



Center for
Religious Studies

CENTRAL
EUROPEAN
UNIVERSITY

The Center for Religious Studies announces a special session for the CEU University-Wide Doctoral Seminar RELI 6000 *Religious Enthusiasm: Psychology, Politics and History*

Dan Sperber
(CEU)

What makes partly opaque beliefs and practices attractive?

RELI 6000 *Religious Enthusiasm: Psychology, Politics and History* is open to doctoral students for credit; open to MA students for credit with special permission from the instructors.

This seminar is cross-listed by the Departments of History, Medieval Studies, Sociology and Social Anthropology, Cognitive Science, the Doctoral School of Political Science, Public Policy and International Relations and is supported by the CEU Humanities Initiative.

Attendance to the special seminar sessions is open to all students from departments cross-listing the course as well as members of the CEU community, pending prior registry: To RSVP, please contact religion@ceu.edu.

Abstract: People -- and children in particular -- don't accept assertions or instructions blindly; they exercise some degree of epistemic vigilance. This vigilance can be directed at the source of the information: who to trust? It can also be directed at the content: what to believe? When a content is partly opaque -- as is typically the case with religious beliefs and practices -- then vigilance towards the content is ineffective and vigilance towards the source becomes determinant on its own. Opaque contents from a trusted source are, somewhat paradoxically, more likely to be accepted and to spread than contents more open to evaluation. Earlier work on apparently irrational beliefs had shown how this help explain their propagation. The talk extends this line of explanation to the case of cultural and in particular religious practices, drawing on experimental work by developmental psychologists Gergely Csibra and Gyorgy Gergely on communication and imitation in infancy, and on forthcoming work of anthropologist Radu Umbres on imitation in cargo cults.

Dan Sperber is a French social and cognitive scientist, professor in the departments of philosophy and of cognitive science at the CEU, Budapest He is the author three books on anthropological themes: *Rethinking Symbolism* (1975), *On Anthropological Knowledge* (1985), and *Explaining Culture* (1996). He is also the co-author, with Deirdre Wilson of two books on human communication, *Relevance: Communication and Cognition* (Second Revised Edition, 1995) and of *Relevance and meaning* (2012). A new book with Hugo Mercier on reasoning, *The Enigma of Human Reason*, will be published in 2017.

**Thursday,
January 28, 2016
5:30 PM**

**CEU, Nador 9
Popper Room**

Reception to follow

