

Dr. H. François Dengah
 Office: 245 D Old Main
 Office Hrs: T.TH 3-4:30pm
 francois.dengah @usu.edu

Evolution of Religion: The Cognitive Science of Religion and Faith

Spring 2016
 ANTH 4800
 3:00-5:30pm W
 OM 243



COURSE DESCRIPTION: In this course we will examine “religion” through the framework of evolutionary theory. To do so, we will utilize conceptual tools and theories from anthropology, as well as from sociology, psychology, and biology. From this perspective we will inquire why religious belief is seemingly unique to our species, the possible reasons for its development, and how religion continues to shape our psychological and social development. To accomplish this task, this course will utilize the original writings from experts from within and outside anthropology. Students will be exposed to foundational thinkers as well as recent scholars who tackle the question of religious belief from an evolutionary angle.

This course utilizes 3 key approaches in discussing evolution and religion:

1. Cognitive byproduct theories: Our minds are predisposed toward certain kinds of “religious” ideas and experiences. These predispositions exist due to evolutionary forces experienced by our ancestors, and together these cognitive modules function in the experience of religion.
2. Adaptationist theories: Religious phenomenon may be adaptive either for individuals, groups, or societies.
3. Agnostic approach to the “existence” of the supernatural. Proving or disproving the existence of supernatural forces is not the concern of this course. Rather, we are interested in how humans, as biological entities, process and utilize religion and religious experience as a means for adaptation and survival.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES: By the end of this course, attentive students will...

Class Objectives	Course Work	IDEA Rating
Better understand the evolutionary approaches to the study of religion	Readings, discussions, lecture	<i>2. Learning fundamental principles, generalizations, or theories</i>
Improve their social scientific writing and oral presentation skills	Discussion, abstracts, exams	<i>8. Developing skills in expressing oneself orally or in writing</i>
Be able to critically examine variations and commonalities in religious belief and behavior cross-culturally.	Readings, discussion, abstracts, exams	<i>11. Learning to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments, and points of view.</i>

READINGS: All readings are available on Canvas. See schedule of readings below. Students are expected to bring all copies of the assigned readings to class.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Class Discussion: This course operates as a seminar, utilizing the philosophy of a “flipped classroom,” where students lead class discussions, and teach the articles to the class. It is expected that you will: 1. Summarize or have other students clearly and succinctly review the readings. 2. Pose questions to the group to develop the main ideas, as well as highlighting strengths and weaknesses. 3. Bring in **outside** resources (films, video clips, news articles, etc.) to highlight important points and to develop the overall discussion.

*Discussion leaders will be assigned randomly by groups of ~5 students. Each group will lead discussion 3x over the semester. Together, these discussions are worth 20% of your final grade.

2. ARTICLE ABSTRACT ASSIGNMENTS: Each week, students will write an abstract for each article, summarizing its argument, approach, results, and conclusions. These should be no more than 200 words per article. It is recommended that you write your abstract immediately after reading the article, while the information is still fresh in your mind. Abstracts are worth 20% of your final grade.

3. CLASS PARTICIPATION: Students are expected to come to class on Wednesday prepared to discuss the readings assigned for the week in question. Half of the participation score (10% of final grade) will come from weekly, in class quizzes. *Class participation will be evaluated separately from attendance.* That is, the quality of participation is assessed quite apart from deducting points for poor attendance. Participation is worth 20% of your final grade.

4. ATTENDANCE POLICY: Attendance at every class meeting is a non-negotiable requirement. This is particularly important since we meet only once a week. More than *two* unexcused absences will lower the grade for the course at the rate of 5% per absence.

5. EXAMINATIONS: 2 take-home essay tests will be required of all students. Each is worth 20% of the final grade.

Midterm Exam: March 2

Final Exam: May 4

GRADING POLICY: The final grade for the course will be based on the following formula:
Abstracts = 20%; Midterm = 20%; Final = 20%; Discussion = 20%; Participation = 20%

MAKE-UP and LATE WORK POLICY: Late assignments will not be accepted. No make-up exams will be given.

CLASSROOM CONDUCT: BE POLITE! Reading newspapers, sleeping, surfing the web, emailing, texting, answering the phone, coming in late, and talking are behaviors disrespectful to the instructor and the rest of the class and absolutely will not be tolerated. Students who persist in these behaviors may be excused from the class or even dropped from the course.

PLAGIARISM: There will be 0 tolerance for plagiarism, and you will receive an F in the course. According to USU: “Plagiarism includes knowingly representing, by paraphrase or direct quotation, the published or unpublished work of another person as one’s own in any academic exercise or activity without full and clear acknowledgment. It also includes the unacknowledged used of materials prepared by another person or agency engaged in the selling of term papers or other academic materials.”

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES: Reasonable accommodation will be provided for all persons with disabilities in order to ensure equal participation within the program. If a student has a

disability that will likely require some accommodation by the instructor, the student must contact the instructor and document the disability through the Disability Resource Center (797-2444), preferably during the first week of the course. Any request for special consideration relating to attendance, pedagogy, taking of examinations, etc., must be discussed with and approved by the instructor. In cooperation with the Disability Resource Center, course materials can be provided in an alternative format.

====TOPICAL SCHEDULE & READING ASSIGNMENTS====

1: 1/13	Orientation
2: 1/20	<p>Defining Religion (Group 1)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Spiro, Melford E. (1987). Religion: Problems of Definition and Explanation. In <i>Culture and Human Nature: The Theoretical Papers of Melford E. Spiro</i>. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Pp. 187-222. 2. Saler, Benson (2008). Conceptualizing Religion: Some Recent Reflections. <i>Religion</i> 38: 219-225. 3. Asad, Talal (1993). The Construction of Religion as an Anthropological Category. 4. Lowie, Robert (1963). Religion in Human Life. <i>American Anthropologist</i> 65:532-542.
3: 1/27	<p>Evolutionary Theory and Adaption (Group 2)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Matthew Day (2008). <i>Godless Savages and Superstitious Dogs: Charles Darwin, Imperial Ethnography, and the Problem of Human Uniqueness</i>. 2. Gould and Lewontin (1979). <i>The Spandrels of San Marco and the Panglossian Paradigm: A Critique of the Adaptationist Programme</i>. 3. Wilson, David Sloan, and William Scott Green (2007). Evolutionary Religious Studies (ERS): A Beginner's Guide. http://evolution.binghamton.edu/religion/resources/guide/ 4. Bloom, Paul (2007). Religion is natural. <i>Developmental Science</i> 10: 147–151.
4: 2/3	<p>Cognitive Science of Religion (Group 3)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Barrett, Justin (2007). Cognitive Science of Religion: What Is It and Why Is It? <i>Religion Compass</i> 1: 1-19. 2. Boyer, Pascal (2003). Religious Thought and Behavior as By-Products of Brain Function. 3. Atran, Scott (2002). <i>In Gods We Trust: The evolutionary landscape of religion</i> pp. 51-79. 4. Rossano, M. (2006). The religious mind and the evolution of religion. <i>Review of General Psychology</i> 10: 346-364.
5: 2/10	<p>Soul Beliefs (Group 4)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tylor, E.B. (1871). Animism. <i>Primitive Culture</i>. London: John Murray. 2. Bering, Jesse (2006). The folk psychology of souls. <i>Behavioral and Brain Sciences</i> 29: 453–462. 3. Bering, Jesse M., Katrina McLeod, Todd K. Shackelford (2005). Reasoning about dead agents reveals possible adaptive trends. <i>Human Nature</i> 16(4):360-381. 4. Bloom, Paul and Dave Pizzaro (2006). <i>Homer's Soul</i>
6: 2/17	<p>Supernatural Beliefs (Group 1)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Kelemen, Deborah (2004). Are Children “Intuitive Theists?” <i>Psychological Science</i> 15: 295–301. 2. Norenzayan, A. & I. Hansen (2006). Belief in supernatural agents in the face of death. <i>Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin</i> 32:174-187. 3. Purzycki, B. (2013). The minds of gods: A comparative study of supernatural agency. <i>Cognition</i> 129:163–179. 4. Barrett, J. (1998). Cognitive constraints on Hindu concepts of the divine. <i>Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion</i> 37:608-619.

7: 2/24	<p>Ritual (Group 2)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Atkinson, Quentin D., and Harvey Whitehouse (2011). The cultural morphospace of ritual form: Examining modes of religiosity cross-culturally. <i>Evolution & Human Behavior</i> 32(1):50-62. 2. Leinard, P. and P. Boyer (2006). Whence collective rituals? A cultural selection model of ritualized behavior. <i>American Anthropologist</i> 108:814-827. 3. Sosis, Richard (2009). The adaptive value of religious ritual. <i>American Scientist</i> 92:166-172. 4. Turner, Victor (1964). Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites de Passage. <i>The Proceedings of the American Ethnological Society</i>. University of Washington Press.
8: 3/2	<p>Adaptation to Psychology (MIDTERM DUE)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Malinowski, Bronislaw (1955). Rational Mastery by Man of His Surroundings. From <i>Magic, Science and Religion</i>. New York: Doubleday. 2. Evans-Pritchard, E.E. (1937). Witchcraft Explains Unfortunate Events. From <i>Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic Among the Azande</i>. Oxford: Clarendon Press. 3. Pattison, E. Mansell (1977). Psychosocial Interpretations of Exorcism. <i>Journal of Operational Psychiatry</i> 8(2). 4. Nash, June (1972). Devils, Witches, and Sudden Death. <i>Natural History</i> 81(3).
Spring Break	
10: 3/16	<p>Adaptation to Social Living (Group 3)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Spiro, Melford (1952). Ghosts, Ifaluk and Teleological Functionalism. <i>American Anthropologist</i> 54 (4): 497-503. 2. Harris, Marvin (1966). The Cultural Ecology of India's Sacred Cows. <i>Current Anthropology</i> 7(1): 51-64. 3. Radcliffe-Brown, A. R. (1945). Religion and Society. <i>The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland</i> 75: 33-43. 4. Shariff, Azim, Norenzayan, Ara, & Henrich, Joseph (2010). The birth of high gods. How the cultural evolution of supernatural policing influenced the emergence of complex, cooperative human societies, paving the way for civilization. In <i>Evolution, culture, and the human mind</i>. New York: Psychology Press. 5. Irons, William (2001). Religion as a hard-to-fake sign of commitment. In <i>Evolution and the Capacity for Commitment</i>. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
11: 3/23	<p>Altered States of Consciousness (Group 4)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lewis-Williams, J.D. (1997). <i>Harnessing the Brain: Vision and Shamanism in Upper Paleolithic Western Europe</i>. 2. McClenon, James (1997). Shamanic Healing, Human Evolution, and the Origin of Religion 36(3):345-354. 3. Bourguignon, Erika (1980). Spirit Possession and Altered States of Consciousness: The Evolution of an Inquiry. In <i>The making of psychological anthropology</i>. 4. Luhrmann, Tanya (2012). <i>When God talks back. Understanding the American evangelical relationship with God</i>. Vintage (excerpt). 5. Greenfield, Sidney (1994). A model explaining Brazilian spiritist surgeries and other unusual, religious-based healings. <i>Subtle Energies & Energy Medicine Journal Archives</i> 5(2).
12: 3/30	<p>Society for Applied Anthropology Conference: NO CLASS</p>

13: 4/6	<p>Healing and Curses (Group 1)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. McClenon, James (2006). The ritual healing theory: Therapeutic suggestion and the origin of religion. <i>Where God and science meet: How brain and evolutionary studies alter our understanding of religion</i>. 2. Moerman, Daniel E., and Wayne B. Jonas (2002). Deconstructing the placebo effect and finding the meaning response. <i>Annals of Internal medicine</i> 136(6): 471-476. 3. Cannon, Walter Voodoo Death 4. Seligman, Rebecca (2005) From Affliction to Affirmation: Narrative Transformation and the Therapeutics of Candomblé Mediumship 42:272-294.
14: 4/13	<p>Skepticism (Group 2)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sagan, Carl (1987). The Burden of Skepticism. <i>The Skeptical Inquire</i> Fall. 2. Norenzayan, Ara, and Will M. Gervais (2012). The origins of religious disbelief. <i>Trends in cognitive science</i> 17: 20–25. 3. Johnson, Dominic (2012). What are Atheists for? Hypotheses on the functions of non-belief in the evolution of religion. <i>Religion, Brain, and Behavior</i> 2(1):48-99
15: 4/20	<p>Emerging Religions (Group 3)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sentes, Bryan and Palmer, Susan (2000). Presumed Immanent: the Raelians, UFO Religions and the Postmodern Condition. <i>Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions</i> 4: 86-105. 2. Wallis, Roy (1975). Scientology: Therapeutic Cult to Religious Sect. <i>Sociology</i> 9:89-100. 3. Muesse, Mark W. (1997). Religious Studies and “Heaven’s Gate”: Making the Strange Familiar and the Familiar Strange. <i>Chronicle of Higher Education</i>. 4. Saliba, John A. (2006). The study of UFO religions. <i>Nova Religio</i> 10(2): 103-123.
16: 4/27	<p>Religion and Violence (Group 4)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Atran, Scott (2006). The moral logic and growth of suicide terrorism. <i>Washington Quarterly</i> 29(2): 127-147. 2. Sosis, Richard, and Candace Alcorta (2008). Militants and martyrs: Evolutionary perspectives on religion and terrorism. <i>Natural security: A Darwinian approach to a dangerous world</i>: 105-124. 3. Atran, Scott, and Jeremy Ginges (2012). Religious and sacred imperatives in human conflict. <i>Science</i> 336(6083): 855-857. 4. Atran, Scott, Hammad Sheikh, and Angel Gomez (2014). Devoted actors sacrifice for close comrades and sacred cause. <i>Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences</i> 111(50): 17702-17703.
17: 5/4	FINALS