

# Bridging Belief and Social Practice: Connecting the Participatory Dimension of Religious Belief to an Account of Socially Extended Mind

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## **Abstract**

The theory of extended mind has been applied by some to the study of religious cognition. Past efforts have mainly centered around how material culture, like bibles and rosaries, functions in the perspective of extended cognition. In the present paper, I shift focus to unite these works with research on socially extended mind and participatory theory and discuss the additional role of living and nonmaterial culture, including cultural norms, customs, institutions, social ritual, and social others in capturing a full-bodied view of extended religious cognition. I apply these areas of theory to the study of dispositional belief, affective states and processes, and the self and defend their application within this religious context.

Keywords: socially extended mind, religious cognition, nonmaterial culture, participatory theory

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## Introduction

According to the extended mind thesis (ExM), the mind is extended into the world when it is joined with outside resources that influence or help it carry out a particular cognitive function provided that certain conditions are met (see Clark & Chalmers, 1998; Menary (ed.), 2010; Newen et al. (eds.), 2018 for key texts). Tools, technology, symbols, and even other people's minds can be considered as examples of these external resources in broader interpretations.

The creation and regulation of a wide variety of cognitive processes by social institutions has been the focus of socially extended mind research. There is yet room for others to broaden the scope of this thesis to include additional institutions since previous work has mostly concentrated on legal systems (see Gallagher, 2013; Huebner, 2013; Tollefsen, Dale, & Olsen, 2013; Merritt, 2013; Gallagher, 2017). In this essay, I'll argue that engagement with religious traditions, social institutions, and social others help to constitute several cognitive processes, particularly religious belief and other forms of religious experience.

Others (e.g., Krueger, 2014b; Krueger, 2016) have sought to apply ExM to the religious context but have by and large done so in different ways than how the present project seeks to. Krueger (2016), in his paper titled "Extended Mind and Religious Cognition," focuses more on how physical artifacts (material culture), such as rosaries and bibles function in instances of extended cognition and affectivity. Colombetti and Krueger (2015) also talk about how religious settings have an impact on worship experiences by enhancing the sense of participation in a shared experience and creating a cohesive community of believers. In his paper focusing on music as extended mind, he also considers how sound contributes to this picture of extended cognition and affectivity, drawing heavily upon examples which have a religious flavor, such as hymns, chants, the use of instruments like organs, etc., or how venues like temples with their acoustics contribute to this musical picture (Krueger, 2014b). In addition, Gaelin Meyer in her paper titled "Religious Ritual and Extended Cognition" has considered religious ritual (ritualized behavior itself) as a form of extended cognition (n.d.). The present project separates itself from connected papers by focusing primarily on the social aspect of believing; that is, how social others, norms, and institutions contribute to religious belief and how this constitutes extended mind and

cognition. In other words, this project differs from past projects with respect to the types of external resources that are emphasized (social others, groups, customs, norms, institutions, etc.) and with respect to the types of mental states that are emphasized (especially dispositional belief, although this project alongside Krueger (2014) and Krueger (2016) discusses affectivity and the self as well).

More in line with the present project, research has also looked at how social connections and religious communities generate forms of belief and worldviews through their nonmaterial culture. Religious communities offer a social setting where people can interact and partake in shared activities that support religious beliefs and mold cognitive frameworks. Collective rituals, social support, sharing myths and ideas, and other aspects of group dynamics all contribute to the upkeep and development of religious practices and beliefs (e.g., Krueger, 2016). According to the socially extended mind paradigm used to study religious traditions, religious cognition is not just an individual activity but is also intricately woven into religious societies' social and cultural structures. Religious traditions' common doctrines, rites, and customs offer cognitive resources and frameworks that shape how people see, understand, and interact with the outside world by enabling new types of belief and experience.

In the first section, I will begin the analysis by briefly summarizing the inception-point of the ExM literature. Next, I will lay out the socially ExM thesis and Gallagher's (2013) definition of "mental institutions." In Section II, I will then quickly turn to discussion about the parity principle and cognitive bloat regarding the socially extended mind thesis which will be two key sticking points of my analysis. I'll also take a look at other contributions to the ExM literature that suggest additional concerns, such as the need for distinguishing between temporary processes and permanent states and establishing a requirement for dynamic relationships between internal events and outside resources. Following the introduction of these key criteria, I will then demonstrate how the criteria for mental institutions relate to religious institutions in Section III and IV and provide particular examples of how religious institutions and mental activities are coupled. In Section III, I will refine our conception of belief in the context of religion and argue that this view of religious belief is more amenable to socially and materially extended views of cognition than internalist views. In Section IV, I will tie in the affective

aspects of religious cognition, connecting discussion of socially extended mind to affective states and processes. In the same section, I will also connect literature on extended self, identity, and personality to this same context. I will close by summarizing my arguments and examining possible detractors (Section V).

## **Section I – Socially ExM and “Mental Institutions”**

In one of their seminal works “The Extended Mind,” Clark and Chalmers (1998) propose the *extended mind thesis* (ExM). The extended mind thesis holds that the boundaries of cognition and the mind include external resources and environmental elements in addition to an individual's brain and body. This viewpoint contests the conventional view that cognitive functions are brain-based and contends that tools, artifacts, and social interactions are vital in enhancing human cognition. According to this theory, extended cognition occurs when there is a particularly close coupling between, or functional integration of, physical resources in the external environment and the biological brain and body.

In response to criticism and further elaboration of the original concepts, further waves of the extended mind theory emerged. The first wave of scholars was elaborated upon by academics like Richard Menary and Sean Gallagher who emphasized the significance of social and cultural influences on cognition. From individual cognitive artifacts to social and cultural practices that influence and sustain cognitive processes, the emphasis changed among some. These developments expand on the concepts of the previous wave by better recognizing the importance of interpersonal relationships, language, and cultural norms as factors that we cognize with and by recognizing how cognition is often dispersed over a network of people, objects, and the environment. It emphasizes that cognitive processes are not just extended into tools but also into our bodies and through our interactions with the physical and social environment (recognizing the importance of embodied and embedded cognition). Subsequent ExM inquiry has also emphasized how the mind and the outside environment are in a dynamic, reciprocal connection, affecting and being impacted by one another.

These developments are responsible for the expansion of ExM to also include theories of socially extended mind, which specifically emphasize the function of social interactions and institutions in cognitive processes. They imply that social structures, practices, and cultural norms are just as likely to be tools in our cognition as physical devices like smartphones or calculators are.

Gallagher (2013), among many others, applies the extended mind thesis to this social domain. He makes a case for social forms of internal and external cognitive coupling, not between minds and tools or technologies, but rather between minds and other minds (such as in a family, the school community, formal institutions, etc.). While he primarily uses examples from more organized institutions, such as the legal system, to support his socially ExM theory, Gallagher also gives examples involving simple social custom. Religious traditions can also range from formalized institutions to loose collections of myths and practices shared by diverse social communities, and this brings up some terminological concerns.

Gallagher uses his concept of "mental institutions" to support his case for socially ExM. In ordinary language, the term "institution" can apply to either formal organizations with a social, religious, or professional mission or to the particular rules, customs, and traditions of a particular social group. Institution can therefore refer to an organization as a whole, like the Church of England, or to certain rules that apply to certain social groups (including but not limited to formal institutions), like baptism. Gallagher draws no clear terminological distinction between degrees of formalized social organization, even though he uses examples drawing upon formal institutions (like codified and formalized legal systems) and looser social groups (like the local community). For clarity, I avoid using the term "institutional" when discussing social activities that lack a clear organizational structure and reserve terms like "institutional norms" and "institutional practices" for referring to specific operations a formal institution performs. For examples which do not involve formal institutions (such as looser social groups like a local community), I use broader terms like "social institutions," "social norms," or "social practices."

Gallagher argues that "mental institutions" do not have the parity principle as a criterion (more on this in the following section) and suggests systems in which the external is required for the existence of particular mental activities. Mental Institutions "...are not only institutions with which we accomplish certain cognitive processes, but also are such that without them such

cognitive processes would no longer exist” (Gallagher, 2013, p. 3). Because they provide the framework necessary for the process to exist, mental institutions are essential to particular mental activities. For instance, legal decisions wouldn't exist without a legal system of some type.

He outlines two standards for mental institutions. When we engage with mental institutions (that is, when we appropriately interact with them), they "include cognitive practices that are produced in specific times and places" and are "activated in ways that extend our cognitive processes." Mental institutions are social institutions that are essential tools in the deployment of their relevant mental activities. As a mind accomplishes some process by the use of some social institution and depends on it to be that type of process, it is extended into the social system. This may entail creating and signing a legal contract as well as determining whether someone should be found guilty of murder, both of which are done using and dependent upon a legal system (Gallagher, 2013).

You might think of "mental institutions" as referring to social norms and structures that are the tools of the trade of some ways that people think and behave. Languages, educational systems, scientific groups, legal frameworks, religious traditions, and other types of collective organization are examples of these institutions. Through engaging in these mental institutions, people can expand and modify their cognitive talents through acquiring cognitive resources, common information, and methods of thinking. Individuals participate in group problem-solving, communication, and information sharing through social interactions, which makes certain kinds of cognition possible and fundamentally shapes how our cognition occurs.

In short, the socially extended mind and the idea of mental institutions emphasize the notion that our cognitive processes are necessarily facilitated by social and cultural circumstances rather than being the exclusive product of our particular internal systems. These viewpoints acknowledge the importance of social interactions and cultural norms in expanding our cognitive capacities and general cognitive landscape.

I'll use this paradigm to examine organized religion and demonstrate how it makes for an especially prime target for social ExM. For each example, I'll briefly discuss if the process might

still function without social institutions. Additionally, I will demonstrate how these mental processes are a part of dynamical systems that have feedforward and feedback mechanisms between the institutions as a whole and specific agents. I'll conclude by pleading for further discussion in this area and for the inclusion of religious institutions in socially ExM literature. Importantly, rather than submitting Gallagher's view to exhaustive critical scrutiny, I'll be taking it at face value and applying it to a new domain.

As an aside, many of the examples I rely upon have to do with Christian faith and practice, however, this is simply because I am more familiar with it and not because I believe that Christianity is the only or ideal religion to which socially ExM can be applied. Should the cases below support my theory, it will be relevant to any religious movement, sect, or cult as long as the proper enactively linked arrangement is present.

## **Section II - ExM and Key Areas of Contention**

In their original paper, Clark and Chalmers (1998b) outlined the parity principle, which states that "if, as we confront some task, a part of the world functions as a process which, were it to go on in the head, we would have no hesitation in recognizing as part of the cognitive process, then that part of the world is (so we claim) part of the cognitive process" (quoted from Clark, 2010, p. 45). This means that if there is a process that we would intuitively recognize as cognitive and it is being carried out in this instance by a hybrid system of internal and external processes, we should not hesitate to refer to this hybrid system as cognitive or mental. A similar idea is captured by the "glue and trust" criteria. Both are helpful for locating instances of coupled internal-external systems that, in other (purely internal) configurations, are already characterized as cognitive (e.g., Colombetti & Roberts, 2014).

There has also been discussion about whether or not this requirement was actually necessary (Gallagher, 2013). Is it necessary for the process to be able to be performed solely inside the brain, or is it sufficient to argue that the cognitive process extends outside of the skin if it can be performed inside the head? Clark (2008) supports the latter thesis. This leaves the possibility open for situations where the cognitive process is entirely dependent on the existence of outside



resources, which fully facilitate it, or situations where the existence of outside resources generate the particular process itself, making it impossible to imagine the process without the key role of something outside the body. Gallagher seems to view the parity principle as inapplicable for mental institutions, however, it is my view that, in his examples of mental institutions, such as legal decisions, they are at least analogous to processes which we would already deem cognitive, such as personal decisions (vs. legal decisions). While a legal decision can never be fully internal, all decisions are cognitive nonetheless.

However, this effort for inclusivity also invites the "cognitive bloat" concern (see, for example, Adams & Aizawa, 2001; Rupert, 2004; Allen-Hermanson, 2013). In order to avoid overexpansion, Clark (2008) outlines additional requirements. He makes the following claims: (a) external resources must be consistently available; (b) they must be simple to get; and (c) the beliefs must be unquestionably supported. At first glance, these requirements appear to apply only to Otto's situation, but deeper examination reveals that they are plausible in some ways and disputable in others. First, criterion (c) contends that in order for Otto's beliefs to qualify as extended mind, they must be unquestionably endorsed by him. According to Gallagher (2013), Otto and his notebook's entire process should not be compromised by the inclusion of critical scrutiny, examination, pondering, or skepticism, which are all cognitive processes in and of themselves. Gallagher also points out that (a) and (b) are both concerns of degree and wonders where we should draw the line about how accessible and widely available an external resource should be. Do we draw the line at Otto's notepad, which is always carried around in someone's pocket, or can it also encompass items that are less frequently accessible or that are only occasionally available? In essence, Gallagher argues that all of Clark's criteria are too restrictive and instead endorses a wider application of extended theory.

Due to this ambiguity, less stable and dependable forms of coupling are also possible, such as sporadic couplings with outside resources or even widely dispersed networks of various minds (Wilson & Clark, 2010; Gallagher, 2013). According to Clark (2008), who draws on dynamical systems theory, external resources must be a part of a "self-stimulating loop" as opposed to only being coupled in a one-way interaction (Shapiro, 2011; Colombetti & Roberts, 2014). Regarding this want for dense interactivity, Gallagher (2013) attempts to dispel our concerns about

cognitive bloat by giving us an example of the problem-solving process in which we build an animal pen to contain our livestock. In this example, Gallagher argues that local customs and cultural norms are interactively coupled to our cognitive process of problem solving in a way that other enactive manipulations of the outside world are not – local customs are comparatively even more “densely interactive” than the physical materials available to us with which we can solve the problem (see also Rupert, 2009; Rowlands, 2009). This, Gallagher claims, makes the nonmaterial aspects of this problem seem like even more ripe targets for ExM. In consideration of this issue, I will also discuss how the interaction between institutions and individual minds is a two-way process in the context of religious belief and experiences.

Importantly, the “mechanism” composed of brain, body, and environment functions differently within different mental activities.<sup>1</sup> The dynamics of, say, believing something and experiencing an emotion is likely to have a radically different functional and temporal profile. While both will be dynamic, they may differ greatly in this respect and additionally on a case-by-case basis. For example, musically induced emotions may involve entrainment and participating in a hymn or chant, which involves the constant attunement to the choral setting, while belief dynamics generally occur on a much more prolonged timescale (Krueger, 2014a). Further, the emotional mechanism involved in the use of a confessional differs greatly from the use of music, both functionally and temporally.

Finally, while the Otto case primarily focuses on the connection between memory and belief, others have attempted to broaden the thesis to include a wider variety of cognitive and mental phenomena, such as affective states (feelings, emotions, and moods), perception, and the self, which I will draw from in my examples (see, for example, Clark & Chalmers, 1998; Clark, 2008; Colombetti & Roberts, 2014; Carvalho, 2019; Shin, 2013). In my analysis, I discuss more formally cognitive states and processes, such as believing, in addition to affectivity and selfhood in Section IV. Finally, the need for a dynamic relationship between internal and external resources has also been discussed and will be touched on in my upcoming examples of socially ExM.

### Section III – Believing with Others and Nonmaterial Culture

Perhaps the most relevant instances to the debate over ExM in religion, in my opinion, are dispositional beliefs. For one, there is a deep interconnectedness in concepts like belief and faith, and crucially, beliefs are commonly viewed as “cold” and “detached” brain-bound representations of external reality.<sup>1</sup> Because space is limited, I will not be considering all the possible mental states and processes that are role-players in religious thinking, and instead will focus my attention on religious belief. Dispositional beliefs, as opposed to occurrent beliefs, which are beliefs as they occur to us in our active awareness, dispositional beliefs are best described as things we believe even when we are not actively aware of it.<sup>1</sup> Examples of dispositional beliefs are additionally relevant because they involve a relevant concept to philosophy of mind that is frequently considered in the ExM literature (recalling Otto). Otto’s recollection of his beliefs is rendered external in his case, but in cases of religious belief, I will argue that religious beliefs essentially depend upon the material and nonmaterial culture of a social environment. In this construal, I will argue that we believe *with* social institutions, others, and other things.

What is meant by the phraseology behind saying we do *x with y*? The use of the word “with” in particular is here meant to capture a dependency claim. When I say that we believe *with* a social group, I mean to say that their role is part of what makes it this type of believing.<sup>2</sup>

Comparatively, when I say that we play tennis with a tennis racket and ball, I am not simply saying that these are sufficient materials with which to play the sport. On the contrary, I am arguing that they are essential in order for the game to really be tennis. If you substitute in a badminton racket, baseball bat, birdie, or golf ball, the game we are playing is no longer really tennis (regardless of what we call it). Similarly, we cannot really play piano on the keyboard or organ, and certainly not on a saxophone, even if there are many commonalities between them and pianos, because the instrument used is what makes it that type of playing. Compare this to another activity, like fishing. While we generally fish with a rod, we could equally fish with our

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<sup>1</sup> For example, while I am not currently aware of it (and may have never been aware of it before), it would be hard to say that I’ve just now formed my belief that the sun will rise on July 18<sup>th</sup>, 2050.

<sup>2</sup> I am not saying we believe *with* them as in we believe *in conjunction with* them, or that we are in agreement regarding what we individually believe. Rather, I am saying they are part of the material apparatus by which we entertain this type of belief, regardless of whether our beliefs align with one another.

hands (like noodling for catfish). While I think this is an equally valid example of *acting with*, importantly, there is no dependency claim regarding the tools. The standard tools of the trade are not essential to what fishing is, as compared to playing tennis, which is that activity in virtue of the correct use of certain tools and settings, including the racket, ball, court, etc.<sup>3</sup>

Gallagher's (2013) view is that legal decisions require a legal system, including its experts, documents, statutes, customs, and more, because a legal system is what we do this type of deciding *with*. Religious believing, I argue, is something that is essentially done with social others as well. By this I mean that there can be no religious believing outside of some social environment, which includes both material and nonmaterial culture, because these social others, norms, customs, and institutions are the tools of the trade – the essential apparatus with which we maintain beliefs of this kind. I will examine this claim more fully in the present section and address some likely misconceptions about and objections to my framing. Before committing to the central claim, however, I will weigh different approaches to conceptualizing religious belief.

Religious beliefs can cover a wide range of topics and subject matters, such as beliefs concerning the existence of deities, spirits, cosmology, the afterlife, personal values (steady convictions about what is significant or right), and more. Uncontroversially, religious ideas held by individuals are typically shaped and created in part by textual, institutional, and other social sources of information, including institutional experts, even though the particular content of these belief systems might vary greatly between institutions and even on an individual basis. That is to say that religious belief, though highly normative in the senses listed, is also not monolithic. But do words like “shaped by,” “impacted by,” or “influenced by” adequately capture the full relationship between our social environment and religious beliefs? Of course, everyone agrees that external resources play *some* (causal) role in shaping and creating our beliefs, however, that’s consistent with a completely internalist reading of religious belief. Conversely, what basis is there to consider religious belief to be socially extended? I will make a case for extended religious belief by discussing the characteristics of religious belief that are relevant to these questions and by applying this framework to Gallagher’s theory of socially

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<sup>3</sup> Unless we were to specify fly fishing or noodling, then we reach the same level of dependency upon the appropriateness of the external apparatus.

extended mind. My aim is to defend a view of religious belief that takes the beliefs to be fully dependent upon the agent being situated in a social environment and which is not consistent with more standard internalist views of belief.

Stepping away from the extended and distributed cognition approach, standard computationalist and functionalist approaches to belief would be to argue that beliefs are internal representations about the nature, state, etc. of things in the world and which function to organize behavior around personal goals and objectives.<sup>4</sup> Beliefs are generally truth-directed claims about how things are (they seek to align with what is true; e.g., Williams, 1973; Fassio, n.d.). That is to say that beliefs are sensitive to evidence and aimed at capturing knowledge. As such, we cannot simply decide what we believe (we are not doxastically voluntaristic; see, for example, Williams (1973) “Deciding to Believe”; Winters (1979) “Believing at Will”; Pojman (1986) “Religious Belief and the Will”). While our beliefs are affected toward cognitive biases, as a whole, our beliefs tend toward what appears to be true in light of the available evidence. Our beliefs also essentially function to organize action and behavior. Beliefs amount to an internal guide to our interactions with our environment and ourselves.<sup>5</sup> They are (only sometimes accurate) representations of the world impressed upon us and stored within our heads, according to these more traditional perspectives.

Although it is a widely held assumption that beliefs are internal representations; see, for example Margolis (1977), Fodor (1987), Quilty-Dunn & Mandelbaum (2018), Schwitzgebel (2022), Rao et al. (2009); this perspective is not without difficulties and possible issues. In addition, according to some models of cognition that we have already mentioned, the body and how it interacts with the environment are fundamentally linked to cognitive processes, including beliefs. If internal representations are the only thing considered, the body and context may be ignored in the development of beliefs and cognitive processes.

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<sup>4</sup> The mind is the brain’s functional organization, according to functionalism. Computationalism holds that the brain’s functional structure is computational. These theses are logically independent and miscible (Piccinini, 2010).

<sup>5</sup> See also dispositional and interpretational theories of belief; for a review see Schwitzgebel (2021).

The idea that religious belief may be reduced to a straightforward functional profile might create a number of questions and potential difficulties as well, even though religious belief systems play a significant role in guiding behavior. For starters, by concentrating only on the functional element of belief, this perspective may ignore the underlying cognitive processes that support the development and upkeep of beliefs. Neglecting these elements could result in an insufficient understanding of how cognitive processes like perception, memory, reasoning, and emotion play differential roles in shaping different types of beliefs. Additionally, a variety of contextual elements, such as social, cultural, and historical contexts, frequently have a role in our believing. If we only define belief in terms of function, we might miss the influence these seemingly extraneous factors have on how beliefs are formed, changed, and expressed. This we can see more clearly if we contrast beliefs about matters of fact with beliefs of different types which are shaped more strongly by context.

Think about how our beliefs regarding, for instance, the capital of the United States, Washington, D.C. (1), and the fact that Jesus Christ is the son of God (2) could alter over time. Until information is revealed that would disprove belief 1, I am likely to hold this belief. I am likely to continue believing that 1 is true unless I am presented specific types of official reports or documents, footage from press meetings with government officials, other press coverage, and other types of evidence that I perceive to be credible proof to the contrary, that the capital city has been changed to some other city, or some other big political change has occurred. On the other hand, the continuation of 2 is determined by a complicated range of social factors including all my encounters with people who share or don't share my beliefs, as well as textual sources of information, interactions with environments that have religious significance like the local cathedral, the impression made on me by hymns, and more. These interactions are the fuel which ignites, sustains, extinguishes, or lets die out beliefs of this kind. Take, for example, how our interactions with a pastor might help shape our belief in God. This belief is better indexed, I think, in light of their being friendly, giving us good guidance in life, being well respected by others at the church and in the local community<sup>6</sup>, by being capable at conducting sermons and

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<sup>6</sup> Van Leeuwen (2014), in discussing the findings of Sauvayre (2011), also notes that “a cult member, for example, may conclude that the “guru” behaved immorally. This realization, more than cognition of empirical evidence, leads to departure from the cult and to a shedding of its “beliefs,” reflecting the idea that the personal standing of religious figures contributes more to religious beliefs than perceptual evidence.

rituals, and an array of other personal and social factors, than it is indexed in light of how they transfer factual information to us about God. While 1 also is informed by my interactions with my social environment, this interaction amounts to an exchange of information. Contrarily, Belief 2 is shaped, kept, used, and even rejected through everyday interaction with a rich cultural environment. While my belief in 1 is shaped by information processing and internal reasoning, our adherence to 2 is better understood in terms of our commitment to various social settings and how amenable they are to fostering certain beliefs.<sup>7</sup> The more we commit ourselves to that space, more “warmth” is given to our religious beliefs, helping to cement them by tying them to our everyday lived experiences.<sup>1</sup> Psychological research also supports the claim that religious beliefs are not particularly sensitive to counterevidence (e.g., Van Leeuwen, 2014) in a way that beliefs about matters of fact are, and Van Leeuwen argues that they relate more to special authority, and are also different in their susceptibility to free elaboration.<sup>8</sup>

Some might question whether religious attitudes are better considered beliefs or something like faith, and whether we should treat faith as a type of belief or something else entirely. Mark Wrathall, for example, has framed faith as a thing of its own, where faith requires reliance and trust and is resilient when faced with doubts (Laraway, 2022). He also argues that faith does not have to correspond to any particular belief per se and gives the example of how it is different to say we have faith in versus believe in something. However, it is not clear to me that faith in something has no corresponding dispositional beliefs, such as that they are worthy of our trust. While I will not subject this view to critical scrutiny, it seems implausible to me that religious faith and religious belief are not at least tightly bound up. For example, while I agree that believing in God (that he exists, has certain properties, etc.) and having faith in God (in his vision, plan, etc.) might not be the same thing, it is also the case that we can only have faith in his plan in virtue of our beliefs about him existing, being all-loving, being omniscient, omnipotent, and so on. On the other hand, some might think of our enduring and trusting attitude

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<sup>7</sup> Though some have argued that religious beliefs are at least minimally counterintuitive (Boyer, 1994).

<sup>8</sup> Regarding free elaboration, Van Leeuwen argues that religious belief systems are subject to further imagination and reinterpretation, a topic I also touch on later when talking about changing views concerning LGBTQ+ issues and rock music. He also notably argues that religious credences provide us with a map or guide through which to pursue “fullness” in life, and likewise a guide of things to avoid. This gives religious belief systems a more innate directedness than factual beliefs and normative orientation (Van Leeuwen, 2014, p. 709; Taylor, 2007).<sup>1</sup>

toward God's existence as an exercise of "faith" while still concerning a belief. While I don't mean to argue for one or the other, this view of faith as committed belief, I think, describes the type of belief which I am trying to capture well.

In essence, one key aspect of religious beliefs that separates them from other types is that they require a certain degree (and the right type of) upkeep and maintenance, which can be achieved through being an active member of the religious community. They are not stable internal representations that sit, relatively unchanged, inside our heads until their next access, in which we modify them given new evidence or use them to guide our actions; rather, they are constantly negotiated *with* a cultural space and can change almost unbeknownst to us, with no necessary addition of evidence or reasoning. This is not to say that either is more or less resistant to revision or extinction, rather that maintenance occurs in different ways based upon type, and that the way maintenance occurs in the case of religious belief is not well captured by a perspective which takes the beliefs to be internal representations which are sustained relatively rigidly unless we are provided with counterevidence.

Religious belief is, consequently, unorthodox in comparison to beliefs about matters of fact (for example, that the capital of the United States is Washington D.C.) and is not fully understood when construed as internal representations of the world which simply concern a category of subject matters (gods, afterlife, etc.). Rather, religious belief is an essentially in the social world activity, in terms of how these beliefs are maintained, and is best understood by considering perspectives which view the mind as socially embodied, embedded, enacted, and extended. There are likely many types of belief which have a similar relationship to cultural spaces, including some philosophical beliefs, moral beliefs, and aesthetic beliefs, for example. Religious beliefs, like these others, depend upon some interpretable social space in which they occur, are maintained, and hammered out – that is, they are formed through participation and interaction *with* this space. Furthermore, while they may serve many functions in everyday life, they are in no way reducible to any select number of these functions, and they are not clearly facts of the world "impressed" onto us either, so they likely do not fit the traditional view explored here for a variety of other reasons as well.



Similar to religious belief, hope seems like it could be subjected to a straightforward dispositional analysis in internalist terms. For example, "hope is a standing state that's located inside the head and is apt to show up in a person's behavior and speech: something like a disposition to think positively about the future." But for many examples of hope, which genuinely need constant upkeep and maintenance in order to last over time, this doesn't seem reasonable. Instead, we maintain hope by exploiting our problem space. We are not just predisposed to think positively about the future regardless of circumstances; we hope with the conditions of our dilemma. Additionally, belief in oneself or in one's talents could be viewed as only a stored representation, similar to "I can do it!" This, however, doesn't seem right because having faith in oneself also seems to require constant maintenance, reaffirmation, etc. What's more, they are not only revised amid counter-information (say, if someone should convince us it's better to be pessimistic or to believe that we cannot do it), and instead are sustained or dropped through continuous interaction. In essence, we are hopeful and believe in ourselves by negotiating and exploring a problem space, which is the tool through which we develop and upkeep beliefs of this kind.

Other perspectives have taken more mixed approaches than the one I have rejected here. The pragmatist school of philosophy, for example, also contends that ideas' significance and veracity are best understood in terms of their application in real life and how they influence people's experiences and behaviors. Pragmatists contend that belief's capacity to influence behavior is what gives beliefs their significance. We view our beliefs as instruments that assist us in navigating the world and achieving our objectives. Therefore, knowing the practical aspects of belief is essential to comprehending their nature. Pragmatism, however, also contends that beliefs are not solitary mental processes but rather are a part of a wider network that includes societal norms, values, and beliefs, and sometimes things which are brought about through our desire to believe in those things (see, for example, Murphy & Murphy, 1990; James, 2014; Dewey, 2013; White, 2009) and in that respect is more amenable to the view I am pushing in this paper.

According to this perspective (pragmatism), ritual and social practice are crucial components of developing and upholding beliefs. Rituals frequently include symbolic actions that support

certain beliefs, foster a sense of community, and provide a common meaning. Social practices including political rituals, religious ceremonies, and scientific investigations give context for the development, expression, and transfer of beliefs. For instance, rituals like prayer, meditation, or group worship are considered crucial for the development and reinforcement of religious beliefs. People who engage in these practices are more able to connect with their views emotionally, socially, and experientially. These practices breathe a warmth into belief which might otherwise be seen as cold representations.<sup>1</sup> Ultimately, in this view (and my own), the wider picture of belief dynamics involves continuous integration in a vast routine of social and religious practices.

Similar rituals are found in scientific practices, such as peer review, conferences, and experimental methods, which are essential to the development and confirmation of scientific views (e.g., Latour & Woolgar, 2013). These procedures offer an apparatus for debating theories, exchanging information, and reaching agreements among scientists. In general, philosophical stances like pragmatism emphasize the interconnectedness of ritual, social practice, and belief, emphasizing the significance of taking the communal and practical aspects of beliefs into account.

Recent research in the fields of religious studies and philosophy of religion have also taken unique approaches to conceptualizing religious belief by applying participatory theory. Notably, in her essay “Practice, Belief, and Feminist Philosophy of Religion” Amy Hollywood (2016) has argued that there is a cognitivist bias in philosophy of religion which focuses too heavily on the role of belief in religious life. In contrast, she argues that philosophers of religion should turn their attention to the function of ritual and social practice. While we probably should not dispense with the idea of belief altogether, the important take away, as Jacob Holsinger Sherman (2023) puts it, is that Hollywood argues that “practical reason is constructed through ‘learned modes of being in the body and the world’ (p. 241)” (p. 4).” Hollywood frames ritual practice as not secondary to religious belief, but as formative of other things religious including religious virtue, affect, and belief (see also Asad, 1993).

Drawing from this research which gives priority to ritual over belief, Holsinger Sherman (2023), on the other hand, has argued for the mutual importance of practice and belief, and more concisely, the role of practice in believing. Contrary to the traditional paradigm which views beliefs as maps for action, Holsinger Sherman argues that action (such as ritual) also has a role in rooting and tempering religious belief. From this perspective, religious communities get us believing by shaping our habits, dispositions, skills, and more generally our *habitus* (or habituated way of perceiving and acting within our social and material environment)<sup>1</sup>. Thus, religious belief gains part of its uniqueness from the fact that it is necessarily participatory. In his words, “Picking up where Hollywood leaves off, we might argue along similar lines for the recognition of doxastic conditions that include spiritual practice and moral formation as irreducible components of certain beliefs and ethical intuitions. Written in declarative sentences, such beliefs might look akin to ordinary propositions, but the key point is that some of these propositions can only be countenanced within a wider semantic field composed of correlative habits. Let us call these habitus-indexed propositions *participatory truth claims*. A participatory truth claim is a claim that cannot be properly entertained by untaught bodies and minds, which is to say outside a certain *paideia* (broad system of cultural education)” (p. 5). In contrast, consider again the belief concerning the capital of the United States. Our having this belief is less crucially informed by our engagement with any particular social milieu.

Participatory theory, which I pull off the shelf here to discuss its application to socially ExM, in epistemology is an approach to understanding truth and meaning as enacted by the interaction of a mind and its environment and is a framework that places an emphasis on the function of group participation and social interaction in the production of truth (for broader discussion, see Tarnas, 2010). The conventional concept of truth as an immutable, independent reality that exists regardless of individual viewpoints or interpretations is called into question by this method. Instead, this view of participatory truth claims asserts that beliefs (and truth itself) is revealed through widespread involvement and participation within a specific social or communal context.

Social constructivism, the theory that knowledge and truth are socially produced and influenced by cultural, linguistic, and historical aspects, is sometimes linked to the idea of participatory knowledge (see, for example, Schreiber & Valle, 2013; Vygotsky & Kozulin, 1989; Lourenco,

2012). This perspective holds that truth cannot be found or accessed apart from human experiences and social interactions. Truth is also viewed in this context as the result of constant discussion, compromise, and agreement within a community or a particular field of knowledge. It is acknowledged that multiple viewpoints and interpretations, rather than a single, impartial viewpoint, contribute to a more thorough grasp of truth. Thus, according to participatory theory, what is believed to be true will be shaped by how the individual is embedded into a certain social context and how they individually engage with it.

Participatory theory also takes into account the ways in which social settings and power relations can affect how truth claims are developed, spread, and verified. What is deemed true may vary in degree depending on various groups or individuals, and marginalized voices or opposing viewpoints may be eliminated or silenced. This view is drastically different than the more traditional views I introduced earlier in this section because it shifts focus away from evidence and internal impressions toward how social interactivity supports belief and faith, or how we believe *with* social others, norms, and customs.

Others have also connected the extended mind literature to ritualized behavior, but less centered around how it facilitates belief. Gaelin Meyer, for example, develops a conception of ritual which considers ritual itself to be a cognitive process. My analysis, in contrast to Meyer's, considers how being embedded in a religious group, including engaging in its rituals, supports religious belief, particularly their formation and transmission in a way which is essentially constitutive to religious believing. Furthermore, others have tried to elucidate how ritualized behavior can support cognition (see, for example, McCauley & Lawson, 2002; Whitehouse, 2002).

Still others have looked at how religious cognition is enriched by material culture, using it to "think the unthinkable" (Krueger, 2016, p. 241; see also Day, 2004). Material culture includes religious structures, artifacts, and other material representations of religious matters. Material culture, it is argued, serves as an external store of representations of religious concepts, people, myths, and other information which some of our thinking fully depends upon. For one, it can

function as an externalized memory.<sup>9</sup> Krueger (2016) argues that “like Otto’s notebook-bound belief that MoMA is on 53<sup>rd</sup> Street, so, too, are some of the faithful’s dispositional beliefs housed in frequently consulted devotional texts. As Colombetti and Roberts (2015) note, many people carry analogue (printed) or digital (in tablets or smartphones) versions of these texts constantly, making them accessible on a moment’s notice. From the perspective of ExM, relying on these texts—as well as manipulating other objects such as a Catholic rosary or Hindu Japa Mala prayer beads—ought to count as a part of the physical process constituting the individual’s faithful disposition or religious sentiment” (p. 242-243).

They can also give a more tangible reality to abstract, complicated, or even contradictory ideas concerning religious matters,<sup>10</sup> and can therefore be seen as tools for understanding (Krueger, 2016). The present paper, as I see it, contributes to this material culture account by also considering how the people themselves are part of this cultural environment. What’s more, the present paper’s typological approach to belief provides a novel application of an existing social ExM framework. Ultimately, in the words of Day (2004), “the broad spectrum of rituals, music, relics, scriptures, statues and buildings typically associated with religious traditions are no longer seen as mere ethnographic icing on the computational cake. Rather than thin cultural ‘wrap arounds’ that dress-up the real cognitive processes going on underneath, they begin to look like central components of the relevant machinery of religious thought” (p. 116; see also Krueger, 2016; Malafouris, 2013). So too, I would argue do the less material social norms themselves, and the people who in part embody them.

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<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Mithen (1998) “The Supernatural Beings of Prehistory and the External Storage of Religious Ideas” and Krueger (2016) “Extended mind and religious cognition.”

<sup>10</sup> Many have been interested in how people make sense of abstract religious ideas, for example Day (2004) and Krueger (2016). Krueger tells how “Day notes that engaging with unthinkable deities and realities in religious worship or imagination, for example, presents a cognitive dilemma. On the one hand, despite their supernatural nature, the actions, decisions, and motivations of these deities are surprisingly intelligible. This is because they generally conform to our folk psychological expectations about non-supernatural agents” for example by “possessing beliefs, desires, and intentions” while “on the other hand, they also possess properties and abilities we can barely even imagine: they exist outside of space and time but still causally intervene in human affairs; the God of Jews, Christians, and Muslims knows everything, is everywhere at once, and is composed of nonphysical stuff—or a mysterious mixture of both human and divine reality (e.g., Jesus)” (p. 243). Others have been interested in similar questions, for example psychologists who are interested in how people use conceptual metaphors to relate abstract concepts (like God) to more tangible things (like a father, a shepherd, light); see, for example, Landau, Keefer, & Rials (2010); Keefer, Rials, & Brown (2021).

My participatory views on religious belief, I think, align nicely with Gallagher's concept of "mental institutions," or modes of cognition which could not exist in the absence of integration with a particular social institution. That is to say that having religious beliefs involves participating in a world with social others, in how we come to believe in the first place, how we maintain our beliefs, and how these beliefs relate to other aspects of our cognition and behavior. Social others are the vehicles by which we have beliefs of this sort. Gallagher's claim is one of dependency also. Based on my reading, Gallagher is arguing that a legal decision is a type of decision making that is only able to exist within a legal setting. When juror Alexis is playing her role in a legal decision, she decides *with* the legal institution. I am arguing that religious beliefs are a type of belief which are given reality through a religious setting and peerage. When Fidel believes that Jesus is his savior, he believes this *with* his parish. Not simply alongside his parish but using his parish. Embeddedness within a social paideia is a necessary component of having a belief of this kind because they are the means through which we develop beliefs of this kind. Through our interaction with this broader context, we are able to teach ourselves to believe these things. I hope to show, as I defend this view in the remainder of this section, that this is because religious beliefs are more than just internal representations about certain types of things. They are importantly also things we form through social interaction, and things we are able to believe because we experience the world as socially rich for interaction.

I turn my attention to some of the concerns discussed in Section II that orbit the extended mind view. Pretty clearly to me, beliefs (of all types) are cognitive and mental states. It is my conviction also that the more complicated social dynamics of belief revision and transmission are themselves (equally) cognitive exercises. Similar to Gallagher, I argue that there are types of belief (like there are types of decision) which originate out of our engagement with a social setting.

The parity principle is not easily applied anyway in the case of religious beliefs (except by adopting an internalist account of religious belief, which I am trying to reject). This, to me, is because religious beliefs are essentially "in the world" phenomena. By this, I mean that religious belief is hard to imagine going on exclusively within our own head in the first place. I do not mean this because of religious belief's subject matter alone; rather, religious believing functions

via embeddedness as well. Essentially, to have a belief of this kind, you must be in the world and view the world as social.

We can imagine a scenario in which a person named Fidel, without the assistance of any social contacts, comes to the animistic or anthropomorphizing conclusion that “these rocks each have souls” (see Guthrie, 1995; Guthrie, 2002; Guthrie, 2000 for theories on the development of religion and animism). Equally, he might embrace and support this opinion after hearing it from a lone wandering wiseman, after being born into a family or community that supports it, or after joining an established organization that, together with the institution’s specialists, sanctions the belief. What is important is not that the belief exists in a world a real social others, only that the person believing experiences the world as a social one.

In the original case, there is no social other with which to participate regarding their religious belief. *Prima facie*, there is no participatory aspect to case 1, and it appears as a simple representation of the (believed in) facts of the outside world. My aim with this case was also to show an instance of religious belief which does not involve belief transmission from outside sources to the individual. I argue this to assuage any concerns regarding my framing of religious belief as participatory. I am trying to highlight that this does not necessarily entail the influence of real social others (other human beings). Instead, I hope to show that religious beliefs are a product of our tendency toward experiencing the world as social and are formed via these interactions with a social environment. I will not argue that this case could go on solely “inside the head.” I instead argue, to reiterate, that religious belief is necessarily an “in the social world” form of cognition. To argue for this, I support my case by drawing from the work of anthropologist of religion Stewart Guthrie.

Importantly, I do not want to consider animistic beliefs to be “primitive” or “less developed” in comparison to polytheistic or monotheistic religions, as some early scholars of animistic religion did (e.g., Edward B. Taylor). Rather, I am trying to isolate an instance of religious belief which is well explained by simple cognitive processes underlying belief formation and which does not necessarily involve, *prima facie*, a social environment. Following Stewart Guthrie’s analysis, animistic religions are equally as complex and modern as any other religion, however, they may

still provide us with a useful tool for imagining what early human religions might have been like (e.g., Guthrie, 2002). What's more, others have discussed related topics within the ExM literature (such as HAAD; Meyer, n.d.; McCauley & Lawson, 2002). As such, I use animism as a starting point to more realistically distance my first case from beliefs which are spread by transmission from one person to another to connect belief formation to simpler and more specific cognitive processes, and which does not at first glance involve interaction with a social environment (since, it may be hard to imagine, for example, excluding the influence of divine revelation, developing Christian beliefs without some exposure to other believers).

First off, what is animism? "Animists are people who recognize that the world is full of persons, only some of whom are human, and that life is always lived in relationship to others" (Harvey, 2005, p. xi). Animism is a large and diverse category of beliefs and religious practices associated with the belief in spirits, including in humans, other living creatures (such as animals and plants), the dead, inanimate objects (like masks), landforms (like volcanos), and elsewhere. Animistic beliefs are characterized by the recognition of personhood and spirit in things around us in the natural world (and often in dreams). Like other religious belief systems, this recognition of personhood helps to guide behavior toward maintaining good relationships with social others (including real people and believed in spirits).

In my original case the belief in question does not originate with a social other (belief transmission), but I will here argue that it is critically social and participatory. At the very least, the first case involves Fidel's interaction with the physical world around him (and so in part originates from his being a body in the world). But what's more, theories of religion have argued that animistic beliefs, and perhaps religion in general, originate out of humankind's tendency to anthropomorphize nature (Guthrie, 1995). Guthrie argues that people are drawn toward ascribing personhood to things in nature, including clouds, fire, leaves, wind, and even bicycles as a product of a cognitive bias known as Hypersensitive Agency Detection (or Hyperactive Agency Detection; HAAD). HAAD was first theorized and coined by psychologist Justin Barrett. This tendency, Guthrie argues, has an evolutionary purpose in how it guides interaction with the world (e.g., assuming agency better allows us to avoid potential predators), and is fundamentally



inclined toward seeing the world as social (for other theories on the evolutionary purpose, if any, of religious thinking, see Pyysiäinen & Hauser, 2010).

Seen through the participatory lens that I endorse in this paper, even non-transmitted religious beliefs can be seen as socially interactive with perceived social others. That is to say that animistic beliefs are religious (above their subject matter) because they also depend upon participation (they involve our participation with the spirits or perceived agency in things around us and are formed and maintained by exploring, manipulating, and engaging with this social space). Thus, we maybe cannot imagine a case of religious belief which goes on exclusively within the head. Rather, I argue, religious belief formation and maintenance necessarily involves being in the world and participating with perceived social others, in our case a rock and its spirit. This case, to me, helps to show how religious belief is essentially a function of being a body in a world of social others with whom we are interacting and is more than just standard beliefs concerning certain subject matters.

The latter cases show examples of belief transmission as the initial exposure to the belief beginning with exposure to a social other or set of social or formal institutions who endorse the belief. Belief transmission, though its functioning is quite different from the first case, is equally a cognitive process which involves cognition on both sides of any exchange. There are cognitive aspects to believing in the first place, persuading, and equally so to weighing and contemplating the ideas of others, endorsing them or not, and so on. This full array of distributed processes, considered through my participatory model which emphasizes the role of ritual and social engagement in forming, maintaining, and spreading religious beliefs, creates a fuller picture of religious belief dynamics (e.g., Whitehouse, 2004; Whitehouse, 2002). In essence, we form our beliefs, weigh them critically, upkeep them, spread them, discard them, and more *with* social spaces as we navigate them.

Importantly, I think belief transmission, revision, and fixation can be influenced along both top-down and bottom-up pathways (think back to how some ExM theorists have highlighted the importance of inextricably dense interactivity between internal and external resources). For the top-down, similar to the legal decision case given by Gallagher, the institution establishes the

precedents for the rules of evidence (for instance, by deciding which religious texts are authoritative on the subject) and avenues of justification (for instance, ways we can apply philosophical methods to the study of religious texts) available to belief formation, doubt, and fixation. To preserve the integrity of their belief systems, religious institutions form collective and official views, engage in argumentation, present evidence, and engage in disputes with outside forces. They exert top-down control in a way that constrains what parishioners see fit to believe. Equally as important, institutions give us schemas for action and facilitate involvement in ritual practice. In doing so, they help to temper the beliefs which they espouse.

These institutional experts may be clergy people, theologians, pandits, monks, or other members who take on ceremonious roles. In contrast to the instances of the legal system, however, I think there is greater input from the lowest rung of a religious group. Gallagher (2013) addresses the concern that Alexis is not sufficiently involved in the proceedings of a court case, even if she were to have the final say after having experts limit the kinds of questions she could ask and the potential responses to those questions with the rules of judgement clearly laid out for her. The limitations stated, according to him, are "stored in a system - a system previously established in cognitive processes" (p. 4). Although the level of activity may not be crucial, I believe there should be a dynamic interaction between internal cognitive events and institutional standards. The official views of religious institutions are in some respects more delicate and malleable, while legal professionals have a more rigid influence over how common people engage with the institution. While maintaining tradition is also a crucial component of religious practice, the institution's beliefs might occasionally shift as a result of pressure from below. Thus, the contributions of individual members to the social environment, along with their takeaways from it, will differ among cases, both quantitatively and qualitatively. According to Gallagher (2013), "The involved cognition is distributed. There is a distribution across a number of participants – including the experts, where the distribution is different in each scenario" (p. 4). Yet participatory perspectives also point to the role of power dynamics while also considering the role of individual actors. In reality, it is not often the case that every member of a social group exerts the same degree of influence over the group as a whole. Following Gallagher, these roles will differ on a case-by-case basis.

This considered, when it comes to the views they believe, parishioners and their parishes have a more dynamic interaction than in Alexis' scenario, where the contributions of experts are farther removed from Alexis' choice. The opinions of specialists, laypeople, and even the greater community outside of the church are taken into consideration when forming a religious institution's official views. The "give-and-take" nature of religious belief systems includes feedforward and feedback mechanisms between institutions and individual minds. I've already shown how an institution can influence people's worldviews. On the other hand, the lowest-ranking individuals of the organization can influence the views of the organization as a whole. This could occur at the parish level, for instance, if a layperson were to persuade a priest of his interpretation of a biblical passage, or on a macrolevel, where the official beliefs of an institution can change due to the beliefs of the larger community, other institutions, or the general zeitgeist.<sup>11</sup>

A notable example is how the Catholic church's views have gradually changed from explicit opposition to LGBTQ+ individuals seeking legal marriage in 2003 to support for such individuals, in line with the high levels of support among Catholics in most Western European nations (Diamant, 2020). In the legal system, the authority of a non-expert, such as a jury, is constrained by the rules of the game. The general public may exert pressure on these laws and legal norms, although this is typically done in a more indirect manner, such as by supporting a candidate, participating in a referendum, or engaging in protest or activism. Keeping the participatory view in sight, believing that certain behaviors or identities are sinful, clearly, is not an evidential claim; it is one that is formed, shaped, and deployed within overlapping cultural spaces in which it responds to social, material, ritualistic, and other environmental factors which play roles in the changing consensus. Thus, organized religion and other systems of collective belief have quite different feedback processes than legal decisions because beliefs are more fluid and intangible, as compared to codified law or legal precedent. Admittedly, however, formal religious institutions, including the Catholic church and others, wield a large amount of top-down

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<sup>11</sup> Others have pointed to the fact that religious beliefs are shaped by the spirit of the times. Krueger (2016) notes, for example, that in some churches “services are celebrated with rock music, light shows, and videos—and worshippers are encouraged to stand, sing, and energetically participate. Again, these contemporary forms of worship have arisen in response to the changing values and emotional needs of modern audiences” (p. 250) while as recently as the 1960s, rock music was widely considered to be “the devil’s music” by many concerned Christians (see Stephens, 2018).

control over their followers, not unlike the legal system in this general respect.<sup>i</sup> As was noted before, power within social groups can play a huge role in the structure and evolution of social practice and belief.

In addition, others have considered talk as a form of religious practice, ritual, and form of activity (e.g., Wuthnow, 2011). Talk, including ritual readings of scripture, prayer, singing hymns, the act of confession, and even including small talk among a parish, are likely to help us reinforce our beliefs and may have a unique role in tempering belief. That is because speech involves more direct expressions of belief and for us to recommit to what we otherwise implicitly or dispositionally believe. The other side of that same coin is that talk, especially open dialogue, helps to facilitate belief transmission and belief revision.

In sum, religious belief is essentially social. The dynamics of religious belief, including formation, fixation, transmission, and revision are cognitive processes that take shape through social activity and participation. It is a type of believing which is done with others. In the next section, I will turn to how two other aspects of cognition: affectivity and identity, are situated within this approach. I argue that our social environment is also a tool in our feeling and identity and enables new forms of these areas of cognition.

#### **Section IV – Connecting Socially ExM to Affectivity and Selfhood**

Recent trends in ExM research have better considered affectivity, identity, perception, memory, and other forms and aspects of cognition; for example, see Krueger's (2016) "Extended Mind and Religious Cognition"; Carter, Gordon, and Palermos's (2016) "Extended Emotion"; Colombetti and Roberts's (2015) "Extending the Extended Mind: the Case for Extended Affectivity"; Krueger's (2015) "Emotions and the Social Niche" and (2014b) "Varieties of Extended Emotions." In the present section, I address how we also use our broader social environment, including social others, to have unique religious affective experiences and senses of selfhood. Krueger (2016) considers how material culture facilitates unique emotional experiences: "moods and emotions, such as awe, wonder, joy, love, despair, gratitude, contrition, guilt, and compassion, seem to be a central part of religious experience. Very often the material context in

which we enact our religious practices, and the tools we use to enact them, are designed specifically to scaffold the emergence and ongoing development of these feelings” (p. 245). Notably, Krueger is describing how music is something that we can “explore” and “manipulate” as we use it to “guide (and regulate) our musically driven emotions and behavior.” Music, crucially, is something “*we can do things with*” to Krueger. In this section, I argue the same of the living and nonmaterial aspects of a religious space, stepping away from belief to discuss affectivity and the self.<sup>12</sup> Similar to Krueger on material culture, I think that social others, norms, customs, and institutions are things *we can do things with*, as I’ve argued for in Section IV regarding believing, and things *we can also feel with* and *identify ourselves with*, as I will argue in this section.

Furthermore, Krueger has also given attention to the key role that music plays in organizing religious rituals. Krueger notes that “musical structures facilitate organized movements and behavioral coordination between participants by providing environmental cues enabling groups of individuals to move and act in time, as one... In these traditions, musical cues (generally organ or choral music) signal when to sit, stand, kneel, pray, or greet one’s fellow worshippers; they also signal the start of the gospel reading, tell participants when to approach the front of the church for communion, and even determine what sort of actions are appropriate during a particular phase of the service (e.g., slow, thoughtful music when filing back to one’s seat after communion versus buoyant end-of service music signaling the freedom to get up and mingle)” while “also encoding ritualistic practices and action scripts and, in so doing, preserves their memory over many generations” (p. 247). His view here seems to see music as an external resource which enables ritualized behavior, together with its unique cognitive profile. My view, to be clear, also views the “stage directions” of this ritualized behavior, or the nonmaterial culture, as part of the external apparatus which enables unique cognitive profiles.

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<sup>12</sup> Relatedly, belief and feeling have a tight relationship. That is, our beliefs about religious matters can have a very direct relationship with what we feel. On the one hand, our beliefs about and interactions with the world around us can shape our emotional life and well-being. On the other hand, what we feel can directly impact how we interact with the world and what we believe about it (e.g., Frijda et al., 2000). Emotions have the potential to shape our beliefs, amplify them, alter them, and make them resistant to change. Beliefs and emotions and feelings are thus mutually determinant. Regardless of the relationship between beliefs and emotions, however, my argument in this section is that we feel *with* social others (in the way that we play tennis *with* a racket and believe *with* social others). Notably, I am also not just arguing that religiosity or religious practice associate with differences in cognition. I am arguing that religious communities create new types of affective experiences and are tools in feeling these ways.

## Socially Extended Affectivity

One example of an affective experience I want to explore is that of having sinned. People may feel acute or persistent guilt and shame when they don't act in accordance with their religious principles.<sup>13</sup> Guilt is an experience that we have regarding our perception about a particular action we have taken and is characterized as a negative feeling of remorse and responsibility for some negative event (Dolezal, 2022). Guilt is generally conceived of as an isolated experience, whereas shame is self-oriented and more longitudinal. Shame is perceived as a quality that a person possesses rather than a series of discrete incidents. Shame would be the perception that one is a sinner (inherently or in relation to others), as opposed to guilt, which would be the sense that one has sinned. Generally, this emotional experience is related to how we feel our actions will be interpreted by others. Everybody sins, according to the Christian doctrine, but those who transgress more than others (or believe they do) may suffer shame in particular intensity and for a long period of time. Religious institutions are a significant source of exposure to the numerous beliefs and values that support the process of interpreting a past behavior or oneself as something that others would condemn in the context of guilt and shame.

When we sin and seek forgiveness, we feel guilt, shame, and relief *with* our parish, priest, and the Lord who we confess to, situated within this social custom of sin and confession. While atheists and agnostics have alternative ideological systems for judging right and wrong that may be more or less coupled to external sources, beliefs about sin inevitably depend on a particular worldview and external sources of information like religious texts or social others. The institution also offers a structure for controlling these feelings through repentance and particular methods of asking for pardon. Confession and admitting to moral offences, whether to a priest or in private prayer, entails recalling past incidents, making value-based personal judgements, and

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<sup>13</sup> Moral evaluations, relatedly, are also strongly related to religious convictions as well. A person's religious beliefs can have a significant influence on their behaviors when they must make an ethical choice or appraisal. Their perceptions of what is sinful, karmically significant, or otherwise of religious significance influence how individuals behave in relation to what they and their religious community consider to be moral. What's more, these types of evaluations and choices are highly value-laden and shaped by what we feel. These moral beliefs can also relate to how we judge the qualities and conduct of others as well as how we deal with wrongdoers (Rothschild et al., 2015 for example).

having subjective sensations of guilt, shame, and feeling "cleansed" of misdeeds. We regulate moral concern with our social setting (via confession, purchasing indulgences, etc.), including our own shame and guilt.

Others have considered how the physical architecture of confessionals is designed to facilitate these types of emotional experiences, including by “minimizing distraction and embarrassment by blocking out the external world” (Krueger, 2016, p. 249). By establishing a private area for the parishioner and the priest, divided only by a grid or lattice, where sins can be freely confessed, it also fosters openness and confidence. In this way, the confessional serves as a technological device that manages emotions while also embodying and upholding ideas and customs that are essential to the Catholic faith (Krueger, 2016). Here I would ask you to consider one of the original thought experiments Gallagher (2013) brings to the table featuring the process of building an animal enclosure. Gallagher asks us to consider two explanations for why I build a particular style of fence around my pasture. He contends that my participation in social behaviors and customs is a "specific kind" of enactive coupling. My physical manipulation of a set of wooden poles and wire to keep my cattle in my pasture is not a part of the cognitive process; however, my engagement with the specific local custom or practice of using a fence to solve this problem (and even committing to a particular kind of fence) is a part of the cognitive process. The mental processes necessary to solve the problem would be more restricted "in the head" if there were no regional norm in this regard. Every time, whether formally or informally, cultural norms, regional expertise in the form of customs, etc., influence and mold the thinking (p. 11). Thus, the forest is missed for the trees if we apply a purely material-oriented externalism. The confessional works its wonders only in virtue of its role in facilitating a social custom of confessing, which functions in virtue of the agent's embedded interaction with their church. This social custom gets them reflecting; it is structured to draw their attention to the ways in which they have sinned and to facilitate the regular experience of guilt, shame, penance, and (hopefully) even relief.

Additionally, our ability to control existential anxieties is greatly influenced by our religious beliefs. Concerns regarding mortality, the nature of the human condition, and the meaning and purpose of existence are known as existential questions (e.g., Benatar, 2016). These issues have a

significant impact on how we live our daily lives, set goals, etc.; they can be especially troubling for people because they relate to the very nature of our existence, how we find meaning in the world, and how we approach death (e.g., Kierkegaard, 2013; Cranney, 2013; Landau et al., 2018). Because it threatens the security of our existence, is unavoidable, and entails several uncertainties regarding the afterlife and the possibility of immortality; for instance, the awareness that you as a human will someday die can be extremely anxiety inducing. Additionally, it makes you confront the fleeting nature of your existence and reflect on how to make the most of the time you have.

Existential psychology has identified mechanisms, such as the terror management theory (TMT) (e.g., Vail et al., 2010), by which people can control and offset these worries. According to TMT, individuals can reduce their fear of dying by embracing cultural worldviews and engaging in generative behaviors that (symbolically) immortalize them even after their unavoidable demise. These worldviews are so important to us personally not only because they enable us to comprehend and make significant contributions to the world, but also because they serve as a coping mechanism for our anxieties related to dramatic existential change and the unknowable. The adoption of cultural worldviews (religious or non-religious) and other compensating measures, some of which may more or less entail external or social resources, can be used to control these existential fears. Essentially, TMT theorists argue that we regulate these affective states *with* cultural spaces. While the process of internalizing cultural worldviews is consistent with a computationalist viewpoint, the way that we use them to moderate levels of death anxiety throughout our lives is better understood by externalist accounts in which the social setting is a tool for “exploring” solutions to these anxieties.

As a final instance of affective experience and regulation, I will turn back to marriage, which has also been discussed by Krueger (2016). A legal contract, where an agreement is made and implemented in external memory, is one of Gallagher's best examples. In this case, the surrounding legal institutions influence, limit, and mold the cognitive processes. A similar case would be marriage, which is recognized by law and by religion. A marriage is a particular kind of agreement between two individuals (or families) that is instantiated in external memory and can include a variety of emotive processes, such as feelings of love, attachment, or even



disappointment or oppression. It may also be symbolically expressed, such as through jewelry, clothing, ceremonies, and documents. Although getting and being married can occur without any overtly religious context, institutional standards (whether legal or religious) frequently have an overt role in how agreements are made and how they are organized afterward. The religious institution dominates at every level in the process of exploring our experience of marriage, including everything from a couple's expectations for how daily life in their marriage will be, to their perceptions of its cultural significance, to the particular ways in which a marriage officiant seals the deal, altogether enabling rich emotional experiences. These experiences are conveyed through the use of material culture (as Krueger (2016) shows us<sup>14</sup>) in addition to the cultural norms themselves embodied in the material culture and enacted by the participants. It is a type of agreement which depends upon its social and material cultural context and which carries its emotional weight only within that space. Plainly to me, the material aspects alone are not sufficient either to capture the full picture of why we have such strong emotional experiences at weddings.

In sum, we feel *with* our religious community, and it furnishes us with tools for regulating our emotions. We are able to have unique experiences by navigating and manipulating these social settings, including that of having sinned, being a sinner, being mortal, and being married. This apparatus includes both material and nonmaterial culture (for example, ideas, rules, laws, values, norms, morals, language, organizations, and formal institutions; see Griffiths et al., 2012).

### Socially Extended Self

Turning away from affectivity, I will now touch on the literature concerning extended self, identity, and personality. Clark and Chalmers (1998) in their original paper broach this topic briefly. They ask us “what, finally, of the self? Does the extended mind imply an extended self?”

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<sup>14</sup> These material implements (and practices themselves) also vary vastly based on the cultural context. Krueger notes that “The paintings, statues, music, songs, food, clothing, and architecture—as well as the practices surrounding these items—will vary greatly, depending on the beliefs and teachings of the particular religious tradition of which they are a part. For example, contrast the material setting of a wedding in a Catholic church, say, versus a Hindu or a secular wedding ceremony. Accordingly, these items not only scaffold emotional experiences but also embody distinct values, norms, and practices governing distinct emotion scripts and display rules—in other words, ideational factors determine how these context-specific emotions are expressed” (p. 249).

It would seem so. Most of us already accept that the self outstrips the boundaries of consciousness; my dispositional beliefs, for example, constitute in some deep sense part of who I am. If so, then these boundaries may also fall beyond the skin. The information in Otto's notebook, for example, is a central part of his identity as a cognitive agent" (p. 18). He claims that if we accept something similar to the model provided by ExM, then there is no such thing as a self—at least, not if we mean some cognitive essence that serves as the constant foundation of who and what we are (Krueger, 2016). Instead, Clark frames extended self as a "rough-and-tumble control-sharing coalition of processes—some neural, some bodily, some technological—and an ongoing drive to tell a story, to paint a picture in which I am the central player" (Clark, 2007, p. 114). ExM thus provides a much more fluid, dynamic, and changeable picture of the self (Krueger, 2016). While others have done much to develop theories of extended self (e.g., Shin, 2013), I focus my analysis on how religious settings are important tools used in the process of forming and sustaining certain identities.<sup>15</sup> I do this by first looking to a particularly lucid example that can be seen in research on a set of religious practices among the Mexica societies of Meso-America that has unique import for seeing how embeddedness in a religious community can create settings for self-exploration.

In the religions of the Nahuatl peoples of central Mexico, particularly the Mexica, they engaged in a religious practice called Deity Impersonation by scholars (*ixiptlatli* in Nahuatl). Carrasco (2013) argues that this term is misleading, however, because to the Mexica it was believed that the impersonator literally became that god as opposed to being an actor of some sort (notably, Mexica religious beliefs and rituals included over 200 gods all together). Deity Impersonation occurred in many ritual contexts throughout Mexica society. One such instance was the festival of *Toxcatl*, which is described in the Florentine Codex and other primary sources as a yearly celebration of one of the creator gods *Tezcatlipoca* (Lord of the Smoking Mirror). A young, captured man was made to dress as the god and live among the Mexica people for a full year as the god *Tezcatlipoca*, before being sacrificed at the *Templo Mayor*.

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<sup>15</sup> Like affectivity, it is my conviction that personality and identity can have a mutually determinant relationship with certain religious or spiritual beliefs. Clark and Chalmers seem to view beliefs as partially constitutive of identity, which is a view that I am also sympathetic too. Regardless, my aim is to argue that our social environment is an essential tool to exploring some identities.

Upon being chosen for this role, he was believed to literally be Tezcatlipoca himself, and was treated like a god, despite being a war captive. According to primary sources, he received instruction in courtly speaking, singing, and flute playing (discussed in Guilhem, 2003, p. 206). He was greeted with reverence for the entire year as he walked the streets of Tenochtitlan, the capital of Mexica society, performing. People would salute him as the living embodiment of the deity as he strolled about the city. He was also provided with a costume to wear daily and would perform numerous other ceremonies during the year, including being ritually married to four maidens who played the roles of the deities Xochiquetzal, Xilonen, Atlatonan, and Huixtocihuatl.

On festival day at the end of the year, he then proceeded to ascend the pyramid where the priests would sacrifice him. The war captive who would portray Tezcatlipoca in the future participated in the event in person and most likely did so while donning his predecessor's skin as well (Guilhem, 2003, p. 206). Other deity impersonators were also sacrificed during the feast (p. 196).

For one, extensive training was necessary to become an *ixiptla*, which included studying the rituals, dances, songs, and symbolic representations related to the particular god. The impersonator undoubtedly developed a strong sense of discipline, devotion, and mastery as a result of this tough and strenuous training procedure. The arduous training may aid in the *ixiptla*'s development as a person by establishing a strong sense of self and identity connected to their position as a heavenly representative.

What's more, within Mexica culture, the *ixiptla* occupied a prestigious and highly regarded position. They were viewed as bridges between the worlds of the gods and humans, serving as mediators between them. They were accorded a special social rank and prestige since the community respected and valued their role. Given that they were viewed as carrying the divine attributes connected with the deity they impersonated, the community's esteem and acknowledgment might strengthen the *ixiptla*'s sense of identity and help them develop their personalities.

The experience may have also fostered a sense of religious meaning and purpose in life for the *ixiptla* who temporarily transcended themselves by impersonating a deity in order to merge with

the divine for a brief period of time. Their sense of identity was undoubtedly profoundly impacted by this transforming event, which obfuscated the line between the divine and the human. A person's personality and worldview may be influenced by the brief immersion in the divine character, which may result in increased spiritual awareness and a sense of connectedness to a greater purpose. Furthermore, the finite nature of their existence may have greatly impacted their sense of urgency toward fulfilling their responsibilities as an *ixiptla*, especially as each participated in their predecessor's ritual sacrifice.

Finally, the *ixiptla* performed elaborate ceremonies and shows as part of their impersonation, sometimes with the aid of theatrical costumes, masks, and symbolic items. The *ixiptla* were able to embody the traits and virtues of the god they represented because of their creative representations. Ritual was a forum for the *ixiptla* to explore many elements of their personality and identity through the image of the divine, and the performance nature of their function may have allowed for some creativity and self-expression.

In conclusion, the Mexica people's practice of deity impersonation may have helped the *ixiptla* develop a sense of identity, self, and personality through the role's religious importance, rigorous training, communal acknowledgment, transformational experiences, and symbolic manifestations. The interaction of these elements most likely fostered a strong sense of kinship with the divine, a sense of mission, and a distinctive identity connected to their function as God representatives within Mexica culture. This identity that the *ixiptla* took on is not a simple process of impression and internal conversion. Rather it is a conversion that is felt out while exploring and manipulating a new cultural space and role. By becoming an avatar of a divine entity, the *ixiptla* was able to explore a cultural model and to find their own rendition of it, placing their identity and the tradition itself in constant conversation.

In sum, religious practice is connected to how we develop our sense of self and our affective experiences. Religious practice and social norms help to support these cognitive areas by giving us modes of regulating key emotions, finding purpose in life and death, and ways of understanding who we are in relation to the world and society. Following Krueger (2016) once again, who argues that “the sorts of cases discussed affirm anthropologist Clifford Geertz's

(1926–2006) observation that musical spaces, and the artifacts that comprise them, provide the imaginative context in which ‘the lived-in order merges with the dreamed-of order’ (quoted in Small (1998) p. 98)” (p. 248). It is my view that the religious setting, including not only its material culture, but also the direct social others with whom we share the space, and the nonmaterial norms, rules, rituals, and more create an imaginative space in which we can explore new self-concepts, affective experiences, and worldviews.

## **Section V – Conclusion**

Having concluded my analysis, I will summarize my arguments in this section and address some possible detractors or gaps. Centrally, I have argued that religious believing is partly constituted by social practice and engagement, including religious ritual and other forms of nonmaterial culture. I have argued that religious beliefs are a type of truth claim about the world which are entertained only by embedded agents in the world, and which are properly entertained through active manipulation of a particular social environment. I proceeded to connect the socially extended framework to affective processes and identity to show how social practice shapes these domains. Next, I will consider possible detractors to my arguments.

Some might argue that religious belief is more like beliefs about matter of fact because ritual and social practice have been given an inflated role in the case of belief formation. To this, I would point to the philosophical and psychological research which has highlighted many unique characteristics of religious belief. While I do not think social practice is the only aspect that sets religious belief apart from other types of belief, I do think that it is an important difference which has particular applications to theories of socially ExM. Others might take issue with my application of participatory theory, particularly as it relates to participatory epistemology. Importantly, I am not arguing about the real truth value of religious beliefs. Rather, I argue only that social participation is essential to the existence of such a type of beliefs, and that they (ritual and belief) both form and develop via involvement with a social paideia.

Some might argue that ritual itself is cognitive (following Meyer, n.d.), and supports belief, so it is extended ritualized behavior as opposed to extended belief. I, on the other hand, have argued

that ritual and social practice play a constitutive role in religious believing. I do not disagree that ritualized behavior is itself cognitive. Instead, I am inclined to think that while ritual itself may also be cognitive, a cognitive process (engaging in ritual) can play a fundamental role in a different cognitive process (religious believing).

Some might argue that cognition is scaffolded rather than extended. This is a debate for somewhere else, as there is much disagreement in this area and this debate would warrant its own project. While I am largely impartial to which account can better explain the relationship between social practice and belief, I tailor my analysis to the theoretical perspective outlined by Shaun Gallagher because I think it best fits my view of religious belief as participatory (at least among the perspectives that I am aware of).

Overall, I have argued that the above cognitive functions are formed and attuned via embedment in a social *paideia* or community and by actively engaging in and exploring ourselves within its rituals and social customs. Often today, these social groups take on organized structures in the form of formal institutions. Understanding these institutions, which can restrict, improve, permit, or even originate *de-novo* specific types of mental activity, is essential to comprehending these cognitive processes themselves. Future directions for research could include further exploring the structural profile of religious belief dynamics, particularly by focusing in on the extended nature of different mechanisms through which beliefs are shared from person to person, including how power relates to the various roles in these relationships, and the mechanisms through which people maintain their religious beliefs via social and material practice and integration.<sup>1</sup> Future projects could also build upon the limited literature on socially extended self, in the religious context and otherwise.

The manner in which disciplinary institutions mold our behavior and thought processes is famously discussed by Foucault (1975). He especially discusses how this role justifies their existence. According to him, they are there to wield power, shape people into societal models, and impose obedience to social norms. In a jail, a criminal is the institution's input; its intended output is a person who has been reformed. In a school, an untrained, often misbehaving pupil is the input, and the goal is to produce an obedient young scholar. Institutions have an omnipresent

and extensive influence over how we think, feel, and act. Yet, at the same time, as I hope to have shown, social institutions generate new ways of believing and new content for our belief. Religious belief ties us to our community, guides our actions toward what we consider good and ethical, and helps us make sense of challenging subjects like meaning and death. As such, religious institutions are much like the common ExM examples of tools and calculators in how they are tools that support cognition and mental activity, from believing, to feeling, to being, all while creating new ways of doing those things.

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<sup>i</sup> This change or addition was made after receiving feedback from markers within the department and was not featured in the submitted version of this dissertation.