

**FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES**

**SCHOOL OF ART HISTORY, CLASSICS AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES**

***Te Kura Toirangi***

**RELIGIOUS STUDIES**

**RELI 328 RELIGION AND HUMAN BIOLOGY  
20 POINTS**

**TRIMESTER 2 2014**

**Important dates**

**Trimester dates:** 14 July to 16 November 2014

**Teaching dates:** 14 July to 17 October 2014

**Mid-trimester break:** 25 August to 7 September 2014

**Study week:** 20–24 October 2014

**Withdrawal dates:** Refer to [www.victoria.ac.nz/students/study/withdrawals-refunds](http://www.victoria.ac.nz/students/study/withdrawals-refunds). If you cannot complete an assignment or sit a test or examination, refer to [www.victoria.ac.nz/students/study/exams/aegrotats](http://www.victoria.ac.nz/students/study/exams/aegrotats).

**Class times and locations**

Lecture place: HMLT103.

Time: Wednesdays 13:10-15:00

Start date: Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> July 2014

Tutorials: start the second week of term and occur every week except for the weeks beginning August 18, and October 13th. Tutors will be available in weeks without tutorials for one to one consultations, by appointment. Students should sign up for tutorials through S-Cubed

**Names and contact details**

**Course Instructor:** Dr. John Shaver

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Office: Hunter HU 115

Office hours: Wednesday 4pm→5pm or by appointment.

**Coordinator:** Associate Professor Joseph Bulbulia

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Office: Hunter HU 322

Office hours: Monday 4pm→5pm or by appointment.

**Administrator:** Alikali Kalliabetsos, HU 318, 463 5299

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## **Communication of additional information**

Additional information or information on changes will be conveyed to students on Blackboard. Because information about the course will change from time-to-time, students are expected to check Blackboard for updates at least once a week.

## **Prescription**

We discover religion from the vantage point of fascinating interdisciplinary research happening at the borders of biology, neuroscience, economics, and religious studies. Sample topics: the praying brain; out of body experiences; the placebo effect; hypnosis; collective ritual; emotion and memory; the evolutionary archaeology of religion; trance; violence and generosity.

## **Course content**

This course approaches religion as a dimension of human biology. We consider research that investigates religion using the methods of cognitive science, evolutionary biology, neuroscience, economics, and social psychology. Topics include religious education; religion and cooperation; hypnosis; collective ritual; emotion and memory; and the evolutionary archaeology of religion.

## **Course learning objectives (CLOs)**

Students who pass this course will be able to:

1. understand debates in the biological study of religions;
2. evaluate arguments based on scientific evidence;
3. construct arguments based on scientific evidence;
4. express ideas clearly and persuasively, in writing.

## **Teaching format**

This course is taught through one two hour lecture and one tutorial per week throughout the trimester.

## **Mandatory course requirements**

In addition to achieving an overall pass mark of 50%, students must:

- Miss no more than two tutorials.
- Students must submit assignments no later than 17.10.2014  
(No assignments will be accepted after 17.10.2014).

## **Workload**

For 20 points one trimester courses, 16 hours per week are recommended. An average student should spend 13 hours per week for preparation, reading and writing in addition to attendance at lectures and tutorials. The total workload for the course, including class time, should be approximately 200 hours.

## Assessment

Assessment items and workload per item		%	CLO(s)	Due date
1	Critical Response Essay 1 (approximately 1,200 words) Recommended average time spent on this task <b>25 hours</b>	15%	1, 2,3, 4	01.08.2014
2	Critical Response Essay 2 (approximately 1,200 words) Recommended average time spent on this task <b>25 hours</b>	15%	1,2,3,4	22.08.2014
3	Critical Response Essay 3 (approximately 1,200 words) Recommended average time spent on this task <b>25 hours</b>	15%	1,2,3,4	12.09.2014
4	Critical Response Essay 4 (approximately 1,200 words) Recommended average time spent on this task <b>25 hours</b>	15%	1,2,3,4	03.10.2014
5	Critical Response Essay 5 (approximately 1,200 words) Recommended average time spent on this task <b>25 hours</b>	15%	1,2,3,4	13.10.2014
6	Final in-class test (100 minutes) <b>16 hours course work throughout term + 24 hours study in the week of the test.</b>	25%	1,2,3,4	15.10.2014

### Marking criteria.

#### Critical response essays:

- 33.3% for clarity.
- 33.3% for critical engagement.
- 33.4% for creativity.

### Submission and return of work

Response essays must be submitted electronically via Blackboard. Essays are due at midnight on the due date. Marks for each item of assessment will be noted on Blackboard, normally within two weeks from submission date.

### Extensions and penalties

- Essays shorter than 1,000 words or longer than 1,500 words will not be marked.
- Any late submission will *not* receive written feedback.
- Unexcused late submissions will receive a 0.05 point deduction for each day that the assignment is late.
- Students will have a 48-hour grace period before receiving point deductions. This period includes weekends and holidays (e.g. if an essay is due 5pm Friday, points will be deducted beginning 5pm Sunday).
- The only valid excuse for a late submission will be a medical certificate.

### Materials and equipment

Students are permitted computers in class, though only to take notes. Students must disable their wifi. Cell phones must be switched off.

# The Lecture Schedule

## Week 1. July 16: Introduction to The Evolutionary Study of Religion

Optional Reading: Smith, E.A., (2000). [Three styles in the evolutionary study of human behavior](#). In (Eds., Lee Cronk, William Irons, and Napoleon Chagnon). *Human Behavior and Adaptation: An Anthropological Perspective*, 27-46. Hawthorne, NY: Aldine de Gruyter.

## Week 2. July 23: The Cognitive Science of Religion

Barrett, J. L. (2011). [Cognitive science of religion: Looking back, looking forward](#). *Journal for the scientific study of Religion*, 50(2), 229-239.

Guthrie, S. (2008). [Spiritual beings: a Darwinian, cognitive account](#). In Bulbulia, J., Sosis, R., Genet, R., Harris, E., Wyman, K., and Genet, C., editors, *The Evolution of Religion: Studies, Theories, and Critiques*, pages 239–245. Collins Foundation Press, Santa Margarita, CA.

## Week 3. July 30: Memetics and Cognitive Optimums

Dawkins, R. (1989 [1976]). *The selfish gene*. New York: Oxford University Press, Chapter 11, [Memes the New Replicators](#), pp.

Boyer, P. (2001). *Religion Explained: the evolutionary origins of religious thought*. New York: Basic Books. [Chapter 2: What supernatural concepts are like](#), pp.51-91

## Week 4. August 6: Religion and Ecology

Rappaport, R. (1967). [Ritual Regulation of Environmental Relations among a New Guinea People](#). *Ethnology* 6(1), 17-30

Sosis, R., & Bulbulia, J. (2011). [The behavioral ecology of religion: the benefits and costs of one evolutionary approach](#). *Religion*, 41(3), 341-362.

## Week 5. August 13: Costly Signaling Theory

Sosis, R. (2006). [Religious behaviors, badges, and bans: Signaling theory and the evolution of religion](#). *Where God and science meet: How brain and evolutionary studies alter our understanding of religion*, 1, 61-86.

Sosis, R., & Bressler, E. R. (2003). [Cooperation and commune longevity: A test of the costly signaling theory of religion](#). *Cross-Cultural Research*, 37(2), 211-239.

## Week 6. August 20: Group Selection and Cultural Evolution

Wilson, D. S. (2005). [Testing major evolutionary hypotheses about religion with a random sample](#). *Human nature*, 16(4), 382-409.

Shariff, A., Norenzayan, A., & Henrich, J. (2010). [The birth of high gods](#). *Evolution, culture, and the human mind*, 119-136.

Richerson, P. J., & Newson, L. (2008). [Is religion adaptive? Yes, no, neutral, but mostly, we don't know](#). *The Evolution of Religion: Studies, Theories, and Critiques*. Collins Foundation Press, Santa Margarita CA pp. 73-78

**Mid-trimester break:** 25 August – 7 September 2014

### **Week 7. September 10: Religion across the Human Lifespan**

Alcorta, C. S. (2006). [Religion and the life course: Is adolescence an “experience expectant” period for religious transmission](#). *Where God and science meet*, 2, 55-79.

Shaver, J. H., & Sosis, R. (2014). [How Does Male Ritual Behavior Vary Across the Lifespan?](#). *Human Nature*, 25(1), 136-160.

### **Week 8. September 17: Religion and Fertility**

Blume, M. (2009). [The reproductive benefits of religious affiliation](#). In *The biological evolution of religious mind and behavior* (pp. 117-126). Springer Berlin Heidelberg.

Weeden, J., Cohen, A. B., & Kenrick, D. T. (2008). [Religious attendance as reproductive support](#). *Evolution and Human Behavior*, 29(5), 327-334.

### **Week 9. September 24: The effects of pathogens on religions**

Fincher, C. L., & Thornhill, R. (2008). [Assortative sociality, limited dispersal, infectious disease and the genesis of the global pattern of religion diversity](#). *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*, 275(1651), 2587-2594.

Fincher, C. L., & Thornhill, R. (2012). [Parasite-stress promotes in-group assortative sociality: The cases of strong family ties and heightened religiosity](#). *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 35(02), 61-79.

### **Week 10. October 1: Stress and Anxiety**

Sosis, R., & Handwerker, W. P. (2011). [Psalms and coping with uncertainty](#): Religious israeli women's responses to the 2006 lebanon war. *American Anthropologist*, 113(1), 40-55.

Sibley, C. G., & Bulbulia, J. (2012). [Faith after an earthquake: A longitudinal study of religion and perceived health before and after the 2011 Christchurch New Zealand earthquake](#). *PloS one*, 7(12), e49648.

### **Week 11. October 8: Ritual and Arousal**

Konvalinka, I., Xygalatas, D., Bulbulia, J., Schjødt, U., Jegindø, E. M., Wallot, S., ... & Roepstorff, A. (2011). [Synchronized arousal between performers and related spectators in a fire-walking ritual](#). *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 108(20), 8514-8519.

Atkinson, Q. D. and Whitehouse, H. (2011). [The cultural morphospace of ritual form examining modes of religiosity cross-culturally](#). *Evolution and Human Behavior*, 32(1):50–62.

### **Week 12. October 15: In-class test**

## Recommended reading

Barrett, J. (2007). "Cognitive Science of Religion: What Is It and Why Is It? - Barrett - 2007 - Religion Compass - Wiley Online Library." Religion Compass.

Bering, J. M. (2006). "The Folk Psychology of Souls." Behav. Brain Sciences**29**: 453-498.

Boyer, P. (2003). "Religious Thought and Behaviour as By-products of Brain Function." Trends in Cognitive Sciences**7**(3): 119-124.

Boyer, P. and P. Lienard (2006). "Why ritualized behavior? Precaution Systems and action parsing in developmental, pathological and cultural rituals." Behavioral and Brain Sciences**29**(6): 595-613.

Bulbulia, J. (2004). "Religious Costs as Adaptations that Signal Altruistic Intention." Evolution and Cognition**10**(1): 19-38.

Bulbulia, J. (2008). "Meme Infection or Religious Niche Construction? An Adaptationist Alternative to The Cultural Maladaptationist Hypothesis." Method and Theory in the Study of Religion**20**(1): 67-107.

Bulbulia, J. (2012). "Spreading order: religion, cooperative niche construction, and risky coordination problems." Biology and Philosophy**27**(1): 1-27.

Dawkins, R. (1989 [1976]). The selfish gene. New York, Oxford University Press.

Geertz, A. W. (2010). "Brain, Body and Culture: A Biocultural Theory of Religion." Method & Theory in the Study of Religion**22**(4): 304-321.

Guthrie, S. (1993). Faces in the clouds: a new theory of religion. New York, Oxford University Press. Chapter 1.

Johnson, D. (2005). "God's Punishment and Public Goods: A Test of the Supernatural Punishment Hypothesis in 186 World Cultures." Human Nature**16**(4): 410-446.

McCauley, R. N. and E. Cohen (2010). "Cognitive Science and the Naturalness of Religion." Philosophy Compass**5**(9): 779-792.

Richerson, P. J. and R. Boyd (2005). Not By Genes Alone: How Culture Transformed Human Evolution. Chicago, The University of Chicago Press.

Richerson, P. J. and L. Newson (2008). Is Religion Adaptive? Yes, No, Neutral, but Mostly, We Don't Know. The Evolution of Religion: Studies, Theories, and Critiques. J. Bulbulia, R. Sosis, R. Genetet al. Santa Margarita, CA, Collins Foundation Press: 73-78.

Schjoedt, U., H. Stødkilde-Jørgensen, et al. (2011). "The Power of Charisma: perceived charisma inhibits the attentional and executive systems of believers in intercessory prayer." Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience**4**(2): 199-207.

Sosis, R. (2000). "Religion and Intragroup Cooperation: Preliminary Results of a Comparative Analysis of Utopian Communities." Cross-Cultural Research**34**(1): 77-88.

Sterelny, K. (2007). "SNAFUS : an evolutionary perspective." Biological Theory2(3): 317-328.

Whitehouse, H. (2004). Modes of Religiosity: A Cognitive Theory of Religious Transmission. Lanham, MD, AltaMira Press.

Wilson, D. S. (2002). Darwin's Cathedral : Evolution, Religion, and the Nature of Society. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.

## Class representative

The class representative provides a useful way to communicate feedback to the teaching staff during the course. A class representative will be selected at the first lecture of the course. Students may like to write the Class Rep's name and details in this box:

Class Rep name and contact details:
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## Student feedback

This course will be evaluated by CAD

Student feedback on University courses may be found at [www.cad.vuw.ac.nz/feedback/feedback\\_display.php](http://www.cad.vuw.ac.nz/feedback/feedback_display.php).

## Other important information

The information above is specific to this course. There is other important information that students must familiarise themselves with, including:

- Academic Integrity and Plagiarism: [www.victoria.ac.nz/students/study/exams/integrity-plagiarism](http://www.victoria.ac.nz/students/study/exams/integrity-plagiarism)
- Aegrotats: [www.victoria.ac.nz/students/study/exams/aegrotats](http://www.victoria.ac.nz/students/study/exams/aegrotats)
- Academic Progress: [www.victoria.ac.nz/students/study/progress/academic-progress](http://www.victoria.ac.nz/students/study/progress/academic-progress) (including restrictions and non-engagement)
- Dates and deadlines: [www.victoria.ac.nz/students/study/dates](http://www.victoria.ac.nz/students/study/dates)
- FHSS Student and Academic Services Office: [www.victoria.ac.nz/fhss/student-admin](http://www.victoria.ac.nz/fhss/student-admin)
- Grades: [www.victoria.ac.nz/students/study/progress/grades](http://www.victoria.ac.nz/students/study/progress/grades)
- Resolving academic issues: [www.victoria.ac.nz/about/governance/dvc-academic/publications](http://www.victoria.ac.nz/about/governance/dvc-academic/publications)
- Special passes: [www.victoria.ac.nz/about/governance/dvc-academic/publications](http://www.victoria.ac.nz/about/governance/dvc-academic/publications)
- Statutes and policies including the Student Conduct Statute: [www.victoria.ac.nz/about/governance/strategy](http://www.victoria.ac.nz/about/governance/strategy)
- Student support: [www.victoria.ac.nz/students/support](http://www.victoria.ac.nz/students/support)
- Students with disabilities: [www.victoria.ac.nz/st\\_services/disability](http://www.victoria.ac.nz/st_services/disability)
- Student Charter: [www.victoria.ac.nz/learning-teaching/learning-partnerships/student-charter](http://www.victoria.ac.nz/learning-teaching/learning-partnerships/student-charter)
- Student Contract: [www.victoria.ac.nz/study/apply-enrol/terms-conditions/student-contract](http://www.victoria.ac.nz/study/apply-enrol/terms-conditions/student-contract)
- Subject Librarians: <http://library.victoria.ac.nz/library-v2/find-your-subject-librarian>
- Turnitin: [www.cad.vuw.ac.nz/wiki/index.php/Turnitin](http://www.cad.vuw.ac.nz/wiki/index.php/Turnitin)
- University structure: [www.victoria.ac.nz/about/governance/structure](http://www.victoria.ac.nz/about/governance/structure)
- Victoria graduate profile: [www.victoria.ac.nz/learning-teaching/learning-partnerships/graduate-profile](http://www.victoria.ac.nz/learning-teaching/learning-partnerships/graduate-profile)
- VUWSA: [www.vuwsa.org.nz](http://www.vuwsa.org.nz)