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Title: Religion: Ritual and Community to Costs and Signals

Abstract: This paper sketches a picture of the early emergence of religion, arguing that religion began as a loosely linked set of practices that established prior to the development of their narrative and ideological component, and that social investment in the transmission of these local versions of proto-religion stabilised prior to religion becoming an institutionally costly ideological system. This sketch models the origin and establishment of religion in egalitarian forager societies. I then extend that picture to groups in transition from egalitarian to inegalitarian social environments, “big men” societies and their archaeological equivalents. In this extension, I consider the costly signalling model of religion and suggest that it is best seen as a family of models. These vary in the extent to which they scale from smaller to larger social worlds. Some are scale-independent; others can be scaled up, but only by overcoming increasingly difficult signal broadcast problems. These issues of scalability are then integrated with transformations in the character and function of ritual and belief, as ritual becomes an instrument for competitive interactions within and across groups, and an expression of unequal status and power, while also retaining in important ways earlier roles of mediating social cohesion. Changes in ritual were both a mechanism and an expression of the shift to a less equal social world.

Bio: Kim Sterelny is a philosopher who was born and educated in Australia, and who has spent his working life in Australia and New Zealand, with occasional departures to England and America. His work has always been on the border areas between philosophy and the sciences, especially the life sciences. In the last decade, he has mostly worked on the evolution of the distinctive features of human social life and the cognitive capacities that support that life. Some of this work is reported in *Thought in a Hostile World* (2003) and *The Evolved Apprentice* (2012). His interests outside philosophy include natural history, cricket and red wine.