

My thesis in this chapter is fourfold. First, the conceptual spark of deity concepts is humanity's hypersensitivity to the presence of *unseen agency* in the world around us. Because this agency, as with our thoughts and intentions, is not visible, it may potentially be anywhere. Second, deity concepts initially develop as elaborations on intuitive reasoning about the agency of the partible and permeable person, particularly after death. Third, the transmission and perpetuation of large-scale socially concerned deities like YHWH rely on their performance of functions that increase social cohesion, such as providing access to "strategic information,"⁴ monitoring behavior, facilitating costly signaling, and punishing violators of social mores. Fourth, these functions are facilitated through powerful social institutions and through the use of material media to *presence*—that is, reify or bring about the presence of—the unseen agency, which may, depending on the relevant reflective reasoning, transform the unseen agency into an agent that may be seen, socially engaged, and even handled. While my thesis builds on a number of well-established features of human cognition, some of the discussion will also address prominent but preliminary theories about evolution and universal experiences of infancy that are thought to contribute to the emergence and development of those features.

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While there continues to be debate about many of the details of the supernatural agency hypothesis, it builds on the convergence of four insights about agency from cognitive and evolutionary psychology that explain the production of deity concepts on an individual level and their propagation on a social level. According to the first of these insights, human evolution has made us hypersensitive to the presence of mental agents in the world around us. This is thought to derive at the most basic level from genes most consistently being passed on by early primates who most rapidly reasoned that the rustling in the bushes or the shadows darting around in the night were agents that might be focused on them. There was a low cost for false positives—maybe you get made fun of—compared to the high cost of false negatives—death—so evolution embedded that hypersensitivity deep in our intuitive reasoning, giving our minds a hair trigger for the presence of mental agents in the world around us (Guthrie 1993; Barrett 2000, 31; Majj, van Shie, and van Elk 2019).

The second insight is the teleological orientation of our intuitive reasoning, or our tendency to attribute purpose and intention to circumstances, events, or entities for which we lack an adequate explanation. In other words, we tend to

⁴ This is a technical term within CSR that generally refers to any information that can aid in human decision-making, and particularly related to social interactions. See Boyer 2001, 150–55; Purzycki et al. 2012; Purzycki 2013.