

[Norenzayan, A., & Shariff, A. F. \(2008\). The origin and evolution of religious prosociality. *Science*, 322, 58:62](#)

We examine empirical evidence for religious prosociality, the hypothesis that religions facilitate costly behaviors that benefit other people. Although sociological surveys reveal an association between self-reports of religiosity and prosociality, experiments measuring religiosity and actual prosocial behavior suggest that this association emerges primarily in contexts where reputational concerns are heightened. Experimentally induced religious thoughts reduce rates of cheating and increase altruistic behavior among anonymous strangers. Experiments demonstrate an association between apparent profession of religious devotion and greater trust. Cross-cultural evidence suggests an association between the cultural presence of morally concerned deities and large group size in humans. We synthesize converging evidence from various fields for religious prosociality, address its specific boundary conditions, and point to unresolved questions and novel predictions.

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