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Van Kaam C.S.Sp. Endowed Chair in Scholarly
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Bruce Ledewitz

Duquesne University, ledewitz@duq.edu

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Title: Can Science Explain Religion?

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1/14/2010—There are a lot of attempts today to “explain” religion scientifically. For instance, H. Allen Orr asks this very question in reviewing *The Evolution of God* by Robert Wright, in the *New York Review of Books*. Another example is Judith Shulevitz’ review in the *New York Times* of *The Faith Instinct* by Nicholas Wade. I will have more to say about both of these reviews, and books, but first I want to mention a distinction made by Shulevitz. She writes that Wade “does not agree with the cognitive anthropologist Pascal Boyer that religion is a byproduct of our overactive brains and their need to attribute meaning and intention to a random world.” Now I am not sure that this is what Boyer argues. I am now reading *Religion Explained* (2001) to find out. The question I would ask here is simply, from what vantage point would one be able to describe the world as “random”? How would one show that there is not “meaning and intention” in it? And particularly how would one be able to see and show that if our brains are wired not to see it? I have this problem with much so-called explanation of religion. I always want to say that religion endures perhaps because in some way it is true. (I’m not sure that Boyer actually disagrees with that. Early in his book he points out that “any organism that was prone to such delusions would not survive long”. Maybe his thinking is more sophisticated than that of Shulevitz.)