

Elective course “Soul Beliefs: Causes and Consequences”

Abstract: Throughout history, the vast majority of people around the globe have believed they have, however defined, a “soul.” While the question of whether the soul exists cannot be answered by science, what we can study are the causes and consequences of various beliefs about the soul and its prospects of surviving the death of the body. Why are soul and afterlife beliefs so common in human history? Are there adaptive advantages to assuming souls exist? Are there brain structures that have been shaped by environmental pressures that provide the foundation of body/mind dualism that is such a prominent feature of many religions? How do these beliefs shape the worldviews of different cultures and our collective lives? What is the role of competing afterlife beliefs in religion, science, politics, and war? This course explores several facets of this relatively unexplored but profoundly important aspect of human thought and behavior.

Learning Objectives: Our task is to consider the history of beliefs in the soul as well as a modern scientific view of the problem. Find out why these views are so common and whether they offer any advantages. Is there a fundamental difference between beliefs in the immortality of the soul between different religions and is there a scientific basis for this belief?

Learning Outcomes: This course will show a different perspective on the universally encountered belief about the existence of the soul. Having listened to the course, you will understand both the historical side of the problem and the position of evolutionary religion, analyzing this phenomenon

Plan:

- a Introduction to the Course
- b What I was Told to Believe
- c Historical Foundations of Soul Beliefs #1
- d Historical Foundations of Soul Beliefs #2
- e Historical Foundations of Soul Beliefs
- f Functions of Religion in Ancient & Modern Times
- g Religions Under Attack
- h Religions Under Attack
- i Big Ideas & Big Controversies
- j Darwin's Dangerous Idea
- k The Mind-Body Problem

Reading List: Bhaskar, R. From East to West: odyssey of a soul. – London: Routledge, 2000.

The turn of the soul: representations of religious conversion in early modern art and literature / Ed. by L. Stelling, H. Hendrix, T. M. Richardson. – Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2012.

Grading System 100% -point scale, which will be referred to the 10-point HSE system

Methods of Instruction: Video lectures