

College of Arts & Sciences
Department of Psychology
Oakland University

***PSY 3020: Evolution, Science, and Superstition
Winter 2021 (Online, Synchronous)***

Instructor: Adam E. Tratner, PhD

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CRN: 12608

Classroom: Online; Moodle & Zoom

Virtual Discussion Sessions: Monday & Wednesday 3:30pm – 5:17pm on Zoom (links in Moodle)

Office Hours: Friday 11am-12pm & by appointment.

Virtual Availability: Available (outside of classroom hours) Sunday-Friday 8am-8pm to chat via email, Google Meet, & Zoom. I usually respond to emails within the hour.

Course Description

This course examines human nature from an evolutionary standpoint and explores the psychological processes that underlie supernatural beliefs and belief systems. Specific topics include evolutionary biology, social cognition, philosophy of science, paranormal beliefs, teleology, superstition, and religion. *This class fulfills a category requirement (4 credit hours) for the Evolutionary and Comparative group.*

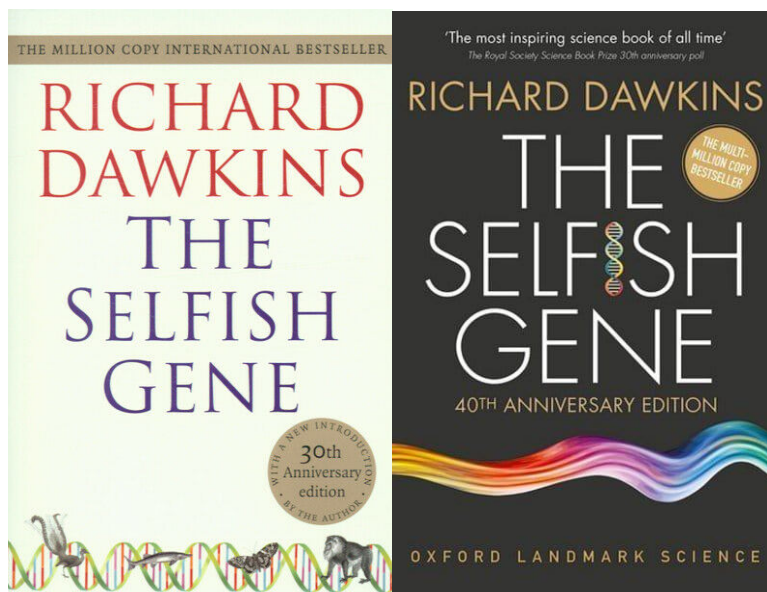
Course Prerequisites: C or better in PSY 2500

Required Texts:

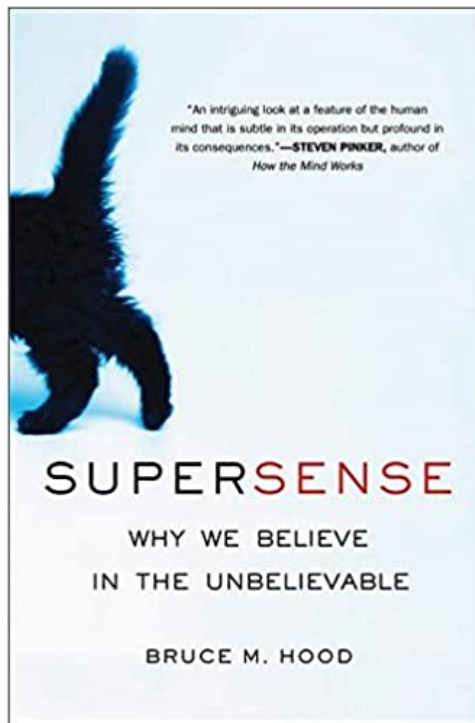
1. *The Selfish Gene (30th or 40th anniversary edition)*, by Richard Dawkins
 2. *Supersense – Why We Believe in the Unbelievable*, by Bruce Hood
 3. *The Belief Instinct – The Psychology of Souls, Destiny, & the Meaning of Life*, by Jesse Bering
- + Select articles posted on Moodle under the weekly headings.

Here are images of the books for your reference:

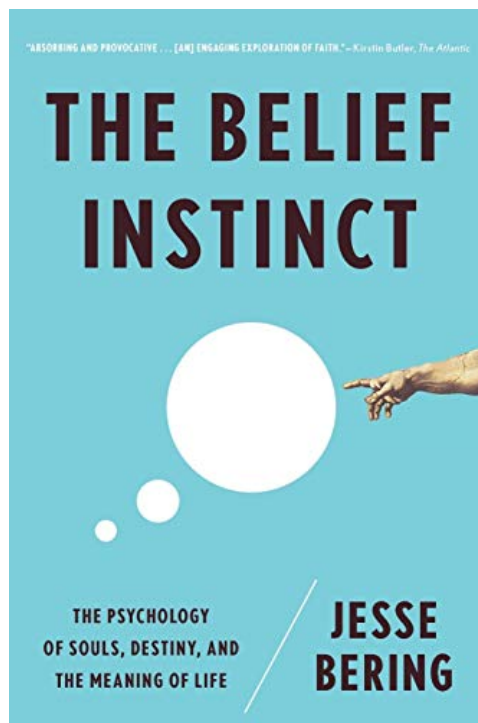
1. *The Selfish Gene (30th or 40th edition; either one will do)*, by Richard Dawkins



2. *Supersense – Why We Believe in the Unbelievable*, by Bruce Hood



3. *The Belief Instinct – The Psychology of Souls, Destiny, & the Meaning of Life*, by Jesse Bering



Learning Outcomes

On completion of this course you should demonstrate:

1. An understanding of how evolutionary processes shape the human mind, and therefore our capacity to form beliefs.
2. The ability to dispassionately examine the psychological mechanisms that give rise to various beliefs.

Course Objectives:

1. Respect and use critical and creative thinking, skeptical inquiry, and a scientific approach to understanding behavior and mental processes.
2. Understand and apply psychological/scientific principles to personal, social, and organizational issues.
3. Value empirical evidence, tolerate ambiguity, act ethically, and reflect other values that are the underpinnings of psychology as a science.
4. Communicate effectively in a variety of formats.

Cross-Cutting Capacities

Effective communication, critical thinking, and analytical reading/writing.

Course Expectations

General Expectations

Given that this is an upper-division course, it is expected that students will devote at least **10-15 hours** per week on this course, split between attending virtual discussion sessions, reading, writing, & watching supplemental videos. Students are expected to complete all writing assignments individually, unless otherwise stated. It is also crucial that students have consistent access to an internet connection.

Expectations for Students

- (1) Have a reliable internet connected computer with the most updated Moodle-compatible web browsers (e.g., Chrome, Firefox, Safari, Edge). You may also need current versions of the Flasher player, Java and a PDF viewer. If you are not familiar with the Moodle platform or are unsure of how to navigate the online resources, see <https://www.oakland.edu/online/> for additional tutorials and learning support.
- (2) Have a backup plan to be able to log in from another computer or another location in the event that your computer crashes or internet goes down. Plan ahead for submitting assignments!
- (3) Log in to Moodle several times a week (at least 3-5 times).
- (4) Follow the calendar of events and complete all of the assignments by their deadlines.
- (5) Respond to emails within 24 hours during weekdays.
- (6) Participate in a polite and thoughtful manner.
- (7) Observe proper classroom etiquette by respecting each other's privacy, using constructive criticism, and refraining from derogatory/inflammatory comments.

Expectations for the Instructor

- (1) I (the instructor) will log in to the course daily and will alert students if I will be absent for longer than 1 day [note: this is unlikely to happen].
- (2) I (the instructor) will respond to your questions, concerns, and emails within 24 hours [48 hours on weekends].
- (3) I (the instructor) will grade all assignments and exams in a timely manner [within 2-3 days].

SUDDEN LOSS OF INTERNET ACCESS

If students lose access to a reliable internet connection and are unable to submit coursework or attend virtual discussion sessions, it is necessary to contact (via telephone) the **Office of E-Learning and Instructional Support** as soon as possible to work out a solution. This office can reach out to me and alert me to the situation, and also guide you towards resources to find internet access.

Here are their phone numbers: Office (248) 370-4566 / Help line (248) 805-1625.

Course Content

All course content is available on Moodle. Materials consist of Zoom links to virtual discussion sessions/office hours, required readings, supplemental videos & content, and submission portals for course assignments. I will post all of my lecture slides immediately after each class whenever I give presentations. Guidelines for writing assignments can be found under the Course Essentials subheading. See schedule for all due dates.

Grade Determination

The class is out of 400 total points split between 4 grade categories, each worth 100 points. Attendance & Participation, Reaction Papers, Leading Discussions, and a Research Paper.

Attendance & Participation	Leading Discussions	Reaction Papers	Research Paper	Course Total
100 points (25%)	100 points (25%)	100 points (25%)	100 points (25%)	400 points

25% - Attendance & Participation: This grade category has 2 components, and in order to receive credit you must satisfy BOTH of these components.

- (1) *Attending Virtual Discussion Sessions:* Attending virtual discussion sessions on Zoom is mandatory. Furthermore, students are required to turn on the camera and speak up when addressed. This policy is meant to ensure that you are present and attentive during discussions – treat this class as if it were in-person. If you do not attend virtual discussions, you will not earn any Attendance/Participation points.
- (2) *Writing Discussion Questions about the readings:* In addition to attending virtual discussions, students are expected to read the assigned material before arriving to class and submit **3 typed** discussion questions about the reading(s) prior to arriving to class. You will submit your discussion questions by uploading them to the submission portals on Moodle under each weekly subheading. Discussion questions must be uploaded no later than 3:30pm on the day of the assigned readings. Grades will be assigned on the basis of the degree to which the questions reflect a careful and thoughtful reading of the assigned material.

Attending virtual discussions + submitting discussion questions is worth 4 points per scheduled class day. 2 of these virtual discussions/discussion question papers will be dropped from the final grade. In other words, you may freely miss 2 discussion sessions/discussion question papers throughout the semester without penalty. Discussion questions that are submitted late will not be accepted (see: Make-up work policy below). The reading schedule for assigned chapters, articles, and specific page numbers is noted in the schedule at the bottom of the syllabus.

25% - Leading Discussions: During each of our virtual discussion sessions, several students will lead discussion of the material presented in the assigned readings or lecture. Every student in the class will lead discussions twice, on two different days throughout the semester. Students will select and sign up for these two dates at the start of the semester. Grades will be assigned on the basis of the thoughtfulness and clarity of the questions, as well as the ability to stimulate lively discussion. Each day that you lead discussion is worth 50 points.

25% - Reaction Papers: Students will complete 5 reaction papers throughout the semester. For each of these reaction papers, students choose any topic featured in the assigned readings and class discussions, and then write a brief, APA-style paper about the topic. Students are required to find, cite, and discuss at least 2 outside primary sources (e.g., peer-reviewed journal articles) to accompany their written analysis of a topic of your choosing. Primary sources can be found using the OU Libraries website and Google Scholar. Each paper must be a minimum of 2 pages long (maximum 4 pages), 12-point Times New Roman font, and use 1-inch margins, typed, and double-spaced). Students will submit these papers on Moodle by uploading them via the submission portal (see due dates on the schedule).

The goal of these reaction papers is twofold: 1) Students will further reflect on the readings, lectures, videos, and/or discussions leading up to due date, and to articulate any of their thoughts, questions, and curiosities related to the material. 2) Students will practice writing academic papers using APA formatting, and using academic sources to enhance/support their ideas. Grades will be assigned on the basis of the degree to which the reaction papers reflect thoughtful consideration of the issues presented in the readings, videos, or relevant class discussions, and whether students successfully integrate outside sources to accompany their reflections on the material. Each of the 5 reaction papers are worth 20 points (i.e., 5% of your grade per reaction paper). Late papers will not be accepted (see Make-up work policy below).

25% - Research Paper: Students will complete a research paper that is due at the end of the semester during Final's week. In this paper, you will choose a supernatural phenomenon and write an extensive literature review that discusses the psychological mechanisms, brain processes, and/or the behavioral components of this phenomenon. Papers must be written according to APA formatting guidelines, complete with references. Grades will be assigned on the basis that the paper follows APA guidelines, thoughtfully reviews the relevant literature, is theoretically grounded, thoroughly explores the phenomenon from a scientific standpoint, and is well-written. This assignment is worth 100 points out of the total 400 points in the course. You (or one group member) must **upload** your typed exam document by **Wednesday, April 21st, 2021 at 6:30 PM**. Late papers will not be accepted (see Make-up work policy below).

Course Conduct

This class centers around discussing the readings, particularly the ideas presented in the readings. Students with questions and comments are both encouraged and required to speak up! This class is a space where diversity of thought is cherished, and students can freely share, discuss, and debate challenging ideas, including one's own beliefs and commonly held beliefs in society. Many students come from different backgrounds and have different views, and therefore have unique perspectives to share with one another. It is essential that students discuss and disagree with one another in a respectful manner. Insulting and belittling other students will not be tolerated. Disrespectful behavior will be addressed by (1) a general announcement, (2) direct announcement, (3) a request to leave the discussion, or (4) removing you from the discussions if the disruption is serious enough or persists.

During Lectures

On most days I will start off class with a very brief lecture outlining some key ideas that complement the readings. This is meant to help nail down important concepts and theories prior to discussing them. During these lectures, students with questions should type their questions in the Zoom chat or politely interject when I am not speaking. For example: "Excuse me Adam, I have a question about X, Y, and Z."

During Discussions

Most class sessions center around discussing the readings, particularly the ideas presented in the readings. Students with questions and comments are both encouraged and required to speak up! During discussion sessions, students DO NOT need to raise their hand to talk (obviously this is an ineffective way of getting attention in an online discussion), but keep in mind proper classroom decorum. Discussions can easily become hectic - therefore I ask that you politely wait your turn to speak, and do not interrupt others.

Make-up Work

No make-up coursework is permitted. There will NOT be opportunities to make up missed participation on virtual discussions. I will not accept late discussion questions or reaction papers unless you can provide a **legitimate excuse** of your reason for being unable to submit them (e.g., a doctor's note, loss of a reliable internet connection). If you cannot complete these assignments on the assigned due dates, it is your responsibility to turn in your reaction papers and discussion questions early, and to make virtual appointments with me to discuss the readings. See Excused Absence Policy for approved sporting activity related absences.

Extensions for Reaction Papers and the Research Paper will be offered only if you can provide **legitimate documentation** of your reason for being unable to turn it in on time (e.g., a doctor's note, loss of access to internet).

Oakland University GPU Calculator

TOTAL PERCENT	Honor Points	OU Grade	OU GRADE
93-100%	4.0	A	2.9
90-92.9%	3.7	A-	2.8
87-89.9%	3.3	B+	2.7
83-86.9%	3.0	B	2.6
80-82.9%	2.7	B-	2.5
77-79.9%	2.3	C+	2.4
73-76.9%	2.0	C	2.3
70-72.9%	1.7	C-	2.2
67-69.9%	1.3	D+	2.1
60-66.9%	1.0	D	2.0
≤59%	0.0	F	

Standard Department Policies

Excused Absence Policy

University excused absences apply to participation as an athlete, manager or student trainer in NCAA intercollegiate competitions, or participation as a representative of Oakland University at academic events and artistic performances approved by the Provost or designee. For the OU excused absence policy, visit <http://www.oakland.edu/provost/policies-and-procedures/>

Special Considerations

A student with a documented learning or physical disability must contact the Office of Disability Support Services, 103A North Foundation Hall, (248) 370-3266, and inform the professor of special needs during the first week of classes. For more information, visit <http://www.oakland.edu/dss>

Policy on Academic Misconduct

The University's regulations that relate to academic misconduct will be fully enforced. Any student suspected of cheating and/or plagiarism will be reported to the Dean of Students and, thereafter, to the Academic Conduct Committee for adjudication. Anyone found guilty of academic misconduct in this course may receive a course grade of 0.0, in addition to any penalty assigned by the Academic Conduct Committee. Students found guilty of academic misconduct by the Academic Conduct Committee may face suspension or permanent dismissal. The full policy on academic misconduct can be found in the General Information section of the Undergraduate Catalog.

Faculty Feedback

As a student in this class, you may receive “Faculty Feedback” in your OU e-mail if your professor identifies areas of concern that may impede your success in the class. Faculty Feedback typically occurs during weeks 4-5 of the semester but may also be given later in the semester and more than once a semester. A “Faculty Feedback” e-mail will specify the area(s) of concern and recommend action(s) you should take. Please remember to check your OU email account regularly as that is where it will appear.

Video Recording Policy

Students who wish to video-record virtual discussions must request permission to do so. These recordings may only be used for the purpose of personal study and cannot be shared with individuals outside the class without the consent of the professor. At the conclusion of the semester, students may request permission to keep these recordings; otherwise, it is expected that all recordings will be deleted.

Veteran Support Services

The office of Veteran Support Services (VSS) is responsible for giving support services to more than 300 veterans, service members, and dependents of veterans. VSS is staffed with personnel who are veterans and current or former students. Any student veteran or dependent of a veteran requiring assistance with navigating the Veterans Administration, understanding service-related benefits, or requires referrals to campus and community resources should contact one of the Veterans Liaisons by visiting 116 North Foundation Hall, or phoning 248-370-2010. <http://wwwp.oakland.edu/veterans/>

Tentative Schedule (next page)

Week	Date	Topic	Reading	Pages	Due
1	M 1/4/21	No Class			
	W 1/6/21	Syllabus / Introduction	Syllabus	1-10	
2	M 1/11/21	The Evolutionary Perspective	13 Misunderstandings about Natural Selection Your Brain is Not an Onion with a Tiny Reptile Inside	1-12 1-6	
	W 1/13/21	The Selfish Gene	Chapters 1, 2, & 3	1-45	
3	M 1/18/21	No Class! Martin Luther King Day			
	W 1/20/21	The Selfish Gene	Chapters 4 & 5	46-87	Reaction Paper #1
4	M 1/25/21	The Selfish Gene	Chapters 6 & 7	88-122	
	W 1/27/21	The Selfish Gene	Chapters 8 & 9	123-165	
5	M 2/1/21	The Selfish Gene	Chapters 10 & 11	166-201	
	W 2/3/21	The Selfish Gene	Chapter 12	202-233	Reaction Paper #2

6	M	2/8/21	The Selfish Gene	Chapter 13	234-266	
	W	2/10/21	The Evolution of Morality	Is It Good to Cooperate? Testing the Theory of Morality-as-Cooperation in 60 Societies	47-69	
7	M	2/15/21	The Shape of Thought	Modularity	39-48	
	W	2/17/21	Me, Myself, & I	Modularity & The Social Mind: Are Psychologists Too Selfish?	131-144	Reaction Paper #3
8	M	2/22/21	No Class! Winter Recess			
	W	2/24/21	No Class! Winter Recess			
9	M	3/1/21	Supersense	Prologue, Chapters 1 & 2	v-36	
	W	3/3/21	Supersense	Chapters 3 & 4	37-106	
10	M	3/8/21	Conspiracy Theories	Conspiracy Theories: Evolved Functions and Psychological Mechanisms	770-788	
	W	3/10/21	Supersense	Chapter 5 & 6	107-166	

11	M	3/15/21	Free Will?	Free Will in Scientific Psychology Do We Have Free Will?	14-18 47-57	
	W	3/17/21	Supersense	Chapter 7 & 8	167-222	Reaction Paper #4
12	M	3/22/21	Supersense	Chapter 9 & 10	223-254	
	W	3/24/21	The Belief Instinct	Introduction & Chapter 1	1-38	
13	M	3/29/21	The Belief Instinct	Chapter 2	39-76	
	W	3/31/21	The Belief Instinct	Chapter 3	77-110	
14	M	4/5/21	The Belief Instinct	Chapter 4	111-130	Reaction Paper #5
	W	4/7/21	The Belief Instinct	Chapter 5	131-164	Research Paper Topics (due 6pm)
15	M	4/12/21	The Belief Instinct	Chapters 6 & 7	165-216	
	W	4/14/21	The Evolutionary Landscape of Religion	Birth of High Gods	2-27	

Research Paper Due Date: Wednesday, April 21st, 2021 at 6:30 PM

Note: This course will observe all deadlines posted on the Oakland University Academic Calendar, including add/drop dates. See <https://www.oakland.edu/registrar/important-dates/> for more information.