

## Anthropology 305: The Biology and Ecology of Religion

Spring 2002

T 9:30-12:00

Beach Hall 447A

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There is one fundamental question that will guide this semester: Why do humans practice religion? I believe that to answer this question we must understand ourselves as biological organisms. We are the only species that engages in religious behavior, which raises several obvious questions such as, why have these behavioral patterns evolved in the human lineage? And what are the origins of religion? To understand religion as a cultural institution that impacts human beliefs and behavior we must determine what factors in our evolutionary history have favored religious practice. In this course we will attempt to evaluate two broad and competing hypotheses. The first is that religion served some adaptive function in human history – whether or not it is still adaptive is a different issue and one we won't necessarily address. The alternative hypothesis is that religion did not emerge to solve some adaptive problem, but is epiphenomenal. Religious behavior and belief is obviously multifaceted and extraordinarily complex, thus we should approach our task carefully and respectfully.

**Class Structure:** The class will have a seminar format. This means that all students are *required* to read all assigned readings *before* the class, and must be *prepared to discuss* them in class. Preparation for discussion implies both note-taking and time allocated to synthesizing the material. Students should expect to be called on and to evidence preparation for discussion. The general tone of the discussion should be supportive of a free exchange of ideas. Approximately 55% of the grade for the class will be based on the *quality* of class participation.

**Readings:** Readings will consist of books, book chapters, and journal articles. The three required texts for the class are available at the UConn Co-op:  
Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity by Roy Rappaport  
The Social Ecology of Religion by Vernon Reynolds and Ralph Tanner  
Wondrous Healing: Shamanism, Human Evolution, and the Origin of Religion by J. McClennon

**Grades:** There is no set assignment for this course. Everyone is expected to pursue a “project” that will constitute 45% of your final grade, however, students can choose a topic and format of interest to themselves. In evaluating these assignments I will be considering the quality of the work submitted or presented. Possible projects include writing a grant, writing a paper, conducting research (e.g., experiments, interviews, HRAF, etc.), or presenting a paper, but is not limited to these. Projects may be pursued collaboratively with other classmates. Projects that aim to produce a significant product such as a journal article do not need to be completed by the end of the semester. Large projects will be evaluated on what was accomplished during the semester.

**Assignment Dates:**

**Feb 12:** Students should have spoken to me about their plans for their project by this date and a short written statement (few sentences) describing those plans should be submitted.

**March 26:** Students must provide me with some evidence of their progress (written or oral).

**May 13:** Final projects are due.

## Readings and Class Schedule

### January 29: Introduction

#### February 5: Ritual as Communication

Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity, Roy Rappaport (Ch 1-5)

“Explaining Religion Without Explaining it Away,” John Watanabe and Barbara Smuts

#### February 12: Religious Time and the Sacred

Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity, Roy Rappaport (Ch 6-10)

#### February 19: Religious Experience and the Religion of the Future

Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity, Roy Rappaport (Ch 11-14)

Reading from Ecology and the Sacred (TBA)

#### February 26, March 5, March 12: Ritual and Morality from an Evolutionary Perspective

“Evolutionary Theories of Morality and the Manipulative Use of Signals,” Lee Cronk

“On the Evolution of Morality and Religion: A Response to Lee Cronk,” Roy Rappaport

“The Use of Moralistic Statements in Social Manipulation: a Reply to Roy A. Rappaport,” Cronk

“Religion as a Hard-to-Fake Sign of Commitment,” William Irons

“Alliances and Ritual Ecstasy: Human Responses to Resource Stress,” Brian Hayden

“A Biological View of Morality,” Richard Alexander

“Symbolic Origins,” Terrence Deacon

Sosis (TBA)

#### February 26: The Evolution of Morality

“A Biological View of Morality,” Richard Alexander

“Theories of Morality and the Manipulative Use of Signals,” Lee Cronk

*Recommended but not required:*

“On the Evolution of Morality and Religion: A Response to Lee Cronk,” Roy Rappaport

“The Use of Moralistic Statements in Social Manipulation: a Reply to Roy A. Rappaport,” Cronk

#### March 5: Ritual

“Religion as a Hard-to-Fake Sign of Commitment,” William Irons

“Alliances and Ritual Ecstasy: Human Responses to Resource Stress,” Brian Hayden

“Symbolic Origins,” Terrence Deacon

#### March 12: The Evolution of Morality and Social Control

“Conflict and the Evolution of Social Control,” Christopher Boehm

Commentaries by Antweiler, Bernstein, Black, Carling, Dentan, Gardner, Knauft, Krebs, Thierry, and Tiger

Response: “The Origin of Morality as Social Control,” Christopher Boehm

#### March 19

Spring Break

**March 26: Group Selection and Morality**

“Unto Others: The Evolution and Psychology of Unselfish Behavior,” Sober and Wilson  
 Commentaries by Batson, Boehm, Gintis, Harman, Laland, Odling-Smee, Feldman, Myerud, Nesse, Nunney, Rosenberg, Rottschaefer, Stevens, Vine, Zahavi  
 Response: “Morality and Unto Others,” Sober and Wilson  
 “Cooperation and Commune Longevity: A Test of the Costly Signaling Theory of Religion,” Sosis

**April 2**

Work on projects

**April 9: Religion and the Life Course**

The Social Ecology of Religion, Reynolds and Tanner

**April 16: Shamanism and Health**

Wondrous Healing: Shamanism, Human Evolution, and the Origin of Religion, James McClennon

**April 23: The Neuropsychology of Religion**

“Mammalian Ritual,” Laughlin and McManus  
 “Ritual and Human Social Cognition,” McManus  
 “The Neural Substrates of Religious Experience,” Saver and Rabin  
 “Trance States: A Theoretical Model and Cross-Cultural Analysis,” Winkelman

**April 30: Religion and Health**

“Religion and Psychological Distress,” Ross  
 “The Relation of Religious Belief and Practices, Depression, and Hopelessness in Persons with Clinical Depression,” Murphy, Ciarrocchi, Piedmont, Cheston, Peyrot, Fitchett  
 “Does Religion Influence Adult Health,” Ferraro and Albrecht-Jensen  
 “Religious Attendance Increases Survival by Improving and Maintaining Good Health Behaviors, Mental Health, and Social Relationships,” Strawbridge, Shema, Cohen, Kaplan  
 “Religion and the Well-Being of Adolescents,” Donahue and Benson

**May 7: Nonadaptive Explanations of Religion**

“Toward and Evolutionary Psychology of Religion and Personality,” Kirkpatrick  
 “The Origin of an Illusion,” Guthrie  
 “The Big-Bang of Human Culture: the Origins of Art and Religion,” Mithen  
 “Understanding Biological and Social Influences on Religious Affiliation, Attitudes, and Behaviors: A Behavior Genetic Perspective,” D’Onofrio, Eaves, Murrelle, Maes, Spilka