative ethnographies are less essential than they are in the case of other social and cultural phenomena. The historical record of religion is reasonably good relatively speaking ... but the prehistoric record is much thinner. For this reason, the comparative method becomes essential. ... Despite this method's limitations, there is no realistic alternative.

(2018: 250 n. 1)

However, even if certain contemporary groups are the best analogs available—even if they are better analogs than chimps and other human groups—it does not follow that they are *good* analogs: they appear to be the “best of a poor lot.” Rather than invoke a weak analogy and the absence of other sources of evidence, it seems more intellectually honest to say that we just don't know what prehistoric humans believed about gods.

In this context of ethnographic analogy, Marsh invokes Stark's (2007) analysis of the ethnographic record. Stark examined 300 cultures described in the database known as the *Ethnographic Atlas of World Cultures* (Murdock 1967, Murdock 1981). This atlas or collection of information was developed by anthropologists to represent the ethnographic record. Anthropologists such as George Murdock reviewed the primary ethnographic literature on hundreds of preindustrial cultural groups. They interpreted and numerically coded this qualitative data to catalogue the presence or absence of certain defined attributes in each group, such as whether the group believed in high gods, with the atlas following Swanson's definition of a high god as a “spirit who is said to

have created all reality and/or is reality's ultimate governor" (Murdock 1967: 52; Swanson 1960: 209–210). The resulting database permitted subsequent researchers like Stark to do cross-cultural studies of belief in high gods without having to wade through all the primary literature.

The *Ethnographic Atlas* reports the following results: out of 748 cultural groups, 63% of them acknowledged a high god, whereas 37% of them did not (Murdock 1967). However, Stark (2007) limits his analysis to "only the most primitive groups" in the atlas, for example, hunter-gatherer groups and nomadic tribes. Stark's results were these: out of the 300 groups he analyzed, 57% of them acknowledged a high god. Out of the 120 hunter-gatherer groups he analyzed, 40% of them acknowledged a high god (Stark 2007: 60–61).

Does the *Ethnographic Atlas* or Stark's analysis show by analogy that prehistoric humans had no concept of a high god? Clearly not. After all, a substantial proportion of the cultural groups Stark examined *do* acknowledge a high god. Moreover, if a substantial proportion of prehistoric humans did acknowledge a high god this would put pressure on Marsh's claim that the nonbelief of others was *natural* "in the sense of being built into the physical or biological structure of the world, and being generally outside the scope of human agency and control" (2013: 355).

The ethnographic record is also standardly represented by the database known as the *Standard Cross-Cultural Sample* (Murdock and White 1969), which describes a subset of 186 groups that feature in the larger *Ethnographic Atlas*. This sample is generally accepted by social scientists as better for testing cross-cultural hypotheses because its groups are well described, more distributed across the world, representative of each region, and more likely to be historically independent from one another (White 2008). Does this database support NN? Clearly not. A majority of the groups affirm high gods. Out of 186 groups in the database, there were enough data to permit coding on high gods for 168 of the groups. The result was that 60% of the groups (100 out of 168) acknowledged a high god, including a substantial proportion of the sample's hunter-gatherer groups. It could be argued that a majority of the sample's hunter-gatherer groups did not believe in a high god (Peoples et al. 2016; Sanderson 2018: 13–15). But even so, and even if such groups were a good analogy to prehistoric humans, it would not follow that prehistoric belief in a high god was nonexistent or extremely rare.

Finally, it is worth consulting what standard textbooks on comparative religion and the history of religion tell us about the ethnographic record. These textbooks tell us that belief in a high god is fairly common among indigenous peoples. For instance, Ninian Smart observes that

[t]he idea of a supreme High God is quite widely held by small-scale peoples. In most, if not all, of the indigenous cultures of Africa there

is a belief in a supreme Spirit ruling over or informing lesser spirits and gods. He governs natural forces, dwells on high, is inexplicable, creates souls, men, and all things.

(Smart 1996: 22)

David Noss and Blake Grandgaard observe that “it begins to appear, when all of the evidence is considered, that practically all of the Australian tribes held a belief in some kind of high god” (2018: 22).

The ethnographic record does not confirm NN. But consider a revision of the problem of NN. Marsh could invoke the ethnographic record to argue that even though belief in a high god was common, belief in a specifically “moralistic” high god was extremely rare. Both the *Ethnographic Atlas* and the *Standard Cross-Cultural Sample* describe a culture’s high god more specifically by sorting each culture’s religion into one of the following four categories:

- A high god absent or not reported in substantial descriptions of religious beliefs.
- A high god present but otiose or not concerned with human affairs.
- A high god present and active in human affairs but not offering positive support to human morality.
- A high god present, active, and specifically supportive of human morality.

In the *Ethnographic Atlas*, high gods were present in 63% of the groups (471 out of 748), but only 24% of the groups (181 out of 748) were coded as having high gods who were “present” and “active in human affairs” and “specifically supportive of human morality” (Murdock 1967). In the *Standard Cross-Cultural Sample*, high gods were present in 60% of the groups (100 out of 168), but only 23% of the groups (40 out of 168) were coded as having high gods who were “present” and “active in human affairs” and “specifically supportive of human morality” (Murdock and White 1969). Marsh could invoke these data to argue by analogy that NN in a specifically *moralistic* high god was prevalent among prehistoric humans, which is surprising given theism.

However, this revision of the problem is unpromising, for a number of reasons. First, the categorization of whether a high god was “active in human affairs” and “specifically supportive of human morality” was determined by the subjective interpretation of travelers, anthropologists doing fieldwork, and the later coders of their descriptions. The actual people described were not asked whether their gods cared about morality, with the definition and scope of morality being made explicit. Researchers raise serious doubts about the accuracy and reliability of this

coding for “moralistic” high gods. For instance, Purzycki et al. (2018) observe:

High Gods that are specifically “moralistic” are determined by coding qualitative ethnographic data on a five-point categorical scale: such gods are “Present, active, and specifically supportive of human morality.” However, it is unclear what constitutes being “supportive of human morality,” how such ethnographic data were coded, how ethnographers, travelers, and the coders of their subsequent writings determined what constitutes “human morality” and its “support,” and what kinds of things gods might care about that do not constitute “human morality.”

(104)

Moreover, the question of whether a high god counts as moralistic is theoretically vexed. Is being morally concerned identical to being “nice” as opposed to being “mean” (McKay and Whitehouse 2015)? Since moral concern and concern for human affairs come in degrees, how much concern does it take? Second, the smaller minority of cultural groups coded as believing in a specifically moralistic high god (as defined above) is still a sizable minority, which undermines the claim that belief in such a god was nonexistent or extremely rare among prehistoric humans. Finally, this revision of the problem of NN would still rely on a questionable ethnographic analogy of the sort we have already critiqued.

8.3.3 *The Cultural Evolution of Religion*

What does the cultural evolution of religion literature say? Marsh suggests that the cultural evolution of religious concepts had the following trajectory: “beginning, roughly, with ancestor spirits, animism, polytheism, henotheism and then eventually moving on to theism, at least in some regions” (2013: 363)? Such evolutionary stories have a long and influential history. “Evolutionists” of the late 1800s

regarded it as axiomatic that religion had developed out of modest beginnings, in animism, animatism, magic, totemism or whatever, and that a genuine belief in personal deity had emerged only gradually, as the end product of an inordinately long and slow process.

(Sharpe 1986: 178–179)

For instance, the founder of British anthropology Edward Burnett Tylor in his *Religion in Primitive Culture* (1871) proposed three stages of cultural evolution: religion originated with animism in primitive cultures (belief in human souls and then nature spirits), it evolved into polytheism in more advanced cultures, and then eventually took the form of

monotheism in civilized cultures. For support, he invoked the ethnographic record: the “stone age religion” of animism is prevalent in current-day “primitive” cultures. More recently, archaeologist Steven Mithen (1996: chap. 9) traces the origins of religion to totemism, animism, and ancestor spirits, and psychologist Matt Rossano (2010) traces it to ancestor worship, animism, and shamanism.

But such evolutionary sequences are controversial, and their empirical basis remains dubious (Insoll 2004: 46–47). The ethnographic record does not confirm them, as we have seen. Belief in a high god is often found in the simplest groups and coexists with belief in small gods, so it is not clear which came first. Did small gods precede high gods or *vice versa* (or did they coexist together)? Did religious belief begin with high gods in some parts of the world and with animism in other parts of the world? The ethnographic record apparently cannot tell us: “Discerning the origin of religion may be a fruitless enterprise, at the very least in terms of ethnographic evidence as it is possible to discern monotheism or ‘high gods’, ‘animism’ and belief in impersonal forces in the same societies at the same time” (Sutherland 2017: 91).⁸

The historical (written) record also does not confirm such evolutionary sequences, for high gods appear in the earliest records. Norenzayan et al. (2016: 47: 50) summarize historical data showing that

once the earliest written records appear, which help determine more precisely the content of ancient religious beliefs, we find powerful gods [high gods] concerned with public prosociality playing a central role in ancient societies as diverse as ancient China, Egypt, and Mesopotamia.

Moreover, the relevant empirical literature consistently tells us that we don’t know what prehistoric humans believed about gods. For instance, Purzycki (2013: 165) observes that “while many traditional [small-scale hunter-gatherer] societies appear to have moralistic (Boehm, 2008) and omniscient deities ... just how widespread such beliefs are/were within such societies remains unknown.” Even empirical theorists who motivate evolutionary sequences observe that the jury is still out. For instance, Peoples et al. (2016) use comparative phylogenetic methods (which are controversial) and a small sample of current-day hunter-gatherer groups to try to reconstruct the sequence of the cultural evolution of religion. But they concede that “despite established speculations [from Edward B. Tylor] about various beliefs and behaviors that may represent an original form of religion, specific traits of nascent religiosity, and the sequence in which they emerged, have remained unknown” (2016: 262). Examples of such agnosticism could be multiplied.

However, we should consider a recent theory in the cultural evolution of religion literature that claims that prehistoric humans did not believe

in “big gods” or moralistic high gods. This is the *big gods theory* developed by Ara Norenzayan (Norenzayan 2013, Norenzayan et al. 2016). His theory seeks to explain two puzzles: the rise of big cooperative societies and the cultural prevalence of belief in big gods or “powerful, omniscient, interventionist, morally concerned gods” (Norenzayan 2013: 7–8). The overwhelming majority of us live in big societies and believe in a big god. Why is that so? Consider two core claims of his theory.

First, the cultural group selection hypothesis: after the agricultural revolution gave rise to sedentary and larger groups (some 12,000 years ago), belief in moralistic high gods proliferated by cultural group selection because it enabled humans to sustain cooperation in larger groups. Cooperation is costly, and the temptation to free ride is stronger in larger groups in which it is easier to get away with it and remain anonymous. Thus, groups that believed in powerful, all-knowing, morally concerned gods who monitored and enforced cooperative behavior were more likely to exhibit such behavior, live in larger groups, outcompete other groups without such beliefs, and thus successfully transmit their beliefs to others. Norenzayan’s hypothesis is that this cultural evolutionary process explains the prevalence of belief in moralistic high gods and is at least one important contributor to the rise of large cooperative societies.

Second, Norenzayan derives from his hypothesis the “small gods for small groups” prediction: prehistoric humans did not believe in moralistic high gods, for they lived in small face-to-face groups and thus could sustain cooperation with social monitoring—no big invisible cops needed.

Could Marsh rely on the *big gods theory* to establish prehistoric non-belief?⁹ It appears not. Norenzayan’s cultural group selection hypothesis, even if true, would not show that prehistoric humans failed to believe in moralistic high gods. He intends his hypothesis to explain the *spread* of such beliefs, not their *origination*. Such beliefs originated, he suggests, as by-products of the natural dispositions described in the cognitive science of religion (Norenzayan 2013: 8–10, 15–19). But we observed earlier that such dispositions are biased toward high god concepts, which suggests that prehistoric humans may have believed in a high god.

Is Norenzayan’s prehistoric prediction true? Did prehistoric humans living in small groups *only* have small gods? For support, he invokes (surprise!) the ethnographic record. First, he appeals to hunter-gatherer groups:

There is little dispute anymore that all hunter-gatherer groups have their spirits and gods who transcend physical, biological, and psychological limitations, at least to some extent. But these deities are not that powerful, have limited knowledge, and are largely indifferent toward human affairs.

(2013: 122)

He reasons that “if modern hunter-gatherer groups clue us to the ancestral conditions ... then we can conclude that these beliefs [in big gods] started as rare forms of cultural beliefs” (2013: 123). The problems with this inference should be manifest. First, Norenzayan’s interpretation of the ethnographic record is empirically inadequate because a substantial proportion of hunter-gatherer groups acknowledge a high god, as we observed earlier (Peoples et al. 2016).¹⁰ Second, if Norenzayan is resting his interpretation on whether high gods are specifically coded as “moralistic” in the ethnographic databases, there are serious doubts about the accuracy and reliability of this coding, as we observed earlier. Finally, Norenzayan’s inference from the contemporary ethnographic record (as he interprets it) to the religious beliefs of prehistoric humans is a questionable ethnographic analogy of the sort we have already critiqued.

Norenzayan also invokes ethnographic data showing a correlation between high god beliefs and larger groups. Cross-cultural studies do show a modest correlation between high god beliefs and various measures of social complexity (Johnson 2005), but everyone (Norenzayan included) observes that the correlation does not establish causation: it does not show that high god beliefs contribute to group size or *vice versa* or whether other factors explain the correlation. However, even if high god beliefs did contribute to group size after the agricultural revolution, this would still not license the conclusion that prehistoric humans had no such beliefs or concepts. All this suggests that the *big gods theory* cannot establish prehistoric nonbelief.

8.3.4 The Archaeological Record

Could Marsh invoke other empirical literatures to support NN, such as prehistoric archaeology? It appears not. Beliefs don’t fossilize and the ambiguous archaeological remains that we have do not inspire confident interpretations. For instance, there is no majority opinion about how to interpret the ambiguous cave paintings of the Upper Paleolithic—they didn’t come with captions underneath (Davies 2012: 3). Even if (a big if) such prehistoric art could be interpreted as indicating belief in certain gods, it could not tell us that prehistoric humans lacked belief in a high god. More generally, the *nonexistence* of high god concepts is not something we could easily recognize in the archaeological record: what would it look like? The “grave goods” found at some ancient burial sites (some 30,000 years ago) could be interpreted as indicating that prehistoric humans believed in souls or ancestor spirits who survived death (Rossano 2010: 62–65; Johnson 2016: 76). Even so, such concepts could have coexisted with concepts of a high god, as they often do in the ethnographic and historical record. It could be argued that if concepts of souls are the oldest god concepts *that we can detect* in the archaeological record, then they are the oldest god concepts *period*. However, this would

be a bad inference, for the archaeological record is very incomplete and the content of prehistoric religious beliefs, as archaeologists observe, is very difficult to infer from the spotty material remains that have been discovered (Binford 1972). The absence of archaeological evidence for high god concepts is not good evidence of their absence. Thus, the archaeological record cannot confirm NN.

Recall that Marsh claims that “we know” that NN was prevalent among prehistoric humans. We have seen, however, that the empirical literatures he invokes do not support his claim. The overall balance of empirical literature and testimony suggests that the jury is still out on what prehistoric humans believed about gods. Since it is not clear that NN was prevalent, it does not provide evidence against theism.

8.4 Would NN Be Surprising Given Theism?

In this section, we argue that even if NN was prevalent among prehistoric humans, it would not be very surprising given theism: any shock would be diminished by a minimally inclusive form of theism and the fact that prehistoric humans plausibly had access to an implicit relationship with God.

First, NN would not be very surprising given a minimally “inclusive” form of theism. NN would be surprising given a strict exclusivist form of theism that holds the *belief requirement* for salvation: for all humans capable of it, explicit (conscious) belief in a theistic god or high god before one’s death is an absolute (exceptionless) requirement for salvation and flourishing in the hereafter. But most theists apparently reject this requirement and for good philosophical, theological, and scriptural reasons.¹¹ For instance, the belief requirement problematically implies that the culturally indoctrinated child or isolated indigenous person who dies in ignorance cannot be saved. If we set aside the belief requirement and instead accept the minimally inclusive view that prehistoric humans could still have had access to salvation, despite their ignorance of a theistic god or high god, then NN is not as surprising as it would otherwise appear. In other words, there is much less tension between NN and inclusive forms of theism, which are the more plausible forms of theism anyway.

Second, NN would not be very surprising given the fact that prehistoric humans plausibly had access to an implicit relationship with God. One important response to hiddenness arguments is that humans can have a valuable relationship with God without explicit (conscious) belief in God—call it an *implicit* relationship.¹² If prehistoric humans plausibly had access to such a relationship, their ignorance was not so bad and thus not so surprising given theism.

There are different ways to conceptualize how humans could have an implicit relationship with God. One way is to make a distinction between

de re awareness and *de dicto* awareness.¹³ During my first year in graduate school, I met Fred Dretske at a YMCA in Durham, North Carolina, but I did not realize I was interacting with *Fred Dretske*, the prominent philosopher. I was aware *of* the kind gentleman in front of me, but I was not consciously aware *that* he was Fred Dretske. Similarly, prehistoric humans could have been aware *of* the God of theism without being consciously aware *that* this being with whom they interacted was all-powerful, all-knowing, perfectly loving, and so on.

How might this implicit relationship look? There are different models. Prehistoric humans could seek and positively relate to God in *de re* fashion even though they do not consciously realize that they are seeking and relating to the God of theism. Such implicit relating might take the form of interacting with what they take to be a powerful spiritual being: their beliefs about this being might be “superficially false but sufficiently true in the sense of giving them at bottom an inchoate sense of the true God” (Leech and Visala 2011: 311). Implicit relating might also take the form of pursuing or loving The Good, which on traditional theism is God himself. It might be expressed in the form of being grateful for one’s goods, being humbled by the natural world (e.g., the starry heavens), appreciating beauty, respecting the moral law, repenting from wrongdoing, and pursuing the transcendent through artistic creation and religious practices. For instance, Poston and Dougherty (2007) suggest that our experience of gratitude involves an implicit relationship with God:

We all receive some benefits in this life, and if we are ever grateful for them it seems that we are grateful for their source, so to speak. God is in fact the benefactor of all, so whoever expresses gratitude to the benefactor in fact expresses gratitude to God and is to that extent in a relationship with Him. This can serve as the basis of a more meaningful relationship later.

(2007: 193)

Implicit relating also might take the form of prehistoric humans interacting with one another, for example loving and being loved by one another. This is no *ad hoc* suggestion but, rather, is rooted in the Christian tradition (Cuneo 2013). In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus says that how we treat the “least of these” (e.g., whether we love them and meet their needs) is how we treat God himself:

Then the King will say to those on his right,

‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’

Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’

And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’

(Matthew 25:34–40, ESV)

In such ways, God could be interacting with prehistoric humans throughout their earthly lives, such that when they become aware of God’s identity in the hereafter, their earthly experiences could take on a “deep retrospective significance” that elicits the fitting expression: “It was you all along!”¹⁴ God could be interacting with us in similar ways too (if God exists).

There appears to be nothing incoherent or implausible about prehistoric humans possessing such an implicit relationship with God (if God exists). Of course, it is not how we normally think about relationships because our human relationships are almost always explicit. Nor is such a relationship with God of the highest quality: an explicit relationship with God would be better (seeing God “face-to-face” in heaven would be even better). But an implicit relationship with God on earth would still be good. Hence, it would not be so bad for prehistoric humans to be temporarily limited to an implicit relationship with God during the course of their earthly lives. Yes, they temporarily did not have access to something better, but they still had something good. When the accessibility and value of an implicit relationship with God is taken into account, it is not as surprising that God would permit the NN of prehistoric humans.

There are other considerations that could diminish the surprise of natural belief. For instance, NN would not be surprising if there are plausibly good reasons for God to permit it. Unlike Schellenberg’s (1993) argument from divine hiddenness, Marsh’s argument concedes that there could be such reasons.¹⁵ But is their existence plausible? We could motivate the claim that God has good reasons to permit NN (even if we don’t know what they are) by offering a theodicy of NN or a “skeptical theist” response or both. But we will refrain. Enough has been said to neutralize the problem of NN.

8.5 Conclusion: The Common Consent Argument for Theism

The problem of NN is an interesting metaphysical debunking argument against theism. Like all debunking arguments, it can be tested by examining its genealogical claims and their alleged skeptical implication. Having put it to the test, we found that it falls short on both counts. First, on empirical grounds it is not clear that NN was prevalent: the empirical jury is still out on what prehistoric humans believed about gods. Second,

even if NN was prevalent, it would not be very surprising given theism: any shock would be diminished by a minimally inclusive form of theism and the fact that prehistoric humans plausibly had access to an implicit relationship with God. We conclude that NN presents no problem for theism.

Our discussion suggests that if there is any problem in the neighborhood, it is the problem of widespread belief in a high god, a problem for naturalism. Although it is not clear what prehistoric humans believed, the empirical evidence indicates that high god beliefs have been prevalent across known history and cultures. The data on religious affiliation indicate that currently about 90% of the global population believes in a high god.¹⁶ And the trend is projected to continue into the future (Hackett et al. 2015). Why do so many humans believe in a high god?

This common consent regarding a high god (a 90% consensus) is more surprising given naturalism than theism. If naturalism is true and human history is unguided by God, then the outcome could have easily been different: cultural-historical processes could have easily led humans to alternative beliefs (Braddock 2021). For example, if cultural conditions had been somewhat different, Christianity and Islam could have easily failed to emerge, spread, and persist, while religions or secular worldviews not affirming a high god could have flourished in their place. The contingency of cultural history is evidenced by the fact that cultures have gone in all sorts of different religious and secular directions. Thus, it is surprising (given naturalism) to find 90% of humans converging upon belief in a high god. Given theism, however, we should not be so surprised. According to theism, there is a loving God who made human beings and wants to be in relationship with them. Plausibly, this relationship requires belief in a high god. Thus, we should expect such belief to be widely accessible. Does common consent regarding a high god count as evidence for theism? The common consent argument deserves more attention than it has received (Kelly 2011).¹⁷

Notes

- 1 Marsh (2013: 354, 356–358, 361, 371 n. 12). Marsh (2013: 358) also supports his argument by drawing upon Stark's (2007) analysis of high gods in the ethnographic record.
- 2 Joyce (2013) distinguishes between "justification debunking" and "truth debunking." De Cruz and De Smedt (2015: 183–184) make a distinction between origin stories that challenge the justification of religious belief (undercutting defeaters) and those that challenge the truth of religious belief (rebutting defeaters). Van Eyghen (2020: 3) discusses two types of debunking arguments from the cognitive science of religion: *unreliability* arguments (which imply that religious belief is unreliable) and *incompatibility* arguments (which imply that religious belief is false).
- 3 We categorize the problem of natural nonbelief as a debunking argument rather than a hiddenness argument for two reasons. First, like other

- debunking arguments, it invokes the origins of religious belief to cast doubt upon it. Second, hiddenness arguments usually don't invoke the origins of religious belief to cast doubt upon it.
- 4 The following three paragraphs draw on Braddock's (2018: 177–179) description of CSR.
 - 5 See also Barrett (2011: 132–133) for a similar list.
 - 6 See Barrett (2011: 132–133, 2012a: chaps. 3–6, 2012b: 322). Of course, additional CSR literature could be cited in a more comprehensive review.
 - 7 Zuckerman (2007) estimates that 90% of the global population believes in God. The best data available are the data of religious affiliation from the Pew Research Center. An estimated 55% of the global population belongs to Christianity and Islam. The number of believers in a high god runs much higher than 55%, for most Hindus (15% of the global population) believe in a high god, and many Buddhists (7% of the global population), folk religionists (6% of the global population), and religiously unaffiliated people (16% of the global population) do so too (Hackett and Stonawski 2017). Of course, many religiously unaffiliated people do not believe in a high god (e.g., secularists), and some religious traditions appear not to affirm a high god (e.g., Theravada Buddhism, Daoism, some pantheistic traditions of Hinduism), but their numbers are comparatively small. Given the data on religious affiliation, a reasonable estimate is that about 90% of the world believes in a high god.
 - 8 For the same point, see Stringer (1999: 549–550).
 - 9 Goldman (2019: 170–174) recently invoked Norenzayan's (2013) theory to motivate prehistoric nonbelief in God.
 - 10 In later work, Norenzayan apparently backs off the claim that small societies have small gods and big societies have big gods (Norenzayan et al. 2016).
 - 11 For discussion of the majority "inclusivist" view, see Kärkkäinen (2003). Inclusivism and exclusivism can refer to views about salvation or views about religious truth. What we are commending here is a minimal inclusivism about salvation which simply rejects one strict claim, the *belief requirement*. This view is perfectly compatible with "exclusivist" views of religious truth (e.g., only one major world religion is fully correct). It is compatible with the disjunctive claim that explicit belief *or implicit belief* is required for salvation (e.g., see Cuneo 2013 on implicit belief). It is compatible with the claim that explicit belief is required either during one's earthly life *or afterwards at some point* (e.g., when "those who have never heard" receive fuller revelation from God before Judgment Day). It is also compatible with the claim that explicit belief during one's earthly life is required *for most people* (e.g., for "those who have heard" or have received sufficient revelation from God). Thus, we are not advocating pluralist views that see belief in God as unnecessary and world religions as offering equally valid paths to salvation.
 - 12 E.g., Poston and Dougherty (2007), Cuneo (2013), and Baker-Hytch (2016).
 - 13 See Baker-Hytch (2016: 385–390) and Howard-Snyder (2016).
 - 14 See Baker-Hytch (2016: 389) for the basic idea and phrases quoted.
 - 15 Schellenberg (1993) argues that the concept of perfect love, properly understood, entails that a perfectly loving God does not and could not have sufficient reasons for allowing any nonresistant nonbelief. But Marsh finds such arguments "too strong" (2013: 373): Marsh allows that God might have good reasons for allowing NN.
 - 16 See note 7 of this chapter.
 - 17 For comments on this chapter, kind thanks to Timothy Insoll, Lari Launonen, Diego Machuca, Andrew Moon, Joshua Thurow, Aku Visala, and an anonymous reviewer.

References

- Baker-Hytch, Max. 2016. "Mutual Epistemic Dependence and the Demographic Divine Hiddenness Problem," *Religious Studies* 52 (3): 375–394.
- Barrett, Justin. 1999. "Theological Correctness: Cognitive Constraint and the Study of Religion," *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 11 (4): 325–339.
- Barrett, Justin. 2008. "Why Santa Claus Is Not a God," *Journal of Cognition and Culture* 8 (1–2): 149–161.
- Barrett, Justin. 2011. *Cognitive Science, Religion and Theology: From Human Minds to Divine Minds*. West Conshohocken: Templeton Press.
- Barrett, Justin. 2012a. *Born Believers: The Science of Children's Religious Belief*. New York: Free Press.
- Barrett, Justin. 2012b. "Towards a Cognitive Science of Christianity." In J. B. Stump and Alan G. Padgett (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Science and Christianity*, 319–334. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Barrett, Justin and Frank Keil. 1996. "Conceptualizing a Nonnatural Entity: Anthropomorphism in God Concepts," *Cognitive Psychology* 31 (3): 219–247.
- Barrett, Justin and Rebekah Richert. 2003. "Anthropomorphism or Preparedness? Exploring Children's God Concepts," *Review of Religious Research* 44 (3): 300–312.
- Bering, Jesse. 2002. "Intuitive Conceptions of Dead Agents' Minds: The Natural Foundations of Afterlife Beliefs as Phenomenological Boundary," *Journal of Cognition and Culture* 2 (4): 263–308.
- Bering, Jesse. 2006. "The Folk Psychology of Souls," *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 29 (5): 453–462.
- Binford, Lewis. 1972. *An Archaeological Perspective*. New York: Seminar Press.
- Boyer, Pascal. 2001. *Religion Explained: The Human Instincts That Fashion Gods, Spirits and Ancestors*. New York: Basic Books.
- Braddock, Matthew. 2016. "Debunking Arguments and the Cognitive Science of Religion," *Theology and Science* 14 (3): 268–287.
- Braddock, Matthew. 2018. "An Evidential Argument for Theism from the Cognitive Science of Religion." In H. Van Eyghen, R. Peels and G. van den Brink (eds.), *New Developments in the Cognitive Science of Religion: The Rationality of Religious Belief*, 171–198. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Braddock, Matthew. 2021. "The Contingency of the Cultural Evolution of Morality, Debunking, and Theism vs. Naturalism." In J. De Smedt and H. De Cruz (eds.), *Empirically Engaged Evolutionary Ethics*, 179–201. Cham: Springer.
- Cuneo, Terence. 2013. "Another Look at Divine Hiddenness," *Religious Studies* 49 (2): 151–164.
- Currie, Adrian. 2016. "Ethnographic Analogy, the Comparative Method, and Archaeological Special Pleading," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science Part A* 55: 84–94.
- Davies, Stephen. 2012. *The Artful Species: Aesthetics, Art, and Evolution*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- De Cruz, Helen and Johan De Smedt. 2015. *A Natural History of Natural Theology*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

- De Smedt, Johan and Helen De Cruz. 2020. *The Challenge of Evolution to Religion*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Goldman, Alvin. 2019. "God and Cognitive Science: A Bayesian Approach." In A. Goldman and B. McLaughlin (eds.), *Metaphysics and Cognitive Science*, 155–181. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Guthrie, Stewart. 1993. *Faces in the Clouds: A New Theory of Religion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hackett, Conrad, Phillip Connor, Marcin Stonawski and Vegard Skirbekk. 2015. "The Future of World Religions: Population, Growth Projections, 2010–2015." Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050/>
- Hackett, Conrad and Marcin Stonawski. 2017. "The Changing Global Religious Landscape." Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewforum.org/2017/04/05/the-changing-global-religious-landscape/>
- Hafer, Carolyn and Laurent Bègue. 2005. "Experimental Research on Just-World Theory: Problems, Developments, and Future Challenges," *Psychological Bulletin* 131 (1): 128–167.
- Hayter, Holly. 1994. "Hunter-Gatherers and the Use of Ethnographic Analogy: Theoretical Perspectives," *Totem: The University of Western Ontario Journal of Anthropology* 1 (1): 39–49.
- Hodder, Ian. 1982. *The Present Past: An Introduction to Anthropology for Archaeologists*. London: Batsford.
- Howard-Snyder, Daniel. 2016. "Divine Openness and Creaturely Nonresistant Nonbelief." In A. Green and E. Stump (eds.), *Hidden Divinity and Religious Belief: New Perspectives*, 126–138. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Insoll, Timothy. 2004. *Archaeology, Ritual, and Religion*. London: Routledge.
- Johnson, Dominic. 2005. "God's Punishment and Public Goods," *Human Nature* 16 (4): 410–446.
- Johnson, Dominic. 2016. *God Is Watching You: How the Fear of God Makes Us Human*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Jose, Paul. 1990. "Just-World Reasoning in Children's Immanent Justice Judgments," *Child Development* 61 (4): 1024–1033.
- Joyce, Richard. 2013. "The Evolutionary Debunking of Morality." In J. Feinberg and R. Shafer-Landau (eds.), *Reason and Responsibility*, 527–537. Boston: Wadsworth.
- Kärkkäinen, Veli-Matti. 2003. *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions: Biblical, History, and Contemporary Perspectives*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic.
- Kelemen, Deborah. 2004. "Are Children 'Intuitive Theists'? Reasoning about Purpose and Design in Nature," *Psychological Science* 15 (5): 295–301.
- Kelly, Thomas. 2011. "Consensus Gentium: Reflections on the 'Common Consent' Argument for the Existence of God." In K. J. Clark and R. J. Vanarragon (eds.), *Evidence and Religious Belief*, 135–156. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lee, Richard and Richard Daly. 1999. "Introduction: Foragers and Others." In R. B. Lee and R. Daly (eds.), *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Hunters and Gatherers*, 1–22. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Leech, David and Aku Visala. 2011. "The Cognitive Science of Religion: A Modified Theist Response," *Religious Studies* 47 (3): 301–316.

- Marsh, Jason. 2013. "Darwin and the Problem of Natural Nonbelief," *The Monist* 96 (3): 349–376.
- McKay, Ryan and Harvey Whitehouse. 2015. "Religion and Morality," *Psychological Bulletin* 141 (2): 447–473.
- Mithen, Steven. 1996. *The Prehistory of the Mind: The Cognitive Origins of Art, Religion and Science*. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Murdock, George. 1967. *Ethnographic Atlas*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Murdock, George. 1981. *Atlas of World Cultures*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Murdock, George and Douglas White. 1969. "Standard Cross-Cultural Sample," *Ethnology* 9: 329–369.
- Norenzayan, Ara, Azim Shariff, Will Gervais, Aiyana Willard, Rita McNamara, Edward Slingerland, and Joseph Henrich. 2016. "The Cultural Evolution of Prosocial Religions," *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 39: 1–65.
- Norenzayan, Ara. 2013. *Big Gods*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Noss, David and Blake Grangaard. 2018. *A History of the World's Religions*. 14th edition. New York: Routledge.
- Peoples, Hervey and Frank Marlowe. 2012. "Subsistence and the Evolution of Religion," *Human Nature* 23: 253–269.
- Peoples, Hervey, Pavel Duda, and Frank Marlowe. 2016. "Hunter-Gatherers and the Origins of Religion," *Human Nature* 27: 261–282.
- Petrovich, Olivera. 2019. *Natural-Theological Understanding from Childhood to Adulthood*. New York: Routledge.
- Poston, Ted and Trent Dougherty. 2007. "Divine Hiddenness and the Nature of Belief," *Religious Studies* 43 (2): 183–198.
- Purzycki, Benjamin. 2013. "The Minds of Gods: A Comparative Study of Supernatural Agency," *Cognition* 129 (1): 163–179.
- Purzycki, Benjamin, Joseph Henrich, Coren Apicella, Quentin D. Atkinson, Adam Baimel, Emma Cohen, Rita Anne McNamara, Aiyana K. Willard, Dimitris Xygalatas, and Ara Norenzayan. 2018. "The Evolution of Religion and Morality: A Synthesis of Ethnographic and Experimental Evidence from Eight Societies," *Religion, Brain & Behavior* 8 (2): 101–132.
- Rossano, Matt. 2010. *Supernatural Selection: How Religion Evolved*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sanderson, Stephen. 2018. *Religious Evolution and the Axial Age: From Shamans to Priests to Prophets*. London and New York: Bloomsbury.
- Schellenberg, J. L. 1993. *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Sharpe, E. J. 1986. *Comparative Religion: A History*. 2nd edition. London: Duckworth.
- Smart, Ninian. 1996. *The Religious Experience*. 5th edition. Pearson.
- Stark, Rodney. 2007. *Discovering God: The Origins of the Great Religions and the Evolution of Belief*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Stringer, Martin. 1999. "Rethinking Animism: Thoughts from the Infancy of Our Discipline," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 5 (4): 541–555.
- Sutherland, Liam. 2017. "Tylor and Debates about the Definition of 'Religion': Then and Now." In P. Tremlett, L. T. Sutherland and G. Harvey (eds.), *Edward*

- Burnett Tylor, Religion and Culture*, 87–104. London and New York: Bloomsbury.
- Swanson, Guy. 1960. *The Birth of the Gods: The Origin of Primitive Beliefs*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Tylor, Edward. 1871. *Primitive Culture*. London: John Murray.
- Van Eyghen, Hans. 2020. *Arguing from Cognitive Science of Religion: Is Religious Belief Debunked?* London and New York: Bloomsbury.
- White, Douglas. 2008. “Standard Cross-Cultural Sample.” In W. A. Darity (ed.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, 2nd edition, volume 8, 88–93. New York: Macmillan.
- Wielenberg, Erik. 2010. “On the Evolutionary Debunking of Morality,” *Ethics* 120 (3): 441–464.
- Zuckerman, Phil. 2007. “Atheism: Contemporary Numbers and Patterns.” In M. Martin (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Atheism*, 47–65. New York: Cambridge University Press.