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1

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

social, anthropology as that science is now practiced in Britain and North America. He was born in 1832 to a family of prosperous Quakers who owned a London brass factory.[2] The Quakers originally were an extreme, almost fanatical group of English Protestants who dressed in plain, unfashionable clothes and lived by the inspiration of a personal "inner light." By the 1800s most had discarded their unusual dress, earned social respect, and moved all the way over to very liberal, even nonreligious views. This perspective is clearly present in Tylor's writings, which show a strong distaste for traditional Christianity, especially Roman Catholicism.

Because both of Tylor's parents died when he was a young man, he planned to assist in managing the family business, only to discover his own health failing when he showed signs of developing tuberculosis. Advised to spend time in a warmer climate, he chose to travel to Central America and left home in 1855, at the young age of twenty-three. This American experience proved decisive in his life, for it kindled his keen interest in the study of unfamiliar cultures. As he traveled, he took careful notes on the customs and beliefs of the people he saw, publishing the results of his work in a book entitled *Anahuac: Or Mexico and the Mexicans, Ancient and Modern* (1861). On his journeys, Tylor also met a fellow Quaker, the archaeologist Henry Christy, who sparked his interest in prehistoric studies. Though he did not travel again, Tylor began to study the customs and beliefs of all peoples who lived in "primitive" conditions, whether from prehistoric ages (insofar as they could be known from archaeological finds) or from tribal communities of the present day. Soon he published a second book, *Researches into the Early History of Mankind and the Development of Civilization* (1865). Six years later, after much more work on these subjects, he published *Primitive Culture* (1871), a large two-volume study that became the masterwork of his career and a landmark in the study of human civilization. This important book not only appealed to a wide audience of general readers but also cast a spell over a number of brilliant younger men who were to become Tylor's enthusiastic disciples. Through their further outstanding work, the systematic study of folklore and the newly developing science of anthropology made great strides in the later years of the nineteenth century.[3] Though it was not the only such book, *Primitive Culture* served as a virtual Bible for all who were inspired by what was called "Mr. Tylor's science."

Tylor continued his work, and in 1884 was appointed Oxford University's first reader in the new field of anthropology. Later on he became its first professor in the discipline, enjoying a long career that extended all the way to World War I. Even so, none of his later writing matched the importance of *Primitive Culture*. Since this influential book presents his theory of animism in definitive form, it is the natural centerpiece for our examination of Tylor's views.

Primitive Culture

Background

The significance of Tylor's work is best appreciated within its historical and religious context. *Primitive Culture* was published in Victorian Britain at a time when thoughtfully religious people were wrestling with more than a few disturbing challenges to their faith. Since the early years of the century, a number of philosophers, historians, and naturalists in the field of geology found themselves drawn to the idea of very long-term development both in nature and human society. To some, the Earth and human life were beginning to look far older than the mere 6,000 years that theologians had computed from their readings in the biblical book of Genesis. The young Tylor was acquainted with these discussions and strongly disposed to think in similar terms.[4] Then, in 1859, Charles Darwin published his famous *Origin of Species*, perhaps the most important single book in science or any other field during the entire nineteenth century. His theory of evolution by natural selection struck many as contrary to the scriptures but irresistibly persuasive nonetheless. It was followed in 1871 by *The Descent of Man*, a work just as controversial because of its startling thesis about the animal origins of the human race. After the *Origin* the controversy over "evolution" was on almost everyone's lips, and the idea of development took an even stronger hold on Tylor's thought. Moreover, while these disputes raged, other thinkers were raising further troublesome questions about some of the most basic elements of Christian belief, including the historical accuracy of the Bible, the reality of miracles, and the divinity of Christ. Thus, when *Primitive Culture* appeared, with its new theory on the origin of *all* religious belief systems including the Christian one, it seemed to send yet another tremor of doubt through an already unsettled populace.

Tylor also drew upon new trends in research. He placed a pioneering emphasis on "ethnography" and "ethnology." These were the labels he and his associates gave to a distinctive new kind of study: the description (ethno*graphy*: from the Greek *grapho*, "to write") and scientific analysis (ethno*logy*: from the Greek *logos*, "study") of an individual society, culture, or racial group (from the Greek *ethnos*, a "nation" or "people") in all of its many component parts. They also used the term "anthropology," the scientific study of mankind (from the Greek *anthropos*, "man"). In addition, as a personally nonreligious man, Tylor refused to settle any question by an appeal to the divine authority of the Church or the Bible.

Prior to Tylor's day and still during much of his career, people of traditional views insisted that the origin of the Christian religion, at least, had to be understood as something miraculous in character, primarily because it had been revealed as such by God in the scriptures and affirmed in Church traditions.

Over against this orthodox view, Christian scholars of liberal inclinations pursued a more naturalistic understanding of things, but still in a manner quite supportive of traditional religious beliefs. They were led by Friedrich Max Müller, the learned and eloquent German whom we met in our opening pages.

Müller and Tylor shared the view that appeals to the supernatural should be left out of their discussions, but they disagreed strongly on the value of Tylor's ethnological research. Müller felt that the key to religion, myth, and other aspects of culture lay in language. He and other students of comparative philology (the forerunner of today's linguistics) had shown that the forms of speech in India and most of Europe belonged to a group of languages that originated with a single ancient people known as Aryans.[5] By comparing word parallels across these languages, they tried to show that the thought patterns of all these "Indo-European" Aryans were largely the same, and that, in this large portion of the human race, religion began when people reacted to the great and powerful workings of nature. In awesome natural processes like the sunrise and sunset, these ancient Aryans experienced a dim "perception of the infinite," the sense of a singular divinity behind the world. Unfortunately, when they expressed this feeling in their prayers and poems, their speech betrayed them. They personified things. The Greeks, for example, belong to the Aryan family; for them the word "Apollo" once simply meant "sun" and "Daphne," the "dawn." Over time these simple original meanings came to be forgotten; further, because the words were nouns with either masculine or feminine gender and because they were used with verbs expressing activity, the names for these natural objects came gradually to suggest personal beings. As Müller put it in a clever wordplay of his own, the *nomina* (Latin for "names") became *numina* (Latin for "gods"). Instead of noticing that every day as the dawn fades the sun rises, people began to tell fanciful tales of the goddess Daphne dying in the arms of the god Apollo. Through this process, which Müller called a "disease of language," words meant to describe nature and hint at the infinite power behind it degenerated into silly stories of many different gods, along with their misdeeds and comical misadventures. Instead of framing a pure, natural religion drawn from an inspired and beautiful perception of the infinite, people succumbed to the absurd stories of mythology.

Tylor, who had little training in languages, thought a few of Müller's ideas made sense and even incorporated them into his own. But he strongly disagreed with Müller's method of building a theory almost entirely on little more than language habits and word derivations. One needed more than mere verbal misunderstandings of events like the sunrise to explain the beginnings of the complex systems of belief and ritual that go under the name of religion—or even the tales of mythology, for that matter. One purpose of *Primitive Culture*, accordingly, was to present Tylor's decidedly different approach. Even without knowing the language, he felt, it was far better to study a given culture in *all* of its component parts—to explore the actual deeds, habits, ideas, and customs that language *describes*—than to make far-fetched guesses based only on the analogies and origins of certain words. Ethnology was clearly better than etymology.

Aims and Assumptions

It was against this backdrop—of evolutionary ideas at odds with the Bible and ethnologists opposed to philology—that Tylor introduced his book, announcing it in quite grand fashion as an attempt to pursue a new "science of culture." The proper subject of such an inquiry, he claimed, is not just language, but the whole network of elements that go into the making of what is commonly called human civilization. Ethnology assumes that any organized community or culture must be understood as a whole—as a complex network made up of knowledge and beliefs, of art and morals, tools and technology, language, laws, customs, legends, myths, and other components, all fused into a unitary system. Ethnology tries to find patterns, or laws, of human culture and expects these laws to be "as definite as those which govern the motion of waves" and "the growth of plants and animals."[6] Like the chemist or biologist, the ethnologist gathers facts, classifies and compares them, and searches for underlying principles to explain what has been found. Tylor was further convinced that when this work is properly done, and when the whole span of the human past is placed under observation, two great laws of culture come clearly into view. They are (1) the principle of psychic unity, or uniformity, within the human race and (2) the pattern of intellectual evolution, or improvement, over time.

With regard to psychic unity, Tylor maintained that throughout the world many things done or said by human beings at different times and places quite obviously resemble each other. Though some of these likenesses may have come from "diffusion"—from one people managing to teach another its good ideas—it is more often the case that different people discover the same ideas and invent the same customs quite independently. In other words, the similarities are not coincidental; they demonstrate the fundamental uniformity of the human mind. Unlike the "racialists" of his day, who saw fixed and unalterable differences separating various groups within the human race, Tylor and his associates contended that all human beings are in essence the same, especially with regard to their basic mental capacity. When in different cultures we observe very similar things, they may be presumed to be products of a single, universal rationality. With respect to logic—that is, the capacity to follow certain formal and necessary procedures of reasoning—humans of all places and times are the same. For Tylor, as one observer has put it, "all the world is a single country."[7]

But if this is true (and here the second principle plays its role), then whenever variations *do* occur, they cannot be evidence of a difference in kind, only of a difference in degree, or a change in the level of development. When two societies are seen to diverge, it is because one must be higher and the other lower on the scale of cultural evolution. Tylor thought evidence of these grades of development could be found everywhere. Because in all cultures each generation learns from the last, he believed he could trace through human history a long pattern of social and intellectual improvement, from the first savages, who hunted and gathered their food, through the cultures of the ancient world and the Middle Ages, which were based on farming, up to the modern era of trade, science, and industry. In history, each generation improves upon the last by standing on its shoulders and starting where the earlier has left off. In brief, civilization tells the story of "the ascent of man."

The Doctrine of "Survivals"

With his assumptions in place, Tylor proceeds to the evidence. We cannot speak of progress, he says, without noticing in some cultures certain things that do not look progressive at all. If a London physician prescribes surgery for an ailment while a doctor in a rural village advises bloodletting, we can hardly say that all of modern English medicine is progressive. We must account also for what is backward. Tylor does so by outlining his much-discussed "doctrine of survivals."[8] He notes that not all cultures and not all things in any one culture evolve at the same pace. Some practices, fitting in their day, linger long after the march of progress has passed them by. Among these are curious pastimes, quaint customs, folklore, folk medicine, and assorted superstitions found in almost every sphere of human endeavor. For example, no serious modern hunter would still use a bow and arrow to kill game, but the skills of archery are still with us—now as a sport or hobby. Archery "survives" from a bygone age when hunting game was crucial to sustaining life. Again, nothing is more common than to give a blessing after a sneeze; it seems trivial. Yet this was once a serious gesture, governed by the belief that at that very moment a spirit, or demon, had come out of the body. Today the blessing survives, but as a habitual response whose original intent has been long forgotten. Again, in many lands, people urge, strangely, that one should never try to save a drowning person. Though to us such advice seems cruel and selfish, it was in earlier cultures perfectly rational, for it was widely held that the river or sea, deprived of its almost captured victim, would take revenge on the very person who made the rescue. Tylor observes that the record of human history is filled with superstitions such as these, which show that while the stream of social evolution is real and its current strong, a trail of cultural "leftovers" floats in its wake.

If the principle of evolution shows why survivals exist, then it is the companion principle of uniformity that enables us to understand and explain them. Since—regardless of race, language, or culture—all human beings reason the same, we can always enter the minds of people in other cultures, even though the level of their knowledge may be very different from our own. Modern primitives, like ancient peoples, know less than we do and fail to test their opinions sufficiently, but they still think with the same mental mechanism as ours. So even amid great differences, uniformity of the mind unites the human race.

Aspects of Human Culture

For Tylor the connection between basic rational thinking and social evolution is apparent in all aspects of a culture if we only take time to look at them closely enough. He furnishes as a prime example the use of magic, which is common everywhere among primitive peoples. Magic is based upon the association of ideas, a tendency that "lies at the very foundation of human reason."[9] If somehow in thought people can connect one idea with another, then their logic moves them to find the same connection in reality. Primitive people believe that, even at a distance, they can hurt or heal others just by acting on a fingernail, a lock of hair, a piece of clothing, or anything else that has been in contact with their persons. Or they think that a symbolic resemblance matters. Some tribal peoples imagine that because certain diseases tint the skin yellow and because gold is of the same color, jaundice in the body can be cured with a golden ring. Others who practice primitive agriculture have been known to torture human victims in the belief that their tears of pain will bring showers of rain to the fields. To us such actions may seem stupid or cruel; to believers in magic, they are rational efforts to influence the world.

Tylor finds the same pattern of rationality in two of humanity's most basic and significant accomplishments: the development of language and discovery of mathematics. In each case, the process starts simply, with single words that mimic the sounds of nature and with counting systems based on fingers and toes. Over time, these concepts are slowly built up to produce the very complicated systems of speech and number that today we master even in childhood and apply with ease in everyday affairs. Across the long span of history, Tylor explains, this process has required countless trials and ended in many errors, but through them all the line of progress makes itself visible. Even mythology, that storehouse of seemingly irrational ideas and amusing stories, is governed by the logic of rational thinking. Myths arise from the natural tendency to "clothe every idea in a concrete shape, and whether created by primitives of the remote past or those of modern times, they tend to follow orderly laws of

development."[10] Myths originate in the logical association of ideas. They account for the facts of nature and life with the aid of analogies and comparisons, as when the Samoans recall the ancient battle of the plantains and bananas to explain why the winners now grow upright while the losers hang down their heads. In the same vein, a myth may connect suitable imaginary events to the lives of legendary or historical figures; it may grow logically out of a play on words; or it may try, through stories, to teach a moral lesson. In some cases—and here Tylor includes an idea of Müller's—myths arise under the influence of language, which has gender, and out of the natural inclination to make analogies between human activities and processes in nature. If the noise of a storm sounds like an angry human outburst and rainfall suggests tears of sorrow, it is easy to see how, in myth, these great forces of nature lend themselves to tales in which their activities are made to resemble those of animals and human beings. Thus earthquakes are attributed by the Scandinavians to the underground writhings of their god Loki, by the Greeks to the struggles of Prometheus, and by Caribbean peoples to the dancing of Mother Earth. Though partly works of the imagination, these personifications are just as clearly exercises in rational thought; they are meant to explain how things happen. When primitives animate the sun, moon, or stars, they honestly think of these objects as having personal characteristics.

The Origin of Religion

Tylor's comments on myth are important, for in his eyes they mark the path of inquiry that must also be followed in searching for the origin of religion. He recognizes, of course, that we cannot explain something unless we know what it is; so religion must first be defined. He further observes that we cannot casually follow the natural impulse to describe religion simply as belief in God, though that is what his mostly Christian readers might want to do. That approach would exclude a large portion of the human race—people who are plainly religious but believe in more and other gods than do Christians and Jews. He therefore proposes, as a more suitable place to start, his own minimal definition: religion is "belief in spiritual beings."[11] This formula, which others, following Tylor, have adopted as well, has the merit of being simple, straightforward, and suitably wide in scope. For though we can find other similarities, Tylor feels the one characteristic shared by all religions, great or small, ancient or modern, is the belief in spirits who think, act, and feel like human persons. The essence of religion, like mythology, seems to be animism (from the Latin *anima*, meaning "spirit")—the belief in living, personal powers behind all things. Animism further is a very old form of thought, which is found throughout the entire history of the human race. So, Tylor suggests, if we truly wish to

explain religion, the question we must answer is this: How and why did the human race first come to believe that such things as spiritual beings actually exist?

Asking this question is easy; answering it is another matter. Devout people will want to say that they believe in a spiritual being, such as God, because that being has actually spoken to them, supernaturally, through the Bible or the Quran or some other scripture. For Tylor, however, as for Müller, appeals to divine revelation are not acceptable. Such statements may be pleasing as personal confessions, but they are not science. He insists that any account of how a human being, or the whole human race, came to believe in spiritual beings must appeal only to natural causes, only to considerations of the kind that scientists and historians would use in explaining an occurrence of any sort, nonreligious as well as religious. We must presume that early peoples acquired their first religious ideas through the same reasoning process they applied to other aspects of their lives. Like us, they simply observed their world and tried to explain it.

What observations, then, did these primitives make? And what explanations did they choose? Tylor at this point peers backward, deep into prehistoric times, to reconstruct the thoughts of the very first human beings:

> It seems as though thinking men, as yet at a low level of culture, were deeply impressed by two groups of biological problems. In the first place, what is it that makes a difference between a living body and a dead one; what causes waking, sleep, trance, disease, death? In the second place, what are those human shapes which appear in dreams and visions? Looking at these two groups of phenomena, the ancient savage philosophers probably made their first step by the obvious inference that every man has two things belonging to him, namely, a life and a phantom as being its image or second self; both, also, are perceived to be things separable from the body. . . . The second step would seem also easy for savages to make, seeing how extremely difficult civilized men have found it to unmake. It is merely to combine the life and the phantom . . . the result is that well-known conception . . . the personal soul, or spirit.[12]

From their vivid encounters with both death and dreams, early peoples reasoned first to a simple theory of their own lives: that each of us is animated by a soul, a spiritual principle. They thought of this soul as "a thin, unsubstantial human image, in its nature a sort of vapour, film, or shadow; the cause of life and thought in the individual it animates."[13] From this premise, they next reasoned, as we all do, by analogy and extension. If the concept of a soul explains the movements, activities, and changes of the human person, why should it not also be applied more widely to explain the rest of the natural world? Why should not plants and trees, the rivers, winds, and animals, even the stars and planets also be moved by souls? Further, since souls are separable from the

objects they animate, why should there not also be, behind the visible scene of nature, beings who do not even need to be connected to physical objects—why not spirits, pure and simple? If there are souls in humans, could there not also be such powerful beings as demons and angels who have no necessary attachment to normal physical objects, though they certainly can enter and "possess" them if they wish? Last, and above all, could there not perhaps be certain supreme spirits, the beings we call gods?

Through this natural, almost childlike chain of reasoning, early humans arrived at their first religious beliefs. Like their myths, their religious teachings arose from a rational effort to explain how nature worked. From this perspective, all seemed quite clear: as souls animate persons, so spirits must animate the world.

Tylor further argues that the value of this animistic theory to primitive peoples is apparent from the great variety of early beliefs and customs it could readily explain. Doctrines of a future life provide an example. In Oriental cultures there is widespread belief in reincarnation, while in religions of the Western world, like Christianity and Islam, there are the doctrines of resurrection and immortality of the soul. Animism explains both as ways of extending the life of the soul beyond the death of the body. Being separable from the flesh, the soul has an afterlife and destiny of its own. Animism also explains why sacred objects and trinkets—things called "fetishes"—are important to primitives. Such people are not "idol-worshippers," as narrow-minded Christian missionaries used to describe them. They do not worship sticks and stones; they adore the "anima" within, the spirit that—not wholly unlike the god of Christians themselves—gives the wood of the stick or substance of the stone its life and power. Knowing the nature of animism, we can also make sense of tribal medicine. When a man shakes uncontrollably with fever, he knows that he does not himself do this; he is "possessed" by a demon within. To be cured, he needs an exorcism, not a medicine. The evil spirit must be driven out.

Throughout most of the entire second volume of *Primitive Culture*, Tylor fills his pages with examples to illustrate the full scope and scale of animism in earlier centuries of human civilization. It was a system that spread worldwide, becoming the first "general philosophy of man and nature" ever devised.[14] As it was absorbed by a tribe or clan or culture, it spread into every aspect of daily life. If one asks why, across almost all cultures, the gods have human personalities, the answer is that they are spirits modeled on the souls of human persons. If we want to know why gifts are given to the dead at primitive funerals and why the services, especially for great and powerful men, sometimes even include human sacrifice, animism gives the answers. The gifts provide support for the soul in its new residence beyond the grave; the sacrifices

furnish the king or prince with the souls of servants to wait upon him in the realm of death, just as they did in life. Why do the Indians of America talk to animals as they would to each other? Because, like themselves, animals too have souls. Why does the water move, or the tree grow? Because nature spirits inhabit them. Why does the medicine man fast or use drugs? To qualify himself "for intercourse with the . . . ghosts, from whom he is to obtain direction in his craft."[15]

In this systematic, sequential fashion, with scores of examples at his disposal, Tylor explores the whole range of primitive life, thought, and custom. At each point he shows how the doctrine of animism makes sense of ideas and behaviors that otherwise would strike us as nothing more than irrational and incomprehensible nonsense.

The Growth of Religious Thought

Tylor further explains that once these spiritual ideas acquired their grip on the minds of ancient peoples, they did not remain in a fixed form. Like everything else in history, animism exhibits growth and development. At first people think of individual spirits as small and specific, associated with each tree, river, or animal they happen to see. Later on, their power widens. The spirit of one tree grows in power to become the spirit of the forest or of trees in general. In time, that same spirit is gradually considered separable from the object it controls, acquiring its own identity and character. At this stage, when people worship, say, the goddess of the forest, they recognize the woodlands as her home, but they know she can also leave this home if she wishes. Among the very earliest Greeks, for example, Poseidon was at first simply the spirit of the "divine sea"; later he acquired his trident, beard, and distinctive character, so that by the time of the poet Homer, he had become a mighty and personal deity who could leave the sea and travel swiftly to Mount Olympus when Zeus assembled the gods in council.

Interestingly, Tylor approaches this later growth of a belief in the personal gods of mythology much the way Max Müller does, though he refuses to see it as arising from some unfortunate disease of language. In the animistic view, the more complex polytheism that we see among the Greeks belongs to an age of cultural progress rather than linguistic decay. From about the time of Homer forward, a new era of civilization—Tylor calls it the "barbaric" stage—takes over from the earlier "savage" stage. In the savage era, people hunted, gathered, lived in small clans, and never got beyond their first simple ideas of spirits. With the coming of the barbaric age, we find agriculture, cities, and literacy—all the main elements of the great civilizations built by the Babylonians, Greeks and Romans, native Americans, Hindus, and Chinese. In these "higher" cultures,

there are divisions of labor and complex structures of power and authority, and their religions show the same characteristics. We find the spirits of local trees and rivers on one level, while above them stand the much greater spirits of the wind, rain, and sun. The local spirit of the river can do nothing about it if the god of the sun should decide to bake dry the streams that feed him or the goddess of rain should transform him into a raging flood. Just as a king and council of nobles rule their subjects, so the sun (or Heaven) as king and the Earth as queen rule the natural world with the wind, rain, and seasons as their powerful agents or advisers.

Such complex polytheistic systems are quite typical of the barbaric age. They reach their highest form, however, when they are organized in such a way that one god, one supreme being, stands at the top of the divine society. And gradually, by different paths, most civilizations do move to this last, highest stage of animism—belief in one supreme divinity. Needless to say, Judaism and Christianity are the leading examples of the last stage. Monotheism forms the logical end to the process of development that began in the dark mists of prehistory, when the man whom Tylor calls the first "savage philosopher" concluded that souls like his own must animate the world around him.

The Decline of Animism and Progress of Thought

In one sense the story of animism is an encouraging one. Religion can be seen to have gradually evolved upward from the first primitive belief in the spirits of the trees and rocks to the later high plain of monotheism and ethics exhibited in Judaism and Christianity. Higher civilization correlates with "higher religions." But that is not the full story. A clear-eyed look at animism and its history in the dry light of science suggests a less cheerful view. Whatever progress we find has been severely limited. For however great its spread and wide its appeal through history, we cannot forget that animism at bottom is a grand mistake. As we all know, the world is *not* animated by invisible spirits. As any modern geologist can tell us, rocks do *not* have phantoms within them. Any botanist can explain that plants are *not* moved to grow by some secret *anima* in their stem. Science shows that the real sun and sea owe nothing to the adventures of Apollo and Poseidon, that plants grow by the reactions of chemicals within their fibers, and that the wind and water are only names for powerful flows of molecules governed by iron laws of cause and effect.

In its time, the animist explanation of things was reasonable enough. But the better methods of today's science show us that the reasoning of early peoples has always had its element of unreason as well. Though they can think rationally, one must also note that primitives think rationally only as children do. Savages, Tylor reminds us, are

> exceedingly ignorant as regards both physical and mental knowledge; want of discipline makes their opinions crude and their action ineffective . . . the tyranny of tradition at every step imposes upon them . . . much of what they believe to be true, must be set down as false.[16]

It follows from this that whereas the course of reason once led people naturally toward the system of animism, in the modern era, the age of science, that same course of reason ought now to lead away from it. Intellectual progress today must be measured by an opposite movement—the retreat of animist theory from all of those very realms of life it was once thought to explain. Gradually, but none the less certainly, the falsehoods of savage and barbaric peoples must withdraw before the spreading truths of the sciences. In sphere after sphere of nature, animist spirits and deities must bow and defer to modern science's impersonal causes and effects. In the modern era, religion's advance, like that of its close friends magic and myth, "has been checked by science, it is dying of weights and measures, of proportions and specimens."[17] We now understand our world only to the degree that we can pull ourselves away from animism's powerful but misguided embrace. A few of its ethical principles may linger as still useful, but its gods must die and disappear.

In the end, then, Tylor's theory provides a mixed portrait of religion and its development. As an effort of early peoples to understand the world, as a response to its mysteries and uncertain events, animistic religion presents a natural parallel to science. Both are inspired by the human search for understanding—the deep urge to know just how things work. But clearly religion is earlier, more primitive, less effective than science. Belief in spiritual beings represents a natural stage in the evolution of human reason, but it is not the end stage, and it is certainly no longer the most rational response to the world now that the program and methods of empirical science have come our way. Like the other odd customs and superstitions people are unwilling to part with, religion is now a "survival." In that connection, Tylor insists that the double mission of ethnology, "the reformer's science," requires not only that it point the way of progress but that it also take on "the harsher task" of clearing away the clutter of animism that still persists. Destined to disappear, religion can only slow the progress of mind for those who persist, unwisely, in clinging to its comforts. In the final analysis, animist ideas belong properly to the childhood of the human race, not to its maturity. And having entered adulthood, we must put away childish things.

Further on, we can examine and assess this theory, along with the judgment on the future of religion that follows from it. But first, we need to consider how these ideas were adopted and further developed in the work of James Frazer, Tylor's most famous and influential disciple.

J. G. Frazer

Early in his career, while still a promising young student in classics at Cambridge University, James George Frazer became a "convert" to Tylor's ideas and methods. Thereafter, he devoted immense effort to anthropological research, and through the rest of his long life, he promoted his own amplified version of the animistic theory. The centerpiece of Frazer's many labors was *The Golden Bough* (1890–1915), a monumental study of primitive customs and beliefs. As we shall see in chapters to come, this important book has exercised a lasting influence on subsequent thinking about religion. More than that, in the early years of the twentieth century it left a large imprint on almost every field of modern thought, from anthropology and history to literature, philosophy, sociology, and even natural science.[18]

Like Tylor, Frazer came from a Protestant Christian family, but his was not a home of liberal, affluent Quakers.[19] Born on New Year's Day, 1854, in Glasgow, Scotland, he was raised by stern and devout Scottish Presbyterian parents. His father's daily habit of reading the Bible in family worship left him steeped in its sacred stories and permanently affected by the beautiful imagery and the stately rhythms of its language. Of course, the truth of the Bible—as well as the Calvinist theology of his parents—was quite another matter. Frazer rejected both. Early in life he took the stance of an atheist, or at least an agnostic, in regard not only to Christian beliefs, but any religion. For him, religion was to be always an interest but never a creed. During the years of his early schooling, he much preferred to immerse himself in the non-Christian world of ancient Greek and Roman civilization. He studied classical languages intensively, winning multiple prizes in Latin and Greek at his preparatory school and at Glasgow University while later earning a scholarship to Trinity College, Cambridge. Eventually he became a fellow of Trinity, where he was to marry a very protective spouse, remain childless, and live the quiet, private life of a university don for the rest of his days. If ever a man fit the description of an "ivory tower" scholar, it was James Frazer.

While at Cambridge, Frazer pursued his first interest: classical literature. He wrote on the philosopher Plato and began to translate the writings of the ancient Greek traveler Pausanias, who had compiled a rich record of Greek legend, folklore, and popular custom. Pausanias would prove useful in considering primitive religion.

At just about the time he was starting his work on Pausanias, two unexpected encounters changed the course of Frazer's thought—as well as his career. While on a walking tour, a friend gave him a copy of *Primitive Culture*. As he began to read, he was attracted at once to Tylor's account of animism and its importance to primitive thought. Just as important, Frazer found his eyes suddenly

opened to the possibilities of anthropological research and the use of the comparative method. The second encounter was not with a book but a person. In 1883, the very same year that he came upon Tylor's work, Frazer met William Robertson Smith (1846–1894), a brilliant and controversial Scottish biblical scholar, who soon became his mentor and very close friend.[20] Intellectually, Smith was a perfect soulmate. Like Frazer, he was fascinated by the way in which anthropology, through its study of modern tribal societies, could shed light on an ancient subject, in his case the story of the ancient Israelites as told in the Bible. Ahead of his time, Smith actually traveled to Arabia to observe the customs of desert communities and apply them in his research. In particular, he felt that the use of "totems" by these tribal peoples was extremely important. Totem use was associated with the tribal custom of dividing into different clans, or kinship groups. Each of these clans commonly attached itself to a specific animal (or occasionally a plant), which it recognized as its totem, according it worship as a kind of divinity. Totemism was also linked to exogamy, the practice of marrying only "outside" the clan. If within a large tribe a man belonged, say, to the smaller clan of the bear, he was obliged to marry only a woman from another clan (say, of the eagle or deer) and not from his own totem group. In addition, because the totem was sacred, members of the clan were not allowed to kill or eat their chosen animal—except (as Smith supposed, though there was no evidence) on certain special occasions, when the rule might have been purposely broken, perhaps for some ceremonial totem animal sacrifice. In *The Religion of the Semites* (1890), his most important book, Smith drew on his observations in Arabia and on Tylor's concept of evolutionary survivals to argue that ancient Hebrew practices, especially their sacrifices, fit with uncanny precision into the category of tribal totemism that he observed in modern Arabia.

Frazer, for his part, was captivated by both the originality of Smith's ideas and the intellectual excitement that came through his personality in almost every scholarly conversation. In return, Smith, who at this very moment was editing the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, wisely used his new position to encourage his friend. He asked Frazer to write the articles on the subjects of "totem" and "taboo." Frazer accepted, so long as Smith would help. It was not long before Frazer's work in preparing these articles won him over fully to the anthropological perspective—and laid the groundwork for most of his later research. Soon the two men were sharing research on primitive customs and beliefs, each relying on the other in almost equal measure.

The Golden Bough

As he began his turn to anthropology, Frazer did not leave his classical studies behind. His aim was still to read the Greeks and Romans, but now with an eye

also on anthropology, looking for traces of the older, primitive world behind the cultivated poetry, drama, and philosophical writings of the classical authors. Helped by Tylor's doctrine of survivals, he felt that classical civilization could be seen with new a clarity if one noticed the earlier primitive ideas and habits that persisted within it. He was convinced that a blend of classics and anthropology, of the well worn and the as yet untried, offered the prospect of a virtual revolution in understanding the ancient world. This perspective was to guide the broad research project that would become *The Golden Bough.* The publication of this ever-expanding book occupied Frazer for most of his adult years and became his definitive statement on the origin and nature of religion. In time, *The Golden Bough* grew to three editions and twelve thick volumes, requiring over twenty-five years of Frazer's long days in his study to bring to completion. It was first published in two volumes in 1890. A second, three-volume edition appeared in 1900. New installments were added regularly until it reached its full length in 1915. By then, what began as a book had ended as an encyclopedia. Fortunately for us, in 1922 Frazer abridged *The Golden Bough* into one very long single volume; in the discussion that follows, we can take advantage of this helpful shorter version.[21]

The Golden Bough begins like a good mystery. It offers a riddle, some tantalizing clues, and a striking description of long-forgotten scenes and events. Frazer explains that along the Appian Way, the ancient road that runs from Rome to the villages of central Italy, there is a small town named Aricia; near it, in a wooded grove by a lake called Nemi, stands the ruin of a temple dedicated by the Romans to Diana, goddess of the hunt, as well as of both fertility and childbirth. In the happy days of the empire, this lakeside shrine with its woodland was both a country resort and a place of pilgrimage. Citizens of Rome traveled often to the site, especially at midsummer, to celebrate a yearly festival of fire. It was to all appearances a restful, civilized, and lovely place. But the woods at the lakeshore also held a secret. The Roman poets told of a second god, Virbius, who was also worshipped at the temple. He was sometimes identified with the young Greek hero Hippolytus, who, according to other myths, had been murdered by one of the gods in a fit of anger, only to be restored to life by Diana, who then chose to hide him here at her temple. Virbius was represented by a very mysterious figure, a man who was understood actually to live in the woods and was said to be both a priest and a king. He took it as his duty to keep constant watch not only over Diana's temple but also over a sacred tree that grew in the forest—an oak with a distinctive yellow branch, or "golden bough." The man bore the title Rex Nemorensis, "Nemi's King of the Wood." Though obviously human, this king was thought also to be a god; he was at once both the divine lover of the goddess Diana and the animating spirit of the sacred oak tree near which he stood guard.

Strange as this King of the Wood himself may seem, the way in which he acquired his position was still stranger. It came by way of a murder. Legend held that this priest-king had taken over the wood by putting to death the previous one, and that he too would keep his power only as long as he remained vigilant and strong, ready in a moment to defend his very life against other would-be kings who might try to seize his place and power. To keep his life and rule, the king had constantly to walk the temple woods, sword in hand, waiting for the approach of any would-be assailant. Should his guard fail or his strength weaken, an intruder might at any moment break through, duel the king to his death, and tear away the golden bough, which then entitled the victor to both the sexual favors of the goddess Diana and the priestly rule of the woodland. On the victor also, however, fell the same wearying burden of vigilant self-defense—the need to guard the oak without rest and to search the forest for the threatening form of any new rival who might approach, ready to kill, and eager himself to become the next King of the Wood.

With an opening scene such as this, so haunted with mystery and hidden danger, curious readers found it hard to resist following Frazer into the long trail of his narrative. But the reason for all of this drama was not just the wish to tell an unusual story. Frazer's purpose was rather to set the stage for his study by unfolding a single, sharp contrast—one that discloses the outline of an earlier, more brutal state of humanity lying just below the surface of the societies we like to think of as civilized. How, he asks, could there be a place as beautiful as the grove at Nemi, a temple and grounds so loved by visitors for its peace and healing renewal, yet at the same time so steeped in a heritage of savage violence? How is it that a center given over to the comforts of religion could be the stage for a ritual murder? That is a riddle we should very much like to see explained. In searching for solutions Frazer tells us that we will get nowhere if we keep only to the evidence available from the days of classical Greek and Roman civilization. The pastimes of cultivated Romans who visited Diana's temple offer no clues to explain the shadowy, foreboding personage of the King of the Wood. To account for such a figure, we must look elsewhere—into the deeper prehistoric past, when savage ancestors of the Romans walked the very same woods and shores centuries before Diana's temple was ever built. If it should be that among these much earlier peoples we can find an obscure custom or belief that continued down to Roman times, if we should discover one of Tylor's "survivals," then we might very well have a way to identify the King of the Wood and solve his deadly mystery. Doing so, however, requires a great deal of searching and comparing, for prehistoric peoples have left us no documents. The only thing we can do is reach out everywhere into the folklore, legends, and practices of the most primitive peoples we know to see if among them there can be found any old patterns or traditions into which

the Roman legends may fit. If we can penetrate the system of primitive ideas that lies behind it, the dark riddle of the King of the Wood and his murder can perhaps be understood. But that task is not uncomplicated. It turns out that primitive thinking (and here Frazer somewhat departs from Tylor) is governed by two quite different systems of ideas: the one is magic, the other religion. Understanding both of these, and the connection between them, is the key that gives entry to the primitive mind.

Magic and Religion

Once introduced, the subjects of magic and religion become a central theme of *The Golden Bough*, and though Frazer does finally return to it, the mystery of the King of the Wood recedes into the background. *A Study in Magic and Religion* is in fact the subtitle given to the book in its second edition. To appreciate the importance of these enterprises to primitive peoples, we must notice a fundamental fact of early human life, whether lived in Diana's woodland or any other place on the globe. It centered on the struggle to survive. Hunters needed animals to kill; farmers needed the sun and suitable rains for their crops. Whenever natural circumstances did not accommodate these needs, primitive peoples, being capable of thought, made every effort they could to understand the world and change it. The very first of these efforts took the form of magic. Frazer's full name for it is "sympathetic magic," since the primitive mind assumes that nature works by sympathies, or influences. In words that closely resemble Tylor's, he explains that "savages" (like Tylor, he preferred this word for prehistoric peoples) always suppose that when two things can in some way be mentally associated—when to the mind they appear "sympathetic"—they must also be physically associated in the outside world. Mental connections mirror physical ones. Going beyond Tylor, however, he finds in magic something more systematic, and even "scientific," than his mentor did. He points out that the main connections made by the sympathetic magician are basically of two types: imitative, the magic that connects things on the principle of similarity; and contagious, the magic of contact, which connects on the principle of attachment. In the one case, we might say "like affects like," in the other, "part affects part." When Russian peasants pour water through a screen in a time of drought, they imagine that because the filtered falling water *looks* like a rain shower, sprinkling of this sort will actually force rain to fall from the sky. When a voodoo priest pushes a pin through the heart of a doll decorated with the fingernails and hair of his enemy, he imagines that merely by contact—by contagious transmission—he can bring death to his victim.

Frazer explains that evidence of this magical thinking can be multiplied in countless examples drawn from primitive life around the globe, and he supplies them in great number. When, as traders report, the Pawnee Indians touched the blood of a sacrificed maiden to their field tools, they firmly believed that, merely by contact, its life-giving power would be transferred to their seeds of maize. When drought strikes certain villages of India, the people dress up a boy in leaves, name him the Rain King, and at each house sprinkle him with water, all in the belief that this ritual will bring the rains, making green plants to grow again. When the Indians of South America bury lighted sticks in the ground during an eclipse of the moon, they believe the darkening of its fire will also put out all fires on earth, unless some, at least, are hidden from its influence. In each of these cases, and many, many others that he cites, Frazer shows how simple peoples everywhere assume that nature operates on the principles of imitation and contact. They think of these principles as constant, universal, and unbreakable—as firm and certain as any modern scientific law of cause and effect. In India, when the Brahmin priest makes his morning offering to the sun, he firmly believes it will not rise without his ritual. In ancient Egypt, the Pharaoh, who represented the sun, routinely made a solemn journey around the temple to ensure that the real sun would complete its daily journey as well. Magic is thus built on the assumption that once a proper ritual or action is completed, its natural effects *must* occur as prescribed. Such rites form a kind of science for primitive peoples. They offer knowledge of the natural world and control of its processes.

Frazer also goes beyond Tylor, who tends to speak of magical knowledge as its own reward, in emphasizing the social power that accrues to people who have command of the magical art. It is not by accident that in primitive cultures the person who can claim mastery of its techniques—whether called a magician, medicine man, or witch doctor—routinely holds a position of considerable prestige and power. Usually the magician rises to the role of king, since he best knows how to control the natural world for the good of the tribe or for the evil of its enemies. Evidence from around the globe shows that among tribal peoples, nothing is more common than for the magician to be also the village chieftain or king.

Of course the power that magical skills confer ought not blind us to a quite fundamental problem: Magic may look like science, but it is a false science. Primitives are deceived, but moderns are not. As every modern person certainly knows, the laws of imitation and contact do not apply to the real world. Magic cannot work. The primitive magician, for all his shrewd magical skills, is simply wrong. The real world does not operate by the pattern of sympathies and similarities he mistakenly applies to it. Over time, therefore, the more critical and thoughtful minds even in primitive communities draw the reasonable conclusion that magic is, at bottom, nonsense. The magician can try to explain away failures or even take the blame upon himself, but the facts cry out loudly

that it is the system, not the man, that is mistaken. The general recognition of that failure is for Frazer a momentous development in the history of human thought; for as magic declines, religion comes to fill its place.

Religion follows a path quite different from that of magic. Here we may recall that Tylor, after defining religion as belief in spiritual beings, found it generally to resemble magic, both being built upon the uncritical association of ideas. Frazer is perfectly content with Tylor's definition of religion, but he is more interested in the contrasts than the similarities it shows with magic. For him the interesting thing about religion is precisely its rejection of the principles of magic. Instead of magical laws of contact and imitation, religious people claim that the real powers behind the natural world are not principles at all; they are personalities—the supernatural beings we call the gods. Accordingly, when truly religious people want to control or change the course of nature, they do not normally use magical spells but rather prayers and pleadings addressed to their favorite god or goddess. Just as if they were dealing with another human person, they ask favors, plead for help, call down revenge, and make vows of love, loyalty, or obedience. These things are crucially important, for the personalities of the gods control nature; it is their anger that can start a storm, their favor that can save a life, their compassion that can calm a troubled sea. For Frazer, wherever there is belief in these supernatural beings and wherever there are human efforts to win their help by prayers or rituals, we have moved out of the realm of magic and into that of religion.

In addition, and though it may not seem so at first, this turn to religion should be read as a sign of progress because it improves on magic and marks an intellectual advance for the human race. Why? For the simple reason that religious explanations are better than magical ones in describing the world as we actually experience it. Magic, we must recognize, asserts laws that are impersonal, constant, and universal. If the rain ritual is done correctly, rain *must* actually come; the rules of imitation and contact do not allow exceptions. Religion is quite different. From the start it never claims to have iron-clad principles of explanation. To the contrary, it confesses that the world is in the hands of the gods, who control nature's forces for *their* interests, not ours. Moreover, the gods are many, with different personalities and often competing aims and agendas. We worship the gods, we pray and sacrifice to them in the hope that they will bring rain, or give us children, or heal the sick, but we cannot force them to do these things. Religion offers no guarantees. And yet as Frazer sees it, this very uncertainty is in its way commendable. Is it not a fact that most of nature's processes, great and small, *do* fall outside our control? To offer prayers that sometimes are answered and sometimes are not, to ask favors that are granted one day and denied the next—is not such a view of the world, which places all things under the control of great and powerful beings beyond

ourselves, very close to the facts of our existence as we actually find them? Does it not actually fit far better than magic to life as we actually encounter it, filled with both its surprise pleasures and unexpected misfortunes? Like the gods, the world sometimes gives us what we want—and sometimes it does not.

Magic, Religion, and the Divinity of Kings

With the coming of religion, there also appear certain related changes in society. Gradually, the old magician-king gives way to the new priest-king, whose power lies in the new religious type of thought—specifically, in his ability to communicate with the gods or, just as often, in possessing a kind of divinity himself. Divine kings are as natural to the age of religion as magician-kings are to the age of magic, though we ought not to consider this transition between the two periods to have been sharp or sudden. Frazer reminds us that cultures evolve slowly and often unevenly through time. Even as they were gradually turning over the control of the natural processes from the principles of magic to the personalities of the gods, primitive peoples usually combined the two systems. Even as they embraced the gods, they still reserved a place for magic; in fact, they often used magic *on* the gods, trying, as it were, to force them to act favorably on human requests. Frazer finds magic and religion to have been mixed so often and in so many cultures around the world that, in the mountains of evidence he supplies, he scarcely even tries to disentangle the two.

Examples of magic and religion in combination play a key role in some of Frazer's most important discussions. Ritual prostitution is an instance. Primitive people, he says, believe that if the sexual encounter reproduces human life, a ritual act of intercourse performed in the house of the gods will, by the law of imitation, actually *compel* the divine Sky Father and Earth Mother to do the same. With that, the rains will come, and crops will grow for another season. Royal personages are seen in a similar light. While many tribal societies think of their king in religious terms, as a god, they conceive of his powers and his relation to the tribe as magical. The king is seen as the divine center of the world. His mere words become law. From his person an energy radiates in all directions, so that any of his actions, or any change in his state of being, can affect the whole balance of the natural order and the whole life of the tribe. At the same time, it should be noted that this divine power is more magical than personal in nature—so thoroughly magical, in fact, that even the king himself must bow to it. Frazer notes how some African peoples do not allow the king to leave his house, because the mere movement of his body would affect the weather. In ancient Ireland, kings were forbidden to be in a certain town at sunrise or in another on Wednesdays or to sail their ships on certain Mondays—all for fear of the effects of their magical powers on specific places at specific times.

The magical charge carried by the person of the king also explains why monarchs are often surrounded by taboos—sacred prohibitions meant as life preservers for souls. In some cases, the king may not be allowed to touch certain persons or things because of the effect his powers may have on them; in others, persons must avoid the king for just the opposite reason—because of the ill effects *they* may have on *his* use of his powers. Even into recent times, the emperor of Japan, the divine Mikado, was seen as so filled with magical power that his feet were not allowed to touch the ground.

In more general terms primitive peoples often insist that because the king is a god, measures must be taken to preserve his divine energy, transferring it to a new person whenever he shows signs of sickness, injury, or age. Nothing was more startling to Victorian readers of *The Golden Bough* than the evidence it furnished to show that when in some tribal cultures kings age or grow ill, they must be ritually put to death, so that their divine spirit can be conveyed in full strength to a new ruler. Hardly less shocking were its demonstrations that to the primitive mind, such executions are not immoral acts of cruelty; they are sacred acts of magical necessity. This was true, moreover, even though the form of the ritual was subject to change. Since many kings did not relish the prospect of being executed, often a slave or captive, an animal, an image, or even a son was put forward as the king's substitute. Indeed, Frazer at one point suggests that the Jewish festival of Purim and the Christian remembrance of Christ's crucifixion at Passover both fall into the category of these royal substitutions. It is of interest, he suggests, that both involve the sacrifice of a "pretend" king and both show a similar intent: to preserve by magical transfer the power of the divine life.[22]

The Gods of Vegetation

Of all the places where magic and religion converge, none is for Frazer more common than the great, seasonal cults of vegetation and agriculture that are found so widely around the world. Worship of vegetation gods like Osiris, Tammuz, Attis, and Adonis was widespread not only in the ancient civilizations of Egypt, Greece, and Rome but almost everywhere that people practiced the arts of agriculture. These agrarian cults were steeped in symbols of sexuality and the cycle of birth and death. Ancient Cyprus provides an instance. There the god Adonis was routinely paired with the goddess Aphrodite/Astarte, whose rituals included prostitution and a bizarre sexual law requiring all virgins to sleep with a complete stranger at the temple before their marriage. Strange as it may seem, says Frazer, it was not perversion that inspired this practice but the sacred rules of imitative magic. The purpose of the rite was to compel the gods also to mate, so that all of nature could be reborn.

Rituals of death and rebirth served a similar purpose. In the cult of Attis, the myth that recounted the bloody death of the god had to be reenacted each year because it ensured the death of the crop at harvest time; then each spring the god was to be ritually reborn, so the plants could once again come to life and grow. As Frazer explains it, worshippers in these religions "thought that by performing certain magical rites they could aid the god who was the principle of life, in his struggle with the opposing principle of death. They imagined that they could recruit his failing energies and even raise him from the dead."[23] When the rites were performed, all of nature could be expected to benefit from the return of life and growth. In Egyptian traditions, the god Osiris clearly was a personification of the grain; the story of how, after death, his mangled body was scattered across the land offers a mythical counterpart to the process of planting, in which dead seeds are sown across the fields, later to be reborn and rise as growing plants. For nearly all who participate in these religious cults, the sacrifice of some sacred animal identified with a deity, such as the bull of Dionysus, is a way of pushing the gods, and thus the crops, forward in their natural cycle. Similarly, when primitives sacrifice an actual human king as a divinity, that horrible rite mirrors myths like those of Attis and Osiris, where the magic of imitation is reinforced by the magic of contact. As in the myths, so in the ritual: the body of the victim may be torn apart or burnt, while the flesh and blood, or bones and ashes, are spread on the fields, releasing their magical power to fertilize the soil.

In additional volumes of his study, Frazer brings forward still other primitive customs that fit this magical-religious pattern of thought, most notably those associated with the totem and the scapegoat. Robertson Smith, as we saw, first called Frazer's attention to the primitive practice of totemism, and this practice was the focus of pioneering research at the very time the second edition of *The Golden Bough* was in preparation. Working among Australian aboriginal tribesmen, two field investigators, Baldwin Spencer and F. J. Gillen, made the remarkable discovery that on certain special occasions the sacred totem animal was indeed killed and eaten by its clan—just as Robertson Smith had earlier guessed![24] The Aborigines called the ritual of eating the *intichiuma* ceremony. In it, says Frazer, we can see in perhaps their earliest form the rites of religious sacrifice and the concept of the dying god. By killing the totem, primitives protect against the decline of power in their animal god; by eating it, they take its divine energy into themselves. A similar pattern is to be found in the custom of the tribal "scapegoat." Anyone familiar with the Bible knows how the scapegoat was used by the Hebrews, who each year chose an animal for the specific purpose of being sent away from the community in a solemn ritual and left to wander until it died. Seen in the light of magical principles, this practice arises from the belief that sins or illnesses can somehow be physically driven out of

the community by attaching them to an object like a stick or leaf and allowing them to be carried on the animal's back as it travels away. When placed in the context of totem practice and royal executions, the underlying purpose of the ritual becomes apparent: since the animal represents the divine, its banishment is another way of killing the tribal god.

Tree Spirits, Fire Festivals, and the Myth of Balder

In explaining the role played by magical-religious ideas in the worship of vegetation gods, Frazer draws most of his evidence from the ancient Mediterranean world. He was convinced, however, that these ideas and practices could be found in the European countries as well. To prove this point, he relied heavily on the work of a German student of folklore, Wilhelm Mannhardt (1831–1880), who had gathered evidence of the archaic customs, rituals, and mythology of European peasants into several important books.[25] Among these, Frazer made special note of certain traditions observed by the Celtic peoples of the British Isles and by the Nordic cultures of Scandinavia. In northern Europe, the worship of tree spirits was prevalent; perhaps because of its great size, the oak tree in particular was held sacred. Among the early Celts there were also dramatic fire festivals like the great Beltane ceremony, which was celebrated every spring and fall and called for human images to be thrown into its raging sacred flames. In Norse tradition, again, there was the tragic myth of Balder, the beautiful young god killed by an arrow made of mistletoe, the only thing in all of nature that could do him harm. As with Osiris in Egypt, Nordic mythology presented his death as an immense tragedy, and at the funeral, when Balder's body was burnt aboard his own ship in a huge fire at the ocean's edge, there was deep mourning in the assembly of the gods.

In general terms, these sagas and stories from the North provide still further evidence of magic and religion in close association. But they also serve a second purpose; they bring the long narrative of *The Golden Bough* to its end. With these stories in hand, the riddle that began the tale can at last be solved, though even at this point the path to the solution is not a simple one. It follows a sequence of comparisons and connections too complicated to trace in detail, so we shall have to be content with a short summary sketch.

If we look closely at the myths and rituals of the North, Frazer explains, it is clear that Virbius, the king of Diana's woodland, and the Norse god Balder, who also may have been once a real person, are both human embodiments of the great tree spirit, the soul of the sacred oak. This is not surprising, for among primitives the spirit, or soul, of an object can always exist in external form. The spirit of the tree need not remain in its trunk; it can also exist, outside its wooden

body, in these human forms. Conversely, the souls of deities like Balder and Virbius are capable of traveling outside *their* quite human bodies as well; when they do, they lodge, naturally enough as tree spirits, in the ever-green mistletoe, which grows on the trunk of the oak even in the coldest winter. In this telltale clue, says Frazer, we have at last an explanation for the golden bough said to grow from the tree at Nemi; it is simply a poetic name for the mistletoe, which turns a definite shade of yellow when cut from its tree. Further, the action we find in the Nordic myth, the shooting of the arrow at Balder, closely parallels that of the Roman tale, where the bough is broken by the assailant and in the moment of challenge probably hurled (just like Balder's arrow) at the King of the Wood. Both stories thus describe the same kind of act: an assault on the god in which his own soul (in the form of the mistletoe) is seized from him and turned against his body to secure his death. The god is killed in order magically to take from him his divine power.

If these parallels are valid, then anthropology can step in to make the final connection. It seems clear to Frazer that the tales of Balder and Virbius alike must have originated in real events: the prehistoric murder of a tribal king to transfer his divine powers as commanded by the laws of early magic and religion. So it is nothing less than the sacrificial murders of real human kings from the deep past that lie behind the mortal figures of Balder and Lake Nemi's King of the Wood. The midsummer festivals of fire that the Romans so innocently enjoyed at Diana's temple only confirm the connection. It is no accident that these rites bear a striking resemblance to the midsummer fire rituals found also in Scandinavia. In both there is the common fact of a fire ceremony held at precisely the same time of year—and fueled probably by the sacred wood of fallen oaks. In addition, there are, especially in the northern rites, those curious hints of a victim in the fire: the ritual burning of Balder's body and those human images thrown into the flames of the Irish Beltane fires. Such clues tell us that however innocent on their surface, these ceremonies too are survivals recalling the hideous sacrifice of human beings envisioned as dying gods. Frazer intimates that in the earliest centuries of human life together, there were countless occasions when fires such as these were solemnly lit to welcome the bodies of those unfortunate kings (or their unhappy substitutes) who were human predecessors of Balder and Virbius—gods who had to be slain so that the powers of nature would not weaken but be renewed.

From all of this it should be indisputably clear that the earliest humans lived their lives by a system of ideas that was rational enough for them but fearfully distant from our own. Behind the rites of Diana's temple and the Roman legend of the King of the Wood lies the grim ordeal of human sacrifice, the ceremonial murder of a man thought to be a god.[26] Barbaric to us, such actions were

nonetheless rational in the ages that knew them, for the laws of nature were seen to require nothing less than this ultimate sacrifice. Better to kill the one than risk the death of all. To the primitive mind, it was the voice not of revolution but of religion and reason that first uttered the cry: "The king is dead; long live the [new] king."[27]

Conclusion

Looking back on it when he had finished, Frazer described his book as a great "voyage of discovery," a journey backward in time to explore the mind of prehistoric humanity. A long voyage it certainly was! Though he rarely left his study, his investigations had taken him—in thought at least—to nearly every place, time, and culture known to the human race. No corner of undiscovered humanity could escape the global reach of his discussions. He gathered information, seemingly, from everyone and everywhere, and he had the great good fortune of being himself at the right place and time to do so. Writing in Cambridge during the golden last decades of the British empire, he was ideally positioned to gather stories from missionaries and soldiers, from traders and diplomats, from travelers, scholars, and explorers who passed on personal observations from every odd and lonely corner of the world. Through their letters, reports, and responses to Frazer's own questionnaire, these sources—some reliable, others less so—provided him with all that he could need and, indeed, more even than he could want.[28]

This vast fund of information Frazer had at his disposal gave him great confidence in the scientific merits of his theory and, with it, his account of the origin of religion. In his view, worship of the gods had arisen, as Tylor first suggested, in the earliest human attempts to explain the world, and it was driven by the human desire to control the powers of nature—to avoid its hazards and win its favors. Magic was the first such attempt, and it failed. As it declined, belief in the gods arose, subtly combined with it, and over the centuries moved more and more fully into its place. Religion put its hopes in prayers and pleadings. But in the end, it too has been found wanting; its claims about the gods have been found to hold no more truth than the laws of magic. Accordingly, says Frazer, just as the age of magic was replaced by that of religion, so too the present era of belief in the gods, one or many, must yield to the third and next era of human thought—the age of science, which is now upon us. Like magic, religion must be assigned to the category of Tylor's survivals. Though it clings to life among backward peoples, as a kind of intellectual fossil, its time has passed. In its place has come science, a way of thought now very much alive, which offers knowledge of the world that is both rational and faithful to facts. Like a new and better magic, science abandons the belief in supernatural beings

and once again tries to explain the world by appealing to general and impersonal principles. In the present age these principles are no longer the secret sympathies of imitation and contact but the valid laws of physical cause and effect. As religion fades, science inevitably assumes its place, for it is the rationality of the present, and it knows the true laws of nature. For Frazer, it is magic without the mistakes.

Analysis

If we stand back to observe the theories of Tylor and Frazer in broad outline, several key themes come clearly into view:

1. Science and Anthropology

In terms of method, Tylor and Frazer both see themselves as *scientific* theorists. They assume from the outset that any explanation of religion which appeals to claims of miraculous events or to some supernatural revelation must be ruled out. They will not allow a theory that might claim, for example, that the ancient Hebrews followed the Ten Commandments because they were revealed by God. Only natural explanations can be seriously considered. Accordingly, such scientific study requires the wide collection of facts, followed by comparison and classification; only after that can one formulate a general theory that accounts for all the instances. Both men feel they can do this best through their new sciences of ethnology and anthropology, which gather samples of behavior from every culture in the world and thus seem ideally suited to the purpose of framing something so broad as a general theory of religion. Not surprisingly, both *Primitive Culture* and *The Golden Bough* are very large books, their pages crowded and bursting with examples, instances, parallels, and variations, all meant to support the broad generalizations that are central to the theories they advance.

2. Evolution and Origins

Tylor and Frazer both are committed to explaining religion primarily in terms of its prehistoric origin, its beginning in ages long past and its gradual evolution to present form in the centuries thereafter. They believe that the key thing is to discover how it began, to observe it in its earliest, simplest form, and then to follow the path from its beginnings to the present day. Further, they are convinced that, broadly speaking, this origin is something we *can* actually discover, though not in any single event.[29] Religion, they say,

arose in a set of circumstances faced by all prehistoric peoples, who responded in ways that, though mistaken, were the best their reason could manage, given the limitations of their knowledge. Further, having arisen in the past, religion has seen its status, along with its claims of truth and usefulness, change significantly over the long process of its intellectual evolution. Through their own hard efforts, human beings have slowly improved themselves by creating ever more civilized communities, by learning the limits of their knowledge, and by treating each other with greater measures of decency and dignity. To be sure, religion—an agent of progress insofar as it once took the mind of humanity a step beyond magic—has played its role in this great evolutionary drama, but only for a time. With the arrival of science, that role now is ended.

3. Intellectualism and Individualism

Theorists today often refer to Tylor and Frazer as advocates of an "intellectualist" approach to religion.[30] By this they mean that both men think of religion as first of all a matter of beliefs, of ideas that people develop to account for what they find in the world. Religion is not seen as in the first instance about group needs, feelings, structures, or activities. On the contrary, it originates in the mind of the individual "savage philosopher," as Tylor calls him, the lone prehistoric thinker who tries to solve the riddles of life and then passes his ideas on. Religion becomes communal or social only when an idea seen to be valid by one person comes gradually to be shared by others. Religious groups, accordingly, are in the first instance viewed as collections of individuals who happen to share the same beliefs.

Critique

In the prime years of their influence, which came in the last decades of the Victorian era, Tylor and Frazer won many disciples within anthropology and even more admirers outside of it—among them people who enjoyed the fascinating application of their ideas to literature, art, history, philosophy, and even popular opinion. To those who read them at the time, these two talented authors seemed capable of shedding new light on almost every feature of religion or society one might want to address. Even so, there were a few, like Max Müller, who had serious doubts about how far one could really go with the methods of anthropology and the principles of intellectual evolutionism. As the years have passed, the ranks of the skeptics have grown, and the severity of the criticisms has increased as well. Ironically, the most serious doubts now

surround precisely those things noted above as the key elements of the intellectualist program. They include the following:

1. Anthropological Method

Though both Tylor and Frazer were pioneers in using anthropological data, their methods have not worn well over time. Professional anthropologists in particular grimace at the way in which these enterprising Victorians bring together supposedly similar customs of different peoples in different times and places without only minimal regard for their original social context.[31] It is this method, for example, that allows Frazer to associate Celtic fire festivals with Scandinavian ones, and then to assume conveniently that a practice found only in the former (tossing human images into the fires) must at some point have occurred also in the latter. All the while, he overlooks that while the Nordic fires occur in midsummer, as in the festival of Diana, the Celtic festival occurs only in the spring and fall. After a close look at such loosely made connections, we find ourselves asking what it is, apart from the coincidence of fire in each, that enables Frazer to connect these festivals at all. Similar stretchings occur throughout the argument of *The Golden Bough*, though less often in the pages of *Primitive Culture*.

2. Evolutionism

This habit of using evidence loosely raises complications also for the doctrine of intellectual progress, which Tylor and Frazer both make central to their theories. When Tylor finds an example of religious monotheism, he assumes it reflects a stage of thought later than polytheism. Yet the evidence brought forward seldom shows such a sequence because it is mostly "timeless" in character. Its source is an undatable oral tradition, which may be recent or ancient; no one knows. Often it is impossible to tell whether, say, belief in one high god developed in earlier or later centuries of a people's history, or perhaps somewhere in between. When Frazer finds a report of purely magical practices, for example, he naturally assumes that they are rooted in an era that historically precedes the age of religion. But how does he know this? The evidence usually cannot tell him. Most of his examples show magic and religion existing together, as if both arose in a long single span of history that was both magical and religious at the same time. It is not surprising that Tylor and Frazer found it difficult to respond when other scholars of the time, most notably critics like Andrew Lang and Wilhelm Schmidt, pointed out the uncomfortable fact that monotheism, supposedly the "higher" form of religion, was more common in the simpler cultures of people who hunted and gathered food than in the later,

advanced communities of those who farmed and kept herds of domestic animals while almost everywhere embracing polytheism.

3. The Individual and the Social

Finally, as we shall see in the chapters immediately following, strong doubts have been raised about the intellectualist individualism that Tylor and Frazer endorse. Is it really true that religious behavior arises only, or chiefly, from intellectual motives, as the work of solitary thinkers seeking to explain life's riddles and mysteries? Is it true that the social and ritual elements of religion are purely secondary—always dependent upon the intellectual factor, which is supposedly more fundamental? Further, if the origin of religion lies in ages and peoples far beyond the reach of the historical record and must be creatively reconstructed from legends and folkways, how do we prove such speculations? They seem to lie beyond either proof or disproof. It was this issue that led a theorist we shall meet later, E. E. Evans-Pritchard, to say that most explanations of the sort given by Tylor and Frazer are "just so stories"—imaginative reconstructions of what *might have happened*, but nothing more.[32]

However all of this stands, there is little doubt that, historically considered, the intellectualist theories of Tylor and Frazer are of great importance. As we shall see further on, their work has served as the starting point for most other theorists both in their time and afterward. Their theories of animism and magic have come to represent a theoretical stance that rival thinkers have felt free to reject, endorse, or revise, but never to ignore.

Notes

1. Abridged ed., p. 51; see n. 21 below.

2. The only full-length biography of Tylor is R. R. Marett, *Tylor* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1936). There is a short appreciation of Tylor's life and work prepared in honor of his seventy-fifth birthday by Andrew Lang, who regarded himself as more an associate and peer of Tylor than a follower; see "Edward Burnett Tylor," in *Anthropological Essays Presented to Edward Burnett Tylor* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), pp. 1–15.

3. For Tylor's associates, disciples, and influence on the study of folklore, see Richard M. Dorson, *The British Folklorists: A History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968); on Tylor's work in particular, see pp. 167–197.

4. On the influence of early evolutionary ideas on Tylor's thought, see George W. Stocking, Jr., *Victorian Anthropology* (New York: Free Press, 1987), pp. 46–109, and Robert A. Segal, "Victorian Anthropology," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 58, no. 3 (Fall 1990): 469–477.

5. Müller developed his views over a period of more than four decades from the late 1850s to the end of the century. Among his most important works were the influential essay "Comparative Mythology" in the *Oxford Magazine* (1856), *Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion: As Illustrated by the Religions of India* (1878), and the Gifford Lectures, published as *Natural Religion* (1881). Müller's subsequent works develop in more detail the general themes of natural religion—deity, morality, and immortality. Articles that Müller published to the end of the century echo or offer variations of themes developed in the books.

6. E. B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art, and Custom*, 2 vols., 4th ed., rev. (London: John Murray, [1871], 1903), 1: 2.

7. Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, p. 162.

8. On the general doctrine of "survivals," see Margaret T. Hogden, *The Doctrine of Survivals: A Chapter in the History of Scientific Method in the Study of Man* (London: Allenson, 1936).

9. *Primitive Culture*, 1: 115–116; on the association of ideas, see J. W. Burrow, *Evolution and Society* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp. 248–251.

10. *Primitive Culture*, 1: 408.

11. *Primitive Culture*, 1: 424.

12. *Primitive Culture*, 1: 429.

13. *Primitive Culture*, 1: 429.

14. *Primitive Culture*, 2: 356.

15. *Primitive Culture*, 1: 414.

16. E. B. Tylor, "The Religion of Savages," *Fortnightly Review* 6 (August 15, 1866): 86.

17. *Primitive Culture*, 1: 317.

18. For Frazer's influence on historical studies and his role in the development of anthropology, see Eric Sharpe, *Comparative Religion: A History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1975), pp. 87–96; Brian Morris, *Anthropological Studies of Religion* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 103–106; and Robert Ackerman, *The Myth and Ritual School: J. G. Frazer and the Cambridge Ritualists* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1991). On the relevance of his work to issues in philosophy and science, especially questions of epistemology, see Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough*, ed. Rush Rhees, tr. A. C. Miles (Nottinghamshire, England: Brynmill, 1979). The two most important studies of Frazer's great influence on literature in the twentieth century are John B. Vickery, *The Literary Impact of* The Golden Bough (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973), and the collection of essays in Robert Fraser, ed., *Sir James Frazer and the Literary Imagination: Essays in Affinity and Influence* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990). An interesting study of *The Golden Bough* as *itself* a work of literature more than science is Stanley Edgar Hyman, *The Tangled Bank: Darwin, Marx, Frazer & Freud as Imaginative Writers* (New York: Athenaeum, 1974), pp. 233–291.

19. There is an excellent biography of Frazer by Robert Ackerman, *J. G. Frazer: His Life and Work* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1987); see also *The Macmillan Encyclopedia of Religion*, under "Frazer, James, G."

20. On the encounter with Robertson Smith and his influence on Frazer, see Ackerman, *J. G. Frazer*, pp. 53–69, and Robert Alun Jones, "Robertson Smith and James Frazer on Religion: Two Traditions in British Social Anthropology," in George W. Stocking, Jr., ed.,

Functionalism Historicized: Essays on British Social Anthropology, History of Anthropology, vol. 2 (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), pp. 31–58.

21. James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, abridged edition (hereafter cited as *The Golden Bough*) (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1924). It needs to be pointed out that over the years of its composition, Frazer changed his views on a number of important issues considered in *The Golden Bough*. Myth proved an especially troublesome topic, as did totemism. On the latter, he wavered from one theory to another and had to accommodate new information that kept coming in from ethnographic field studies. On the differences between *The Golden Bough*'s three editions, see Ackerman, *J. G. Frazer*, pp. 95–100, 164–179, 236–257, and Fraser, *The Making of the Golden Bough*, pp. 117–155, 156–202.

22. On this thesis, which was developed chiefly in the second edition, see Ackerman, *J. G. Frazer*, pp. 167–169.

23. *The Golden Bough*, p. 324.

24. On the work of Spencer and Gillen, see Ackerman, *J. G. Frazer*, pp. 154–157; also Chapter 3 of the present volume, where the research of Émile Durkheim is considered.

25. These were *Die Korndämonen (Spirits of the Corn)* (1868); *Der Baumkultus der Germanen (The Tree-Worship of the Germans)* (1875); and *Antike Wald- und Feldkulte (The Ancient Worship of Forest and Field)* (1875–77). On Mannhardt's influence on British anthropology and the work of Frazer, see Sharpe, *Comparative Religion: A History*, pp. 50–51.

26. For further analysis of human sacrifice in religion, see René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, tr. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977) and *The Scapegoat*, tr. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

27. *The Golden Bough*, p. 714.

28. For examples of Frazer's correspondence and methods of research, see Fraser, *The Making of The Golden Bough*, pp. 75–85, and throughout. On Frazer's questionnaire and the critical comment that he did not rely on it nearly as much as on the work of other scholars, see two articles by Edmund Leach, "Golden Bough or Gilded Twig," *Daedalus* 90 (1961): 371–399, especially p. 384, n. 4, and "On the 'Founding Fathers': Frazer and Malinowski," *Encounter* 25 (1965): 24–36.

29. On the scholarly search for the origins of religion, see the study by Tomoko Masuzawa, *In Search of Dreamtime: The Quest for the Origin of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

30. On the intellectualism of Tylor and Frazer, see my "Max Müller, E. B. Tylor, and the 'Intellectualist' Origins of the Science of Religion," *International Journal of Comparative Religion*, 1, no. 2 (June 1995): 69–83; for an assessment of recent attempts to restate the Tylorian position, see Gillian Ross, "Neo-Tylorianism: A Reassessment," *Man*, n.s. 6, no. 1 (March 1971): 105–116.

31. These criticisms have come from many quarters of modern anthropology, and they are the main reason why Frazer's views, especially, have been almost universally discarded. There is more respect for Tylor. For an appreciation of his work and a criticism of the doctrine of "survivals," see Burrow, *Evolution and Society*, pp. 244–245. For a particularly stringent criticism of Frazer, see two articles by Edmund Leach cited in n. 28 above.

32. E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Theories of Primitive Religion* (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1965), p. 25.

Suggestions for Further Reading

Ackerman, Robert. *J. G. Frazer: His Life and Work*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1987. The definitive intellectual biography of Frazer.

Ackerman, Robert. *The Myth and Ritual School: J. G. Frazer and the Cambridge Ritualists*. London: Routledge, 2002. Explores Frazer's association with the famous and influential circle of classical scholars at Cambridge University.

Burrow, J. W. *Evolution and Society*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1970. A close study of E. B. Tylor and other early Victorian anthropological thinkers who argued for a pattern of evolutionary growth in both society and religion.

Clack, Brian R. *Wittgenstein, Frazer and Religion*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999. Examines the influence of *The Golden Bough* on one of the most important philosophers of the twentieth century.

Dorson, Richard M. *The British Folklorists: A History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968. Still the best study of the circle of learned amateurs whose work provided a context for the researches of Tylor and Frazer and helped lay the foundations for modern scientific anthropology.

Fraser, Robert. *The Making of The Golden Bough: The Origins and Growth of an Argument*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990. Published on the centennial anniversary of the first printing of *The Golden Bough* in 1890, this study examines ideas and influences that found their way into its pages as well as the changes that occurred over the long interval of its composition.

Fraser, Robert, ed. *Sir James Frazer and the Literary Imagination: Essays in Affinity and Influence*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990. A collection of essays also published on the centennial anniversary of *The Golden Bough*, it explores Frazer's wide impact on modern literature and other spheres of intellectual life.

Horton, Robin. *Patterns of Thought in Africa and the West: Essays on Magic, Religion, and Science*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1993. A collection of illuminating essays by the best-known current neo-Tylorian theorist.

Hyman, Stanley Edgar. *The Tangled Bank: Darwin, Marx, Frazer & Freud as Imaginative Writers*. New York: Athenaeum, 1974. An interesting study of *The Golden Bough* as a work whose greatest impressions were made in the arts and culture rather than anthropology and social science.

Lang, Andrew. "Edward Burnett Tylor." In *Anthropological Essays Presented to Edward Burnett Tylor*, edited by Andrew Lang. Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1907, pp. 1–15. A short appreciation of Tylor's life and work by a brilliant contemporary of Tylor, who also wrote extensively on the matter of explaining religion.

Leach, Edmund. "Golden Bough or Gilded Twig." *Daedalus* 90 (1961): 371–399. A severe critique of Frazer by a leading contemporary British anthropologist.

Marett, R. R. *Tylor*. London: Chapman and Hall, 1936. Though now dated, the only available biography of Tylor. Marett was one of Tylor's disciples and an important theorist of religion in his own right.

Rivière, Peter, ed. *A History of Oxford Anthropology*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2007. An instructive collection of essays charting the rise of anthropology in Britain; discusses the university's role in the early efforts and the later rise of field anthropology.

Stocking, George W., Jr. *Victorian Anthropology*. New York: Free Press, 1987. A perceptive and detailed study of the early British anthropologists in their nineteenth-century social and intellectual context.

Vickery, John B. *The Literary Impact of* The Golden Bough. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973. A study of the surprisingly wide and deep influence Frazer's book had on some of the greatest writers of the early twentieth century, including, among others, T. S. Eliot and James Joyce.

Wheeler-Barclay, Marjorie. *The Science of Religion in Britain, 1860–1915*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010. A thorough and thoughtful account of the pioneers—Müller, Tylor, Frazer, Lang, and others—in the science of religion as it took shape in the context of mid- and late-Victorian intellectual change and cultural debate.

2

Religion and Personality: Sigmund Freud

Religion would thus be the universal obsessional neurosis of humanity.
Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*[1]

Few thinkers in modern times have stirred more episodes of fierce debate than Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), the psychologist from Vienna, Austria, who at the turn of the twentieth century stunned not only the field of medicine but society at large with his unsettling new analyses of the human personality. To this day, almost anyone who hears the name "Freud" associates it with two things: psychotherapy and sex. That impression is not inaccurate as far as it goes, but it does not go very far. Freud was a most unusual man, driven by ceaseless curiosity, towering ambition, and a remarkably wide range of intellectual interests. His original profession was medicine, especially brain research. But the more he traveled this path of specialized study, the more it branched in new and different directions. His neurological inquiries quickly widened to an interest in the nature of mental illness and other puzzles of the mind. Before long he had proposed a provocative new concept of the human personality. From this platform, he moved confidently ahead, searching out the psychological dimension in almost every aspect of human life, from seemingly insignificant things like dreams, jokes, and personal quirks to the deep, complex emotions that steer personal relationships and shape social customs. Wherever he turned, he found yet another application of his ideas. They illuminated questions about the nature of the family and social life; they offered clues to the explanation of mythology, folklore, and history; and they suggested new interpretations of drama, literature, and art. To Freud and his followers, it seemed at times as if he had found an explanatory golden key. Analysis of the psyche opened a door on the innermost motives of human thought and action, from the stresses placed on the individual personality to the great forces that drive and shape civilizations. It could uncover the smallest