

Pascal Robert BOYER

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Current position

2000- Henry Luce Professor of Individual and Collective Memory, Washington University.

Previous positions

1998-2000 Director of Research (Directeur de Recherche), Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Lyon, France
1993-98 Senior Researcher (Chargé de recherche), Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Lyon [France]
1990-93 Senior Research Fellow, King's College Cambridge
1986-90 Junior Research Fellow in Anthropology, King's College Cambridge

Education

1983 Doctorat d'Ethnologie, Université de Paris-Nanterre
1979 Maitrise d'Ethnologie, Université de Paris-Nanterre

Research themes

[current] Evolution of human cultures: Cognitive capacities that make cultural acquisition possible. Connection between evolved human psychology, specially domain-specific learning principles, and the transmission of cultural knowledge.
[current] Cognitive processes engaged in threat-detection and precaution psychology. Developmental and cultural aspects of threat-detection.
[current] Cross-cultural, developmental aspects of trust, fairness and property. Ethnographic and experimental protocols in China, USA and Africa.
[past] Cross-cultural psychology of religious concepts. Recall for (and inferences from) novel and odd conceptual associations. Memory processes engaged in supernatural and religious concepts. Ethnographic fieldwork, behavioral experiments in Gabon, Cameroon, Nepal.
[past] Anthropological research on memory and transmission of cultural knowledge concepts through oral literature (Fang, Cameroon). Cognitive aspects of traditional oral transmission.

Fellowships & Awards

- 2011 Guggenheim Fellow, John S Guggenheim Memorial Foundation.
2008 Sage Research Fellow, Sage Foundation & University of California.
2008 Templeton Fellow, JF Templeton Foundation & Goethe Universität Frankfurt.
1999-2000 Fellow, Center for Evolutionary Psychology, University of California, Santa Barbara.
1995-96 Fellow, Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, Stanford.

Main Grants

- 2010-13 US Air Force Office of Scientific Research, “Threat Detection in Mind and Culture”, \$465,000.
2006-08 Templeton Advanced Research Program, project on “Ritual Behavior and Supernatural Beliefs”, \$100,000.
2000-02 Research grant from Cognitique Programme, Ministry of Research, France : in collab. with Dr Jean Decety (PI), “The Perception of Causation: Behavioral and Neuro-Imaging Investigations”, \$60,000.
2000-02 Grant from “Emergence” Programme, Région Rhône-Alpes: in collab. with Dr Nathalie Bedoin (co-PI), “Entry-level and Domain-level Concepts in Cognitive Development and DAT (Alzheimer)”, \$15,000.
1998-2000 Research Grant from the “Aide a Projets Nouveaux” Programme of the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, for the “Ontological Categories in Development, Language and Culture” project, \$45,000.
1997-99 (co-PI) Research Grant from the “Programme Cognisciences”, Ministry of Technology, France, for a two year experimental project on “Intuitive Ontology in Cultural Acquisition”, \$32,000 of \$230,000.
1995-96 Grant # 8900078 from the John D. & Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, for stay at Center for Advanced Studies, Stanford.
1990-94 Special grant from King’s College Research Centre, King’s College Cambridge: “Acquisition of Religious Knowledge” project, \$45,000.
1984-86 Two-year Research Award, Fyssen Foundation, Paris, \$37,000

Teaching

Courses

- 2000- *Depts of Psychology and Anthropology, Washington University in St. Louis.* “Cognition and Culture”, “Human Evolutionary Psychology”, “Topics in Cognitive Development”, “Autobiographical Memory”, “Introduction to the Study of Memory”, “Human Nature in Genes and Cultures”.
- 1995-99 *Universite Lumiere, Lyon, Cognitive Science Programme:* M.A. course: “Domain Specificity in Conceptual Development”, PhD Seminar: “Categorization and Specificity in Development and Pathology”.
- 1998 *Ecole Normale Supérieure, Libreville, Gabon.* Graduate Course: Cognition and Culture.
- 1986-93 *King's College Cambridge,* Undergraduate supervision.
- 1991 *University of California, San Diego:* 1. Undergraduate “Literacy and oral tradition in a cognitive perspective”; 2. Graduate “Psychology of Religion”.
- 1990 *University of Cambridge,* “Religious Symbolism”, “Literacy and oral tradition”.
- 1986-1993 *King's College Cambridge,* Undergraduate supervision.

Graduate Students

- 2010- *John Christner,* Cognitive Psychology Program, Washington University.
- 2008- *Jing Xu,* Cultural Anthropology Program Washington University.
- 2005- *Brian Bergstrom,* Cognitive Psychology Program, Washington University.
- 2002-8 *Bianca Basten,* Cognitive Psychology Program, Washington University. [now at University of Wisconsin LaCrosse)

Publications

Books & Edited collections

- Boyer, P** (2010) *The Fracture Of An Illusion. Science And the Dissolution of Religion*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 112p. [👉](#)
- Boyer, P & Wertsch, JW**, Eds. (2010). *Memory in Mind and Culture*, New York: Cambridge University Press, viii+324pp. (Winner, Outstanding Academic Award, *Choice*). [👉](#)
- Boyer, P** (2001). *Religion Explained. The Evolutionary Origins of Religious Thought*, London: Random House & New York: Perseus, 404pp. Translated into Dutch (Amsterdam: De bezijge Bij); French (Paris: Robert Laffont); Spanish (Mexico: Taurus); German (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta); Polish (Warsaw: Ksiloiki); Finnish: (Helsinki : WSOY); Greek (Thessaloniki: Vaniak); Japanese (Kyoto: NTT); Italian (Milan: Gli Editori). [👉](#)
- Boyer, P**, Ed. (1993). *Cognitive Aspects of Religious Symbolism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. [👉](#)
- Boyer, P** (1990). *Tradition as Truth and Communication. A Cognitive Description of Traditional Discourse*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, xi+244pp. [👉](#)
- Boyer, P** (1988). *Barricades Mystérieuses et Pièges à Pensée. Analyse du mythe ekang*, Paris: Société d'Ethnologie, 184pp. [👉](#)

Articles

- Baumard, N & **Boyer, P**. Intuitions, Reflections and Communication in the Building of Human Cultures (under review). [PDF](#)
- Boyer, P (in press). From studious irrelevancy to consilient knowledge: Modes of scholarship and cultural anthropology, in Slingerland, E & Collard, M (Eds.) *Creating Consilience*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, pp. 00-00. [PDF](#)
- Boyer, P & Petersen, MB**. (2011) The Naturalness of (many) social institutions: Evolutionary and Cognitive Background, *Journal of Institutional Economics* 00(0): 1-25. doi:10.1017/S1744137411000300 [PDF](#)
- Boyer, P** (2010) Intuitive Detection of Mental Disorder: Cognitive Background to Folk-Psychiatry, *Philosophical Psychology* 23(6): 821-844. doi: 10.1080/09515089.2010.529049 [PDF](#)
- Boyer, P** (2010) Why Evolved Cognition Matters to Understanding Cultural Variation, *Interdisciplinary Science Reviews* 35(3-4): 377-87. doi: 10.1179/030801810X12772143410449 [PDF](#)

- Boyer, P** & Szechtman, H (Eds.) (2010) Threat-Detection and Precaution: Neuro-physiological, Behavioral, Cognitive and Psychiatric Aspects, Special Issue, *Neuroscience and Biobehavioral Reviews* 35(4): 989-1080.
- Boyer, P** & Bergstrom, B (2010) Threat-Detection in Child Development. An Evolutionary Perspective, *Neuroscience and Biobehavioral Reviews* 35(4): 1034-41, doi:10.1016/j.neubiorev.2010.08.010. [PDF](#)
- Keren, H, **Boyer, P**, Mort, J, Eilam, D (2010) Pragmatic and Idiosyncratic Acts in Human Everyday Routines: The Counterpart of Compulsive Rituals, *Behavioural Brain Research* 212: 90-95. doi:10.1016/j.bbr.2010.03.051
- Boyer, P** (2009) Extending the range of adaptive misbelief: Memory “distortions” as functional features, *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 32(6): 513-4. [PDF](#)
- Boyer, P** (2009) What are memories for? Functions of recall in cognition and culture, in Boyer P & Wertsch JW (Eds.), *Memory in Mind and Culture*, New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 3-31.
- Boyer, P** (2009) Cognitive predispositions and cultural transmission, in Boyer P & Wertsch JW (Eds.), *Memory in Mind and Culture*, New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 288-320.
- Boyer, P** (2008) Bound to Belief? *Nature* 455: 1038-9. [PDF](#)
- Boyer, P** & Lienard, P (2008) Ritual Behavior in Obsessive and Normal Individuals: Moderating Anxiety and Reorganizing the Action-Flow, *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 17(4): 291-4. [PDF](#)
- Boyer, P** (2008) Evolutionary Economics of Mental Time-Travel?, *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 12(6): 219-223. [PDF](#)
- Boyer, P** & Bergstrom, Brian (2008) Evolutionary Perspectives On Religion, *Annual Review of Anthropology* 37:111-130. [PDF](#)
- Boyer, P** (2007) Are Specialised Inference Engines The Precursors Of Creative Imagination? In Roth, I (Ed.), *Imaginative Minds*, London: British Academy, pp 239-258. [PDF](#)
- Boyer, P** & Lienard, P (2006). Why Ritualized Behaviour in Humans? Precaution Systems and Action-parsing in Developmental, Pathological and Cultural Rituals, *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 29: 1-56. [PDF](#)
- Boyer, P** (2006). Prosocial aspects of afterlife beliefs: maybe another by-product, *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 25(5): 466-466.
- Lienard, P & **Boyer, P** (2006). Whence Collective Rituals? A Cultural Selection Model of Ritualized Behaviour, *American Anthropologist* 108(4): 814-827. [PDF](#)
- Bergstrom, B, Moehlmann, B, & **Boyer, P** (2006). How children evaluate the source and scope of cultural information, *Child Development*, 77(3): 531-538. [PDF](#)
- Boyer, P**, Robbins, P, & Jack, A (2005). Varieties of self systems worth having, *Consciousness and Cognition* (special issue: The Self and Its Brain, ed. by Boyer, P, Robbins, P, & Jack, A), 14: 647-660.

- Boyer, P** & Barrett, HC (2005). Causal Inferences: Evolutionary Domains and Neural Systems, Invited contribution to an Interdisciplines.org web-conference on Causation (Anne Reboul, Editor). <http://www.interdisciplines.org/causality>
- Boyer, P** (2005). A Reductionistic Model Of Distinct Modes Of Religious Transmission, in Harvey Whitehouse & Robert McCauley (Eds.), *Mind and Religion: Psychological and Cognitive Foundations of Religion*, Altamira Press, pp. 3-30.
- Boyer, P** & Barrett, HC (2005). Evolved Intuitive Ontology, in David Buss (Ed.), *Handbook of Evolutionary Psychology*, New York : John Wiley, pp. 96-118. [PDF](#)
- Boyer, P** (2004). Religion, evolution and cognition, *Current Anthropology*, 45(3): 430-433.
- Boyer, P** (2003). Science, Erudition and Relevant Connections, *Journal of Cognition and Culture*, 3(4): 344-358.
- Boyer, P** (2003). Are ghost concepts "intuitive," "endemic" and "innate"? *Journal of Cognition & Culture*, 3(3), 233-243.
- Boyer, P** (2003). Out of Africa. Lessons from a By-Product of Evolution, in Light, T & Wilson, B (Eds.), *Religion as a Human Capacity*, Leiden: Brill, pp. 27-44.
- Blakemore, SJ, **Boyer, P**, Pachot-Clouard, M, Meltzoff, AN, & Decety, J (2003). Detection of contingency and animacy in the human brain, *Cerebral Cortex*, 13: 837-844. [PDF](#)
- Boyer, P** (2003). Religious thought and behaviour as by-products of brain function, *Trends in Cognitive Science*, 7(3): 119-124. [PDF](#)
- Blakemore, SJ, Fonlupt, P, Pachot-Clouard, M, Darmon, C, **Boyer, P**, Meltzoff, AN, Segebarth, C, & Decety, J (2001). How the brain perceives causality: An event-related fMRI study. *Neuroreport: For Rapid Communication of Neuro-science Research*, 12(17), 3741-3746.
- Boyer, P**, & Ramble, C (2001). Cognitive Templates for Religious Concepts: Cross-cultural Evidence for Recall of Counter-Intuitive Representations. *Cognitive Science*, 25, 535-564. [PDF](#)
- Boyer, P**, Bedoin, N & Honoré, S (2001). Relative contributions from kind- and domain-concepts to inferences concerning unfamiliar exemplars, *Cognitive Development* 15: 457-479. [PDF](#)
- Boyer, P** (2001) Cultural Inheritance Tracks and Cognitive Predispositions: The Example of Religious Concepts, in H. Whitehouse (Ed.), *The Debated Mind: Evolutionary Psychology and Ethnography*, Oxford: Berg, pp. 57-89.
- Boyer, P** (2000). Natural Epistemology or Evolved Metaphysics? Developmental Evidence for Early-Developed, Intuitive, Category-Specific, Incomplete, and Stubborn Metaphysical Presumptions, *Philosophical Psychology*, 13: 277-297. [PDF](#)
- Boyer, P** (2000). Functional Origins of Religious Concepts: Conceptual and Strategic Selection in Evolved Minds (Malinowski Lecture 1999), *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 6: 195-214. [PDF](#)
- Boyer, P** (2000). Evolution of the modern mind and the origins of culture: religious concepts as a limiting case, in Carruthers, P & Chamberlain, A. (Eds.), *Evolution and the Human Mind: Modularity, Language and Meta-Cognition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp 93-112.

- Heckhausen, J & **Boyer, P** (2000). Evolutionary Psychology and the Behavioral Sciences: Introductory Notes. *American Behavioral Scientist* (Special Issue: Evolutionary Psychology), 43: 917-924.
- Boyer, P** (2000). Evolutionary Psychology and Cultural Transmission. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 43: 987-1000.
- Boyer, P** & Walker, SJ (2000). Intuitive Ontology and Cultural Input in the Acquisition of Religious Concepts, in Rosengren, K., Johnson, C. & Harris, P (Eds.), *Imagining the Impossible: Magical, Scientific and Religious Thinking in Children*, New York: C.U.P, pp. 130-156.
- Boyer, P** (1999). Human Cognition and Evolution, in Moore, H. (Ed.), *Anthropological Theory Today*, Cambridge: Polity Press, pp. 206-233.
- Boyer, P** (1999). Cultural Evolution, in Keil, F. & Wilson, R. (Eds.), *The M.I.T. Encyclopedia of the Cognitive Sciences*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, pp. 209-211.
- Boyer, P** (1999). Cultural Symbolism, in Keil, F. & Wilson, R. (Eds.), *The M.I.T. Encyclopedia of the Cognitive Sciences*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, pp. 215-216.
- Boyer, P** (1999). Cognitive Aspects of Religious Ontologies: How Brain Processes Constrain Religious Concepts, in Alhbäck, T. (Ed.), *Approaching Religion*, Åbo-Turku, Finland: Donner Institute.
- Boyer, P** (1998). If “tracking” is category-specific a “common structure” may be redundant, (commentary on R. Millikan’s article), *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 21: 67-68.
- Boyer, P** (1998). Cultural Transmission with an Evolved Intuitive Ontology: Domain-Specific Cognitive Tracks of Inheritance (commentary on S. Atran’s article), *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 21: 570-571.
- Boyer, P** (1998). Comments on Walter Burkert’s Creation of the Sacred, *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*, 10: 88-92.
- Boyer, P**, (1998). Cognitive Tracks of Cultural Inheritance: How Evolved Intuitive Ontology Governs Cultural Transmission, *American Anthropologist*, 100: 876-889, December 1998.
- Boyer, P** (1997). Further Distinctions between Magic, Reality, Religion and Fiction, *Child Development* 68: 1012-1014.
- Boyer, P** (1997). Recurrence without transmission: The Intuitive Background of Religious Ontologies, in M. Mauzé (Ed.), *Present is Past: Some Uses of Tradition in Native Societies*, Lanham, MD: University Press of America.
- Boyer, P** (1996). Cognitive limits to conceptual relativity: The limiting-case of religious categories, in J. Gumperz & S. Levinson (Eds.), *Rethinking Linguistic Relativity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Boyer, P** (1996). What makes anthropomorphism natural: Intuitive Ontology and Cultural Representations, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute N.S.*, 2:1–15.
- Boyer, P** (1996). Comments on Geoffrey White’s Identity Through History, *Pacific Studies*, 19: 156-159.
- Boyer, P** (1996). Religion as an impure subject. Cognitive order in religious representation, *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 8: 201-213.

- Boyer, P** (1995). Causal Understandings in Cultural Representations: Cognitive Constraints on Inferences from Cultural Input, in Sperber, D., Premack, D. & James-Premack, A. (Eds.), *Causal Cognition: A Multidisciplinary Debate*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Boyer, P** (1995). L'objet des croyances: Un catalogue bien limité, *Sciences Humaines* 53: 40-44.
- Boyer, P** (1995). Ceteris Paribus (All Else Being Equal...), in Brockman, J. & Matson, K. (Eds.), *How Things Are. A Science Tool-kit for the Mind*, New York, NY: William Morrow.
- Boyer, P** (1994). Cognitive Constraints on Cultural Representations: Natural Ontologies and Religious Ideas, in L. Hirschfeld & S. Gelman (Eds.), *Mapping the Mind: Domain Specificity in Culture and Cognition*, New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Boyer, P** (1993). Cognitive Aspects of Religious Symbolism, in Boyer, P (Ed.), *Cognitive Aspects of Religious Symbolism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (pp.1-48)
- Boyer, P** (1993). Symbolism, *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, London: Routledge, (pp. 861-862)
- Boyer, P** (1993). Pseudo-Natural Kinds, in Boyer, P (Ed.), *Cognitive Aspects of Religious Symbolism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 121-141.
- Boyer, P** (1992). Explaining Religious Representations: Outline of a Cognitive Approach to Religion, *Numen* 39: 27-58.
- Boyer, P** (1992). Causal Thinking and Its Anthropological Mis-representation, *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 22: 187-213.
- Boyer, P** (1990). Pourquoi les Pygmées n'ont pas de culture, *Gradhiva* (Paris) 7: 3-11.
- Boyer, P** (1989). Tradition sans transmission. L'acquisition des concepts traditionnels, in R.G. Cardona (ed.), *La trasmissione del sapere. Aspetti linguistici e antropologici*, Rome: Bagatto Libri, pp. 45-72.
- Boyer, P** (1989). L'étoffe et la doublure des héros. Aspects des couples épiques, in R. Hamayon (ed.), *Singularités*, Paris: Librairie Plon, pp. 85-98.
- Boyer, P** (1987). Aspects pragmatiques de l'épopée mvvet ekang, in J. Fernandez-Vest (ed.), *Kalevala et traditions orales du monde*, Paris: C.N.R.S., pp. 441-449.
- Boyer, P** (1987). The Stuff Traditions Are Made Of, *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 17: 49-65.
- Boyer, P** (1986). The "empty" concepts of traditional thinking, *Man, Journal of the Royal Anthr. Institute* 21: 50-64.
- Boyer, P** (1986). Tradition et Vérité, *L'Homme, Revue Française d'Anthropologie* 26: 309-329.
- Boyer, P** (1986). Tradition Orale, *Encyclopaedia Universalis*, 18:335-337.
- Boyer, P** (1984). La tradition comme genre énonciatif, *Poétique* 58: 55-72.
- Boyer, P** (1982). Récit épique et tradition, *L'Homme, Revue Française d'Anthropologie* 22: 5-34.
- Boyer, P** (1982). Le Status des forgerons et ses justifications symboliques, *Africa* 53: 44-63.

Boyer, P (1982). *Nouvelles Recherches sur le Status des Forgerons d'Afrique Noire*, Paris, Institut d'Ethnologie, 96pp. (micro-edition of MA dissertation)

Boyer, P (1980) Les Figures du Savoir Initiatique, *Journal des Africanistes* 50: 31-57.

Selected talks and invited lectures

- 2011 [Oct] *Adaptations and the Origin of Culture*, Penn Lecture Series “Adaptations”, Penn Humanities Forum, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.
- 2010 [June] *Culture and the self*, National Humanities Center, Workshop on “Models of the Self”.
- 2010 [April] *Ritualized Behaviour and pathology*, Depts of Philosophy and Cognitive Science, Johns Hopkins University,
- 2010 [March] *The naturalness of social institutions*, London School of Economics, London, UK.
- 2010 [Feb] *Ritualized Behaviour and pathology*, Dept of Psychology, University of Oregon.
- 2009 [Nov] *Evolutionary Origins of Memory*, Darwin Centennial Workshop, Center for Mind and Culture, Emory University, Atlanta.
- 2009 [May] *Ritualized Behaviour and pathology*, Anthropology Colloquium, Stanford University.
- 2008 [Nov] *Three modes of scholarship and the future of anthropology*, “Integrating Science and Humanities” workshop, University of British Columbia, Vancouver.
- 2008 [July] Sage Lectures in Cognitive Science. (1) *Religion as a by-product of brain function*. (2) *Ritualized behavior in pathology and culture*. (3) *The Evolution of Patience: Neuro-cognitive systems*. (4) *The Evolution of Patience: Cultural Processes*. Sage Center for the Study of the Mind, University of California, Santa Barbara.
- 2008 [May] Templeton Research Lectures 2008: *Is there a science of religion?*, Goethe University – Frankfurt [4 invited lectures].
- 2008 [Feb] *The role of autobiographical memory in moral psychology*, Case-Western Reserve University, Dept of Cognitive Science, invited lecture.
- 2008 [Jan] *Ritualized behaviour in culture and pathology*, University of Cambridge, Dept of Social Anthropology.
- 2007 [Oct] *Why autobiographical memories?* Rutgers University Center for Cognitive Science, invited lecture.
- 2007 [Oct] *Explaining Belief*, Rutgers University Center for Critical Analysis, invited seminar.
- 2007 [May] *Why do patients and religious people perform rituals?* University of Oxford, invited lecture.
- 2007 [April] *Limits of human cognition and trans-humanism*, Workshop on Transhumanism and Human Nature, University of Arizona.
- 2007 [Feb] *Why perform rituals?* University of California, Los Angeles, invited lecture.
- 2006 [June] *Why do patients and religious people perform rituals?* Invited plenary address, Society for Philosophy and Psychology Annual Meeting, St. Louis.

- 2006 [Feb] *Why perform rituals?* Princeton University, Center for the Study of Religion Lectures of Cognition and Religion.
- 2005 [May] *Ritualized behaviour in culture and pathology*, Institute of Cognition and Culture, Queen's University, Belfast.
- 2005 [Mar] *Varieties of cognitive processes involved in religious representations*, American Philosophical Association annual meeting, San Francisco.
- 2005 [Feb] *Ten problems for a new social science*, International Fellows Program, University of California, Los Angeles.
- 2004 [June] *Evolution and self-representations*, "The Brain and its Self" workshop, Washington University in St. Louis.
- 2004 [May] *Evolution of Constrained Imagination*, Imagination and Cognition conference, British Academy, London.
- 2003 [August] *Gods, Spirits and Mental Instincts*, keynote address, New England Institute conference on Evolution and Religion, University of New England, Portland, ME.
- 2003 [Feb] *Precis of "Religion Explained"*, Harvard University Psychology Dept.
- 2001 [April] *Precis of "Religion Explained"*, Dartmouth College, Dept of Religion.
- 2001 [March] *Cultural concepts: Constraints on transmission*, Rutgers University Cognitive Science Colloquium.