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1 Background

For the past seven years I have been engaged in the exploration of religious conflict and violence.¹ That interest, coupled with research on the early history of Christian preaching, on the one hand, and, on the other, of the career of a Christian cleric at the centre of a schism that in the early fifth century C. E. split much of the Roman empire, has led me to focus in on how and why religious groups come into conflict in the first place and the possible agency of language in religious sectarianism and radicalisation.² This focus has in turn led me to argue that there is nothing special or essential about religion in relation to social conflict or social violence and that we should look rather to neurological or cognitive processes for explanations.³ This has directed me in particular to seek explanatory models in theories and experimental research findings that emerge from the study, on the one hand, of social – specifically, moral – psychology and, on the other, of cognitive linguistics – in this latter case, most especially moral and morally-encoded conceptual metaphors.⁴ Other neuroscientific research can, I have found, also be brought to bear that usefully informs and strengthens the insights from those two fields.⁵ It is at the neuro-cognitive level, I would argue, that we find the most fruitful explanation for behaviours and events that have often proven to defy reason. This is because, as I will argue in this article, there is a significant role in both the generation and the memory of religious conflict played not by historical reasoning in the usual sense – although a rational, conscious element is involved – but historical pre-reasoning. That is, historical reasoning matters not because of the reasoning *per se*, but because of what the reasoning activates at the pre-conscious, and therefore pre-rational, level in the brains of those who tell and retell their own history and that of other groups whom they encounter.

What is activated can be both positive and negative. It is much easier, however, as the mass of scholarly literature on the topic shows, to analyse religious conflict in the negative than in the positive. With this in mind, when I employ the term “the dark side of historical reasonings” rather than this negative aspect, I refer to what cognitive psychologists term “the dark side of the mind”, that is “the mental unconscious where processes unfold without conscious awareness, without conscious control and without intention or self-reflection”.⁶ A consequence of bringing the pre-conscious mind into consideration is the opening up of the proposition that, since in terms of the evolution of the human brain the passage of time between the earliest documentary human history and the present is negligible – the brains of humans some 3,000 years ago and today are similarly cognitively modern⁷ – it is possible

¹ The research presented is funded by an Australian Research Council grant (DP170104595: Memories of Utopia: Destroying the Past to Create the Future, 2017-2020).

² See, e. g., Mayer 2013, 2017.

³ See Mayer 2018, 2020.

⁴ See Mayer 2019a.

⁵ The work of Ingram 2013, now already dated, in the field of Critical Rhetoric concerning emotional political rhetoric as causative of literal brain damage and as neuro-chemically rewarding has proven particularly useful.

⁶ Banaji 2011, 1.

⁷ On the significant time spans involved in the evolution of the modern brain’s physiology, see Holloway/Sherwood/Hof/Rilling 2009. On the evolution of human cognition (brain functions), see Heyes 2012. The time period under consideration in this article is defined by a focus on discourse, that is, the origin and survival of writings that provide evidence of a particular group’s reasoning about the past.

that a number of the same pre-conscious cognitive processes that inform conflict behaviour in the present have been at play throughout that time period. There is a large argument here about the role of culture in informing specific social behaviour,⁸ just as there is an equally major discussion about whether a post-Reformation – largely Protestant – concept of religion has validity for the millennia prior to the Reformation.⁹ These considerations are acknowledged.¹⁰ In the specific case of moral judgments, as I have argued elsewhere, however, there is strong evidence to suggest that, while culturally informed, the way moral judgments are formed and processed has a tendency to be cognitively universal.¹¹ With all of these considerations in mind, what I will proceed to do is to set out a number of propositions concerning ways in which an understanding of the pre-conscious mind can help us to better understand the different roles in generating or mitigating religious conflict that historical reasoning can play.

2 Conflict, reasoning, and the dark side of the mind

For the purposes of clarification a number of theoretical frameworks and definitions specific to religious conflict and historical reasoning require setting out. It is also important to establish precisely which areas of research within the cognitive and neuro- sciences are likely to provide the most useful explanatory models and to understand why this is the case.

2.1 Historical reasoning, religion and conflict

Firstly, in the context of religious conflict, historical reasoning can be defined in at least three different ways. It can be used to refer to the study of reasoning that produces religious conflict at different periods in historical time, excluding the present. This kind of approach produces an historical survey. Case studies are presented and, although some common threads might be observed, the diversity exhibited due to individual contexts tends to be the focus.¹² Historical reasoning can also be used to refer to reasoning about the past by religious groups that produces conflict between or within those same religious groups. Usually that reasoning concerns the group's own past and – as will be argued – primes actors within that group for conflict in that group's present.¹³ This does not negate historical studies of historical reasoning in this second sense. The group's present concerns the moment in time that is the focus of our analysis or study and the past it reasons about is always relative to it. It is the second sense that is the focus of the present article. A third understanding of historical reasoning is also possible. When one is concerned with reasoning in the cognitive-

⁸ See, e.g., Feder 2016.

⁹ See, e.g., Nongbri 2013, Barton/Boyarin 2016, McCutcheon 2018.

¹⁰ It is similarly important to acknowledge that there is a rapidly expanding field of research that explores the cognitive evolution of religion from which the cognitive approaches explored in the present article are distinct. For a survey of approaches to this field from an historical perspective, see Petersen/Sælid/Martin/Jensen/Sørensen 2019. Cognitive evolution of religion theories sit within the larger field of Cognitive Science of Religion, exemplified by the work of scholars like Harvey Whitehouse (University of Oxford).

¹¹ See Mayer 2019a.

¹² This is the case with the bulk of the edited volumes produced by or associated with the research project in which I have been engaged: Mayer/Neil 2013, Mayer/De Wet 2018, Papanikolaou/Demacopoulos 2019, Neil/Simic 2020, Dijkstra/Raschle 2020.

¹³ The use of the term 'priming' here is allied to but differs from current technical usage in cognitive science research. There priming refers to the influence of prior stimuli on the pre-conscious processing of subsequent stimuli, with focus on the influence of sensorimotor processing (phylogenetic scaffolding) on abstract reasoning (ontogenetic scaffolding). See Ackerman/Huang/Bargh 2012, 467-470. The employment of the term here is closer to that of media studies: the influence of pre-conscious schemas and frames activated through narrative patterns on subsequent pre-conscious decision-making and *post hoc* rationalisation.

scientific sense of ‘rationalisation’, reasoning can be viewed as historical because the cognitive priming that the reasoning effects across a religious group is not usually immediate, but rather occurs over a period of time. That is, the cognitive processes that will be discussed produce conflicting reasonings that are difficult to shift precisely because the narratives that underpin them have been told and retold within a religious group over years, decades or even centuries.

Secondly, religious conflict primarily concerns group behaviour. Conflict can occur between different religious groups or within the same religious group. A religiously-motivated dispute between two individuals is a personal dispute or argument. Unless those individuals operate within a group and their views and behaviour are representative of the group, their dispute is not a religious conflict. Religious conflicts, like all conflicts, display characteristics of human groupishness.¹⁴ Acknowledgement of this directs the researcher looking for explanatory models towards sociology and social psychology – fields that explore how groups think and behave. For analysts of religious conflict, the value placed on social theories and models is determined, however, by how one theorises religious conflict. For theorists who locate the primary cause of religious conflict in religion, a modernist understanding of ‘religion’ and of the distinction between sacred and secular leads them to prioritise religious belief sets.¹⁵ For theorists who locate the primary cause of religious conflict in conflict behaviour, priority is given to aspects of religious group-think and associated group behaviour that are common to social groups rather than unique to religion.¹⁶ The first group of scholars hold that there is something essential about religion that causes conflict and that religious conflicts are special in relation to other kinds of conflicts (e.g. transnational, ethnic, or political).¹⁷ The second group, in which I include myself, holds that, when it comes to conflict, there is nothing essential or special about religion.

Thirdly, if one accepts this second position, then an attempt to understand the underlying cause/s of religious conflict directs the researcher towards morality – in particular, moral cognition – as a key component. Teehan 2016 usefully sketches the evolution of morality within humans for the purpose of producing prosocial behaviours that mitigate against innate self-interest in order to facilitate in-group cooperation and advantage. The key points of relevance for understanding the close nexus between morality and religion are as follows:

1. “Humans have an evolved predisposition to cooperate with others, are concerned about their reputations as social partners, and seek to signal their social value; we are acutely sensitive to the risk posed by cheaters and free-riders, and prone to punish those who fail to appropriately contribute to social exchanges. [...] From an evolutionary perspective, moral systems are means of promoting and rewarding prosocial behavior while discouraging and punishing socially costly behavior.”¹⁸
2. Morality evolved as an in-group adaptation. Out-group members “may stand in a competitive relationship” with the in-group. As a result, “Our evolved moral psychology is deeply biased toward the in-group, with a consequent relative moral insensitivity to the out-group.”¹⁹

¹⁴ On “humans as naturally group-forming creatures” and on strong in-group bonding as an evolved threat response, see Ackerman/Huang/Bargh 2012, 462.

¹⁵ E. g., the exclusivity and totalising discourse of monotheisms or ‘scripture’-based religions: Assmann 1998, 2003, 2006.

¹⁶ Wright/Khoo 2019 conduct a survey of religious violence literature that attributes cause to religion and conclude that identified causes tend to be religious variants of common social-psychological processes.

¹⁷ For a critique of this approach, in which it is argued that the religion-secular divide is specious and a project of liberal modernism, see Potts 2018, Cavanaugh 2009, 2014.

¹⁸ Teehan 2016, 6.

¹⁹ Teehan 2016, 6.

3. Evolutionary psychologists distinguish between *ultimate* (e.g. kin altruism) and *proximate* causes (e.g. parental love). “Ultimate causes provide an evolutionary account of how it is that humans came to have the various proximate causes that they have; but it is proximate causes that move us to act”.²⁰
4. “Humans are equipped with cognitive mechanisms for empathy that are bottom-up processes, which function automatically, quickly, and are generated outside of conscious control; and [...] empathy functions as the proximate cause of moral behavior, playing a key role in triggering our moral intuitions.”²¹
5. “Our moral psychology evolved to function in relatively small, homogeneous groups, characteristic of human society for the greater part of our evolutionary history.” Extending small-group moral psychology to “encompass the large, and largely anonymous, groups that humans inhabit” is problematic. The development of religions is “at least one means for extending the reach of our evolved moral tools”.²²
6. Religions, “as cultural institutions, developed to bind communities into socially cohesive, morally bound communities as group size and complexity began to tax our evolved moral intuitions”.²³

Joshua Greene, using the metaphor of moral tribes, explains why this evolved moral psychology works well for small in-groups but is prone to producing conflict when one group encounters another with a divergent “moral commonsense”.²⁴ The moral intuitions that Teehan refers to are “the universal cognitive modules upon which cultures construct moral matrices”.²⁵ The universality of these cognitive modules is significant in terms of explaining why certain types of human group behaviour repeat throughout history and can be observed across cultures and why groups’ reasonings about their past are likely to conform to identifiable patterns when inter- and intra-group conflict is involved. That religions developed on top of these evolved social-functional moral intuitions helps us to understand why explanations for religious conflict that start with religion, even when they focus on the sociology of religion or cognitive science of religion, are less likely to prove useful. It helps to explain why approaches that reject the hypothesis that there is something essential to religion that causes conflict tend to find more satisfactory answers in economic, political or ethnic root causes. It also supports the applicability to religious conflict of the multitude of studies that focus on the cognitive basis of political radicalisation and conflict. The same universal moral intuitions sit beneath, and are common to, human religious, economic, political and ethnic systems.²⁶ At a fundamental level, everything that involves the formation of advantageous human groups and human cooperation within them is, in terms of these pre-conscious social-functional moral intuitions, morally encoded. That is, they have their basis in instinctual value judgements.

2.2 The moral pre-conscious and rationalisation

²⁰ Teehan 2016, 7.

²¹ Teehan 2016, 7.

²² Teehan 2016, 8. The remainder of the article discusses the evolutionary benefit of religions as cultural institutions and the cognitive bases for the religion-morality nexus.

²³ Teehan 2016, 12. That the ‘expression of moral values, but also the nature of religion’ concerns ‘the relation that social practices and discourses establish between people’ is argued on anthropological grounds by Doja 2011.

²⁴ Greene 2013.

²⁵ Haidt 2012, 146. Graham/Haidt/Koleva/Motyl/Iyer/Wojcik/Ditto 2013 sets out the theory in full.

²⁶ Without understanding of moral cognition, Brubaker 2015 makes the same point. The moral pre-conscious as a common link between politics and religion was proposed by Lakoff 1996 on the basis of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), later supported by Haidt 2012 on the basis of Moral Foundations Theory (MFT).

The universal cognitive modules that facilitate in-group cooperation are often labelled intuitions because they function in the pre-conscious or dark side of the human mind. As Yudkin summarises, “they are often beyond the reach of reason, impervious to argumentation”.²⁷ The moral foundations/intuitions thus far identified are small in number and binary: care/harm; fairness/cheating; loyalty/betrayal; authority/subversion; and sanctity/degradation.²⁸ As noted above, acute sensitivity “to the risk posed by cheaters and free-riders”, with an accompanying propensity “to punish those who fail to appropriately contribute to social exchanges” (fairness/cheating), is a particularly strong universal evolved human predisposition. Each moral foundation has a characteristic emotion or set of emotions: compassion (care/harm); anger, gratitude, guilt (fairness/cheating); group pride, rage at traitors (loyalty/betrayal); respect, fear (authority/subversion); disgust (sanctity/degradation).²⁹ The emotions correlate with the automatic, pre-conscious response that occurs before rationalisation.³⁰ The significance of the intuitions (and attendant emotions) lies in how the human brain processes information. The dual process theory of thought asserts that “two different systems of thought co-exist; a quick, automatic, associative, and affective-based form of reasoning and a slow, thoughtful, deliberative process”.³¹ The second system requires cognitive effort, the first is intuitive. In moral reasoning or decision-making, possibly precisely because of the primary role of morality in evolved cognition, rational thought does not have priority. Moral judgments or decisions take place without exception at the intuitive, affective (emotional) level first and are only subsequently rationalised, if rationalisation does occur. That is, we routinely make split-second gut-level moral judgements of which our minds are unaware. Haidt labels this process “the intuitive dog and its rational tail”.³² When reasoning does occur, its purpose is to justify the intuitive moral conclusion that has already been drawn.

The implications of all of these findings for understanding religious conflict per se should by now be becoming self-evident. Religions evolved to extend small in-group cooperation, but in-group cooperation does not work particularly well when groups become larger and more anonymous. Religions have sought to overcome this by developing systems that promote empathy and belonging among non-kin (people who are not part of their family or clan) across large numbers via ritual/devotional practices and explicit, conscious moral codes.³³ Religious observances of these kinds signal commitment to the in-group. Since social-functional moral intuitions – the five moral intuitions described above, on the basis of which humans routinely act – have priority in group behaviour, however, dissonance between a religion’s explicit prescribed moral code and the intuitive moral judgements of individual actors or subgroups within the larger in-group can readily occur.³⁴ That is, the religious moral

²⁷ Yudkin 2018, 38.

²⁸ Haidt 2012, 146. There is some slight variation in how the foundations are labelled: McKay/Whitehouse 2015, 454-455 refer to in-group loyalty/betrayal, respect for authority/subversion, and purity/degradation; Yudkin 2018, 38 refers to purity/disgust. The possibility of liberty/oppression (Haidt 2012, 197-216) as a sixth foundation has yet to be confirmed.

²⁹ Haidt 2012, 146 fig. 6.2.

³⁰ Rozin/Haidt/McCauley 2008.

³¹ Gronchi/Giovannelli 2018, 1.

³² Haidt 2012, 32-60, earlier described as “the emotional dog and its rational tail” in Haidt 2001.

³³ Teehan 2016, 19-24. The prescribed codes do not need to be written down or systematised. Teehan 2016, 14-19, adduces the example of the Tyvan people of western Mongolia to explain how hunter-gatherer religions require ritual practices as signals of religious commitment in relation to morally-relevant transcendent beings.

³⁴ That dissonance can elicit strong condemnation by outsiders (as hypocritical self-interest, eliciting the fairness/cheating intuition in correlation with disgust): Laurent/Clark/Walker/Wiseman 2014. In behavioural terms, perceptions of hypocrisy are unlikely to play a significant role in religious conflict, on the basis that they can elicit a shared moral judgement across groups (Isserow/Klein 2017, 219-220), while insiders who judge that an individual or subgroup within the in-group has violated their own moral authority are more likely to abandon

code that a group aspires to may not match the moral code that it instinctively routinely acts on. In this sense, religions through their prescribed moral codes add an extra layer to what Greene describes as “the tragedy of commonsense morality”.³⁵ The fate of Protestant Christianities following the Reformation, as a consequence of their emphasis on *sola scriptura*, is a case in point. As Gregory observes, rather than unifying or purifying the religion, it was rapidly discovered that scripture itself could be interpreted in multiple ways, leading to sectarianism and long-lasting, intractable inter-group conflicts.³⁶

Of potential benefit for explaining not just religious conflict per se, but the role in religious conflict of historical reasoning is a further aspect of moral cognition: rationalisation. Rationalisation is a form of post-hoc reasoning in which the brain makes sense of our automatic actions. Our mind “takes an action that has already been performed and then concocts the beliefs or desires that would have made it rational”.³⁷ It produces what Cushman describes as a “useful fiction”.³⁸ Given that in moral decision-making rationalisation consistently occurs after the fact, this particular cognitive mechanism has significant implications. Graham, arguing that “even individual rationalization is inherently social”, extends the application of rationalisation from the individual to group-think (collective rationalisation).³⁹ “Just as individual rationalization can extract useful information from non-rational sources like instincts and habits, communal processes can cohere moral intuitions and norms into the shared ‘useful fictions’ of shared moral narratives.”⁴⁰ These shared narratives can result in system-justifying ideological accounts with both advantageous and problematic entailments. As Graham concludes:

[...] collective rationalization shows how these two provisions can be in opposition: system justification and shared narratives about the moral exceptionalism of the in-group can be advantageous, in forming a loyal and orderly collective body, but these useful fictions come at the expense of the truth. The bias Cushman describes (in connection with individual theory of mind) to perceive all behavior as rational can motivate collective rationalization as well, as groups create shared beliefs and (objectively false) narratives to make sense of – and justify – their histories.⁴¹

the in-group rather than fight. Isserow/Klein 2017, 220-221, conclude that judgements of hypocrisy directed at moral authorities may in fact have a mitigating effect and bring morally diverse groups closer together.

³⁵ Greene 2013, 4-5: groups share some core values; each group’s philosophy is woven into its daily life; each group has its own version of moral common sense; they fight, not because they are immoral, but because when they come into competition, they view the contested ground from very different moral perspectives. Cf. Haidt 2012, 366: “[Morality] binds us into ideological teams that fight each other as though the fate of the world depended on our side winning each battle. It blinds us to the fact that each team is composed of good people who have something important to say.”

³⁶ Gregory 2012, esp. 204, where he talks about “rival moral communities”. Gregory’s larger thesis in this book has been viewed as contentious, but this particular insight remains valid. On the conceptual framing and circularity of reasoning that arise when the concept of ‘scriptures’ is central to a religion, see Pyysiäinen 1999.

³⁷ Cushman 2020, 1.

³⁸ Cushman 2020, 8-9. It is to be noted that the entire issue in which Cushman’s article appears is devoted to critique, extension, and nuancing of his thesis. The concept of “useful fiction” is critiqued in particular by Veit/Dewhurst/Dolega/Jones/Stanley/Frankish/Dennett 2020.

³⁹ Graham 2020, 1.

⁴⁰ Graham 2020, 1.

⁴¹ Graham 2020, 2. Similar to the extrapolation from individual rationalisation to group rationalisation, research that identifies the primacy of morality (moral traits + moral brain-processing) in the formulation of third-person identity (Strohinger/Nichols 2015) may eventually also prove relevant to how an in-group processes out-group identity leading to non-rational judgements about the out-group. Brady/Crockett/Van Bavel 2020, 5, for instance, refer to moral-emotion expressions as “among the most powerful signals to the self and others about one’s identity”. Moral emotions refer to the social-functional moral emotions (e.g. outrage, disgust, contempt, shame, elevation). These are distinct from non-moral emotions, e.g. sadness.

By the phrase “shared narratives about the moral exceptionalism of the in-group” Graham is referring to earlier work in which he and Haidt identified a common ideological narrative based on sacred values that is instrumental in generating social conflicts.⁴² The anthropologist Scott Atran, who combines their work on sacred values with fusion theory to explicate the actions of terrorists, explains sacred values as follows:

while the term ‘sacred values’ intuitively denotes religious belief [...] sacred values refer to any preferences regarding objects, beliefs, or practices that people treat as both incompatible or nonfungible with profane issues or economic goods, as when land or law becomes holy or hallowed and as inseparable from people’s conception of ‘self’ and of ‘who we are’.⁴³

“A sincere attachment to sacred values” produces “a rule-bound logic of moral appropriateness” (black or white thinking) that is resistant to cost-benefit analysis.⁴⁴ As part of the psychology of sacredness, the objects, beliefs or practices imbued with sacred value become viewed by the in-group as worthy of ultimate protection, requiring in turn “a vision of what [they] must be protected from: This is a vision of evil.”⁴⁵ The resulting ideological narrative, Graham and Haidt argue, is simple, effective at group binding, and encourages militant action.

Ideological narratives [...] by their very nature, are always stories about good and evil. They identify heroes and villains, they explain how the villains got the upper hand, and they lay out or justify the means by which – if we can just come together and fight hard enough – we can vanquish the villains and return the world to its balanced or proper state.⁴⁶

The way that the brain processes moral decision-making encourages *post hoc* rationalisation of gut moral intuitions. When this occurs within groups and when sacred values are involved, the collective rationalisation of a group’s past is not only likely to diverge from objective reality, but can play an active role in generating conflict and, ultimately, violence.⁴⁷

One final aspect of cognition helps to explain why rationalisations can prove problematic when moral intuitions are involved. This aspect concerns the link between rationalisation and its expression in linguistic narrative form, and the way that our brain utilises patterns. Moral reasoning is abstract reasoning. Cognitive linguists argue that “there is a language-independent system in which abstract thought is understood metaphorically” and that “language uses this system and extends it to a huge new range of abstract thought via metaphor”.⁴⁸ They distinguish between primitive and complex concepts. Primitive concepts “have a schema structure. Schema structures “mediate between embodiment [neural] circuitry and complex concepts that are expressed by linguistic structures”.⁴⁹ Elementary schemas “have a Part-whole structure, with the entire Schema as the Whole, and Semantic Roles as the Parts.”⁵⁰ Schemas thus function conceptually like mini-stories. In complex concepts, neural

⁴² Graham/Haidt 2012. At p. 14 they argue for the inclusion of a psychology of sacredness in the “evolved psychological mechanisms” that are part of moral systems.

⁴³ Atran 2016, 194.

⁴⁴ Atran 2016, 195-197.

⁴⁵ Graham/Haidt 2012, 17.

⁴⁶ Graham/Haidt 2012, 16.

⁴⁷ As Atran 2016 argues, actions based on sacred values are frequently counter-intuitive, the actors are highly resistant to compromise, while the resulting conflict and/or violence can prove intractable. Actions counter normal group psychology in that they can be costly to the group. Actors devoted to a sacred value will fight to the death to protect it, preferencing preservation of the sacred value over not just their own (= martyrdom) but also group survival. Within a devoted-actor mindset, compromise is viewed as betrayal.

⁴⁸ Lakoff 2014, 4. The basic neural theory is presented on p. 5-6.

⁴⁹ Lakoff 2014, 5. Ackerman/Huang/Bargh 2012, 467-471, describe schemas as conceptual scaffolding.

⁵⁰ Lakoff 2014, 5.

binding circuits link these elementary schemas together across different parts of the brain. This produces conceptual metaphors, links emotions to concepts and provides the connection between cognition and behaviour.⁵¹ Combinations of conceptual metaphors produce conceptually coherent frames.⁵² Like schemas, conceptual frames have simple narrative structures and are neurally bound with emotions.⁵³ As cognitive linguists argue, conceptual frames are simple, automatic, and reflexive.

Frames are cognitive shortcuts that we use to interpret the world around us, to represent the world to others, to reason about it and to make decisions having an impact on it. When we categorize a phenomenon in a frame, we give meaning to some aspects of what is observed, and at the same time we discount other aspects that are (or become) less relevant. Thus, frames provide meaning through a selective process, which filters people's perceptions and concepts, providing a specific perspective on a problem.⁵⁴

When frames are activated, they may not be accurate, they leave out essential details, and can prove difficult cognitively to resist and thus override.⁵⁵ Narratives that follow simple patterns – heroes and villains, good and evil, loyalty and betrayal – can produce automatic behaviours and emotions. When a group repeatedly hears and tells such stories about its past, it strengthens the neural bindings to the underlying conceptual frames, constantly arousing the associated emotions in its members' brains. Collectively, the research about social cognition and the evolution of moral intuitions and religion discussed throughout section 2 suggests that narrative patterns that activate moral intuitions in association with perceived threat are likely to prove particularly effective at producing out-group rejection, in-group binding, and militant – in the sense of aggressive and/or defensive – action.

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⁵¹ Lakoff 2014, 5-7.

⁵² Lakoff 2014, 11. Explanation of the role of frames in evolved social cognition is itself still evolving. Lakoff 2009, 28-38, refers to cultural narratives and associates them with personal and group identity. The concept of 'frames' is used variously by different fields. In communication studies (e. g. Brewer/Graf/Willnat 2003, De Vreese 2005) a frame or framing is equated with a story line or narrative pattern (how information is consciously presented), as opposed to cognitive psychology, where narrative patterns are conscious instantiations that are informed by frames. Frames, in this latter perspective, are neurally instantiated and function at the pre-conscious level. On the distinction between frames as "actors' perspectives" and narratives as "the expressed products of those perspectives" from a general social sciences perspective, see Aukes/Bontje/Slinger 2020. For a critique of framing theory within communication studies, see Scheufele/Iyengar 2014.

⁵³ Lakoff 2009, 21-28; Lakoff 2014, 12 (narratives have frame, linear order, emotion, and metaphor structures); Ervas/Gola/Rossi 2015. Ervas/Gola/Rossi, 646, point out the role of emotional bindings for effecting automatic threat response.

⁵⁴ Ervas/Gola/Rossi 2015, 647.

⁵⁵ Shmueli/Elliott/Kaufman 2006, 208: "This selective simplification filters people's perceptions and defines their fields of vision. It can lead to sharply divergent interpretations of an event [...] what makes frames useful also makes them prone to error." Note that 'error' itself is in the eye of the beholder. As Greene 2013 argues, objective reality is irrelevant to moral commonsense, which is sincerely held to be true by the in-group. It is this conviction of moral appropriateness that lies at the heart of social conflict.

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