

# Why You Just Helped That Stranger

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## *The Wall Street Journal:*

As you wait to fly out of a strange town with no plan to return, a local at the airport drops his knapsack in front of you, spilling its contents. Odds are that you will then do something that would astound a meerkat, lion or vampire bat: You will help the stranger pick up his things.

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Human beings have spent 99% of their history living in small hunter-gatherer bands. Such cultures rarely have a deity who pays attention to humans, let alone one who monitors and judges their morality, meting out rewards and punishments. When do religions tend to invent such moralizing gods? A number of researchers—such as Carlos A. Botero of Washington University in St. Louis and his colleagues—have shown that moralizing gods become more common in large-group cultures.

Why? Psychologist Ara Norenzayan of the University of British Columbia (UBC), looking at the size of groups, proposes that as cultures grow, something uniquely human emerges—opportunities to act anonymously. To Dr. Norenzayan, that's when moralizing gods become useful to maintaining the social order. Even if you do something rotten and no one knows, there's a Someone who does.

Read the whole story: [The Wall Street Journal](#)