

# The Amazonian Tribe That Won't Believe in God

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A tribe after Karl Popper's own heart! I remember reading about the Pirahã when I was investigating the etymology of the neologism "ignosticism" coined by the late Rabbi Sherwin Wine of a branch of Humanistic Judaism (it implies that the subject questions the value or relevance of non-falsifiable ideas like "omniscience" and "omnipotence")

The structural parameters of their language, as I recall, means a mythic culture without abstract nouns: "immaterial" propositions like "a Creator" cannot even be conceptualized. I think we would call this *theological non-cognitivism*. Mathematics only exists with reference to immediate, countable items, so there are only words for "one", "a couple", and "many". Integers do not exist. There is no perfect geometry, so why bother speaking or thinking about it? There are only real-world objects which can be referred to by indicative pronouns like "that" and "this", so there don't need to be abstract nouns implying the existence of universal forms – conceptually, this shows how they do not see objects as individual examples of a universal archetype, but, simply, individuals. Likewise, "Death" does not exist, since a non-present person cannot be described: they cannot be the agents of action, so they cannot be the subjects of present-tense verbs in sentences, thus, there is nothing to communicate nor share as being real.

I often think that Plato, *specifically*, and the people whom he inspired were obsessed to the point of developing behavioral neuroses with a religious veneration of the phenomenon of "language". I think a tremendous part of our *current* intellectual culture is absorbed with this same, mistaken conceptualization of linguistic objects as real entities. I also think that Epicurus completely bypasses this trap door of language to which other intellectuals fall prey by grounding his ethics and epistemology in a justifiable physics. He would have a lot to talk about with the Pirahã!