



Exploring the Origins of Religious Beliefs

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Message from the Guest Editor

Dear Colleagues,

Considerable attention has been given to the topic of ‘origins’ in the academic study of religion, albeit construed in various ways. Four areas in the study of ‘origins’ can be highlighted:

1. Classic studies in the late-19th and early-20th centuries sought to reveal ‘the origin of religion’ either through the search for the original form of religion, from which all others developed, or in how religion is generated by society (Durkheim) or emerges from the structures of human psychology (Freud).
2. Other studies from the 19th century to today, historical or sociological in orientation, have examined the emergence of specific religious traditions, giving rise to the critical study of.
3. Another perspective promotes religious traditions’ own representations of their origins (and potentially their relationship with other ‘religions’).
4. From the late 20th century into the 21st century, new studies have focused on religion as something innate to humanness (*Homo sapiens sapiens*) which serves the interests of human development.

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Fresh developments in the disciplines that consistently make significant contributions to our understanding of religious personality, authority, devotion, and community - disciplines ranging from psychology, sociology, and anthropology to history, art history, philosophy, literary criticism, and political science – fuel general, as well as scholarly, interest in the world's religions.

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