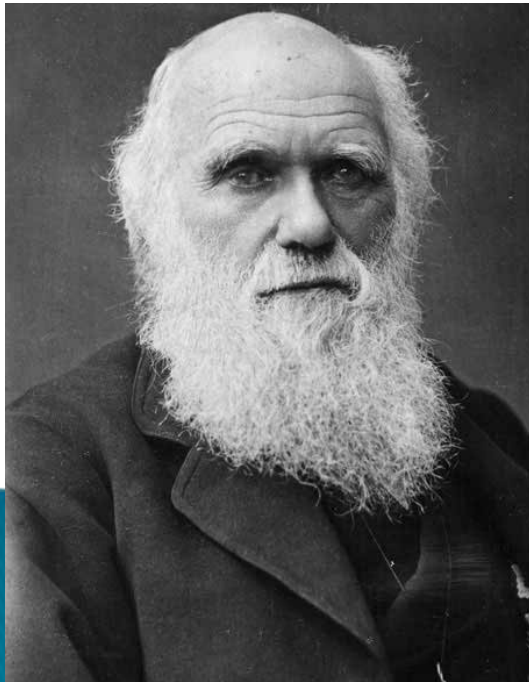


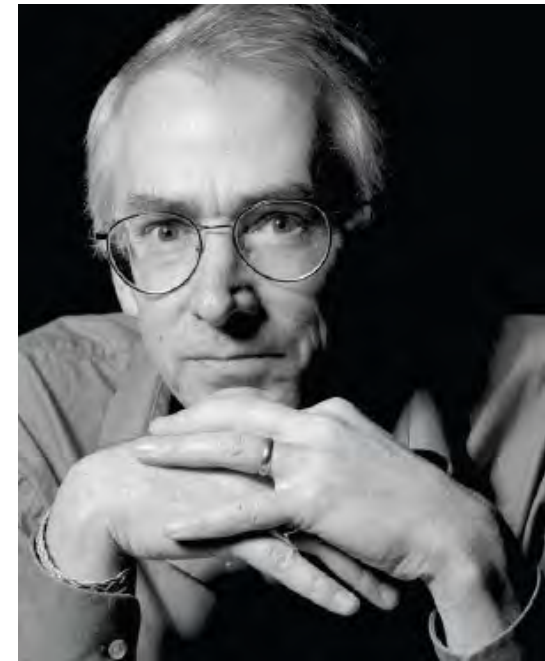
# To what extent can evolutionary theory be used to explain religion?



# Religion as Adaptation

David Sloan Wilson  
(Binghamton)

- ▶ Religion contradict individual
  - Abstinence vs offspring
  - Sacrifice in famine
- ▶ Group Selection
  - Drowning (Altruism)
  - Guppies predator inspectors
  - Christianity selflessness
  - “Partners with Gods”



# Religion as Spandrel

Spandrel (from architect): by-product of something functional  
(space between arch)

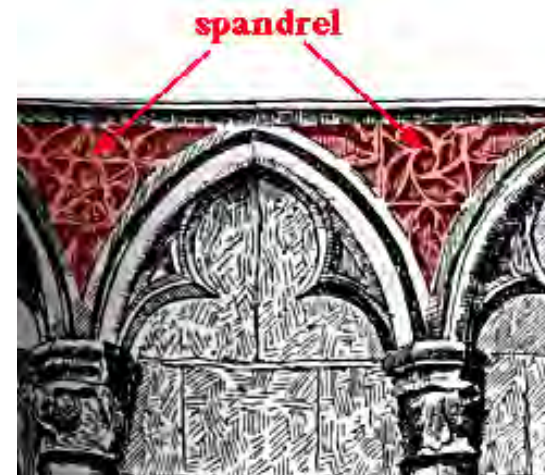
Ilkka Pyysiäinen(Helsinki), Marc Hauser &  
Steven Gould & Richard Lewontin (Harvard),  
Scott Atran (Cambridge)



- Humans develop characteristics to increase survival (Arch)
  - Noise in Woods → Agency
  - Increase interaction/Brain size → Theory of Mind



- Religion “piggy back” (Spandrel)
  - Agency → belief something is present
  - Theory of Mind → designer has some purpose



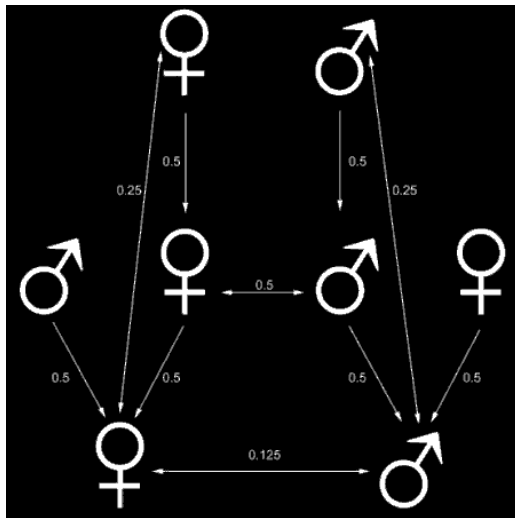
# Religion as Spandrel (cont)



Pascal Boyer (Cambridge)

## Modified Spandrel-Adaption View

- Religion used to be biologically useful
  - Survival/Explanation
  - Monkey experiment
- “Clans” increase/less family → less useful or even detrimental
  - Inclusive fitness lessen (Hamilton-Oxford)
- Ancestors predispose us to religion
  - Most interesting story gets remembered (Buddha fasting/supernatural events)





# Religion as Meme



Richard Dawkins  
(Oxford)

- Religion is selfish meme
  - Prospers at expense of organism (abstinence to spread word of Christ)
- Only persists due to genetic drift
  - Natural Selection's mistake



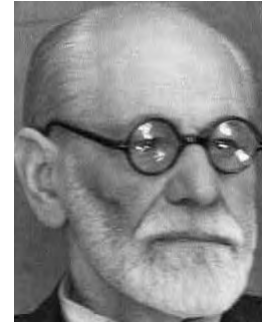
Daniel Dennett  
(Tufts)

- Religion is like any human behavior
  - Survival shows Purpose
- Rational behavior is perspective dependent
  - Parasite in ant
  - Religion rituals → who's benefiting?



# Other Explanations of Religion

- Sigmund Freud—coping mechanism  
psychological distress



- Karl Marx—way to control  
people/mask truth



- Rodney Stark/Roger Finke—Non-zero  
game theory & Invisible hand
  - Us more denominations=more  
competition->more church-goers  
than EUR



- Stephen Post—health and happiness  
improve



- Blaise Pascal—cost less to believe than  
not (believe lie vs internal damnation)



# Conclusion

- Obvious lack of evidence on all theories/Possible bias on all sources
  - Haven't identified God Spot→ can't pinpoint religion's origins or uniqueness to humans
  - Even if Darwin's theory doesn't hold seems some progressive explanation will fit (meme, spandrel etc or combination) its presence
  - Can't explain societal function(every society has)/religious experiences
  - Therefore all theories on evolution are presently incomplete and difficult to test and prove
- 