Introduction

On a February day in the winter of 1870, a personable middle-aged German scholar rose to the stage of London's prestigious Royal Institution to deliver a public lecture. At the time, German professors were famous for their deep learning, and this one was no exception, though as it happened he had also become very English. His name was Friedrich Max Müller. He had first come to Britain as a young man destined for Oxford, where his plan was to study the ancient texts of India's Vedas, its books of sacred knowledge. He soon settled in, took a proper English wife, and managed to acquire a position at the University. Müller was admired for his knowledge of Sanskrit, the language of early India, but he also acquired a mastery of English, which he employed with admirable skill in popular writings on language and mythology that appealed widely to Victorian readers. On this occasion, however, he proposed a different subject: he wished to promote "the science of religion."

Those words in that sequence doubtless struck some in Müller's audience as puzzling in the extreme. After all, he was speaking at the end of a decade marked by furious debate over Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859) and its startling theory of evolution by natural selection. Thoughtful Victorians had heard so much of science pitted *against* religion that a science *of* religion could only fall on the ears as a quite curious combination. How could the age-old certainties of faith ever mix with a program of study devoted to experiment, revision, and change? How could these two apparently mortal enemies meet without one destroying the other? These were understandable concerns, but Müller was of a different mind: he was quite certain that the two enterprises could meet and that a truly scientific study of religion had much to offer to both sides in that controversy. His lecture, the first in a series later published as an *Introduction to the Science of Religion* (1873), was designed to prove just that point. He reminded his listeners that the words of the poet Goethe on language could also be applied to religion: "He who knows one, knows none."[1] If that is so, then perhaps it was time indeed for a new and objective look at this very old subject. Instead of following the theologians, who wanted only to prove their own religion true and others false, the time had come to take a less partisan approach, seeking out those elements, patterns, and principles that could be

found uniformly in the religions of all times and places. Much could be gained by proceeding as a good scientist, by gathering various facts—customs, rituals, and beliefs—of religions throughout the world and then offering theories that compare and account for them, just as a biologist or chemist might explain the workings of nature.

Certainly not everyone, even among scholars, agreed that something of value could be gained from the study of many religions. Back in Germany, Adolf von Harnack, the foremost Church historian of the age, insisted that Christianity alone is what matters; other faiths do not. "Whoever does not know this religion knows none," he wrote in pointed rejection of Müller's view, "and whoever knows it and its history, knows all."[2] He added, with more than a trace of disdain, that it was pointless to go to the Indians or the Chinese, still less the Africans or Papuans: Christian civilization alone was destined to endure, so there was little need to bother. Harnack was unusually blunt, but his view itself was not unusual. There was a fairly wide consensus among theologians and historians across Europe that Christian ideals and values, which formed the spiritual center of the West, expressed the highest in human moral and cultural achievement. To imagine that something significant could be learned from others was to think inferiors can tutor their betters. None of this could discourage Müller, however: he was confident that serious study would show how certain shared spiritual intuitions link the sages of Asia and other distant lands to the saints and martyrs of the Church.

Ancient Theories

Müller's program may have been unwelcome to some and new to others, but elements of what he proposed in his lecture were in fact very old. Questions as to what religion is and why different people practice it as they do doubtless reach back as far as the human race itself. The earliest theories would have been framed when the first traveler ventured outside the local clan or village and discovered that neighbors had other gods with different names. When on his travels the ancient historian Herodotus (484–425 BCE) tried to explain that the gods Amon and Horus, whom he met in Egypt, were the equivalents of Zeus and Apollo in his native Greece, he was actually offering at least the beginning of a general theory of religion. So was the writer Euhemerus (330–260 BCE) when he claimed that the gods were simply outstanding personages from history who began to be worshipped after their death. According to Cicero of Rome, the Stoic Chrysippus (280–206 BCE) was a thoroughly systematic student of the customs and beliefs of as many tribes and races as his travels led

him to encounter. Some Stoic philosophers accounted for the gods as personifications of the sky, the sea, or other natural forces. After viewing the facts of religion, they and others sought, often quite creatively, to explain how it had come to be what it was.[3]

Judaism and Christianity

These philosophers lived in the classical civilizations of ancient Greece and Rome, where many divinities were worshipped and the idea of comparing or connecting one god with another was a natural habit of mind. Both Judaism and Christianity, however, took a very different view of things. To Isaiah and other prophets of Israel, there was no such thing as a variety of gods and rituals, each with a different and perhaps equal claim on our interest or devotion; there was only the one true God, the Lord of the covenant, who had appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and had revealed the divine law to Moses on Mt. Sinai. As this God alone was real and all others were mere figments of the human imagination, there was little about religion that needed either comparison or explanation. The people of Israel were to trust in Yahweh, who had chosen only them and had spoken to them directly; other nations worshipped idols, their eyes being darkened by ignorance, wickedness, or both. Christianity, which arose out of later Judaism, took over this perspective of Isaiah almost without change. For the apostles and theologians of the early Church, God had put himself on clear display in the human person of Jesus the Christ. Those who believed in him had found the truth; those who did not were victims of the great deceiver Satan—their souls destined to pay a bitter eternal price in Hell. As Christianity spread across the ancient world and later to the peoples of Europe, this view came to dominate Western civilization. There were occasional exceptions, of course, but the prevailing attitude was expressed most clearly in the great struggle against Islam during the age of the Crusades. Christians, the children of light, were commanded to struggle against the children of darkness. The beauty and truth of God's revelation explained the faith of Christendom; the machinations of the Devil and his hosts explained the perversions of its enemies.[4]

For the better part of a thousand years after the Roman empire had become Christian, this militant perspective on religions outside the creed of the Church did not significantly change. But around the year 1500, as the epoch of world explorations and the age of the Protestant Reformation arrived, the beginnings of a new outlook began to take shape. The voyages of explorers, traders, missionaries, and adventurers to the New World and to the Orient brought

Christians into direct encounters with alien peoples who were neither Jews nor Muslims, both of whose religions were readily dismissed (the first as a mere preface to Christianity, the second as a perversion of it). Missionaries, traveling with those who explored and conquered, were at the leading edge of the engagement. Their aim was to bring "heathen nations" to Christ, and so they certainly did. Many were converted, but the process also brought surprises. When the scholarly Jesuit Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) took residence at the court of the emperor in China, the missionary very nearly became the convert. The Chinese, Ricci discovered, had a real civilization, with art, ethics, and literature. Their ways were rational, and they followed the impressive moral wisdom of their own Moses, the ancient teacher Confucius. Another Jesuit, Roberto di Nobili (1577–1656), had a similar experience in India. The spiritual wisdom of the Hindu sages captured his imagination; he studied the sacred books so intensively that he became known as "the white Brahmin." Still other missionaries, at work in the New World, discovered something like belief in a Supreme Being among America's "Indians." As these reports filtered back to Europe, it occurred to some in thoughtful circles that the condemnation of such peoples as disciples of the Devil just might be premature. China's Confucians may not have known Christ, but somehow, without a Bible to guide them, they had produced a civilization of mild manners and high morals. Had the apostles visited, they too might have admired it.

At the very same moment that these contacts were being made, the Christian civilization that the Prince of Peace presumably *had* established found itself plunged into bloody and violent turmoil. Led by Martin Luther in Germany and John Calvin in Switzerland and France, the new Protestant movements of Northern Europe challenged the power of the Church and rejected its interpretations of biblical truth. While the explorers traveled, their homelands often came ablaze with the fires of persecution and war. Communities were split apart by ferocious quarrels over theology, first between Catholics and Protestants and later among the scores and more of different religious sects that began to appear in once-unified Christendom. Amid the religious storms and political struggles that gripped the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it is no surprise that concerned believers on all sides grew less certain that they alone held God's final truth in their hands. The deadly, destructive wars of religion, which persisted for more than a hundred years in some lands, led people to believe that the truth about religion cannot possibly be found in sects that were prepared to torture and execute opponents, confident their work was God's will. Surely, some said, the truth of religion must be found beyond the quarrels of the churches, beyond the tortures of the stake and the rack. Surely, the faiths of Europe could find a pure and common form, a simpler and more universal framework of belief and values that could be shared across the borders of confessions.[5]

The Enlightenment and Natural Religion

It was this quest for a shared, simpler religion, set against the bloody background of the previous era, that inspired thinkers of the eighteenth century, the Age of Enlightenment. They embarked on a mission that led them to the idea of a true and ancient "natural religion" shared by the entire human race. Natural religion formed the basic creed of Deism, as it commonly came to be called. It enlisted the most articulate voices and celebrated names of the age: philosophers such as John Toland and Matthew Tindal in Britain, the American colonial statesmen Thomas Jefferson and Ben Franklin, and brilliant men of letters such as Denis Diderot and the great Voltaire in France, as well as the dramatist Gotthold Lessing and philosopher Immanuel Kant in Germany. Nearly all in this circle, who saw themselves as voices of reason, endorsed the idea of a universal, natural religion. They affirmed belief in a Creator God who made the world and then left it to its own natural laws, instituted a parallel set of moral laws to guide the conduct of humanity, and offered the promise of an afterlife of rewards for good and punishments for evil. To the Deists this elegantly simple creed was the faith of the very first human beings, the common philosophy of all races. The best hope of humanity was to recover this original creed and to live by it in a universal brotherhood of all peoples—Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Confucians, and all others—under their one Creator God.

In addition to its commendable work in promoting tolerance, the Deist notion of an original natural religion of humanity opened the door to a new way of explaining the many forms of religion in all their conflict and confusion. Whatever the different beliefs of the various Christian sects, the rituals of native Americans, the ancestral rites of the Chinese, or the teachings of the Hindu sages, all could ultimately be traced back to the natural religion of the first human beings and then followed forward as that ancient wisdom was gradually transformed and dispersed into its modern versions and variations. China especially offered proof of this point. As trading ships from the Orient began to return regularly in the 1700s, fascination attended all forms of *chinoiserie*. Fabrics, spices, porcelains, teas, and furnishings gave evidence of China's civility and elegance, its prosperity, deference, and piety, all plainly acquired without any help from the Bible. These graces, and the ethics of Confucius especially, displayed the virtues of natural religion.

Modern Theories

There was, of course, another side to the Deist agenda. To praise natural religion was also to blame revealed religion, which by the Deists' estimate was little

more than the twisted handiwork of priests and theologians. By and large, the Christian Church was seen by Deists as filled with retailers of ignorance and superstition, revelations and ceremonies, miracles, confessions, sacraments, saints, and sacred texts in a language few could understand. Natural religion, on the other hand, was emphatically not a set of truths revealed directly by God to the Church and withheld from the rest of humanity. True religion was natural and primeval—the one universal faith of humanity long before it had been corrupted by churches, dogmas, and clerics. Moreover, because it was natural rather than supernatural, religion could also be explained rationally, just as the laws of motion and gravitation had been shown by Newton the physicist to be implanted in the world as it came from the Creator's hand.[6]

Deists prized rationality but showed little appreciation for the deep emotions that give life to religion or for the enchantments of its rich history and its wealth of diverse cultural forms. That posture deeply alienated those who saw traditional devotion as the very heart of religion. Faithful Catholics, fervent Protestants (called Pietists), and revivalists such as John Wesley protested the Deist program by celebrating a religion of the heart rather than a dry, rationalistic religion of the head. Their appreciation of the emotions was shared by religious Romantic writers, scholars, and poets who joined to it a deep appreciation of just what Deists despised—the glory of churches and temples, the surpassing beauty of rituals and ceremonies, the power of sacraments and prayers: the entire rich and colorful history of religious faith, especially (but not only) the Christian faith. The historical forms and institutions of religion, they contended, are not enemies of the religious spirit; they are its guardians and they bear its torch. The accents of this Romantic reaction are perhaps best illustrated in the great French historical novelist Vicomte de Chateaubriand, whose book *The Genius of Christianity* (1802) savors the beauty and history of old Catholicism.

It is fair to say that both of these historical streams—the cold current of Enlightenment Deism and the warm waters of religious Romanticism—converged in the mind of Max Müller and others. As a thinker, Müller was a virtual Deist. He relied on the philosopher Immanuel Kant, Germany's voice of Enlightenment, who centered religion on the two cardinal doctrines of Deism: a belief in God above and "the moral law within." As a personality, however, Müller was a Romantic. His young life overlapped the later years of Chateaubriand, and though he was a German Protestant rather than a French Catholic, he was just as deeply affected by the same mystical spirit and attuned to the presence of the divine wherever it could be discerned, either in the beauty of nature or in the spiritual strivings of humanity. Wherever in nature or history clues to the divine might appear, he was prepared to find them.

This blend of contrasting perspectives—Deist and Romantic—furnished Müller and others like him with both a motive and rationale for the study of all

religions. They believed that it was possible to find the root impulse of religion everywhere, and they made use of methods that were mainly historical. By sustained and diligent inquiry, they would reach far back in time to discover the earliest religious ideas and practices of the human race; that accomplished, it was a natural next step to trace their development onward and upward to the present day. Müller and his associates believed not just that they could do such a thing, but that in their time it could be done better than the Deists ever imagined, largely because of great advances made in the study of archaeology, history, language, and mythology, complemented by the newfound disciplines of ethnology and anthropology.[7] In addition to his knowledge of the Vedas and mythology, Müller was himself one of Europe's foremost names in the field of comparative philology, or linguistics; the Hindu Vedas that he edited were then thought to be the oldest religious documents of the human race. Archaeologists in first decades of the nineteenth century had made significant discoveries about early stages of human civilization; historians had pioneered new critical methods for studying ancient texts; students of folklore were gathering information on the customs and tales of Europe's peasants; and the first anthropologists could draw on reports from those who had observed societies of apparently primitive people still surviving in the modern world. In addition, there was now the very successful model of the natural sciences to imitate. Instead of just guessing about the origins and development of religion or naively assuming with some Deists that to know the writings of Confucius was to know all of Chinese religion, inquirers could now systematically assemble facts—rituals, beliefs, customs—from a wide sample of the world's religions. With these in hand and properly classified, they could infer the general principles—the scientific "laws of development"—that would explain how such belief systems arose and what purposes they served.

By the middle decades of the 1800s, then, a small circle mainly of French, German, and British scholars felt that both the methods and materials were on hand to leave speculation behind and offer instead systematic theories about religion's origins that could claim the authority of science. Not only in Müller's lectures but in other writings of the time as well, we can notice an optimism, an energy, and confidence about the tasks ahead. The aim was not just to guess about origins, but to frame theories based on evidence. Like their counterparts in the physical sciences, students of religion would work from a solid foundation of facts and frame generalizations that could be tested, revised, and improved. To all appearances, this scientific method had the further advantage that it could be applied independently of one's personal religious commitments. Müller was a deeply devout, almost sentimental Christian who believed that the truth of his faith had nothing to fear from science and would in fact shine more brightly if it were explained in the context of other religions. As we shall soon see, E. B. Tylor,

Müller's contemporary and critic, took a different view, convinced that his scientific inquiry gave support to his personal stance of agnostic skepticism. Both, however, believed that a theory of religion could be developed from a common ground of objective facts that would provide both evidentiary support and a final test of truth. Both also believed that they could reach theories that were comprehensive and general in nature. Such was the confidence they had in both their science and the body of facts at their disposal that they felt no hesitation in claiming they could explain the entire phenomenon of religion—not just this ritual or that belief, not just religion in one place or time, but the worldwide story of its origin, development, and diversity. In stating this bold ambition, they laid out the issues that the major theorists of the twentieth century (those who occupy center stage in this book) would later need to address.[8]

When we look back on it from the perspective of the present day, this hope of forming a single theory of all religions somewhat astonishes by its vaulting ambition. We are inclined now to be far more modest. Impressive books have been written just to explain one belief of one religion or to compare a single feature—a specific custom or ritual—of one religion with something similar in another. Nonetheless, the hope of one day discovering some broad pattern or general principle that explains all (or even most) religious behavior has not been given up easily. As will be clear in some of the chapters to come, several important theorists of the twentieth century have been inspired by this very same ideal, and for understandable reasons. Physicists have not given up on Einstein's unified field theory even though finding it has proved more difficult than many of them imagined. In the same way, religionists, despite the difficulties, have also been inspired by the scientific ideal of a general theory that can draw many different phenomena into one coherent, widely illuminating pattern. Moreover, explanations need not be valid to be of value; in religion, as in other fields of inquiry, a suggestive and original theory can, even in failure, spur new inquiry or reformulate issues in such a way as to promote fruitful new understandings. Thus, even if most of what they say were found to be in error, the theorists who appear in these pages would still deserve our time and attention. Their ideas and interpretations are original. Further, they diffuse themselves beyond the sphere of religion to affect our literature, philosophy, history, politics, art, psychology, and indeed almost every realm of modern culture.

It is interesting in this connection to notice how well hidden are the origins and first advocates of ideas now regarded as belonging to the stock of common knowledge. How many people who casually refer to religion as a superstitious belief in spirits realize that they are essentially repeating E. B. Tylor's famous theory of animism as explained in *Primitive Culture*, a work now well over a hundred years old? Would they today recognize the name of either the author or his once-revered book? Who among those who claim that science replaces

religion can recall the fame of James Frazer at the turn of the twentieth century, when he placed that thesis at the center of his monumental *Golden Bough*? How many general readers with a curiosity about religion would recognize the unusual name and provocative theory of Mircea Eliade, even though his institutional influence on the study of religion in the American academy over the past half century has been remarkably widespread? How many know the role that anthropologist E. E. Evans-Pritchard has played in philosophical debates over rationality and relativism? How readily can people who refer to the Protestant work ethic in everyday conversation identify German sociologist Max Weber, who first defined it? The views associated with the leading radical thinkers, especially Marx and Freud, tend to be better known, of course, but often in ways that are vague, fragmentary, or distorted. In consequence, a great deal of current debate *about* such theories often goes on without a very firm grasp of the assumptions, evidence, and logic to be found *in* them. One service this book can render is to help readers relatively new to this subject avoid making just that mistake.

Nine Theories

The following chapters consider nine of the most important theories of religion that have been put forward since the idea of a scientific approach to religion first caught the imagination of serious scholars in the nineteenth century. In each case, the theory is presented first by discussing the life and background of its major spokesman, then by treating its key ideas as presented in certain central texts, and finally by noticing its distinctive features in comparison with other theories and recording the main objections raised by its critics.

Principle of Selection

Out of a number of theories that might have been chosen for the purpose, this book selects those that have exercised a shaping influence not only on religion but on the whole intellectual culture of the twentieth century. The representative spokesmen for each are: (1) E. B. Tylor and James Frazer, (2) Sigmund Freud, (3) Émile Durkheim, (4) Karl Marx, (5) Max Weber, (6) William James, (7) Mircea Eliade, (8) E. E. Evans-Pritchard, and (9) Clifford Geertz. Knowledgeable readers will notice at once that several highly regarded figures, including the Swiss psychologist Carl Jung and even Max Müller himself, fall outside this group. Omissions as large as these are not easy to justify; indeed, another author might well have chosen differently. But the choices do have a rationale. Important as he was in promoting the idea of a science of religion,

Max Müller has been left aside because his own theory was for the most part rejected in his own time and had only limited influence thereafter. Again, the influential French philosopher Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, who is noticed briefly in Chapter 8, is a theorist who some would say deserves admission here, but Lévy-Bruhl too is a complex figure whose views changed significantly over time; moreover, since the major issues he took up were also considered by E. E. Evans-Pritchard, who had the further benefit of grounding his views in actual fieldwork among tribal peoples, the latter seems for our purposes the better of the two to select. The same is true to a degree in the case of Carl Jung. It is well known that Jung took a subtle, sympathetic, and textured approach to religion and that he made extensive use of religious materials in his psychological research. For just that reason, however, he offers a somewhat less rigorously consistent example of a psychologically functional interpretation than we find in Freud. Jung's influence on the field, though great, was less extensive, so Freud seems the right choice. The better theorist to place in this text along with Freud is the American William James, now considered in Chapter 6. In addition to taking a position on religion quite different from Freud's, he illustrates well how in its early decades psychology was much more than psychoanalysis. In the end any book must have limits, and some choices may well appear to some readers more arbitrary than astute. The important thing is to grasp that these classic theorists offer models of how some—admittedly not all—of the most influential interpretations of religion have made their mark over the past century and more.

Definition of Terms

Before we begin, some comment is needed on the two terms that are most basic to the discussions that follow: "religion" and "theory." Most people, even if they are coming to this subject for the first time, have some idea of what the term "religion" means. They are likely to think of belief in a God or gods, in supernatural spirits, or in an afterlife. Or they are likely to name one of the great world religions, such as Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism, Judaism, or Islam. They also probably have some general idea of what the term "theory" means. Having heard the term most often in the context of science, they think of it as a kind of explanation—an attempt to account for something that is not at first understood. It answers the question "Why?". Most of us readily admit that we do not understand the theory of relativity, but we do recognize that it somehow accounts for the connection between space and time in a way that no one had imagined before. At the start of things, there is no need for us to go beyond everyday notions such as these. Whatever their limitations, ordinary understandings of general terms such as "religion" and "theory" are indispensable

for a book such as this—not only at the starting point, but to offer guideposts as we proceed. At the same time, we should also notice that few of the theorists we shall consider are content to stay with these intuitions of common sense once they have seriously worked their way into the issues.

When discussing the term "religion," some observers find that "belief in a God or gods" is far too specific, far too theological a definition to use for certain people such as Buddhists, who worship no God, or for specific groups such as some Jews, who think of their faith chiefly as a matter of activities rather than beliefs. To accommodate such instances, which clearly belong to the sphere of religion, a theorist might better follow the path chosen by Durkheim and Eliade, who both prefer a broad concept like "the sacred" as the defining essential of religion. They note that the Buddhist who does not believe in God does, after all, have a sense of the sacred. So they find this abstract term more suitable when one is considering the entire span and story of religion in the world rather than traditions of just one place or time or type. Again, some theorists strongly prefer *substantive* definitions, which closely resemble the commonsense approach. They define religion in terms of the beliefs or the ideas that religious people affirm. Others think this approach just too restrictive and offer instead a more *functional* definition. They leave the content, the ideas, of religion off to the side and define it solely in terms of how it operates in human life. They want to know what a religion does for an individual person psychologically or for a group socially. Less concerned with the content of people's beliefs or practices, they are inclined to describe religion, *whatever its specific content*, as that which brings a sense of comfort or well-being to an individual or provides support for a group. As we proceed, it will be wise to keep in mind that the matter of defining religion is closely linked to the matter of explaining it and that the issue of definitions is considerably more difficult than common sense at first look leads us to believe.

The same can be said for the term "theory." At first glance, the idea of an explanation of religion is not hard to understand, but again, the more deeply one moves into the actual business of explaining, the more complex it becomes. Two brief illustrations can show why. First, a theorist who proposes to explain religion by showing its "origin" can mean by this word any of several things: its *prehistorical* origin—how, at the dawn of history, the first human beings acquired a religion; its *psychological* or *social* origin—how, at all times in human history, it arises in response to certain group or individual needs; its *intellectual* origin—how, at one time or all times, certain perceived truths about the world have led people to believe certain religious claims; or its *historical* origin—how, at a known specific time and place in the past, a certain prophetic personality or a special sequence of events has created a religion and given it a distinctive character or shape. Both in describing and in evaluating a

theory, it is important to know what kind of origin it is seeking and what connection one type of origin may have with the other types.

The second case has already been partly noticed: theories of religion, no less than definitions, may also be either substantive or functional in character. Theorists who advocate substantive approaches tend to explain religion intellectually in terms of the ideas that guide and inspire people. They stress human intention, emotions, and agency. People are religious, they say, because certain ideas strike them as true and valuable and therefore ought to be followed in the framing of their life. Theorists who stress this role of human thought and feeling are sometimes described as interpretive rather than explanatory in their approach. Religions, they contend, are adopted by persons and are about things that have meaning to human beings; accordingly, interpretations, which take account of conscious human intent, best explain religion, which after all is the product of human thoughts and purposes. Interpretive theorists tend to reject "explanations" because they are about things, not persons. They appeal only to impersonal processes rather than to humanly meaningful purposes. Functional theorists, by contrast, strongly disagree. They think that though explanations are of course good for things—for physical objects and natural processes—they are just as useful in understanding people. Functional theorists strive to look beneath or behind the conscious thoughts of religious people to find something deeper and hidden. They routinely contend that certain underlying social structures or unnoticed psychological pressures are the real causes of religious behavior. Whether they are individual, social, or even biological, these compelling forces—and *not* the ideas that religious people themselves imagine to be governing their actions—form the real sources of religion wherever we find it. We will be able to trace these differences in some detail later on in our discussion.[9] For the moment, however, they serve notice that with theories of religion, no less than with definitions, the seemingly simple often masks the deceptively complex.

In the chapters to follow, we will attend to the definitions as well as the explanations advanced by our theorists, taking note of the links that in each case connect the one with the other. Along the way, it should become apparent how and why each theorist is moved to consider both the obvious and the unnoticed, the surface and the substrate, in the effort to understand religion. It should also be clear that these theories have been placed in a sequence, both chronological and conceptual, that is meant to suggest a pattern. After starting with the classic intellectualist theories of Tylor and Frazer, we move next to explanatory approaches, tracing the lines of psychological, social, and economic functionalism through Freud, Durkheim, and Marx, respectively. We then turn to Weber and James, who offer qualified departures functionalist theories, and to Eliade, who strikes a more assertive protest against their explanatory reductionism. We finish with the more recent theories of Evans-Pritchard and Geertz, both of which may be seen as attempts to overcome the interpretive/explanatory divide. The conclusion will offer a brief review of what has happened among theorists in the interval since these classic theories came into currency, and it will ask some final comparative and analytical questions.

Notes

1. F. Max Müller, *Lectures on the Science of Religion* (New York: Charles Scribner and Company, 1872), p. 11. This was also published under the title *Introduction to the Science of Religion*. On Müller's interesting life, see Nirad Chaudhuri, *Scholar Extraordinary: The Life of Professor the Rt. Hon. Friedrich Max Müller* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1974).
2. Cited in Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer, "The Economic Ethics of the World Religions," in Hartmut Lehmann and Guenther Roth, *Weber's Protestant Ethic: Origins, Evidence, Contexts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 350.
3. On these ancient precursors of the modern theory of religion, see Eric J. Sharpe, *Comparative Religion: A History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1975), pp. 1–7.
4. Sharpe, *Comparative Religion*, pp. 7–13.
5. On the connection between the wars of religion in Europe and the effort to explain religion comparatively, without theological judgments, see J. Samuel Preus, *Explaining Religion: Criticism and Theory from Bodin to Freud* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987), pp. 3–20.
6. On early Deism and later skepticism in the Age of Enlightenment, see the discussions of Herbert of Cherbury and David Hume in Preus, *Explaining Religion*, pp. 23–39, 84–103.
7. On the rise of anthropology in the mid-Victorian years, see (among others) Richard M. Dorson, *The British Folklorists: A History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968); Paul Bohannan, *Social Anthropology* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1969), pp. 311–315; J. W. Burrow, *Evolution and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970); and George W. Stocking, Jr., *Victorian Anthropology* (New York: Free Press, 1987).
8. On these early efforts to develop theories of religion with the help of anthropological and other research, see Brian Morris, *Anthropological Studies of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 91–105.
9. The most important and provocative analyses of this division are to be found in two collections of trenchant essays by Robert A. Segal: *Religion and the Social Sciences: Essays on the Confrontation* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989) and *Explaining and Interpreting Religion: Essays on the Issue* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1992).

Suggestions for Further Reading

Bellah, Robert. *Religion in Human Evolution: From the Paleolithic to the Axial Age*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011. The last major effort of an eminent American sociologist, this ambitious survey engages the difficult, seldom-ventured task of reconstructing the early history of religion—from human beginnings through the great civilizations of antiquity.

Chaudhuri, Nirad C. *Scholar Extraordinary: The Life of Professor the Rt. Hon. Friedrich Max Müller*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1974. A detailed study, by a native Indian scholar, of the life and some consideration of the theories of Friedrich Max Müller.

Eliade, Mircea, Editor in Chief. *The Macmillan Encyclopedia of Religion*. New York: Macmillan, 1987. At present the most useful and comprehensive English-language reference work on religion.

Evans-Pritchard, E. E. *Theories of Primitive Religion*. Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1965. A brief and penetrating analysis of certain classic approaches to the explanation of religion.

Fitzgerald, Timothy. *The Ideology of Religious Studies*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000. A controversial critique of the study of religion on the grounds that the term "religion" is impossible to define, so explanations that appeal to the concept are neither meaningful nor useful.

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Animism and Magic: E. B. Tylor and J. G. Frazer

> Are the forces which govern the world conscious and personal, or unconscious and impersonal? Religion, as a conciliation of the superhuman powers, assumes the former. . . . [I]t stands in fundamental antagonism to magic as well as to science [which hold that] the course of nature is determined, not by the passions or caprice of personal beings, but by the operation of immutable laws acting mechanically.
>
> James Frazer, *The Golden Bough*[1]

Our survey begins with not one but two theorists whose writings are related and whose ideas closely resemble each other. The first is Edward Burnett Tylor (1832–1917), a self-educated Englishman who never attended a university but, through his travels and independent study, arrived at the theory of animism, which in his view held the key to the origin of religion. The second is James George Frazer (1854–1941), a shy, scholarly Scotsman who, unlike Tylor, spent virtually all of his life in a book-lined apartment at Cambridge University. Frazer is often associated with what is sometimes called the "magic" theory of religion, rather than with Tylor's animism, but in fact he was a disciple of Tylor, who readily took over his mentor's main ideas and methods while adding certain new touches of his own. As we shall see in our discussion, the two theories are so closely related that we can more helpfully consider them as differing versions—an earlier and later form—of the same general point of view. Tylor is perhaps the more original thinker, while Frazer enjoys the greater fame and influence.

E. B. Tylor

E. B. Tylor's first interest was not religion but the study of human culture, or social organization. Some, in fact, consider him the founder of cultural, or