

ROBERT ALUN JONES

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# THE SECRET OF THE TOTEM

RELIGION AND SOCIETY FROM McLENNAN TO FREUD



THE SECRET  
OF THE TOTEM



ROBERT ALUN JONES

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*Religion and Society from McLennan to Freud*

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FOR PHILIPPE BESNARD

(1942-2004)



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## INTRODUCTION



THE NOTION of writing a book about the study of totemism had its origin in the late 1970s, when I received a grant from the National Science Foundation that allowed me to spend a year at Cambridge University. At the time, I had for several years been teaching the history of social theory in the sociology department at the University of Illinois, and I fancied myself an emerging authority on the works of Émile Durkheim. Inspired by some ideas found in Steven Lukes's *Durkheim*, I'd become particularly interested in *Les Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse* (1912), Durkheim's magnum opus and indisputably a "classic text" in social theory. Unlike my sociologist colleagues, however, I was less interested in whether or not Durkheim's theories were "true" than in the institutional and intellectual processes whereby they emerged. For I was, both by training and inclination, a historian rather than a sociologist. Despite an early interest in social theory, for example, I'd managed to take undergraduate courses in history and philosophy as well as sociology, and as a graduate student at the University of Pennsylvania, I was fortunate to find a program that afforded a similar degree of disciplinary latitude.

At Penn in the late 1960s, there was one book with which every budding intellectual historian had to be intimately familiar—Thomas Kuhn's *Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962). In opposition to the older, Sartonian historiography, which had viewed the history of science as cumulative and progressive and had thus encouraged us to understand the past in terms of

the present, Kuhn argued instead that we should understand the intellectual commitments of the past as answers to their own, historically quite specific, questions; that we should appreciate the rationality of ideas that might now seem irrational; that we should set aside our search for the heroic agents of the progress of knowledge (not to mention our criticism of those considerably less-heroic figures who fell short of or even impeded such progress) in favor of the reconstruction of the complex processes of historical change; in short, that we should understand the science of a given period in its own terms. In sum, the history of science seemed ripe for revision, and if Kuhn had little to say about the historiography of the social sciences, the appropriate inferences were drawn almost immediately by writers like George Stocking and Quentin Skinner, whose essays on the history of anthropology and political theory, respectively, had already begun to appear during my four years in Philadelphia.<sup>1</sup>

Fortified in this way by Kuhn, Stocking, and Skinner, I spent much of the next ten years writing articles and essays encouraging sociologists to embrace their kind of historicism, while my substantive research focused increasingly on Durkheim and, more specifically, on those ideas that culminated in *Les Formes élémentaires*. Initially, the problems that confronted me there seemed quite straightforward. Durkheim wrote nothing of any great interest on the subject of religion until at least 1894–1895, when he taught a lecture course on religion at Bordeaux. In a later, lamentably rare autobiographical passage, he confirmed that this course had been a watershed in the development of his thought, a “revelation” in which, by reading of “the works of Robertson Smith and his school,” he had found “the means of tackling the study of religion sociologically.”<sup>2</sup> Smith thus became a key figure in my effort to understand the development of Durkheim’s sociological theory of religion between 1895 and 1912, and it was to examine his papers at the University Library, Cambridge, that I left for England in 1978.

As so often happens, what had initially seemed a clear case of direct intellectual influence proved, on further examination, to be unusually complex. Durkheim’s writings immediately after 1895, for example, seemed to bear no evidence that he had seriously considered the arguments of Smith’s classic *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites* (1889; 2nd ed., 1894). Instead, in works like *Le Suicide* (1897), “La Prohibition de l’inceste et ses origines” (1898), and the preface to the second volume of *L’Année sociologique* (1899), Durkheim appeared far more interested in the quite different religious conceptions held by Smith’s friend and protégé, Sir James Frazer, which had been expounded in the first edition of *The Golden Bough* (1890). I also discovered indifference and even hostility to Smith among the Durkheimians Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss, especially in their “Essai sur la nature

et la fonction du sacrifice” (1899). Smith’s influence was at last evident in Durkheim’s “Sur le totémisme” (1902), but that lengthy, tedious, and tendentious essay was in fact a ruthless denunciation of the second edition of *The Golden Bough* (1900), attacking many of the failings that Durkheim had simply passed over in the first.

What had intervened? How and why had Durkheim’s conception of religion changed so that conceptions he countenanced in the first edition could be denounced in the second? The significant intervening factor seemed to be the publication of Baldwin Spencer and F. J. Gillen’s *Native Tribes of Central Australia* (1899), which afforded the primary ethnographic foundations for both the second edition of *The Golden Bough* and “Sur le totémisme,” not to mention *Les Formes élémentaires*. The curious thing here, and what aroused my latent Kuhnian suspicions about the relations between scientific “theories” and the “facts” that they purportedly explain, was that Spencer and Frazer had begun a detailed correspondence long before the appearance of *Native Tribes*, that Frazer’s second edition was thus in some sense collaborative, and that Spencer himself considered Durkheim’s speculations in “Sur le totémisme” as wildly misconceived. These misconceptions seemed to have been carried over not only into *Les Formes élémentaires* but also into Freud’s *Totem und Tabu* (1913), a work that appeared just months later and again embraced many of the ideas of Smith and Frazer, Spencer and Gillen, while arriving at radically different conclusions. Finally, the most intriguing possibility emerged through my reading of Franz Boas and especially Claude Lévi-Strauss, who suggested that totemism had in some sense never existed at all.

By this time, I was convinced that this might be an interesting story—that is, the story of an almost obsessive interest in the nature and causes of a peculiar set of interrelated beliefs and practices, which over more than half a century spawned several “classic texts” in the history of social science, but which eventually turned out to be in some sense illusory, the product of the actively constructive imaginations of social scientists themselves. But as my research progressed, my point became less to suggest that totemism had been “socially constructed” (to use the fashionable phrase) than to point to the place of this construction within the larger social evolutionary framework shared by Frazer, Durkheim, and Freud. Animal worship and even totemism had interested European intellectuals long before the mid-nineteenth century, of course, and I’ve sketched this pre-evolutionary discourse in the early part of my first chapter. But the meaning and significance of totemism became a powerful “evocative object”<sup>3</sup> for the Victorian anthropological community only as social evolutionary theory became firmly established.

In effect, social evolutionism thus created the “final vocabulary”<sup>4</sup> within which these writers described not only “primitive” peoples but also themselves. Social evolutionism made it possible, first, to postulate the existence of a primitive “totemic stage,” second, to raise questions about the nature of totemic beliefs and practices and their origins and, third, to propose various theories as answers to these questions. My account of this Victorian obsession with totemism thus became coextensive with that of the rise and fall of the social evolutionary vocabulary in social anthropology. When social evolutionary assumptions began to wane, doubts and then denials of the existence of totemism emerged simultaneously. But this wasn’t because better, brighter social scientists like Boas and his students had discovered that totemism didn’t exist, nor even because the theories about the nature and origin of totemism described below were demonstrably false or mistaken. Rather, if we understand theories as historically relative constellations of questions and answers, then these particular theories can be understood simply as the answers to questions to which fewer and fewer social scientists sought any solution whatever. Evolutionary social theory was thus the ship on which totemism set sail, and when the ship began to sink, there was little hope for those still on board.

But why, a friendly reviewer of this book in manuscript has asked, totemism? Why not animism, for example, which was an equally comfortable passenger on the social evolutionary boat? Part of the answer, of course, is that some writers in this period rather clearly did prefer animistic explanations for the origin of religion. Edward Burnett Tylor, the virtual doyen of social evolutionary theory, not only advanced such explanations but wondered openly, long before Boas, why so many of his colleagues were so obsessed with the possibility of totemic origins. But more importantly, the totemic hypothesis carried with it associations that were, to the writers discussed below, literally irresistible. To the devout (if rather heterodox) Robertson Smith, who had embraced liberal Protestant conceptions of God’s progressive self-revelation, the suggestion that ancient totemic clans might have practiced a “totemic sacrament” afforded a materialistic antecedent to the more ethical and spiritual dispensation found in the Hebrew Bible. To the agnostic Durkheim, who had recently and ingeniously combined elements of German social realism with Rousseau’s theories of natural constraint to displace the normative vocabulary of Cartesian rationalism,<sup>5</sup> the fact that the totem (i.e., the name of an animal or plant) was the foundation of the earliest forms of social organization implied that religion and society were not merely intimately connected but quite literally the same thing. And to the atheist Freud, whose psychoanalytic theory of the sexual etiology of the neuroses had recently been expanding into a theory of culture and society,

the suggestion that these same totemic clans were rigidly exogamic argued for the view that the prohibition against incest was the origin of civilization itself.

To writers like these, animism—which postulated a “primitive philosopher” whose reason, albeit frequently misled and mistaken, was not in nature unlike our own—had little to offer. This in turn explains (and I hope justifies) my choice of a title, which is identical to that of one of Andrew Lang’s many books. My intention here, of course, was ironic. Among the several assumptions shared by these evolutionary writers (Lang included) were the notions that all societies progress through what are, in some sense, the same evolutionary stages; that the beliefs and practices of existing primitive peoples are thus, in some sense, the analogues of those of our own prehistoric ancestors; and that the earliest, most primitive beliefs and practices thus contain within them the underlying—and continuously operative—causes of our own institutions. When one reads Robertson Smith, Frazer, Durkheim, or Freud, therefore, there is a constant, palpable sense that some secret is being revealed, one with powerful explanatory consequences. The irony here, of course, is that this “secret” of the totem—of its meaning and significance—proved to be that (at least in the sense understood by these writers) it did not exist at all.

A somewhat less friendly reviewer argued that the book might have been significantly improved in two ways—first, by greater attention to the “broader contexts” to which “cultural evolutionary theory lent its support,” and, second, by a stronger “critical purchase” on the writers in question, especially in light of the “burgeoning field of postcolonial studies.” Such a critical purchase lacking, this reviewer has observed, “the very sympathy and wealth of intricate detail with which these theories are presented obscures the sense that there might have been anything problematic with them.” These two criticisms are of course closely related, and my initial response is, first, to agree that context and criticism are in general very good things but, second, to suggest that neither is really central to the primary purposes of this particular book. In any case, contexts and criticisms are infinitely expandable, and a serious grappling with both would have soon swelled the dimensions of my book far beyond any attractive to a university press. But I have more specific reasons for my reluctance to embrace either of these criticisms, which I shall briefly sketch out below.

To begin, the insistence that we should try to reconstruct the social and historical context of past ideas has been among the most important and productive consequences of the work of Kuhn, Stocking, and Skinner,<sup>6</sup> and I believe that I’ve been among the more strenuous and persistent advocates of this injunction.<sup>7</sup> But I also agree with Skinner that we should keep clearly



in mind the ends that such contextualization is intended to serve.<sup>8</sup> More specifically, if we consider the various contextual elements as “causes” or even mere “influences,” then we should at the very least be extremely careful about the claims that we make for our historical explanations. Of the five writers who are the foci of major chapters below, for example, three (McLennan, Smith, and Frazer) were Scots, and two (Smith and Frazer) were Free Church Presbyterians. But their theories of totemism were significantly different, each from the other two, and Frazer’s in fact owed far more to Tylor than to Smith. So I agree with Skinner that, understood as causes or influences, aspects of the social, economic, and political context usually explain little more than the broader outlines of a society’s intellectual preoccupations within any particular historical period. Instead, I’ve tried to ask myself what each of these writers “was doing” in saying what he said, in the sense of an intended social action. And to answer this question, I’ve typically found that the most useful thing is to reconstruct the intellectual context of each writer’s texts, for it was only within this context that the texts themselves could have been meaningful and understandable in the first place.

Something quite similar might be said about the book’s lack of “critical purchase.” It is true, of course, that the ideological foundations of Victorian anthropology have been subject to numerous criticisms from the perspective of postcolonial studies and also that the literature on totemism in particular affords an almost irresistible invitation to expose the political, economic, and psychological underside of the social sciences. Much of this is good and important work, and I hope that nothing I have said below might be construed as detracting from its significance. But if I am thus abundantly aware that there are many things that are “problematic” in the works of these writers, I have been less concerned to point out why they were wrong than to describe why they thought they were right. These descriptions will of course refer to beliefs, attitudes, reasons, preconceptions, assumptions, prejudices, ideologies, biases, and so on that we no longer share, but as I shall suggest in my concluding paragraph, I think much of the value of studying intellectual history lies in the fact that it confronts us with this kind of radical discontinuity between past and present.

To approach the history of ideas in this way, I should add, is to be neither credulous nor uncritical, for the suggestion that to “say something” is also to “do something” contains within it the implication that what was done might have been done (by the prevailing norms of epistemic rationality) rather badly; and where this was in fact the case, I’ve tried to make this clear, either directly or, more often, indirectly, through the criticisms made by the writer’s own contemporaries (e.g., Marett’s critique of Frazer).

But in general, I've tried to avoid the quite natural tendency to adjudicate between elect and reprobate by the more recent standards of anthropological orthodoxy. However appropriate and useful it is for social scientists to emphasize the errors and deficiencies of their predecessors, therefore, as a historian I've tried to see these writers as answering their own questions rather than ours and to see their beliefs as reasonable in a way that we might now consider irrational. And if we approach the ideas of the past in this way, we put ourselves in a position to see that what might previously have seemed to us to be so "problematic" was not, in fact, the thing that led to their demise at all.

These historiographical considerations notwithstanding, my primary aim has been to tell a story about the sometimes obsessive inquiry by European intellectuals into the meaning and significance of totemism between 1865 and the First World War. The word "totem" itself appeared somewhat earlier, in John Long's *Voyages and Travels of an Indian Interpreter and Trader* (1791), where it was used to describe the Chippewa belief in a guardian spirit that assumed the form of a particular animal (e.g., a bear, elk, or moose) that the Chippewa thereafter refused to eat or kill. For a half century, it was assumed to be a distinctively American institution, until Sir George Grey's *Journals of Two Expeditions in North-west and Western Australia* (1841) gave it a greater generality, as well as most of those features that would beguile the five writers who became my primary focus—a social organization by clans and/or tribes bearing the name of an animal or plant; a prohibition against injuring or killing a representative of one's totemic species; matrilineal descent (the child taking the totem of the mother rather than the father); a prohibition against marriage within one's totemic group; and even the suggestion that "civilized nations, in their heraldic bearings, preserve traces of the same custom."

The real efflorescence of interest in totemism, however, began with J.F. McLennan's *Primitive Marriage* (1865) and especially his essay on "The Worship of Animals and Plants" (1869–70). McLennan is thus the focus of my first chapter ("Totemism as Animal Worship"). Precisely because the discussion of totemism makes little sense outside the larger social evolutionary context, however, my discussion of McLennan's life and work is preceded by a description of pre-evolutionary anthropology, which includes brief accounts of the historical association of religion with animal worship, of "Biblical anthropology" and degenerationist theories of primitive religion, and of the historical legal theories of Henry Sumner Maine. As a critique of Maine, McLennan's *Primitive Marriage* provided the first genuinely evolutionary theory of social organization and laid the foundation for the first evolutionary theory of totemism in "The Worship of Animals and Plants."

The chapter concludes with a brief description of the rather tepid reception of McLennan's views by John Lubbock and E. B. Tylor.

McLennan's most important influence, therefore, was on his fellow Scot William Robertson Smith, who is the focus of my second chapter ("Totemism as Sacrament"). As a devout Free Church Presbyterian, Smith visited Germany and became inspired by the liberal Protestant theology of Albrecht Ritschl; and as the leading British intermediary for the "Higher Criticism" of the Old Testament, he had by 1881 become the victim of the last successful heresy trial in Great Britain. Migrating from Aberdeen to Cambridge, Smith improved his Arabic, expanded his interests from the ancient Hebrews to the wider field of comparative religion, and began to apply McLennan's "totemic hypothesis" to the study of ancient Arabian tribes, first in *Kinship and Marriage in Early Arabia* (1885) and then in his classic—and powerfully sociological—*Lectures on the Religion of the Semites* (1889; 2nd ed., 1894).

At Cambridge, Smith soon commissioned his friend and more famous fellow Scot James Frazer, to write articles (including a seminal piece on totemism) for the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Frazer therefore is the focus of my third chapter ("Totemism as Utility"), which includes a detailed treatment of his monumental survey of primitive religion and magic, *The Golden Bough* (1890), a work which in its second (3 vols., 1900) and third (12 vols., 1915) editions inspired the so-called "Cambridge Ritualists" and furnished literary themes for writers like Eliot, Joyce, Lawrence, and Yeats. Encouraged by Baldwin Spencer and F. J. Gillen's *Native Tribes of Central Australia* (1899), Frazer eventually proposed at least three different theories of the origin and significance of totemism—all of them equally rationalist and utilitarian. This in turn provoked Frazer's chief British adversary, R. R. Marett, to advance the more irrationalist conception of a "pre-animistic" stage in the evolution of primitive religion, with which that chapter concludes.

My fourth chapter ("Totemism as Self-Transcendence") deals with the great French sociologist and philosopher Émile Durkheim, beginning with the "largely formal and rather *simpliste*" conception of religion he held up to 1902. It was only then, I argue, that Durkheim, disturbed by Frazer's rationalist interpretation of the ethnographic data provided by Spencer and Gillen, embraced the more irrationalist, Ritschlian conceptions of Smith's *Lectures* and produced "Sur le totémisme," the first of a series of essays and lectures that eventually culminated in *Les Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse* (1912). And only months after the appearance of *Les Formes élémentaires*, Sigmund Freud offered still another theory in *Totem und Tabu* (1913), which explained totemism and exogamy as the consequence of repressed Oedipal wishes and guilt resulting from the slaying of a putative "primal

father.” My fifth chapter (“Totemism as Neurosis”) discusses Freud’s views on religion, including his Jewish upbringing in Vienna, the early development of psychoanalysis, the antireligious “animus” of his early writings, the influence of Wundt’s folk psychology and Jung’s concept of a collective unconscious and, of course, Freud’s book on totemism itself.

But even as Frazer, Durkheim, and Freud produced their classic volumes, doubts about totemism had already begun to emerge. In “Totemism: An Analytical Study” (1910), A. A. Goldenweiser questioned whether the central features of totemism actually coincide in more than a few instances, while demonstrating emphatically that they do exist independently in many. In my concluding chapter (“The Secret of the Totem”), I have explained how Goldenweiser’s critique merely reflected a more general skepticism about totemism (indeed, about evolutionary anthropological theory altogether) led by Franz Boas. Reduced from an objective (in the field) to a subjective (in the anthropologist’s mind) fact, totemism by 1920 was undergoing a process of what Lévi-Strauss would later call “accelerated liquidation.” By 1960, Lévi-Strauss was comparing totemism with hysteria, insisting that once we try to identify certain totemic phenomena and group them together, the symptoms and characteristics themselves “vanish or appear refractory to any unifying interpretation.” And by the late twentieth century, totemism seems to have disappeared altogether. The “secret” of the totem, which had so obsessed writers like Frazer, Durkheim, and Freud, was the answer to a question that was no longer asked.

Readers might reasonably wish to know what is new in my account of this strange episode in European intellectual history. The answer to this question, of course, will depend not only on what the reader already knows but on what I ought to have known and did not. At the risk of exaggerating the significance of what, to others, may seem both obvious and familiar, however, I should like to point to a few substantive observations that were, at least to me, something of a surprise. The influence of Ritschl on Robertson Smith, for example, has been discussed by others, primarily in the context of Smith’s subsequent trial for heresy and migration to Cambridge University; but I am not aware that other writers have made the link, as I have tried to do in chapter 2, between Ritschl’s liberal Protestantism and the arguments of Smith’s *Lectures* (and indirectly through Smith, of course, on Durkheim’s *Les Formes élémentaires*). As suggested above, almost every scholar who has written about *Les Formes élémentaires* has mentioned Durkheim’s 1895 lecture course on religion at Bordeaux, which Durkheim himself later described as his first encounter with Smith and “pour moi une révélation.” But I am not aware that others have been so perplexed by this remark as I have, for the simple reason that there is not one iota of evidence

that Durkheim had assimilated a single idea from Robertson Smith until well after the turn of the century. On the contrary, as I have argued in chapter 4, Durkheim's understanding of religion remained not only "formal and *simpliste*" but Frazerian in its emphasis on taboo, regulation, and constraint until "Sur le totémisme" (1902). Finally, as I've tried to emphasize in chapters 3 and 4, I have been impressed by how much the irrationalist, anti-Tylorian, and anti-Frazerian arguments of both Marett and the later Durkheim owe to American pragmatism and, more specifically, to William James. For my observations about Boas and the "liquidation" of totemism in my conclusion I claim no originality whatever, but for the implications that I have drawn from these, as described in my conclusion, I take full responsibility.

# 1

## TOTEMISM AS ANIMAL WORSHIP



### PROGRESS, DESIGN, AND DEGENERATION

IN THE history of religious ideas, the belief that the earliest gods were animals or plants is very old, and it has been persistent, tenacious, and adaptable as well. One of the oldest accounts of such beliefs, for example, was the Phoenician cosmogony of Sanchuniathon, a refugee from Tyre who settled in Berytus in the second quarter of the sixth century BCE. At that time, Phoenicia was undergoing a phase of secularization and disenchantment, so that the old polytheistic superstitions seemed less relevant and compelling. Into this context of increasing skepticism, apparently drawing on much older sources (including the Middle Egyptian cosmogony of Taautus), Sanchuniathon introduced a highly rationalist account of the evolution of the gods, arguing that people first worshipped plants, next the heavenly bodies (which they supposed to be animals), then the “pillars” or emblems of the Creator, and finally the anthropomorphic deities. Fragments of Sanchuniathon’s history were preserved and translated into Greek by Philo of Byblos (64–141 CE), a Phoenician nationalist and ethnographer who believed that rationalist accounts like Sanchuniathon’s were the source of the later, derivative, and deformed works written by Hesiod and other Greeks, who had relied on the allegorical and supernaturalist myths recounted by Phoenician priests. The Greeks, Philo insisted in his *Phoenician History* (c. 100 CE), were not originators but imitators—and bad imitators at that. Philo’s translation was in turn preserved by the Neoplatonist philosopher Porphyry (c. 232–303 CE), in his *Against the Christians*—a bitter attack

on the new faith. Porphyry's polemic then became a focus of the *Preparatio Evangelica* (312–318 CE) of Eusebius (c. 260–340), who proposed to follow a method different from that of earlier Christian apologists. Rather than relying on his own arguments, he would advance his case by citing the very words of the most famous learned advocates of paganism: “In what other way,” Eusebius asked, “can it appear that we have done well in forsaking the customs of our forefathers, except by first setting them forth publicly and bringing them under the view of our readers? For in this way the divine power of the demonstration of the Gospel will become manifest, if it be plainly shown to all men what are the evils that it promises to cure, and of what kind they are.”<sup>1</sup>

Before the Phoenicians and Egyptians, the *Preparatio Evangelica* began, none but the ancient Hebrews—who “with clearest mental eyes looked beyond all the visible world, and worshipped the Maker and Creator of the universe”—had made any progress in the knowledge of natural and celestial phenomena. All others, having “fallen away from this only true religion,” and gazing on things “with eyes of flesh, as mere children in mind,” proclaimed these entities to be gods. Reproducing a lengthy extract from Philo's translation of Sanchuniathon's Phoenician history, Eusebius noted that the Phoenicians “knew no other gods than the sun, the moon, and besides these the planets, the elements also, and the things connected with them,” and also “consecrated the productions of the earth, and regarded them as gods, and worshipped them as the sources of sustenance to themselves and to following generations, and to all that went before them, and offered to them drink-offerings and libations.” The Phoenicians thus introduced “an abyss of evils,” not the least of which was children who “got their names . . . from their mothers, as the women in those days had free intercourse with any whom they met.” Such was the character of the theology of the Phoenicians, Eusebius concluded, “from which the word of salvation in the gospel teaches us to flee with averted eyes, and earnestly to seek the remedy for this madness of the ancients.”<sup>2</sup>

In the ancient world, therefore, the Phoenician history was employed for rationalist, nationalist, Neoplatonist, and Christian purposes, and more recently, Protestant understandings have exhibited the same kind of interpretive elasticity. By the early eighteenth century, for example, Richard Cumberland (1631–1718), an Anglican bishop, antagonist of Hobbes, and father of British utilitarianism, had for some time been “sensible of the Measures that were too notoriously and too publicly taken in favour of Popery.” As a “heartly Lover of the Protestant Religion,” his editor (and son-in-law) added, “the great Subject of his Sermons was to fortify his Hearers against the Errors, and to preserve 'em from the Corruptions of that Idolatrous

Church.” Cumberland thus reproduced the cosmogony as *Sanchoniatho's Phoenician History* (1720), to remind his fellow Protestants “how Religion came at first to degenerate into Idolatry,”<sup>3</sup> particularly noting that the early Phoenicians “consecrated the plants shooting out of the earth, and judged them Gods, and worshipp'd them, upon whom they themselves liv'd, and all their posterity, and all before them; to these they made their Meat and Drink-offerings.”<sup>4</sup>

To this distinctively Protestant understanding of the significance of animal worship, eighteenth-century travel accounts added observations concerning the role played by animals in the social organization of native Americans. In the same year that Cumberland's volume appeared, for example, Pierre-François-Xavier de Charlevoix led the scientific and exploratory mission to southern Canada later described in his *Histoire et description générale de la Nouvelle-France* (1744), where he observed that the various Indian nations of the Great Lakes region were divided into three families or tribes, each identified by the name of some animal.<sup>5</sup> And while trading with a band of Ojibways in the late 1770s, the Englishman John Long overheard a story that, later described in his *Voyages and Travels* (1791), assumed an almost bizarre significance in the subsequent speculation about the meaning and nature of totemism. Briefly, one of the Ojibways had dreamed that if he and some of his fellows went to the foot of a high mountain five days march away, they would find a large herd of elk, moose, and other animals. When the man awoke, he told others of his dream, urging them to come with him, but as their own hunting grounds were closer, they demurred. Possessing a “typically superstitious” respect for his dream, however, the man felt bound to go on alone and, arriving at the spot, saw the animals of which he'd dreamed, firing instantly, and killed a bear. Unfortunately, the bear was the man's *totem*, or “guardian spirit.” Shocked at what he had done, therefore, the man first collapsed in shame and grief and then slowly made his way toward Long's house. On the way, he was confronted by another bear who threatened to attack but first asked why the man had killed his *totem*. The man replied that he'd not known the bear was among the other animals and begged for mercy, at which the bear let him go, but not before warning him on behalf of the high god (or “Master of Life”) to be more careful in the future and to tell his story to the other Ojibways so that their totems might be safe as well.<sup>6</sup>

The similarity between the accounts of Charlevoix and Long is incomplete. Charlevoix described a form of social organization of clans and/or tribes, each designated by the name of an animal or (less frequently) a plant, while Long referred to the Ojibway belief that each person has his own *totem* to which his destiny is bound, that this spirit assumes the shape of



an animal, and that the animal in question should never be hunted, killed, or eaten. But in the later ethnographic and anthropological literature, the two features would frequently be fused and taken as descriptions different aspects of the same social reality. So began the process of “constructing” totemism—of cobbling together an ostensibly real social phenomenon while simultaneously contriving a vocabulary to describe it. Considering the later, extremely ambitious claims made on behalf of this phenomenon, it’s worth noting that Long himself was already prepared to generalize well beyond his own observations. However strange it might seem, he added, *totemism* is not “confined to the Savages.” A Jewish banker in the court of Louis XV (“superstitious as the people of his nation are”), for example, believed that his destiny was bound up with that of a black hen he owned. Understandably, the credulous banker was extremely solicitous of the bird’s health. And so he should have been, Long added, for the eventual death of the fowl coincided precisely with that of the banker.<sup>7</sup>

The French banker and his black hen notwithstanding, totemism was considered an exclusively American institution for the next fifty years, until Sir George Grey described an apparently similar institution in his *Journals of Two Expeditions in North-west and Western Australia* (1841). Grey’s father had been an army colonel who died in 1812, shortly before his son’s birth. His Anglo-Irish mother, the daughter of a clergyman, had remarried a man of the same profession, and Grey was indelibly marked by her evangelical piety. Although he benefited intellectually from a family connection to the liberal Anglican scholar Richard Whately (1787–1863), Grey’s early education was quite erratic, and eventually, like his father, he entered the military. Commissioned as an ensign in 1830, he served in Ireland, where he searched for illicit stills, maintained order at political meetings, and protected officials who collected Anglican tithes from the Catholic peasantry. But Grey felt a strong sympathy for the Irish peasants and would later recall that the experience made him receptive to the call for social reform.

In the 1830s, reform meant “systematic colonization” (emigration). But for Grey, its purpose was not to reproduce the old world in the new but rather to create an egalitarian society in which the poorer classes of Britain could lead more simple, natural lives, free of the tyranny of the landed aristocracy. In 1836, he proposed to the Colonial Secretary and the Royal Geographical Society an exploration of northwestern Australia, with an eye to opening the interior for settlement; and in July 1837, he embarked on the HMS *Beagle* (only recently returned from the voyage that had taken Darwin to the Galapagos Archipelago) for Cape Town and then Australia. Both ill-prepared and ill-fated, the expedition failed miserably, and Grey returned to England in 1840. But his visit proved significant in an unantici-

pated way, for as George Stocking has observed, Grey was among the most sensitive and perceptive ethnographers of his time. In addition to learning the local dialect, he made extremely careful observations of native customs including hunting, food preparation, family meals, and funeral ceremonies. Just months after his return to England, he published a two-volume account of these and other observations in his *Journals* (1841), which would become one of the most influential ethnographic works of the nineteenth century.<sup>8</sup>

The most important aspect of Grey's *Journals* was his account of the Australians' forms of social organization. "One of the most remarkable facts connected with the [Western Australian] natives," he observed, "is that they are divided into certain great families, all the members of which bear the same names." According to the natives, these names (or *kobongs*) were derived from the names of animals or plants and served as the family's "crest" or "sign." Most striking, however, was the peculiar relationship between the family and the animal or plant in question: "A certain mysterious connection," Grey reported,

exists between a family and its *kobong*, so that a member of the family will never kill an animal of the species, to which his *kobong* belongs, should he find it asleep; indeed, he always kills it reluctantly, and never without affording it a chance to escape. This arises from the family belief, that some one individual of the species is their nearest friend, to kill whom would be a great crime, and to be carefully avoided. Similarly, a native who has a vegetable for his *kobong*, may not gather it under certain circumstances, and at a particular period of the year.

Where Grey was able to determine the meaning of each family's *kobong*, it seemed to imply that family members believed that they were of the same stock as the animal and that their progenitors have been transformed into human beings at some earlier time. Finally, these family names were disseminated and perpetuated according to two laws: first, children always take the name of the mother rather than the father; and second, a man cannot marry a woman of his own family name. Violations of the second law in particular, Grey observed, "they hold in the greatest abhorrence."<sup>9</sup>

Grey's *Journals* were based primarily on his own observations, but he had also read Albert Gallatin's 1836 *Synopsis* of North American Indian tribes, which provided brief accounts of the observations of both Charlevoix and Long, and which Grey in turn took to be descriptions of "this same custom of taking some animal as their sign."<sup>10</sup> Grey's description of totemism certainly went further, of course, introducing some of the features that it would later assume in the writings of McLennan, Smith, Frazer, Durkheim,

and Freud—for example, social organization by clans and/or tribes bearing the name of an animal or plant; a prohibition against injuring or killing a representative of one's totemic species; matrilineal descent (the child taking the totem of the mother rather than the father); a prohibition against marriage within one's totemic group; and even the suggestion that “civilized nations, in their heraldic bearings, preserve traces of the same custom.”<sup>11</sup> But totemism was not yet the “evocative object” it would become for these later writers, for it had not yet been cast within the larger scientific vocabulary of social evolutionary theory. On the contrary, to Grey the fact that aboriginal beliefs and practices were extremely primitive, highly complex, and superbly adapted to their environment suggested that they could only have been conceived not by savages but by God. The additional fact that such primordial social forms, in which the role of reason was conspicuously absent, had survived into the present implied that God had willed this as well. In short, God intended that these forms remain unaltered until they were brought into contact with Christianity, in particular, and European civilization in general. And this, in turn, Grey considered “proof that the progress of civilization over the earth has been directed, set bounds to, and regulated by certain laws, framed by Infinite wisdom.”<sup>12</sup>

This notion—that totemism was evidence of design—was a direct extension of the more general theological framework that had been laid out by Richard Whately, Grey's mentor and the Archbishop of Dublin from 1831. Whately was among the most famous of the “Noetics,” a group of Oxford dons who criticized traditional orthodoxy and sought to broaden the Church of England by infusing it with a more critical spirit. Insisting that an internal disposition to believe is no substitute for the external evidence accessible to any rational mind, Whately was also an avowed anti-Evangelical. In a series of lectures on political economy given in 1831, for example, Whately had argued on putatively empirical grounds that social progress (for which neither private self-interest nor public spirit nor philanthropic sentiment appear to be sufficient, observable causes) is the result of Divine Providence. This is particularly obvious, Whately added, if we examine the condition of currently existing savage peoples, where we see that no savage tribe has risen to civilization without the aid of others more civilized and that many savage tribes have been visited repeatedly and at considerable intervals but, lacking settled intercourse with civilized people, continue in the same, uncultivated condition.

But if the rise from savagery to civilization was thus possible only through contact with more civilized peoples, one might ask, how did the earliest *civilizations* arise? To Whately the inference was straightforward—there must have been a revelation made to the first generation of our spe-

cies. Such a miracle, of course, is attested to in the book of Genesis; but as a Noetic and anti-Evangelical, Whately insisted that his own argument was based on “no authority but those of reason and experience” (the empirical observation of presently existing savages) and that Scripture was appealed to not as inspiration but merely as a historical record of undeniable antiquity. In this record we find human beings endowed with a knowledge of the most essential arts (e.g., the domestication of animals and plants), a simple division of labor, and the institution of private property. These minimal conditions for the further growth of civilization provided, the pursuit of private and even selfish ends ultimately led, “by the wise arrangements of Providence,” to public good and social progress. Those to whom such truths were not revealed, of course, degenerated into savagery and idolatry.<sup>13</sup>

### PREEVOLUTIONARY ANTHROPOLOGICAL THEORY

CONCEPTIONS LIKE Whately’s held substantial attractions for the early Victorians, for they provided a suitably nonsecular account of the rise of Western civilization, together with an explanation for why some of God’s children had so palpably not risen at all.<sup>14</sup> With his metaphorical redescription of society as a combustible substance that, though never kindled self-sufficiently, burns with ever-increasing force once it is divinely ignited, Whately could tell a story whose sources were ostensibly ethnographic while simultaneously conforming to the main themes of the Genesis narrative. Nonetheless, this kind of “biblical anthropology” had long faced serious difficulties. Although the historicity of the Genesis account was widely accepted until the 1860s, for example, the lengthier chronologies of other ancient peoples posed a challenge for Christian apologists. By the late seventeenth century, the mechanistic perspective of the Scientific Revolution had also presented problems for Christian accounts of the history of the earth. And the discovery, exploration, and colonization of the New World, with its increasingly undeniable diversity of peoples, raised questions about how these human beings, in their various conditions, came to be where and how they were. By the late eighteenth century, therefore, there was a growing sense, especially in France and Scotland, that the stark contrast between enlightened Europeans and benighted savages might rather be explained through a more secular appeal to “development” or “evolution.”<sup>15</sup>

Whether French or Scottish, these writers shared not only the belief in social progress but also the view that it could be studied “philosophically.” But there were also significant differences. The French, for example, were constitutionally predisposed to the Cartesian doctrine of the of *idées claires*

*et simples*, infallible and accessible to all human beings. Burrow has emphasized how difficult this was to reconcile even with the past history of civilized peoples, let alone the known facts of primitive societies. Within the Cartesian tradition, therefore, irrational beliefs and behavior were automatically construed as something requiring explanation, and this frequently took the form of an insistence that reason (though always present) had been thwarted by social and historical circumstance and thus prevented it from realizing its end. This in turn led to the view shared by Turgot, Condorcet, and Comte that there are distinctive stages through which reason must pass, gradually extricating itself from error and superstition until it arrived at its triumph in modern science. This encouraged a focus on the nature of primitive mentality and the evolution of religious belief, as well as an emphasis on the conscious, directive capacity of the human mind and thus on progress as part of an activist political program.

This Cartesian perspective is not irrelevant to my discussion of totemism, although even in the case of Durkheim, I believe that its role has been misunderstood and its significance exaggerated.<sup>16</sup> But for McLennan, Smith, and Frazer, the Scottish solution was clearly more important. As with the French, here again there were distinctive “stages” in the progress of human reason, but for the Scottish philosophical historians, these stages were based not on the intellectual categories first identified by Turgot but on human desires and passions and on specific forms of subsistence technology—hunting and gathering, agriculture, and commerce. Moreover, for the Scottish historians, the primary cause of progress was not intellectual curiosity but specific forms of social organization; as a consequence, the Scottish perspective was in general more appreciative of the organic, unconscious, and unpremeditated aspect of social evolution. This in turn rendered the Scots receptive to what would later be called the “comparative method”—the guiding methodological principle of the construction of totemism, in particular, and of social evolutionary theory in general.

As John Burrow has observed, the fundamental assumption of this method—that there are similarities between the beliefs and practices of contemporary primitive peoples and those in the recorded history of past civilizations—is so simple that approximations of it can be traced back almost indefinitely. The distinctive contribution of the Scottish historians was rather that they used these resemblances as the foundation for a systematic classification of societal types and then used this classification to construct a hypothetical sequence that illustrated the development of civilization. Past and present could thus be used to illuminate each other, although the primary interest was in the illumination of the past by more exotic aspects of the present. The limitations of historical evidence could thus be compen-

sated for by an abundance of historical conjecture, even giving rise to the phrase “conjectural history.” By the end of the eighteenth century, this Scottish tradition of conjectural history did more to sustain the concerted study of primitive institutions and nonrational behavior than anything English writers had to offer. English aristocrats were sent to Scottish universities, and English intellectuals studied Scottish publications like the *Edinburgh Review* and the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Before Ricardo, even political economy was a Scottish export, disseminated by Scots like James Mill and McLennan’s father-in-law, John Ramsay McColloch.<sup>17</sup>

But however influential, this Scottish tradition of conjectural history differed from its social evolutionary descendant in one important respect: it was constantly preoccupied with the laws of human nature *in general*. Despite the burgeoning evidence of a diversity of peoples stimulated by the age of discovery, eighteenth-century anthropologists did not seriously question the basic unity of mankind, for they lacked of any notion of what modern anthropologists understand by the concept of “culture.”<sup>18</sup> During the same period in which philosophical history emerged in France and Scotland, however, a parallel process of social redefinition was taking place in Germany, where the primary focus was indeed on “culture” understood as the inward moral and aesthetic manifestations of the human spirit. The least nationalistic of all European peoples, the German upper classes of the Enlightenment were contemptuous of much that was Germanic and had adopted French fashions, dress, etiquette, manners, ideas, and language. Late in the century, however, a powerful reaction against this was advanced by Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803). A Protestant pastor and theologian who considered the French frivolous and affected, Herder felt that the imitation of foreign customs made people shallow and artificial. All true culture or civilization, he argued, must arise from native soil, and especially from the *Volk*, or common people, which possessed its own genius, or *Volksgeist*.

Herder’s conception rebelled not only against the French but against that entire pattern of Enlightenment thought that had emphasized reason, the identity of human nature, the universal rights of man, the timeless principles of natural law, and the classical rules of aesthetic judgment. For these Enlightenment ideas, Herder and his followers increasingly substituted those of intuition, the diversity of human nature, the social and historical origins of particular rights and laws, and the peculiar genius represented by the art of each particular people. Formed in the distant past, each national spirit unfolded organically, from an internal prototype: for example, the Jews, despite being scattered throughout the world, remained spiritually identical to the ancient Hebrews; the blacks, fired with passion

by the tropical sun, were permanently denied the “finer intellect” of the Europeans; and “well-formed” men, molded by temperate climates, produced the “cultivation and humanity” peculiar to European culture. Herder thus became the single most important source of all subsequent and frequently paradoxical manifestations of German romanticism—racism and nationalism; the positive estimation of the mythopoeic mentality; the historical conception of national individuality; the interest in traditional German folklore; the search for the oriental roots of Western culture; the comparative study of languages; and later anthropological conceptions of cultural pluralism and relativism.

The reception of these Germanic ideas into Great Britain was temporarily delayed by a more indigenous mode of political and social thought. Since the seventeenth century, a central ambition of English writers had been the creation of a genuine science of morals and legislation, and in the early nineteenth century, this ambition had been realized in utilitarianism. Precisely because utilitarianism was a vocabulary cobbled together for the rational design of societies, however, it was considerably less useful for thinking and speaking intelligently about beliefs and practices that were rather obviously *not* the product of rational design (except, of course, to condemn such beliefs and practices as “irrational” and thus identify them as likely candidates for reform). Utilitarians also embraced the view that human nature comprised certain basic, ineradicable inclinations (especially the “natural” tendency to pursue pleasure and avoid pain), and thus they were largely insensitive to particular conditions of time and space and thus to the kind of evolutionary framework anticipated by the conjectural historians and later realized through the comparative method. The utilitarians, trying to establish a program of social and political reform, were also impatient with the slow, gradual pace implied by the historical, deterministic vocabulary of the conjectural historians. Finally, the utilitarian vocabulary was underwritten by a specific, practical concern of colonial administration—specifically, the reform of corruption and vested interests—for which detachment rather than understanding seemed the appropriate European posture.<sup>19</sup>

During the first half of the nineteenth century, therefore, the central idea of evolutionary anthropology—that contemporary primitive societies might be used as evidence for reconstructing the history of our own societies—was largely neglected. The utilitarian preoccupation with reason, reform, and the constancy of human nature combined with other factors (the parochial arrogance of Western imperialism, the confident zeal of Christian missionaries, the controversy over slavery) to discourage genuinely scientific interest in anything that was alien, primitive, and/or irrational. Gradually, however, this situation began to change. One cause was simply geographi-

cal; that is, as imperial commitments multiplied, explorations like those of Grey, based upon a knowledge of local dialect and the careful observation of native practices, multiplied as well. With increased contact with native populations, colonial administrators like Henry Sumner Maine could no longer treat primitive customs and superstitions as simply tedious or revolting and instead began approaching them with a more genuinely scientific curiosity. In England, the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science was founded in 1857, and the Anthropological Society of London, in 1863. John Stuart Mill's *Auguste Comte and Positivism* (1865) is only the retrospectively most visible sign of a growing interest in sociology (and the French variant of "philosophical history") among English writers.

For our purposes, of course, it is noteworthy that this growing demand for more careful, detailed observations was increasingly conjoined with their arrangement in some sort of evolutionary theory of society. Why this was so is by no means obvious. One popular explanation, for example, has been an appeal to the powerful influence of Charles Darwin—that evolutionary social theory arose from the desire to emulate, in social science, the achievements of *The Origin of Species* (1859). But in fact, the founders of the new evolutionary anthropology (e.g., Maine, McLennan, Spencer, Pitt-Rivers, and possibly even Tylor) had all written on or become interested in that subject well before 1859. Nor was this because they had foreknowledge of Darwin's theory, for only Lubbock, who had come to social anthropology through his interest in archaeology, possessed such advanced knowledge. Instead, the powerful attraction of evolutionary theories of society seems to have derived from their capacity to breathe new life into the ancient idea that all human beings possess some common essence or nature and that this essential human nature provides the necessary foundation for any universal principles of ethics or politics. Increasingly, as we have seen, this idea had been challenged dramatically by the undeniable variability of human nature: by the clear evidence that that human purposes were not one, but many and diverse; by the increasingly obvious fact that societies were maintained not by the rational perception that they served human happiness but rather by the unconscious influence of custom and habit; and finally by the irresistible conclusion that human beings followed these customs not because they helped to maintain social order but for reasons that seemed entirely fanciful (or for no comprehensible reason whatever). By embracing some variant of evolutionary social theory, however, Europeans could reaffirm the basic unity of humankind not because human nature was seen to be everywhere the same but because the undeniable differences between human beings were understood as reflecting different stages in the same evolutionary process. And by calling this process



“progress,” this social theory could be extended into a moral and political theory as well.<sup>20</sup>

Biblical anthropologists, of course, remained unmoved by these presumptive attractions, and in an 1854 lecture, “On the Origins of Civilization,” Whately attacked evolutionary theories of society in both their French and Scottish varieties, insisting still again that “there is no one instance recorded of any [savage people] rising into a civilised condition, or, indeed, rising at all, without instruction and assistance from people already civilised.”<sup>21</sup> When John Lubbock attacked this position at meetings of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, first in Dundee (1867) and then again in Exeter (1869), Grey (who had returned to England from Australia in 1868) offered his own experience among savage peoples as evidence that his mentor had been “mainly right.”<sup>22</sup> But if Grey’s *Journals* had touched upon many of the features of totemism that would later beguile writers like Frazer, Durkheim, and Freud, the developments of the 1860s would also leave the Biblical vocabulary within which they had been initially conceived significantly less attractive.

## HISTORY AND PATRIARCHY

A TRANSITIONAL step here was made by Henry Sumner Maine (1822–1888), whose thought was formed within a preevolutionary framework and whose insistence on the patriarchal origin of primitive marriage would leave him outside the mainstream of later British anthropology. But Maine is an important figure in our story, for it was in opposition to his *Ancient Law* (1861) that the earliest theory of totemism was conceived and then debated. Maine’s Scottish parents had migrated to England shortly before his birth, and two years later, mysteriously and permanently, the father abandoned the family—a fact sufficiently embarrassing to leave Maine secretive about his origins in later life and also to stimulate his identification with that social and intellectual elite whose leadership was responsible for the social progress celebrated in his writings. Maine went to Pembroke College, Cambridge, where he read classics and mathematics and monopolized the university prizes typically won by students at St. John’s or Trinity. Invited to join the Apostles, an intellectually exclusive society whose secret meetings focused on British utilitarianism and German historicism, Maine read and discussed the works of Bentham, James Mill, and especially Barthold Niebuhr (1776–1831), whose *Römische Geschichte* (3 vols., 1827–28) approached early Roman myths and legends with rational skepticism and granted more attention to social and institutional history than to individuals and events.

Unable to hold a fellowship because it required taking religious orders, Maine accepted a tutorship at Trinity Hall, the de facto school of law at Cambridge. In 1847, he won the Regius Professorship of Civil Law, whose less than onerous duties he supplemented with legal practice after being called to the bar in 1850, and in 1852 he became Reader in Roman Law and Jurisprudence at the Inns of Court. Throughout this early period, Maine's views on jurisprudence remained extensions of the utilitarian and historicist notions he had embraced as a Cambridge Apostle, based largely on the work of John Austin (1790–1859), the friend of Bentham and James Mill whose *Province of Jurisprudence Determined* (1832) had become the *locus classicus* of the “analytical” school of jurisprudence. Austin was interested only in “positive” (by contrast with “divine” or “natural”) law and in the analysis of legal concepts, not the empirical study of the social or historical contexts of particular legal systems—for example, a “law” is a rule established by a sovereign in a politically independent society; a “rule” is a species of command obliging the performance of actions; a “command” is the expression of a wish that another do (or forbear from doing) an act, combined with the ability and intent to inflict harm for noncompliance; a “sovereign” is a person (or group of people) receiving habitual obedience from most members of a society; and so on. By thus answering the question of “what the law is” analytically, jurisprudence only then might to answer the quite different question of “what the law ought to be,” which Austin answered in strictly Benthamite terms by considering the possible utility of general rules of conduct.

A historian already familiar with Niebuhr's *Römische Geschichte*, however, Maine would also have known the work of Friedrich Karl von Savigny (1779–1861), the founder of the German “historical” school of jurisprudence that had grown up in the wake of Herder's romanticism. In *Vom Beruf unserer Zeit für Gesetzgebung und Rechtswissenschaft* (Of the vocation of our age for legislations and jurisprudence; 1814), Savigny set out an essentially romantic theory that drew heavily from the writings of Montesquieu, Edmund Burke, and Justus Möser to oppose the natural law theories of the French Revolution and, indeed, of liberalism in general. Positive law, Savigny insisted, is not the product of reason, nor even of conscious, intentional effort, but rather of unconscious, implicitly consensual beliefs that evolve “organically” over time. Law, like custom, is determined by the character and historical development of particular nations (what would later be called the *Volksgeist*) and, as such, should not be changed by the arbitrary will of legislators but only after detailed historical scholarship had revealed its “organic principle” and separated its “lifeless” elements from what Savigny called “living customary law.” Savigny's school would dominate German

universities for the next half century, making the historical study of law a more scientific discipline, blurring the boundaries that separated it from sociology, allying it with the idea of evolution, and—as Maine was well aware—reviving the study of ancient Roman law.

Within jurisprudence, the significance of Maine's *Ancient Law* (1861) would lie in its introduction, to an Anglophone audience, of the historical method of writers like Savigny. But as we shall see, *Ancient Law* was important *outside* of jurisprudence altogether, to more sociologically inclined writers like McLennan and Durkheim. This appeal cannot be explained by the influence of Savigny, for while the romantic and nationalistic German school encouraged detailed historical research, its preoccupation with the unique and the particular also afforded few opportunities for systematic comparison. Quite outside its German romantic sources, *Ancient Law* contained an additional element that John Burrow has aptly described as “a scientific bent, an urge to classify, order, abstract, and generalize.”<sup>23</sup> This element reveals the extent of Maine's debt to the German émigré Friedrich Max Müller, whose essay “Comparative Mythology” (1856) had recently lifted the field of comparative philology to unprecedented heights of popularity.

By 1850, the notion that many languages (e.g., Celtic, German, Sanskrit, Latin, Greek, and so on) could be traced back to an original “Indo-European” or “Aryan” tongue spoken by the early inhabitants of Southwest Asia was commonplace among both philologists and ethnologists, and as prehistoric archaeology gradually began to stretch the assumed span of our existence beyond the traditional biblical chronology of 6,000 years, this notion began to have a “reconstructive” interest. Specifically, from the words that had survived in the ancient languages of the Indo-European family, Müller hoped to resurrect an image of man in his most primitive condition. His method began with the assumption that any natural object, human artifact, or social relationship that was described by the same root in all Indo-European languages could be assumed to be a part of the primitive Aryan source and its original meaning reconstructed accordingly. For example, if the root for the word “door” in Sanskrit, Greek, German, and so on, was the same, we might assume that the primitive Aryans lived in houses that had doors. By contrast, anything for which there were two or more different roots could be assumed to be the product of a later innovation (the roots for “sea” being different, Müller assumed that the Aryans lived inland, etc.).

Applied to the problems of ancient mythology, Müller's method promised to resolve an enduring paradox: that the ancient Greeks, who themselves had an instinctive aversion to anything excessive or monstrous, produced myths that are filled with irrational things, including wild stories of the origins of things; descriptions of gods who are incestuous, adulterous, murderous,

thievish, cruel, cannibalistic; accounts of men and gods metamorphosing into animals, plants, celestial bodies; descriptions of the descent of men and gods into the place of the dead and their return; and so on. This was the question that early Christians had raised against the heathen expositors and apologists for pagan myths; now, centuries later, it raised problems for the alleged progress of the human intellect from savagery to civilization. Müller's solution was that myths were the product of what he called a "disease of language." Briefly, words that in their primitive Aryan form were used to describe certain natural phenomena came later to be used metaphorically; still later, the steps from the original meaning to the metaphorical significance were simply forgotten. The interpretation of myths, therefore, was largely a matter of finding the common root of names in different Indo-European languages (e.g., the Greek "Zeus," inexplicable in Greek, corresponds to the Sanskrit "Dyaus," from the verb *dyu*, "to shine") and then tracing out this solar imagery within the myth (e.g., the idea of a young hero who died in the fullness of youth was first suggested by primitive descriptions of the Sun, which "dies" at the end of a day or at the onset of the rainy season and so on). In fact, Müller argued that all Indo-European myths (including their "silly, savage, and senseless" elements) were originally derived from the observation of natural (and especially solar) phenomena, which inspired awe and wonder among the ancient Aryans.

Müller's 1856 essay would have a powerful influence on British folklore for the next twenty years. For as the mythological and philological affinity of Indo-European peoples became a common assumption, Müller's comparative philological methods became a model for the study of the early stages of civilization generally. Most important, within Müllerian philology there were elements that might be construed in evolutionary terms, for example, the "natural selection" of some linguistic terms rather than others, the "laws of language" that operated beyond the conscious control of individual human beings, the inexorable progress of the human mind, and so on. If Maine's early writings were still Austinian, therefore, his interest in comparative philology meant that *Ancient Law* itself would reflect some of these proto-evolutionary perspectives. Rather than starting with the early legal codes common throughout the Mediterranean world in the fifth century BCE, for example, Maine asked what had preceded them. His answer was that (the philological analysis of the Sanskrit literature still being incomplete) the best evidence lies in the Homeric poems, where the word "Themistes" (the plural of "Themis," the goddess of justice) was commonly used to describe the divinely inspired judicial decisions of monarchs. "Themistes," in short, were not Austinian "laws" but separate, isolated "judgments," unrelated by any thread of principle. Nothing could have contrasted more sharply with

Austin's *Province of Jurisprudence Determined* and its vocabulary of rules, commands, obligations, sanctions, and sovereigns. The further back we go in the history of primitive thought, Maine insisted, the farther we are from anything even remotely resembling the elements described by Austin, and in the very infancy of mankind, there was no legislator, nor even a distinct author of law.<sup>24</sup>

The subsequent evolution of law was from these heroic monarchies to aristocracies, which exercised judicial privilege according to unwritten custom, and then to the ancient legal codes of which the Twelve Tables (450–451 BCE) was simply the most retrospectively visible instance. These codes, of course, depended on the discovery and diffusion of the art of writing, which afforded better security for the preservation of law and, above all, made laws public and accessible to popular understanding. Throughout this evolution from Themistes, to customs, to codes, the development of law was dictated by unconscious feeling rather than rational deliberation or purpose, but with the emergence of writing, this kind of “spontaneous development” ended and legal changes took place deliberately, purposefully, and from conscious desire for change and improvement. Social progress thus turned on the question of when a society put its laws in writing, and once this had been achieved in the West, the differences between “stationary” (e.g., India and China) and “progressive” (e.g., Rome) societies became increasingly pronounced. The stationary condition is the rule, Maine insisted, and the progressive society the rare exception, and so it was to the evolution of Roman law that he directed his full attention.

For our purposes, two aspects of Maine's treatment of Roman law are important. First, Maine was highly critical not just of Bentham and Austin but of almost all theories of jurisprudence, which he considered little more than idle speculation. The noteworthy exception here (as it would be for Durkheim) was Montesquieu's *De l'esprit des lois* (1748). Even he had not broken entirely with earlier, more conjectural theories, but the “general drift” of his work was in a new direction, emphasizing uncouth, strange, and indecent manners and institutions and explaining laws as the effects of climate, local situation, and historical accident.<sup>25</sup> Second, again like Durkheim, and for the same reasons, Maine proposed that we begin “with the simplest social forms in a state as near as possible to their rudimentary condition,” for whatever the difficulties of understanding primitive societies, these are minor compared to “the perplexities which beset us in considering the baffling entanglement of modern social organisation.”<sup>26</sup> Where Durkheim would exploit the detailed Australian ethnographies of Baldwin Spencer and F. J. Gillen, however, Maine's focus was almost entirely on the fragments of ancient law that have survived from early Indo-European peoples.

When this evidence is examined, Maine observed, we see that the earliest societies were based on patriarchal authority: the eldest male parent was absolutely supreme in his household; his dominion extended to life and death and was as unqualified over his children and their houses as over his slaves; the possessions of the children belonged to the father; and upon the death of the father, these possessions were equally divided among his descendants in the first degree. Most important, the earliest societies were not collections of individuals but rather aggregations of families, and they began to exist wherever a family held together rather than dispersing on the death of the patriarch. If we conceive of the earliest societies in this manner, Maine then argued, a number of otherwise perplexing features of ancient law become quite transparent. The fact that ancient law was so scanty, for example, seems less curious when we recall that it was always supplemented by the despotic commands of the patriarch. The ceremonious nature of ancient law is hardly surprising when we recognize that it governed transactions less between individuals than between small, independent groups or corporations. The fact that ancient laws express a different conception of life is consistent with the entities (family groups whose “lives” continue beyond the death of their individual members) with which it is concerned. And this also explains why ancient law seems to presuppose such an odd conception of ethics, in which the moral elevation or debasement of the individual is confused with the merits or offenses of the group to which the individual belongs.<sup>27</sup>

Most important, this evolutionary conception of law helps us to understand why all early societies regarded themselves as having descended from the same original stock and sometimes considered this the sole reason for their political union, even while preserving records or traditions that clearly indicated that people of alien descent were admitted to and assimilated within the original family group. In short, the composition of the state was uniformly assumed to be natural, while it was simultaneously known to be largely artificial. This was an early example of what Maine called a “legal fiction”—an assumption that conceals the fact that a rule of law has changed while the letter of the law remained the same. To Maine, such fictions—ridiculed by the utilitarians—were crucial to social progress, for they satisfied the need for reform while not offending the conservative, sometimes superstitious resistance to legal change. Without this particular fiction, for example, it would have been impossible for one primitive group to absorb another. (Modern expedients—for example, individuals in the two groups voting or acting cooperatively, according to their geographic location—were anathema to primitive societies, for whom the idea that individuals might exercise political rights simply because they lived within the same borders was strange and monstrous.) “The expedient which in

those times commanded favour,” Maine explained, “was that the incoming population should feign themselves to be descended from the same stock as the people on whom they were engrafted; and it is precisely the good faith of this fiction, and the closeness with which it seemed to imitate reality, that we cannot now hope to understand.”<sup>28</sup>

Eventually, of course, these early societies ceased recruiting new members through the factitious extension of consanguinity, becoming aristocracies surrounded by new populations making no claim to common origin. Increasingly, these populations embraced the view that local contiguity rather than real or artificial blood relationship was the foundation of political communities. In more fortunate, progressive societies such as Rome, the older assumptions of patriarchal family organization gradually disappeared, but even there, traces of this earlier system survived in the *Patria Potestas*, an ancient form of private familial authority in which the father literally had the power of life and death over his son, could give his son a wife or divorce children of either sex, could transfer his children to another family, or even sell them. The *Patria Potestas* was not a durable institution, and by the later Roman Empire, the father’s authority had been drastically reduced. But Maine was intrigued by how slowly this reduction took hold and also by the extent to which other parts of ancient law (e.g., degrees of kinship) seem to have depended upon the earlier institution.

The modern notion of kinship, for example, is “cognatic”: descent is traced, through male or female, from the same pair of married persons. But in ancient Rome, descent was never traced through the female, and kinship was thus “agnatic”: it included all the cognates who traced their descent exclusively through the male as well as those brought into the family through artificial extension. Why would a conception of kinship so elastic as to incorporate adopted strangers, Maine asked, be so exclusive as to shut out all descendants of a female member? Maine’s answer was that the basis of agnation was not the marriage of the father and mother but rather the authority of the father: “In truth, in the primitive view, Relationship is exactly limited by *Patria Potestas*. Where the *Potestas* begins, Kinship begins; and therefore adoptive relatives are among the kindred. Where the *Potestas* ends, Kinship ends; so that a son emancipated by his father loses all rights of Agnation.” This also explains why, in the ancient world, the descendants of females fell outside the boundaries of kinship: “If a woman died unmarried, she could have no legitimate descendants. If she married, her children fell under the *Patria Potestas*, not of her Father, but of her Husband, and thus were lost to her own family.”<sup>29</sup> Why not both? Because if men were considered the relatives of their mother’s relatives, then they would have been subject to two *Patriae Potestates* and thus to two quite different jurisdictions.

The laws of “stationary” societies, Maine argued, cannot be understood unless we assume that these societies never advanced beyond this primitive condition of the patriarchal family, and even in “progressive” societies like that of ancient Rome, its influence can be seen in the *Patria Potestas* and its related institutions. The subsequent evolution of progressive societies, however, has been distinguished by the gradual dissolution of family dependency and its replacement with an ethic of individual obligation and responsibility. Although the rate of change has varied from one society to another and though the direction of development itself has been subject to occasional reaction, the movement of progressive societies has been a constant evolution from a condition in which all relations of persons are summed up in those of family to a quite different condition in which relations arise only through the free agreement of individuals—for example, the status of slave disappears, to be replaced by the contractual relation of servant to master; the status of “female under tutelage” gives way to marital contract; the status of “son under power” surrenders to the civil obligations between parents and their adult children. The movement of all progressive societies, Maine insisted in the most famous phrase of *Ancient Law*, has consistently been one “from status to contract.”

To his contemporaries in the field of jurisprudence, as we have seen, Maine’s significance lay in his attack on the a priori theorizing of Bentham and Austin, his introduction of German historicism to a largely Anglophone audience, and his use of the comparative method to trace the evolution of ancient law. To a later audience, however, he would seem a more ambivalent, transitional figure. Reasoning from the patriarchal institutions described in the Hebrew Bible, for example, Maine seemed oblivious to the emerging archaeological revolution and its infinitely expanded conception of time—something confirmed by his frequent conflation of the “primitive” with the merely “ancient.” Maine’s comparative method, of course, depended in part on tracing surviving laws and customs back to earlier social contexts, thus anticipating the famous “doctrine of survivals” advanced by E. B. Tylor (1832–1917) in the late 1860s. Tylor’s notion of survivals, however, derived from folklore and geology, and its methodological value depended on the psychic unity of human beings, which allowed the inquirer to reason back from irrational tradition to the rational behavior underlying it. Maine’s method owed more to Savigny, and its value thus depended on a real, concrete historical connection of present to past—a specific group of people behaved historically in a particular way, and this practice survived in different forms among their different descendants.<sup>30</sup>

But if Maine’s approach was thus in some sense more historical than evolutionary, there is no question that *Ancient Law* took on an evolutionary



significance in the post-Darwinian world. Maine had an elitist conception of history that fit comfortably with a social Darwinist vocabulary, for example, and he could argue persuasively that his patriarchal theory of primitive social organization was more consistent with Darwinian theories of primate behavior than the notion of promiscuity and matriarchy soon to be introduced by John Ferguson McLennan (1827–1881). Most important for our purposes, Maine had advanced a quasi-evolutionary theory of law and patriarchy that would become the focus of McLennan's attack, and it was within the context of that attack that McLennan advanced the first social evolutionary theory of the meaning and origin of totemism.

### THE ANTIQUITY OF MAN AND THE GERMS OF CIVIL SOCIETY

THE OLDEST son of an insurance agent in the Scottish highland town of Inverness, McLennan went in 1845 to King's College, Aberdeen, where he was exposed to the typical and quite distinctively Scottish curriculum: four years of general education, including Latin, Greek, logic, rhetoric, natural philosophy, chemistry, and mathematics, and finally moral philosophy.<sup>31</sup> Like Maine, he particularly distinguished himself in mathematics, winning both the Hutton and Simpson prizes in his senior year. In 1849, he moved on to Trinity College, Cambridge University (his parents feared exposing him to the Romanist influences of the Oxford Movement), where he continued to show a flare for mathematics and obtained a wrangler's place in the math tripos. But McLennan was drawn to the humanities—his tutor was the Plato scholar W. H. Thomson, his friends were students of philosophy and literature—and, by 1853, disappointed with his performance and without his degree, he had left Cambridge for London.<sup>32</sup> There he became part of the Pre-Raphaelite circle, wrote essays for liberal publications, and studied law at the Inns of Court (where he would have heard Maine's lectures). Returning to Scotland in 1855, he studied law in Edinburgh, was called to the bar, and practiced until 1870. But as a poor speaker who greatly preferred the company of intellectuals, McLennan never became a successful lawyer.

McLennan's earliest publication was his *Encyclopedia Britannica* article "Law" (1857), by which time Maine had been lecturing on Roman law at both Cambridge and the Inns of Court for more than a decade. And though *Ancient Law* would not appear for another four years, the temptation to compare this early essay with Maine's classic remains irresistible. Initially, McLennan seemed to embrace the classic utilitarian vocabulary of Bentham and Austin, but when he turned to the origin of society, hints

of Maine's influence began to appear. Rejecting social contract theory (the view that society was formed by the aggregation of solitary beings) as "completely without foundation," McLennan insisted instead that "the germs of the subordination to authority which are essential to the civil state" were to be found in the family. Marriage alone provides for the orderly gratification of appetites and affections, he argued, and thus is necessary to human life (even "the rudest savages" grant it a degree of permanence). McLennan insisted that the earliest families were patriarchal and that as these multiplied, they combined to form tribes. The feelings of kinship that united families into tribes then brought tribes together in nations, whose governments reflected their patriarchal familial origins, and thus surviving feelings of kindred tended "though more feebly still, to unite nations in the great society of mankind."<sup>33</sup>

This discussion of the origin and development of society owed a significant debt to the eighteenth-century Scottish philosophic historians. In his *Dissertation on the Theory of the Laws of Nature and Nations* (1799), for example, Sir James Mackintosh (1765–1832) had presented a critique of the concept of "natural liberty" (the freedom a man would have had in the state of nature, sacrificed upon entering a governed society) as simply incoherent. Man's state of nature *is* society, McLennan agreed, adding that his freedom is greater or lesser depending on the number of ways he might exercise his faculties, the number of objects on which they might be exercised, and the extent to which they are exercised—all things that increase through social participation: "Government and laws subordinating individual to public interests, and prescribing the modes and limits of social activities," McLennan argued, "establish order and security—the guarantees of human happiness; and while, in a sense, abridging men's liberties, so increase the materials on which the faculties left with them may be exercised as on the whole greatly to enlarge their freedom in the truest sense."<sup>34</sup>

Turning to the evolution of law itself, McLennan noted that men interfered with one another's enjoyments in even the earliest societies, and as social relations grew more complex and objects of desire multiplied, conflict increased as well. For a society to hold together, therefore, it was necessary to find a means to resolve disputes. When the conflict was between a stronger and a weaker person, of course, it was resolved in favor of the stronger, but when there was a conflict between equals (there yet being no government), the only alternatives were physical combat or arbitration, prudence favoring the latter. This exercise of impartial judgment by a third party, based upon the best available notions of right and wrong, is what McLennan (using the term in a sense somewhat different from Maine) called "equity." But McLennan clearly agreed with Maine that the origin of law lay

in the judgments of arbiters (like Maine, McLennan here pointed to the Homeric Themistes described in Grote's *History of Greece*), and those judgments passed into contracts and then into rules of custom that, administered and enforced by the sovereign, constituted the highest rudimentary form of law.

In this way, experience simultaneously generated both rules of action (law) and doctrines respecting conduct (morality), the former conserved by use and convenience, the latter advanced by reason and reflection. Because the prudential motives guiding early judgments existed at first only in relation to law, McLennan seemed to agree with William Whewell's *Elements of Morality* (2 vols., 1845), that morality was initially dependent on law. But the conclusion that Whewell had reached by abstract argument was, for McLennan, a fact of history, for as late as Homer, law and morality were almost indistinguishable. As their differences became perceptible, their influence was reciprocal, so that "the stability of the social progress is secured, opinion steadied, and excessive inequalities in the development of the classes of society prevented." Finally, agreeing with the German historical school of jurisprudence, McLennan insisted that this evolutionary process is incessant, that its most recent developments are subject to the same laws of inner necessity as its most primitive stages: "Law grows with the growth, and strengthens with the strength of the people," McLennan paraphrased Savigny, "and finally dies away as the nation loses its nationality. The sum, therefore, of this theory is, that all law is originally formed in the manner in which . . . customary law is said to have been formed; that is, it is first developed by custom and popular faith, next by jurisprudence; everywhere, therefore, by internal silently operating powers, not by the arbitrary will of a law-giver."<sup>35</sup>

For McLennan, the lesson to be drawn was that law is the product of sentiment and habit and that as sentiments and habits change, so will the law. Turning to the question of legislation, therefore, he insisted that the best preparation for sound law making is a scientific knowledge of human nature, for which he turned to John Stuart Mill's *Logic of the Moral Sciences* (1843), and also of society, for which he appealed to Auguste Comte's *Cours de philosophie positive* (1830-42). The science of human nature studies the laws whereby circumstances affect character and conduct (Mill called these "ethological" laws) and these "must be deduced from the general laws of mind, experimentally investigated by psychology, by supposing sets of circumstances, and then considering what, according to the laws of mind, will be the influence of those circumstances on the formation of character." The science of society, by contrast, studies the laws by which social phenomena are harmonized and by which they tend to change (Comte called these so-

cial “statics” and “dynamics”), laws that derive from the laws psychology and ethology. But whether one deduces social laws from those of the mind and verifies them by history (Mill), or deduces social laws from history and then verifies them by the general laws of the mind (Comte), the method of the science of society is deduction, its purpose is to supply the legislator with general principles for solving practical problems, and its underlying assumption is that human nature is everywhere the same.<sup>36</sup>

McLennan’s *Encyclopedia Britannica* article has been described as a compendium of the theoretical possibilities available to him in 1857, containing, for example, the analytical vocabulary of Bentham and Austin, Maine’s theory of the patriarchal family as the origin of society, Mackintosh’s conception of liberty, Whewell’s notion of the dependence of morality on law, Savigny’s romantic notion of the relation between law and the *Volksgeist*, Mill’s science of human nature, Comte’s science of society, and so on.<sup>37</sup> Some elements of McLennan’s later thought are already present, though only in a tentative, eclectic, and incoherent mix and without the powerful social evolutionary perspective of his later work. The same might be said of McLennan’s article “Marriage and Divorce—the Law of England and Scotland” (1861), where the mood focused again on reform and his guiding principle was utility but where the romantic and historicist elements of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* article persisted, applied to what would soon become the subject of McLennan’s most famous work. Two years later, McLennan published a third essay, “Hill Tribes in India” (1863), which owed some debt to comparative philology and whose argument was Darwinian, hinting at an evolutionary perspective on marriage. But again, this was not yet the evolutionary theory that McLennan would advance eighteen months later in *Primitive Marriage* (1865). Rereading “Hill Tribes” himself in October 1867, McLennan was “shocked” at how weak it was and quickly wrote to John Lubbock (to whom he had earlier recommended the essay) urging him not to read it at all.

What intervened—the rapidly changing conception of the antiquity of man—had caused “a change in [McLennan’s] problem, its context, his method, and in the substance of his argument.”<sup>38</sup> In his *Principles of Geology* (1830), Sir Charles Lyell (1797–1875) had argued that there are natural (by contrast with supernatural) explanations for all geological phenomena, that the physical, chemical, and biological processes we observe today do not differ in quality or magnitude from those of the past, and that (because these everyday natural processes work very slowly indeed) the Earth must therefore be very ancient. Darwin, who was Lyell’s friend and protégé, would borrow heavily from the *Principles of Geology*, but the archaeological evidence was still so limited, and the time period during which human

beings were assumed to inhabit the earth still so brief, that it was difficult to provide a strictly uniformitarian explanation for cultural phenomena. Even Lyell himself could not imagine the series of natural causes that would account for the leap from “an irrational to a rational animal.” Evidence for the existence of prehistoric man in Britain had been reported to the Society of Antiquaries as early as 1797, and around 1830 a series of archaeological finds had been made in Britain, Belgium, and France. Moreover, at least in principle, the prevailing biblical “catastrophism” (which explained differences in fossils discovered in successive geologic strata as the product of repeated cataclysmic occurrences followed by new creations) allowed for the existence of man prior to the Flood. Unfortunately, it did not allow for the existence of antediluvial man in Europe, only in the Mesopotamian “cradle of the race.” In 1847, when Jacques Boucher de Perthes (1788–1868) published the first of the three volumes of his *Antiquités celtiques et antédiluviennes*, describing the flint hand axes and other stone tools he had found embedded with the bones of extinct animals at Abbeville, near the Somme valley, French geologists rejected it as amateurish speculation; his paper on his researches at Abbeville, sent to the British Archaeological Association in 1849, made little impression.

The 1850s witnessed more discoveries that seemed to stretch the temporal boundaries of human existence. The dry winter of 1853–54, for example, revealed the remains of prehistoric Swiss lake dwellings, and in 1857, the bones of Neanderthal man were found in a limestone cave in Rhenish Prussia. But the real break came in 1858, when Brixham Cave, which contained numerous human artifacts together with extinct animals, was discovered near Kent’s Hole in Devonshire. In this new context, Boucher de Perthes’s earlier discoveries were reassessed, and in 1859 Sir John Evans, reporting to the Society of Antiquaries on a recent visit to Abbeville, announced that it was now certain that “in a period of antiquity, remote beyond any of which we have hitherto found trace, this portion of the globe was peopled by man.”<sup>39</sup> In 1862, the discovery of flint and bone splinters in caves near the town of Eyzies-de-Tayac, in the Dordogne, led to a series of excavations led by the French geologist Édouard Lartet and the London banker Henry Christy (an amateur ethnographer, archaeologist, and Tylor’s traveling companion to Mexico in 1856), establishing Eyzies-de-Tayac as the preeminent archaeological site for the study of the Upper Paleolithic period (40,000–10,000 BCE). In these caves, McLennan later observed, we have “transcended the period of historical records. In reaching a time indefinitely more remote, we have come on a condition of man indefinitely lower.”<sup>40</sup>

Lyell had announced his own conversion to the antiquity of man in 1859 at the Aberdeen meeting of the British Association. Four years later, he pub-

lished his *Geological Evidence of the Antiquity of Man* (1863), in which, for the first time, he tentatively accepted Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection, but only in the major revision of *Principles of Geology* (1865) did Lyell unequivocally endorse Darwin's theory, adding some powerful arguments of his own in support. The fact that Lyell had finally yielded, "after a long resistance," McLennan would later write, "is the best proof of its force." After his own tour of Abbeville in 1860, Sir John Lubbock (1834–1913), who had known Darwin from early childhood, committed himself to popularizing the antiquity of man among Victorian intellectuals, visiting all the important Continental sites, writing more accessible accounts of the work of Evans, Lartet, Christy, and Joseph Prestwich for the *Natural History Review*, and ultimately synthesizing the evidence for the antiquity of man in *Prehistoric Times* (1865). Summarizing all he had learned from Lyell and Lubbock, McLennan would later emphasize the significance of the evidence they provided of man as a tool-using animal and especially as an artist, sharing the earth more than 20,000 years ago with animals now extinct. And at that time, McLennan added, man was already distinctively *man*, for he possessed the same traits he now exhibits, "with remarkable powers of contrivance, and aesthetic tastes," albeit "with less knowledge, and consequently with ruder habits."<sup>41</sup> Henceforth, his problem, its context, his method, and the substance of his argument would indeed be changed.

The two chief sources of information about the early history of civil society, McLennan claimed in the beginning of *Primitive Marriage* (1865), are studies of existing primitive peoples and those of the "symbols" of more advanced nations. Archaeology, of course, provides information about primitive peoples, but only about their artifacts, not their social organization. And while comparative philology tells us about the social condition of the Indo-European race before its dispersion, these Aryan institutions emerged only long after the earliest civil society, on which they shed no light whatever. To understand the earliest societies, therefore, we must begin with the study of existing primitive peoples, among whom marriage laws are often unknown, the family system is undeveloped, and the only recognized blood relationship is through the mother, only then moving on to compare this evidence with the symbols that survive in the might stages of civilization. Why should we examine presently existing societies in order to understand the earliest forms of social organization? Because in the study of law and society, "old" refers not to *chronology* but to *social structure*. What is most archaic is thus what lies nearest to the beginning of social progress, and what is most modern is farthest removed from that beginning. Fortunately, he added, these materials are abundant, for the uneven development of the human species means that almost every conceivable phase of progress may

be observed and recorded somewhere. But why should we base a theory of social progress on the comparison of savage peoples with their more advanced counterparts? Here McLennan introduced his “method of survivals”: we “trace everywhere, disguised under a variety of symbolical forms in the higher layers of civilization, the rude modes of life and forms of law with which the examination of the lower makes us familiar.” The histories of advanced civilizations and presently existing primitive peoples thus mutually illuminate one another, for “wherever we discover symbolical forms, we are justified in inferring that in the past life of the people employing them, there were corresponding realities; and if, among the primitive races which we examine, we find such realities as might naturally pass into such forms on an advance taking place in civility, then we may safely conclude . . . that what these now are, those employing the symbols once were.”<sup>42</sup>

The particular symbol (or survival) with which *Primitive Marriage* was concerned was “bride capture”—the ancient custom whereby, after a contract of marriage, the bridegroom or his friends were required to feign stealing the bride, carrying her off from her friends and family by superior force. By contrast with cases of real abduction, McLennan observed, the symbol was distinguished by the preceding marriage contract, which was then validated by the organized, concerted act of capturing the bride. Though particularly well defined in ancient Greece and Italy, this practice might be found almost everywhere, suggesting that it represents some universal tendency of mankind. Initially, McLennan suggested, it appears that bride capture was the survival of earlier periods of lawlessness in which women, like other forms of property, were seized by the most powerful men; the plausibility of this explanation is increased by the fact that historically women captured in war have often been appropriated as wives. But it is unlikely, McLennan then observed, that mere lawlessness should thus be consecrated into a surviving legal symbol, especially when we consider that analogous symbols have not survived to represent the transfer of other types of property. The existence of an earlier stage in history in which wives were obtained by rapine is a *necessary*, but not a *sufficient* condition; for in addition, the practice must have been sufficiently general and invariable that an association between marriage and rapine was firmly established in the popular mind, so that thereafter the *pretence* of rapine was required to grant validity to the ceremony of marriage. “It must have been *the system* of certain tribes to capture women—necessarily the women of other tribes—for wives.”<sup>43</sup>

What could have given rise to such a system? McLennan began his answer by describing a condition from which it clearly could *not* have arisen: if the members of a family or tribe were *forbidden* to intermarry with the

members of other families or tribes and were free to marry among themselves, then there would be no room for such a system of capture in the constitution of marriage. This condition is *endogamy*, and the tribes that practice it are *endogamous* (terms for which McLennan had discovered parallels in botany, but which only now entered the vocabulary of social science). If a number of endogamous tribes formed a political union, of course, then the possibility of intertribal marriage, based upon negotiation, sale, and purchase would emerge. But such political unions, which presuppose a state of friendliness and cooperation among the tribes, appeared only quite late in the evolution of human societies, and they would necessarily have excluded any violence between tribes in order to obtain wives. Endogamous tribes, therefore, could have no place for marriage by capture, and neither could they form an association between marriage and rapine that would lead them to adopt the symbol of capture in marriage ceremonies. If such a symbol *is* found in an endogamous tribe, McLennan thus concluded, we may be certain that it is a survival of some earlier time when the tribe was organized on some principle other than endogamy.<sup>44</sup>

McLennan then asked his reader to imagine tribes organized on precisely the *opposite* principle, one that prohibited marriage within the tribe and whose tribesmen were thus dependent on other tribes for their wives. Friendly relations between separate tribes, as we have just seen, were a necessary condition for peaceful intertribal marriages. So if we assume that such relations between tribes were unknown in very early times, these *exogamous* tribes would have been able to obtain wives *only* by means of theft or force. This construction was purely hypothetical, of course, and McLennan was acutely aware of what was necessary to establish its plausibility. First, it had to be shown that exogamous tribes either exist or have existed in the past; second, it had to be demonstrated that in very early times the relations of separate tribes were uniformly hostile; and third, McLennan had to show that in a number of well-authenticated cases these first two conditions were conjoined with a system of wife capture.

McLennan began by pointing to numerous, widely distributed instances of tribes that practice bride capture and then proceeded to tribes that practice exogamy—in many cases conjoined with bride capture. For our purposes, the most interesting of these came from the passage in Grey's *Journals* (1841) that described the division of the Australian natives into a few great families, with the members of each family all bearing the same totemic names.<sup>45</sup> "These family names and divisions," McLennan paraphrased Grey, "are perpetuated and spread throughout the country by the operation of two laws: first, that the children of either sex always take the name of the mother; and second, that a man cannot marry a woman of his



own family name.”<sup>46</sup> In addition to this conjunction of matrilineal descent and exogamy, McLennan was impressed by the serious obligations and (to European eyes) rather odd consequences that such family membership entailed. Members were bound together for purposes of defense and vengeance, for example, to the extent that men frequently seceded from their own tribe to form an alliance with another in which their mother’s family was particularly strong, and since vengeance was satisfied by spilling the blood of any of the offender’s kin, acceptable potential victims would have been readily available in their original tribe. Again, since the Australians were polygamists, a man would often have wives in different families, so that in war children of the same father would often found themselves opposed to one another, or even to their father—who, according to the “peculiar” laws cited above, could never have been their relative.<sup>47</sup>

McLennan was also aware of how completely this Australian system seemed to contradict the conclusions of *Ancient Law* (1861), where Maine had been unable to conceive of how human beings could be grouped together on any principle more primitive than that of the patriarchal family or bound together by any system of blood ties more rude and elementary than those of agnation derived from the *patria potestas*. Maine’s great mistake, McLennan observed, arose from his confusion of what was merely ancient with what was truly primitive, from an excessive attention “to those systems of ancient law which like the Hindoo, Roman, and Jewish, belonged to races which were far advanced at the earliest dates to which their history goes back.” Instead, McLennan insisted, Maine should have focused on presently existing primitive peoples, where we see that men are related only to their mother’s relatives; that societies are bound together by polygamy, exogamy, and female kinship; and that the earliest form of kinship is not derived from convenience or utility but is simply the most obvious—specifically, mothers, about whose relation to children there can be no mistake.<sup>48</sup> As for evidence for the state of hostility among primitive peoples, while admitting that primitive war is perhaps “not quite so ugly” as its more civilized counterpart, McLennan nonetheless insisted that it is habitual, the normal condition of human beings in primitive times.

The three conditions necessary to an early, exogamous stage of social evolution thus established, what might have brought such a stage into existence? The early difficulties of subsistence, McLennan suggested, required the strengthening of males for productive and defensive purposes, to the obvious disadvantage of females. This in turn gave rise to female infanticide, a practice “common among savages everywhere,” and especially among the peoples who exhibit the symbol of bride capture. By rendering women scarce, female infanticide would have led initially to polyandry

(several men sharing a single wife) within the tribe, and then to the effort to capture wives from without. There was, of course, an alternative, more psychologistic explanation: exogamy was the result of the innate abhorrence of sexual relations with members of the same kin. But this McLennan flatly rejected, arguing that the sexual imbalances within the tribe resulting from female infanticide would have established a prejudice against endogamy “even before the facts of blood-relationship had made any deep impression on the human mind.”<sup>49</sup>

This last quoted phrase is important, for McLennan indeed believed that the earliest human groups did not, and could not, have had any idea of kinship whatever. This is not to say that they felt no instinctive bond of fellowship for their comrades, cohabitants, and companions (what McLennan called their “stock-group”), but these feelings existed prior to and quite independent of any “theory” as to their foundation. At the root of kinship, of course, lies the physical fact of consanguinity, but since this fact is not an innate idea and must rather be learned through observation and reflection, there must have been stage at which it had not yet been understood. And when the idea of consanguinity *did* emerge (as we have already seen), McLennan insisted that it was traced through females only. For the simplest, earliest perception would have been that one has one’s *mother’s* blood in one’s veins, followed by recognition that the same blood exists in the veins of one’s siblings, cousins, nephews, nieces, and so on, as a series of inferences. The alternative possibility (that kinship might be traced through males) became possible only where there was some degree of certainty about the identity of the father (or of certainty about the father’s blood, for where all possible fathers were also brothers, there could be certainty about blood without certainty about the father’s identity).<sup>50</sup>

This kind of certainty presupposes marriage, and yet as Maine himself had shown, the evolution of human societies was always from status to contract, from the traditional rights of groups to the gradual assertion of the claims of individuals. We know nothing about sexual relationships in these earliest groups, he admitted, but we can trace the steps of human progress backward, “finding as we go back the noble faculties peculiar to man weaker and weaker in their manifestations, producing less and less effect . . . upon his position and habits.” The further back we go, the more we discover the traits of gregarious animals, and the less we find indications of operative intellect. “As among other gregarious animals,” McLennan concluded, “the unions of the sexes were probably in the earliest times, loose, transitory, and in some degree promiscuous.”<sup>51</sup> Uncertainty of paternity was therefore the cause, and a system of female kinship was the effect. And since McLennan assumed that all societies pass through the same evolutionary stages (including that

of “promiscuity”), the universal priority of a system of female kinship was a necessary conclusion.

Having reached this initial, hypothetical stage of primitive promiscuity, McLennan simply reversed his direction, tracing the progress of human marriage forward as a series of hypothetical evolutionary propositions, explaining how female kinship might have developed into its male counterpart, exogamy into endogamy, and so on. The stage of female kinship, for example, emerges only because the tie with the mother is more likely to be recognized before, and to be more certain than, the tie with the father. However, within this matrilineal group, the child’s connection to the group is stronger than that to the mother, and the men of the group hold the women in common. This stage of “general” promiscuity then gives way to its more “regulated” counterpart (polyandry), which comprises two forms. In the first, “Nair” form, the various husbands of a woman were not themselves related, and descent is still traced through the female. In the second, “Tibetan” form, the husbands are brothers, which presumes patrilocal residence and also marks the beginning of patrilineal descent. When Tibetan polyandry passes away, it leaves a trace of itself in the “levirate” (the obligation of the younger brother to marry his elder brother’s widow). McLennan thus argued that the levirate and widow inheritance are survivals of an earlier stage of polyandry, while polyandry is evidence of a still earlier stage of matrilineal descent. And since exogamy and polyandry are both results of the same cause (a shortage of women due to female infanticide), all exogamous peoples must also have been polyandrous at some time.<sup>52</sup>

Similarly, before the recognition of kinship, the children of captured wives would have been considered just as additional members of an internally homogeneous stock-group, but female descent would have introduced children belonging to different stocks, making the group heterogeneous. Marriage within the group would now be consistent with the law of exogamy, and since different parts of the same group were not hostile toward one another, the practice of capturing wives would have been superseded. Matrilineal descent would now connect the children more strongly to the mother than to the group, leading to the separation of residences and thus to the most primitive form of the family; this would in turn reduce the uncertainty of male parentage and, combined with the influence of property and the right of succession, encourage the development of male kinship. Such groups would again be internally homogeneous and would practice exogamy and bride capture, but with an important difference—the children of captured brides would no longer be of foreign stock, for they would all descend from the father. These “families” would thus begin to grow into a “tribe” of kinsfolk and, with success in warfare, into a “caste” that regarded

other tribes as inferior and thus established a rule of endogamy, including the “fiction” of descent from a common ancestor—the same fiction that Maine had described as an expedient useful to the combination of primitive groups, but whose good faith and close resemblance to reality, he confessed, “we cannot now hope to understand.”<sup>53</sup>

*Primitive Marriage* is an anthropological classic, offering “one of the clearest, most elaborate, and least apologetic” examples of use of the comparative method in evolutionary social theory. In *Ancient Law*, following the model of comparative philology, Maine had compared phenomena that were apparently genetically related, relied on historical documents, and attempted to establish historical sequences of cause and effect—using ethnographic data from presently existing societies only within the constraints of this framework. Still burdened with a pre-Darwinian notion of the temporal span of human existence, he mingled ancient and primitive cultures indiscriminately, and his conception of the earliest families (drawn from the book of Genesis) stressed “perfect marriage, conjugal fidelity, and the certainty of male parentage.”<sup>54</sup> In “Hill Tribes” (1863), McLennan had still been attracted to comparative philology, to the study of the tribes of a specific geographic location whose uses and customs were genetically related and had diversified under the influence of accidental circumstances. Barely eighteen months later, tantalized by the theoretical possibilities of an almost inconceivably greater span of prehistoric time, McLennan flatly dismissed the Aryans as “post-pleistocene,” and thus enormously distant from—and irrelevant to our understanding of—the original foundations of human society. To compensate for the utter lack of historical documents concerning these foundations, he fashioned his “method of survivals,” which assumed that beneath the surviving “symbols” of more advanced civilizations we might discern the practical realities with which a variety of presently existing primitive cultures had already made us familiar. No longer limited to concrete historical sequences, McLennan was now free to draw upon societies throughout the world and to put forward evolutionary theories about their development from lower to higher forms. In sum, McLennan had found a way of thinking and speaking about people who were almost inconceivably primitive and to do so in a highly generalized, naturalistic, and scientific manner.

## THE RELIGION OF ANIMALS AND PLANTS

BY THE late 1860s, the attack on degenerationist theories of primitive peoples had become an all-out assault. In *Prehistoric Times* (1865), Lubbock had already been convinced that many savage races were altogether destitute of

religion, an institution of such “inestimable value” that he found it inconceivable that any society might voluntarily abandon it. Then at the meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science in Dundee in 1867, Lubbock not only reaffirmed this judgment but specifically attacked the degenerationist views expressed in Whately’s *Political Economy* (1831). Whately’s belief that the earliest human beings were familiar with the domestication of animals and plants, for example, was rejected on the grounds that Australian Aborigines are unfamiliar with both and were unlikely to have forgotten subsistence technologies so advantageous to their environments (especially within the roughly six thousand years allowed by Archbishop Ussher’s biblical chronology). Lubbock added that even in the most civilized nations there are beliefs and practices that make sense only if we assume that they are the traces of earlier, far more primitive stages through which all societies must pass.<sup>55</sup>

The most interesting response to Lubbock came not from Whately himself but in a book titled *Primeval Man* (1868), written by a Scottish noble, the eighth Duke of Argyll (George Douglas Campbell). Argyll offered only tepid support for Whately’s particular version of degenerationism, quite specifically rejecting the notion that the principles of the domestication of animals and plants had to be “divinely communicated” and qualifying Whately’s insistence that no savage people had ever raised itself but for external, civilized assistance. But Argyll set still less value on Lubbock’s argument that the original condition of mankind was utter savagery, arguing instead that an early ignorance of subsistence technologies was not incompatible with moral superiority as well as a divinely endowed “instinct” for social progress; that such instinct might indeed have been among the “instruments” whereby God worked out his will in nature and history; that presently existing savage peoples are descendants of the “weaker” races, driven from favorable locations by more powerful tribes as part of the process of degeneration; and that “the known character of man and the indisputable facts of history prove that he has within him at all times the elements of corruption—that even in his most civilized condition, he is capable of degradation, that his Knowledge may decay, and that his Religion may be lost.”<sup>56</sup>

Lubbock replied immediately in a paper presented before the British Association at Exeter in 1869, reaffirming his arguments of 1865 and 1867 while responding to each of Argyll’s criticisms. For our purposes, however, his most interesting arguments concerned primitive religion, which he had begun to expand into an evolutionary theory of the stages of religious belief and practice. His “lowest form of religion,” for example, was “a mere unreasoning belief in the existence of mysterious beings” (for example, the spirits,

invisible to others, who visit during dreams and nightmares). In fetishism, the second stage, this belief is more rational and methodical (the native now believes that by means of witchcraft the spirit can be compelled to serve human ends and purposes). At a still higher stage, we find totemism (the worship of animals and plants, which also serve as emblems of the clan or tribe), a form of religion that “can be shown to have existed, at one time or another, almost all over the world.” Only at the fourth stage, Lubbock observed, do we reach what Whately and Argyll would describe as “idolatry” (the emergence, as a result of the slowly increasing power of chiefs and priests, of temples and sacrifices dedicated to anthropomorphically conceived deities), with the higher, more abstract conceptions of religion following thereafter. Each stage, Lubbock quickly added, “is superimposed on the preceding, and . . . bygone beliefs linger on among the children and the ignorant. Thus witchcraft is still believed in by the ignorant, and fairy tales flourish in the nursery.”<sup>57</sup>

There can be little doubt that this evolutionary theory, which Lubbock himself described as “a fair argument in opposition to the view that savages are degenerate descendants of civilised ancestors,” was conceived as a response to the degenerationists. Whately and Argyll, he continued, “would find it very difficult to show any process of natural degradation and decay which could explain the quaint errors and opinions of the lower races of men, or to account for the lingering belief in witchcraft, and other absurdities, etc., in civilised races, excepting by some such train of reasoning as that which I have endeavoured to sketch.” Even Genesis, Lubbock insisted, suggests that the degenerationist account is heterodox; for there we see Adam not only as first naked and then clothed with leaves but as unable to resist the most trivial temptation and entertaining gross, anthropomorphic conceptions of God as well. In his mode of life, his moral condition, and his intellectual capacities, therefore, Adam was a typical savage. From savagery, Lubbock thus concluded, the subsequent history of man has been “one of progress, and . . . in looking forward to the future, we are justified in doing so with confidence and with hope.”<sup>58</sup>

McLennan not only shared many of Lubbock’s ideas, but the two were in frequent contact during the period in which they were conceived. For after the publication of *Primitive Marriage*, McLennan had begun to think about a cooperative intellectual venture—a summary description of the stages of human progress—that would involve himself and the Sanskritist S. T. Aufrecht in Edinburgh, and Lubbock and T. H. Huxley in the south. On 15 October 1867, McLennan had written to Lubbock indicating the need for a more precise, sociological definition of “civilization,” which he then developed in “The Early History of Man” (1869), an essay that Stocking has

described as “perhaps the best single summary view of the sociocultural evolutionary position as it emerged in the mid-1860s.”<sup>59</sup> “Our proposition,” McLennan began, “is that the antiquity of man is very great,” and that the popular biblical chronology, according to which all men descended from the family of Noah in 2348 BCE, is “entirely wrong.” To prove this assertion, he described in some detail the ancient civilizations of Egypt, China, and the Indo-Europeans, emphasizing their differences, their geographic independence, and their extraordinary cultural achievements, which, taken together, made their common, relatively recent descent implausible. The biblical chronology discarded, McLennan added, we need no longer think of the ancients as being much closer to the beginnings of human progress than we are or assume that four or five thousand years is more than a fraction of the time that progress has taken or be amazed at the Homeric or Vedic literature appearing so “early” in the history of mankind.

But if this “archaeological revolution” of the 1860s has thus altered the way we think and speak about *antiquity*, McLennan observed, it cannot answer our most important questions about the social life of *prehistoric* man. The same uniformitarian principles, of course, should be applied; just as Lyell had insisted that our explanations of past geological phenomena must be modeled on the physical, chemical, and biological processes we observe in the present, the forces that explain our progress from antiquity to the present must also be those we appeal to in our explanations of the earlier progress from savagery to civilization. In fact, McLennan argued, we *must* believe this, for otherwise we would have to assume that social progress was the product of a “supernatural communication of ideas”—something for which there is no evidence whatsoever. But archaeology can tell us little about the actual rise from savagery to civilization, which presumes certain forms of domestic and political organization, a certain level of the arts of subsistence, the existence of means for the communication of ideas and common action, which include language, religion, and so on.<sup>60</sup>

McLennan’s goal was to show that there had indeed been progress from savagery to civilization in all of these areas, beginning with domestic social organization; to do so, he was aware that he needed some criterion by which one form of social organization might reasonably be said to be “higher” and “better” than another. Initially, this criterion appeared to be little more than common consent: “No one will question but that a tribe of men, ignorant of marriage and blood-relationship, and without permanent attachments of males to females, and of parents to offspring, is as low a group as is conceivable, a simple herd, as we shall call it, when presented as an aggregate of creatures other than human.”<sup>61</sup> But it soon becomes clear that in McLennan’s view, “progress” is equivalent to “regulation,” so that

even Nair polyandry (in which co-husbands are strangers in blood) is an improvement on promiscuity; Tibetan polyandry (in which co-husbands are brothers) is an advance on the Nair; the levirate is an improvement on Tibetan polyandry; agnatic monandry is an improvement on the levirate; and modern marriage laws, which concede equal rights to women, further improve a system of domestic organization that still contains far too many survivals of the husband's supremacy as head of the agnatic family. The same progress, McLennan added, can be traced in those institutions (such as rights of property and laws of succession) closely linked with domestic organization.

As this emphasis on regulation suggests, McLennan was convinced that these advances in domestic social organization constituted *moral* (not just *material*) progress. By whatever standard we apply, moral rules "are the lower the farther back we go, and are everywhere in harmony with the general character of the grouping at each stage of the evolution." In presenting this theory of social-cum-moral progress, McLennan had two opponents in mind. The first was Sir George Grey, for whom, as we have seen, Australian totemism was an instrument of God's will, designed to prevent the social progress of Aborigines until they could be introduced to the truths of Christianity. For McLennan, as we shall see, totemism was a transitional stage in the progress from savagery to civilization, and while he considered this "wholly divine as much as it is wholly human," he disagreed with Grey as to the mode of the divine operation. McLennan's second opponent, not surprisingly, was the Duke of Argyll, who "cannot be taken seriously" until he has produced "an ancient people whose moral standards we should call high, and whose grouping was in accordance with such standards."<sup>62</sup>

In fact, by the late 1860s, McLennan's attentions had increasingly been drawn to totemism. In *Primitive Marriage*, his search for tribes that practiced exogamy combined with bride capture had already led him to Grey's *Journals*, where he found "great families" of Australian natives sharing the same totemic names, which were spread throughout the country through the "peculiar" laws of exogamy and matrilineal descent.<sup>63</sup> In a footnote in "Kinship in Ancient Greece" (1866), McLennan speculated for the first time that totemism might be a stage through which all societies, including those of the Peloponnesus, had passed in the course of their evolution.<sup>64</sup> In "Totem" (1868), written for *Chambers's Encyclopaedia*, he observed that "the ruder races of men are found divided into tribes, each of which is usually named after some animal, vegetable, or thing which is an object of veneration or worship to the tribe. This animal, vegetable, or thing," McLennan explained, "is the *totem* or *god* of the tribe"—adding that totemism might explain some of the otherwise obscure aspects of Greek mythology and also



that an example of its very early existence in widely separated countries can be found in serpent worship.<sup>65</sup> But a more detailed account of this belief can be found in McLennan's review of James Fergusson's *Tree and Serpent Worship* (1868) that appeared in *Cornhill Magazine* during the same year.

Serpent worship was a familiar topic among the Victorians, for whom it frequently served as one of the evidences of Christianity. In *The Worship of the Serpent Traced Throughout the World, Attesting the Temptation and Fall of Man by the Instrumentality of a Serpent Tempter* (1830), for example, John Bathurst Deane (1797–1887) had argued that serpent worship—"the only universal idolatry"—had preceded every form of polytheism and was thus inexplicable except by reference to the Genesis account of the Serpent of Paradise.<sup>66</sup> But the approach of James Fergusson (1808–1856), a respected historian of Indian architecture, was more historical and also more wide-ranging in its search for evidence. While preparing for an exhibition in Paris in 1866, Fergusson had acquired photographs of the Buddhist *stupas* (the dome-shaped shrines used to mark Buddhist relics and sacred places) and their elaborate carvings at Sanchi and Amravati (c. first to fourth century CE). By piecing together these photographs, Fergusson was able to effect a virtual restoration of the monuments, which led the India Council to sanction their publication. The sculptures included evidence for what seemed to be the worship of trees and serpents, and Fergusson's text explored the extent of such worship not just in India but throughout the ancient world. Turning to Judaea, for example, Fergusson quickly dismissed the more literal, apologetic interpretation of writers like Deane, insisting instead that the authors of Genesis, referring to Mesopotamian rather than Judaeian traditions and preparing to introduce "the purer and loftier worship of Elohim," sought to eradicate "that earlier form of faith which the primitive inhabitants of the earth had fashioned for themselves."<sup>67</sup>

McLennan's long and close friendship with Robertson Smith had begun at about the time his review was written, and there can be no doubt that both would have shared Fergusson's understanding of Genesis. But McLennan also objected to at least three aspects of Fergusson's argument. The first objection concerned Fergusson's excessive reliance on the archaeological rather than ethnographic evidence for early serpent worship. For McLennan, as we have seen, was committed to the illumination of ancient survivals by present and primitive beliefs and practices and thus insisted that "living instances" of such worship would strengthen Fergusson's argument: "With the mind full of the fact that the worship is still a living reality," McLennan suggested, "the significance of the traces that are found—sometimes they are few and faint—of the worship in the remote history of the advancing nations, would be more readily perceived; the revelation they afford of the

state of the ancient world would be more full and impressive.” But this, McLennan admitted, was largely “a question of presentment” and paled by comparison to his second objection to Fergusson, which concerned the latter’s embracing of a favorite argument of Max Müller.

In the early history of Europe and Asia, Müller had argued, there were three great races—the Semites, Aryans, and Turanians (Ural-Altaiic peoples)—that correspond to three great families of languages. Originally, in some remote prehistory, each of these races had formed a unity, but with the passage of time, each had diversified into a great variety of peoples with a multiplicity of distinct languages. Through the comparative study of languages, however, the original unity of each race might be reconstructed, and since there was initially an intimate relationship between religion, language, and race, this would also yield a genetic classification of religions based upon their descent from a common (Semitic, Aryan, or Turanian) origin. His survey of tree and serpent worship completed, Fergusson concluded that the Turanians were the only real serpent worshippers—something “perfectly consistent with [their] lower intellectual status” but “diametrically opposed to the spirit of the Bible and the Veda, which, in varying degrees of dilution, pervades all Aryan and Semitic religions.”

McLennan was clearly skeptical of Müller’s philological classification while admitting that ethnology had nothing better to replace it, and no less than Deane (albeit obviously for different reasons), he was committed to the universality and priority of serpent worship. The Vedas and the Bible, for example, clearly belong to much later periods in the evolution of Aryan and Semitic religions, and McLennan was convinced that their “intellectual status” was as low as the “Turanian” (a category that he considered utterly hypothetical and therefore meaningless) at earlier stages. The ancient Hebrews clearly persisted in serpent worship at least to the reign of Hezekiah (c. 715–698 BCE), McLennan insisted, and in several ancient religions, the serpent presides at the creation of the world and is the god of life and health. These primitive beliefs and practices have survived into more recent centuries. For example, even though converted to Christianity in the ninth century CE, the Swedes worshipped serpents down to the Reformation, and even in modern times, Europeans still seem capable of holding the most “monstrous beliefs.” Serpent worship, McLennan concluded, is completely independent of ethnic associations; in this sense, “it resembles the ancient polyandry which was peculiar to no division or race of mankind, but was a phase at one stage of the development of every race.”<sup>68</sup>

Finally, McLennan disagreed with Fergusson’s explanation for the origin of tree and serpent worship. According to Fergusson, the worship of trees arose from the primitive perception of their beauty and utility, while that of

serpents derived from their “terrible and exceptional power”—an argument that Fergusson advanced as a friendly extension of the rationalist treatment of myth in Sanchuniathon’s *Phoenician History*.<sup>69</sup> But such an appeal to the intrinsic properties of the objects worshipped, McLennan objected, fails in light of the fact that many of the plants worshipped by primitive peoples are neither beautiful nor useful and also that the worship of serpents (as Fergusson himself acknowledged) is not a religion of fear but rather of love. Introducing an argument to be made later and more forcefully by Durkheim, McLennan thus insisted on the “non-intrinsic” aspect of the sacredness of animals and plants, which are repeatedly, for whatever reason, conceived by their worshippers as benign entities—a conception that significantly enlarged the field of potentially sacred animals and plants. “We think it is now made probable,” McLennan thus concluded, “that the ancient nations came through the *totem* stage we find savages in, and apparent that serpent worship was originally but one of many forms that prevailed of animal worship.”<sup>70</sup>

It was McLennan’s “Worship of Animals and Plants” (1869–70), however, that effectively began the debate over the meaning and significance of totemism in evolutionary social theory. “Few traditions respecting the primitive condition of mankind are more remarkable, and perhaps none are more ancient,” McLennan began, than that of Sanchuniathon’s history, with its insistence that the first gods were plants and then animals. Quite aside from the singularity and antiquity of his account, however, McLennan insisted that Sanchuniathon “is shown by the results of modern inquiry to be wonderfully correct,” particularly in the Phoenician’s observation that the earliest men were “nam’d by their mothers, the women of those times, who without shame lay with any man they could light upon”—or, in McLennan’s words, that “in primitive times there was kinship through mothers only, owing to the uncertainty of fatherhood.”<sup>71</sup> McLennan thus set out to explain the nature of totems, their place in presently existing societies, and the intellectual condition of people in “the totem stage of development.” Ultimately, however, his goal was to confirm the speculations of Sanchuniathon and thus “to show that the ancient nations came, in pre-historic times, through the Totem stage, having animals and plants, and the heavenly bodies conceived as animals, for gods before the anthropomorphic gods appeared.”<sup>72</sup>

Like Frazer, Durkheim, and Freud after him, McLennan was particularly fascinated by Australian totemism, and his summary of the evidence taken from Grey’s *Journals* repeated all of the features touched on briefly in *Primitive Marriage*: the division of the Aborigines into tribes designated by the localities they inhabit; within each tribe, stock-groups<sup>73</sup> sharing the name of some animal or plant, which also extend across the several

tribes; within the stock-groups, the two “peculiar” laws of exogamy and matrilineal descent, preventing any tribe from consisting entirely of one stock-group; the belief among the members of the stock-group that they were descended from the animal or plant; the duty of the members of each stock-group to join together for the purpose of defense or avenging crimes; and the generality of totemism throughout Australia and even Oceania. From there, McLennan turned to Native American totemic groups, reviewing (as Grey himself had) the reports of Charlevoix and Long as summarized in Gallatin’s *Synopsis* (1836). Here again, McLennan found totemic stock-groups practicing exogamy and matrilineal descent, but within the more advanced Native American tribes, he pointed to cases in which the solidarity of the stock-groups has become sufficiently strong that they had withdrawn to form local tribes of their own. Even if these stock-groups continued to practice exogamy, McLennan observed, the kind of change of kinship already described in *Primitive Marriage* (i.e., permitting the totem to descend from the father rather than the mother) would have allowed such tribes to become permanent and internally homogeneous.<sup>74</sup>

McLennan then raised a question that would beguile social scientists for the next half century. What is the relationship between the members of the stock-group and their totem? Grey, of course, had already observed that members of the stock-group considered themselves descendents of their totem, that the totem was thus regarded as their “friend” or “protector,” that they used the totem as their family crest or symbol, and finally that they killed a member of the totemic species only with the greatest reluctance.<sup>75</sup> But for McLennan, this simply raised more questions. How, for example, did the natives suppose that their progenitors had thus been transformed from animals into human beings? McLennan had no answer but added that the Australians make no distinction between the spiritual and material, or the animate and inanimate, that “the only benign beings they know are their Totems” and they have “no God in the proper sense of the word.” They believe that death is the result of the actions of supernatural agents rather than of natural causes, so therefore these agents are still closely identified with nature, dwelling in specific physical locations and exercising their influence in a manner analogous to natural forces. In short, natural phenomena are explained by “the presence in animals, plants, and things, and in the forces of nature, of such spirits prompting to action as men are conscious they themselves possess,” a belief not only universal among primitive peoples, but one that has never been surrendered except where it was replaced by the belief in natural law.<sup>76</sup>

McLennan was hardly the first to insist on the universality of this primitive belief in spiritual forces inhabiting animals, plants, and other objects,

whose actions afforded an explanation of natural phenomena. In 1865, Tylor had already speculated on the psychological foundation of such beliefs in his *Researches Into the Early History of Mankind*,<sup>77</sup> and two years later, in a paper titled “On Traces of the Early Mental Condition of Man” (presented before the Royal Institution of Great Britain), he described these beliefs in greater detail, as a primitive philosophical attempt to explain natural phenomena by ascribing to them a human life and personality, together with the religious worship of the spirits presumed to inhabit natural objects. For savages, these early beliefs thus perform the functions of both science and religion; by studying this “childlike theory of the animation of all nature” (for which Tylor introduced the term “animism”)<sup>78</sup> he hoped to show “how generally man in his lowest known state of culture is a wonderfully ignorant, consistent, and natural spiritualist.” A slight familiarity with this savage spiritualism, Tylor acknowledged, has led some to consider it the consequence of degeneration from the earlier beliefs of more advanced civilizations, but a more complete knowledge of the facts reveals that this “inverts the real history of events.” As he had in 1865, Tylor referred this primitive spiritualism to the association of ideas (the habit of connecting things in our minds when they have no real connection in the world), a mental process that gives rise to “those delusions of sorcery which pervade and embitter the whole life of the savage,” and even carry “a stream of folly far into the culture of the higher races.” Fortunately, the evolution of human societies had witnessed “a slow process of natural selection, ever tending to thrust aside what is worthless, and to favour what is strong and sound”—thereby assuring social progress.<sup>79</sup>

Tylor had only briefly passed over Grey’s account of Australian totemism in *Researches*. But shortly after the presentation of his 1867 paper, he had become acquainted with McLennan, and the two “had much conversation on the philosophy of totems.”<sup>80</sup> Both the conversation and the paper led McLennan to reply to Tylor in “The Worship of Animals and Plants,” suggesting, first, that totemism was simply animism plus several other peculiarities (the appropriation of a particular animal or plant to the tribe, the hereditary transmission of it through mothers, its connection with exogamy, and so on) and, second, that animism had slowly evolved out of totemism, “through various stages of development, bringing the realms of nature one by one within the scope of the hypothesis which is its foundation.” The earliest, least theoretically developed stage, for example, is represented by the Aryans, the southern African Bushmen, the Fuegians, and the Andaman Islanders; a second, more developed stage can be found in the Australian Aborigines; the Native American Indian tribes had reached the third stage of vivifying the heavenly bodies; and the fourth stage, in which spirits have been assigned to groves and forests, could be seen in New Zealand, as

well as ancient Greece and Rome. The highest stage of animism, McLennan concluded, is found in pantheism, at which point it begins to die as it slowly “withdraws its spirits from one sphere after another on their being brought within the domain of science.”<sup>81</sup>

If the totem stage is universal, of course, then *all* the nations of antiquity must have passed through it, and we should expect that by the time these civilizations began to keep written records these totems would have been promoted to gods and become objects of religious worship. As a consequence of the combined effect of exogamy and female kinship, we should further expect that there would be at least as many animal and vegetable gods as there were distinct stocks in the population, that these stocks would be named after the sacred animals, that these animals would be their “crests” or emblems, and that their traditions would include the suggestion that the stock-group descended from the animal worshipped. Finally, since these gods would have preceded the emergence of their anthropomorphic counterparts, we should expect that the sacred legends would include at least some hint of this evolutionary priority. These conditions satisfied, McLennan argued, we might safely conclude that in prehistoric times the ancient civilizations practiced totemism in much the same form that we presently observe it among the natives of Australia. The certainty of this conclusion, he added, would be further strengthened if we discovered that on the basis of this hypothesis, myths that have hitherto appeared utterly meaningless were suddenly rendered intelligible and also if we found evidence that these civilizations had once practiced both exogamy and female kinship.<sup>82</sup>

What evidence exists that might confirm this hypothesis? If the ancient civilizations did pass through the totem stage, McLennan reasoned, it was certainly in prehistoric times, and the information we possess about such times includes the signs of the zodiac, of which the majority are animals, as well as the constellations that (as Sanchuniathon had emphasized) take on animal forms. Since there is nothing in the groupings of the stars to suggest such animal forms, McLennan asked, how did these early peoples come to name the constellations, and even some of the individual stars, after the names of animals? Briefly, in ancient as in modern times, the constellations were given names that commanded respect and even veneration on earth; the fact that these names were those of animals suggests strongly that these animals had been worshipped as gods. Beginning with the most thoroughly studied (Fergusson’s serpent in the constellation *Serpentarius*), McLennan thus pointed to the abundant evidence that the animals represented in the constellations were once worshipped as gods and that in many cases their worshippers shared their names, used them as crests or emblems, and believed themselves to be descended from them.<sup>83</sup>

This association of animals with pagan gods had of course been noted before, and various explanations proposed. In *A New System, or, an Analysis of Ancient Mythology* (1774), for example, Jacob Bryant (1715–1804) had explained pagan myths as the consequence of degeneration from the original Israelite worship of the one true God. The pivotal role here was played by the Flood and the subsequent dispersion of the children of Ham, who (as a consequence of what Max Müller would later call a “disease of language”) misremembered the earlier, true revelation and thus fell into the worship of false gods.<sup>84</sup> Within this theory, the worship of animals was derived from their earlier status as the “emblems” of those on Noah’s ark, but even if we accept Bryant’s argument that all people descended from the children of Ham, McLennan observed, this would still not explain animal worship. First, Bryant’s list of Arkite emblems doesn’t begin to include all the animals or plants that have been worshipped in antiquity; second, any explanation for the worship of those not represented on the ark might also be extended to those that were; and third, Bryant provides not a single historical instance of an Arkite emblem having degenerated into a pagan god.<sup>85</sup>

According to a second “emblem” theory, each animal species represented the nature of one or another of the gods. But for McLennan, this theory raised more questions than it answered. Why, for example, would people think of taking animals and plants to represent their gods? And inversely, why should the selection of an animal to represent a god render its species sacred? We don’t worship pigeons, for example, while the dove is one of our most mysterious symbols. But if we assume that the dove had once been a god and then (with the rise of the anthropomorphic gods and then of monotheism) become obsolete, we can see how it would have declined to become a mere symbol. Finally, this version of the emblem theory assumes something that even Jacob Bryant had denied—that the anthropomorphic gods were worshipped earlier than the animal gods—when the evidence suggests the reverse.<sup>86</sup>

There was still a third version of the emblem theory, that of Sir Austen Henry Layard, the English archaeologist whose *Discoveries in the Ruins of Nineveh and Babylon* (1853) had added greatly to the Victorians’ knowledge of Mesopotamia. Almost en passant, Layard too had suggested that the various compounds of animal and human forms in pagan mythology “were intended to convey the union of the greatest intellectual and physical powers.” But this theory, McLennan complained, not only fails to account for the *real* worship of *living* animals but is also inconsistent with the mythological compounds themselves, which are frequently uninspiring and thus could hardly have been designed to convey a sense of extraordinary powers. Here again, therefore, McLennan appealed to what Durkheim would later

and famously describe as the “non-intrinsic” aspect of the sacred. “The fact is,” McLennan concluded, “though *we* now make use of lions, sphinxes, and so on, to convey such ideas as [Layard] refers to, we demonstrate in doing so only the poverty of the modern imagination and the feebleness of our art instincts; inasmuch as being incapable of inventions, we mimic old forms derived from the religious faiths of long past and misunderstood generations.”<sup>87</sup>

Setting aside these alternative theories, McLennan suggested, if we embrace the view that the ancient civilizations first progressed through the totem stage, then practiced the worship of animals and plants, and finally arrived at the religion of anthropological gods, then many things are explained, for example, that there is an apparently endless variety of plants and animals in the pantheon of tribal gods (regardless of their intrinsic characteristics); that the names of the tribes are taken from animal and plant species (while members of the tribes consider themselves to be of the same species); that in Egypt, Greece, India, and other places there are large numbers of such gods (as many as there were distinct stocks in the population); that an animal god preeminent in one society is often subordinate in another (gods follow the fortunes of the tribes); that so many ancient legends describe strange relationships between animals and the anthropomorphic gods; and so on. Since “it is so simple and comprehensive,” McLennan concluded,

and has a basis of facts for its foundation in existing Totem-races; since we have reason to believe that the mental condition of these races and the beliefs they entertain have been at some time the mental condition and beliefs of all the advanced races; and since the only *assumption* we make is that all races have been progressive, which in other matters they undoubtedly have been, it seems impossible to resist the conclusion that our hypothesis is a sound one—that the ancient nations came through the Totem stage.<sup>88</sup>

Its simplicity and comprehensiveness notwithstanding, McLennan’s theory of totemism made little immediate impression on the Victorian anthropological community. Lubbock, as we have seen, was familiar with some of the same sources used by McLennan (Grey, Schoolcraft, Fergusson, and others) and had included a totemic stage in the evolutionary theory of religion he had conceived as part of his reply to Whately and Argyll. Despite its detailed critique of McLennan’s theories of female infanticide, exogamy, and bride capture, however, Lubbock’s *Origin of Civilization* (1870) contained no discussion of McLennan’s theory of totemism. This was not because religion was ignored. On the contrary, Lubbock now expanded his



evolutionary theory of religion, insisting that despite their apparent variety, the religions of savages “agree in their general characteristics” and are “but phases of one sequence, having the same origin, and passing through similar, if not identical stages.” They remain difficult to understand, of course, because traces of lower beliefs survive into higher evolutionary stages. But if we consider whether the “estimate in which the Deity is held” is lower or higher, we quickly see that the sequence is atheism, fetishism, totemism, shamanism, idolatry, supernaturalism, and finally the highest stage in which religion becomes associated with morality. So the religion of savages is not just different from, but the opposite of, our own: “their deities are evil, not good; they may be forced into compliance with the wishes of man; they require bloody, and rejoice in human, sacrifices; they are mortal, not immortal; a part, not the author, of nature; they are to be approached by dances rather than by prayers; and often approve what we call vice, rather than what we esteem as virtue.”<sup>89</sup>

Lubbock’s evolutionary theory was thus a celebration of the triumph of the religion and morality of civilized Europeans over the atheism and fetishism of illiterate savages. Recalling that Lubbock was the son of a distinguished mathematician and astronomer and had known Darwin from the time he was a child, we should not be surprised that the same theory was both a celebration of modern science and an attempt to resolve its apparent conflict with religion. For at every step in the evolutionary process, Lubbock insisted, a greater acquaintance with the laws of nature had enlarged the mind of man and brought him to ever-higher conceptions of God. Though many people fear that science is hostile to religious *truth*, Lubbock reassured his readers, science opposes only religious *error*: “so far from Science being opposed to Religion, true religion is, without Science, impossible; and if we consider the various aspects of Christianity as understood by different nations, we can hardly fail to perceive that the dignity, and therefore the truth, of their religious beliefs is in direct relation to their knowledge of Science and of the great physical laws by which our universe is governed.”<sup>90</sup>

On the principle that the traces of lower beliefs survive into higher evolutionary stages, Lubbock emphasized that the emergence of totemism did not imply the abandonment of fetishism—“from which indeed no race of men has yet entirely freed itself”—but rather its enlargement to include the belief in beings of a higher, less material nature that cannot be controlled through witchcraft. Totemic deities are not yet creators and, though superhuman, are not yet supernatural, and since religion and morality had not yet been conjoined, totemic gods do not reward virtue and punish vice. Above all, where the fetish is an *individual*, totemism is a deification of

classes: "The negro who has, let us say, an ear of maize as a Fetish, values that particular ear, more or less as the case may be, but has no feeling for maize as a species. On the contrary, the Redskin who regards the bear, or the wolf, as his Totem, feels that he is in intimate, though mysterious, association with the whole species." And though indebted to Fergusson's *Tree and Animal Worship* (1868), Lubbock rejected Fergusson's discovery of the origin of totemism in the "intrinsic qualities" of the serpent, as well as his "diffusionist" account of its subsequent evolution. Instead, on the analogy of Müller's "disease of language," Lubbock found the origin of totemism in the poverty of the language of savages, which led them to name their families after various animals and eventually to regard such animals with respect and then awe; far from being traced to any common geographic origin, totemism "sprang up spontaneously in many places, and at very different times."<sup>91</sup>

As we have seen, McLennan wrote "The Worship of Animals and Plants" (1869–70) during the earliest stage of his acquaintance with Tylor, and it included a reply to Tylor's essay "On Traces of the Early Mental Condition of Man" (1867). Not surprisingly, Tylor's monumental *Primitive Culture* (2 vols., 1871) returned to the discussion of totemism as part of its larger treatment of primitive religious beliefs. Tylor began with the rejection of Lubbock's theory of primitive atheism on grounds that were both conceptual and empirical: that is, conceptual because an excessively restrictive a definition of "religion" would automatically (and therefore misleadingly) exclude many primitive tribes from having a religion at all; and empirical because no primitive tribe without something resembling a (more broadly defined) "religion" had ever been observed. Lubbock's argument thus appeared to Tylor as an attempt to substitute speculation for the absence of evidence, and instead, Tylor proposed a minimal definition of religion as "the belief in spiritual beings," something that "appears among all low races with whom we have attained to thoroughly intimate acquaintance"—in other words, the system of beliefs that he had earlier characterized as "animism."<sup>92</sup>

How were these beliefs to be explained? At a low level of culture, Tylor began, thinking people were impressed with two problems: first, the difference between a dead body and one that is merely sleeping; and second, the human shapes that appear in people's dreams and visions. Considering these two problems, the "ancient savage philosophers" drew the obvious inference that each person possesses both a "life" and a "phantom," each of which has a close relationship to the person's body: the "life" enables the body to feel, think, and act, while the "phantom" is the body's image or "second self." Yet both are also separable from the body: the life is able to leave the body in death, while the phantom can appear to people at a

distance from the body. Not surprisingly, the savage soon concluded that these two things (the life and the phantom) were simply different manifestations of one and the same “soul.” This process of reasoning, Tylor argued, explains the various features of the animistic system of beliefs held by savage peoples: for example, the belief in a soul that is responsible for life, consciousness, and thought in the person it animates; the belief that the soul is capable of leaving the body, moving about in space, and appearing to other people in dreams or visions; the belief that the soul continues to exist and appear to others after the death of the body that it once possessed; the belief that, thus liberated, the soul can enter, possess, and act within the bodies of other people, animals, plants, or otherwise inanimate things; and so on. This animistic system of beliefs, Tylor insisted, is extremely general among savage peoples, and as Lubbock had just one year earlier, Tylor explained this generality not as the result of diffusion but rather as “answering in the most forcible way to the plain evidence of men’s senses, as interpreted by a fairly consistent and rational primitive philosophy”—a fact that also explains its survival through ancient and medieval philosophy and into modern civilization.<sup>93</sup>

Tylor’s detailed discussion of this “primitive philosophy” eventually led him to discuss the worship of plants and animals, beginning with that “remarkable document of mythic cosmogony”: Sanchuniathon’s Phoenician history. According to Sanchuniathon (as we have seen) the earliest men “consecrated the plants of the earth, and judged them gods, and worshipped the things upon which they themselves lived and their posterity, and all before them, and (to these) they made libations and sacrifices.”<sup>94</sup> Such sacred plants, Tylor admitted, are conceived in various ways, for example, as having a spirit embodied in or attached to it; as the spirit’s shelter or favorite haunt; as a scaffold or altar where offerings might be made to a spirit; as the mere symbol for some other deity; and so on. But all these conceptions, he then insisted, are simply variations on the basic principles of animistic theology. Similarly, the worship of animals can be understood as the natural outcome of this primitive philosophy, first, because the animals themselves are conceived as possessing souls that survive the death of their bodies; and second, because animals frequently seem to serve as the repositories for the souls of dead ancestors.<sup>95</sup>

The 1873 edition of *Primitive Culture* also provided a cautious review of the speculations about totemism. “It is well known,” Tylor wrote, citing Long’s *Voyages and Travels* (1791), “that numerous tribes of mankind connect themselves with, call themselves by the name of, and even derived their mythic pedigree from, some animal, plant, or thing, but most often an animal.” The origin of this belief, Tylor added, belongs to mythology,

while the forms of social organization connected with it concerns the nature of primitive law and custom. Totemism “only comes within the province of religion,” he thus emphasized, “so far as the clan-animals, etc., are the subjects of religious observance, or are actually treated as patron-deities.” But as McLennan’s “remarkable investigation” had pointed out, both Long’s Algonquins and Grey’s Australians seemed to meet this condition. “These facts,” Tylor concluded, “indicate not mere accidental peculiarities, but a widespread common principle acting among mankind in the lower culture.”<sup>96</sup>

So Tylor at least took McLennan seriously, suggesting that we ask about the origin of totemism. And in 1873, the most serious attempt to explain totemism had been Lubbock’s appeal to the poverty of savage language. Tylor recognized the debt that Lubbock’s theory owed to Müller’s philological method, but though ancient traditions of human heroes whose names were “Sun” or “Moon” might explain solar and lunar nature myths, Tylor cautioned, “when we find men paying distinct and direct reverence to the lion, the bear, or the crocodile as mighty superhuman beings, or adoring other beasts, birds, or reptiles as incarnations of spiritual deities, we can hardly supersede such well-defined developments of animistic religion, by seeking their origin in personal names of deceased ancestors, who chanced to be called Lion, Bear, or Crocodile.”<sup>97</sup> In fact, despite his familiarity with McLennan and his deep and abiding interest in primitive religion, Tylor wrote very little about totemism until near the end of the century. “The cause of my holding aloof from published discussions of the subject,” Tylor then said, “has been a sense of its really bewildering complexity, coupled with the expectation that further research among the races of the lower culture would clear its outlines.”<sup>98</sup> And when Tylor did become involved (as we shall see below), it was as a skeptic, uttering admonitions and caveats that would later seem prophetic.

In fact, as Claude Lévi-Strauss would point out almost a century later, McLennan had arrived at his “totemic hypothesis” only as an extension of his earlier, quite independent assertions of the primitive universality of exogamy and female kinship,<sup>99</sup> and the rationalist McLennan remained less interested in the religious aspect of totemism than in its possible connection to types of social organization. After 1870, therefore, he spent most of his remaining career expanding and refining the arguments of *Primitive Marriage* (1865)—on matriarchy and patriarchy, exogamy and endogamy, the levirate and polyandry, and so on—in opposition to writers including Maine, Morgan, Lubbock, and Herbert Spencer.<sup>100</sup> Inversely, writers whose interest in religion was deep and long lasting (e.g., Lubbock and Tylor) found little to inspire them in McLennan’s account of totemism. At least twenty years

would pass, therefore, before the religious import of totemism would be asserted and vigorously defended by McLennan's considerably more devout friend and fellow Scot, William Robertson Smith.

This initial indifference notwithstanding, however, the significance of McLennan's achievement should not be underestimated. Inspired by the archaeological revolution, he had found a way to redescribe the institutions of primitive societies in a way that did justice to the increasingly obvious diversity of human beings, the dominance among "savages" of custom and habit, and the apparent irrationality of their motives and purposes—even while dismissing with the earlier, more biblical vocabulary of degenerationists like Whately and Argyll. Civilized Europeans and primitive savages could still be seen as utterly different, of course, but not because God had favored some over others. On the contrary, they were different because they reflected different stages of the same evolutionary process, which itself might be better understood through the careful, scientific observation of the beliefs and practices of presently existing savage tribes and their comparison with apparently similar beliefs and practices in later, more advanced societies. McLennan was a rationalist and his interest in religion itself always residual, so that his account of totemism was but an extension of his more fundamental interest in questions of about the social organization of primitive societies. But for the next half century, social evolutionary theory and totemism would be joined at the hip, for no serious account of the meaning and origin of the latter could be undertaken without deploying the full vocabulary of the former. Robertson Smith, however, was not a rationalist in any sense, and so it was he who, still within a social evolutionary context, fully articulated the religious aspect of totemism—opening the door through which Frazer, Durkheim, and Freud moved so quickly.

## 2

### TOTEMISM AS SACRAMENT



**W**ILLIAM ROBERTSON Smith cuts an ambiguous figure in the history of religious ideas. More than any other writer, it was Smith who stimulated the provocative theories of religion advanced by Frazer, Durkheim, and Freud, but Smith himself was not an original scholar and was rather described as “clever at presenting other men’s theories”<sup>1</sup>—albeit it within new and frequently hostile contexts. An important contributor to two of the most serious challenges to Christian orthodoxy of the last century (the “Higher Criticism” of the Bible and the comparative study of religion), Smith became the victim of the last successful heresy trial in Great Britain, but he was also a devout, if slightly heterodox believer. And ironically, if the views on Biblical criticism for which Smith was attacked are now widely regarded as true, the views on totemism and sacrifice for which he would be praised are now largely dismissed as false.

#### SMITH’S EARLY LIFE

ROBERTSON SMITH was born in Aberdeenshire, Scotland, in 1846. His father was the headmaster of a prosperous school until the “Great Disruption” of 1843, when a dispute over ecclesiastical governance led the Evangelical Party, including Smith and more than a third of the ministry of the Established Church, to secede and form the Free Church of Scotland. Called to

the ministry, Smith supplemented his meager stipend by tutoring students at the manse, including his extremely precocious son. Despite recurrent illness, William flourished in this environment, learning the Hebrew alphabet before he was six, receiving a Vulgate on his twelfth birthday, and particularly excelling in the Bible classes held at the manse each Sunday afternoon. "Although their studies were arranged to suit the requirements of the entrance examination at the University of Aberdeen," Smith's father recalled, "there was no cramming. No cribs were allowed. There was no such thing in the house, and so it came to pass that a passage from a Latin or Greek author which they had never seen had no special terrors for them, and presented only difficulties such as they had already encountered and often surmounted."<sup>2</sup>

Entering the University in 1861, Smith almost immediately encountered Alexander Bain, who had been appointed to the chair of rhetoric and logic just one year earlier. An associationist in psychology and utilitarian in ethics whose friends included Darwin, Mill, and Comte, Bain was considered an atheist by members of the Free Church, and William was warned against the dangers of his ideas. Their philosophical differences notwithstanding, however, William grew to appreciate Bain, who later spoke of Smith as his most brilliant student.<sup>3</sup> And an extraordinary student he was, in science and mathematics as well philosophy and classical languages. By late 1865, he had begun studying theology, German, and Hebrew in preparation for an ecclesiastical career. Although his studies were frequently interrupted by illness, he secured a variety of academic prizes, eventually graduating first in his class in both classics and mathematics. William then entered New College, Edinburgh, a seminary established by the Free Church just one year after the Disruption, where his most important association was with A. B. Davidson, the professor of Hebrew language and Old Testament exegesis.

In the early 1850s, Davidson had begun a series of visits to Göttingen, where he studied with the Old Testament scholar Heinrich Ewald and was thus exposed to the latest developments in biblical criticism. Many of these were soon reflected in Davidson's *Commentary Critical and Exegetical on the Book of Job* (1862), which would later be described as "the first really scientific commentary on the Old Testament in the English language," and its author as "the one scientific Hebraist of the first rank in Great Britain."<sup>4</sup> Despite "heresy-hunting men" who "were not slow to find such new and unsound views as to lead them to champion another and safer man,"<sup>5</sup> Davidson was soon elected to the General Assembly of the Free Church and later joined the prestigious Committee for the Revision of the Authorized Version of the Bible. Davidson and Smith forged an immediate bond, the former describing Smith as "far ahead of any other student he ever had in

any of his classes,” and the latter calling Davidson “a man of great ability.” When Smith planned a trip to Germany during the summer of 1867, he initially chose Tübingen, in part because Davidson would spend his vacation there, and when Davidson went to Italy instead, Smith changed his plans.

No less than Davidson, Smith would be deeply influenced by German theology and biblical criticism, although initially, this was delayed by a provincial diffidence. When Davidson decided to go to Italy, for example, Smith’s father urged him to go to Heidelberg, where he might hear the great German theologian Richard Rothe (1799–1867). But Rothe was a rationalist (something for which Smith felt himself ill-prepared) so he went instead to Bonn. But even in Bonn he found the religious atmosphere destabilizing, for there were more Catholics than Protestants, and there was more disagreement on matters of doctrine among the Protestants themselves. To Smith, the apathy with which religious debates were carried out implied indifference, and his letters to his father reflect his concerted effort to distinguish between pure infidels (David Friedrich Strauss), rationalists (Daniel Schenkel, Rothe), members of the *Vermittlungsschule* (Johann Peter Lange, Adolf Kamphausen), and strict Lutherans (Ernst Wilhelm Hengstenberg). Smith was also distressed by the “low moral tone” of Goethe’s novels, for which the Germans expressed so much enthusiasm, and as a strict Sabbatarian, he complained of the difficulty he experienced declining invitations for walks with other students and professors on Sunday afternoons.<sup>6</sup> Smith was a quick study, however, and embraced some of the newer theological and critical ideas. Returning from Germany in the fall, his essays presented before the New College Theological Society hinted at the increasing sophistication of his religious ideas.

To understand these essays, it is useful to consider the more traditional Christian notion of what is revealed in a revelation. For centuries, both in the Roman Catholic Church and the more conservative branches of Protestantism, the view has been that what is revealed is a body of religious “truths” capable of being expressed in propositions. According to this view, a knowledge of these truths is necessary for our salvation, and God has thus communicated them to us. The mode of communication is of course supernatural, by means that lie beyond the ordinary laws of nature. This conception of revelation has had significant consequences for how we conceive of faith (a response to revelation), the nature of the Bible and its inspiration (a medium of revelation), and Christian theology (thought that proceeds on the basis of revelation). Where revelation was conceived as the divine disclosure of religious truths, for example, faith was quite naturally understood as the obedient believing of these truths, the Bible as the book in which they’d been written down and thus made accessible to us, and



theology as the manipulation of these propositions into a systematic body of Christian doctrine.

This “propositional” theory of revelation emerged soon after the New Testament period, reached its fullest expression in scholasticism, was abandoned by the Reformers (especially Luther) in the sixteenth century, and was reestablished in the Protestant scholasticism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. By the nineteenth century, however, this theory was increasingly challenged by an alternative “antipropositional” or “*Heilsgeschichtliche*” conception that sometimes acknowledged a debt to Luther but that increasingly gathered strength from the development of grammatical exegesis and biblical criticism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This “nonpropositional” view argued that revelation consists not in the promulgation of divinely authored truths but in the performance of God’s self-revealing acts within human history. The locus of revelation was thus not *propositions* but *events*, and what was revealed was not truths *about* God but God *himself*, through his actions toward human beings. Within this nonpropositional conception, God’s actions were not construed as “miracles” in the conventional sense—as events that override the laws of nature, elude all natural explanation, and thus compel a religious response—but rather as publicly observable and, understood *nonreligiously*, as a part of the secular world history that might be described from the perspective of politics, economics, psychology, and sociology. This conception is important, by the way, for it would open a space for the powerfully sociological conception of ancient Semitic religion that Durkheim would find in Robertson Smith’s later works. But these same events might be construed *religiously*, understood “from the inside” by the prophets and apostles in the light of a profound and consistent ethical monotheism as a part of the history of salvation (*Heilsgeschichte*) that began with the nation of Israel and ended with the birth of the Christian community as a response to Jesus. Such a religious understanding, of course, depended heavily on faith not as “the obedient believing of divinely-disclosed truths” but as the human completion of the revelatory event itself, the judgment and appreciation that God was indeed at work in a certain situation.<sup>7</sup>

Not surprisingly, this nonpropositional conception also implied a different way of reading the Bible. Rather than a collection of divine truths, here the Bible was seen as the historical record of those events through which God had revealed Himself to prophets and apostles, and rather than written at the dictation of the Holy Spirit, it was understood as the composition of many different writers over a period of a thousand years, distinguished from secular records of the same period primarily by the single but crucial fact that it was written from the standpoint of faith. Finally, according to the

nonpropositional view, there simply *are no* divinely authoritative theological propositions or doctrines. Religious doctrines represented the human (and thus quite fallible) attempt to understand the religious significance of the revelatory events described in Scripture. Such theologies and doctrines arose within a community of faith that lived, for better or worse, on what it believed to be an experience of divine revelation. For such communities, the appropriate form of apologetic was one that defended the right of the believer, given the distinctive religious experience out of which his faith arose, to trust that experience and live his life accordingly.<sup>8</sup>

Written shortly after his return from Germany, Smith's earliest theological essays attacked the traditional, propositional conception of revelation while patiently introducing his Free Church contemporaries to the more recent, nonpropositional alternative. "On Prophecy and Personality" (January 1868), for example, dismissed the "mere mechanical theory" whereby God revealed to the prophet "a ready-made thought or a complete visionary picture of a purely objective kind," arguing on Kantian grounds that whatever appears to the prophet as *objective* "is really a product of personal activity acting on certain *subjective* elements." The theophany of God to Moses on Sinai notwithstanding, Smith argued that most revelations were presented *from within*, without annihilating the prophet's self-consciousness and continuous with his earlier thoughts. The "strong productiveness" of the prophet's own mind (and thus the moral elements of his own social and historical context) was for Smith a necessary factor in the prophetic vision.<sup>9</sup> The propositional view of miracles, Smith argued in "Christianity and the Supernatural" (January 1869), granted them only a secondary value, as the criterion whereby the divine authority behind revelation was recognized. But such a conception, Smith added, had caused Christianity far more trouble than it was worth, for the effort to use miracles as a proof of divine authority had led many to conclude that the book could not be trustworthy at all. Instead, Smith encouraged his audience to consider miracles not as isolated events but as interwoven in the ongoing history of redemption itself. This alters the way we conceive of the Bible, which is not *itself* revelation but is rather the *record* of those historical facts in which God revealed *Himself* (not abstract truths or doctrines) to man. In sum, Smith was prepared to grant the historical inaccuracy of the Bible as a record as long as its "superior personality" was acknowledged.<sup>10</sup>

This second essay in particular reflected the influence of Rothe (the German rationalist whom Smith had been reluctant to visit at Heidelberg in 1867), provoking charges of "habitual contempt of Scripture" from his fellow students.<sup>11</sup> But Smith's theological views were about to take another, still more liberal turn, as he spent the period between late April and mid-August

1869 in Göttingen, where he was introduced to the great German theologian Albrecht Ritschl. Descending from a long line of “academically interested religious professionals,” Ritschl embraced his family’s commitment to the more liberal wing of the Lutheran Church. After studying at Bonn and Halle, he was increasingly drawn to followers of the Tübingen School, who were reconstructing the origins of Christianity and the early history of the Church on Hegelian principles. Ritschl read the works of Ferdinand Christian Baur (1792–1860), visited Tübingen itself in the summer of 1845, and soon became the first northern German member of the school. His habilitation dissertation, published as *Das Evangelium Marcions und das kanonische Evangelium des Lukes* (1846), argued that the apocryphal gospel of Marcion was actually the source for the Gospel of Luke. The argument fit perfectly with Baur’s contention that Christianity is a logical historical development rather than a dogma revealed once and for all, and Baur both approved and defended the thesis, making Ritschl the bright young star of the Tübingen School.

Ritschl himself, however, had already begun to question Baur’s tendency to sacrifice the authenticity of biblical documents, the primacy of revelation, and the sheer objective complexity of historical events to his abstract, dialectical conception of history.<sup>12</sup> From stardom, therefore, he rapidly fell into the kind of apostasy brilliantly set out in *Die christliche Lehre von der Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung* (3 vols., 1870–74), which became the single most important text in the development of Smith’s theological (and sociological) ideas. For Ritschl, Luther was the most significant figure since Christ, not because he modernized Christianity but because he restored to it an understanding of the original Christian consciousness. Like Schleiermacher, therefore, Ritschl believed that a rational validation of Christian truth was impossible and also that the starting point of all Christian theology lay in personal experience. But Schleiermacher’s emphasis on emotional disposition as the foundation of religion seemed to Ritschl perilously subjectivist, leaving the believer with no assurance that he was in contact with a reality above and beyond himself. The corrective was to begin not with “religious consciousness” as such but rather with *history*—in short, with the specific nature of Christian experience as described in the Gospels. And the nature of this experience was not Schleiermacher’s “feeling of absolute dependence” but rather a sense of freedom based not on the emotions but on our conative (i.e., willful, effortful) faculties. The common element in all religions, Ritschl insisted, is essentially *ethical* and *pragmatic*, the mastery of nature, both within and beyond ourselves. The special power of religion is thus to deliver us from both the passions of our own nature and the determinism of our physical environment. As physical beings, of course, we are part of a natural order, dependent on it, subject to it, and constrained by

it, but as spiritual beings, we are moved to free ourselves, transcending our physical nature and circumstances and achieving independence from them. Ritschl's conception here is unmistakably Kantian, of course, but with an important reservation. For like Robertson Smith as well as Durkheim after him, Ritschl elevated the moral authority of the community over that of the autonomous individual reason.

This conception of religious self-transcendence was closely related to Ritschl's notion of value judgments. In his *Mikrokosmos* (3 vols., 1856–64), the German philosopher Rudolf Hermann Lotze had proposed a modification of Kant's theory of knowledge by distinguishing between two different ways in which the mind receives sensations from the phenomenal world. In *scientific or theoretical* judgments, the mind judges sensations according to their causal relations in a mechanical system of nature. But in *value* judgments, the mind judges sensations according to the feelings of pleasure or pain they produce. To Lotze's distinction, Ritschl added another, between *concomitant* value judgments, where the mind experiences pleasure or pain from mere observation and cognition, and *independent* value judgments, where the perception of moral ends or obstacles excites *moral* experiences of pleasure or pain. Not surprisingly, religious knowledge is the result of these independent value judgments, which define our attitude toward the world. Either we enjoy our hegemony over nature as promised by God, or we suffer at the perception that we have been abandoned, that God failed to assist us in our effort to transcend ourselves and our circumstances.<sup>13</sup>

While Ritschl agreed with Kant that we cannot know things in themselves, he also agreed with Lotze that we can know things through their effects upon us. To know the person of Christ, therefore, we should begin where Luther began in his *Larger Catechism*: not with the abstract doctrines of Nicaea, Constantinople, or Chalcedon but with Christ's work and its value in our lives. To understand the Christian conceptions of the forgiveness of sins, justification and reconciliation, and so on, it is insufficient to describe what Jesus *said* about these matters. For even if His words seem clear, their significance becomes intelligible "only when we see how they are reflected in the consciousness of those who believe in Him." This meant that Ritschl placed enormous emphasis not simply on revelation itself but on how revelation was received, and it also meant that, for Ritschl, Christian theology was not grounded in the individual consciousness but rather in the concrete events of history as experienced by the early Christian community. "All religions," Ritschl stated bluntly, "are social." They are always the possession of a community rather than an individual.<sup>14</sup> Like Durkheim, therefore, Ritschl admired the Roman Church for its preservation of this truth, even as he disdained the more individualist, subjectivist elements of Protestantism.

The need to reconstruct the experience of this early Christian community justified Ritschl's insistence on the most rigorous historical criticism, for this alone could rescue Christian theology from both rationalist philosophical speculation and emotional, pietistic subjectivity. And as he reconstructed the consciousness of early Christianity, Ritschl was led to his distinctive conception of the relation between religion and ethics. Moral goodness, he insisted, was something that could be achieved only within such a community, for it alone afforded the context within which the individual might realize his destiny and lead an ethically self-conscious life. The moral actions that we perform thus represent the human counterpart of redemption, just as the community required for their performance is the terrestrial counterpart of the Kingdom of God. The realization of this Kingdom of God is our highest good, the religious goal of all ethical action. This is why all true religion promotes this-worldly activity, which helps us to transcend both external nature and ourselves. Ritschl thus resented the criticism that, like Kant, he had made religion subordinate to ethics. In fact, he felt that he had done just the opposite, making the understanding of religious consciousness the necessary condition for moral and spiritual fulfillment.<sup>15</sup>

If this process of "reproducing" the consciousness of the early Christian community is essential to understanding of the Christian religion, we must also compare Christianity with other religions. For the "peculiar nature of Christianity," Ritschl argued, "can be ascertained only by calling the general history of religion to our aid." This was the theological door through which Smith's comparative study of Semitic religion would make its highly controversial entrance. Criticizing Schleiermacher for granting insufficient attention to the history of religion, for example, Ritschl insisted that the ancient Hebrew conception of God was intimately connected to the "final end" of the Kingdom of God, as well as the means to this end (the redemptive purification from sin). But in the Old Testament, Ritschl added, the end was conceived under the limitation of the idea of a national commonwealth, while the Hebrews' understanding of the means was accompanied by hopes of political independence and material prosperity. In Christianity, by contrast, the Kingdom of God is understood as the common end of God and the elect community, "in such a way that it rises above the natural limits of nationality and becomes the moral society of nations. In this respect," Ritschl emphasized, "Christianity shows itself to be the perfect moral religion."<sup>16</sup>

Arriving in Göttingen just months before the first volume of *Die christliche Lehre* appeared, Smith was introduced to these ideas through Ritschl's lectures, of which he wrote to his father that he had "never heard anything so interesting on a theological subject . . . [Ritschl] has evidently such thorough clearness in his own view, and such complete acquaintance with the

views of others, as to make his lectures exceedingly instructive.”<sup>17</sup> Smith returned from Göttingen in late August and on 8 November 1869, presented his presidential address to the New College Theological Society. Modern theology, Smith insisted, requires a historical understanding of “the general principles of God’s historical dealings with man.” The subjective consciousness of union with God “is absolutely the first thing in true Christianity, and it is from this consciousness outwards that the Christian develops for himself a true notion of God and a true notion of man.” This has been shown, Smith added, by some recent German theologians who, by returning to Luther, had become “the real restorers of a believing theology.”<sup>18</sup>

By this time, Smith had also made some important acquaintances in Edinburgh and begun to acquire what his biographers called “a recognised position in general society.” On 29 October for example, he wrote to his father that he had dined the previous day with several people including an advocate named J. F. McLennan: “There is a new talking club to be set up, of which Tait and these two are to be members, as likewise Sir A. Grant, Campbell Shairp, and Tulloch of St. Andrews, and a whole circle of literary and scientific men in or near Edinburgh, the object being to have one man at least well up in every conceivable subject.”<sup>19</sup> Such was the founding of the Edinburgh Evening Club, the community of Scottish intellectuals within which Smith and McLennan, whose essay “The Worship of Animals and Plants” had just then begun to appear in *The Fortnightly Review*, quickly became intimate friends. Unexpectedly, however, Smith soon found himself back in Aberdeen.

In late September 1869, the chair of Hebrew and Old Testament exegesis at the Free Church College of Aberdeen had unexpectedly become open. Such appointments were in the hands of the General Assembly, and ordinarily went to older scholars with considerable experience in a pastoral charge. But Davidson immediately gave Smith the opportunity to teach the preparatory Hebrew class at Edinburgh, worked quietly through the General Assembly on his behalf, and finally provided a powerful letter in support, emphasizing Smith’s uncommon intellectual maturity and independence of mind, his familiarity with the Hebrew language, and his knowledge of the latest developments in Continental theology and biblical criticism. Smith’s first public contribution to the theology of the Old Testament, “The Question of Prophecy in the Critical Schools of the Continent,” was written primarily to commend its author to the favorable notice of the electors; its acceptance for publication in the *British Quarterly Review* (April 1870) was due in part to the influence of McLennan.<sup>20</sup> The essay again stressed the Ritschlian reconstruction of the consciousness of the early religious community, suggesting, for example, that Old Testament prophecy testifies better than any other

documentary source to “the inner life of the noblest and truest Israelites, representing at once the purest religious conceptions and the deepest national feelings that these ages could show.”<sup>21</sup>

Despite the opposition of most of the Aberdeen professors, Smith was licensed as a probationer in early May 1870, elected to the chair on 25 May, and ordained as a minister in the Free Church of Scotland on 2 November (just one day before the first class of the semester). His inaugural address, “What History Teaches Us to Seek in the Bible,” delivered on 7 November 1870, reiterated many of the views already expressed in his earlier theological essays but also set these within the deeper context of Lutheran and Calvinist orthodoxy and contrasted them sharply with those of the Roman Catholic Church. The propositional view of revelation, for example, was traced to the ahistorical, allegorical notion of Scripture held by the postapostolic, pre-Reformation Church. Reading mainly with a view to practical edification and exhortation, these writers had approached the Old Testament with the notion that Christian truth was “everywhere the same” and that a passage was “understood” once they could find within it a meaning that bore on Christian life. “What these passages meant to the early Hebrews, or why such truths are embodied in obscure forms,” Smith complained, “were of no special concern to these exegetes; for these truths were identical to the spiritual truths of the New Testament.” But such a view is intelligible, he continued, “only on the supposition that the essence of Christianity lies in a series of formulae expressing eternal abstract truths or unchanging principles of morality” —in short, on a propositional conception of revelation. With the Reformation, however, Luther found the strength “to wield the Bible as it had never been wielded before.” By contrast with its allegorical predecessor, the Reformation hermeneutic embraced the view that we must seek in the Bible not “a body of abstract religious truth,” but “the living, personal history of God’s gracious dealings with men from age to age.” To understand these personal dealings of God with human beings, we must follow the advice of Luther’s preface to Isaiah—to “study the contemporary history, and learn how things stood in the land; how men’s minds were bent, what designs of war or peace than had in hand and, above all, their attitude to God, the prophet and religion.”<sup>22</sup>

After assuming his chair, Smith carried on a “copious and intimate” correspondence with Ritschl on theological issues, visiting Göttingen once again during the summer of 1872. Soon he had also joined Davidson on the Committee for the Revision of the Authorized Version of the Bible, revised the proofs of Davidson’s *Introductory Hebrew Grammar* (1874), and begun adding Arabic to his Hebrew and expanding his Old Testament scholarship into the new field of comparative religion. He also wrote letters to his friend

McLennan, including one on the possibility of totem warfare in Coptos and Tentyra.<sup>23</sup> The most fateful of Smith's activities during these years, however, was his involvement with the *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

### THE ABERDEEN HERESY

THE EDITOR of the ninth edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (1875–89) was T. Spencer Baynes, a Shakespeare scholar from Somerset who had been a Baptist minister, an assistant to Sir William Hamilton at Edinburgh, and, by 1875, Professor of logic, metaphysics, and English literature at St. Andrews. In his introduction to the first volume he emphasized that there had been significant advances in science, philosophy, and religion since the eighth edition (1853–61) and that these should be dealt with in a scholarly, undogmatic manner in the new version. When the Biblical articles in the first volume (“Abraham” and “Adam”) disappointed him, Baynes welcomed a friend's suggestion that Smith be asked to write seven articles (“Angel,” “Apostle,” “Aramaic Language,” “Ark of the Covenant,” “Assidaeans,” “Baal,” and “Bible”) for volumes 2 and 3. It was the last, which appeared on 7 December 1875, that inspired the last successful heresy trial in Great Britain.

To understand the issues at stake in the trial, it's useful to have some sense of the development of biblical criticism, particularly as applied to the Pentateuch (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy), through the mid-nineteenth century. The tradition that Moses was the author of the Pentateuch derives from the fact that he is such a central figure within them. But the Pentateuch itself refers to Moses in the third person, and claims of Mosaic authorship extend only to specific portions. Early rabbinical sources had already noted that Moses did not write his own death account (Deut. 34:5–12), and the medieval Jewish scholar Ibn Ezra (d. 1167) puzzled over anachronisms that persist throughout the five books. But it was only in the eighteenth century that serious efforts were made to distinguish the component parts of the Pentateuch according to a theory of multiple sources. In 1711, H. B. Witter recognized parallel accounts of the Creation in Genesis, distinguishable by the different names given to God (Elohim and Yahweh). In 1753, the French physician Jean Astruc arrived independently at the same conclusion, postulating an “Elohim” and a “Yahweh” source from which the book of Genesis had been compiled, and in 1780, J. G. Eichhorn provided evidence of doublets, diversities of style, and characteristic words and phrases that further distinguished the two sources. By the early nineteenth century, this “documentary hypothesis” had been extended from Genesis alone to the entire Pentateuch. The



studies of Hermann Hupfeld showed that characteristics of three documents—a Yahweh document (eventually abbreviated “J” after the German spelling of Yahweh), an Elohim document, or “E,” and a second Elohim document characterized by priestly interests and thus called “P”—could be found in varying degrees in the books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, and he argued that a skilled redactor had combined these three documents into an organic whole. Deuteronomy was recognized as different from anything contained in Genesis through Numbers and was thus designated “D” (the fourth Pentateuchal source).

This rudimentary version of the documentary hypothesis lacked only a clear dating sequence for the four sources in order to assume the general outline by which it has been known ever since. The key element here was Deuteronomy. As early as 1805, W. M. L. de Wette had already concluded that Deuteronomy was the “book of law” discovered in the temple at Jerusalem in 621 BCE and then made the basis of the reforms of King Josiah (640–609 BCE), that it contained laws written long after Moses, and that it was itself a seventh-century document. Karl H. Graf and Julius Wellhausen pointed out that the Deuteronomist was familiar with J and E but not with P, suggesting that P was the most recent of the sources, while J and E were older than D. Similarly, J and E are oblivious to the Deuteronomic law of the one altar (Deut. 12), while P simply assumes it, thus reflecting a time by which the Deuteronomic legislation was already well established. Since J contained features slightly more primitive than E, the chronological order of the documents was shown to be: J (c. 850 BCE), E (c. 700 BCE), D (c. 650 BCE), and P (c. 500–450 BCE).

As he had made clear in his early theological essays, Smith was familiar with this literature, but those essays had been written for academic audiences, while his public preaching had been largely conventional and above reproach. With “Bible,” Smith’s biblical and theological views reached a much wider audience, still framed within a dispassionate, academic style that many of his newer readers found unsympathetic. In the original draft of the article, an introductory paragraph explained that Scripture might be approached from either a *theological* or a *literary-historical* perspective. Smith emphasized that these perspectives were not mutually exclusive but added that the Reformers had chosen to interpret the Bible by the same methods used in the interpretation of other books and that only “historical accident” had led to the association of this interpretation with seventeenth- and eighteenth-century rationalism. Smith thus grounded his critical methods in the theology of the Reformation, while simultaneously distancing himself from the current rationalism. Assuming that the same point had already been made in Baynes’s introduction, however, Smith deleted this paragraph from the final draft.<sup>24</sup>

“Bible” began by noting that the age of the Old Testament falls into two distinct periods: an initial stage of religious “productivity” that began with the foundation of theocracy in the work of Moses (thirteenth century BCE) and concluded only with the legal reforms of Ezra (near the end of the fifth century BCE), and a subsequent period of stagnation and conservative tradition. The first, productive period saw a continual struggle between the spiritual principles of Old Testament religion and two adversaries: polytheistic nature worship; and an unspiritual conception of Jehovah as a God whose interest in Israel was independent of moral considerations. Throughout this struggle, the spiritual faith was repeatedly compelled to demonstrate its strength through new religious developments that were powerfully enunciated by the great eighth- and seventh-century prophets, as well as God’s undeniable providence for His people. The scholarly study of this crucial role of the Hebrew prophets, Smith complained, had repeatedly been frustrated by “traditional prejudices.” The predictive element in prophecy, for example, had long received undeserved significance, distracting scholars from the context of the prophets’ own time and place; inversely, scholars had assumed that all the laws and most of the doctrines of Old Testament religion had existed from the earliest, Mosaic dispensation. The prophets were thus understood “partly as inspired teachers of old truths, partly as predicting future events, but not as leaders of a great development, in which the religious ordinances as well as the religious beliefs of the Old Covenant advanced from a relatively crude and imperfect to a relatively mature and adequate form.”

These prejudices had been overcome by the developments of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century biblical criticism. Grounding his chronology firmly on the documentary hypothesis, therefore, Smith provided an evolutionary account of the development of Old Testament religion, emphasizing that the Book of Exodus contemplates the worship of Jehovah on altars other than that of the central sanctuary and that these local sanctuaries, which exposed worship to heathenism and superstition, had been condemned by the eighth-century prophets. By the reign of Josiah, the principle of a single sanctuary was also supported by the written law book (Deuteronomy) found in the Temple at Jerusalem. But since the legislation of this book does not correspond with that of Exodus, it could hardly be Mosaic. During the period of prophetic inspiration, therefore, there was no finality with regard to the ritual *law* any more than with regard to religious *ideas and doctrines*. The religion of the prophets was thus “not a finished but a growing system, not finally embodied in authoritative documents, but propagated mainly by direct personal efforts.”

The struggle described earlier—between spiritual and unspiritual religion—reached a crisis when the prophetic predictions of a judgment on

the nation's sin were fulfilled in the fall of the kingdom of Judah to the Babylonians and the resulting Exile (586–536 BCE). The Hebrew nation was now quite literally extinct, and the unspiritual, merely political worship of Jehovah as the “god of the state” was impossible. Even after Cyrus the Great of Persia conquered Babylon in 539 BCE and permitted the Hebrews to return to Judah (536 BCE), the returning exiles had no political future. Faith in Jehovah thus became possible only on moral and spiritual grounds, inseparable from the religious principles and Messianic hopes of the prophets, and this religious vocation was in turn embodied in the legal and political reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah (late fifth century BCE). After this reformation, however, the spiritual religion of the Hebrews lapsed into the second, stationary period of Old Testament history described earlier. The long-decadent spirit of prophecy expired with Malachi, and the Pentateuch (the law book brought to Jerusalem by Ezra) became the rule of the theocracy. The religious ordinances of Israel thus ceased their development, and a first step toward the replacement of the “living guidance of the prophetic voice” with an authoritative collection of Scriptures had been taken.<sup>25</sup>

“Bible” contained other arguments that Free Church evangelicals would find objectionable, but these (particularly the dating of Deuteronomy) were the points that became central to the heresy trial and to Smith's eventual deposition. Initial reviews of the article in English publications were relatively favorable, but on 16 April 1876, the *Edinburgh Courant* published a review written by A. H. Charteris, professor of biblical criticism at the University of Edinburgh. In “Bible,” Charteris found simply a reproduction of the rationalist views of the Dutch theologian Abraham Kuenen, and he particularly objected to Smith's critique of the predictive element in Old Testament prophecy. This criticism was particularly embarrassing because Charteris was a member of the Established Church and its most widely respected evangelical, and the discomfort was compounded by a favorable review of “Bible” written by John Tulloch, a more liberal member of the Established Church who was anathema to most evangelicals of either church.<sup>26</sup> On 29 May, Smith was politely invited to write a letter “affirming his soundness in the faith and his regret at having caused uneasiness.” Predictably, Smith reacted with “the indignation of superior scholarship,” and for the next four years, the “Robertson Smith case” worked its way through a seemingly endless maze of committees, subcommittees, commissions, special commissions, libels, amended libels, replies to libels, reports, dissents from reports, and so on. By 15 January 1878, Smith had been suspended from his position and the “draft libel” had grown to almost 8,000 words, including charges that he had taught that the Pentateuch was not Mosaic; denied the historicity of Deuteronomy; described inspired writers as taking liberties and making errors; suggested

that the books of Job, Jonah, and Esther contained poetic inventions; denied the spiritual character of the Song of Songs; repudiated the comments of Jesus on the authorship of the Old Testament; treated prophecy as arising from spiritual insight and lacking the element of prediction; and dismissed the superhuman reality of angels as a popular assumption not essential to revelation. To each of these charges, Smith replied brilliantly, aided by the fact that the Westminster Confession, to which the Free Church was committed, is utterly silent on all of them. Finally, near one in the morning on 28 May 1880, the last charge against him having failed, Smith was called before the General Assembly, courteously admonished, asked to justify the confidence placed in him by the Free Church, and reinstated.<sup>27</sup> Smith had won.

Or had he? During the latter stages of his trial, Smith had judiciously declined invitations to write the *Encyclopedia Britannica* articles on “Isaiah” and “Israel,” confining his energies instead to the field of Semitic archaeology. Unfortunately, before making this decision, he had already written the articles “Haggai,” “Hebrew Language and Literature,” and “The Epistle to the Hebrews.” On 8 June 1880, the eleventh volume of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, including these three articles, appeared. Within a week, a detailed complaint against Smith had been brought before the Edinburgh Presbytery, insisting that he had spoken irreverently of Scripture, charged it with inaccuracy, dismissed the predictive element of prophecy, and made it impossible for readers to regard prophecy as divine in its origin.<sup>28</sup> The Commission of Assembly appointed a committee to examine the documents, including not only the *Encyclopedia* articles but also Smith’s essay on “Animal Worship and Animal Tribes Among the Arabs and in the Old Testament” (1880), which had just appeared in the *Journal of Philology* and affords a convenient bridge between Smith’s early biblical scholarship and his later views on totemism.

“Animal Worship” began by reminding his audience of McLennan’s conclusion, in “The Worship of Animals and Plants,” that “from the earliest times” and “in the most widely separated races,” animals and plants “were worshipped by tribes of men who were named after them and believed to be of their breed.” While this “may not perhaps prove to be so universally applicable as Mr. McLennan’s hypothesis assumes,” Smith argued, it remains extremely suggestive for the study of ancient religions and should be “taken into account and put to the test” wherever we find an ancient religion that acknowledges animal gods. More specifically, Smith was concerned with the current debate over the origin of Semitic religion—briefly, whether it was purely “astral” (referring only to the stars and planets) or whether it might not also include “telluric” elements (referring to the earth). The latest advocate of the astral theory was Wolf Wilhelm, Graf von Baudissin, whose *Studien*

zur *Semitischen Religions-Geschichte* (1876) had dismissed the connection between Semitic animal worship and totemic tribes by arguing that the animal forms or associations in Semitic religion were merely pictorial representations of astral phenomena. Smith acknowledged that animal gods were frequently identified with the stars and planets but denied that the animals thus worshipped were mere representations. Instead, citing McLennan's Peruvian examples, he insisted that precisely the reverse was the case—that “there was not any beast or bird upon the earth whose shape or image did not shine in the heavens”<sup>29</sup>—while simultaneously questioning whether all the Semitic animal gods (e.g., Beelzebub, Dagon, Nasr, and so on) were identified with planets or constellations even in the later stages of their worship. If the astral theory of Semitic animal gods is thus inconclusive with regard to the origin of these deities, Smith added, we must ask whether traces exist of a belief that the animal gods were progenitors of tribes that also bore their name—in other words, ask if the ancient Semites practiced totemism. For in that case, he concluded, “the theory that the animal forms are mere pictures of divine attributes must fall to the ground; for a tribe would not claim to be the offspring of an attribute, but of the god himself under his proper name.”<sup>30</sup>

Although McLennan's theory had been advanced almost without reference to the Semitic peoples, the possibility that early Semitic religion and social organization were linked in the way described by McLennan had occurred to Smith several years earlier, from his study of the Old Testament. The same source suggested that pre-Islamic Arabia (a more primitive, purely polytheistic society in which spiritual religion had not yet begun its struggle with ancestral heathenism) was the part of the Semitic world most likely to shed light on the matter. The Arabic sources available to Smith in Aberdeen were of course limited, he observed, but “even the scanty helps which I have at hand have yielded so many relevant facts, and throw so much light on the data contained in the Bible, that I venture to put forth a provisional argument, which I hope will be found to possess sufficient consistency to justify publication, and to invite the cooperation of scholars in further research.”<sup>31</sup> In some cases, for example, the tribe has the name of an animal, and Arab genealogies refer the origin of the tribe to an ancestor who had also had this name. In other cases, the tribe has the name of a god, but here again, the worshippers of the god consider themselves his descendants. Taken together, Smith argued, these facts point to “an earlier habit of religious thought,” in which the ideas of god, animal, and ancestor were all brought into some kind of intimate connection—precisely like that found in American and Australian totemism.

In McLennan's theory, of course, totemism was connected with female kinship, and this form of kinship was in turn connected to the practice of

polyandry and exogamy. Here again, Smith observed, the evidence suggests that the ancient Arabs might indeed have practiced totemism. The fact that the animal names given in Arab genealogies typically belonged to subtribes while the same animal name frequently belonged to subtribes of different groups, for example, is precisely what would happen where a tribe practiced exogamy and the totemic name was transmitted through the mother. Similarly, exogamy and polyandry are the natural consequence of female infanticide, a practice so much approved among the ancient Arabs that “an old proverb declares that the destruction of a female child is a virtuous action.” Again, McLennan had suggested that the symbol of bride capture in marriage is the “survival” of exogamy and marriage by actual capture, and the Bedouin marriage ceremony indeed includes such a symbol. And again, Smith pointed to survivals of Nair polyandry, in which kinship is traced solely through the mother, among the ancient Arabs; finally, their dubious historical accuracy notwithstanding, the older Arabic myths and legends contain abundant evidence of female kinship. “These facts,” Smith concluded, “appear sufficient to prove that Arabia did pass through a stage in which family relations and the marriage law satisfied the conditions of the totem system.”<sup>32</sup> From Arabia, Smith then turned to southern and eastern Canaan, where he discovered analogous institutions (totemic names, primitive promiscuity, female kinship); from there, he returned full circle, to the ancient Israelites, noting that “the practices condemned by the higher moral sense of the prophets were . . . remnants of old usage,” that “the early Hebrews had no scruple in intermarrying with the surrounding nations,” and that “the totem tribes of their neighbours . . . reappear in Israel.”<sup>33</sup>

For Smith, this question was not merely historical or anthropological but rather concerned “the great problem of the Old Testament religion” and thus the very foundation of his own religious faith. “It is a favorite speculation,” he explained, “that the Hebrews or the Semites in general have a natural capacity for spiritual religion.” They are frequently represented as “constitutionally monotheistic,” for example, or their worship is described as containing, from the start and quite independent of divine revelation, a “lofty character from which spiritual ideas were easily developed.” Smith’s rejection of this notion was both thorough and significant, for it would provide an important part of the foundation for his classic *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites* (1889). First, he observed, the notion that the ancient Hebrews were “constitutionally monotheistic” was rather clearly *not* the opinion of the prophets who, on the contrary, “always deal with their nation as one particularly inaccessible to spiritual truths and possessing no natural merit which could form the ground of its choice as the people of Jehovah.” For another, “the superstitions with which the spiritual religion

had to contend were not one whit less degrading than those of the most savage nations. And indeed the second commandment, the cardinal precept of spiritual worship, is explicitly directed against the very worship of the denizens of the air, earth, and water which we have been able to trace out. It does not appear," Smith concluded, "that Israel was, by its own wisdom, more fit than any other nation to rise above the lowest level of heathenism."<sup>34</sup>

The crucial phrase here, of course, was "by its own wisdom." For Smith was always convinced that the religion of the eighth- and seventh-century prophets was the product of God's authentic, irreducible self-revelation to mankind. By (almost literally) "fleshing out" the more materialistic religious context that preceded that self-revelation, however, Smith clearly felt that he was serving the greater glory of God; for this purpose, his speculation about an early, totemic stage of Semitic religion was a powerful tool. By 17 June he had written to his sister, expressing the hope that his "totem paper" had reached McLennan, adding that "it has been very well received by the leading Arabic and Old Testament men to whom I have sent it, and I have got in letters several interesting new pieces of evidence." The Free Church, of course, was less pleased. In the Presbytery of Edinburgh, for example, the Reverend George Macaulay described Smith's description of Israelite animal worship as "contrary to the facts recorded and the statements made in Holy Scripture," as well as "gross and sensual—fitted to pollute and debase public sentiment."<sup>35</sup> So if Smith's views on totemism were not the cause of his being deposed (for that purpose, the *Encyclopedia* articles would have been quite sufficient), they at least added substantially to the case against him, and at a hearing of the commission on 29 October 1880, he was again suspended from his duties.

At this point, Smith decided to make a full and complete statement of his position in a series of popular lectures, delivered extempore in Glasgow, then taken down in shorthand, revised, and delivered again in Edinburgh—all during the first three months of 1881. Whetted by the Aberdeen heresy, the public's appetite for the controversy was apparently substantial. Smith reported that the average attendance was more than 1,800 people and added that the "sustained interest" with which the audience followed the lectures was "sufficient proof that they did not find modern Biblical Science the repulsive and unreal thing which it is often represented to be."<sup>36</sup> The content of the lectures, published as *The Old Testament in the Jewish Church* (1881), again reflected Smith's debt to Ritschl and repeated many of the arguments about biblical criticism that Smith had made earlier, especially in "What History Teaches Us to Seek in the Bible" (1870). But Robert Rainy, the principal of New College and leader of the Free Church (who in fact shared Smith's views on biblical criticism) had by now given up any thought of saving him

and merely hoped to avoid the blanket condemnation of criticism by the Free Church. After Smith had refused to resign, therefore, Rainy reached a compromise with the more conservative leaders in the church, in which Smith was to be deposed from his chair while his teaching itself was not condemned. On 24 May 1881, Rainy moved Smith's deposition, without any prejudice to the content of *The Old Testament in the Jewish Church*, and the motion passed easily. Fearing an appeal to the civil courts, the assembly left Smith with his salary, which he refused to accept. Though deposed from his chair, Smith had never been convicted of heresy and thus retained his status as a Free Church minister, but as an academic with no pastoral interests, he never even considered the possibility of taking a congregation.

Instead, Smith accepted a position as coeditor (with Baynes) of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, which required him to move to Edinburgh, where he renewed some of his earlier intellectual associations. From there, his trips to London for meetings of the Revision Committee led to a growing connection with Cambridge and particularly with a fellow Scotsman, William Aldis Wright. It was during this period that Smith delivered the course of eight lectures that became *The Prophets of Israel*, published in April 1882. Several months later, the position of Lord Almoner's Reader in Arabic at Cambridge became open unexpectedly, and Wright immediately urged Smith to put his name forward. On 1 January 1883 Smith received the appointment, and by the following October, he had settled permanently in Cambridge. On 10 January 1885 Smith was elected to a fellowship at Christ's College. No heretic, it was said, had ever fared better.

### THE GRAND TOTEM MARCH

AS LORD Almoner's Reader in Arabic, Smith was required to give one lecture each Easter term, and the topics he chose indicate his growing interest in comparative religion. During the same period, he expanded his 1880 essay on animal worship into a third series of public lectures, published as *Kinship and Marriage in Early Arabia* (1885), whose principal argument was that male kinship in Arabia "had been preceded by kinship through women only." This change of kinship, he argued, corresponds "in the most striking manner" with the theory presented by McLennan in *Primitive Marriage*, to the extent that "all the evidence might easily have been disposed under heads borrowed from his exposition." Because the views of his "lamented friend" McLennan (who had died four years earlier) were not widely known, however, Smith resolved to build a "self-contained argument on the Arabian facts alone, following a retrogressive order from the known to the unknown



past, and not calling in the aid of hypotheses derived from the comparative method until, in working backwards on the Arabian evidence, I came to a point where the facts could not be interpreted without the aid of analogies drawn from other rude societies.”<sup>37</sup>

At the time of Mohammed (c. 571–632 CE), Smith began, the Arabian Peninsula was populated by a multitude of local groups with widely varying types of subsistence technology, laws, and social customs. But each group was held together in the same way—by unity of blood and a set of internally binding duties and obligations. Occasionally, these groups might come together into larger wholes, but these were always unstable, dissolving back into their individual elements. So these elemental groups, which were the basis of larger associations and into which the latter constantly tended to resolve themselves, became the starting point for Smith’s investigation. According to Arab genealogists of the early seventh century, these were all patriarchal tribes, formed through a process of division and subdivision based on the principle of male kinship. When a tribe grew to a certain size, it broke into subtribes, each composed of the descendants of one of the great ancestor’s sons and taking his name. So between a nation, tribe, subtribe, and family, there was no difference other than size and distance from the common ancestor; within this scheme, every Arab who possessed a *nisba* (group name) could in principle trace his genealogy back to one of two ancient stocks (the Yemenites or the Ishmaelites).<sup>38</sup>

This genealogical theory was not unlike Maine’s, and, not surprisingly, Smith considered it “totally unworthy of credit.” Adhering to the “Arabian facts alone,” Smith challenged this theory by pointing to a variety of features within the Arab tradition that were simply inconsistent with the theory of male ancestry. Some Arab tribes, for example, referred their origin to a female eponym. The ritual commingling of blood by which two men became brothers or two kin groups allies necessarily implied an earlier period in which the social bond was not based on fatherhood but on “the blood of the tribe as a whole.” Survivals of *mot’a* marriage (in which the woman did not leave her home, her people gave up no rights over her, and the children of the marriage did not belong to the husband), even into the time of Mohammed (when it was condemned), strongly suggested an earlier period of female kinship. In ancient Arabia, fatherhood was determined not by procreation but by the rule that the husband was father to all children born in his bed; in short, physical paternity was not the basis of any important social relationship. Finally, referring to the “epoch-making” study of McLennan, Smith argued that considerations like these eventually lead us to an early stage of Semitic society in which “the very grossest forms of polyandry once prevailed.”<sup>39</sup>

But this was as far as Smith's "self-contained argument" would take him. The origin of an institution as fundamental as kinship, he explained, "must lie in a stage of the evolution of society so remote that the special characteristics of individual races, like the Semites, cannot be thought to have been developed." In other words, Smith was now reaching for a stage of society earlier and more primitive than arguments based on the Semitic races alone would allow. If the earliest stages of kinship are to be explained at all, it must be "on general principles, based on a wide induction," through "comparison of the course of social development in savage races generally." In one sense, therefore, Smith now left the geographically narrow space of Semitic history to embrace the wider world of McLennan's sweeping evolutionary comparisons, but as Stocking has noted, Smith's purpose in doing so went well beyond the argument of *Primitive Marriage*. Beyond "all that we have reached," Smith explained, there remain "a series of questions of the highest interest to the student of primitive society in general, and of these one at least is too important to be left quite untouched."<sup>40</sup>

The question "too important to be left untouched" was the nature and significance of totemism. Reminding his audience that Semitic tradition knows no stage more primitive than that in which all absolute social obligations were based on blood, Smith added that this in turn required a clear rule of descent—one that traced descent first through the female and only later through the male. Because brides were frequently taken from other groups, however, this meant that within two or three generations each local group would contain representatives of a variety of stock-groups. And a man's stock-group, of course, was determined by his totem. Within this complex situation, in which a local group might contain a variety of different stock-groups, the significance of totemism was that "it supplied the necessary machinery for working a law of exogamy and enabling a man to fulfil the obligations of kindred."<sup>41</sup>

The final chapter of *Kinship and Marriage* was thus devoted entirely to totemism, including a general description of the institution followed by an assessment of the evidence for its existence in early Arabia. Although a "totem tribe" may be distributed among a number of local groups over a considerable geographic region, Smith explained, its members believe that they are all of one blood and share the "more or less religious" conviction that the life of the tribe is "in some mysterious way" derived from an animal or plant whose name they bear. All members of the tribe believe that they are brothers of the totem animal, which they consider sacred and whose flesh they refuse to eat except on rare, solemn occasions. Like McLennan, Smith believed that totemism was usually found in connection with exogamy but also that it must have existed everywhere *before* exogamy. For

exogamy necessarily presumes the existence of a system of kinship that involved no degrees of relationship, just participation in a common stock. Since savages could not have conceived of such an idea in an abstract way, then it must have been understood in a concrete, tangible form—which seems always to have been supplied by totemism. “Lying as it does behind exogamy,” Smith said of totemism, “the origin of this curious system . . . is yet more obscure than the origin of [exogamy].”<sup>42</sup>

Evidence for the existence of totemism, Smith acknowledged, is limited to three kinds of “relics” (or survivals) of that institution to be found among peoples who have passed through, but ultimately emerged from the totemic stage: first, the existence of stock-groups named after animals; second, the conception that members of the group are of the same blood as the eponym animal; and third, the belief that the animal is sacred and therefore to be venerated and not to be used as ordinary food. All three being found in the same tribe, Smith argued, the proof of totemism is complete, but even where this is not possible, we might still conclude that the proof is at least “morally complete.” Smith found quite strong evidence for the first two criteria when applied to Arabia. For the third, Smith admitted, the evidence is predictably weak, not because the Arabs lacked animal gods but because the Islamic sources “draw a veil, as far as they can, over all details of the old heathenism.” But even here, Smith insisted, the pre-Islamic sanctuaries provide indirect evidence of idols in the form of animals, of the association of animals with worship, of the simulation of animals on the part of the worshipper, and so on. Taking all the evidence together, Smith concluded, the Semitic facts cannot be separated from what we know of totemism in other parts of the world, and since we have traced the Arab social system and rule of kinship to a stage which, in other parts of the world, is habitually associated with totemism, then “the force of the argument from analogy seems overpowering, and it becomes more than a bare hypothesis that the old Arab groups of female kinship were originally totem tribes.”<sup>43</sup>

Smith’s next step was to extend this early totemic stage from the Semites of Arabia to “the northern Semites” (the ancient Hebrews). Smith had already pointed to the view “constantly gaining ground that the Hebrews and Aramaeans emerged as armed hordes of nomads from Arabia.” He now added to this view his insistence that no one “who has given attention to the subject will be prepared to believe that the development of Arabian totemism can be subsequent in date to [this] Semitic dispersion.” This was extremely important to his argument because the evidence for the early existence of totemism among the Hebrews was far weaker than that found in Arabia. This, Smith argued, is entirely to be expected, for the Arabs retained a tribal constitution longer than the other Semitic races, while the

primitive social organization of the Hebrews was “profoundly modified” by their conquest of Canaan, their transition to agricultural life, and their absorption of a large part of the aboriginal population. Even so, Smith then observed, we find tribes among the northern Semites with animal names, and animal gods were worshipped by the same peoples.<sup>44</sup>

Here the significance of Smith’s earlier attack on the “astral” theory of Baudissin becomes clear. The “current prejudice,” he acknowledged, is to view totemism only in its relation to the history of religion, to view the earliest Semitic gods as identified with heavenly bodies, and, where animals rather clearly *were* worshipped, to view them as pictorial representations of the attributes of these celestial gods. Smith recognized that some astral features were superimposed upon Semitic religion wherever Babylonian influence was strong but added that these features were the result of the later emergence of a more syncretic, national religion that embraced a large number of clans. By contrast, the local worship retained features of a totemic rather than an astral religion, bearing evidence of “earlier prevalence of much more primitive superstitions.”<sup>45</sup> Anticipating the argument of his *Encyclopedia Britannica* article, “Sacrifice” (1886), Smith pointed to the evidence of sacrificial ritual—briefly, the oldest sign of belief in celestial gods is the burnt offering, whose smoke rises toward the heavens, while the earliest type of Semitic sacrifice is one in which the gift of the worshipper or blood of the animal is simply poured out at a sacred place or smeared on a sacred stone.

Most important to Smith, however, was the fact that astral theories of religion ignored the most important features of early Semitic faiths, which included not only their tribal character but “the belief that the tribesmen are the children of their god.” This was a very different idea, Smith emphasized, from the more advanced belief that men “are children of one great Father, or creatures of a celestial power.” For Smith, the significance of McLennan’s “totem hypothesis” over all previous theories of primitive heathenism was precisely its focus on the social rather than the religious aspect of totemism—first, because McLennan’s hypothesis “does justice to the intimate relation between religion and the fundamental structure of society which is so characteristic of the ancient world,” and second, because the truth of the hypothesis “can be tested by observation of the social organisation as well as the religious beliefs and practices of early races.”<sup>46</sup> It was this emphasis on the structural features of social organization, so powerfully expanded in Smith’s *Religion of the Semites* (1889), that would inspire Durkheim’s *Les Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse* (1912). Ironically, however, Smith’s closest and most important intellectual association at this time was with a person to whose theories, more than any others, Durkheim’s work would be opposed.

Shortly after settling in Cambridge, Smith met and formed a friendship with a fellow Scot, the classicist and comparatist James Frazer, and by July 1887, Smith had enlisted Frazer to write the articles “Taboo” and “Totemism” for the twenty-third volume of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. The second article, of course, is immediately significant for our purposes, but even the first, which would eventually swell (in typical Frazerian fashion) to become *The Golden Bough* (2 vols., 1890), would play an important role in defining the notion of “sacredness” so important to both Smith and Durkheim. Taboo (or *tapu*), Frazer observed, is the name given to a system of religious prohibitions that has gained its fullest development in Polynesia but which is in fact found throughout the world. Etymologically, *tapu* initially meant “marked thoroughly,” or set aside, while the antonym is *noa* means “general” or “common.” Taboo thus roughly corresponds to our word “sacred” (and would become the foundation for Durkheim’s famous distinction between sacred and profane objects) with the notable qualification that it carried no moral connotation but merely “a connexion with the gods as a separation from ordinary purposes and exclusive appropriation to persons or things considered sacred.” Taboos could thus be general (applying to a whole class of objects), particular (applying to one or more individuals of a class), permanent, temporary, punished by either religious or civil sanctions, imposed artificially by human beings or arising naturally from conditions like illness or childbirth, based upon privilege or disability, and so on. In his Tylorian manner, Frazer suggested that this original conception of taboo had itself evolved from animism and only later been granted the connotations of “sacredness”—an “artificial extension” due to the “ambition and avarice” of “chiefs and priests.” In serving these interests, however, it subserved the progress of civilization, by fostering conceptions of the right of property and sanctity of marriage that, in time, grew strong enough to stand alone and dismiss the crutch of superstition.<sup>47</sup> For Frazer, therefore, taboo was the origin of our more advanced conceptions of law and morality, hinting at his later notion of the evolutionary relationship between magic, religion, and science.

Smith had already written to a friend about Frazer’s second article, expressing his hope that the *Encyclopedia’s* publishers

clearly understand that Totemism is a subject of growing importance, daily mentioned in magazines and papers, but of which there is no good account anywhere—precisely one of those cases where we have an opportunity of being ahead of everyone and getting some reputation. There is no article in the volume for which I am more solicitous. I have taken much

personal pains with it, guiding Frazer carefully in his treatment; and he has put about seven months' hard work on it to make it the standard article on the subject. We must make room for it, whatever else goes.<sup>48</sup>

As it turned out, Baynes and Smith weren't able to make sufficient room, the article swelling until the publishers were compelled to issue it separately as a short volume in 1887, the abridged version appearing a year later in the *Encyclopedia*. "Since the late J. F. McLennan first pointed out the importance of Totemism for the early history of society," Frazer began, "various writers have treated of the subject and added to his materials, but no one, I believe, has tried to collect and classify all the main facts, so far as they are presently known." This was good description of Totemism (1887), which offered no new ideas of its own but provided a brief, useful summary of what was known about the phenomenon. A totem, Frazer observed, is "a class of material objects which the savage regards with superstitious respect, believing that there exists between him and every member of the class an ultimate and altogether special relation." The connection between the man and his totem is mutually beneficent—the totem protects the man, while the man shows respect for the totem by not killing it (if it is an animal) or not cutting or gathering it (if it is a plant). Embracing Lubbock's earlier distinction, Frazer emphasized that, by contrast with a fetish, "a totem is never an isolated individual, but always a class of objects" and that there are at least three different kinds: the clan totem, common to all the members of a clan and passing by inheritance from generation to generation; the sex totem, common either to all the males or to all the females of a tribe; and the individual totem, belonging to a single person and not passing to his or her descendants.<sup>49</sup>

"By far the most important of all," the clan totem is "reverenced by a body of men and women who call themselves by the name of the totem, believe themselves to be of one blood, descendants of a common ancestor, and are bound together by common obligations to each other and by a common faith in the totem." Reiterating the distinction already explored by Smith, Frazer emphasized that totemism is *both* a religious *and* a social system that, in the first, consists of the relations of mutual respect and protection between a man and his totem and, in the second, consists of the relations of the clansmen to each other and to men of other clans. "In the later history of totemism," Frazer observed, "these two sides, the religious and the social, tend to part company; the social system sometimes survives the religious; and, on the other hand, religion sometimes bears traces of totemism in countries where the social system based on totemism has disappeared." But in its original form, Frazer added, "the evidence points

strongly to the conclusion that the two sides were originally inseparable; that, in other words, the farther we go back, the more we should find that the clansman regards himself and his totem as beings of the same species, and the less he distinguishes between conduct towards his totem and towards his fellow-clansman.”<sup>50</sup>

For the sake of exposition, however, Frazer considered the two separately, beginning with the religious aspect, emphasizing that the taboo against killing or eating the totem often extends to touching or even looking at it; that savages frequently place themselves more fully under the protection of the totem by placing its mark on their faces or bodies; and that the identification of the man with his totem is the object of a variety of ceremonies observed at birth, marriage, death, and so on. But Frazer seems to have been particularly interested in ceremonies of initiation, where the connection between the religious and the social aspects of totemism are especially close. The scarring or knocking out of teeth associated with Australian puberty rituals, for example, is explained by the need for “a visible language” whereby savages “might be able to communicate their totems to, and to ascertain the totems of, strangers whose language they did not understand.” Even more interesting in the light of Frazer’s later work are initiation ceremonies involving the mimic death and revival of a member of the clan, represented by the real death and assumed revival of the totem. Frazer considered this idea of the immortality of the individual totem as “an extension of the idea of the immortality of the species, which is, perhaps, of the essence of totemism.” As a consequence, he argued, “it is not necessary to suppose that the similar festivals, which, with mingled lamentation and joy, celebrate the annual death and revival of vegetation, are directly borrowed from totemism; both may spring independently from the observation of the mortality of the individual and the immortality of the species.”<sup>51</sup>

Frazer’s discussion of the social aspect of totemism dealt in some detail with the totemic rules of exogamy and female descent, placing special emphasis on the exogamous division intermediate between the tribe and the clan which Lewis Henry Morgan, in his *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity of the Human Family* (1871), had called a “phratry.” A phratry, Frazer explained, is a clan that has undergone subdivision, producing an entity comprising several clans; in Australia, where phratries are still more important than in America, phratries are still further divided into subphratries. An Australian might thus have as many as five distinct kinds of totems (phratry, subphratry, clan, sex, and individual), although the clan totem, from which the totems of phratry and subphratry have grown, would remain the primary type. In a startling anticipation of an argument later introduced by Durkheim and Mauss, Frazer observed that in these

totems superimposed on other totems, we might possibly discern “a rudimentary classification of natural objects under heads which bear a certain resemblance to genera, species, etc. This classification,” he added, “is by some Australian tribes extended so as to include the whole of nature.”<sup>52</sup>

Frazer also offered the rudiments of an evolutionary theory of totemism, suggesting that as a clan emerges and grows, the totemic bond increases in strength but that when it subdivides, the strength of the bond diminishes in inverse proportion to its extension, eventually dissolving “into the vast reservoir of nature from which it sprang.” This occurs to clan after clan, totem after totem, “till all things in nature are seen to be, as it were, in motion, and after a period of mustering and marshalling to fall into their places in the grand totem march.” With the change from female to male kinship and the emergence of more permanent settlement, the advance in culture yields a longer collective memory, and those totems that have become deities of the larger, more comprehensive groups assume the higher ranks in a religious hierarchy. Finally, these higher, more comprehensive gods, as their animal and vegetable attributes contradict and cancel each other out, tend increasingly to throw off these attribute and to “retain only those human qualities which to the savage apprehension are the common element of all the totems whereof he is the composite product. In short,” Frazer concluded, “the tribal totem tends to pass into an anthropomorphic god.”<sup>53</sup>

For the origin of totemism, however, Frazer insisted that no satisfactory explanation had been given. Both Lubbock and Spencer, following the example of Müller’s comparative mythology, had found the origin of totemism in the poverty of language, which led savages to name themselves after animals and eventually to regard these animals with religious awe, but in words similar to those Durkheim would use to dismiss the same Müllerian arguments, Frazer argued that these writers grant to verbal misunderstandings “far more influence than . . . they ever seem to have exercised.” Frazer hinted at what would eventually become the second of his own explanatory theories, pointing to “the tendency of totemism to preserve certain species of plants and animals,” which “largely influenced the organic life of the countries where it has prevailed. But this question,” he added, “is beyond the scope of the present article.”<sup>54</sup> As this closing hint suggests, Frazer was philosophically a rationalist, ethically and politically a utilitarian, and anthropologically a disciple of Tylor. Even where he was concerned with the social aspect of totemism, therefore, “the sense of rational invention, if not by an individual legislator then by a generalized savage philosopher, was very strong.”<sup>55</sup> Each of the three theories Frazer would eventually offer to explain the origin of totemism would depend upon savages finding an intellectual solution to a cognitive problem posed



by some otherwise inexplicable natural phenomena. Frazer, like Tylor, was a child of the Enlightenment. Smith, as we have seen, had drunk from another well.

### THE NATURAL RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY

IN APRIL 1887, Smith received an invitation from the trustees of the Burnett Fund to deliver three courses of lectures between October 1888 and October 1891 at Marischal College, Aberdeen. The topic proposed was “the primitive religions of the Semitic peoples, viewed in relation to other ancient religions, and to the spiritual religion of the Old Testament and of Christianity.”<sup>56</sup> Smith accepted and, by the early months of 1889, had completed preparation for the first series of lectures, which dealt with the religious institutions of Semitic antiquity—its holy places, holy seasons, holy people, sacrificial system, and ritual generally. This first series was published as *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites: The Fundamental Institutions* (1889; 2nd ed., 1894)—by any standard a classic text in the history of religious ideas.

Smith’s focus was on the Semitic peoples who, in the ancient world, occupied the Arabian Peninsula as well as the more fertile lands of Syria, Mesopotamia, and Iran. These peoples had always held a special interest for students of religious history because of the three great world religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) that had grown up in their midst. But in fact, Smith’s subject was not these religions that had a Semitic *origin* but rather Semitic religion “as a whole in its common features and general type.” Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, Smith explained, are “positive” religions of great religious innovators who “spoke as the organs of a divine revelation” and “departed from the traditions of the past.” And they were interesting to Smith for what lay *behind* these innovators—“the old unconscious religious tradition, the body of religious usage and belief which cannot be traced to the influence of individual minds” but which formed “that inheritance from the past into which successive generations of the Semitic race grew up as it were instinctively.”

This was not mere antiquarian curiosity. For Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all had to establish themselves on foundations laid by these older beliefs and practices: “A new scheme of faith can find a hearing,” Smith emphasized, “only by appealing to religious instincts and susceptibilities that already exist in its audience, and it cannot reach these without taking account of the traditional forms in which all religious feeling is embodied, and without speaking a language which men accustomed to these old forms can understand.” Much of what the New Testament has to say about sacri-

fice and the priesthood, for example, presupposes notions common among Jews of the Old Testament, as embodied in the ordinances of the Temple, but even these earlier ritual ordinances were not entirely original. They were the reshaping of institutions, in accordance with a more spiritual doctrine, shared by the ancient Hebrews and their heathen neighbors. In this way, the study of ancient Semitic religion “has a direct and important bearing on the great problem of the origins of the spiritual religion of the Bible.”<sup>57</sup>

Smith’s assumption here, for which he offered both biblical and racial arguments, was that ancient Hebrew religion was not the exclusive possession of the tribes of Israel but rather the common property of a group of kindred peoples. The biblical argument reaffirmed a point that Smith had made in his essay on animal worship, that “by its own wisdom,” Israel was “no more fit than any other nation to rise above the lowest level of heathenism.” For a careful reading of the Old Testament tells us that “the mass of the people found the greatest difficulty in keeping their national religion distinct from that of the surrounding nations,” that they “were not conscious of any great difference between themselves and their heathen neighbours,” and finally, that they “fell into Canaanite and other foreign practices with the greatest facility.” This was the significance of the Old Testament prophets, and it is only in this context that their writings can be understood: “The whole history of Israel is unintelligible,” Smith insisted, “if we suppose that the heathenism against which the prophets contended was a thing altogether alien to the religious traditions of the Hebrews.” Smith’s second argument was that because traditional religion is handed down from generation to generation, it is largely a matter of race. Were the Israelites “of a common stock” with their neighbors? Here again Smith returned to an issue he had raised in *Kinship and Marriage*, arguing now on linguistic grounds that “before the Hebrews, the Aramaeans, and the Arabs spread themselves over widely distant seats, and began their course of separate national development, there must have been long ages in which the ancestors of all these nations lived together and spoke with one tongue.” Even afterward, the dispersion of the Semitic peoples was never went so far as that of the Aryans, so that there is “hardly another part of the world where we have such good historical reasons for presuming that linguistic affinity will prove a safe indication of affinity in race.”<sup>58</sup> Taken together, therefore, the biblical and racial evidence supported Smith’s commitment to the study of the most general, widespread, and permanent features of Semitic religion.

One of the most original and influential parts of Smith’s argument was his discussion of the role of myth and ritual in ancient religions. Every religion includes beliefs, on the one hand, and institutions, ritual practices, and rules of conduct, on the other. But in ancient and modern religions,

the place and proportion of belief and ritual is quite different. The modern Christian, for example, tends to see religion from the standpoint of belief and doctrine and to treat ritual practices and rules of conduct as derived from the creed, so that “when we approach some strange or antique religion, we naturally assume that here also our first business is to search for a creed, and find in it the key to ritual and practice.” But however natural, this is a great mistake, for the ancient religions had for the most part no creed and rather “consisted entirely of institutions and practices.” This is not to say that the ancients followed rules and rituals without attaching any meaning to them but only that the practice was fixed, and the meaning attached to it was vague and highly variable. In ancient Greece, for example, certain things were done at a temple, and people agreed that it would be impious not to do them. But if you were to ask *why* things were done in this way, you would receive a variety of mutually contradictory explanations, and no one would care which one you accepted. This is because the explanations would not have been of a kind to inspire strong feelings—in short, they would not have been *dogmas*. Instead, they would have been “stories” about the circumstances which led to the establishment of the practice, by the example or command of a god. In short, they would have been *myths*. In all the ancient religions, Smith generalized, myth takes the place of dogma in this way.<sup>59</sup>

The role that myth played in ancient religions, however, was quite different from that played by dogma in their descendants; that is, the belief in these myths was not an essential part of ancient religion, for it had no sacred sanction or binding force on the worshipper. Myths were part of the apparatus of the worship, but various stories were made available to the worshipper and, so long as he performed the ritual, no one cared what he believed about its origin. Belief in a specific myth was not obligatory, nor was it assumed that by believing it a person acquired religious merit and conciliated the favor of the gods. What *was* obligatory and meritorious was “the exact performance of certain sacred acts prescribed by religious tradition.” Since the ritual was fixed and the myth variable, and the ritual obligatory and belief in the myth discretionary, we may assume that the myth was derived from the ritual, and not the ritual from the myth. Most myths were also offered as explanations for religious practices, and these were explanations were of a kind that could only have emerged after the original meaning of the practice had been forgotten. Finally, because these explanations were consistently false, “the myth itself requires to be explained, and every principle of philosophy and common sense demands that the explanation be sought, not in arbitrary allegorical theories, but in the actual facts of ritual or religious custom to which the myth attaches.”<sup>60</sup>

This was the famous “ritual theory of myth,” which would inspire a generation of classicists including Jane Harrison, F. M. Cornford, A. B. Cook, and Gilbert Murray, and it exerted an equally powerful influence on the history, sociology, and anthropology of religion. Smith illustrated this theory with an analogy almost certainly drawn from Maine, suggesting that political institutions are also older than political theories and that in both religion and politics, form and precedent are more important than the later, rational justifications for why they should be followed. But even to describe this as an “analogy” is misleading, for Smith considered religious and political institutions simply two aspects of the larger whole of customary behavior. The gods and their worship were simply another part of the social life into which each man was born, which he took for granted, and to which he unconsciously conformed throughout his life. Religious nonconformity was an offense against the state, for if religious rules and practices were threatened, the foundations of society were undermined and the favor of the gods forfeited. “But so long as the prescribed forms were duly observed,” Smith emphasized, “a man was recognized as truly pious, and no one asked how his religion was rooted in his heart or affected his reason. Like political duty, of which indeed it was a part, religion was entirely comprehended in the observance of certain fixed rules of outward conduct.”<sup>61</sup>

This in turn helps to explain Smith’s approach to the study of ancient religions. When we study politics, we start with the way political institutions shape human behavior, not with the theories contrived about them. And so with religion we should begin not with what was said about the gods but with how religious rules and practices shaped the lives of their worshippers. Similarly, just as the study of ancient political institutions typically begins with a classification of the various *types* of government by which these states were ruled, so the study of the religious institutions of the Semites should start with some notion of the types of divine governance. By examining the titles by which men addressed the gods, for example, and the languages used to express dependence on them, we can learn what place the gods occupied in ancient societies. One consequence of this was that Smith, like Ritschl, was always more interested in the social office and function of the gods than in their metaphysical nature. In ancient societies, Smith argued, “the question [of] what the gods are in themselves is not a religious but a speculative one; what is requisite to religion is a practical acquaintance with the rules on which the deity acts and on which he expects his worshippers to frame their conduct.” When the prophets speak of the knowledge of God, therefore, “they always mean a practical knowledge of the laws and principles of His government in Israel.” Or as he put it in response to critics of the 1889 edition of *Semites*: “In early heathenism, the really vital question is

not what a god has the power to do, but whether I can get him to do it for me, and this depends on the relation in which he stands to me."<sup>62</sup>

Approaching the study of ancient religion in this way, Smith discovered that religious practices had grown up gradually, over the course of many centuries, reflecting habits of thought characteristic of diverse stages of man's intellectual and moral development. The Lyellian metaphor was irresistible. "The record of the religious thought of mankind, as it is embodied in religious institutions, resembles the geological record of the history of the earth's crust; the new and the old are preserved side by side, or rather layer upon layer." And as we have already seen, the first step to their explanation was not speculative theory but "the classification of ritual formations in their proper sequence," a "rational life-history" of religious experience. The first step in such a history, Smith continued, is to imagine what he called a "natural" society, to which each man belonged, without choice, simply by virtue of birth and socialization. As a member of such a society, a man has imposed upon him certain obligations and duties, which he is required to perform on pain of social penalties and disabilities; but at the same time, the society confers upon him certain social rights and advantages. Such "natural" societies exist in the modern as well as the ancient world, of course, but in ancient societies, the gods had their place as well as men: "The circle into which a man was born was not simply a group of kinsfolk and fellow-citizens," Smith insisted, "but embraced also certain divine beings, the gods of the family and of the state, which to the ancient mind were as much a part of the particular community with which they stood connected as the human members of the social circle."<sup>63</sup> If the god was a "father" and the worshippers his "offspring," for example, this was to be taken literally rather than metaphorically, for it meant that the worshippers were literally of his stock, and the god and worshippers made up one natural family with duties to one another. And if the god was a "king" and his worshippers were his "subjects," this too was to be taken literally, meaning that he was the leader of the state, to be consulted in all weighty political matters, and to be approached only with homage and tribute.

This was Smith's seminal conception of "the ancient religious community," which he discovered among the Aryans as well as the ancient Semites. "In both races, the first steps of social and religious development took place in small communities, which at the dawn of history had a political system based on the principle of kinship, and were mainly held together by ties of blood, the only social bond which then had absolute and undisputed strength, being enforced by the law of blood revenge." But these natural, organic societies were not coextensive with the state, which was formed only later, when several of these groups, drawn together by a common interest

or practical necessity (self-defense, aggression, and so on), formed a political association. Smith emphasized the artificial, ephemeral nature of these associations, whose only formal leadership was a “conference” comprising the elders of each clan (the forerunner of the senate of elders found in both Semitic and Aryan antiquity) and that tended toward dissolution once the need that created it was satisfied. But in times of prolonged danger, the temporary authority of a military commander easily passed into lifelong leadership at home as well as in the field, resulting in the institution of hereditary kingship (for example, the house of David).<sup>64</sup>

To this point, Smith claimed in allusion to Maine, social progress in Semitic societies was comparable to that in ancient Greece and Rome. But after 800 BCE, progress in the West accelerated, while that in the East was arrested. In the case of the Arabs, for example, the desert lacked the material conditions necessary to advancement, and the religious development of the Arabs was “proportionately retarded.” The northern Semites of Syria and Palestine, on the other hand, were conquered by the Assyrians and thus deprived of political independence, so that “from the eighth century onwards the history of Semitic religion runs a very different course from that which we observe on the other side of the Mediterranean.” As the small, autonomous Semitic communities coalesced into larger social and political entities, a systematic hierarchy of deities emerged on the models provided by the Babylonians and Assyrians. Smith’s answer to theories of a primitive polytheism, therefore, was that this kind of polytheism was not primitive. The ancient Semites accepted the gods of their enemies, of course, but they did not worship them, for they enjoyed no “natural kinship” with them. Physically, therefore, the Semitic god was conceived as an ancestor, and morally, the god and his worshippers were conceived as bound together by duties and obligations that derive from the physical conception. In the spiritual religion of the Hebrews (and still more in Christianity), of course, the idea of divine fatherhood is entirely dissociated from this physical conception: man is created in the image of God, but not begotten, and being a child of God is a matter of grace rather than nature. But in the older Semitic religions, Smith emphasized, the older, physical conception predominates and is to be taken literally rather than metaphorically.<sup>65</sup>

But if the ancient Semites thus conceived their relations to the god as those of physical kinship, Smith denied that this kinship was originally conceived as fatherhood. Instead, Smith again followed McLennan, insisting that it was the mother’s blood that formed the original bond of kinship and that the ancestral tribal deity was a goddess, not a god. Once we understand this, Smith emphasized, we see that the “indissoluble bond” that unites worshippers to their god is *identical* with the bond of blood fellowship that unites the members of the

group to one another; this means that “even in its rudest forms religion was a moral force; the powers that man reveres were on the side of social order and tribal law; and the fear of the gods was a motive to enforce the laws of the society, which were also the laws of morality.” Here again we see the reason for Smith’s interest in McLennan’s theory of totemism: it gave him access to a period before divine fatherhood where religion was undeniably a moral force. Admittedly, this moral force was narrow and particularistic, bound up with custom and usage, and thus poorly equipped to raise morality toward higher ideals. Nonetheless, morality “originally formed and grew strong in the narrower circle of the family or the clan; and the part which the religion of kinship played in the development and maintenance of these habits,” Smith insisted, “is one of the greatest services it has done to human progress. This service it was able to render because the gods were themselves members of the kin, and the man who was untrue to kindred duty had to reckon with them as with his human clansmen.”<sup>66</sup>

This interweaving of religion, morality, and social progress owed an obvious debt to Ritschl, and Smith presented it as an answer to the “fear-theory” of religion advanced by Ernest Renan’s *Histoire du peuple d’Israël* (5 vols., 1887–1893). Renan had suggested that the earliest gods represented the personification of hostile natural forces, which primitive men could not understand or control and therefore feared and sought to appease. In response, Smith did not deny that primitive men experienced such feelings, but he did deny that the attempt to appease such powers was the origin of religion and, in doing so, introduced a distinction that would play a powerful role in the subsequent debate over primitive religion: “From the earliest times,” Smith observed, “religion, as distinct from magic or sorcery, addresses itself to kindred and friendly beings, who may indeed be angry with their people for a time, but are always placable except to the enemies of their worshippers or to renegade members of the community. It is not with a vague fear of unknown powers, but with a loving reverence for known gods who are knit to their worshippers by strong bonds of kinship, that religion in the only true sense of the word begins.” This distinction, Smith complained, seems to have escaped some modern theorists, but was “plain enough to the common sense of antiquity, in which private and magical superstitions were habitually regarded as offences against morals and the state.” Religion, by contrast, was “a relation of all the members of a community to a power that has the good of the community at heart, and protects its law and moral order.”<sup>67</sup> If the distinction had escaped Renan, of course, it would not be lost on Durkheim, whose discussion of the relationship between religion and magic (here foreshadowed by Smith) would become a central element of *Les Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*.

In addition to these benign, affective relations between gods and men, Smith's "natural religious community" also connected men and their gods to concrete physical objects. For all acts of worship, Smith emphasized, "have a material embodiment," which is not at the discretion of the worshipper but is governed by fixed rules. Rites must be performed "at certain places and certain times," for example, with the aid of "certain material appliances and according to certain mechanical forms." In this sense, gods and worshippers are not only parts "of one social community" but also "of one physical unity of life." This conception became the foundation for Smith's critique of Tylor's animistic hypothesis. The origin of this notion, Smith argued, lies in an extremely primitive psychological stage in which men had not yet learned to draw sharp distinctions between organic and inorganic nature or (within organic nature) between animals and plants, and they ascribed to all material objects a life analogous to their own. Smith agreed with Tylor that primitive psychology, and especially dreams, suggest to savages a crude distinction between soul and body combined with the belief that the soul may act where the body is not, and he also agreed with Tylor that the unbounded use of analogy typical of prescientific thought extends this notion to all parts of nature. But for Tylor, the earliest gods were not *identified* with natural objects but merely *inhabited* them, on the model of the human soul, separable from the human body. For Smith, on the other hand, this separation could never be complete, for "in ritual the sacred object was spoken of and treated as the god himself; it was not merely his symbol but his embodiment, the permanent center of his activity in the same sense in which the human body is the permanent centre of man's activity"—a notion epitomized in the primitive conception of the demon's haunt or the god's sanctuary. "The whole conception," Smith concluded, belongs "to a stage of thought in which there was no more difficulty in ascribing living powers and personality to a stone, tree, or animal, than to a being of human or superhuman build."<sup>68</sup>

This difference with Tylor was important, for it represented an extension of Smith's earlier, antiallegorical approach to biblical exegesis into the realm of primitive religion and ancient mythology. All over the world, we find myths connecting both men and gods with animals, plants, rocks, and other inanimate objects, which modern commentators explain as allegories. But Smith's point was that this explanation ignores the distinction between primitive thought, "which treats all nature as a kindred unity because it has not yet differentiated things into their kinds," and modern philosophy, "in which the universe of things, after having been realised in its multiplicity of kinds, is again brought into unity by a metaphysical synthesis." And this point was important to Smith because it secured his



evolutionary (and undeniably liberal Protestant) conception of religious-economic progress. For in the more primitive stage, the “range of the supernatural” extended beyond the bounds of religion per se to include demons and witches as well as gods, and as we have seen, the gods themselves differed from the more demoniac powers not by their nature but by their stable relations with a specific group of men. The Arab *jinn*, for example, is a demonic power to be feared and avoided, while the local god might be approached with a hopeful confidence. This is not because there is any difference of nature between them but because the *jinn* are strangers and thus enemies, while the god, to those worshippers who frequent his sanctuary, is a known and friendly power. Smith thus suggested that the earth might be conceived as “parceled out between demons and wild beasts, on the one hand, and gods and men, on the other.” To the former belong “the untrodden wilderness with all its unknown perils, the wastes and jungles that lie outside the familiar tracks and pasture grounds of the tribe, and which only the boldest men venture upon without terror.” And to the latter belong “the regions that man knows and habitually frequents, and within which he has established relations, not only with his human neighbours, but with the supernatural beings that have their haunts side by side with him.” As man gradually encroaches on the wilderness and drives back the wild beasts, Smith explained, “so the gods in like manner drive out the demons, and spots that were once feared, as the habitation of mysterious and presumably malignant powers, lose their terrors and either become common ground or are transformed into the seats of friendly deities.”<sup>69</sup>

In sum, the local god has fixed relations with a community of men as well as with a definite sphere of nature, and it is through this local god that the worshipper is brought into “stated and permanent alliance with certain parts of his material environment which are [otherwise] not subject to his will and control.” Within somewhat narrow limits, Smith observed, pointing to Frazer’s *Encyclopedia* article, “exactly the same thing is effected, in the very earliest stage of savage society . . . through the institution of totemism.” Indeed, for a variety of reasons (such as the fact that they appeared to men in the form of animals, that each kind of animal was conceived as an organized kindred, that it was this solidarity among the members of an animal species that made them fearful objects of Arab superstition, and so on), Smith believed that the *jinn* might once have been totems. If the origin of totemism remains as great a mystery as the origin of the gods, Smith concluded, it is unlikely that the two problems are independent. For in both cases, “the thing to be explained is the emancipation of a society of men from the dread of certain natural agencies, by the establishment of the conception of a physical alliance and affinity between the two parts.” Smith even specu-

lated briefly on the origin of totemism, noting that the ancient Semite saw the supernatural in “wherever the spontaneous life of nature was manifested in an emphatic way” and that remote and exceptional phenomena (such as celestial movements, volcanic eruptions, and others) were less likely to influence the savage imagination than “mundane and everyday things, which are not less mysterious to him and touch his common life more closely.”<sup>70</sup> Combining these two observations, Smith suggested that *water* (particularly the subterranean springs that naturally irrigated the land and produced life) was something that among the ancient Semites had the most clearly marked supernatural associations and thus gave rise to totemism.

### THE TOTEMIC SACRAMENT

WHETHER GODS or demons, supernatural entities are pervasive in the regions inhabited by savage peoples. The sanctuary, however, is that special place where the god is constantly present in some visible embodiment, where ritual precautions are stringently enforced, and where man might thus approach the god with sacrifices. Smith thus laid the foundation for his seminal theory of a totemic sacrament and so for his powerful influence on Durkheim’s sociology of religion. Yet there was no point in his work where he relied more clearly on the earlier work of Frazer, and particularly the *Encyclopedia Britannica* article “Taboo” (1888). For the fundamental principle governing access to the sanctuary, Smith observed, is that it is “holy” and “must not be treated as a common place.” To modern minds, of course, holiness is an *ethical* idea that goes back to the Hebrew prophets and especially Isaiah, where human beings are “holy” only insofar as they have some association with spiritual things and ultimately with God. But for the ancients, Smith insisted, holiness had nothing to do with morality or purity of life, as it was not primarily an attribute of *people* at all but rather of specific *places* at which human beings came into relation with divine things. Initially, this notion of the holiness of the sanctuary seems merely an extension of its belonging to the god, but this notion of “divine proprietorship,” Smith insisted, depended on a privileged class of sacred people (priests) to assert and defend it and was thus a later evolutionary development. The earlier conception was one in which the prohibition against private encroachment was consistent with public, communal rights at holy places. Such rights, however, could not be exercised without definite restrictions, and it was these restrictions (not the notion of divine property) that defined the nature of holy places. In this sense, the distinction between things that are holy and things that are unclean was not yet clear. Both were taboo, meaning

that they were set aside and surrounded by restrictions, that they must be kept apart from more ordinary people or things, and that the violation of these restrictions was subject to both civil and religious penalties.<sup>71</sup>

One aspect of Smith's argument here deserves special attention, particularly in light of its later impact on Durkheim. For there was an element of taboo that was "perfectly irrational from the standpoint of any religion that has clear views as to the personality of the gods" and yet would never be eliminated from the Semitic conception of holiness. This was the notion that the oldest sanctuaries were "charged in all their parts and pertinents with a certain supernatural energy," together with the belief that this energy was contagious or infectious, capable of "propagating itself by physical contact," so that "common things brought into contact with the holy place become holy and inviolable, like the original pertinents of the sanctuary." Smith acknowledged that this principle admitted of many gradations. The consecration of people, for example, was less permanent than that of things, and ritual washings or ablutions could remove the sanctity born of physical contact. And though the underlying principle lay in "the intrinsic power of holy things to vindicate themselves against encroachment," there was a variety of civil sanctions short of supernatural intervention to maintain the separation of holy and common things. But no ancient society, Smith emphasized, "deemed its good order to be sufficiently secured by civil sanctions alone; there was always a last recourse to the curse, the ordeal, the oath of probation at the sanctuary—all of them means to stamp an offender with the guilt of impiety and bring him under the direct judgment of the supernatural powers."<sup>72</sup>

This lack of distinction between primitive ideas of holiness and uncleanness was important to Smith, for it allowed him to advance another Ritschlian argument about the relationship between religion, morality, and social progress. Shortly after the dispersion, the northern Semites had already begun to make such a distinction; their precautions in the presence of holy things were motivated by respect for a benign, friendly god, while those of their southern counterparts were based upon fear of hostile supernatural powers. These northern restrictions based upon respect, by sharp contrast with southern cautions based on fear, contained the emerging principles of social progress and moral order. "To know that one has the mysterious powers of nature on one's side so long as one acts in conformity with certain rules," Smith explained, "gives a man strength and courage to pursue the task of the subjugation of nature to his service. To restrain one's individual license, not out of slavish fear, but from respect for a higher and beneficent power, is a moral discipline of which the value does not altogether depend on the reasonableness of the sacred institutions." Most important, the asso-

ciation of the idea of holiness with a beneficent god whose own interests are bound up with those of the community “makes it inevitable that the laws of social and moral order, as well as mere external precepts of physical observance, shall be placed under the sanction of the god of the community.”<sup>73</sup>

This discussion of holiness and sanctuary laid the foundation for Smith’s discussion of sacrifice, which dominated six of his eleven lectures. For it was not enough for the worshipper to make himself present at the sanctuary: he must also “come into contact with the god himself,” which occurred when he “directed his homage” to a natural object or to an “artificial mark of the immediate presence of the deity.” Natural or artificial, this object was both an idol (representing the presence of the god) and an altar (to receive the gift of the worshipper): “Both are necessary to constitute a complete sanctuary,” Smith explained, “because a complete act of worship implies not merely that the worshipper comes into the presence of his god with gestures of homage and words of prayer, but also that he lays before the deity some material oblation.”<sup>74</sup> Smith’s theory of sacrifice would become extremely influential, and it was something for which his earlier work on biblical criticism had prepared him admirably. But Smith was by now an ardent comparativist, convinced that sacrifice was the typical form of *all* complete acts of worship, among *all* early peoples, in *all* parts of the world. While he consistently put the Semitic facts in the foreground, therefore, Smith also appealed to the evidence of sacrifice in other cultures to confirm or modify his conclusions.

Starting with the Levitical distinction between *minha* (cereal oblations) and *zēbah* (animal sacrifices), for example, Smith augmented the Semitic evidence with Greco-Roman examples (drawn frequently from Frazer) to argue, first, that *minha* was initially a tribute paid to the god by the worshipper from the produce of the soil; second, that *zēbah* implied the idea of communion with the deity in a sacrificial meal of holy food; third, that the conception of tribute necessarily implied a settled, agricultural economy; and fourth, that the notion of sacrifice as a communal meal between god and worshippers is thus more primitive than that of a gift or tribute to the gods. Most important, Smith appealed to his earlier description of the ancient religious community, emphasizing that *zēbah* was a public rather than private event, indistinguishable from a feast: “For a feast is not complete without flesh,” Smith argued, “and in early times the rule that all slaughter is sacrifice was not confined to the Semites. The identity of religious occasions and festal seasons may indeed be taken as the determining characteristic of the type of ancient religion generally; when men meet their god they feast and are glad together, and whenever they feast and are glad they desire that the god should be of the party. This view is proper to religions in

which the habitual temper of the worshippers is one of joyous confidence in their god," Smith recalled the Ritschlian equation between religion and social optimism, "untroubled by any habitual sense of human guilt, and resting on the firm conviction that they and the deity they adore are good friends, who understand each other perfectly and are united by bonds not easily broken."<sup>75</sup>

How was this "habitually joyous temper" of ancient sacrificial worship to be explained? Again, Smith's theory reflected the liberal Protestant connection between religion and Victorian notions of social progress: "The communities of ancient civilisation were formed by the survival of the fittest," he explained, "and they had all the self-confidence and elasticity that are engendered by success in the struggle for life." Once formed, such an ebullient, insouciant institution would not soon disappear, for (anticipating Durkheim's notion of "collective effervescence") Smith emphasized that the most important functions of ancient worship were reserved for public occasions, when "the whole community was stirred by a common emotion." This emphasis on the public, social nature of sacrificial ritual also helped Smith to fill out his earlier distinction between religion and magic. For however benevolent the gods might be in the life of the community, they could not be relied on for every private need, and they were never of any assistance to the individual in matters opposed to the public interest. "There was therefore a whole region of possible needs and desires," Smith observed, "for which religion could and would do nothing; and if supernatural help was sought in such things it had to be sought through magical ceremonies, designed to purchase or constrain the favour of demoniac powers with which the public religion had nothing to do."<sup>76</sup> For Smith as for Durkheim, therefore, the distinction between magic and religion was isomorphic with that between the individual and society, between private and public interest.

Most important, Smith had embraced Ritschl's emphasis on the ethical value of religion. The power of religion over our lives is twofold, Smith emphasized, "lying partly in its association with particular precepts of conduct, to which it supplies a supernatural sanction," but "mainly in its influence on the general tone and temper of men's minds, which it elevates to higher courage and purpose, and raises above a brutal servitude to the physical wants of the moment." The first, regulative function is important, Smith noted, but the second, stimulative function, which religion performs "by teaching men that their lives and happiness are not the mere sport of the blind forces of nature, but are watched over and cared for by a higher power," has still greater significance. It certainly did to Durkheim, as we shall see, for the "largely formal and rather *simplicite*"<sup>77</sup> quality of his early

writings on religion is due to their almost exclusive focus on the purely external, regulative function. It would be Durkheim's discovery of Smith's *Lectures* in 1895 and 1896 that would eventually lead to his far more powerful notion of "the dynamogenic quality of religion" to be found in *Les Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse* (1912).

To this point, Smith's argument had focused almost entirely on the ancient Semites, together with some examples taken from Greco-Roman culture. But now Smith began to push the meaning of sacrifice back to an earlier, more primitive stage. The sacrificial meal, he observed, was an appropriate expression of ancient religious life not just because it was an act in which god and worshippers participated but because in these societies, commensality (the act of eating and drinking together) was a symbol and confirmation of fellowship and mutual social obligations. In the Old Testament, these obligations were absolute and inviolable and could only have originated in kinship. This was not *our* idea of kinship, of course, for that is hardly absolute, being measured by degrees. But for the early Semites, a "kin" was "a group of persons whose lives were so bound up together, in what must be called a physical unity, that they could be treated as parts of one common life. The members of one kindred looked on themselves as one living whole, a single animated mass of blood, flesh, and bones, of which no member could be touched without all the members suffering."<sup>78</sup> It was this bond of kinship, including both god and worshippers, that commensality constituted and confirmed.

To illustrate the specific nature of the sacrificial meal, Smith appealed to the subsequently famous (or perhaps infamous) case of the slaughter of a camel by a clan of Arab Saracens, described by Saint Nilus of Ancyra in the late fourth century CE. At that time, the Saracens owned camels, and there was no apparent reason why a man shouldn't kill his camel as food for himself and his family. But in fact, such private slaughter was absolutely forbidden, so that the camel could be killed and eaten only under unusually extreme conditions of hunger, and even then only at a public ritual at which all kinsmen were present. It's not immediately obvious why Smith should have been drawn to this particular case. Nilus's Arabs themselves did not consider the slaughter a sacrifice to the gods, although at a much earlier period they had sacrificed camels to Venus (their sole deity). But they had ceased this practice long before, and Venus was no longer a clan or tribal deity. Smith's argument, however, was that the slaughter of Nilus's camel was a survival from that much earlier stage in the evolution of Semitic religion when every slaughter had necessarily been a sacrifice. Even though the victim had since lost its sacrificial character, the principle—that private slaughter was forbidden and must always be an affair of kindred—had survived.

The comparative method thus gave Smith's argument its modicum of credibility. The special circumstances under which Nilus's Arabs were permitted to slaughter their camels (extreme pressure of hunger, and only in the presence of kinsmen), for example, were similar to those under which savages are permitted to kill their totems, and while there was no *direct* evidence that the scruple against the private slaughter of a camel had its origin in feelings of kinship, Smith reminded his audience of the *indirect* evidence that "the consent and participation of the clan, which was required to make the slaughter of a camel legitimate, is the very thing that is needed to make the death of a kinsman legitimate." More *direct* evidence, Smith added, "we cannot expect to find, for it is most improbable that the Arabs of Nilus's time retained any clear ideas about the original significance of rules inherited by tradition from a more primitive state of society." Finally, Smith pointed to the evidence of parallel institutions among other Semitic peoples, arguing that "all the Semites at one time protected the lives of animals proper for sacrifice, and forbade them to be slain except by the act of the clan, that is, except under such circumstances as would justify or excuse the death of a kinsman."<sup>79</sup>

By now, Smith was but a small step from the assertion that the early Semites had practiced totemism. That the gods and their worshippers were kinsmen, he reminded his audience, was a fundamental doctrine of Semitic religion; that animals were regarded as gods was equally well established. But totemism also required the belief that families of men (clans and tribes) and families of animals (species) were related, something for which the direct evidence was admittedly "fragmentary and sporadic." Smith's earlier discussion of the concept of holiness, however, had established that holy animals were such not because they belonged to the god but because they were themselves imbued with divine power or life, and if such an animal was holy to a particular god, this must have meant that its life and that of the god were bound up together. In short, they were kin: "If kinship between the gods and their worshippers, on the one hand, and kinship between the gods and certain kinds of animals, on the other, are deep-seated principles of Semitic religion," Smith concluded, "we must necessarily conclude that kinship between families of men and animal kinds was an idea equally deep-seated, and we shall expect to find that sacred animals, wherever they occur, will be treated with the regard which men pay to their kinsfolk." In the earliest societies, therefore, kinship and sanctity were identical. The sacredness of the worshipper, the god, and the sacrificial victim were all based on the same principle of participation in the common life of the clan or tribe. The death of the victim, of course, was a violation of the sanctity of divine life transfused through each member, human or otherwise, of the

community, but the slaughter of such victims was also required on solemn occasions, so that all members of the group might confirm and reconfirm their mystic unity with one another and with their god. Only in this way, Smith emphasized, “can a sacred cement be procured which creates or keeps alive a living bond of union between the worshippers and their god. This cement is nothing else than the actual life of the sacred and kindred animal, which is conceived as residing in its flesh, but especially in its blood, and so, in the sacred meal, is actually distributed among all the participants, each of whom incorporates a particle of it with his own individual life.”<sup>80</sup>

Smith’s account of the subsequent evolution of sacrificial ritual was both interesting and revealing. As the idea of private property played a growing role in both social and religious life, the primitive conceptions of taboo and natural holiness gave way the notion that the sacrificial victim was taken from the property of the worshipper, artificially consecrated, and then given over to the god. Henceforth, sacred things were understood as those belonging to the god and were reserved for his use. Unfortunately, this “gift theory” of sacrifice presented a problem, for the material of the sacrificial gift (the blood and fat of the sacrificial victim) was understood as the food of the god, suggesting that the god was dependent on man for food, even while all good things were supposed to have come from the god. This paradox had concerned the author of Psalm 50 (who insisted that God wanted thanksgiving rather than food) and afforded much amusement to pagan satirists like Lucian; the same paradox afforded Smith the opportunity to reflect deeply (and ambivalently) on the liberal Protestant embrace of social and political progress.

At the beginnings of human thought, Smith reminded his audience, “the natural and the supernatural, the material and the spiritual, were confounded, and this confusion gave rise to the old notion of holiness, which turned on the idea that supernatural influences emanated, like an infection, from certain material things.” For societies to progress, of course, this “crude” conception had to be overcome, for “the vague dread of the unknown supernatural, which in savage society is so strong that it paralyses progress of every kind, and turns man aside from his legitimate task of subduing nature to his use.” This concept “receives a fatal blow,” Smith then observed, “as soon as all supernatural processes are referred to the will and powers of known deities, whose converse with man is guided by fixed laws.” Having embraced Ritschl’s theological gloss on this progress and having made his peace with modern science, Smith admitted that, initially, he was “disposed to see nothing but good” in the notion of personal gods speaking to man through regular, comprehensible laws. “But it was in the last degree unfortunate that these fixed laws were taken to be largely based on the principle



of property," Smith then insisted, "for the notion of property materializes everything that it touches, and its introduction into religion made it impossible to rise to spiritual conceptions of the deity and his relations to man on the basis of traditional religion." Ultimately, "the more ancient idea of living communion between the god and his worshippers, which fell more and more into the background under the theory of sacrificial gifts, contained an element of permanent truth wrapped up in a very crude embodiment." As a result, every subsequent effort of the Semites to find a better way to relate to the gods attached itself to this notion of communion, "taking hold of those forms and features of sacrifice which evidently involved something more than the mere presentation to the deity of a material tribute."<sup>81</sup>

The survival of this "permanent truth" was abundantly clear in times of collective suffering, Smith observed, when gifts and tributes failed and the Semites turned instead to special rites of atonement and piacular sacrifices, less concerned with the maintenance of a good understanding with the deity than with its restoration. In considerable detail, Smith traced the subsequent development of more advanced Christian conceptions (redemption, substitution, purification, atoning blood, the garment of righteousness, and others) from these ancient piacular ceremonies, but in all cases, he emphasized that the original understanding of these rites was based on a *physical* conception of holiness. The fundamental idea of ancient sacrifice, Smith argued, is sacramental communion, and all later rites of atonement derive their strength from this "communication of divine life to the worshippers" and the resulting creation or confirmation of "a living bond between them and their god." In primitive religion, Smith admitted, this is understood in a "physical and mechanical shape," for in primitive life, all spiritual and ethical ideas "are still wrapped up in the husk of a material embodiment." The great task of the ancient religions, therefore, was "to free the spiritual truth from the [material] husk." Progress in this direction was made, particularly in Israel, but "none of the ritual systems of antiquity was able by mere natural development to shake itself free from the congenital defect inherent in every attempt to embody spiritual truth in material forms."<sup>82</sup>

The telling phrase here, of course, is "by mere natural development." For however important a source Smith would become for skeptics, agnostics, and atheists like Frazer, Durkheim, and Freud, he always remained a child of the manse, an ardent (if slightly heterodox) defender of his and his father's kirk. Paradoxically, his most powerful conceptual tools (including the "natural" religious community, the distinction between magic and religion, the notion of a primitive totemic sacrament) were conceived not as the elements of a naturalistic account of the evolution of religion from its primitive origin to modern counterpart but rather to dramatize how

inconceivable it was that Christianity might be “explained” in this way. For Smith, to “free the spiritual truth” from the material “husk” of totemism remained the function of the great eighth- and seventh-century prophets (for him undeniably the agents of a genuinely divine revelation) and Jesus (for him the God of his father, the Free Church, and liberal Protestantism). However odd it might seem to a more secular audience, therefore, the attempt to make Smith fit an account of the emergence of the scientific study of religion as a gradual triumph of reason over unreason is doomed to failure, perhaps as an ironic counterpart to Smith’s own, withering critique of his fellow believers’ reading of *their* spiritual conceptions into the ritual practices of the ancient Semites.

Smith’s *Lectures* also mark the beginning of that period of almost obsessively focused scrutiny of totemism that culminated around 1910 with Frazer’s *Totemism and Exogamy*, Durkheim’s *Les Formes élémentaires*, and Freud’s *Totem und Tabu*. For as we have seen, McLennan’s interest in the religious aspect of totemism had been largely residual, a mere extension of his more basic concern with primitive forms of kinship and social organization. For Smith, the significance of McLennan’s “totem hypothesis” had been precisely this focus on this social rather than religious aspect of totemism, which confirmed the intimate relation between religion and society. But if McLennan had thus connected totemism to clan exogamy and female kinship, Smith provided a far richer and more detailed description of totemism as a body of primitive beliefs and practices that, within the larger framework of social evolutionary theory, could be understood as the materialistic foundation not just of more advanced religions, nor just of Christianity generally, but of some of the most specific and evocative symbols of Christianity, including the ideas of atonement, communion, and the Eucharist itself. For Smith, totemism was a body of spiritual truths embodied in vulgar, material husks, evolving gradually with its related social institutions until the eighth- and seventh-century prophets, to whom God had truly revealed himself, and the birth of Jesus, who was indeed God incarnate. For these prophecies and this divine self-revelation, no naturalistic account of the evolution of religion from primitive to ancient to modern beliefs and practices could possibly be sufficient. But for his more skeptical descendants, there was blood in the water, and the feeding began immediately.

### 3

## TOTEMISM AS UTILITY



**S**HORTLY AFTER arriving in Cambridge in October 1883, Smith joined Trinity College where, as a famous polymath, heretic, and raconteur, he soon became a desirable dinner companion. One evening the following January, he noticed that another Scot, the young classicist James Frazer (whose conversational skills were more limited) had made a rare appearance in the Combination Room. “He came and sat beside me,” Frazer later recalled,

and entered into conversation. It was the beginning of a friendship which lasted till his death. I think that one subject of our talk that evening was the Arabs in Spain, and that, though I knew next to nothing about the subject, I attempted some sort of argument with him, but was immediately beaten down, in the kindest and gentlest way, by his learning, and yielded myself captive to him at once. I never afterwards, so far as I remember, attempted to dispute the mastership which he thenceforward exercised over me by his extraordinary union of genius and learning.<sup>1</sup>

Frazer and Smith soon formed the habit of taking afternoon walks together and meeting in Smith’s rooms where Frazer was introduced to William Aldis Wright (a fellow member of “the Scottish contingent”). As noted earlier, Smith invited Frazer to contribute some of the classical articles to the ninth edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, including the important

essays on “Taboo” and “Totemism.” Frazer was present when Smith gave the lectures later published as *Kinship and Marriage in Early Arabia* and would lament Smith’s migration to Christ’s College when the latter was elected to a fellowship there in January 1885. “Perhaps the keenest moments of intellectual enjoyment in my life,” Frazer reminisced,

have been times when . . . [Smith] used to come over from Christ’s to my college rooms burning with some new idea that he had just struck out. His fire kindled mine, one idea suggested another, and a sort of electrical discharge of thought seemed to take place between us, while we turned up one passage after another in book after book, each new passage suggesting something fresh, till at last he went away, leaving my study table buried under a pile of books which we had taken down in our feverish haste, and my head throbbing with the new ideas he had sent through it.<sup>2</sup>

For the ten years leading up to Smith’s tragically early death in late March 1894, the two were intimate friends and collaborators, obsessed with questions about the nature of primitive religion in general and totemism in particular. Yet there is a sense in which, both intellectually and emotionally, they remained complete strangers throughout.

#### AN ENGLISH ANSWER TO A ROMAN QUESTION

FRAZER WAS born on 1 January 1854 to a solidly respectable, middle-class Scottish family of the type from which so many adherents of the Free Church were drawn. On his mother’s side were three ministers who had “gone out” during the Disruption, and Frazer would later describe his father as “a simple and devout Christian of unquestioning orthodoxy, who accepted the Bible in its literal sense as the inspired and infallible Word of God.”<sup>3</sup> Frazer’s father was also a confirmed Gladstonian Liberal, the author of several published works, and a controversialist with a keen appreciation of legal rights; the younger Frazer apparently established his own, considerably more reclusive identity in self-conscious opposition to his father’s activism. From childhood, apparently fearful of the loss of time and focus that public life demanded, James retreated inward, not only reading prodigiously but committing himself to the least practical of subjects while simultaneously shunning public life and even that share of the fame that became his with the growing popularity of later editions of *The Golden Bough*. Acutely uncomfortable in ordinary human relationships, he contrived an excessive formality in conversation, and his polished literary style

became not only “the felicitous vehicle for his thought” but increasingly “his principal channel to the social world.”<sup>4</sup> The contrast with the dazzling, heretical Smith could scarcely have been greater (which perhaps explains their friendship). While Frazer would spend his adult life reading, writing, and thinking about religion, however, he was soon drawn to Spencerian, utilitarian arguments that were anathema to Smith, and his childhood Free Church piety soon gave way not just to atheism but to a hostility toward Christian “superstition” that was occasionally quite outspoken.

At Larchfield Academy, under the guidance of its headmaster, Alexander Mackenzie, James received his first rudiments of Latin and Greek, and from there he moved on to Glasgow University in November 1869, just two months before his sixteenth birthday. Although Glasgow offered what today would be considered merely a good secondary education, Frazer was still exposed to scholars of some stature—the classicist George Gilbert Ramsay, who inspired Frazer’s unusually broad, cross-disciplinary notion of classical studies, as well as his extraordinarily thorough knowledge of Latin, and to whom Frazer’s monumental six-volume *Pausanias* (1898) would be dedicated; the philosopher John Veitch, who encouraged Frazer’s interest in psychology and epistemology as well as his hostility to metaphysics; the physicist Sir William Thomson (later Lord Kelvin), whose optimistic insistence that the universe is an ordered, rational system that can be described mathematically stimulated Frazer’s growing conviction that the human mind was a similarly ordered, comprehensible entity subject to its own laws of development; and the idealist philosopher Edward Caird, whose Hegelian jargon reputedly made Frazer ill and whose intuitionist ethics probably hardened Frazer’s associationism and utilitarianism in opposition.<sup>5</sup> A brilliant student at Glasgow, Frazer still understood that like most Scottish graduates, his education was incomplete, and by December 1873, he had applied for and won an entrance scholarship to Cambridge. He became a pensioner (fee-paying student) in January, and in October 1874 (at the age of twenty-one among the oldest of his cohort) entered Trinity College, which remained his “home” for life.

So long as they satisfied certain minimal requirements, students at Cambridge were free to do more or less as they pleased, and what pleased Frazer was his reading, which was voluminous by any standard. A list of the Greek and Latin authors whom Frazer had read by October 1875 (the start of his second year) can be found in Ackerman’s biography, and it is indeed staggering, including all of Plato, Euripides, and Pindar, for example, and substantial number of “late” Latin writers (including Diodorus Siculus, Tertullian, Lucan, and Quintilian) who were rarely studied at the time. Especially in prose, the extent of Frazer’s reading compares favorably with

that of Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, the greatest classicist of his age and a famous antagonist of Nietzsche. Ackerman particularly emphasizes the heavy reading in Plato, which should be seen as an extension of his interest (inspired by Veitch) in psychology and epistemology. This would be carried forward in Frazer's fellowship essay on Plato's theory of knowledge (1879), his unpublished notebook on "Philosophy" (1880), and of course *The Golden Bough* (1890).<sup>6</sup>

Aside from Milton, Addison, and Gibbon, who served as the models for the self-conscious cultivation of his elegant literary style, the most important name on Frazer's nonclassical reading list was Herbert Spencer. By the 1870s, Spencer had supplanted Mill as the dominant figure in British philosophy and was extremely popular throughout the Anglophone world. A catalogue of Frazer's personal library made in 1907 includes no fewer than ten titles by Spencer, all published between 1875 and 1880. On 8 March 1885, when Frazer submitted his first significant essay to the Anthropological Institute, it was accompanied by a letter to its president, Francis Galton, expressing his appreciation for the opportunity to present his ideas before this distinguished gathering. "That Herbert Spencer should be one of them," Frazer added, "is more gratifying to me than I care to say, for my intellectual debt to his writings is deep and will be life long." Even at this early, pre-anthropological stage in his intellectual development, Frazer (like Spencer) believed that thought is constrained by anatomy and physiology, that the development of thought thus occurs within individuals rather than cultures, and that biological and social evolution might thus be understood in the same terms. From this, it would be a small step to Frazer's conviction that all *minds* are fundamentally the same and only a small step further to his view that the *evolution* of mind is everywhere the same, oblivious to environment and culture, obeying its own intrinsic laws of development.<sup>7</sup>

After taking his degree in April 1878, Frazer wrote his dissertation on "The Growth of Plato's Ideal Theory" under the guidance of Henry Jackson, the praelector in ancient philosophy at Trinity and a leading authority on Plato. The dissertation contains two references to the mentality of savages, suggesting the influence of Spencer and possibly Tylor, but Frazer would not read *Primitive Culture* (1871) until the early 1880s, and in all other respects the dissertation clearly predates Frazer's interest in anthropology and the comparative method. Since Frazer's fellowship at Trinity would provide a degree of security until 1885, however, he continued to read voraciously, pursuing new interests as they appeared. He studied at the Inns of Court, for example, and eventually passed his examinations and was called to the bar. He never practiced the law, however, and his writings bear not a whisper of any special interest in primitive law or legal institutions. His early

work in philosophy was entirely derivative, and it is difficult to imagine a writer with fewer philosophical sensibilities. When in December 1881 he applied for a professorship of humanity (Latin) at the University of Aberdeen, he was passed over.<sup>8</sup> But things were about to change.

Pausanias was a geographer and antiquary who traveled widely in the Palestine, Egypt, Italy, Rome, and especially Greece during the early second century CE. At that time, many of the monuments of the ancient world were still standing, and Pausanias's *Description of Greece* is by far the best account that has survived. Widely respected for his plain, thorough, unadorned style, Pausanias was exceptional for his abiding interest in religion, myth, and folklore, and particularly rites and customs that seemed "odd and old-fashioned" and "had long since become extinct in Athens." Frazer shared Pausanias's fascination with odd beliefs and practices, and in July 1884 he contracted with Macmillan to prepare a new translation of the *Description of Greece*. Earlier editions had run to two or at most three octavo volumes of text and notes. Despite Macmillan's efforts to dissuade him, however, Frazer had soon resolved to prepare a full commentary, so that when the work finally appeared in 1898, it comprised six thick quarto volumes of more than three thousand pages. In this, the Pausanias fit the pattern of "modest origins followed by riotous growth" characteristic of Frazer's later works. But by the close of 1886, Frazer had announced to Macmillan that he was shifting his focus to collect materials for "a work on comparative mythology."<sup>9</sup>

If *The Golden Bough* (1890) thus grew out of (and interrupted) Frazer's work on Pausanias; however, there were other factors at work. Although Frazer had met the psychologist and philosopher James Ward as early as 1875, for example, the two became close only in the early 1880s, when both participated in Oscar Browning's well-known Dante reading circle at King's College, and Ward persuaded Frazer to read Tylor's *Primitive Culture* (1871). When Tylor himself praised Frazer's presentation before the Anthropological Institute on 10 March 1885, Frazer replied that it was Tylor's writings that had first interested him in anthropology, marking "an epoch" in his life.<sup>10</sup> During the same year, the French philosopher Ernest Renan published *Le Prêtre de Nemi*, a "drama of ideas" about an enlightened priest who attempts to introduce reason into the absurd religious cult of which he is chief minister. Frazer was an admirer of Renan for many years and would later say that he felt closer to him than to any other French writer or scholar; his 1907 library catalogue included no fewer than ten titles by Renan, several (including *Le Prêtre de Nemi*) in editions of the 1860s and 1870s. Thus the central image of *The Golden Bough* (the priest-king who, as the embodiment of cosmic forces, must be sacrificed to ensure the fertility of the soil and the health of the kingdom) seems to have been inspired

by Renan. Finally, as we have seen, it was in January 1884 that Frazer first met Robertson Smith and began their ten-year period of close friendship and collaboration. Struggling to make sense of what he found in Pausanias, therefore, Frazer would naturally have been impressed by the similarity between the strange beliefs and practices of second-century Greeks and those he had read about in Tylor and discussed with Robertson Smith. Frazer had found his subject—the comparative anthropological study of the primitive mind and primitive religion.<sup>11</sup>

Frazer's initial contribution was "On Certain Burial Customs as Illustrative of the Primitive Theory of the Soul," presented before the Anthropological Institute on 10 March 1885. Frazer's topic was a custom that had perplexed Plutarch: when a man who had been falsely reported to have died abroad returned home alive, he was not admitted by the front door but had to climb to the roof and enter through the chimney. The custom was extremely ancient and by no means confined to Greece and Rome, Frazer added, and it reveals the extent to which the attentiveness granted by the ancients for the dead derived not from affection but from survivors' fear of the ghosts of the deceased. In a dazzling display of erudition, Frazer enumerated the staggering variety of precautions taken (not just by the ancients but by primitive peoples all over the world) to protect themselves from the spirits of disgruntled ancestors, all of which assume that the body had been securely buried. But what if the man had died abroad and his body was unavailable? Frazer's answer was that the absent body was buried in effigy, according to the primitive conception that an effigy is as good as the original. If the man were not really dead, however, he would eventually return home and, reluctant to consider reports of his death as anything but exaggerated, would present his relatives with a delicate question. Was he dead or alive? The solution, Frazer observed, was ingenious: "The man was dead, certainly—that was past praying for. But then he might be born again; he might take a new lease of life." Before this could occur, however, he first had to get into his own house, whose door (according to the elaborate precautionary rituals that Frazer had already described) had been rendered ghost-proof. Since the man was still a ghost, he had to do as ghosts do, and come down the chimney. And this, Frazer concluded in a phrase that almost epitomized his career, "is an English answer to a Roman question."<sup>12</sup> This answer to Plutarch's question might easily have been written by Spencer or Tylor, both of whom were present as it was read. What was unusual in Frazer's argument (as Tylor himself made clear in the ensuing discussion) was not just Frazer's encyclopedic knowledge of ancient texts as well as primitive customs, but his treatment of these texts as repositories of "real facts full of anthropological data."<sup>13</sup> In this and other respects, this initial performance



would prove typical of Frazer's oeuvre. The title itself announced two of his most fundamental anthropological presuppositions: that primitive culture is a matter of intellectual solutions to cognitive problems; and that the problem of understanding these solutions is one of working backward from the customary behavior to the "theory" that explains it.

Shortly after the presentation of "On Certain Burial Customs," Frazer began a correspondence that would eventually have significant consequences for his treatment of totemism. Like Tylor, A. C. Haddon had come from a dissenting entrepreneurial family, his father having inherited a London printing firm that specialized in missionary tracts. But his mother, who wrote children's books on religion and natural history, encouraged his scientific interests, and by 1871, although still deeply religious, he had felt the influence of Darwin and hoped for a career in zoology. Showing no head for business, Haddon was eventually allowed to attend Cambridge, where he had soon exchanged his childhood religion for the agnosticism of T. H. Huxley and dedicated himself to the study of the lowest forms of life. With Huxley's support, he was appointed to the chair in zoology at the Royal College of Science in Dublin and, in 1886, began to make plans for a major research expedition to the islands between New Guinea and Australia. Frazer learned of these plans and, always on the lookout for additional information about native customs, sent Haddon a questionnaire, specifically asking him to collect information about totemism. In 1888, with a three-hundred-pound grant, Haddon set off on a solo expedition to study the formation and structure of the coral reefs of the Torres Straits. Arriving at the islands, however, Haddon discovered that the native population was declining and that white residents knew almost nothing of their customs. Convinced that it was his duty to learn what he could of a rapidly vanishing culture, he abandoned his research on coral reefs and focused on the more rapidly changing culture of the Torres Straits. He wrote to Frazer on his return, and though the letter has not been preserved, Frazer was apparently gratified to receive answers to at least some of his questions. On 22 July 1889, Frazer again wrote to Haddon, this time asking him for a list of all the totems of which he was aware, together with any particular rules that surrounded them.<sup>14</sup> For the most part, however, Frazer spent the last months of the 1880s preparing the first edition of his "work on comparative mythology."

#### THE ODD COUPLE AND THE DEATH OF THE GOD

WHILE PREPARING the *Encyclopedia Britannica* essay on "Taboo," Frazer would necessarily have read a great deal about the prohibitions surrounding the lives of kings. But the letters that Frazer wrote before 8 November 1889

provide no indication of where the ideas that had interrupted his work on Pausanias were leading him. On that day, however, after sixteen months of silence, Frazer abruptly informed Macmillan that he had nearly completed “a study in the history of primitive religion,” to be called *The Golden Bough*. The title referred to the branch that Aeneas, advised by Sybil, had plucked before attempting his journey to the underworld (as well as to Turner’s painting of the woodland lake of Nemi, to be reproduced in the frontispiece of the volume itself). “In antiquity,” Frazer recalled this legend,

this sylvan landscape was the scene of a strange and recurring tragedy. On the northern shore of the lake . . . stood the sacred grove and sanctuary of Diana Nemorensis, or Diana of the Wood. . . . In this sacred grove there grew a certain tree round which at any time of the day and probably far into the night a strange figure might be seen to prowl. In his hand he carried a drawn sword, and he kept peering warily about him as if every instant he expected to be set upon by an enemy. He was a priest and a murderer; and the man for whom he looked was sooner or later to murder him and hold the priesthood in his stead. Such was the rule of the sanctuary. A candidate for the priesthood could only succeed to office by slaying the priest, and having slain him he held office till he was himself slain by a stronger or a craftier.<sup>15</sup>

In his letter to Macmillan, Frazer described his book as an explanation for this strange rule of the Arician sanctuary. Through “an application of the comparative method,” Frazer wrote, it could be shown that the priest represented Virbius (the god of the grove); that his murder represented the death of the god; that the branch was the mistletoe; and that the legend itself was connected to the Druidic reverence for the mistletoe, the human sacrifices that accompanied their worship, and the Norse myth of the death of Balder. But “whatever may be thought of [the book’s] theories,” he concluded, “it will be found, I believe, to contain a large store of very curious customs, many of which may be new even to professed anthropologists. The resemblance of many of the savage customs and ideas to the fundamental doctrines of Christianity is striking.”<sup>16</sup> Needing a one-hundred-pound advance for his trip to Greece so that he might complete his Pausanias, Frazer also asked Macmillan for a quick decision. Although the manuscript was not complete, Macmillan was interested and sent it immediately to his friend, the Liberal politician, editor, and rationalist man of letters John Morley. When Morley’s review was favorable, Frazer rapidly completed the manuscript, and, on 16 December 1899, Macmillan agreed to publish *The Golden Bough*. The book was published in two volumes in June 1890.

The mystery of the Arician sanctuary notwithstanding, the question that was really at the heart of *The Golden Bough* was the same one that Max Müller had asked in 1856: What was the nature of the primitive religion of the Aryans? The answer to this question, Frazer insisted, is not to be found in ancient books, for literature accelerates the rate of social and intellectual progress, while those who do not read remain unaffected. The superstitious beliefs and practices of the illiterate peasantry of modern Europe thus affords a more accurate conception of primitive Aryan religion than anything described in their literature. For Frazer, therefore, “every inquiry into the primitive religion of the Aryans should either start from the superstitious beliefs and observances of the peasantry, or should at least be constantly checked and controlled by reference to them.”<sup>17</sup> The gathering of this evidence had been begun in the early nineteenth century, inspired by German romanticism and led by the brothers Grimm, to whom Frazer had paid abundant tribute just months earlier, in “Some Popular Superstitions of the Ancients” (1890). But Frazer’s more immediate source was Wilhelm Mannhardt, who had begun his study of primitive folklore as a comparative philologist and a disciple of Müller. Disillusioned by the sharp disagreements he found among practitioners of an allegedly scientific method, Mannhardt gave up philology for fieldwork and “set himself systematically to collect, compare, and explain the living superstitions of the peasantry.” Within this broad field, Frazer added, his special focus was on “the religion of the woodman and the farmer, in other words, the superstitious beliefs and rites connected with trees and cultivated plants.” Mannhardt believed that these modern peasant rituals were a form of magic, intended to guarantee the fertility of women, animals, and plants, and Frazer understood this to mean that these peasants, while ostensibly Christians, were also unwitting practitioners of an earlier, pre-Christian faith rooted in the agricultural cycle of birth, growth, death, and decay, which had underlain the official cult of the ancient Romans.<sup>18</sup>

Still more than Mannhardt, however, Frazer insisted that his book owed most to his friend William Robertson Smith: “He has read the greater part of the proofs in circumstances which enhanced the kindness,” Frazer recalled, “and has made many valuable suggestions which I have usually adopted.” Frazer particularly emphasized Smith’s theory of sacrifice, noting that the “central idea” of *The Golden Bough*—the conception of the slain god—“is derived directly, I believe, from my friend.” But Frazer immediately added that Smith did not necessarily assent to any of the theories advanced in *The Golden Bough* and, more specifically, that Smith was “in no way responsible for the general explanation which I have offered of the custom of slaying the god.”<sup>19</sup> For those reading *The Golden Bough* for the first time, this odd

conjunction of effusive gratitude and careful dissociation is perplexing and invites at least a momentary digression to try to characterize a relationship that probably seemed as odd to Frazer and Smith's contemporaries as it remains to us. For despite their extremely close association and collaboration during the last ten years of Smith's life, Frazer seems to have been somewhat mystified by Smith's religious sensibilities.

It was Frazer's meeting with Smith early in 1884, of course, that played so large a part in the former's migration from classics to anthropology, but as we've seen, Frazer's essay on burial customs had treated primitive religion as a set of intellectual solutions to cognitive problems, in sharp contrast to Ritschl and Smith's view of religion as based on the conative, willful faculties. Smith commissioned Frazer's classical and anthropological contributions to the ninth edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, "guiding Frazer carefully in his treatment" of the important subject of totemism, but when Frazer speculated about the origin of that strange institution, he hinted at what would eventually become the second of his three theories (all equally rationalist and utilitarian) pointing to "the tendency of totemism to preserve certain species of plants and animals." Writing to J.S. Black on 27 November 1889, Frazer described the first edition of Smith's *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites* (1889) as "beyond doubt a striking and powerful book, full of original thought and abounding in fruitful views." But he immediately added that "the very simplicity and obviousness of the deductions inspire me with a somewhat vague and perhaps unjustifiable distrust."<sup>20</sup>

In this first edition of *The Golden Bough*, therefore, Frazer's carefully worded effort to connect the central idea of the slain god to Smith's theory of sacrifice (while simultaneously placing it at a distance from his own theory) was not the first sign of an uneasy, equivocal relationship between the two. Nor was it the last. "That mystical or sacramental sacrifices have played an important part in the history of many religions," Frazer wrote in his eulogy for Smith in 1894, was first pointed out by Robertson Smith. Sacrifices and communion are familiar to us, of course, in the Christian doctrine of Atonement and the sacrament of the Eucharist. But Robertson Smith, he added, "was the first to show that conceptions and sacraments of this sort are not confined to Christianity, but are common to it with heathen and even savage religions." This discovery, Frazer emphasized, raises an important question for Christians: How are we to explain this analogy between the Christian Atonement and Eucharist, on the one hand, and the mystical or sacramental sacrifices of the heathen religions, on the other? Smith's answer, Frazer dutifully reported, was that "the mystical sacrifices of the heathen foreshadowed in a dim and imperfect way the Christian conception of a divine Saviour who gives His life for the world." Appropriately, Frazer

took no position on this sensitive issue in his eulogy. But from everything else that Frazer ever wrote about Christianity, we know that he considered it superstitious nonsense, and on the related question of whether Smith's totemic sacrament had its origin in totemism, Frazer simply observed that "the evidence thus far does not enable us to pronounce decisively."<sup>21</sup>

On 15 December 1897, responding to a letter from J.F. White that had asked for recollections of his close friend, Frazer wrote that Smith "seldom alluded to the controversy he had had with a section of the Free Church of Scotland, and when he did so it was without the least trace of bitterness. He never once in my hearing uttered a word of complaint as to the treatment to which he had been subjected. On the contrary," Frazer then added, "I received an impression, more from his expressive silence, I think, than from anything he said, that he was still deeply attached to the Free Church. I confess I never understood his inmost views on religion. On this subject he maintained a certain reserve which neither I nor (so far as I know) any of his intimates cared to break through. I never even approached, far less discussed, the subject with him."<sup>22</sup> The more specific differences between Smith's and Frazer's views on primitive religion will be dealt with in the conclusion of this chapter. But for now it is sufficient simply to recall John Burrow's blunt reminder that Frazer "wrote anthropology like Tylor, not like Robertson Smith."<sup>23</sup>

This Tylorian perspective was evident from the early pages of *The Golden Bough*, where Frazer asked about the origin of the rule that guided that "strange and recurring tragedy" of the Arician sanctuary. Since this rule has no parallel in classical antiquity, he insisted, we must seek our explanation in a more barbarous age, thus embracing Tylor's belief that, despite many superficial differences, the early history of man reveals the similarity with which the human mind has elaborated its first crude philosophy of life. This in turn led Frazer to a set of conditions that, if fulfilled, would yield an explanation of the rule in question—for example, if we can show that a barbarous custom similar to that of the priesthood of Nemi has existed elsewhere; if we can detect the motives that led to its institution; if we can show that these motives operated widely in human society, producing generically similar institutions; and finally, if we can demonstrate that these same motives were actually at work in classical antiquity—*then* we might infer that, in an earlier age, the same motives gave birth to the priesthood at Nemi.<sup>24</sup> The object of *The Golden Bough* was thus the discovery of motives that underlay practices that otherwise appeared to "more civilized" peoples as utterly strange and inexplicable. For Frazer, this could be reduced to answering two simple questions: Why did the priest have to slay his predecessor? And why, before doing so, had he to pluck the Golden Bough?

Beginning with the first, Frazer reminded his readers that the priest was also called the “King of the Wood” and that the connection of a royal title with priestly duties was common in ancient Greece and Italy. If ancient kings were thus revered as *priests* (intermediaries between man and god), he added, they were also themselves revered as *gods*—a notion that is reflected in two important aspects of savage as well as ancient thought. First, the savage is largely unaware of the distinction drawn by more civilized peoples between the natural and the supernatural. To the savage, therefore, the world is pervaded by spiritual agents acting on impulses and motives similar to his own, who are liable to be moved by appeals to their pity, hopes, and fears. Conceiving of the world in this way, the savage sees no limit to his power of influencing the course of nature to his own advantage, either through prayers and sacrifices or (if a god should happen to become, temporarily or permanently, incarnate in his own person) through his direct manipulation of natural phenomena. Second, the savage has a conception that Frazer described as “sympathetic magic”—the performance or avoidance of an act on the belief that it entails good or bad consequences that resemble the act itself. In sympathetic magic, Frazer emphasized, one event is assumed to be followed necessarily and invariably by another, without the intervention of any spiritual or personal agency, and in this sense, it constitutes a primitive version of the modern notion of physical causation and natural law. All savages, Frazer observed, “fancy [themselves] possessed of this power of influencing the course of nature by sympathetic magic; a man-god, on this view, is only an individual who is believed to enjoy this common power to an unusually high degree.”<sup>25</sup>

These two modes of thought yield contrasting types of the “man-god” (one whose divinity derives from a spirit incarnate in his person and a second whose power results from a certain physical sympathy with nature), constituting Frazer’s earliest attempt to distinguish between religion and magic and also to describe their evolutionary relationship. Because the second type of man-god differs from ordinary mortals only by degree, for example, and because at the earliest stage of social evolution both modes of thought coexist, these spiritual agents are not regarded as greatly, if at all, superior to human beings. “At this stage of thought,” Frazer thus observed, “the world is viewed as a great democracy; all beings in it, whether natural or supernatural, are supposed to stand on a footing of tolerable equality.” With subsequent evolutionary progress, of course, man gradually realized how feeble he is in the face of nature, but this recognition implied no corresponding belief in the impotence of those supernatural beings with which his imagination had peopled the universe. On the contrary, Frazer argued, because man did not yet understand the world as a system of impersonal

forces acting in accordance with fixed and invariable laws (in other words, because science had not yet evolved), the recognition that we are feeble in the face of nature only augmented our awe at the power of the supernatural. So the primitive sense of equality with the gods disappears, and man “resigns at the same time the hope of directing the course of nature by his own unaided resources, that is, by magic, and looks more and more to the gods as the sole repositories of those supernatural powers which he once claimed to share with them.”<sup>26</sup>

This change in thought is reflected by a change in practice: with this first advance in knowledge, prayer and sacrifice assume the leading place in religious ritual, while magic (once ranked with them as an equal) falls to the level of a black art. Henceforth, magic is regarded as a vain, impious encroachment on the domain of the gods and as such encounters the steady opposition of the priests. Later, when the distinction between religion and superstition has emerged, sacrifice and prayer are “the resource of the pious and enlightened portion of the community,” while magic is “the refuge of the superstitious and ignorant.” And later still, when the conception of natural law has begun to emerge, magic, “based as it implicitly is on the idea of a necessary and invariable sequence of cause and effect, independent of personal will, reappears from the obscurity and discredit into which it had fallen, and by investigating the causal sequences in nature, directly prepares the way for science. Alchemy,” in short, “leads up to chemistry.” This evolutionary digression notwithstanding, however, Frazer’s main purpose here was to insist that the combination of sacred functions with a royal title that we find in the King of the Wood at Nemi also exists outside the limits of antiquity, as “a common feature of societies at all stages from barbarism to civilisation.” What, then, was the origin of the King of the Wood? Frazer acknowledged at least one “probable tradition”—the euhemerist notion that the King of the Wood was preceded by a line of kings who had been stripped of political power through revolution, leaving them only “their religious functions and the shadow of a crown.” But if the King of the Wood had once been a real king, Frazer objected, his throne would have been in Aricia, three miles from the forest where he is found, while the title itself suggests that he was a king of the forest rather than the city. The more likely origin, Frazer thus argued, lies in the primitive belief in “departmental kings of nature”—persons who were supposed to rule over particular aspects of the natural environment, which itself grew out of the worship of spirits of vegetation described in such abundance by Grimm and Mannhardt.<sup>27</sup>

Frazer believed that the archaic forms of vegetation worship found in the spring and summer festivals of European peasants were analogous to those practiced by the Greeks and Romans in prehistoric times. More specifically,

two arguments suggested that the worship of trees might explain the priesthood of Aricia: the fact that the characteristics of Diana, the goddess of the Arician grove, are those of a tree spirit; and the fact that in the European folk custom, the tree spirit is frequently represented by a living human being, who is regarded as the embodiment of the spirit and the person responsible for its control and periodic regeneration. Since he had already argued that the notion of a god incarnate in a human being was common among primitive peoples, and also that the human being incarnating the tree spirit was described as a king, Frazer felt justified in concluding that the King of the Wood in the Arician grove was indeed an incarnation of the spirit of vegetation. But while this man-god-king has control over the course of nature, his powers are not exercised simply through concrete acts of will. On the contrary, his person is conceived "as the dynamical center of the universe, from which lines of force radiate to all quarters of the heaven," so that "any motion of his . . . instantaneously affects and may seriously disturb some part of nature." This means that "the greatest care must be taken both by and of him," that "his whole life, down to its minutest details, must be so regulated that no act of his . . . may disarrange or upset the established order of nature," and that he must live "hedged in by ceremonious etiquette, a network of prohibitions and observances, of which the intention is . . . to restrain him from conduct which, by disturbing the harmony of nature, might involve himself, his people, and the universe in one common catastrophe."<sup>28</sup>

This "network of prohibitions and observances" designed to protect the life and well-being of the divine king had, of course, been the focus of Frazer's essay on "Taboo" (1888), and as he had in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* two years earlier, Frazer treated this institution in a Tylorian manner, as the evolutionary consequence of animistic beliefs about life, death, and the soul. Just as the processes of inanimate nature are explained by savages as the consequence of living beings within or behind the phenomena, for example, so the activities of an animal or man are explained as the result of a second animal or man (the soul) acting within the first. Consistent with this, the phenomenon of sleep or death is explained by the temporary or permanent absence of the soul, and since death is thus quite literally the permanent absence of the soul, the way to guard against it is to prevent the soul from leaving the body or, if it does leave, to secure its early return. "The precautions adopted by savages to secure one or other of these ends," Frazer observed, "take the form of prohibitions or taboos, which are nothing but rules intended to ensure either the continued presence or the return of the soul."<sup>29</sup>

Inevitably, of course, the divine king eventually grows old, becomes weak, and eventually dies, and since the course of nature is itself understood to be



dependent on his health and well-being, this process of gradual enfeeblement and ultimate death poses a profound threat to his worshippers. For if the divine king dies a natural death, his soul has either voluntarily left his body and refuses to return or it has been removed and detained by a demon or sorcerer; in either case, his soul is lost to his worshippers, and with it their safety, prosperity, and well-being. There “is only one way of averting these dangers,” Frazer observed: “The man-god must be killed as soon as he shows symptoms that his powers are beginning to fail, and his soul must be transferred to a vigorous successor before it has been seriously impaired by the threatened decay.”<sup>30</sup> Some primitive peoples even considered it unsafe to wait for the slightest symptoms of decay and preferred to kill the divine king while he is still perfectly healthy: “Accordingly,” Frazer added, “they have a fixed term beyond which he might not reign, and at the close of which he must die, the term fixed upon being short enough to exclude the probability of his degenerating physically in the interval.”<sup>31</sup>

What has this “killing of the divine king” to do with Arician myth? As an incarnation of the spirit of vegetation, Frazer reminded his readers, the King of the Wood possessed the power to make trees bear fruit, crops grow, and so on, so that his life would have been precious to his worshippers and surrounded by an elaborate system of taboos. And just as the value attached to the life of the divine king paradoxically required his violent death, so the same reasoning would apply to the King of the Wood—in short, he had to be killed in order that his soul might be transferred in good state to his successor. Such an explanation, Frazer added, accounts for one of the more intriguing features of the myth—the curious rule that the King of the Wood held office until a stronger man had slain him: “For so long as he could maintain his position by the strong hand, it might be inferred that his natural force was not abated; whereas his defeat and death at the hands of another proved that his strength was beginning to fail and that it was time his divine life should be lodged in a less dilapidated tabernacle.” If the system of interdictions and taboos surrounding the divine king is thus a largely negative institution, therefore, the ritual slaying of the king has a more positive function of assuring the spirit’s revival or resurrection in a healthier, more robust form. Frazer immediately connected this more positive institution to the annual cycle of decay, death, and resurrection that governs the lives of all hunting, pastoral, and agricultural communities, is reflected in the accounts of ancient mythological figures, and still finds a symbolic expression in the spring, midsummer, and harvest ceremonies of the European peasantry.

Frazer was acutely aware that in some of these ceremonies (the ritual killing of the corn-spirit at harvest, for example), the spirit is frequently

represented in the form of an animal. These representations, Frazer observed, might explain the role played by animals in many ancient myths, as well as their association with some of the mythic figures (the bull with Dionysus, the pig with Osiris, horses with Virbius, and so on), while the peculiar character of the harvest feast (the flesh and blood of the animal are consumed by harvesters) emphasized its sacramental character. Frazer acknowledged the possibility of an alternative explanation, for in the second volume of *Myth, Ritual, and Religion* (1887), Andrew Lang had already suggested that the close association of the bull with Dionysus was due to the fusion of two tribes, one of which had previously worshipped the bull as its totemic animal, while the other had worshipped a spirit of vegetation. But it is not yet certain, Frazer added, that the Aryans ever practiced totemism, while Aryan peoples (e.g., the ancient Greeks) clearly worshipped spirits of vegetation in the form of animals. The myth (for example, that Virbius had been killed by horses) should thus be explained by the features of the cult (that the horses were representations of the spirit of vegetation). This was Frazer's version of Robertson Smith's ritual theory of myth. But while Frazer shared Smith's view that myths change while customs remain constant, he added the rationalist judgment that "the history of religion is a long attempt . . . to find a sound theory for an absurd practice."<sup>32</sup> And for Frazer, absurd practices were simply those attributed to irrational beliefs.

The irrational but psychologically comprehensible belief that the animal was a representation of the vegetation spirit thus explained two aspects of an apparently absurd practice: the ritual protection of certain animals throughout the year; and their periodic sacrifice at a solemn ceremony. But why was the sacrificial victim also ritually consumed by its worshippers? The reasons why savages eat the body of the god, Frazer observed, are "from the primitive standpoint, simple enough." Briefly, the savage "commonly believes that by eating the flesh of an animal or man he acquires not only the physical, but even the moral and intellectual qualities which were characteristics of that animal or man." If the parallels between this practice and the most sacred rite of the Christian faith were not sufficiently obvious to his readers, Frazer was more than willing to make these clear. "When the god is a corn-god," he explained, "the corn is his proper body; when he is a vine-god, the juice of the grape is his blood; and so by eating the bread and drinking the wine the worshipper partakes of the real body and blood of his god. Thus the drinking of wine in the rites of a vine-god like Dionysus is not an act of revelry, it is a solemn sacrament."<sup>33</sup>

This primitive sacrament, of course, was the evolutionary origin of the Eucharist, which Frazer explained as the consequence of utilitarian motives and the laws of associationist psychology; the same laws and motives

applied to still another, equally “Christian” feature of the custom—the belief that the accumulated sins and misfortunes of the people might be laid upon the dying god, who, bearing them away, leaves the people innocent and happy. This belief, Frazer insisted, arises from a mistaken association of ideas, a confusion between the physical and mental: “Because it is possible to transfer a load of wood, stones, or what not, from our own back to the back of another,” Frazer explained, “the savage fancies that it is equally possible to transfer the burden of his pains and sorrows to another, who will suffer them in his stead. Upon this idea he acts, and the result is an endless number of often very unamiable devices for putting off upon someone else the trouble which a man shrinks from bearing himself.” But this individual, psychological tendency can also affect a collectivity, as when an entire community, noting the periodic decline of flora and fauna that coincide with changes of season, seeks to expel those evil spirits and influences that might explain them. When this reasoning is applied to the dying god, he becomes the scapegoat, the one who bears their sins and sufferings into the unknown world beyond the grave.<sup>34</sup>

For Frazer, this was a sufficient answer to the question of why the priest of Nemi had to slay his predecessor. But the second question—why did the priest have to pluck the Golden Bough?—remained. Frazer’s answer began by pointing out that two of the taboos surrounding the life of the divine king (that he could not touch the ground and could not see the sun) are also observed by girls at puberty in many parts of the world. In the first case as in the second, Frazer argued, the purpose of these rules is to suspend or “insulate” the supernatural power of such people between heaven and earth and thus to prevent it from being dissipated or discharged in a way that would endanger not only them but also other people and even the world at large. Frazer then reminded his readers that the soul is frequently conceived as absent from the body without causing death. These absences involve considerable risk, for the wandering soul is subject to various dangers, but Frazer now suggested the opposite possibility—that if soul remains in the person, it runs a greater chance of sustaining injury than if it is temporarily put away in some secret place. The folktales of the European peasantry provided Frazer with abundant evidence of the existence of such a belief among savage peoples, some of which apparently referred to the temporary placing of the soul within a totemic animal or plant; to these, Frazer added the evidence of puberty rites among totemic tribes in Australia and North America, in which the death of a young man is simulated in order to bring him to life again. “Such rites become intelligible,” Frazer observed, “if we suppose that their substance consists in extracting the youth’s soul in order to transfer it to his totem.”<sup>35</sup> This notion that the human soul

was placed within the animal for security became Frazer's first theoretical explanation for the origin of totemism; indeed, it seemed to explain a great deal—the man's worship of the animal, his objection to killing it, the animal's reciprocal kindness to and protection of the man, and the general notion that the man and his totem animal are kinsmen by descent.

But what is the connection between this savage custom and the Golden Bough? Frazer's argument here turned heavily on the Norse myth of Balder the Beautiful (the son of Odin and Frigga). According to legend, Balder was a favorite of the gods, who believed that Balder was immortal and thus amused themselves by throwing rocks or shooting arrows at him. But the jealous Loki learned that Balder might be vulnerable to the otherwise innocuous mistletoe, which he plucked from the oak and gave to the blind god Höd, encouraging him to throw it at Balder. The mistletoe pierced Balder's heart and killed him, and at his funeral, his body was burned on the pyre of a great ship. To this legend, Frazer applied the ritual theory of myth. Both the plucking of the mistletoe and the death and burning of the god, he observed, are found in an annual fire festival practiced by northern European peasants. In these festivals, an effigy of the vegetation spirit is burned, and the purpose is to ensure a sufficient supply of heat and light for men, animals, and plants. In the person of Balder, this effigy of the spirit of vegetation has survived into Norse mythology, and since the oak was pre-eminently the sacred tree of the Aryans, it was to this tree in particular that the vegetation spirit referred. Finally, the mistletoe, which grows neither on earth nor in heaven, is evergreen while the oak is deciduous and thus in winter would remain strikingly fresh among the bare branches of the tree. It would naturally have been viewed as the repository of the soul of the oak tree, and, as long as it was intact, the tree was invulnerable. So when the god had to die (when the sacred tree had to be burned) it was essential to pluck the mistletoe, and "when in later times the spirit of the oak came to be represented by a living man, it was logically necessary to suppose that, like the tree he personated, he could neither be killed nor wounded so long as the mistletoe remained uninjured. The pulling of the mistletoe was thus at once the signal and the cause of his death." Down to the Roman Empire and the beginning of our era, Frazer concluded, it seems probable that "the primitive worship of the Aryans was maintained nearly in its original form in the sacred grove at Nemi, as in the oak woods of Gaul, of Prussia, and of Scandinavia; and that the King of the Wood lived and died as an incarnation of the supreme Aryan god, whose life was in the mistletoe or Golden Bough."<sup>36</sup>

When it appeared in June 1890, *The Golden Bough* was reviewed by almost every major newspaper and periodical in Great Britain. None was

hostile, and the tone of most ranged from favorable to glowing. By early 1891, when the more serious academic journals weighed in with lengthier, generally favorable review-essays, the overall result was an extraordinarily successful debut. From our standpoint, the most striking fault of the work was Frazer's willingness to select beliefs and practices from all times and places, without the least regard to the material, social, and intellectual contexts that made these beliefs and practices meaningful in the first place. But none of the reviewers indicted Frazer for this oversight. A plausible explanation is that, by 1890, after a generation of speculation about changes that might (or might not) have occurred millennia before in the languages that might (or might not) have been spoken by the Indo-Europeans, readers were a bit tired of the elaborate philological fantasies of Müllerian solarists. By contrast, the ethnographic data on which Frazer's book relied seemed reassuringly familiar and concrete: "Everyone knew or recognized the lore of everyday life," Ackerman suggests, "whether in the exotic colonies or at home in Britain among the lower classes; everyone could understand the importance of the fertility of the natural world and the anxieties that primitive humanity might have entertained about it." Most important, the world of rural peasantry that Frazer described—innocent, credulous, whole, and functioning—was laden with deeply felt, unconscious emotion for Europeans who had experienced industrialization.<sup>37</sup>

### THE MISSIONARY ETHNOGRAPHERS

IN FEBRUARY 1898 Frazer at last completed the six volumes of *Pausanias' Description of Greece*, which he had begun as a classicist fourteen years earlier but to which he had subsequently added the wealth of experience acquired in writing *The Golden Bough*. Frazer understood Pausanias as a kind of anthropologist, so that each of his descriptions of a religious belief or practice became the occasion for an essay on similar beliefs and practices throughout the primitive world, a fact that helps to explain both the great length of Frazer's edition and its significance in introducing anthropology to the study of classical civilization.<sup>38</sup> Frazer then began revising *The Golden Bough* with an eye to a second edition. Here the most important stimulus was his correspondence with the Australian ethnographer and anthropologist W. Baldwin Spencer, which rapidly introduced Frazer to ethnographic developments extending back at least a quarter century.

It is a commonplace, of course, that "armchair" anthropologists like Tylor and Frazer did not do their own fieldwork. Instead, they read widely and critically in various sources (classical literature, travel accounts, mis-

sionary reports, and so on) that provided information about human customs and beliefs; gave questionnaires like the one Frazer sent to Haddon, encouraging careful, detailed observation and discouraging ethnocentric bias; and corresponded with those who seemed well-situated, competent observers “on the spot.” However odd it seems to a more professionalized anthropological audience, much of this “epistolary” ethnography was in fact “missionary” ethnography.<sup>39</sup> Early in the century, missionaries had typically been self-educated artisan-mechanics, for whom missions were a form of upward social mobility. Aggressively ethnocentric, they sometimes realized their social ambitions in the establishment of theocratic regimes that exercised political as well as spiritual authority. But in the 1850s (as the case of David Livingstone marks quite clearly), missionaries were increasingly recruited from the universities and thus from a higher social class, and these recruits were inclined to have a more sympathetic view of the religious and cultural practices of those whom they attempted to convert. In this gradual change from the early to the late nineteenth century, Lorimer Fison—easily the most significant missionary anthropologist in the development of Frazer’s thought—was a hybrid, transitional figure.

Born in a small village in Suffolk, where his father was the area’s largest landowner, Fison was raised in “the Evangelical school of the Church of England” and educated at home by his mother, the daughter of a clergyman and scholar. In 1855, Fison entered Cambridge University with the intention of studying mathematics, only to be “sent down” for a student prank. His father’s estate had suffered from the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846, and as the thirteenth of twenty children, Fison found that his prospects had dimmed significantly. So in 1856, he sailed from England to join the gold rush that, having begun four years earlier, would triple Australia’s European population by 1860. Devastated upon learning of his father’s death, Fison had a religious reawakening, left the gold fields for the University of Melbourne, joined the Wesleyan Church, was ordained a minister, and, by 1863, had sailed for Fiji as a Methodist missionary. In Fiji, Fison was initially aggressively ethnocentric, referring to the “hundred thousand men, women and children who still worship false gods, and practice all the abominations of Fijian heathenism.” But by 1866, having despaired of converting the Fijians, Fison began to collect native folktales, which he shared with his sister back in Oxford. The sister was married to a friend of Goldwyn Smith, the Regius Professor of Modern History at Oxford, who in 1868 emigrated to Cornell University and became acquainted with Lewis Henry Morgan. At the time, Morgan was working on his *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity of the Human Family* (1871), and when he mentioned to Smith that he’d been unable to collect reliable information on Fiji and Tonga, Smith suggested

that he send his kinship questionnaires to Fison. The questionnaires were dutifully completed and returned in time for Morgan to include this new information in a special appendix of the 1871 volume, the beginning of what Fison would later call “a second life running side by side and subordinate” to his missionary vocation.<sup>40</sup>

Morgan’s initial theory of kinship was an answer to a preevolutionary, philological question about the unity or diversity of mankind. According to Morgan, the fact that “the same system of kinship terminology” was shared by all American Indians, as well as numerous Asian and Oceanic peoples, suggested strongly that the polygenist ethnologists of the 1850s were simply wrong and that ultimately all human beings belonged to the same family. By the time his questionnaires had reached Fison, however, Morgan had recast this theory into a more social evolutionary framework, arguing that from an initial state of “primitive promiscuity,” there had emerged, in a series of evolutionary stages, the “communal family” of intermarriage between brothers and sisters; the “barbarian family,” in which the tribal organization forbid the intermarriage of siblings but permitted sexual access beyond that relationship; the “patriarchal family” of one man and several wives; and finally the “civilized family,” based upon the fully developed idea of property and its transmission to one’s own children which required both certainty of parentage and fewer heirs, and thus the exclusive cohabitation of one man and one woman. Linked to this evolutionary sequence, and essential to its reconstruction, was a series of “systems of consanguinity”—the Malayan, Turanian, and Ganowanian forms of classification that, overthrown by the “civilized family,” were replaced by the Uralian, Semitic, and Aryan forms.

This theory, which appeared in the same year as *The Descent of Man* (1871), had been conceived in a non-Darwinian framework, and Morgan himself was cautious about relating his views too closely to those of Darwin. But it could easily be subsumed within a Darwinian scheme, and Fison himself (who devoted his “second life” to its documentation) was convinced that Morgan was a Darwinian. For a Christian missionary, this project contained some serious intellectual and emotional tensions, for Fison believed that human beings could not progress without the active assistance of God. Nonetheless, he agreed to move forward tentatively, to see where the data might lead. Initially, Morgan had hoped that Fison would be able to study kinship systems throughout all of Oceania, from Polynesia to Madagascar; in fact, Fison’s investigations were to focus exclusively on Australia, to which he returned in 1871. With Morgan’s encouragement, Fison began by searching for information about Australian kinship terms but soon found that the variation in their usage made the subject hopelessly complex. In-

stead, Fison turned to the study of the social organization of Australian aboriginal society, and particularly the combination of class names and totemic groups among the tribes that spoke the Kamilaroi language (primarily in southeastern Australia). Fison also tried to interest others in this project but ultimately found only one person, Alfred William Howitt, who appreciated “the logic of the system” as a whole.

Two years older than Fison, Howitt was the son of two well-known Victorian writers who were friends of Wordsworth. Alfred attended University College, London, and then accompanied his father to Australia in 1852 where, like Fison, they tried their luck in the gold rush. After two years of indifferent success, the father returned to England to write a book about his experiences, but Howitt stayed on, first as a farmer and then a cattle driver, so that by 1859 he was an experienced bushman sent on exploring expeditions (both private and governmental) into the central Australian desert and the virtually unknown region of Gippsland in southeastern Australia. In 1863, as a reward for his governmental service, Howitt was appointed Police Magistrate and Warden of the Goldfields in Gippsland, where he developed an interest in natural history and geology, read Darwin and Lubbock with enthusiasm, and began collecting information about the local native tribes. While he initially considered the Aborigines “an idle, incorrigibly treacherous, lying race,” greater familiarity soon led to “a more sympathetic paternalism,” and eventually he became a fully initiated member of the Kurnai tribe.<sup>41</sup> As their collaboration evolved in the early 1870s, it was the mathematically inclined Fison who became the evolutionary theorist, while Howitt assumed the role of ethnographer. In 1875, Fison would return to Fiji, where he served until 1884 as principal of a training school for native teachers. But before he left, he and Howitt prepared a new questionnaire including items on kinship terms, class names, and totemic groups. With the assistance of R. Brough Smyth, the secretary of both the Department of Mines and the Board for the Protection of Aborigines, who hoped to use the results for his own book, *The Aborigines of Victoria* (1878), the questionnaire was sent to a variety of people and, by 1881, Howitt was supervising more than fifty correspondents.

The focus of Howitt’s investigations was the Kurnai people of Gippsland, who occupied the extreme southeastern tip of Victoria, while Fison’s concentration was on the Kamilaroi to the north and east. Both groups presented numerous obstacles to ethnographic study. Like other aboriginal groups, the Kurnai had literally been decimated by “social progress,” their numbers falling from an estimated 1,500 in 1839 to 140 in 1877. Those who survived had at least nominally been converted to Christianity, spoke some English, and had settled near missions where “the force of their old customs” had



been attenuated. Howitt's knowledge of their language was imperfect, and most of his information in fact came from a single informant. But because of his longstanding position in the region and an engaging personal style, he was eventually able to reconstruct ceremonies that had not been practiced for more than a quarter-century. By early 1879, he and Fison had sent to Morgan a two-hundred-page manuscript in the hope that it might (like Morgan's *Systems*) be published by the Smithsonian Institute. Morgan did what he could, writing a laudatory preface for the volume; but the Smithsonian would not promise immediate publication, and when Tylor wrote to Fison and Howitt inquiring about their work, Fison was struck by anxiety: "it is known that [Tylor] is collecting materials for a work on the natives," he reminded Howitt, "and he seems to consider that he has a heaven born right to the use of other people's brains and labours."<sup>42</sup> Fison and Howitt thus decided to publish *Kamilaroi and Kurnai* (1880) immediately, in Australia.

Because the purpose of the book was to document and elaborate Morgan's evolutionary theory of kinship while simultaneously rebutting the views of his British critics, it is important to understand the nature of their disagreement. Morgan had been treated courteously by both McLennan and Lubbock when he visited England on his European tour of 1870; in fact, he conceived his *Ancient Society* (1877) as a synthesis of his own and British evolutionary arguments. But McLennan (mistakenly) thought that Morgan had borrowed heavily from his own *Primitive Marriage* (1865) without acknowledging it, while he also rejected Morgan's use of kinship terms as a means of reconstructing earlier forms of marriage (to McLennan, the whole classificatory system seemed one "of mutual salutations only" rather than one of actual blood ties implying real duties and obligations). Both McLennan and Lubbock were also inclined to dismiss Morgan's work as "utterly unscientific," and even the more sympathetic Tylor felt that the weight of Morgan's theoretical reconstruction was more than the evidence would bear. These critical judgments contained an element of national and social class condescension, but Fison and Howitt, like Morgan's ancestors, were emigrant Englishmen, so that quite aside from the debt they felt to one who had given them their start in anthropology, Fison could write to Morgan of his "malicious delight in tracing back aristocratic notions to the ways of savages and showing that they were mere unreasonable survivals of savage notions which were perfectly reasonable in their day."<sup>43</sup>

The book began by tracing the origin and development of Morgan's "Turanian system of kinship" through an analysis of the Australian tribes speaking the Kamilaroi language. First, Fison and Howitt confirmed that the division between marriage classes are extremely widespread in Australia, although they added that Morgan's two classes are sometimes subdi-

vided into four and these four are further subdivided into totemic groups. Marriage among the members of these classes, they continued, is subject to four rules: (1) it is “theoretically communal,” that is, based on the marriage of all the males in one division to all the females of the same generation in another division; (2) it is exogamous, as marriage within each division is forbidden; (3) it is matrilocal, as after marriage, the wife remains in her own division rather than joining that of her husband; and (4) it is matrilineal, with descent traced through the mother. On the basis of these four rules, Fison and Howitt concluded, all the terms of Morgan’s Turanian system of kinship would logically result.

From this discussion of the logic of rules of marriage, Fison and Howitt then turned to the discussion of Morgan’s evolutionary theory. As we have seen, this theory postulated a stage of “primitive promiscuity” followed by the division into two marriage classes and the introduction of exogamy; in opposition to McLennan and Lubbock, who had seen the emergence of exogamy as the unconscious result of female infanticide and marriage by capture, Morgan had insisted that it was the consequence of a deliberate, self-conscious reform imposed by the leaders of the tribe. It was in this context that the meaning of terms of kinship—whether they were mere terms of address (McLennan and Lubbock) or embodied real relationships, duties, and obligations (Morgan)—became so important: “Although those who judged morality by European standards might not appreciate it,” Stocking summarizes Fison and Howitt’s position, “the tribe was in fact punishing incest as it conceived of it.”<sup>44</sup>

If observations like these afforded Fison and Howitt a modicum of “malicious delight,” they also had significant consequences for the later understanding of totemism. McLennan’s mistake, they argued, was that he assumed that savages worked out their understanding of kinship “inductively,” like “good empiricists,” starting from the bond between mother and child and working outward. But while savages certainly reason, they do not reason like John Stuart Mill; rather, they proceed by deduction: “some large fact, involving a general principle, fills their minds, and they accept its logical consequences, clinging to them long after they have ceased to be able to carry them out in everyday life, with a persistence which is often ludicrous, and sometimes even pathetic.” Fison and Howitt thus seemed to echo Maine’s distinction between societies founded on status and those based on contract, insisting that, for the savage, the group *is* the individual, and marriage is founded on the rights neither of the man nor the woman, but of the *tribe*—something extremely difficult for those socialized in the traditions of atomistic individualism to understand. From this primitive starting point, they continued, the subsequent process of social evolution is one of

progressive segmentation, into marriage classes, subclasses, totemic groups, and eventually into modern civilized man with his individual rights and possessions.<sup>45</sup>

Where Lubbock had explained totemism as the consequence of naming individuals, and then their families, after particular kinds of animals and plants, Fison and Howitt insisted that the actual evolutionary development was precisely the opposite: "The individual takes [his totem], in common with his fellows, only because he is a member of the group." Similarly, the "curious reverence" shown for animals and plants that had no "inherent sanctity" was explained as the natural consequence of a close identification between the totemic group and the object that served as its collective symbol or "badge." For Fison and Howitt, therefore, what had seemed to earlier travelers and missionaries as acts of religious worship were "nothing more than . . . demonstrations of affectionate regard towards kinsfolk." To this, of course, one might object that savages do not typically show much regard for one another, but here again Fison and Howitt emphasized the collective nature of group sentiment: "To the savage, the whole gens [stock-group] is the individual, and he is full of regard for it. Strike the gens anywhere, and every member of it considers himself struck, and the whole body corporate rises up in arms against the striker. The South Australian savage looks upon the universe as the Great Tribe, to one of whose divisions he himself belongs; and all things, animate and inanimate, which belong to his class are parts of the body corporate whereof he himself is part."<sup>46</sup>

In sum, for Fison and Howitt, the "religious" aspect of totemism was entirely derivative and secondary, the consequence of a real and concrete system of social organization. This was a view that would be challenged by Spencer and Gillen, as well as Frazer, but it would then be revisited, and in a restricted sense reaffirmed, by Durkheim. Fison and Howitt's reasoning, of course, depended heavily on the familiar apparatus of evolutionary anthropology, and especially on the notion of survivals. Throughout the book, the authors distinguish between the "actual" practices of Australian savages (those which are presently observable) and their "theoretical" practices (those that preceded observed practices and were postulated to explain them), and consistently, the implicit assumption is that the social condition indicated by "actual" practices was always in advance of that suggested by their "theoretical" counterparts (which, of course, had been inferred from them). The apparent anomalies of Howitt's Kurnai (contractual marriage, descent along sexual lines, class divisions that did not include both sexes, and so on) might thus be described as representing a later evolutionary stage than Fison's (presumably less anomalous) Kamilaroi. From the present observation of survivals, therefore, Fison and Howitt could move both

backward (postulating an utterly primitive, if unobservable, past) and forward (postulating a subsequent evolutionary development to modern civilization). But needless to say, what was (or was not) a “survival” depended heavily on prior assumption.<sup>47</sup>

When Morgan died in 1881, Fison and Howitt lost their intellectual champion, and McLennan’s death the same year deprived them of their most prominent British adversary. By this time, however, they had attracted the attention of Tylor, who was interested in their ethnographic data, at least receptive to their theoretical arguments, and had already praised their work in his presidential address to the Anthropological Institute (1880). During the next few years, Tylor would arrange for the presentation and publication of two of their jointly authored theoretical papers, as well as a number of ethnographic pieces written by Howitt alone. In 1884, Fison returned from Fiji to settle in Melbourne where, after 1888, he edited a Methodist newspaper, while Howitt held a variety of government positions before retiring to Melbourne, where he died in 1906 (just one year before Fison). Both men had returned to England in later life, Fison (at Tylor’s invitation) to address the British Association for the Advancement of Science (1894), and Howitt to see through the press the only full-length anthropological work that either produced after *Kamilaroi and Kurnai*—an ethnographic description called *The Native Tribes of South-East Australia* (1904). Throughout this period, the three men stayed in constant communication with one another, and despite Fison’s constant search for evidence of “primitive promiscuity,” his letters to Tylor in particular suggest growing disillusionment with this and other cherished hypotheses of social evolutionary theory. In fact, in *The Descent of Man* (1871), Darwin himself had expressed his skepticism about such promiscuity, pointing to the possessive sexuality of male apes, and the tenacious survival of the hypothesis despite the utter lack of empirical evidence supporting it is one of the more salient indications of the discontinuity between biological and social evolutionary theories. But by the appearance of the first edition of *The Golden Bough*, some of the younger social evolutionists, and most notably Edward Westermarck in his *History of Human Marriage* (1891), had begun to challenge it.

If Fison was a hybrid figure in the gradual shift in the social-class origins of missionaries, Robert Henry Codrington (1830–1922) clearly represents the later stage. The second son of an Anglican clergyman, Codrington came from a family of some distinction, and after an early education at Charterhouse, arrived at Wadham College, Oxford, in 1849. Although chronic ill-health and a breakdown just before examinations denied him honors, he became a fellow in 1855, the same year that he was ordained and began his service as a curate in an Oxford church. As a High Church Anglo-Catholic, Codrington

made a pilgrimage to Rome in 1859 and was presented to the pope, and one year later, when the vicar to whom he had been curate was appointed bishop of Christ Church, he followed him to New Zealand. In subsequent years, opportunities for a bishopric would also present themselves, but Codrington's heart was set on being a missionary. By 1867 he had joined the Melanesian Mission as an assistant to the bishop, John Coleridge Patteson.

Patteson had met Max Müller in Germany during the 1840s and also knew him when he came to Oxford in the early 1850s to lecture on comparative philology. Subsequently, Müller had sent him a copy of his *Outline Dictionary for the Use of Missionaries* (1856), to which Patteson responded with copies of the Lord's Prayer and Apostle's Creed in the several island languages he knew. Still later, in 1865, Patteson sent Müller eleven grammars he had compiled in the hope that the study of the extreme variation in savage languages might shed some light on the question of the monogenesis or polygenesis of language and, by implication, of mankind—the key question of preevolutionary ethnology. Müller responded in turn, sending Patteson (and through him, Codrington) copies of Maine's *Ancient Law* (1861) and Tylor's still more recent *Researches into the Early History of Mankind* (1865). But despite receiving these classic texts of early social evolutionary anthropology, Patteson's work remained firmly within the comparative philological perspective, and after Patteson was killed in 1871 by natives responding to forced conscription, Codrington carried on within the same Müllerian tradition. But the native laborers whose conscription provoked Patteson's murder had been taken to cotton plantations on Fiji, and in 1872, following up on the tragedy, Codrington began a correspondence with Fison, who soon introduced him to social evolutionary theory. Despite the occasional tension that one might expect between a High Church Anglican and an Evangelical Methodist, the correspondence would continue for almost twenty years, accelerating especially in the late 1870s as *Kamilaroi and Kurnai* neared completion. Their division of labor was exemplified in 1879, when Fison aided the publication of Codrington's "Notes on the Customs of the Mota," suggesting a theoretical framework within which Codrington's data took on greater significance and, more specifically, offering comparisons with the Fijians, who, he thought, represented the next higher evolutionary stage. By 1881, Fison had forwarded some of Codrington's linguistic and ethnological information to Tylor, and when Codrington briefly returned to England in 1883, he attended the first series of lectures that Tylor gave as reader in anthropology at Oxford.

Unlike Fison, however, Codrington never truly embraced social evolutionary theory. Codrington's "fieldwork" was largely limited to Norfolk Island, where he met with the natives to provide them with Christian instruc-

tion before sending them back to the various outlying islands as teachers. Undeniably, this contact with the natives was directed toward the modification of their traditional culture, but Codrington shared Patteson's view that the Melanesians' culture should be modified only so far as it was necessary to establish Christianity and also that Christianity itself should always be based on a foundation of native belief. This quite naturally led Codrington to encourage the literate, Christianized Melanesians at Norfolk Island to provide him with systematic accounts either of their own cultures or those of the islands that they had visited as teachers, and though Codrington never explicitly addressed issues of epistemology or "radical translation," he developed an unusual sensitivity to the problems of understanding beliefs dramatically different from one's own.<sup>48</sup>

Codrington's theoretical predispositions were thus quite different from those of most Christian missionaries. According to the classic degenerationist view, savages were "doubly fallen," for in addition to their common share in the sin of Adam, their savagery was itself the consequence of a second fall, a loss of sacred, revelatory knowledge and a resulting descent into idolatry and exile to the nether regions of the earth. Embracing this degenerationist account, Christian missionaries naturally looked for evidence of a lost, primitive monotheism in the surviving traces of ancient beliefs and practices, something in which Codrington had no interest whatsoever. Instead, Codrington was predisposed to look for correspondences between savage and Christian beliefs and practices, "to find the common foundation, if such there be, which lies in human nature itself ready for the superstructure of the Gospel." In one sense, this brought Codrington's work closer to the preoccupations of evolutionary anthropologists, for Tylor had also looked for a "central core" of religion and found it in animism, from which all known beliefs and practices (including those of the Church of England) had allegedly evolved. If Codrington never explicitly rejected Tylor's animistic hypothesis, he did express doubts that the belief in souls was based upon the experience of dreams; in *The Melanesians* (1891), he found no evidence of "a belief in a spirit which animates any natural object, a tree, a waterfall, storm or rock, so as to be to it what the soul is believed to be to the body of a man."<sup>49</sup> To the extent that evolutionists like Tylor and Frazer regarded the worship of animals and plants as merely a specific, derivative form of animism, Codrington was equally skeptical about totemism. Responding in 1888 to a questionnaire from Frazer, for example, Codrington said that he did not believe "any real *totem*, as I understand *totem*," was to be found in Melanesia.<sup>50</sup>

What Codrington *did* find, not only in Melanesia but throughout the whole Pacific, was the belief in *mana*. As early as 1878, he had already written to Max Müller that the Melanesians believe in "a force altogether distinct

from physical power, which acts in all kinds of ways for good and evil, and which it is of the greatest advantage to possess or control." Although "not fixed in anything," Codrington continued, *mana* "can be conveyed in almost anything"—spirits, souls, supernatural beings, water, stones, or bones. In fact, he concluded, "all Melanesian religion consists . . . in getting this Mana for one's self, or getting it used for one's benefit." Thirteen years later, in *The Melanesians* (1891), Codrington added that *mana* is present "in the atmosphere of life," that it works to effect everything beyond the ordinary power of human beings, and that when a man has *mana*, it can be used and directed it to his ends. There were certainly analogies to Tylor's animism here, for the Melanesians clearly believed in spirits (personal, intelligent beings with a visible but not "fleshly" bodily form) that are "full of *mana*."<sup>51</sup> But for Codrington (as Durkheim would appreciate in a powerful way), the essential foundation of religion was not some "savage philosopher" rationally (albeit mistakenly) attempting to explain the natural processes but rather an utterly irrational, unconscious sense of awe and wonder in the presence of extraordinary power.

#### JEVONS, LANG, AND TYLOR

IF CODRINGTON had doubts about the significance of totemism in the history of religion, the same can not be said for Frank Byron Jevons (1858–1936) who, in the words of Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard, swallowed Robertson Smith's theory of a totem sacrament "hook, line, and sinker." Born at Doncaster and educated at Wadham College, Oxford, Jevons was a philosopher who was appointed classical tutor at Durham University in 1882 and remained there for the rest of his life. Evans-Pritchard described his *Introduction to the History of Religion* (1896) as a "widely read and influential" exposition of the views of Robertson Smith but also as "a collection of absurd reconstructions, unsupportable hypotheses and conjectures, wild speculations, suppositions and assumptions, inappropriate analogies, misunderstandings and misinterpretations, and, especially in what he wrote about totemism, just plain nonsense."<sup>52</sup> But within the confusing and disturbing context of late Victorian debate over totemism, the attractions of Jevons's *Introduction* are understandable, as he added nothing new to the debate but rather introduced at an elementary level its most characteristic terms even as he defused the more threatening elements of the comparative method and evolutionary theories of religion. Where the orthodox complained that the comparative method treated all religions as if they were alike, for example, Jevons responded that the same method also necessarily assumed

that all religions were different and that its goal was in fact to ascertain the nature of these differences. Similarly, where religious believers objected to the view that monotheism was the most recent consequence of a lengthy process of social evolution (thus conflicting with the Genesis account of an original, monotheistic revelation), Jevons replied that progress is rather the exception than the rule in evolution and that evolution of “heathen religions” might easily have been a process of degeneration from an initial, divine dispensation of religious truth.<sup>53</sup>

The most interesting part of Jevons’s book, however, lay in its suggestion that the comparative study of religion might indeed reveal the *causes* of these (admittedly “very rare”) instances of religious progress. Jevons agreed with Tylor that primitive man, reasoning by analogy, assumed that “every object which had activity enough to affect him in any way was animated by a life and will like his own.”<sup>54</sup> But the “spirits” that man thus postulated to explain all movement and change, Jevons argued, were not initially “supernatural” and became so only after man, accustomed to the uniformity of nature, had discovered that his expectations and calculations were often frustrated, leaving him not so much fearful as beset with a sense of his own helplessness. This led him to postulate the existence of supernatural entities responsible for these otherwise mysterious, unaccountable deviations from the ordinary course of events, and then to search for a means by which he might enter into reliable, predictable, and confident relations with the agents responsible for them.

This argument, of course, was susceptible to the purely naturalistic interpretation that things mistakenly construed as “supernatural” were simply those beyond man’s control, but Jevons retained the belief in an original, divine revelation and, to this end, argued that primitive man had, for a long time, assumed that through sympathetic magic he could control things that we know he could not. This argument, however, was in turn susceptible to the view that all religion has grown out of magic, that is, that primitive man had initially thought he might constrain even the gods to do his will, that he only gradually learned that his powers were not supernatural, and that prayer and sacrifice thus became the necessary means to the fulfillment of his wishes. Henceforth, the effort to control supernatural entities by magic would have been seen as an invasion of the divine prerogative, and the priest would be sharply distinguished from and elevated above the mere sorcerer. Originally, therefore, divine power and magic would have been indistinguishable, and the early history of religion would have been a gradual differentiation of the two and a partial triumph of the former. Against this, Jevons offered two objections. First, he insisted on a distinction between the early, negative conception of the supernatural (in which man encountered



a striking violation of the uniformity of nature) and its later, more positive manifestation (in which it was construed as the cause of the ordinary and familiar phenomena of nature). The former, negative conception, he insisted, clearly preceded the latter, and so long as man conceived of the supernatural in this way, he couldn't possibly have thought himself equal to or more powerful than the gods. Second, man's attempts to control the phenomena of nature were the cause rather than consequence of his belief in the supernatural and thus were not themselves conceived as "supernatural" at all. According to Jevons, therefore, magic and religion had independent origins and represent different stages in the history of thought.

We've seen that Jevons, like Robertson Smith, considered "religion" equivalent to the establishment of friendly relations with the gods; because the only model on which such relations might have been conceived was that of kinship, Jevons (again like Smith) believed that the earliest gods were also kinsmen. Jevons's discussion of taboo also followed Smith's sociological conception of religion, for the sphere of things taboo is not coextensive with things sacred, and thus taboo is not specifically a "religious" institution. Things that are taboo are considered unclean, dangerous, infectious, and so on, either intrinsically or indirectly, through the association of ideas, and are prohibited not conditionally (for example, by restrictions imposed by a god with whom one has relations of kinship) but rather unconditionally and categorically, as the consequence of an innate "primitive sentiment." So in savage life there is an utterly irrational network of taboos that restrict everyone's behavior, while in civilized life, these taboos—with the notable exception of those (such as private property and marital fidelity) that serve the ends of morality and society—have been eliminated. But how do we get from the savage to civilized condition? Briefly, by "rationalizing" taboo, shaking off the irrational, mechanical bonds of the association of ideas and replacing them with rational alternatives. This happens when taboo becomes part of religion, for then it is no longer arbitrary and assumes the stature of the command of a divine being who has reasons for requiring obedience to his rules, casting aside trivial and absurd restrictions and replacing them with those more essential to morality and society. The agents of this transformation, for Jevons no less than Smith, were the great religious reformers of history who, speaking out not on behalf of utility or human interest but of God were able to break through the crust of rigid custom, weeding out irrational taboos and replacing them with institutions necessary to morality and society, in "a process not of Natural but of Supernatural Selections."<sup>55</sup>

The clan was the earliest form of society, and for someone not of the same kin, the only way to establish friendly relations with the clan was through

the blood covenant. Primitive man imagined that animals and plants think and feel like himself, and thus it seemed natural that they too were bound together on the same principle. This led to alliances between human and animal clans, and the gods, as we have already seen, were already conceived as kinsmen. The earliest societies were thus instances of Robertson Smith's "primitive religious community" (groups in which human beings, animals, and gods were all members, bound together by blood kinship); this in turn explains the prohibitions against harming, killing, or eating one's totemic animal, as well as the belief in a common animal or plant ancestor and the myths of descent. Finally, still following Robertson Smith, Jevons described the primitive world as one "parceled out" among totemic clans allied with friendly gods, as well as an untamed wilderness inhabited by hostile spirits not allied with any clan. It was thus the establishment of satisfactory relations with these erstwhile hostile spirits that not only created religion but afforded the institutional confidence necessary for social and economic progress; in this sense, Jevons considered totemism not only an enormously important stage in the evolution of religious thought but still more significant in the material development of civilization. In sum, Jevons simply reaffirmed Robertson Smith's embracing of the Liberal Protestant view of history, that "true religion" begets social and economic rationalization and progress.<sup>56</sup>

A more interesting critic of Tylor and Frazer was the creative and prolific Andrew Lang (1844–1912). Born in the ancient Scottish town of Selkirk, Lang was a precocious child who read voraciously, particularly in legends, myths, and romances. In 1854, he spent the first of two years at the Edinburgh Academy, where he immersed himself in literature and was introduced to Homeric Greek, and in 1861, he moved on to St. Andrews University, where he began reading contemporary scholarship on myth and folklore, wrote poetry, and attempted to practice necromancy and alchemy. After spending a year at Glasgow University, Lang arrived at Balliol College, Oxford, where as an "aesthete" he admired Swinburne but also studied with Benjamin Jowett and T. H. Green, and in 1868 he took first-class honors in "Greats" and won a fellowship at Merton College. Unable to bear the constraint of any kind of academic specialization and forced by his marriage in 1875 to vacate his fellowship, Lang settled in London as a literary journalist. Able to write almost as rapidly as he could read, Lang would publish (as sole author, collaborator, or translator) more than 350 books, including biographies, children's books, criticism, collections of essays, fairy tales, fiction, folklore, histories, parodies, poetry, and commentaries on ancient texts, not to mention several thousand reviews and essays that appeared in popular journals and magazines.<sup>57</sup>

As we have seen, Müller's "Comparative Mythology" (1856), with its notion of ancient myths as the degenerative products of a "disease of language," had provided British classicists and folklorists with the vocabulary they embraced and deployed for the next twenty years. By the time Lang arrived at St. Andrews, he had already read George Webbe Dasent's *Popular Tales from the Norse* (1859) as well as numerous other folklore studies that reflected Müller's perspective; while a student at Oxford between 1864 and 1868, Lang might have felt Müller's influence more directly. But in 1869 and 1870, McLennan's pivotal essays on totemism appeared, and Lang became convinced that the irrational elements in Greek myths were not the product of the degeneration of *language* but rather the survivals of an earlier condition of *thought* that, while once common if not universal, was now found only among savages and small children. Introduced to Tylor in 1872, Lang immediately read *Primitive Culture*, and thus McLennan and Tylor became the foundations of his anthropological thought. Lang soon found himself in correspondence with several other Tylorian folklorists (such as Edward Clodd, E. S. Hartland, and G. L. Gomme) who, by 1878, had joined to form the Folk-Lore Society.

Throughout the 1870s and 1880s, Lang carried out a systematic attack on Müllerian philology, applying Tylorian anthropology to the comparative study of mythology. In his *Encyclopedia Britannica* article "Mythology" (1884), for example, Lang insisted that Müller's theory failed in its stated intention, which was to resolve the paradox of "silly, savage, and senseless" elements in ancient Greek myths. For if Müller could explain how the sun might be construed as both the child *and* the bridegroom of the dawn (thus yielding a story of Zeus's incestuous behavior), this still didn't explain why the Greek poets, so averse to anything "excessive or monstrous," would relate divine myths that have parallels "among the lowest tribes of Africa and America." Based upon philological discoveries that had established the linguistic unity of the Indo-European peoples, Müller's theory also failed to explain how myths just as irrational and repulsive had been found among the Australians, South Sea Islanders, Eskimo, African bushmen, the Iroquois, and so on. "The fact being identical," Lang argued, "an identical explanation should be sought, and as the languages in which the myths exist are essentially different, an explanation founded on the Aryan language is likely to prove too narrow." Müller's theory also depended on an early, premythological stage, in which words were used in a concrete and substantial rather than metaphorical sense. But this early, premythological man is unlike any man of which we have experience, Lang objected, and if men in this early stage *did* have myths, these could hardly have been produced by the linguistic processes described by Müller, in which gendered words led

early man to attribute sexuality to the phenomena of nature. For the very existence of gendered language itself presumes a condition in which natural phenomena were already considered to possess personal characteristics. Nor did Müller explain how the relatively advanced, “mythopoeic man” would have forgotten the meanings of words and phrases in as few as four generations, while still retaining the words and phrases themselves. Müller’s theory of a “disease of language,” Lang concluded, appears “destitute of evidence, and inconsistent with what is historically known about the relations between the language and the social, political, and literary condition of man.”<sup>58</sup>

Lang thus returned to the original problem (the pervasive element of irrationality in the ancient Greek myths), asking a different question: Is there any stage of human society in which those facts that appear to us to be irrational are accepted as the ordinary occurrences of everyday life? And of course there is. “Everything in the civilized mythologies which we regard as irrational,” Lang answered, “seems only part of the accepted and rational order of things to contemporary savages, and in the past seemed equally rational and natural to savages concerning whom we have historical information.” The irrational elements in Greek myths were thus “survivals” of a stage of thought analogous to that of presently existing savages; this in turn helps us to explain the remarkable similarity of myths throughout the world. Lang didn’t deny the possibility of diffusion here, for this similarity might itself be explained as the result of stories having spread from a single location, handed down over many generations and great distances. But if we assume that these myths had their origin in the same stage of human evolution, wherever it occurs, then the notion of diffusion becomes unnecessary. Just as archaeologists have discovered tools and weapons that can be classified only as “human” (not as the products of any particular society), so many of these early myths are simply “human” (they are but early products of the human mind, without connection to any particular culture). “Such myths might spring up anywhere among untutored men,” Lang explained, “and anywhere might survive into civilized literature.”<sup>59</sup>

Lang thus embraced Tylor’s notion of “independent invention” as the alternative to a diffusionist theory of culture and, again like Tylor, endorsed a cognitionist theory of myth, including its psychological premise that the primary characteristics of the savage mind are curiosity and credulity: “When a phenomenon presents itself,” Lang explained, “the savage requires an explanation, and that explanation he makes for himself, or receives from tradition, in the shape of a *myth*.” What was the origin of the world, of men, of animals? How is the arrangement and movement of the sun, moon, and stars to be accounted for? What gave rise to the tribal dances or the customs of the clan? “Savage mythology, which is also savage science,” Lang

observed, “has a reply to all these and all similar questions, and that reply is always found in the shape of a story.” But if primitive thought was thus similar to our own, it was also significantly different, especially in its “vast extension of the theory of personality”; where civilized man attributes personality only to his fellow human beings, the savage regards even the most abstract natural phenomena (the sky, earth, wind, sea) as endowed with a personality similar to his own.

This last phrase was important, for Lang emphasized that for the savage, these were extensions not just of *personality* but of the *savage* personality. Their character “is what uncivilized men think probable and befitting among beings like themselves.” In short, the savage man’s view of his place in the world “is so unlike our modern view of human relations to the universe that it requires a separate explanation.” And of these primitive beliefs, so unlike those of civilized man, the most extraordinary to Lang were those subsumed under the name *totemism*, which he described as the belief that certain stocks of men are descended by blood from certain animals, that these men have the power of assuming the shape of these animals, that the souls of dead ancestors revert to animal forms, that a man cannot marry a woman who has descended from the same animal, that men may not harm, kill, or eat animals from whom they have descended, and so on. Such beliefs, he observed, are extremely widely diffused among primitive peoples, and the fact that they survive among more civilized races could be seen in Hindu and Pythagorean conceptions of the transmigration of souls.<sup>60</sup>

Lang expanded his evolutionary critique of Müllerian philology in *Custom and Myth* (1884), where he responded to Müller’s recent attack on Charles de Brosses. In *Le Culte des dieux fétiches* (1760), de Brosses had attempted to explain Greek polytheism at least in part as a consequence of the belief in the magical powers of various animate and inanimate objects found in West Africa. In doing so, Lang admitted, de Brosses had introduced the rather unfortunate term “fetishism,” which conflated the worship of animals and plants with the adoration of stones, shells, and feathers, but on the whole, Lang added, de Brosses had “a clear view of the truth that what the religious instinct has once grasped, it does not, as a rule, abandon, but subordinates or disguises, when it reaches higher ideas.”<sup>61</sup> Initially favorably disposed toward de Brosses’s theory of fetishism, Müller had dismissed it when (by contrast with the early hymns of the Rig-Veda) he found traces of fetishism increasingly visible in the “later corruptions” of Indian religion. In his Hibbert Lectures on *The Origin and Growth of Religion* (1882), therefore, Müller insisted that fetishism was not a primitive form of worship at all but rather a later, degenerate corruption of an earlier, purer religious impulse.

Lang's initial response to Müller repeated one of the objections made in the *Britannica* article: that the Rig-Veda is neither "early" nor "primitive" but rather the product of an advanced, sophisticated civilization.<sup>62</sup> But the significance of *Custom and Myth* extends well beyond Lang's critique of Müller's philological method to his most basic conception of the nature of religion itself. If de Brosses had been wrong to conflate totemism with the veneration of stones, shells, and feathers, for example, Müller had made a much more serious error by ignoring totemism altogether. For totemism is not only ubiquitous in primitive cultures but is also constantly conjoined with exogamy. This "actual living totemism," Lang insisted, "is always combined with the rudest ideas of marriage, with almost repulsive ideas about the family. Presumably, this rudeness is earlier than culture, and therefore this form of animal-worship is one of the earliest religions that we know. The almost limitless distribution of the phenomena, their regular development, their gradual disappearance, all point to the fact that they are all very early and everywhere produced by similar causes."<sup>63</sup>

Müller had made this mistake, Lang argued, because he believed that the foundation of all true religion is the feeling of awe, power, and transcendence that "the Infinite" inspires, and thus he had found the worship of animals and plants (let alone stones, shells, and feathers) simply inconceivable. But totemism, Lang insisted, is almost universal among primitive peoples, where it is also connected to rules of marriage and descent quite different from those of the modern family. In the face of this evidence, to suggest (as Müller had) that the worship of animals and plants was the later "corruption" of early religious purity simply flies in the face of the facts. To these empirical difficulties, Lang added theoretical obstacles. If animal worship is a "corruption," for example, under what influences did it arise? And how has this "disease" managed to attack all religions everywhere? Again, how are we to distinguish between Müller's notion of "a faculty for apprehending the infinite," where the infinite is understood as something beyond experience, and a purely innate, subjectivist notion of religion (something that Müller had disclaimed)? Finally, Müller's account of the growth of Aryan religion, as well as its later "corruption," seemed to deny religion any role whatsoever in the development of social institutions (such as the family, tribe, class structure, state).<sup>64</sup> But if Lang's argument was thus more sociological than Tylor's, it was still "cognitionist" in the Tylorian sense. Religion grew from the curiosity and credulity of savages who, attempting to explain what lay behind their experiences, constructed a kind of "savage science."<sup>65</sup>

Lang's more expanded, systematic statement of this Tylorian theme was *Myth, Ritual, and Religion* (1887), a book that E. S. Hartland described as having dealt the "final blow" to the philological interpretation to myth.

Whatever its origin, Lang repeated, totemism “cannot have arisen except among men capable of conceiving kinship and all human relationships as existing between themselves and all animate and inanimate things. It is the rule, and not the exception, that savage societies are founded upon this belief.” For us, Lang emphasized, “totemism is interesting because it proves the existence of that savage mental attitude which assumes a kinship between man and the things in the world.” By now, however, Lang’s focus had turned more specifically to Australian totemism, to those works of Grey, Fison, and Howitt that revealed “in the highest known degree the savage habit of confusing in a community of kinship men, stars, plants, beasts, the heavenly bodies, and the forces of Nature.”<sup>66</sup> And despite the deathblow *Myth, Ritual, and Religion* had dealt to Müller’s degenerationist theories, for Lang it also marked a first step in a decidedly non-Tylorian direction.

In 1882, Lang had been among the founding members of the Society for Psychical Research, a gathering of distinguished scientists and laymen whose purpose was the study of paranormal phenomena (including clairvoyance, telepathy, precognition, extrasensory perception, psychokinesis, and so on). In the first edition of *Myth, Ritual, and Religion*, he cautiously suggested that “the kind of evidence, whatever its value may be, which convinces many educated Europeans of the existence of apparitions has also played its part in the philosophy of uncivilised races.”<sup>67</sup> By 1890, he was openly describing his own paranormal experiences in print.<sup>68</sup> And with the appearance of *Cock Lane and Common Sense* (1894), Lang’s break with Tylorian animism was complete. Ostensibly, his goal here was to reconcile two “rather hostile sisters in science”—the Folk-Lore Society and the Society for Psychical Research. Despite his best efforts, Lang reported, folklorists and anthropologists “will hear gladly about wraiths, ghosts, corpse-candles, hauntings, crystal-gazing, and walking unharmed through fire, as long as these things are part of vague rural tradition, or of savage belief. But, as soon as there is first-hand evidence of honourable men and women for the apparent existence of any of the phenomena enumerated, then Folk-lore officially refuses to have anything to do with the subject.” For its part, the Society for Psychical Research seemed eager to examine every modern instance of those phenomena that folklorists and anthropologists had ignored, but the group neglected the evidence from history, tradition, savage superstition, legends, and so on in which the Folk-Lore Society had such a palpable interest. The “savage and traditional evidence is nearly as much eschewed by psychical research,” Lang summarized, “as the living and contemporary evidence is by Folk-lore.”<sup>69</sup>

To Lang, the reason for this reciprocal negligence was obvious. The Society for Psychical Research refused to consider the evidence of savage peoples because it did not constitute first-hand observation or direct tes-

timony, while the Folk-Lore Society dismissed the evidence of paranormal phenomena because these were ill-fitted to the “ready-made” theory that had worked so well in explaining the savage belief in spirits. Aside from his conciliatory insistence that each group should embrace the interests of the other, Lang insisted that he himself had no theory, but in fact, it is clear that, by this time, Lang had begun to have serious doubts about Tylor’s animistic theory of religion and indeed about evolutionary social theory generally. Lang now suggested that the experiences that had led savages to postulate the existence of spirits might not be mistaken at all, that they might have understood something that modern science does not, and that even if they were mistaken, this in itself shouldn’t discredit their conclusions, for false premises and mistakes often lead to undeniable truths.<sup>70</sup>

More specifically, Lang had begun to take seriously the notion that primitive peoples already possessed a “high monotheism” of their own when they were first contacted by Europeans, and he found especially compelling the growing body of evidence of Australian religion suggesting that the Aborigines (universally considered to be the most backward people in the world) nevertheless knew a high god (the “All-Father”) who had created the world, established human morality, and then receded, granting the day-to-day supervision of the world to spirits and ghosts. By the time that the Gifford Lectures, first given by Lang at St. Andrews in 1888, were published as *The Making of Religion* (1898), their author made it clear that the book contained “very little that was spoken from Lord Gifford’s chair.” While “fixing her gaze on totems, on worshipped mummies, adored ghosts, and treasured fetishes,” he complained, anthropology “has not, to my knowledge, made a comparative study of the higher and purer religious ideas of savages. These have been passed by, with a word about credulous missionaries and Christian influences.” Lang seriously questioned whether such “higher and purer” ideas could possibly have evolved (as Tylor’s theory implied) from the primitive belief in spirits and proposed an alternative evolutionary sequence, suggesting that the early belief in a Supreme Being was later “thrust aside by the competition of ravenous but serviceable ghosts, ghost-gods, and shades of kingly ancestors” until restored in the teachings of the great prophets of Israel, thus ending “the long, intricate, and mysterious theological education of humanity.”<sup>71</sup> Having rejected Müller’s degenerationist philology, therefore, Lang had introduced a degenerationist theory of his own, and for the last decade of his life he would remain an apostate from the evolutionary faith and one of Tylor’s most outspoken critics.

Near the end of the century, Tylor himself would recall having written his “first lines” on totemism as early as 1867 and also having had “much conversation on the philosophy of totems” with McLennan while the latter was



writing “The Worship of Animals and Plants” (1869–70).<sup>72</sup> But in fact, Tylor had written little about totemism. “The cause of my holding aloof,” he confessed, “has been a sense of its really bewildering complexity, coupled with the expectation that further research among the races of the lower culture would clear its outlines, as indeed has to some extent been the case, especially in North America and Australia, the regions where totemism proper is most at home.”<sup>73</sup> In the late 1890s, however, Tylor was invited by William Sanday, a New Testament scholar and president of the Oxford Philosophical Society, to give a talk on his views of the anthropology of religion as treated in the works of Frazer and Jevons: “Whatever my hearers may have learnt from my remarks,” Tylor later recalled, “I became aware that the time had come for a closer examination than seems to have been hitherto made as to the somewhat various and vague ideas which have become associated with the term totemism. It was evident that till this was done, it would not even be possible to ascertain what place the totem may properly claim to occupy in the theory of religion.”<sup>74</sup> In May 1898, Tylor’s “closer examination” took the form of a paper presented before the Royal Anthropological Institute, “Some Remarks on Totemism, with Especial Reference to Some Modern Theories Respecting It”—one of the most important and, in retrospect, prophetic documents in the complex history of the study of totemism.

In *Primitive Marriage* (1865), Tylor observed, McLennan’s interest in totemism had been merely incidental to his study of exogamy. Grey’s *Journals* (1841) had already noted the similarity of the Western Australian *kobong* to the North American *totem*, of course, and (as we have seen) McLennan was aware of Grey’s work. But in *Primitive Marriage*, McLennan’s interest in Grey was limited primarily to his account of the rules of exogamy and matrilineal descent and the way in which these two rules seemed to contradict the conclusions of Maine’s *Ancient Law* (1861).<sup>75</sup> But McLennan’s article “The Worship of Animals and Plants” (1869–70) introduced totemism “as a great principle, one may even say the great principle of early religion, as well as early society” and thus laid the foundations “of most of the lines along which the theory of totemism has been carried on to this day, as well as some of its turns which have obstructed progress.” McLennan’s earlier conception of totemism had been limited to a division of tribes into clans allied with species of animals, between whom and the men there were rules of marriage, protection, and respect; but this notion was now expanded to incorporate “other kinds of animal and plant worship, and to form the result into an expanded doctrine which [McLennan] continued to call totemism.”<sup>76</sup> The result, Tylor argued, was a kind of linguistic confusion and conceptual incoherence that “interfere[s] with distinct reasoning.”

Recall Long's *Voyages and Travels* (1791) and particularly its account of an Ojibwa man's dream of a confrontation with two bears. Long's account, Tylor observed, had clearly confused the animal or plant species common to an entire clan (*totem*) with the quite different guardian spirit possessed by each individual Ojibwa (*manitu*). The two inferences that McLennan had drawn from Long's story—first, that the admonitory bear of the Ojibwa man's dream would evolve into a high god identified with the Master of Life and, second, that this evolution took place undisturbed by external influences—were also unwarranted. For the report that the bear had scratched the man's face and given him a warning from the Master of Life contained no suggestion that the bear would evolve into a high god, and far from being unaffected by external influences, the Ojibwa religion was deeply marked by the Jesuit missionary teachings imposed upon it, especially the Master of Life, who was so palpably the Christian god that, as Long mentioned several times, the Indian name for a Roman Catholic priest was "Master of Life's man." "Not only do we find a development hypothesis of deities read into a story which does not contain it," Tylor observed, "but the whole account is a warning of the risk of uncontrolled theory as to divine evolution. From an angry bear in the backwoods to a supreme deity of the world," he concluded, "is too long a course to be mapped out in merely ideal stages."<sup>77</sup>

Committed in this way to understanding totem animals as having evolved into high gods, McLennan treated the evidence of animal worship in a rather cavalier fashion. Sacred animals in Fiji, for example, were explained as descendants of totem animals, even though the Fijians have no totems or totem clans; the sun worship of the Natchez Indians of Florida was treated as derived from totemism, although the sun is obviously not an animal or plant; and so on. Tylor thus characterized the *Fortnightly Review* essay as an "introductory speculation" rather than a "system," and he considered it significant that McLennan, despite spending much of his later life gathering further information about totemism, never reprinted it. Criticism of these obvious failings would even be unnecessary, Tylor added, "were it not that McLennan's authority has had weight enough to induce modern writers to repeat even his conjectures as established principles."<sup>78</sup> One of these "modern writers," of course, was Frazer, whom Tylor described as not only following but also extending McLennan's dubious line of reasoning. Summarizing George Turner's *Samoa* (1884), for example, Frazer reported that these natives not only have totems and totem clans but forbid injuring or eating their totems for fear that the totem spirit will take up residence in the sinner's body until it caused his death, but Tylor, who was not only familiar with Turner's book but had written its preface, insisted that Turner makes no such reference to totems or totem clans but only to family and

household gods. Arguing here only against *premature* speculation about the origins of religion, Tylor was careful not to restrict investigation into causes that might explain the primitive belief in gods; he insisted that such beliefs were poorly understood and had probably emerged as the result of causes that were extremely complex.

For Tylor, one possible explanation held a special interest. While writing *Primitive Culture* (1871), he had become intrigued by the way primitive peoples place almost every generalized class of objects or actions under the heading of some “mythical being of suitable rank” (such as an ancestor, creator, maintainer, or ruler), which he attributed to the human predisposition to classifying things. In many cultures, for example, savages conceive of what Tylor called a “species-deity,” a kind of “older brother” that embodies the “principle and origin” of all the individual animals of that particular species.<sup>79</sup> Frazer had tried to enlist these observations in support of his early theory of totemism, but Tylor objected that he had encountered not a single valid instance of such a totemic god. “What I venture to protest against,” Tylor complained, is “the manner in which totems have been placed almost at the foundation of religion.” From a minor extension in McLennan’s critique of Maine, totemism had been considered “with insufficient reference to the immense framework of early religion” and been “exaggerated out of proportion to its real theological magnitude.” The importance of totem animals as friends of man, Tylor added, “is insignificant in comparison with that of ghosts or demons, to say nothing of higher deities.” The evolution of religious ideas simply cannot be judged on the slender foundation of “a section of theology of secondary importance, namely, animal-worship, much less of a special section of that, namely, the association of a species of animals with a clan of men which results in totemism.” Of the earliest theories concerning the origin and development of totemism, therefore, Tylor was highly skeptical. He reminded his readers that McLennan had wisely—in the light of the scanty evidence—committed himself to no such theory. Herbert Spencer’s speculations on the origin of animal worship were “purely artificial,” and Jevon’s totem god “merely hypothetical” and lacking “any conclusive proof.” Robertson Smith was praised for having illuminated the significance of sacrificial feasts as a means for binding together societies of worshippers, but until there is “real proof,” of a totem sacrament, Tylor concluded, the totem sacrament “had better fall out of speculative theology.”<sup>80</sup>

But what of the theory proposed by Frazer in *The Golden Bough*? Tylor was careful to note that this theory was not entirely original but had rather been drawn from the work of the Dutch scholar G. A. Wilken, who, in *Animism Among the Peoples of the Malay Archipelago* (1884–85), had already described instances of the savage belief in the human soul’s being “stored”

in an animal or plant for its protection. Tylor felt that Frazer had not sufficiently acknowledged this intellectual debt, and Frazer (typically scrupulous in such matters) was apparently enraged.<sup>81</sup> Tylor went on to observe that Frazer's theory went only "part of the way" in accounting for the more peculiar qualities of totemism and faced at least two seemingly insuperable obstacles. First, if totemic tribes really thought that their souls were in the totem animals, we should have heard of it long before now, but in fact, there had been no mention of such an idea. Second, under the system of matrilineal descent, the rule that an exogamous savage abstains from killing or eating his totem for fear of losing his life, while his wife and children (who would be of a different totem) endanger him regularly by eating his totem with impunity, simply made no sense. In fact, Tylor was more sympathetic to Wilken's own explanation. The Malay Archipelago, he observed, is one of those few parts of the world in which it is still possible to study people who acknowledge certain animals as their spiritual equals or even superiors, possessing not only bodies but thought and speech as well, thus surpassing human beings not only in strength but also in wisdom. Crocodiles, for example, are viewed as kindly, protective beings to whom offerings are made. Since by the doctrine of the transmigration of souls the crocodiles might be near relatives, it is forbidden to kill them, and people look forward to becoming crocodiles when they die. Wilken also seemed to receive independent corroboration from Codrington's *Melanesians*, which described peoples who would not eat bananas for fear that their souls would be *in* bananas after they died. Both in Malaysia and Melanesia, therefore, the belief in the transmigration of souls "bridges over the gap" between a clan of men and a species of animals or plants, so that the men and the animals become united by kinship and mutual alliance. "By thus finding in the worldwide doctrine of soul transference an actual cause producing the two collateral lines of man and beast which constitute the necessary framework of totemism," Tylor concluded, "we seem to reach at least something analogous to its real cause."

But Tylor was still cautious, not least because he had access to papers that had recently been communicated by Baldwin Spencer to the Royal Society of Victoria in anticipation of his book (coauthored with F. J. Gillen) *The Native Tribes of Central Australia* (1899). The exogamy of the Arunta, Spencer and Gillen had made clear, depends on classes or phratries as well as clans, and descent is on the father's side. Individuals as well as clans have totem names, although the first do not regulate marriage, and the totem names of children may (or may not) follow the totem names of either parent, depending on the location where the child is conceived. "A more extraordinary animistic scheme was perhaps never known," Tylor observed, "yet even here the trans-

ference of souls between the man-line and the beast-line is evident." Tylor also refused to pursue the discussion of the alleged "survivals" of totemism into the religions of ancient civilizations, postponing such inquiries "until savage and barbaric animal-worship has been more strictly classified, and the totem has shrunk to the dimensions it is justly entitled to in the theological schemes of the world." But here it is especially useful to recall that totemism was viewed as both a religious *and* a social institution and that Tylor's skepticism about totemism was addressed disproportionately to its religious significance, not to its influence on social organization. "Exogamy can and does exist without totemism, and for all we know was originally independent of it," he carefully observed, "but the frequency of their close combination over three-quarters of the earth points to the ancient and powerful action of the totems at once in consolidating clans and allying them together within the larger circle of the tribe. This may well have been among the most effective processes in the early social growth of the human race."<sup>82</sup> Responding to Tylor at the 1899 meeting of the Folk-Lore Society, therefore, Jevons would emphasize this social function of totemism (especially its influence on the domestication of animals), even as he reasserted its significance in the development of religion.<sup>83</sup> By the time Jevons's response was ready for the press, however, the situation had changed dramatically, for he had read Spencer and Gillen's *Native Tribes*, including its apparent empirical confirmation of Robertson Smith's "totem sacrament." Jevons thus imposed on the editor of *Folk-Lore* to allow him a postscript in which he reaffirmed, in the light of this new evidence, his earlier position.<sup>84</sup>

## MAGIC, RELIGION, AND SCIENCE

BALDWIN SPENCER was the son of a Nonconformist textile entrepreneur who eventually left an estate of more than £200,000. As a student of medicine at Owens College (later the University of Manchester), he came under the influence of the zoologist Alfred Milnes Marshall, a disciple of Darwin, who put him to work sketching specimens in the Zoological Practical Laboratory. After converting to "the new faith of biology," Spencer entered Oxford in 1881 and soon exchanged his residual Methodism for agnosticism. By 1885, he had so impressed Henry Moseley, the Linacre Professor of Anatomy, that he was made a full-time "demonstrator," supervising laboratory work and giving a course of lectures. In 1886, with Moseley's encouragement, he applied for and was elected to the newly established professorship of biology at the University of Melbourne. In Melbourne, Spencer met Lorimer Fison, who was then editing a Methodist newspaper, and tried

unsuccessfully to establish a lectureship for him at a Methodist college. But the real stimulus that took Spencer from zoology to anthropology was the Horn Expedition.

In 1894, with the financial support of the businessman William Horn, the governments of three Australian colonies organized a scientific expedition to venture 200 miles into the central Australian outback. This area was significantly different from the southern and eastern regions studied by Fison and Howitt, which were closer to the coast, had long been in contact with white men, and were where the native culture of the natives had deteriorated significantly. The central Australian climate, by contrast, was extremely dry, so that there had been few white settlements and the native tribes still held to the beliefs and customs of their ancestors. The Horn Expedition found these tribes distributed across the landscape in small local groups, each occupying (and believing that it possessed) a delimited geographic space. The name of each group was the name of the local region, but each group also comprised subgroups identified by the name of some animal or plant (such as kangaroo, emu, Hakea flower, and so on), of which the largest was the witchetty grub, covering more than one hundred square miles and including approximately forty men, women, and children.

Spencer signed on as the Horn Expedition's zoologist, while the anthropological responsibilities were given to E. C. Stirling, director of the South Australian Museum and a lecturer in physiology at the University of Adelaide. Stirling's interest was in physical anthropology rather than culture, while Horn himself was convinced that the Aborigines were "absolutely untamable" and that they lacked religious beliefs altogether.<sup>85</sup> But Spencer was fascinated by the beliefs and practices of the Aborigines and had already begun to move beyond zoology into ethnography when, at Alice Springs, in the very center of the Australian outback, the Horn Expedition encountered Frank Gillen. An Australian-born Irish republican, the impetuous Gillen had for twenty years been manager of the transcontinental telegraph station at Alice Springs, where he was also an activist and an unusually sympathetic subprotector of Aborigines. Gillen had befriended members of the Arunta tribe who gathered around the station and had even been accepted into the Witchetty Grub clan, and the information about their culture that he collected eventually found its way into the expedition's report. After the departure of the expedition, Gillen visited Spencer in Melbourne—where he was introduced to Fison and Howitt—and the two agreed on a collaboration in which Spencer would do the writing based on reports sent by Gillen from Alice Springs, while Gillen would in turn investigate leads suggested by Spencer. Influenced by Fison and Howitt, Spencer was primarily interested in questions of social organization, and Gillen quickly fell into the

spirit of social evolutionary speculation associated with Morgan. The uncorrupted condition of the Arunta notwithstanding, Gillen feared that his and Spencer's work might eventually be only a "splendid verification" of Fison and Howitt.<sup>86</sup>

As a member of the Witchetty Grub totem clan, however, Gillen was already aware of a lengthy and important initiation ceremony known as the *engwura*, for which each group had its own ritual, drawing clan members from miles away. During the summer of 1896, he arranged for the *engwura* to be held at Alice Springs and for Spencer to attend as his *wetecja* (younger brother). Noting how rapidly customs "die out the moment the white man comes on the scene," Spencer later wrote that he and Gillen had "fortunately been just in time to record the details of this tribe." Emphasizing that Gillen had always encouraged the natives "to preserve all their old customs," Spencer added that the Arunta "regard [Gillen] as their man, and by means of the . . . excusable device of calling myself his younger (tribal) brother, I was adopted as a member of the tribe and allowed to see everything."<sup>87</sup> The ceremony, which Gillen expected to last at least a week, went on for almost three months, and during that time, Spencer and Gillen were exposed to a sacred world that no European had seen before.<sup>88</sup>

Early in 1897, Fison wrote to his friend James Frazer, enclosing a second letter he had recently received from Spencer, which mentioned en passant that some of the Arunta "ate their own totems."<sup>89</sup> However incidental Spencer's remark (it was contained in a postscript), it called to mind Smith's theory of a primitive, totemic sacrament in which the god and his worshippers shared a common meal and thus reaffirmed their sense of kinship. The difficulty for Smith's theory, of course, was that the sole concrete instance of such a sacrament was St. Nilus's pre-Islamic nomads sacrificing and consuming a camel; when further examples were not forthcoming, Frazer himself became increasingly skeptical. Eulogizing Smith in 1894, therefore, Frazer could praise him for being the first to recognize that mystical communion sacrifices are found outside of Christianity, in heathen and even savage religions. But on the related question of a primitive, totemic sacrifice, Frazer had simply observed that "the evidence thus far does not enable us to pronounce decisively."<sup>90</sup>

Intrigued by Spencer's postscript, Frazer wrote back to Fison, asking him to forward a request for further information. Fison did so, and on 12 July 1897, Spencer wrote to Frazer directly. "First of all with regard to the eating of the totem," Spencer began, "this was the point which struck me most when first I saw the ceremonies performed, and questioned the natives with regard to their present custom." There are numerous restrictions on eating particular kinds of food, Spencer continued, but in no case do the

restrictions refer to totems (a Kangaroo man kills and eats kangaroos, an Emu man kills and eats emus, and so on). Moreover, this is confirmed in the Arunta traditions (for instance, in the *alcheringa*, a mysterious period in the past, a bandicoot woman is described as eating bandicoot), and the older the tradition, the more certain one is to find people described as eating their own totems. Still more striking, some of these traditions describe the eating of one's totemic animal as a necessary function of the members of that totemic clan. The weight of the evidence, therefore, suggested nothing resembling the solemn, totemic sacrament hypothesized by Robertson Smith—with one notable exception.<sup>91</sup> This was the *intichiuma* ceremony. In the Witchetty Grub clan, for example, the clan members gathered the grubs shortly after it had rained, cooked them, and placed them in a small wooden container (*pitchi*). The headman (*alatumja*) of the clan then took one of the *pitchi*, ground the grubs into a fine powder, ate a bit of the powder himself, and then distributed the rest among clan members, each of whom also ate a small amount. The purpose of this ceremony, Spencer observed, was to assure a sufficient amount of food—if the clan's members ate too little of the powder, they would lose the strength necessary to perform the ceremony, the grubs would not reproduce, and there would be an insufficient food supply.

Spencer himself was inclined to explain these beliefs as the product of cannibalism, for to eat another man (especially a man of one's own totem) was to make his strength your own. Moreover, virtually all the *alcheringa* ancestors were described as cannibals and, if they were, there would have been no reason why they would *not* eat their own totems. From such an origin, Spencer speculated, there might have been two divergent lines of development. In the first, it would have become less common to eat the flesh of other human beings and then less common to eat one's own totem, until the totemic animal or plant itself became *tabu*; in the second, a kind of proprietary right in the totem would have developed, so that only those who were members of the totemic clan could participate in ceremonies like the *intichiuma*. In any case, Spencer considered this consistent with his observations, which included a sharp division between those tribes for whom eating their totem was not *tabu* and those, like the Arunta, who had ceremonies designed to increase the supply of their totem for food.

Spencer was, of course, familiar with *The Golden Bough*, and he described a second set of beliefs that surely struck a chord in its author. In the *alcheringa*, the ancestors are described as having both a spirit (*ulthana*) and a spiritual "double" (*arumburinga*). The *ulthana* may be reincarnated time after time, and because the *arumburinga* is the spiritual double of the *alcheringa* ancestor, it is also the spiritual double of every man who is the



reincarnation of that ancestor. These great ancestors are described as having entered the earth at certain places, which thus become the location for “totem centers,” each haunted by the souls of a particular totem awaiting their reincarnation. Whenever a pregnant woman first feels the child in her womb, she imagines that the spirit of the nearest totem center has entered her, and the child is thus of that totem, regardless of the totem of the father or mother. Upon the birth of the child, the old men of the tribe determine which *alcheringa* ancestor is reincarnated in him, and a *churinga* (a sacred stick or stone with the ancestor’s name engraved on it) is placed in the sacred storehouse where it lies in company with the child’s *arumburinga*. At the age of initiation, the child is taken by the head of his totem to the storehouse where, in a solemn ceremony, he is shown the *churinga* and told his *churinga* name. Finally, the traditions also suggested that, again in the *alcheringa*, when men go out to hunt, they hang their *churingas* on a sacred pole to keep them safe, taking them down again only after they have returned. To Spencer, the *churinga* thus appeared to be a relic of a time when men deposited their spirit somewhere outside of themselves in order to protect it from danger in a manner not unlike that described in the Frazer’s first edition. Frazer himself was both fascinated and perplexed and wrote back on 19 September 1897, indicating that “the totem system among the tribe you describe seems to be very peculiar, and to differ in some respects from those of most other tribes known to us. It is all the more important that the system should be described as fully as possible.”<sup>92</sup>

So began the most important correspondence of Frazer’s career, as Spencer provided a running account of the evidence he and Gillen were collecting in central Australia. But the benefits were in fact reciprocal. Frazer not only helped Spencer and Gillen to find a publisher for *Native Tribes* (Macmillan), but also read the proofs and thus shortened their time to publication. On 15 September 1898, shortly after reading the second proofs, Frazer wrote to Spencer advancing the second of his three theories of totemism. “I have been more than ever struck by your account of the *intichiuma*,” Frazer began, for these “ceremonies for the multiplication of the totem plant or animal have not been . . . reported from any other part of the world, and . . . seem to set totemism in an entirely new light.” Specifically, Frazer suggested, totemism seems to be “a system expressly devised for the purpose of procuring a plentiful supply of food, water, sunshine, wood, etc.” To achieve this end, all the desirable things in nature were put in classes, and each of these classes was then assigned to a specific group of people charged with securing the multiplication of the members of that particular class. One group was held responsible for the multiplication of kangaroos, another group was given the job of securing an abundance of grubs, and so on.

Charged with this responsibility, the members of each group quite naturally identified with the species of animal or plant assigned to them because by doing so, they would know all the secrets of that species (what they eat, how they mate and multiply, how they might be caught, and so on) and this would help the group to do its job. Under such a system, many tribes would have had no objection to a man's catching, killing, and eating his totem, and according to their traditions, the Arunta themselves originally had no such prohibition. Among some tribes, of course, a feeling against the killing and eating of one's own totem might have been felt at the outset or might later have emerged, perhaps as the result of clan members' efforts to ingratiate themselves with animals of their totem, the better to assist in their multiplication and to make them available as food for the members of other clans. Finally, Frazer suggested that Spencer's observations of the *intichiuma* had at last confirmed a theory of Robertson Smith: "The ceremonial eating of the totem by the men of the totem," Frazer wrote, "seems to me a true totem sacrament (the first well-authenticated example of such a sacrament that has come to light, I believe), the object of which is to identify the man with his totem by imparting to him the life and qualities of the totem animal."<sup>93</sup>

Frazer was aware of the obstacles facing this theory—that it seemed incompatible with the likelihood that some totems might not be things that natives considered edible, as well as the possibility that some totemic groups might not practice an *intichiuma* ceremony for their multiplication—and Frazer encouraged Spencer to make further inquiries concerning both. But what clearly concerned Frazer most was that his theory not only afforded no explanation for the exogamy which had long been thought to be a part of totemism but seemed more consistent with clan endogamy. Why indeed, Frazer asked rhetorically, are men and women of the same totem so commonly forbidden to marry or even have sexual intercourse with each other? If totemism existed for the purpose of multiplying the totemic animals and plants, it would seem more natural that a Kangaroo man should mate with a Kangaroo woman, so that by their union (according to the principles of sympathetic magic) the number of real kangaroos should be supposed to increase. Questions like these led Frazer to suspect that the *religious* aspect of totemism (the superstitious relation of the man to his totem animal or plant) was the original and more fundamental element, while the *social* side (the prohibition against marrying a woman of the same totem) was a subsequent extension. For this, at least, would be consistent with the absence of exogamy among the extremely primitive Arunta.<sup>94</sup>

Frazer was convinced that this second theory did not necessarily contradict the one he had advanced in 1890, nor did he see any necessary

contradiction between either of his two theories and the one presented by Tylor at the Anthropological Institute just months earlier (which Frazer also claimed to have stumbled on independently, while reading Spencer's reports): "It might be that the group charged with the multiplication of a particular species of animal or plant kept their spirits (or one set of their spirits) in the animals or plants during their lifetime, and transmigrated with them at death with the whole of their spiritual baggage, part of which had been retained in their human bodies during their lives."<sup>95</sup> That Frazer's second theory was sufficiently capacious to assimilate his first was at least plausible, but his notion that he might also incorporate Tylor's theory—simultaneously putting aside the latter's frontal attack on his treatment of totemism generally—was quite extraordinary. In fact, Tylor had also been sent the proofs of Spencer and Gillen's volume and had suggested to Macmillan that, if only to elide its many "tedious and disagreeable details," the chapter on the *intichiuma* be drastically abridged. In his own letter to Macmillan, however, Frazer insisted that the part to which Tylor had taken exception is "the most interesting and important in the whole book. It sets the system of totemism, at least as it exists among those tribes, in an entirely new and wholly unexpected light, and it furnishes the first well-attested case of what appears to be a real totem sacrament—a thing which hitherto had only been inferred from a few very uncertain examples." The chapter on the *intichiuma*, he added, is "of the highest importance for the history of religion, and opens up lines of enquiry which it will now be most desirable to prosecute in many parts of the world." After a brief exchange, Tylor retreated, and the book was eventually published intact, but the episode marked a breach in the relations between Tylor and Frazer, one that never quite healed.<sup>96</sup>

But even Frazer and Spencer were hardly on the same page. The latter's descriptions of the *intichiuma* contained an element of rational premeditation, but one always embedded within a dense ritual context, while Frazer's savage philosopher had an propensity for economic planning that any utilitarian would have admired.<sup>97</sup> Yet Frazer encouraged Spencer to submit his theory to Fison and Howitt, as well as to Gillen. "Any remarks you or they might make on it would be carefully and respectfully considered by me," Frazer added. "If you were to give it a general or provisional approval, I might state it briefly and tentatively in the new edition of the *Golden Bough* which I have in hand." Spencer wrote back to Frazer on 20 October 1898, confessing that he had not yet discussed Frazer's theory with Fison and Howitt but could still offer some qualified encouragement, as he too was moving toward the view that the religious aspect of totemism was "the more ancient," that the social aspect had been "tacked on" at a later date, and that "your theory that each group of people was originally charged with

the duty of securing the multiplication of the particular object the name of which it bears, appears . . . to fit in admirably with the facts.” In some tribes (such as the Arunta, Ilpirra, and Warramunga), Spencer cautioned, the religious aspect of totemism is developed almost to the exclusion of the social, while in others (the Dieri, the Urabunna) the social element is more prominent (although even there, Spencer emphasized, the presence of *intichiuma* ceremonies suggests a religious element). Spencer even provided a map of Australia indicating that the religious aspect predominates in the center of Australia, where conditions of life are more precarious, while in those coastal areas where food and water are more plentiful, the social element is more prominent. To Spencer, this suggested a relationship between food supply and the development of the religious aspect of totemism.<sup>98</sup>

Frazer’s interest in the Arunta, as we have seen, had been piqued by Spencer’s offhand reference in his letter to Fison to traditions describing clan members eating their own totems. Spencer now added that these same traditions also described men of one totem having sexual relations with women of the same totem; this, combined with explicit accounts of the introduction of the present, exogamic type of organization, suggested strongly that clan exogamy, like the interdiction against eating one’s totem, was a relatively recent form of marital regulation. To this evidence of the Arunta traditions, Spencer then added a touch of speculative psychology, observing that it seems “most natural” for a savage to reason that, just as a kangaroo animal mates with another kangaroo, so a Kangaroo man should mate with a Kangaroo woman, thus increasing the number of those who in their turn could increase the numbers of kangaroo animals. “If we could only get far enough back,” Spencer noted wistfully, “we might possibly find that this was the normal system.”

This suggestion was important, for it put him at odds with Fison and Howitt who, in *Kamilaroi and Kurnai*, had suggested that the two large exogamic “moieties” into which some Australian tribes were divided were “major totems” (such as Eaglehawk and Crow), from which smaller, also exogamic, totemic groups (Kangaroo, Emu, and so on) had subsequently been derived. Spencer could confirm that the present-day Arunta were also divided into two exogamic moieties, but the totemic clans within them were not exogamic, a seemingly illogical condition made possible by the further subdivision of the moieties into submoieties, each of which included members of the same totemic clans. Spencer also argued that the traditions of the Arunta make no sense unless we assume, first, that they refer to a past time when social arrangements were very different from those which now exist; second, that these divisions into moieties and submoieties actually took place only long after there was a well-developed totemic system already in place; and third,

that this process of division and subdivision was the consequence of a deliberate, self-conscious reform for the purpose of regulating marriage. Such a reform would initially have entailed only that a man of one totem must marry a woman of another, but it would eventually have resulted in allowing men of one totem to marry only women of another specific totem, so that the social aspect of totemism would have indeed become prominent.<sup>99</sup>

As for accounts of ancestors killing and eating their totems, Spencer again appealed to a primitive stage in which cannibalism was “the normal condition,” in which men would not only have eaten their totemic animal *naturally* but *necessarily* because it reinforced the close identification with the animal that was essential to the performance of ceremonies designed to increase its numbers. As cannibalism gradually died out, the clan members would first have given up the eating of human beings of their own totem, then the eating of members of other totems, and finally the killing and eating of members of other tribes. From human beings, this process of alimentary prohibition would naturally have been extended to the prohibition against the eating of one’s own totem animal. But the performance of ceremonies to increase the animal would still require a close identification between the clan member and the animal; for this purpose it would have been necessary for clan members to periodically eat at least a small portion of the animal, usually at a time of year when the totem was more abundant (lending the ceremony a conveniently self-fulfilling quality).<sup>100</sup>

There is a sense in which Spencer’s theory, albeit “less crudely one of direct and unremitting self-interest,”<sup>101</sup> was no less “economic” than Frazer’s. The particular bone of contention was Frazer’s suggestion that the purpose of the taboo against killing and eating the totem of one’s clan was to *conciliate* the animals of that species, to “induce them to come quietly and confidently to be injured (in fact, to be killed and eaten)” by the members of the clan. To this, Frazer had added the implication that this conspiracy was *co-operative*, each of the clans quite literally catching and giving to the others those animals they themselves were forbidden to eat (and vice versa). But in the tribes he had studied, Spencer found no evidence of such cooperation or conciliation. The main point of the *intichiuma* is simply “to increase the totem,” without any regard to catching and killing, and the prohibition against eating the totem is that this produces “an estrangement between myself and my totemic animal,” and that this would deprive me of the power to successfully perform the *intichiuma* ceremony. Nor could Spencer offer much support for Tylor’s animistic theory, which suggested that totemic animals and plants are sacred to clan members because they are animated by the souls of dead ancestors. Totemic animals and plants change into men, Spencer admitted, but “there is no idea of the soul of an ancestor ever

passing at death into an animal or plant; indeed, the traditions . . . are quite opposed to any such idea.” Far more important is the belief that when the ancestor dies, his spirit becomes resident in a *churinga* (the stick or stone which is then inscribed with the ancestor’s name) and never leaves until it passes into a woman and is thus reincarnated. But a *churinga* is not a totem animal or plant, and thus Spencer could find no foundation for the Tylorian argument that had inspired Frazer’s first theory of totemism: “The present idea is that in the far past there was no very great difference between, say, a kangaroo and a Kangaroo man,” Spencer observed, “but there is no tradition or idea of any kind that either now or ever, a man keeps or kept his life or spirit or any part of it in his totem animal or plant.”<sup>102</sup>

On 28 November 1898 Frazer wrote back to Spencer, acknowledging his objection that the conciliation of animals is not practiced in Australia but adding that in his first edition of *The Golden Bough* (1890), he had already noted that some Australian tribes try to increase the amount of game not through conciliation but by the more coercive means of sympathetic magic.<sup>103</sup> From this, Frazer quickly moved to the conclusion that sympathetic magic is a more primitive method of securing a food supply than propitiation, and by the end of 1898, he had increasingly become convinced that “if we define religion as the propitiation of natural and supernatural powers, and magic as the coercion of them, magic has everywhere preceded religion.”<sup>104</sup> As men find that they cannot *compel* the higher powers to comply with their wishes, Frazer explained the evolutionary sequence, they condescend to *entreat* them; still later, as men begin to understand that even their entreaties are in vain, they again resort to compulsion, albeit this time in the narrower, more disciplined methods of science. This argument—that the evolution of human thought is from magic to religion to science—would become the single most important innovation in the second edition of *The Golden Bough* (1900).

Meanwhile, in the same letter, Frazer embraced Spencer’s new theory of totemism. “The facts which you have collected,” he observed, “seem to offer a plausible, perhaps probable, explanation of the origin and meaning of totemism—an origin and meaning such as no one had hitherto dreamed of. The inference from your facts seems so easy and obvious,” he added, “that I can hardly but think that on the publication of your book, the solution of the mystery which has puzzled anthropologists so long will occur to thoughtful persons, who will hasten to publish their discovery if you have not already done so.” In addition to embracing Spencer’s theory of the origin and meaning of totemism, Frazer was inclined to agree with him (and thus to disagree with Fison and Howitt) that the religious aspect of totemism was the more fundamental and original and that a fully developed

system of totem clans thus existed before exogamy; upon a second, more careful reading of Spencer's letter, Frazer also claimed to have reached the same conclusion independently.<sup>105</sup> Spencer would be in England just days later, and Frazer not only gave him a place to stay in Cambridge but made arrangements with Sir Francis Galton for a special meeting of the Royal Anthropological Institute where his ideas could be presented.

At the meeting of the Anthropological Institute on 14 December 1898, Spencer set out most of the arguments that had been suggested in his 20 October letter, including the apparent universality of totemism among the central Australian tribes; the preeminence of the "religious" aspect in those tribes closer to the center, combined with the prominence of the "social" element in those near the coast; the present existence of two exogamic moieties in these tribes, most of which also practice clan exogamy (with the notable exception of the Arunta); the Arunta traditions describing an earlier period in which the presently existing exogamic restrictions had not been in force, as well as the subsequent introduction of the restrictions themselves; the descriptions of the performance of the *intichiuma* ceremonies, whose object was the multiplication of the totemic animal or plant; and descriptions of an early stage in which clan members ate freely of their totem animal or plant, together with explanations for why they had stopped doing so freely (the possible estrangement of the animal or plant, which might prevent successful performance of the *intichiuma*) but still did so ritually (the maintenance of an identification with the animal or plant, for the same reason). Spencer then advanced his "hypothesis": that the primary function of a totemic group is to ensure the multiplication of the animal or plant that gives the group its name, again emphasizing that exogamy is merely a subsequent, secondary feature of totemism, introduced (according to the Arunta traditions) as the result of a deliberate action on the part of the more powerful ancestors of the tribe for the purpose of regulating marital relations. Finally, Spencer expressed the same reservations about Tylor's animistic theory of totemism that he had elaborated in his letter to Frazer, while emphasizing the pivotal significance of the *intichiuma*. Before he and Gillen had studied the Arunta, they had assumed that Grey was right, that the two most striking facts about totemism are that the man regards his totem as the same thing as himself and that he won't kill or eat his totem except on rare occasions. But once they came to understand the *intichiuma*, Spencer explained, they realized that the clan member *does not* regard his totemic animal as containing his own soul or spirit or, for that matter, the soul of spirit of a relative, and in other Australian tribes they found that the totem held the same meaning.<sup>106</sup> Grey and Tylor were simply wrong, for the meaning and significance of totemism lay not in the animistic transmigra-

tion of souls but in the performance of ceremonies designed to multiply the members of the totemic species.

At the same meeting, Frazer followed Spencer's presentation with his own, making it clear that he not only agreed with Spencer's theory of totemism but had arrived at the same conclusion himself the previous September. "A conclusion which two minds have reached independently from a consideration of the same facts," Frazer observed, evoking the muse of simultaneous independent discovery, "can hardly be a very forced or unnatural one." The foundations of totemism are now to be found in magic rather than religion, he announced, for totemism is "an organized and cooperative system of magic devised to secure for the members of the community . . . a plentiful supply of all the natural commodities of which they stood in need," as well as providing "immunity from all the perils and dangers to which man is exposed in his struggle with nature." Before *Native Tribes*, the two "canons" of totemism had been: the rule not to kill and eat the totem animal or plant; and the rule not to marry a woman of the same totem group. Among the central Australian tribes, Frazer admitted, the first rule is generally observed except on special occasions, but their traditions clearly point to a time when men were free (and, indeed, had a prior right) to kill and eat their own totems. And among some of these tribes, the second rule is not in force at all, for a man is just as free to marry a woman of his own totem as any other. Traditions also point to a time when men married women of their own totem groups regularly and by preference. In short, Frazer summarized, "we are led back to an early stage in the history of totemism when men regularly killed and ate their totem animals, and regularly married women of their own totem groups. If this was so, the old canons of totemism must be given up, at least so far as the Central Australian tribes are concerned."<sup>107</sup>

From this early hypothetical stage, Frazer then traced an equally hypothetical line of evolutionary development forward. Gradually recognizing that animals do not eat of their own kind, for example, the members of totemic groups would quite naturally have felt that the killing and eating of their totems was inconsistent with the identification of clan members with their totemic animal or plant. Initially, this self-imposed restriction would have removed one possible source of food for the clan, but in these societies, Frazer emphasized, the various totemic groups do not live isolated one from the other but are rather intermingled and practice their magic for the common good. The acceptance by all the clans of the same restriction would thus establish a system of cooperative magic that would increase the overall variety of edible species at the price of abstinence from just one. To this new rule that a man might not eat of his own totem, there would have been



one important exception: at a certain time, the clan member was required to eat a little of the totem in a solemn ceremony, for otherwise his identification with his totem would have been weakened and his performance of the magical ceremonies would have been compromised: "Here, it is plain," Frazer now asserted, "we have at last the long-sought totem sacrament which Robertson Smith with the intuition of genius divined, and which it has been reserved for Messrs. Spencer and Gillen to discover as an actually existing institution among the totem tribes." And the fact that analogous ceremonies can be found among other tribes in other regions of the world, Frazer added, suggests that observations reported in *Native Tribes* might be generalized. "It would be premature to say that the momentous discoveries of Messrs. Spencer and Gillen have finally solved the problem of totemism," Frazer concluded, "but at least they point to a solution more complete and satisfactory than any that has hitherto been offered."<sup>108</sup>

When *Native Tribes* finally appeared early in 1899, Frazer commented on it almost immediately in an essay called "The Origin of Totemism" in *The Fortnightly Review*; in a paper, "On Some Ceremonies of the Central Australian Tribes," written at Fison's invitation for a meeting of Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science; and, of course, in the second edition of *The Golden Bough* (1900). In all three, Frazer's purpose was to redescribe the Australian data in terms of the vocabulary he had been developing since the 1880s. The newly discovered *intichiuma*, for example, was redescribed as similar to the spring and midsummer festivals of the European peasantry that had played so large a part in his first edition. But where Mannhardt's peasants had been unable to provide explanations for the ceremonies they practiced, thus leaving his (and Frazer's) interpretation a matter of inference, Spencer and Gillen's Aborigines had made the purpose of the *intichiuma* (the increase of the totemic animal or plant) abundantly clear. The analogy is imperfect, Frazer admitted in the second edition of *The Golden Bough*, because the Australian Aborigines are hunters and gatherers, while the European peasants plant and harvest. But "what we should look for in vain among the Australians," Frazer added, "we find to hand among the Malays," whose practices provide "close parallels to the harvest customs of Europe" and who retain "a keen sense of the significance of rites which in Europe have sunk to the level of more or less meaningless survivals."<sup>109</sup>

This redescription of the *intichiuma* in turn had implications for Frazer's distinction between magic and religion. In his first edition, Frazer had attempted to distinguish between two conceptions of the "man-god": one whose divinity derived from a spirit incarnate in his person and a second whose power resulted from a physical sympathy with nature. Because the

second type differed from ordinary mortals only by degree and because at the earliest stage of social evolution both modes of thought coexisted, these spiritual agents were not regarded as greatly, if at all, superior to human beings. With subsequent evolutionary progress, however, man realized how feeble he was in the face of nature but (not projecting this feebleness onto the gods) developed an increased sense of awe at the power of the supernatural. The primitive sense of equality with the gods having disappeared, magic gradually gave way to religion.<sup>110</sup> In the second edition, Frazer advanced a more precise, formal distinction. Here “religion” involves the attempt to propitiate or conciliate the higher powers, while “magic” rather attempts to compel or coerce them. While religion “assumes that the great controlling powers of the world are so far akin to man as to be liable, like him, to be moved by human prayers and entreaties,” Frazer explained, “magic makes no such assumption. To the magician, it is a matter of indifference whether the cosmic powers are conscious or unconscious, spiritual or material, for in either case he imagines that he can force them by his enchantments and spells to do his bidding.”<sup>111</sup> More than this, Frazer added, “I believe that in the evolution of thought, magic, as representing a lower intellectual stratum, has probably everywhere preceded religion.”<sup>112</sup>

The resulting evolutionary sequence from magic to religion to science reflected Frazer’s most basic positivist presuppositions. However crude and primitive, for example, the magician shares with the scientist the belief that the world can be controlled, and both exert their efforts to achieve this end. And however important as an intermediary phase in the mental development of human beings, religion, by contrast, represents a falling away from this more natural, practical, and objective conception, replacing it with mysticism and superstition. If the magician failed to understand the laws of nature, therefore, he was also in some sense morally superior to the priest, who understood these laws no better while also subordinating the power of his mind to the authority of illusory beings. The *intichiuma*, of course, was magic rather than religion, not simply in the “sympathetic” sense of the first edition but also in the more highly rationalized and utilitarian “organized system” of “cooperative magic.” If this is true, Frazer concluded, then the religious aspect of totemism (reverence for the totemic animal, as epitomized in the *intichiuma*) preceded its social aspect (exogamy), which had been tacked on at a later point in time.

This in turn affected Frazer’s treatment of Robertson Smith’s theory of a totem sacrament. In 1894, Frazer had already retreated somewhat from his earlier statement that Smith’s theory of sacrifice had inspired the “central idea” of *The Golden Bough* (the slain god).<sup>113</sup> Still, in their “Essai sur la nature et la fonction du sacrifice” (1899), the Durkheimians Henri Hubert

and Marcel Mauss had described Frazer's theory of sacrifice as a "theological exaggeration of Smith's doctrine."<sup>114</sup> "On this," Frazer responded, "I have to say that the two theories are quite independent of each other. I never assented to my friend's theory, and so far as I can remember he never gave me a hint that he assented to mine." At the time Smith's theory was advanced and for years afterward, Frazer recalled, there was "no single indubitable case" of such a sacrament, of "a custom of killing and eating the totem animal as a solemn rite." And as the years passed, Frazer became "more and more doubtful of the existence of such a practice at all." These doubts had "almost hardened into incredulity" when Spencer and Gillen discovered "the long-looked-for rite" among the Aborigines of central Australia. Frazer welcomed this discovery "as a very striking proof of the sagacity of my brilliant friend, whose rapid genius had outstripped our slower methods and anticipated what it was reserved for subsequent research positively to ascertain." From being "little more than an ingenious hypothesis," he concluded, the totem sacrament has become "a well-authenticated fact."<sup>115</sup>

This "authentication" notwithstanding, Frazer was aware that what Spencer and Gillen had found was not exactly what Smith had anticipated. Smith's sacrament, for example, was a religious ceremony, while the *intichiuma* (as Frazer had just argued) was magic. Smith thought that the slain animal was considered divine and never killed except to furnish the mystic, communal meal, but the animals eaten sacramentally by the Arunta were not divine at all. Although typically eaten by members of the same totem, they were habitually killed and eaten by members of other clans as well. Finally, the function of Smith's totem sacrament was to achieve a state of mystical communion of the god with his worshippers, while the purpose of the *intichiuma* was to ensure a plentiful supply of food for the rest of the tribe. Indeed, Frazer's discomfort with anything mystical or supernatural was palpable in his repeated emphasis on the conformity of his own hypothesis with the "simple," "natural," and "practical" needs of savages.<sup>116</sup> Frazer also had some general anthropological reservations about the *intichiuma*. First, Spencer and Gillen had observed the practice of this "totem sacrament" only among the Arunta, not all the tribes known to practice totemism and certainly not all those known to practice animal sacrifice in general. Second, the notion that totemism was a universal stage in the evolution of human societies—the view that Frazer had earlier embraced in *Totemism* (1887) and to which Hubert and Mauss had again drawn attention—had not yet been empirically established: "It is possible," Frazer acknowledged, "that further inquiry may lead me to regard as probable the universality of totemism and the derivation from it of sacrifice and of the

whole worship both of plants and animals. I hold myself ready to follow the evidence wherever it may lead; but in the present state of our knowledge, I consider that to accept these conclusions would be, not to follow the evidence, but very seriously to outrun it.”<sup>117</sup>

In general, the second edition of *The Golden Bough* (1900) represented a stronger, more aggressive restatement of the main themes of the first. In 1890, the central argument (that the priest of Aricia was the embodiment of a tree spirit and that at an earlier period such priests had probably been slain every year to ensure fertility) had been largely comparative and conjectural, the only clear example of such a custom coming from ancient Mexico. But in the “Martyrdom of St. Dasius” (1897), the Belgian historian Franz Cumont had suggested that in ancient Italy itself, a human representative of Saturn (the “god of the seed”) had been put to death each year at the festival of the Saturnalia.<sup>118</sup> Reflecting Frazer’s more formal, evolutionary distinction, the subtitle was changed from “A Study in Comparative Religion” to “A Study of Magic and Religion.” And if the 1890 edition had avoided the sensitive question of the status of Christianity, “circling round it geographically and doctrinally but never mentioning it explicitly,” the edition of 1900 dropped all pretense. It had long been tacitly assumed, for example, that agricultural magic, including human sacrifice and the figure of the dying and reviving god, had been widespread throughout the ancient Near East—with the notable exception of Jewish Palestine. Frazer now succeeded in offending both Jews and Christians by arguing that Purim (and therefore the Passion narrative based upon Purim) reflected the same seasonal pattern of other Near Eastern fertility rituals and that Jesus “was *really* [and therefore, in Frazer’s reductionist analysis, *only*] a member of the group of dying and reviving gods that included . . . Attis, Adonis, and Osiris.”<sup>119</sup>

“I trust that you will approve of the book in its new and enlarged form,” Frazer thus wrote to his Jewish friend Solomon Schlechter on 22 September 1900. “There are things in it which are likely to give offence both to Jews and Christians, but especially, I think, to Christians. You see I am neither the one nor the other, and don’t mind knocking them impartially.” And offend people it did, although its controversial reputation probably increased sales. The response of popular audiences, impressed with Frazer’s literary style and unable to criticize his arguments, was quite favorable. Among Frazer’s professional colleagues, however, the response was otherwise. Haddon was embarrassed, and Lang, who reviewed it four times and then devoted more than half of *Magic and Religion* (1901) to refuting its arguments, was predictably hostile. Moses Gaster, an eminent folklorist as well as a Sephardic rabbi, attacked Frazer’s “ridiculous” Purim fantasy, and though Frazer would remain the favorite anthropologist of the lay public, many of

those closest to him and most knowledgeable in the field would become, and remain thereafter, his enemies.<sup>120</sup>

### MARETT'S MOB

IN THE early summer of 1902, Haddon sent Frazer a paper on totemism that he would present as head of the anthropology section at the meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science. Frazer responded on 10 July, pleased that Haddon had agreed with him that totemism is a form of magic, not religion, and that its purpose is to increase the numbers of the totem animal or plant. But Frazer also complained that Haddon had remained silent on Frazer's other arguments, had disagreed on relatively minor points and, most seriously, had failed to publicly acknowledge the extent of his debt to Frazer. "It is of course for you to decide," Frazer added, "whether you will make that acknowledgment or not. If you do not, I shall retain a very decided opinion of your treatment of me, and I shall not feel bound to keep it to myself."

To this rather odd letter, Haddon wrote a cordial reply, so that Frazer was at least temporarily mollified. Writing back on 13 August, Frazer again encouraged Haddon to "explicitly mention" the view that he and Spencer had "reached independently" and "with which your own agrees in some very important particulars," reflecting Frazer's confidence that subsequent research (including Haddon's) had confirmed his and Spencer's view and that "despite the uproar raised when it was first put forward," the support of anthropological community was "a mere matter of time." Residual questions remained unexplained, Frazer admitted, but "the meaning of totemism (in my opinion) we know already: it is a cooperative system of magic designed to provide the community with the necessaries of life, especially of food." Frazer concluded with some nasty remarks about Tylor, complaining that he had committed himself to three distinct and inconsistent theories: first, that totems contain the souls of dead ancestors; second, that they are merely the emblems of exogamous clans; and third, that Arunta totemism is "the only clearly intelligible system," although it lacks both exogamy and the transmigration of souls. "The solemn warning which Tylor here gives to anthropologists, not to frame theories prematurely as to the origin of totems," Frazer added, "is amusing, when one remembers that a few months before he had been propounding a theory of totemism in the same room,<sup>121</sup> without waiting to read through Spencer & Gillen's book, of which he was actually receiving proofs at the time he propounded the theory, without the least regard for their facts."<sup>122</sup>

This passage is doubly ironic. First, in his address to the Royal Anthropological Institute in May 1898, Tylor had accused Frazer of the same offense with which Frazer had just charged Haddon—that in the first edition of *The Golden Bough*, he had expressed insufficient appreciation for the earlier work of the Dutch scholar G. A. Wilken. This had clearly irritated Frazer, and this irritation was no doubt exacerbated by Tylor's suggestion to Macmillan that the “tedious and disagreeable details” about the *intichiuma* be deleted from Spencer and Gillen's 1899 volume, provoking a breach in their relationship that, as we have seen, never entirely healed. Second, by the time Frazer wrote this letter (August 1902) he had himself already advanced two different theories of the origin and significance of totemism and by 1905 would advance still a third.<sup>123</sup> Before that occurred, however, Frazer would encounter a critic of far greater substance than he had confronted heretofore.

Robert Ranulph Marett (1866–1943) was born on the island of Jersey, off the coast of Normandy, to a family with deep roots in the local gentry. His father, an authority on insular law and custom and founder of the local antiquarian society, had studied at the Sorbonne before serving in a series of important Jerseyan administrative positions. In 1884 Marett arrived at Balliol College as an old-world Tory, but he soon became a radical, a member of the Russell Club, and a participant in the social work of Toynbee Hall. Philosophically he considered himself a Platonist, resisting religious skepticism but siding with Mill against the fashionable Oxford Hegelianism and, upon reading Lang's *Custom and Myth* (1884), immediately enlisted in the evolutionary school of Tylor against the linguistic philologists led by Müller. In 1891 he won a fellowship at Exeter College, Oxford, where he would remain for the rest of his career, but even before arriving at Exeter, he had become interested in the topic (“The Ethics of Savage Races”) announced for the triennial T. H. Green Moral Philosophy Prize. For the next three years, Marett studied the manners and customs of savages, trying to resist any undue influence from his reading of the works of Tylor and Frazer and embracing the principle, reminiscent of Smith and evoking the later Durkheim, that savage life, “being relatively undifferentiated in contrast to civilisation with its diversity of special functions, must be studied as if all of one piece, so that ethics merged into morals, and morals covered also religion, law, government, and, in short, the social custom as a whole.”<sup>124</sup> Although never published, Marett's essay won the prize, which in turn brought him into close personal contact with Tylor, who was among the examiners. Tylor had already started his descent into that senescence which we today call Alzheimer's, and Marett, who would eventually become both his successor and his biographer, assisted him with the revisions for the

fourth edition of *Primitive Culture* as well as the revisions of his Gifford Lectures on natural religion.

One of Marett's undergraduate acquaintances had been F. C. S. Schiller, who had gone to teach in the United States and become a friend and philosophical disciple of William James. In 1897 Schiller returned to Oxford, where he became the leading British exponent of Jamesian pragmatism and later secretary of the Oxford Philosophical Society. Marett was the president of this society, to which he presented the only published version of his essay "Origin and Validity in Ethics" (1902), a synthesis of the rational utilitarianism of the evolutionists and the voluntaristic intuitionism of an empirical, introspectionist psychology. In the fall of 1899, just before the meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, Marett's Oxford colleague and classical archaeologist John Myers asked him to write something "really startling" to enliven the anthropological session. On Jersey at the time, Marett had only a few extracts on the history of religion with which to work but managed to produce "Pre-animistic Religion" (1900), a critique of Tylor's animistic hypothesis, which had dominated discussion of primitive religion for thirty years. In *The Making of Religion* (1898), of course, Lang had already attacked Tylor's theory from the standpoint of savage beliefs in a supreme being. But Marett's question was more fundamental: "Before, or at any rate apart from, Animism, was early man subject to any experience, whether in the form of feeling, or of thought, or of both combined, that might be termed specifically 'religious'?"<sup>125</sup>

As his title suggests, Marett's answer was affirmative. Animistic beliefs, according to Tylor, comprise an "infinitely miscellaneous" group of spiritual entities, including not just the spirits of dead ancestors but a variety of other spirits derived from them. But for these "derivative" spirits to acquire their "animistic" qualities, Marett observed, some common yet highly specific feeling or emotion would have been necessary, a religious "sense" or "instinct" whose object is the "supernatural" (those things that "defeat reasonable expectation") and whose elements are fear, admiration, wonder, and above all the feelings associated with the word "awe." Where feeling outstrips the power of natural explanation, there arises an impulse to objectify and even personify this mysterious feeling for the supernatural, and in the will, there arises a corresponding impulse to render this feeling innocuous or even propitious by means of constraint, communion, or conciliation. This universal feeling for the supernatural is thus both logically and chronologically prior to animism, the latter constituting only a particular embodiment of the former. The more startling manifestations of physical nature (such as thunderstorms, eclipses, volcanic eruptions), for example, are "eminently calculated to awake in [the savage] an Awe that I believe to be

specifically religious both in its essence and in its fruits, whether Animism have, or have not, succeeded in imposing its distinctive colour upon it.” In some cases, Marett acknowledged, these manifestations are personified, a phenomenon for which he reserved the term “animatism.” But this was not yet “animism” in “the strict scientific sense that implies the attribution, not merely of personality and will, but of ‘soul’ or ‘spirit’ to the [manifestation of physical nature].” And where animism does arise, the religious quality that attaches to its objects is less the consequence of “ideal constructions” than of “that basic feeling of Awe, which drives a man, ere he can think or theorise upon it, into personal relations with the Supernatural.”<sup>126</sup>

If we turn from inanimate to animate objects, Marett continued, our subject immediately coincides with that of totemism, “about which I shall say little, if only because it teems with controversial matter.” But at their origin, Marett argued, totemistic practices are not religious but magical, and their object is not to conciliate divine powers but to control them. Unlike Frazer, however, Marett believed that magic and religion frequently overlap, the religion evolving out of magic as these the natives seek to explain these mysterious practices through the conception of an affinity between the spirits of animals and their human clients, and the elevation of the former into supernatural powers. Totemism was thus the rationalization of some more primitive, pre-animistic notion of mysterious forces—a position developed later by Durkheim. Most important, Marett’s conception was based on psychological assumptions dramatically different from Tylor’s associationism. If the religious sense is a constant and universal feature of our mental life, Marett argued, “its essence and true nature must then be sought, not so much in the shifting variety of its ideal constructions, as in that steadfast groundwork of specific emotion whereby man is able to feel the supernatural precisely at the point at which his thought breaks down.”<sup>127</sup> If Myers wanted something “startling” for the meeting of the British Association, therefore, he wasn’t disappointed. Within the small world of British anthropology and folklore, this attack on Tylor (the “aging father of evolutionary intellectualism”) created a sensation.<sup>128</sup>

The same psychological assumptions guided “From Spell to Prayer” (1904), in which Marett turned to Frazer, treating some of the larger philosophical questions raised by the second edition of *The Golden Bough*. Still respecting Frazer’s “working distinction” between magic and religion, Marett tried to mitigate the contrast by proposing “a separation in lieu of a divorce.”<sup>129</sup> Does the spell, for example, help to generate the prayer? Does magic help to generate religion? Frazer’s theory was that magic always precedes religion but that over time, trial and error demonstrate its ineffectiveness, and the “primitive philosopher” turns to religion. To Marett’s question, therefore,



Frazer's answer was that magic is a negative rather than a positive condition for the genesis of religion, that its failure makes religion possible. But this, Marett objected, grants primacy to a kind of reasoning that is absent in primitive culture, introduces "unseen beings" who emerge without a pre-history and fully formed by the mind of man, and treats magic and religion as if they are psychologically disparate, unrelated categories of human experience. Marett attributed this to the associationist psychology that Frazer had acquired from Tylor, who had embraced associationism thirty years earlier when it reflected the current state of psychological opinion. But "no psychologist worth seriously considering," Marett objected, still holds that association is a sufficient explanation for reasoning or thought. The reasons that Marett gave for believing this are familiar to anyone who has read William James's *Principles of Psychology* (1890). Association is not "mental chemistry," James had observed, but rather depends on continuity of interest; the construction of thoughts does not simply reproduce but also transforms what is old; and so on. "Seeing that an all-sufficient associationalism has for sound reason been banished from psychology," Marett argued, "the retention of its peculiar phraseology is to be deprecated as liable to suggest that anthropology is harbouring an impostor on the strength of obsolete credentials." And Marett also questioned the language (for example, "philosophy," "principles," "inferences," "conclusions") that Frazer used to describe the thought processes of savage peoples. For by exaggerating the role of pure reasoning, this vocabulary commits the "psychologist's fallacy," in which the standpoint of the observer is confused with the that of the mind under observation.<sup>130</sup>

If Marett's critique of Frazer's associationist psychology thus owed a debt to James's *Principles of Psychology*, his more nuanced description of the psychology of magic owed an equal debt to James's famous essay "The Will to Believe" (1896). Marett began by comparing two instances of behavior in which one object is substituted for another—an enraged bull goring a person's coat (rather than the person himself), and a jilted lover throwing a picture of his significant other into the fireplace. Each is an example of what Marett called "rudimentary" magic, distinguished from its more "developed" counterpart by the fact that neither the bull nor the lover is acting symbolically to produce some real, concrete effect. There is a difference between the bull and the man, of course, for the bull lacks self-consciousness and thus cannot look back on the goring of the coat as foolish, while the man might later recall his behavior as irrational. This nascent self-consciousness opens the way to a more "developed" type of magic, but Marett insisted that still more is required: the subject must "positively acquiesce" in the state of mind that accompanies the symbolic practice, recognizing that it is

irrational while still letting it “work upon him” and “do him good” in the cathartic sense of allowing him to express anger and frustration without harming another human being. Precisely because the man is both rational and self-conscious, however, the symbol and the reality have “fallen apart” in his thought, and through his “will to believe,” he must construct an “ideal bond” between the symbol and the act symbolized. All that is required by developed magic is that this *ideal* bond be conceived as one that is *real* and that can also be *justified*: “Primitive credulity,” Marett emphasized, “no longer suffices. In the place of a naive and effortless faith there is needed the kind of faith that, to whatever extent it is assailed by doubt, can recover itself by self-justification.”<sup>131</sup>

Suitably impressed by the range of human credulity, Marett believed that this kind of self-justification should be the focus of the anthropological study of magic. But in the sense encouraged by James’s famous essay, he also believed that this kind of symbolic magic embodies a kind of objective truth, that the emotional, cathartic release really works and really is efficacious. For Marett, developed magic is thus “a more or less clearly recognized pretending, which at the same time is believed to project itself into an ulterior effect,” while “the projectiveness of the magical act is grounded, not merely on a subjective bias that ‘fakes’ its facts, but on one that is met halfway, so to speak, by the facts themselves.”<sup>132</sup> This “projectiveness” is bound to strike the savage himself as mysterious, Marett emphasized, and it was precisely here that he disagreed most sharply with Frazer. In his eagerness to describe primitive magic as the savage equivalent of modern science, Frazer had argued that it was based on the primitive understanding of mechanical causation and thus lacked mystery altogether. Marett had no doubts that savages grasp the notion of mechanical causation, but he added that this has nothing to do with magic. On the contrary (as the savage cannot fail to recognize), in the exercise of magic, the “cause” that produces its effect is not at all mechanical (as in a spear being thrown, hitting its target, and killing it), but is rather mysterious (a projection of will, of psychic force). Similarly, from the standpoint of the victim over whom it is exercised, magic is experienced as a kind of “rapport” or “mysteriously enforced assent.” No less than a religious transaction, that between a magician and his victim is “an affair between persons,” an exertion of will that finds its way to another will and dominates it; for this purpose, there is no instrument more perfect than the spell, the uttered, imperative “must,” a kind of “spiritual projectile” that finds its way into the mind of another human being. So primitive magic is not as similar to modern science as Frazer had suggested, nor was it quite so different from primitive religion.

Throughout his discussion of primitive magic, Marett was clearly influenced by Codrington no less than James, and this also guided his description of the relatively easy transitions whereby the spell (magic) becomes the prayer (religion). The casting of the magical spell, as we have seen, is understood by the magician himself as mysterious and supernatural; once the magician thus experiences what it feels like to be an agent of the supernatural, all other, external manifestations of the supernatural are conceived on the same model, as in some sense personally controlled and manipulated by magicians. This is precisely what Codrington had described in *The Melanesians*, where *mana* is the power that does the work, and the object of the beliefs and practices that constitute Melanesian religion is to obtain and control *mana*. Moreover, because *mana* is both nonintrinsic and contagious, it easily passes from the magician himself to other things, which in turn become personified and deified; from here, it is but a short step to the belief that these other things (animals or plants) have “wills” that might also be constrained. In short, the “spell” is on its way to becoming a “prayer,” and—in a far more positive sense than Frazer had imagined—magic is gradually shading over into religion.<sup>133</sup>

Near the end of June 1904, Marett wrote to Frazer warning him that this essay was forthcoming, and a month later, Frazer wrote back thanking him for his courtesy. But then Spencer and Gillen published *The Northern Tribes of Central Australia* (1904), a companion volume to *Native Tribes* that Frazer had again seen through the press. When Marett’s review of this volume attacked Spencer and Gillen’s obviously Frazerian conceptions of totemism, magic, and religion, Frazer was furious: “On every point on which you express an opinion,” he wrote to Marett on 17 December 1904, “you are . . . just as far from the truth as it is possible to be! I mean, that if your opinions were just exactly inverted, they would be the nearest approximation to the truth that we can get, or nearly so, at the present time. What I mean,” he concluded, “will, I hope, be clear from the article on the beginning of totemism which I shall publish shortly in the *Fortnightly Review*.”<sup>134</sup>

This article was “The Beginnings of Religion and Totemism Among the Australian Aborigines” (1905), in which Frazer advanced his third, “conceptual” theory of totemism. Marett’s critique notwithstanding, however, Frazer’s initial concern was with the prolific, indefatigable Lang who, in both *The Making of Religion* (1898) and the second edition of *Myth, Ritual, and Religion* (1901), had emphasized the growing body of evidence that Australian Aborigines believed in a high god (the “All-Father”) who had created the world and established human morality. Frazer’s view that magic had universally preceded religion was obviously orthogonal to Lang’s thought, and apparently Frazer raised it in his correspondence with Spencer: “I do

not believe any native Australian has the slightest idea of anything like an 'All Father,'” Spencer replied on 23 July 1902, “but that this is simply a free rendering, on the part of a man who did not recognize the real importance of the matter, of some term which to the natives implied a very different meaning.”<sup>135</sup> Frazer thus began his 1905 article with a reaffirmation of his earlier position: “Roughly speaking, all men in Australia are magicians,” he observed, “but not one is a priest; everybody fancies he can influence his fellows or the course of nature by sympathetic magic, but nobody dreams of propitiating gods by prayer or sacrifice.”<sup>136</sup>

More interesting was Frazer’s redescription of the map that Spencer had sent to him on 20 October 1898. At the time, Spencer’s purpose had been to suggest that the “religious” aspect of totemism predominated among those tribes closer to the center of the continent, while the “social” element was more salient in the southern and eastern coastal regions, where conditions of climate, water, and food were more propitious. Through their subsequent correspondence, of course, Frazer and Spencer had redefined the “religious” beliefs and practices of the central Australians as a kind of “magic.” Alluding to Spencer’s map, Frazer now acknowledged that in parts of Australia (particularly those in the southern and eastern parts of the continent), “some rudiments of religion appear in a regard for the comfort of departed friends.” It was these rudiments, he suggested, that had misled honest but ill-trained observers to think that they had discovered evidence of “high ethical religions” among the Australian tribes, but these “reports of moral Supreme Beings among the Australian aborigines,” he added, citing Spencer’s support, “come chiefly from Victoria and New South Wales, that is, the parts of the continent where the natives have been longest under the influence of the white man.”<sup>137</sup>

Frazer’s new theory of totemism was built upon evidence drawn from the more primitive tribes of the center where, in *Native Tribes*, Spencer and Gillen had located various “totem centers.” Each of these was associated with a particular totemic animal or plant and haunted by the souls of dead ancestors while they awaited their reincarnation. When a pregnant woman first feels the child in her womb, they observed, she thinks that the spirit of the nearest totem center has entered her. In his essays of 1899 and again in the second edition of *The Golden Bough*, Frazer had passed over this particular feature of Arunta totemism rather superficially. But by 1905, he had become impressed by its “appearance of extreme antiquity” (from features such as ignorance of sexual intercourse as the cause of pregnancy, descent traced neither through the father or the mother, and so on). “This form of totemism,” Frazer believed, “may with great probability be regarded as the most primitive known to exist at the present day, since it seems to date from

a time when blood relationship was not yet recognised, and when even the idea of paternity had not yet presented itself to the savage mind."<sup>138</sup>

Characteristically, Frazer also emphasized how even this gross ignorance of natural causation might reasonably be explained as the consequence of savage habits and modes of thought: the interval between intercourse and the first symptoms of pregnancy is sufficient to prevent the savage from making any connection between the two, while the primitive custom of permitting unrestricted prepubescent intercourse between the sexes would have familiarized savages with sexual unions that are necessarily sterile. Led in this way to seek another explanation for pregnancy, the savage embraces the common primitive belief that a person may be inhabited by a spirit that creates an abnormal state of body or mind: "Naturally enough," Frazer observed, "when she is first aware of the mysterious movement within her, the mother fancies that something has that very moment passed into her body, and it is equally natural that in her attempt to ascertain what the thing is she should fix upon some object that happened to be near her and to engage her attention at the critical moment."<sup>139</sup> Among the objects on which the mother might thus fix her attention, Frazer added, food that she had just eaten would be a natural choice, and this would in turn explain two other features of totemism: that the great majority of totems are edible objects and that the identification of a man with his totem is so complete that the two are considered almost indistinguishable. The fact that such reasoning is so consistent with savage habits of thought would explain the existence of totemism in so many different parts of the world, for it might easily have occurred to people anywhere, without any assumption of their having borrowed it from one another; the fact that each person's totem is determined "accidentally" (by immediate circumstance rather than maternal or paternal descent) would explain why the same community of primitive people frequently contains men and woman of so many different totem stocks. This "conceptional" theory was of course incompatible with the view (advanced by Frazer just five years earlier) that the *intichiuma* embodied the original meaning and significance of totemism, but precisely because the *intichiuma* depends on such a close identification of a man with his totem, it might be "a later, though still very early, outgrowth of totemism rather than its original root."<sup>140</sup>

So close an identification between man and totem, Frazer reminded his readers, is incompatible with exogamy, for realizing that animals mate with their own kind, savages would see no reason why they shouldn't follow suit. But as we've seen, Frazer, Spencer, and Gillen had long believed that exogamy was not an original part of totemism at all but rather the consequence of a later social reform. What gave rise to this reform? Frazer categorically dismissed the notion that it was the consequence of any moral antipathy for

incest: “To suppose that the law of incest originated in any instinctive horror of the act would be to invert the relation of cause and effect, and to commit the commonest of all blunders in investigating early society, that of interpreting it in the light of our modern feelings and habits.” Neither could it have been due to the belief that incest is injurious to offspring, for as we have seen, the most primitive Australians do not believe that children are the result of intercourse. Even in the present, Frazer could cite Darwin to suggest that it was not clear that the inbreeding of healthy parents produces physical deviance in the offspring. Ultimately, therefore, Frazer resigned himself to the conclusion that exogamy was the result not of any putatively rational belief but rather of some savage superstition—an *irrational* belief that incest was injurious to those to engaged in it—whose meaning has been lost.<sup>141</sup>

The more general insight here—that utterly irrational motives often lead to highly beneficial institutions—was then further developed in Frazer’s *Lectures on the Early History of Kingship* (1905). Like *The Golden Bough*, these lectures, on which Frazer collaborated with the classicist A. B. Cook, began and ended with a discussion of the King of the Wood at Nemi, but the rationalist focus on the intellectual steps necessary to the shift from magic to religion was displaced by an emphasis on the latter’s social and political consequences. Even before starting these lectures on kingship, however, Frazer had begun work on the third edition of *The Golden Bough*, which would eventually swell to twelve volumes, and by 16 March 1908, Frazer had again written to Macmillan, this time proposing a “Geographical Survey of Totemism” which would include “all the important and well-authenticated facts about Totemism which are at present known,” and for which *Totemism* (1887) and the *Fortnightly Review* essays of 1899 and 1905 would provide a kind of theoretical introduction.<sup>142</sup> The result, which swelled into four volumes over the next several years, was *Totemism and Exogamy* (1910), a compendium of information about totemism (and an invaluable source for Freud) that in fact contained nothing new. (Ackerman has described it as perhaps the best example of Frazer’s tendency to discard nothing and recycle everything, including whole articles with which he no longer agreed.) Although Frazer continued to defend the “conceptual” theory, his first two theories of totemism appeared here as well, and although he acknowledged that both totemism and exogamy are extremely primitive, he also continued to insist that totemism had preceded exogamy, that the latter had been introduced as a later social reform, and that there was no necessary relationship between the two institutions. Oddly, there is no mention of Semitic totemism, which perhaps reflects Frazer’s unwillingness, after the controversy over the second edition of *The Golden Bough*, to reenter the religious controversy.

Marett's criticisms of Frazer's work kept pace. In his lectures on kingship, for example, Frazer had suggested that the idea of taboo is a kind of "negative magic": just as sympathetic magic *does* something so that the thing symbolized in the action might follow, so taboo *forbids* doing something for fear of the consequences. Consistent with his earlier emphasis on the element of "awe" in primitive religion, however, Marett in 1907 insisted that the sanction behind taboo is always a mystical (and never a measurable) consequence.<sup>143</sup> In 1908, Marett added that the counterpart of taboo is not sympathetic magic but rather *mana* (the supernatural force described in Codrington's *Melanesians*) and that *mana* and taboo thus constitute the positive and negative poles of religion itself.<sup>144</sup> Also in 1908, Marett encouraged his fellow anthropologists to embrace a *social* rather than purely *individual* psychology as the basis of their research because "the subject, the owner as it were, of religious experience is the religious society, not the individual," and if we are to avoid the "psychologist's fallacy," we must focus "on the meaning and purpose totemism has, not for us, but for them, and for them not as so many individuals, but as a group."<sup>145</sup>

In 1910, Marett was appointed reader in Anthropology at Oxford, thus becoming Tylor's successor, and on 27 October he delivered his inaugural lecture, "The Birth of Humility," a copy of which he sent to Frazer. Humility is a subject in which anthropologists should be interested, Marett began, if only because of recent developments in two related fields. The first was social psychology, where William McDougall's *Introduction to Social Psychology* (1908) had recently proposed a new theory of the emotions, reducing them to a few primary instinctual tendencies common to all human beings. The second was comparative religion, where Marett particularly applauded the works of Durkheim and also Edward Westermarck's *Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas* (2 vols., 1906–8), which tried to counteract the "intellectualism" of past anthropological theory. For this kind of intellectualism, Marett took the arguments of the second edition of *The Golden Bough*, and especially Frazer's account of the relationship between magic, religion, and science, as paradigmatic: for example, the ideas that magic is the mistaken application of the most elementary processes of mind (the association of ideas by means of resemblance or contiguity); that both its fundamental presupposition (an implicit faith in the order and uniformity of nature) and ultimate purpose (to control, coerce, and constrain the natural world) are identical with science; and that magic is replaced by religion when the most thoughtful of primitive men reason that as the laws of nature apparently function independently of human will, there must be other beings (like men, but much more powerful) who direct its operations and that these beings are therefore worthy of propitiation and conciliation.

Unlike the spirit of self-sufficiency and even arrogance that characterizes magic, therefore, it was this sense of abject humility that Frazer had made the distinctive characteristic of religion.

Marett didn't find Frazer's theory entirely implausible, for he acknowledged that the Australian Aborigines and North American Indians represent a lower stage of social evolution and that their attitude toward "the mysterious powers of the unseen" was typically more "magical" (coercive) and less "religious" (conciliatory) than that of other peoples. But the new psychology, Marett insisted, would insist that we understand the kind of man who "does not reason out his Religion, but dances it out instead," and in whom "the emotional and motor elements" transcend "the element of conceptual thought." And the new anthropology would insist on a stronger grasp of the social aspect of religion. Savages are "mobbish," imitation is the mainspring of their education, and emotions propagate themselves more readily than ideas: "That ritual, or in other words a routine of external forms, is historically prior to dogma," Marett emphasized, "was proclaimed years ago by Robertson Smith and others. Yet Social Anthropology is but today beginning to appreciate the psychological implications of this cardinal truth."<sup>146</sup> Marett's main argument, however, was that humility was neither the discovery nor the private possession of a few "higher intelligences" but rather was bound up with the social development of ordinary human beings; this in turn led Marett to a remarkably sensitive treatment of the "experience of sacredness" that anticipates that of Durkheim just two years later. Sacred objects, Marett observed, have qualities that are both negative (such as the uncanniness from which we seek escape, the secret before which we cower, the taboo before which we prostrate ourselves) and positive (such as the mystical potency which seems addressed to us personally). Citing A. A. van Gennep's *Les Rites de passage* (1909), Marett insisted that a persistent motive of primitive ritual is the ceremonial enactment of a passage from the profane world of workaday experience into and through a sacred world of religious experience. To look behind these practices for clearly defined ideas is to miss the point entirely: "By sheer force of that vital experience which is always experiment," Marett added in a passage that might have been written by James, the savage "has found out—or rather society has found out for him—that thus to be cast down for a season means that afterwards he will arise a stronger and better man."<sup>147</sup> Humility (and thus religion) is clearly the possession of the most savage peoples; and arrogance is the particular attitude, not only of magic, but of science (including social science) as well.

"Allow me to correct what I believe to be a mistake on your part," Frazer wrote to Marett on 11 May 1911:



In so far as I know Robertson Smith's views from intimate personal acquaintance as well as from a study of his writings, he never proclaimed that "ritual is historically prior to dogma," as you say he did. On the contrary I believe that he would have rejected such a view (as I do) as a manifest absurdity. What he did say, with perfect justice (and I entirely agree with him), is that many dogmas or myths are historically posterior to the rituals which they profess to explain and are therefore worthless as explanations of them, being mere deductions from them. But to generalise and affirm that myth or dogma is universally posterior to ritual is, I believe, an idea that never occurred to him. On the contrary he always assumed that dogma was prior to ritual, and the whole aim of his investigations was to discover the idea (dogma, myth or whatever you please to call it, in short the thought) on which ritual is founded.

"I entirely agree with his views," Frazer then confirmed, "and have always acted on them in my writings, laying more stress on ritual than on myth (dogma) in the study of the history of religion, not because I believe ritual to be historically prior to dogma or myth (that I regard as absolutely false), but because ritual is much more conservative than dogma and far less apt to be falsified consciously or unconsciously, and therefore furnishes a far surer standing-ground for research. That and nothing else," Frazer concluded, "was . . . my friend Robertson Smith's view."<sup>148</sup>

Frazer's letter was full of misunderstandings, both of Robertson Smith and of himself. "I think you have altogether missed my meaning," Marett replied bluntly just two days later. "I meant by dogma precisely what Robertson Smith meant by it" ("theory or *reasoned* belief") while Smith had described the causes of ancient religions as "unconscious forces" and religious traditions themselves as "unconscious." Responding to Frazer's claim that savage ritual has "the imprint of reflexion and purpose stamped on it just as plainly as any actions of civilised men," Marett said simply that "I entirely disagree with it," adding that "if you print your view in that form, using the word thus unqualified, I believe that every psychologist in Europe, including Ward, will be down upon you. . . . All that some of us—McDougall, for instance, and Levy-Bruhl, etc., in France—have been trying to do is to emphasize the *mobbish* character of primitive religion and primitive life."<sup>149</sup> Marett was careful to cite specific passages from Smith's work, and when Frazer wrote back on 17 May, he was forced to admit that these supported Marett's interpretation. "But I still incline to think," Frazer added, "that he was emphasising a novel view (the importance of the study of ritual as compared with myth or dogma) and that in doing so he omitted to state (what he probably assumed) that every ritual is preceded in the minds of the men

who institute it by a definite train of reasoning, even though the train of reasoning may not be definitely formulated in words and promulgated as a dogma. That at least is my view," he concluded, "and I believe that Robertson Smith would have assented to it."<sup>150</sup>

Smith would have assented to no such thing, and this exchange of correspondence between Frazer and Marett thus affords a fascinating glimpse into the relationship of two men who, though intimate friends, were intellectually light years apart. Biblical criticism had led Smith to the comparative method not because he sought to reduce Semitic religion to its "unconscious" antecedents but because he hoped to make the authenticity of God's revelation abundantly clear. Frazer too had begun with a specific problem (the rule of the Arician priesthood), but his ultimate purpose was, like Tylor's, to describe the triumphal progress of the human intellect itself from savagery to civilization. As a biblical scholar, Smith also used the comparative method in a more cautious, historical manner, resisting comparisons between Semitic and non-Semitic cultures, or between Semitic societies representing different stage of evolution, but Frazer, convinced that the human mind was everywhere the same, drew comparisons between European peasants and peoples in the savage state generally, regardless of time, place or even evolutionary stage.

Frazer's objections to Marett notwithstanding, Smith believed that in ancient religion practice was prior to belief and, where beliefs did exist, that myth was prior to dogma, thus laying foundations for the "ritual theory of myth" later developed by writers like Jane Harrison, Francis Cornford, A. B. Cook, and Gilbert Murray. While there is some evidence of a ritual theory of myth in Frazer's early essay on burial customs and even the first edition of *The Golden Bough*, his correspondence with Marett is ample evidence that he had overcome these early indiscretions, and in his introduction to *Apollodorus* (1921), he alternately embraced both euhemerist and cognitionist interpretations of myth, with all their rationalist implications, while simultaneously denouncing their ritualist counterpart.<sup>151</sup> Like Frazer, Smith distinguished sharply between magic and religion, but in Smith's more sociological conception, magic was distinctive primarily because it lacked fixed, communal relations between gods and worshippers and was pursued only for selfish, utilitarian purposes. For Frazer, magic was rather a primitive form of science, and one of the many reasons why Frazer would admire Malinowski's *Argonauts* was his hope that its account of magic in the Kula would dispel "the erroneous view that magic, as opposed to religion, is in its nature essentially maleficent and anti-social, being always used by an individual for the promotion of his own selfish ends and the injury of his enemies, quite regardless of its effect on the common weal."<sup>152</sup>

The focus of Frazer's notion of "taboo" was on sacred persons, as in his discussion of divine kingship, and its origins were animistic. For Smith, however, the holiness of places was the special form of sanctity amenable to independent study, as holy persons, things, times, and even gods all seemed to presuppose the existence of places at which persons minister, things are set aside, times celebrated, and gods reveal themselves. The question of the origin of "taboo" thus resolved itself to that of why some places rather than others became the sites of sanctuaries, and Smith's answer was a theophany that, in turn, immediately became the occasion for a sacrifice and, eventually, regular worship at that location. If Smith lacked any theory of the origin of totemism, he had a clear sense of its social function, which was to emancipate human beings from the fear of natural agencies by establishing with them a physical alliance and affinity. Frazer, by contrast, entertained three different theories of totemism during his career, each of them based on the animistic belief in the separation of the soul from the body, as well as a decidedly rational series of inferences whereby the soul was presumed to move from one body to another. For Smith, totemism epitomized the "natural religious community" of primitive peoples, while for Frazer, it was always an intellectual solution to a cognitive problem posed by some otherwise inexplicable natural phenomenon.

The quarrel between Frazer and Marett thus epitomized two fundamentally different conceptions of the nature of primitive religion, at a time when one was in decline and the other in ascendance. It would be a mistake to make excessive claims for Marett, for, like Frazer, he feared the irrational forces stirring beneath the surface of Edwardian society and in the broadest sense remained an evolutionist, writing a biography of Tylor, editing Spencer's correspondence with Frazer, and publishing books on evolutionary topics until well into the 1930s.<sup>153</sup> But even as he exchanged letters with Frazer, his essays were being read by Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown, who would soon revolutionize British social anthropology. This revolution would replace the evolutionary social theory that had dominated anthropology for more than a half century with a more synchronic approach to the study of primitive peoples. By doing so, it would remove questions about the origin and meaning of totemism from the context within it made sense to ask them, and by the time it was complete, totemism would have declined from its position as the most exotic obsession of writers like Frazer, Jevons, and Lang, to become something of a historical oddity, interesting primarily to those who wondered how so many had been taken in for so long. Before this, however, totemism would play its role as a major preoccupation of two considerably more powerful minds.

## 4

### TOTEMISM AS SELF-TRANSCENDENCE



ON 4 February 1913, Émile Durkheim rose before the Société française de philosophie to defend the “two principal ideas” that “dominate” *Les Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse* (1912). The first these was the “dynamogenic quality of religion” (a phrase that Durkheim had never used before, even in *Les Formes élémentaires*), which refers to the power of religion to inspire not just metaphysical speculation but concrete social action. Precisely because of its importance, Durkheim explained, this idea could not be discussed early in the book, appeared only gradually as it advanced, and could be fully developed only in its conclusion. But once this quality is recognized, he added, the task of the science of religions—to explain the nature and origin of the forces which stimulate social action—becomes clear.

The novelty of phrase notwithstanding, Durkheim had long been convinced that these were *social* forces, which not only constrain, coerce, and dominate the individual but also elevate him well beyond his ordinary powers. The man who is with his god, Durkheim explained to his audience, has “a certain confidence, an ardor for life, an enthusiasm that he does not experience in ordinary times. He has more power to resist the hardships of existence; he is capable of greater things and proves it by his conduct.” Such eudaemonic effects, however, could be realized only in so far as the god is represented in the mind, “with an energy sufficient for the representation

that expresses them to be efficacious.” The gods “have to be believed in, and believed in with a collective faith; for the faith of each can be strong only if it is partaken of by all.”<sup>1</sup> So the gods (society) depend upon men (individuals) for their existence, just as men depend upon the gods for the best attributes of themselves.

The last sentence alludes to the second of Durkheim’s “two principal ideas”—the duality of human nature. Implicit within all religions, this belief was first expressed in the distinction between body and soul, flesh and spirit. In later, more Cartesian and Kantian language, it was represented in the distinction between sensations and concepts and between sensible appetites and moral actions. These are not simply distinctions, Durkheim emphasized, but profound oppositions. Our concepts “do violence to” our sensations, our moral actions “offend” our instincts and inclinations. “No matter what we should do, we can never be completely in accord with ourselves, for we can follow one of our two natures only if the other thereby suffers. We are thus condemned to life perpetually divided against ourselves.”<sup>2</sup> But if Durkheim had no solution, he at least offered an explanation. Cartesian metaphysics and Kantian antinomies merely translated, in abstract philosophical language, the more primitive distinction and opposition between the sacred and the profane; both were dependent upon the same fundamental causes. Society, again, cannot exist without penetrating individual minds and cannot penetrate individual minds without elevating the individual above himself. The individual thus comprises two different “beings,” the first derived from and expressing our physical organism, the second derived from and expressing society. The opposition between these two beings is inevitable, for the first reflects individual sensations and appetites, while the second gives rise to that rationality and morality without which society is literally impossible.

To some extent, this second idea had become a stable feature of Durkheim’s work as early as *De la division du travail social* (1893). But the first emerged only in the early twentieth century, as Durkheim, relying extensively on Robertson Smith and William James, had begun to cobble together a way of thinking and speaking about religious phenomena that would answer Frazer’s rationalist, utilitarian interpretation of Australian totemism.

## FROM ÉPINAL TO THE ÉCOLE NORMALE

DURKHEIM WAS born on 15 April 1858 in Épinal, in Lorraine. His mother was a merchant’s daughter, and his father had been rabbi of Épinal since the 1830s. Émile, whose grandfather and great-grandfather has also been rabbis,

thus appeared destined for the rabbinate, and a part of his early education was spent in a rabbinical school. While at the Collège d'Épinal and under the influence of an old Catholic schoolmistress, Durkheim experienced a brief crisis of mysticism. This was rapidly surmounted even as his early rabbinical ambitions were dismissed, and shortly after his arrival in Paris, Durkheim had broken with Judaism altogether. Still, Durkheim remained the product of a close-knit, orthodox Jewish family, as well as that long-established Jewish community of Alsace-Lorraine that had been occupied by Prussian troops in 1870, suffering the consequent anti-Semitism of the French citizenry. "[Anti-semitism] had already been seen in the regions of the East at the time of the war of 1870," Durkheim later recalled, and "being myself of Jewish origin, I was able to observe it at close hand. The Jews were blamed for defeats."<sup>3</sup> As an adult, Durkheim would believe that the hostility of Christianity toward Judaism had created an unusual sense of solidarity among the Jews. "Their need of resisting a general hostility, the very impossibility of free communication with the rest of the populations, has forced them to strict union among themselves. Consequently, each community became a small, compact and coherent society with a strong feeling of self-consciousness and unity."<sup>4</sup>

An outstanding student at the Collège d'Épinal, Durkheim skipped two years, easily obtaining his *baccalauréats* in letters (1874) and sciences (1875) and distinguishing himself in the *Concours Général*. Intent by now on becoming a teacher, Durkheim left Épinal for Paris to prepare himself for admission to the prestigious École Normale Supérieure. Installed at a pension for nonresident students, however, Durkheim soon became depressed: his father's illness left him anxious over his family's financial security; he was an utter provincial in Paris; and his intellectual predilections, already more scientific than literary, were ill-fitted to the study of Latin and rhetoric essential for admission to the École. After failing in his first two attempts at the entrance examination (in 1877 and 1878), Durkheim was at last admitted near the end of 1879, joining a particularly brilliant cohort of *normaliens* including the socialist Jean Jaurès (who became a life-long friend), the philosophers Henri Bergson, Gustave Belot, Edmond Goblot, Felix Rauh, and Maurice Blondel, the psychologist Pierre Janet, the linguist Ferdinand Brunot, the historians Henri Berr and Camille Jullian, and the geographer Lucien Gallois. Despite the constant fears of failure that haunted him throughout life, Durkheim became an active participant in the high-minded political and philosophical debates that characterized the École during the republican ascendancy. Like Jaurès, Durkheim was soon a staunch advocate of the republican cause, with special admiration for Léon Gambetta, the brilliant orator and "spiritual embodiment of the Third Republic," as well as the more

moderate Jules Ferry, whose anticlerical reforms would soon open doors for Durkheim in secondary education.<sup>5</sup>

Despite his unhappiness with the literary rather than scientific emphasis of the *École*, Durkheim discovered two teachers whose outlook he found more congenial, although the nature and extent of their influence is complex. The French philosopher of science Emile Boutroux, for example, had studied at the *École Normale Supérieure* from 1865 to 1868, where he came under the influence of the neospiritualist philosopher Jules Lachelier. At the time, Lachelier was developing the ideas expressed in *Du Fondement de l'induction* (1871), which challenged the foundations of rationalist science by insisting on the Kantian point that we know the world not as it is but as it is constructed through the categories of the understanding. Insisting that mechanistic causes are never adequate explanations, therefore, Lachelier encouraged Boutroux to read Kant, and Boutroux's student papers suggest that he quickly embraced the antideterminist position.<sup>6</sup> Successful in the *agrégation* in 1868, Boutroux spent the following year studying in Heidelberg, returning in 1871 as an instructor at the *lycée* de Caen. His first major work was *De la contingence des lois de la nature*, a study of determinism in its relation to the physical and moral sciences, for which he received his doctorate in 1874 and which ultimately proved to be his magnum opus. After teaching at Montpellier and Nancy, in 1877 Boutroux received an appointment in philosophy at the *École Normale Supérieure*, where he remained for the next nine years—including the period from 1879 to 1882, when Durkheim was his student.

"If [the laws of nature] were actually necessary," Boutroux wrote in his preface to the English translation of *De la contingence*, "[they] would signify the immutability and rigidity of death. If they are contingent, they dignify life and constitute points of support or bases which enable us constantly to rise towards a higher life." Affirming the latter, Boutroux's next step, in opposition to the rationalist conception of a single world comprising logically deducible necessary relations, was to postulate "several worlds, forming . . . stages superposed on one another."<sup>7</sup> These include the world of pure necessity, the world of causes, the world of notions, the mathematical world, the physical world, the living world and, at last, the thinking world. Initially, Boutroux acknowledged, each of these seems to depend on those beneath it and to receive from them its existence and its laws, but examination and comparison of these forms of being, as well as the sciences that study them, show that it is impossible to connect the higher to the lower forms by any link of necessity. Each world, in short, is indeterminate and contingent (it might *not* have existed, or might have existed *in some other form*) rather than being logically or causally necessary.

Boutroux's doctrine of contingency provided Durkheim with some of the tools he used to attack the Cartesian tradition in French thought. Descartes, for example, had simply dismissed history and the other "human sciences" as of no interest to genuine seekers after truth because they were incapable of yielding either precise definitions or clear rules of evidence from which irrefutable conclusions might be drawn by logical deduction. But the doctrine of contingency placed the "dynamic" and "concrete" sciences (biology, psychology, sociology, etc.) on an entirely different plane from their "static" and "abstract" counterparts (mathematics, physics, etc.), and it insisted that observation and experiment—not logic and abstract reasoning—were their appropriate method. History, in particular, became "singularly important," for things could no longer be understood as the logical, necessary development of their intrinsic nature. On the contrary, things might have been otherwise, or not at all, and thus the conditions of their development up to their present, contingent state become a matter of serious empirical investigation.<sup>8</sup> Durkheim made this debt abundantly clear in 1907 when, responding to the "accusation" that his distinction between psychology and sociology had been borrowed from Wundt, he said instead that he owed it to "my master, Boutroux, who, at the École Normale Supérieure, repeated frequently to us that each science must, as Aristotle says, explain [its own phenomena] by 'its own principles'—e.g., psychology by psychological principles, biology by biological principles. Most impressed by this idea," Durkheim added, "I applied it to sociology."<sup>9</sup>

This influence of Boutroux on Durkheim, however, has been somewhat exaggerated by those who have considered only the irreducibility of sociology to psychology and ignored the larger context of Boutroux's philosophy of science and especially his views on religion. Boutroux believed that the creation of man, for example, "cannot be explained simply by the operation of the physical and physiological laws. His existence and action impose on nature modifications that she herself cannot understand and that appear as contingent, if we adopt the standpoint of the physical and physiological worlds." The corollary of this was freedom, for the individual "is not only the creator of his character, he can also intervene in the events of his life and change their course; every moment he can strengthen his acquired tendencies or endeavor to modify them."<sup>10</sup> And while *De la contingence des lois de la nature* contained no explicit discussion of sociological laws (his theory of qualitatively different, irreducible levels of being culminated in the "thinking world" of human self-consciousness, not that of human societies), this view of creation and freedom in turn affected his understanding of the social sciences. If Boutroux provided Durkheim with the philosophical justification for his antireductionism, therefore, it should be



acknowledged that Durkheim's later claims for sociology would go far beyond anything Boutroux would have condoned. In his inaugural lecture at Bordeaux, for example, Durkheim insisted that "all natural entities from the mineral world up through man came within the province of positive science, that is to say that all that concerns them occurs according to natural laws." Faced with the objection that this conflicts with the notion of free will, Durkheim simply offered his audience a choice: "Either one recognizes that social phenomena are accessible to scientific investigation, or else one admits, for no reason and contrary to all the inductions of science, that there are two worlds within the world: one in which reigns the law of causality, the other in which reign arbitrariness and contingency."<sup>11</sup>

These differences became more obvious when, in 1892 and 1893, Boutroux gave a series of lectures at the Sorbonne, subsequently published as *De l'idée de loi naturelle dans la science et la philosophie contemporaines* (1895), in which he denied the necessity of sociological laws more directly, using an example that was (and remains) quite familiar:

Suppose . . . we explain the development of the division of labour by the progress of social density, the interdependence of the members of a society. The saying of Darwin is recalled, that different beings live side by side more easily than similar beings: they inconvenience one another in a less degree and the struggle for life amongst them is not so keen. Man obtains this salutary diversity by developing division of labour, and so this division of labour shows itself as the necessary result of the struggle for life. Vital competition: a physical cause, thus explains division of labour: a social fact.<sup>12</sup>

The example was taken from *la division du travail social* (1893),<sup>13</sup> the doctoral thesis defended by Durkheim during the spring of the same year Boutroux gave his lectures. In fact, although the thesis was dedicated to Boutroux, he accepted the dedication with a grimace, and according to the Doyen's report of the defense, his discontent was particularly addressed to Durkheim's mechanical, necessitarian mode of explanation.<sup>14</sup> The division of labor is a *necessary* consequence of Darwinian struggle, Boutroux repeated two years later, only in the sense of being *preferable*: "more in conformity with the idea of humanity, responding more completely to that sympathy with the weak which we assume to exist in man." What can this mean, Boutroux asked, except that "what we took to be a crude law of causality involves a relation of finality, and that we are assuming the intervention of the human intellect and will where we think we are bringing into action none but external and material conditions?"<sup>15</sup>

As a devout Roman Catholic, Boutroux's doctrine of contingency was quite literally a theory of divine providence.<sup>16</sup> In *La Science et religion dans la philosophie contemporaine* (1908), he warned that the so-called science of religion would sooner or later destroy religion itself, for religious belief implied "the idea of objects, of forces, of feelings, of states which cannot be reduced to ordinary phenomena, which cannot be explained according to the methods of science." Unlike the other sciences, which "leave standing the things that they explain," the science of religions has "this remarkable property of destroying its object in the act of describing it, and of substituting itself for the facts in proportion as it analyses them."<sup>17</sup> Durkheim wrote immediately to Xavier Léon requesting an evening session of the Société française de philosophie to discuss the book, and when the Société met, on 19 November 1908, Durkheim advanced the argument (familiar to readers of *Les Formes élémentaires*) that a science "cannot make the reality to which it is applied disappear."<sup>18</sup> Not surprisingly, Boutroux's conclusion was precisely the opposite: "It is inconceivable that everything specific to a religion would *not* disappear sooner or later, assuming that the religion is truly explicable, in its entirety, following the principles of a dogmatically rationalist, determinist, and objective science."<sup>19</sup>

The second teacher at the École who impressed Durkheim was the great French historian Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges, whose classic *La Cité antique* (1864) has frequently been cited as a major influence on *Les Formes élémentaires* (1912). Born in Brittany, Fustel entered the École Normale in 1850, where he studied with the historians Victor Duruy, P. A. Chéruel, and J.-D. Guigniaut. Appointed sublibrarian, Fustel hid himself in the stacks, reading Montesquieu, Michelet, Tocqueville, and Guizot, but his chief early inspiration came from Descartes, whose methodological skepticism he applied to the study of history. After the coup d'état of Napoleon III (2 December 1851) led to the suppression of many of the École's nonclassical studies, Fustel turned to the study of ancient history, joining the newly established École française d'Athènes (1853), then the Lycée Amiens (1855), the Lycée St. Louis in Paris (1857), and finally ascending to the chair of medieval and modern history at the University of Strasbourg (1860), where his lectures soon made him a local celebrity. Fustel's masterpiece, *La Cité antique* (1864), quickly won him a following at the court of Napoleon III, and in February 1870, he was called to the École Normale.

Even before arriving in Paris, Fustel's perspective was pro-French and anti-German, and the Franco-Prussian War did nothing to change this. In a series of essays in the early 1870s, he defended the French right of self-determination in Alsace, attacked German historical methods, encouraged renewed respect for the *ancien régime*, and defended the Roman (by contrast

with Germanic) origins of European feudalism. “L’Invasion germanique au Ve siècle” (1872) in particular created a sensation, and by 1874, Fustel had expanded it into the first of a projected four-volume work. But when this first installment was greeted with a storm of criticism, Fustel abandoned the project and turned instead to an intense period of methodological reflection. The result, which occupied Fustel for the rest of his life and was completed only posthumously, was the monumental *Histoire des institutions politiques de l’ancienne France* (6 vols., 1874–1893). For our purposes, the *Histoire* is important because it was the project that literally consumed Fustel during the period in which Durkheim was his student and because its purpose was to articulate the method Fustel had learned from Montesquieu’s *De l’esprit des lois* (1734) and had applied in *La Cité antique* (1864) and that would also guide Durkheim in *De la division du travail social* (1893). This method relied less on the detailed accumulation of facts (something for which Fustel had no more patience than Durkheim) than on wide-ranging comparisons that allowed him to reconstruct a common set of beliefs and institutions shared by the ancient Greeks and Romans; to these comparisons Fustel added a Cartesian skepticism for secondary sources, a deeply historicist sensitivity to anachronism, and an almost Durkheimian indifference to the role of the individual personality in history.<sup>20</sup> If the initial premise of *La Cité antique* was that the Greeks and Romans shared a common body of beliefs and institutions, for example, its secondary premise was that these beliefs and institutions were significantly *different* from those of the Third Republic. Set before us as reasonable social and political aspirations, Fustel complained, a naive, anachronistic, and idealized conception of ancient liberties is not only bad history but actually threatens the progress of modern society. Fustel’s insistence on a radical discontinuity between past and present was thus a part of his effort to restore respect for the France that preceded the French Revolution, and has much in common with Durkheim’s praise for medieval thought and institutions (and criticism of their Renaissance counterparts) in his lectures on the history of educational thought.

But again, the suggestion that Durkheim was deeply influenced by Fustel at this early stage must be weighed carefully. The “radical discontinuity” between past and present, for example, required an explanation; for Fustel (as Durkheim later complained) this was provided by the progress of the human mind. Fustel, like Boutroux, was a Roman Catholic, and *La Cité antique*, as he emphasized in his conclusion, describes the history of a *belief* (the belief in life after death) in which the history of institutions (the family, law, private property, the state, and so on) is secondary and derivative. “After having postulated the religious idea, without tracing its derivation from anything,” Durkheim thus complained in *De la division du*

*travail social* (1893), Fustel “deduced from it the social arrangements which he noted, whilst, on the contrary, it is these arrangements that explain the power and nature of the religious idea.”<sup>21</sup> Durkheim’s fuller appreciation of the independent, explanatory power of religious ideas, and thus of Fustel, would have to wait until his withering critique of Labriola’s *Essais sur la conception matérialiste de l’histoire* (1897) and especially his lectures on ethics at Bordeaux (1898–1900), published posthumously as *Leçons de sociologie: Physique des moeurs et du droit* (1950). These, however, owe as much to Frazer as to Fustel.

There was also a third figure who, though not among his teachers at the École Normale, held political and religious ideas closer to those of Durkheim and who has frequently been cited as an influence. “If you wish to mature your thought,” Durkheim said to René Maublanc, “devote yourself to the study of a great master; take a system apart, laying bare its innermost secrets. That is what I did and my educator was Renouvier.”<sup>22</sup> It was during these years at the École Normale that Durkheim “began to immerse himself in the reading and reflection on Renouvier, which marked him so deeply.”<sup>23</sup> Born in Montpellier, Charles Renouvier had studied mathematics and natural science at the École Polytechnique (1834–1836), where he came under the influence of Comte. A family fortune made it unnecessary for Renouvier to work, but in 1840, the Académie des Sciences Morale et Politiques announced a prize for a paper on Cartesianism, and Renouvier, having already dabbled a bit in philosophy, wrote a *mémoire* that won an honorable mention. Encouraged, Renouvier began to read more widely and had soon expanded the *mémoire* into his first book, the *Manuel de philosophie moderne* (1842). Meanwhile, Renouvier’s brother had introduced him to disciples of the French socialist Henri de Saint-Simon (1760–1825), and for the next twenty years, Renouvier’s fortunes rose and (more often) fell with those of political reform. Under the “liberal empire” of the 1860s, however, Renouvier became a public intellectual, publishing the journals *Année philosophique*, *Science de la morale* (1869), and *Critique philosophique* (1872–1879), which concerned itself with a national system of moral and civil education. With the stabilizing of the Third Republic in the late 1870s and early 1880s, the Ministry of Public Instruction underwrote the publication of his massive *Philosophie analytique de l’histoire* (4 vols., 1896–98), the Institute de France awarded him the Prix Estrade Delcros (1899) for “the ensemble of his philosophical work,” and in 1900 he was elected to the Académie des Sciences Morale et Politiques (succeeding the philosopher Paul Janet).

Renouvier’s moral philosophy was based on Kant, insisting that the idea of human freedom, without which individuals cannot be held responsible for their actions, is a moral if not a metaphysical certainty. Like Kant, Renouvier

was also an antiutilitarian, insisting that our duties and responsibilities derive not from their consequences but from the categorical imperative—our obligation, first, to realize our own “ideal selves,” both in thought and conduct, and then to treat other human beings not as the means to our ends but as ends in themselves. Unlike Kant, however, Renouvier ascribed moral value to actions even if they were also guided by motives other than duty (such as the pursuit of happiness), so long as these remained subordinate to the categorical imperative. If Renouvier’s philosophy was thus less rigid than Kant’s, however, it was still both demanding and austere; he acknowledged, first, that it could be followed only in a “state of peace” in which everyone adheres to the same moral principles and, second, that the real world is a “state of war” in which people seek to use others as the means to their own ends. This became the starting point for Renouvier’s liberal reforms, whose purpose was to defend the rights of the individual against those who would treat him as a means rather than an end. Because the values of Catholicism were demonstrably hostile to a free, democratic society, Renouvier insisted that the church be excluded from all civic and political activities. Only the state could liberate the individual, and its only means was free, compulsory, secular education.<sup>24</sup>

The extent of Durkheim’s debt to Renouvier has been debated for some time, and interest in it increased during the summer of 1995, when a routine inventory of the papers of the French philosopher André Lalande (1867–1964), recently acquired by the Sorbonne, uncovered a detailed, meticulous set of notes covering eighty lectures (almost 600 pages in length) and bearing the inscription: “E. Durkheim—Cours de philosophie fait au Lycée de Sens en 1883–4.” We know that Durkheim, having passed his *agrégation*, had begun teaching philosophy at the Lycée de Puys in October 1882, and moved to the Lycée de Sens just one month later, where Lalande (who would himself enjoy a distinguished career as a philosopher) became his student. The Sens lectures thus constitute our most detailed and complete evidence of Durkheim’s early philosophical commitments. Like Renouvier, the Durkheim of the Sens lectures is a neo-Kantian whose moral philosophy is based on the reciprocity of the idea of human freedom with that of individual responsibility, who dismisses utilitarianism and instead embraces that particular version of the categorical imperative that insists that we treat others not as the means to our ends but as ends in themselves. Unlike Kant, and again like Renouvier, this early Durkheim insists that moral actions must be guided by interests (most notably, the interest in human happiness) as well as duty and also that these interests and duties provide us with a clear sense of individual rights and of the institutions necessary to protect them.<sup>25</sup> Not surprisingly, Durkheim’s earliest publication, “Du rôle

des grands hommes dans la société” (an address given to these same *lycéens* at Sens in 1883) is arguably a Renouvierist critique of Renan’s *Dialogues et fragments philosophiques* (1876).<sup>26</sup>

The most striking thing about the Sens lectures, however, is not that the young lecturer resembles Renouvier but that he so little resembles the later Durkheim. This is not simply to stake out a position in the debate between those who insist on a discontinuity between the “early” and the “late” Durkheim and those who do not but rather to emphasize that the Sens lecturer seems to have lacked any sociological sensibilities whatsoever. But this is not inconsistent with what we have long known about Durkheim’s intellectual development. In 1928, for example, Marcel Mauss (Durkheim’s nephew) recalled that at the time of his *agrégation* (1882), his uncle had already settled on the relations between individualism and socialism as the theme for his dissertation but had not yet seen the topic as particularly “sociological.” By 1883, Durkheim had apparently refined his focus to the relations between the individual personality and social solidarity, but here again there is no reason to think that “individual personality” meant anything more than what it meant in the Sens lectures, where it assumes a large place indeed. In fact, it was only between the first plan of the dissertation (1884) and its first draft (1886) that Durkheim decided that the problem belonged to “the new science of sociology.”<sup>27</sup> During this same period, Durkheim—already attracted to the work of the German economist and social realist Albert Schaeffle (1831–1903)—made his famous visit to the German universities of Berlin, Marburg, and Leipzig, an experience crucial to Durkheim’s “cobbling together” of his social realist vocabulary. At least until the end of the century, this preoccupation with the study of social facts *comme des choses* probably limited his understanding of religion, at least by the admittedly lofty standard of *Les Formes élémentaires*.

## RELIGION AS REGULATION

DURKHEIM’S EARLIEST remarks on the sociology of religion were contained in a review of Herbert Spencer’s *Ecclesiastical Institutions* (part 6 of *Principles of Sociology*, 3 vols., 1876–1897), whose underlying assumptions about primitive religion were, like Tylor’s, both intellectualist and animistic—for example, to explain the dream, primitive peoples postulate the existence of a “second self” or “spirit” who wanders about while the body remains at rest; as death is understood as merely a lengthier separation of the spirit from the body, the savage imagines that his environment is populated by numerous spirits of dead ancestors, whom he fears as he does anything invisible

and mysterious; and to ward off their malevolence and secure their protection, the savage propitiates them, initially by offerings and sacrifices, and later by prayer, giving rise to the primitive cult of spirits. All subsequent religious systems evolve from this origin. Fetishism, for example, arises when the cult is transferred to those things which the spirit is assumed to inhabit. Following Lubbock (and thus, indirectly, Müller), Spencer explained “naturism” as the consequence of an error of language—certain people who were feared and respected were given the names used to describe the great forces of nature, and when tradition no longer distinguished between the person and the thing, natural agents were personified and human origins and adventures attributed to them. Each family quite naturally revered the spirits of its own ancestors, but when families combined and became subject to the leadership of a tribal chief, they began to worship his ancestors as well, hence polytheism; as these gods competed with each other for the credulity and piety of their worshippers, some appeared more powerful than others, giving rise to a hierarchy and ultimately to monotheism.

But as Durkheim appreciated, Spencer’s treatment was not limited to the evolution of beliefs but also extended to institutions. Because the earliest spirits were those of dead ancestors, sacerdotal functions were initially private and domestic; as the patriarchal family became constituted, these functions were concentrated more specifically in the hands of the father and eldest son, becoming political and religious as well as domestic. On the famous Spencerian principle of the “instability of the homogeneous,” these three functions then gradually became dissociated, eventually resulting in an independent priesthood. As the “industrial” type of society replaced its “military” predecessor, the idea of freely entered contracts and freely accepted beliefs replaced the belief in supernatural causation and the oppressive authority of the priesthood. But the ideal of religion, Spencer insisted, will not disappear, for it contains a germ of truth—specifically, the primitive belief that internal events and external phenomena embody different forms of the same “unknowable” energy, the source of all life and change, of which reason conceived the necessity but which science cannot explain.

Readers scanning this review for “adumbrations” of *Les Formes élémentaires* will be tempted in at least three places. It is extremely important, therefore, to note that in 1886, the intended force of these arguments was quite different from what it would become in 1912. Durkheim’s initial objection, for example, concerned Spencer’s explanation of the process whereby the mind passes from the worship of ancestral spirits to that of the forces of nature. “Are we to believe,” he asked rhetorically, “that naturism, the religion which for so long has been the richest source of poetic inspiration, and to which people tired and worn out by all other forms of religious

speculation have an almost instinctive tendency to return, has a figure of speech and an ambiguity as its essential and almost unique cause?" This of course recalls the argument made in *Les Formes élémentaires* against both Tylor and Müller, for whom the earliest form of religion was not totemism but either animism or naturism. But in 1886, Durkheim seems to have had no knowledge of totemism whatsoever, and the point of his objection—encouraged by Albert Réville's recent *Religions des peuples non-civilisés* (2 vols., 1883)—was that naturism had probably arisen both independently of and prior to animism.<sup>28</sup>

Durkheim's second, more serious objection was that Spencer's theory was more psychological than sociological. The sociologist, Durkheim insisted, "must apply himself uniquely to the determination of [religion's] social role," something that Spencer had dealt with in passing, but which "should have dominated the whole work." If we focus on this question, Durkheim suggested, the idea of God (which seemed just a moment ago to be "the sum total of religion") is no more than a "minor accident," a psychological phenomenon "which has got mixed up with a whole sociological process whose importance is of quite a different order." The idea of God symbolizes "all sorts of traditions, customs and collective needs," and what should concern us "is not the symbol, but what it hides and expresses." In this sense, the real object of religion is no different from that of law and morality—"to maintain the equilibrium of society and to adapt it to environmental conditions." In *Les Formes élémentaires*, of course, Durkheim would again describe the idea of God as a symbol that both hides and expresses social facts. But like his early view of the origin of religion, Durkheim's early understanding of religious symbolism was not yet the "dynamogenic" conception he would emphasize before the Société française de philosophie in 1913. In 1886, Durkheim understood that religion expresses "that need for idealism, . . . those aspirations towards the infinite, . . . that vague disquiet which stirs within all warm hearts." But "however incontestable and noble these sentiments may be," he added, "they are not of interest to sociology," which is, rather, concerned with religion as "only a social discipline" and whose power and authority reside "in habit." Religion is thus a "totality of ways of behaving fixed by custom," which (together with law and morality) is one of "the three great regulating functions of society."<sup>29</sup>

Finally, Spencer's evolutionary insistence on the increasing role of free, rational inquiry, together with the declining role of habit and prejudice, had implied that religion (but for idle speculations about the unknowable) would eventually disappear. But "prejudice," Durkheim insisted, is not necessarily a false judgment but simply one that has been accepted on authority; the more than our knowledge expands, the more things there



are which we must believe on the authority of someone else. If hereditary prejudices crumble and disappear, Durkheim thus insisted, it is because they are no longer adapted to the new conditions of social life, and if the prejudices of today are more flexible, it remains true that intellectual progress has served to increase their number. "A society without prejudices," Durkheim thus argued, "would be like an organism without reflexes; it would be a monster incapable of living. Sooner or later, therefore, custom and habit will claim their rights and that is what authorizes us to presume that religion will survive the attacks of which it is the object. For so long as men live together," he concluded, "they will hold some belief in common."<sup>30</sup> *Les Formes élémentaires* contains the parallel argument that all societies need to periodically affirm and reaffirm their collective sentiments and beliefs, that this is the crucible within which religious ideas are born, and that while science gradually replaces its speculative functions, there still remains "something eternal in religion which is destined to survive all the particular symbols in which religious thought has successively enveloped itself." But by 1912, this "something eternal" would include not just the periodic affirmation and reaffirmation of collective sentiments but a kind of theoretical self-justification that, though it was an impetus to action, was not action alone, and though it took account of science, was not itself scientific. Life cannot wait for science, Durkheim would argue in 1912, and must thus depend on faith.<sup>31</sup>

The fate of religion in modern society was also the focus of Durkheim's review of Jean-Marie Guyau's *L'Irreligion de l'avenir* (1887), a work with which he was in far greater sympathy. Born in Laval in 1854, Guyau at seventeen received his *licence ès lettres*, at nineteen an award from the Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques, and at twenty was placed in charge of philosophical studies at the Lycée Condorcet in Paris. Because of poor health, he was forced to live for a time in the French Sudan, but by his death at the age of thirty-four, he had written nine major books (several of them influential) in the fields of ethics, aesthetics, and religion. Durkheim was clearly familiar with these, and especially those in ethics, such as *La morale anglaise contemporaine* (1879) and *Esquisse d'une morale sans obligation ni sanction* (1885). But he found Guyau's sociological account of religion particularly interesting. *L'Irreligion de l'avenir* was divided into three parts, dealing successively with the origin of religions, their subsequent disintegration, and the "nonreligion" of the future. Guyau began by dismissing Müller's focus on a primitive sentiment of the infinite and divine, as well as Spencer's version of animism, on the ground that both impose modern, abstract, and scholarly ideas onto savage minds where they have no place. To the savage, he insisted, everything is animate not because it is inhabited

by the spirits of dead ancestors but because “everything moves and acts as they themselves act and move,” that this life is “like their own,” accompanied by “intelligence, *conscience*, and will.” Savages thus conceive of the gods as being like themselves, even participating in their social life, but also more powerful than human beings, capable of helping or hindering their purposes and thus worthy of respect. For Guyau, therefore, religion is simply the totality of laws that govern the social actions and reactions of men with gods; since these laws are conceived in the imaginations of human beings, they are modeled on those regulating the interactions of human beings themselves. “Religion is a sociology,” Durkheim thus observed, and “the religious bond . . . is accordingly a social bond.”<sup>32</sup>

Inherently social, religion evolves as society does. In its early, “physical” stage, for example, the “society of the gods” includes all the natural objects (animals, plants, rocks, etc.) with which human beings are in interaction, regardless of the distinction between soul and body or spirit and matter. The dissociation of spirits from the bodies they animate marks the beginning of a second, “metaphysical” stage; as these spirits become more powerful and the societies that worship them larger and more inclusive, they come to be conceived as “providences,” which leads to the idea of a single, controlling god who also created the world. Once this providential god is conceived as the arbiter of social justice, we have entered the third, “moral” stage in the evolution of religion. The “cult” (the visible, tangible aspect of religion) undergoes a parallel evolution, from a concrete, utilitarian exchange of services between human beings and gods to purely refined, spiritualized symbols, in which “God” is understood as the principle of “the good” itself and the personification of the moral law. The more recent history of religions, however, has been one of disintegration. Religious dogma, for example, has been subject to a constant, devastating assault from science, education, commercialization, and industrialization, while religious ethics has been replaced with rational, secular alternatives. The morality of the future, which Guyau welcomed, will be “religious anomy” (the emancipation of the individual and the suppression of dogmatic faith). But if the future of religion is this “nonreligion,” the practical idea that lies at the foundation of all religion (the idea of association) will survive. Increasingly, therefore, human beings will recognize that the supreme good lies in the establishment of close-knit, freely entered associations, a loving interpenetration of *consciences* that might eventually result in a *conscience supérieure*, in which the individual *conscience* nonetheless retains its individuality.<sup>33</sup>

Durkheim praised *L'Irreligion de l'avenir* for moving beyond psychology and the individual imagination to understand religion as primarily a sociological phenomenon, but he still found Guyau's explanation (like Spencer's)

excessively intellectualist. His emphasis on the social context of religion notwithstanding, Guyau assumed that the source of religious belief is “the need to understand and to explain,” for which social life provides only the model, not the cause. But the goal of the psyche, Durkheim insisted, is *action*—adaptation to the surrounding physical or social environment. If spontaneous, uncalculated adaptation is sufficient, the intellect remains quiescent, and what is thus true of the individual intellect is still more true of the social intelligence: “Each time anyone attempts the study of a collective *représentation*, he can rest assured that a practical and not a theoretical cause has been the determining reason for it. This is the case,” Durkheim added, “with that system of *représentations* we call a religion.” To Durkheim, therefore, religious *représentations* result from the interpretation of preexisting social sentiments, and to understand religion, it is these sentiments themselves, of which there are two kinds, that must be penetrated. “Intra-social” sentiments (esteem, respect, affection, fear, etc.) link the individual to his fellow citizens, are expressed in the relationships of daily life, leave the individual with his autonomy and personality intact, and, if they render us interdependent, do so without depriving us of our independence. By contrast, “inter-social” sentiments (duty, obligation, etc.) link the individual to the society as a whole, are expressed in the relationship of one society with another, and, when we act under their influence, we do so only as part of “a whole whose movements I follow and whose pressure I accept.” The sociability that plays a part in Guyau’s theory of primitive religion is clearly of the first, “intra-social” type, but it is sentiments of the second, “inter-social” type, Durkheim insisted, that give rise to religion.<sup>34</sup> For Durkheim, this distinction had concrete social and political consequences. Guyau’s “intellectualist tendencies” had led him to misunderstand the root causes of religion, leaving him with the naive belief that it might be subverted by reason alone. But it is not by means of logic that we shall destroy religion, Durkheim insisted, for “the theologian can reason just as well in order to prove it as the free thinker to refute it.” Religious faith is the result of practical causes, and where these causes exist (whatever the state of philosophy or science), religion will exist as well. These causes are social, and thus to destroy religion, “we must look for the change which has taken place in the nature of societies and which henceforward makes religion useless and impossible.”<sup>35</sup> Such an “anti-intellectualist” emphasis on the practical, unconscious causes of religious sentiments, of course, would also characterize *Les Formes élémentaires*. But here again, the defining characteristic of religious feeling is a sense duty and obligation, and in its insistence on the merely epiphenomenal character of religious *représentations*, Durkheim’s early review of Guyau bears a closer resemblance to Marx’s critique of Feuerbach than to

*Les Formes élémentaires*. And like his review of Spencer's *Ecclesiastical Institutions*, Durkheim's treatment of Guyau's *L'Irreligion de l'avenir* was innocent of both ethnography and totemism.

Durkheim's first mention of totemism thus came only en passant in *De la division du travail social* (1893), a work that was still indifferent to ethnography, where Durkheim's source remained Réville's *Religions des peuples non-civilisés* (1883).<sup>36</sup> Here again Durkheim insisted that religion "is something essentially social," but he simultaneously treated this social aspect in the rather stark, Kantian terms of obligation and constraint. Religion forces the individual into practices "that are irksome to him and sacrifices, whether great or small, which cost him something. . . . He must impose upon himself every kind of privation that is commanded of him, and even renounce life itself if the gods so decree. The religious life," he concluded, "is made up entirely of abnegation and altruism." Complaining that "we do not possess any scientific conception of what religion is," Durkheim again insisted that such a definition would have to be broader than the mere idea of God, but the sole characteristic that all religious beliefs and sentiments share, he added, was that they are "common to a certain number of individuals living together." Religion thus "corresponds to a very central domain of the common consciousness"—one which extends "over an ever diminishing area of social life." The force of Durkheim's complaint about Fustel's *La Cité antique* also suggests that he continued to view religious beliefs and sentiments as largely epiphenomenal and thus lacking any independent explanatory power.<sup>37</sup> Finally, in *Les Règles de la méthode sociologique* (1895), constraint is again "the characteristic trait of every social fact." The individual finds himself "in the presence of a force which dominates him and to which he must bow." To induce the individual to submit to this force, it is sufficient "to make him aware of his natural state of dependence and inferiority. Through religion," Durkheim added, "he represents this state to himself by the senses or symbolically; through science he arrives at an adequate and precise notion of it." Durkheim, of course, presented a detailed defense of the "genetic" (comparative) method, even suggesting that the social scientist "will not disdain the information supplied by the ethnographer." This said, however, the same scientist "can, and consequently must, take as the chief material for his inductions societies whose beliefs, traditions, customs and law have been embodied in written and authentic records."<sup>38</sup>

It was at about this time (1894–1895), however, that Durkheim taught a lecture course on religion at Bordeaux; though no record of its content has survived, its significance was attested to by Durkheim himself twelve years later:

It was not until 1895 that I achieved a clear view of the essential role played by religion in social life. It was in that year that, for the first time, I found the means of tackling the study of religion sociologically. This was a revelation to me. That course of 1895 marked a dividing line in the development of my thought, to such an extent that all my previous researches had to be taken up afresh in order to be made to harmonize with these new insights. . . . [This reorientation] was entirely due to the studies of religious history which I had just undertaken, and notably to the reading of the works of Robertson Smith and his school.<sup>39</sup>

Considering the rather uninspired character of Durkheim's writing about religion to this point, this lamentably rare autobiographical passage must be taken quite seriously. But unfortunately, Durkheim never disclosed the precise nature of his *révélation*, so that W. S. F. Pickering, for example, began his account of the relationship with the observation that "no one knows for sure what elements of Robertson Smith were of such revelatory importance to Durkheim" and he concluded with the comment that "the enigma remains."<sup>40</sup>

Nor is there any indication whatsoever, in works written by Durkheim shortly after 1895, that he had seriously embraced the arguments of Smith's *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites* (1889). In *Le Suicide* (1897), of course, Durkheim famously demonstrated that Protestants are disproportionately more likely to take their own lives than either Catholics or Jews and that the beneficent effect enjoyed by the latter is the consequence not of the particular nature of their religious beliefs or sentiments but rather of their greater degree of social integration. What constitutes these religious communities, Durkheim insisted, is "the existence of a certain number of beliefs and practices common to all the faithful, traditional and thus obligatory." In short, insofar as they are highly integrated communities, religious groups exert a "prophylactic" effect against suicide; in this, they are no different from familial, political, or occupational groups. Having given the name "egoism" to this condition of excessive individuation and insufficient social integration, Durkheim then used the word "altruism" to describe its counterpart—the condition of insufficient individuation, "where the ego is not its own property, where it is blended with something not itself, where the goal of conduct is exterior to itself, that is, in one of the groups in which it participates." Where it is especially intense, this altruistic condition gives rise to a second type of suicide, where the individual takes his own life out of duty or obligation to his society. Here we find the first evidence that Durkheim had read Frazer's *Golden Bough* (1890), for the central idea of Frazer's work—the myth of a "man-god" sacrificed so that his spirit might be passed on unimpaired to his successor—is cited as an instance of the

altruistic type of suicide so common among primitive peoples.<sup>41</sup> In his first edition, as we have seen, Frazer had attributed this idea to the influence of Robertson Smith, while in his second edition he denied this. Most important, however, is the fact that in both editions, this “central idea” had been wrenched from its more powerful, sociological context—Smith’s description of “the mystic unity of life in the religious community,” which “is liable to wear out, and must be revived and strengthened from time to time.”<sup>42</sup> And of this conception, which would be the model on which Durkheim’s interpretation of the Australian evidence would be constructed just a few years later, not a trace appeared in *Le Suicide*.

In 1896, Durkheim had joined several colleagues and pupils to establish a new journal, the *Année sociologique*, and in the preface to its first number in 1898, he made it clear that the journal’s central purpose would *not* be to review the “properly sociological literature” but rather to provide sociologists with information on the “special sciences” (such as ethnography and the history of religions) that “offer the materials out of which sociology must be built.” Fustel de Coulanges, Durkheim reminded his readers, had drawn erroneous conclusions about the Roman *gens* because he was ignorant of ethnographic analogues: “The true character of the Roman *sacer* is very difficult to grasp and, above all, to understand, if one does not see it in relation to the polynesian *taboo*”<sup>43</sup>—an observation suggesting that Durkheim’s interest in Frazerian themes had not been exhausted in *Le Suicide*. In addition to marking the commencement of Durkheim’s long and deep immersion in the ethnographic materials from which *Les Formes élémentaires* would be constructed, however, the first volume of *L’Année sociologique* also contained Durkheim’s earliest contribution to that literature, on a topic that had been intimately related to the study of totemism since Grey’s *Journals* (1841).

“La Prohibition de l’inceste et ses origines” (1898), began with Durkheim’s commitment to the same “genetic method” that would guide *Les Formes élémentaires*: “In order to understand a practice or an institution, a judicial or moral rule,” he observed, “it is necessary to trace it as nearly as possible to its origin; for between the form it now takes and what it has been, there is a rigorous relationship.” If we want to understand the prohibition of incest, therefore, we must ignore the repugnance it evokes in us and return to the evolutionary origin of the institution (“the most primitive form that the repression of incest takes in earliest history”) to discover the causes on which these beliefs and habits depend and the functions they perform. This “most primitive form” is the *law of exogamy*, “the rule by virtue of which sexual union between members of the same clan is forbidden.” A *clan* is “a group of individuals who consider themselves related to each other, but who

recognize this relationship in only one manner; namely, by the very specific sign that they are bearers of the same totem,” and a *totem* is “a being, animate or inanimate, and generally a plant or an animal, from which the group is reputed to be descended, and which serves the members as both an emblem and a collective name.”<sup>44</sup> From the outset, therefore, Durkheim defined three of the key elements of primitive societies interdependently, discouraging the suggestion that one might exist independently of the other two and presupposing many of the conclusions he had yet to reach.

Among these conclusions were Durkheim’s beliefs that the function of exogamy was to create and maintain the “binding force” or solidarity of the clan, that it was universal among truly primitive peoples, and that it was the foundation for all subsequent matrimonial prohibitions (including the incest taboo). But what was the cause of exogamy itself? Previous explanations, Durkheim summarized, fall into two general categories. The first (exemplified in the works of Lubbock, Herbert Spencer, and McLennan) emphasizes the specific peculiarities of lower societies and particularly the act of bride capture which, initially sporadic, became generalized and finally obligatory. By now, Durkheim was familiar with all these writers and recognized that each explained bride capture differently. But his objection to all was the same—they had viewed exogamy as a rule prohibiting marriage not within the clan but within the tribe. In fact, exogamy “prohibits individuals of the same clan from uniting with each other,” while “it is in another clan of the same tribe . . . that the men go to take their women or that the women find their husbands.”<sup>45</sup> In short, marriage is exogamous in relation to clans and endogamous in relation to tribes.

The second category included explanations that emphasized some constitutional aspect of human nature in general, such as the “instinctive repulsion” that human beings feel for consanguineous marriage. Typically, Durkheim made short work of such appeals, citing three objections. First, such explanations are inherently tautological, for the cause identified (in this case, the human abhorrence for incest) is merely a redescription of the effect (the fact that human beings abhor incest). Second, Durkheim was suspicious of a “constitutive state of human nature” expressed in so many diverse and even contradictory forms; and third, he could not understand why an “instinctual horror of blood for blood” would be so intimately bound to the social organization of totemic clans. These explanations dismissed, Durkheim then proposed his own, built on the suggestion that totemism was but one instance of a far more general institution that lay at the basis of all religions—the idea of taboo. Durkheim thus set about constructing his notion of what (in *Les Formes élémentaires*) would be his famous distinction between sacred and profane objects. In all primitive societies, Durkheim

began, there are ritualistic prohibitions whose object is “to avert the dangerous effects of a magical contagion by preventing all contact between a thing or category of things, in which a supernatural principle is believed to reside, and others who do not have this single characteristic.” As he would later, Durkheim here emphasized *contagiousness*—that is, an ordinary man cannot come into contact with a person or object that is imbued with supernatural power, because according to primitive beliefs, the power “cannot fail to communicate itself to him from the moment that it makes contact with him.”<sup>46</sup> Things that are taboo must thus be sharply separated from things that are not, and this prohibition is enforced by sanctions sometimes conceived as automatic but sometimes imposed by society itself.

Exogamy, like taboo, consists in a prohibition of contact—specifically, an interdiction that forbids sexual relations between a man and a woman of the same clan: “The two sexes must avoid each other with the same care as the profane flees from the sacred,” Durkheim emphasized, “and any infraction of this rule invokes a feeling of horror which does not differ in its nature from that which confronts the person who violates a taboo.” Like taboo, exogamy is also enforced by sanctions, some of them construed as natural consequences of the violation but others derived from the formal intervention of the society. In the case of exogamy, however, women in particular are believed to be invested with an “isolating power” that holds the masculine population at a distance “not only so far as sexual relations are concerned, but in all details of the daily existence.” This belief arises at the first sign of puberty and is renewed at each period of menstruation, giving rise to a persistent sense of religious horror that eventually excludes women from the religious life altogether. This belief originates in primitive ideas about menstruation and especially menstrual blood—not because it is believed to be “impure” or “dangerous” but rather because blood itself seems to “repulse any contact with it,” thus “creating a void around itself.” The woman thus becomes taboo indirectly because she carries this blood: “A more or less conscious anxiety, a certain religious fear, cannot fail to be present in all the relations which her companions can have with her,” Durkheim explained, “and that is why these relationships are reduced to the minimum.” The more intimate these relations, of course, the more likely they are to be prohibited by the taboo, and sexual relations are not only the most intimate between the sexes but also involve the organ that is the locus of these “terrible manifestations” of blood: “It is from this,” Durkheim thus argued, “that exogamy and the serious penalties which sanction it are derived.”<sup>47</sup>

If the rule of exogamy is thus a consequence of religious anxieties attached to menstrual blood, how does blood acquire this sacred status? The sacredness of blood, Durkheim answered, is derived from totemism itself.



For the totem is the ancestor of the clan, and this ancestor is not a certain species but rather an individual representative of the species. The clan is thus assumed (literally, not metaphorically) to have descended from this individual; on the principle of sympathetic magic (“the part is equal to the whole”), this assumption includes the belief that all the members of the clan, including human beings, animals, or plants, are “of the same substance” as the ancestor. This is what constitutes the collective unity of the clan: “A homogeneous and compact mass,” Durkheim emphasized, “where there exists . . . no differentiated parts, where each one lives like all and each resembles all—this is the clan.” The totemic being “is immanent to the clan; it is incarnate in each individual, and it is in the blood that it resides. It is the very blood itself.” This in turn explained several features of totemism that were otherwise quite mysterious. The rule that one may not kill or eat one’s totemic animal, for example, is explained by the sacredness of the animal’s blood, which is so pronounced that even blood-stained soil itself might become sacred. That descent was initially traced through the mother rather than the father could now be explained as a consequence of the fact that it was “through the women and through them alone” that the clan’s blood was diffused, “to become the common possession which makes for the unity of the group.” Finally, the notion that the blood was construed as sacred explains why exogamy applied only to members of the same clan. Briefly, the totem was sacred only for those who shared its blood, while the totems of other clans were viewed as both socially and religiously indifferent.<sup>48</sup>

Most important, however, Durkheim insisted that the modern taboo against incest has evolved from exogamy. For just as the detailed account of primitive religion in *Les Formes élémentaires* was the occasion for Durkheim’s discussion of the relations between religion and society in modern life, so this evolutionary account of the origin of incest became an occasion for some observations on the contemporary family. Incest is disapproved of in modern society, Durkheim argued, not because of its physical consequences, but because it is assumed to be subversive of the domestic order. “Because of the intimate interaction taking place within it,” Durkheim explained, the family presumably “risks awakening the sexual desires at the same time as it facilitates their gratification, and disorder and debauchery would be the endemic state if marriage of closely related persons were legal.” This gives rise to legislation prohibiting unions between relatives, but such a law, Durkheim insisted, would be powerless if family life really pushed us toward incest, for “the action of the domestic milieu is too strong and too continuous for the abstract precept of the law to be able to neutralize its effects.”<sup>49</sup> In fact, far from “naturally stimulating” incest, the domestic life naturally repulses sexual relations between close relatives,

for the life of the family is dominated by the idea of duty, by a network of obligations and responsibilities that bind together husband and wife, parents and children, brothers and sisters, and so on. This is why the home, as the center of respect and collective discipline, has always had a religious character. Sexual relations, by contrast, are dominated by feelings of pleasure, and the society formed through such relations depends on purely voluntary affinities. Romantic love is thus the domain of freedom, excluding any notion of duty, obligation, and morality. As the “middle ground” between these two extremes, marriage brings together two inherently incompatible states of mind (the good versus the pleasant, duty versus pleasure, the sacred versus the profane) that “violently repel one another.” So we react with horror from the idea that they might be combined into some “unnamable mixture” in which they might lose their distinctive qualities. The dignity of the relationship that connects us with close relatives thus “excludes any other link which would not have the same value.”<sup>50</sup>

But if such reactions to incest seem perfectly natural to us, Durkheim continued, this is only because we are accustomed to them; in fact, history and ethnography afford numerous examples of peoples among whom incest was and is permitted and even prescribed. What conditions had to be fulfilled, therefore, before our modern ideas could emerge? Durkheim’s answer was exogamy, which in effect created two separate spheres: the clan (later the family), which became the seat of morality, religion, and the sacred; and sexuality, which, being external to the clan, was thus relieved of moral connotations and became associated with freedom, secularity, and the profane. In effect, therefore, exogamy made sensuality possible, liberating “individual instincts and desires” from “the yoke of the family in which it had been contained and more or less suffocated.”<sup>51</sup> And from this Durkheim derived all the other accoutrements (such as the social separation of the sexes; differences of clothing, mannerisms, and language; the different roles of men and women in the economy; the air of mystery and sensuality attached to the woman; and so on) of the patriarchal, bourgeois family he celebrated.

In addition to its development of certain key ideas, and particularly the distinction between sacred and profane, Durkheim’s essay on incest followed the same formal structure found in *Les Formes élémentaires*—the initial definition of the phenomena under investigation, which already anticipates his conclusion; the classification and critique of earlier theoretical explanations of the phenomenon; the presentation of Durkheim’s own theory, with an account of how it avoids the limitations of the earlier theories while also illuminating aspects of the phenomenon heretofore anomalous; a concluding narrative describing the phenomenon’s evolution from primitive origins to

present conditions; and so on. But a careful examination of Durkheim's notes confirms what the argument of the text implies—briefly, that Durkheim was not yet aware of the work of Spencer and Gillen and had thus constructed his impressions of totemism largely from Frazer's 1887 book and the first edition of *The Golden Bough* (1890). This is important. Frazer's views were about to undergo the dramatic shift described in the previous chapter; and when they did, Durkheim would be forced to cast about for an alternative vocabulary.

In the preface to the second volume of *L'Année sociologique*, Durkheim acknowledged the "astonishment" that greeted the focus of the first on primitive religions, adding that "it is these phenomena which are the germ from which all others (or at least almost all others) are derived." If only in an indistinct state, Durkheim explained, religion "contains in itself from the very beginning . . . all the elements which in dissociating themselves from it, articulating themselves, and combining with one another in a thousand ways, have given rise to the various manifestations of the collective life."<sup>52</sup> But Durkheim's source here was still Frazer, including an appeal to his account of sympathetic magic as the means to discount competing criteria for the definition of religious facts. This question of defining religion was taken up in a more concerted way immediately after the preface, in "De la définition des phénomènes religieux." This essay that has been the subject of considerable disagreement among Durkheim scholars and deserves careful treatment. Steven Lukes, for example, has described it as "a first, rather groping attempt to see religion as a social phenomenon," contrasting it with Durkheim's later, "more nuanced and complex" sociology of religion. W. S. F. Pickering, by contrast, has argued that the essay "was written as a result of the new insights that [Durkheim] had gained from reading Robertson Smith" and that "the judgment of Lukes that the essay is of little consequence is a hasty one."<sup>53</sup>

Not surprisingly, the essay began with a review of the principles established in the second chapter of *Les Règles*, now applied to the definition of religious facts.<sup>54</sup> In his typical manner, Durkheim then classified and criticized earlier attempts at such a definition. Some writers, for example, had defined religion as a system of beliefs and practices relative to something "as unfathomable to the senses as to reason, . . . the mysterious, the unknowable, the incomprehensible." But these writers ascribed to primitive peoples an idea that they do not possess, for to them the notion that human beings might control natural phenomena through an utterance or a gesture is not at all mysterious or supernatural, but simple, direct, and straightforward. The "exceptionally intense sources of energy" with which the primitive priest or sorcerer communicates, argued Durkheim, again following the early Frazer, are forces "of the kind understood by the present-day sci-

entist.” The idea of mystery is thus neither primitive nor innate but rather the later invention of human beings, and one which plays an important role in only a small number of very advanced religions. An alternative definition had emphasized the idea of God or divinity, which makes religion “a kind of superior ethic” whose function is “to regulate the relationships of man to certain beings of a superhuman nature, on whom he is supposed to depend.” Again relying heavily on Frazer, Durkheim insisted that the primitive conception of divinity is frequently one in which the deity is not greatly elevated above his worshippers, and thus the alleged dependence is often reciprocal. To this Durkheim added the objection, to be repeated later in *Les Formes élémentaires*, that there are many religions (e.g., Buddhism, Jainism, totemism, agrarian cults) in which the conception of an individualized deity is in fact absent. Even those religions that do have gods, Durkheim added, have rites whose efficacy is independent of the exercise of divine power.<sup>55</sup>

After dismissing these earlier attempts at a definition, Durkheim turned to his own construction, eventually concluding that religious phenomena “consist in obligatory beliefs, connected with clearly defined practices which are related to given objects of those beliefs,” while religion itself is “a more or less organized and systematized whole, composed of phenomena of the kind mentioned.” The emphasis on “beliefs” was designed to distinguish religion from law and morality (religion forces us to *think* in certain ways, while law and morality oblige us to *behave* in certain ways), while the focus on “objects” relieved Durkheim of the limitations of definitions that had stressed divinity. The emphasis on “obligatory” beliefs distinguished religion from science, for while both are made up of collective representations, the representations of science are not obligatory: “It is sensible to believe in them, but we are not obliged to do so morally or legally,” while there is “an exact parallel between the religious character of . . . beliefs and the intensity of the repression which imposes respect for them.” Like the definition in *Les Formes élémentaires*, however, this one left open a space for secular beliefs “intermediate between science and religious faith” (for example, representations associated with the French flag, the Revolution, Joan of Arc, etc.), which are “held in common” and of which the community “will not tolerate open denial . . . without resistance.”<sup>56</sup>

Two aspects of Durkheim’s early effort of to define religion suggest that Pickering’s suggestion—that this essay “was written as a result of the new insights that [Durkheim] had gained from reading Robertson Smith”—is mistaken. The first concerns the relationship between religion and magic. “From the earliest times,” Smith had observed, “religion, as distinct from magic or sorcery, addresses itself to kindred and friendly beings, who may

indeed be angry with their people for a time, but are always placable except to the enemies of their worshippers or to renegade members of the community." Private and magical superstitions, by contrast, "were habitually regarded as offences against morals and the state."<sup>57</sup> So for Smith (as for the later Durkheim) the distinction between religion and magic was isomorphic with that between social and individual, public and private, conscience and self-interest, and so on. But in this 1899 essay, Durkheim insisted that a radical distinction between religion and magic is simply impossible because "there are religious rites in great number which are magical too." The rites of sympathetic magic, of course, are "solely magical" in the sense that they are "not directed towards the gods or sacred things," and are thus "in no way dependent on any obligatory belief."<sup>58</sup> But this was not Smith's distinction, nor is it the distinction to be found in *Les Formes élémentaires*. The second aspect concerns Durkheim's treatment of the relation between myth and ritual. In ancient religions, Smith had observed, ritual was fixed and obligatory, while myth was variable and discretionary, and thus we may assume that "the myth was derived from the ritual, and not the ritual from the myth."<sup>59</sup> This was, of course, at the heart of Smith's "ritual theory of myth," on which Durkheim's essay initially appears to waffle, insisting first that "there can be no ritual without myth," while adding that in ancient religions "rites are already developed and definite when myths are still very rudimentary."<sup>60</sup> But Durkheim's commitment to "obligatory belief" as the touchstone for his definition of religion already placed him light-years away from Robertson Smith, for whom ritual, not myth, is fixed and obligatory.

The reason for Durkheim's repeated insistence on the obligatory nature of religious beliefs is clear. An obligation implies the command of a higher moral authority, and only society could perform this role. Religion thus has its origin in society rather than the individual mind, which preserved the "transcendent" character of religious commands while affording them a scientific rather than theological explanation. In one sense, this was a part of Durkheim's effort to carve out an epistemological space for "the new science of sociology," independent of psychology; but in a deeper sense, it was a part of his effort (by now drawing heavily on his lecture courses on Rousseau's *Emile* and *Le Contrat social*) to establish a concrete, social-realist alternative to the Cartesian language of *idées claire et simple* and thus provide a suitably compelling focus for the allegiance of his fellow citizens. But however effective Durkheim's social realist vocabulary might have been for these purposes, it was seriously limited in the means it afforded the description and explanation of religious phenomena. Durkheim was still mired in the language of Frazer (of taboo, constraint, duty, and obligation), and we see little of Robertson Smith or the language of eudaemonic self-

transcendence that Durkheim would later recommend to his audience in the *Société française de philosophie*. Lukes's characterization of this 1899 essay—"a first, rather groping attempt to see religion as a social phenomenon"—seems fully justified.

The plausibility of this suggestion—that Durkheim's *révélation* of 1894 and 1985 had more to do with Frazer than Smith and more with the expansion of the idea of *taboo* into the notion of sacred things than with the eudaemonic effects of communal sacrifice—gains further strength from a reading of Hubert and Mauss's "Essai sur la nature et la fonction du sacrifice" (1899). Admitting that their purpose ("to define the nature and social function of sacrifice") had been aided considerably by the earlier work of Tylor, Robertson Smith, and Frazer, Hubert and Mauss were highly critical of Smith in particular. "The great flaw in this system," they began, "is that it seeks to bring the multiplicity of sacrificial forms within the unity of an arbitrarily chosen principle." The starting point of Smith's theory, for example, was the universality of totemism, which they described as merely "a postulate." Totemism in its pure form is found only among "a few isolated tribes in Australia and America," they objected, and it is particularly difficult to find sacrifices that are "properly totemic." But even if the universality of totemism is assumed, the real heart of Smith's theory was his historical reconstruction of the evolutionary sequence of ritual forms from a primitive, joyous communal sacrifice, and here again, "nothing is more doubtful." Our knowledge of the simplest forms of sacrifice comes from quite recent texts, so that their apparent simplicity might be a consequence of an insufficiency of documents; in any case, simplicity does not itself imply priority in time. Smith had also argued that the function of piacular rites (of expiation or atonement) was less to maintain the original "good understanding" between god and worshippers than to restore this relationship after it had been damaged, so that these rites appear only later, involving "magical" rather than truly "religious" processes. But whether pure or impure, Hubert and Mauss emphasized, "the expulsion of a sacred spirit is a primordial component of sacrifice, as primordial and irreducible as communion." Finally, rather than analyzing the Semitic ritual system in its original complexity, Smith had "set about classifying the facts genealogically, in accordance with the analogical connexions that he believed he saw between them." By contrast, Hubert and Mauss focused on the Sanskrit and Levitical texts, relatively advanced, "well-defined and complete" rituals, and they concluded that "the unity of the sacrificial system . . . does not come, as Smith believed, from the fact that all the possible kinds of sacrifice have emerged from one primitive, simple form. Such a sacrifice does not exist."<sup>61</sup>

These were the views of Hubert and Mauss, of course, not Durkheim himself. But the recently published correspondence between Durkheim and Mauss suggests that this was a project in which Durkheim was thoroughly involved. “Though reluctant ‘to seem like an overseer,’” the editors observe, Durkheim “didn’t hesitate to offer answers and even numerous, quite specific instructions, ranging from the definition of sacrifice to the essay’s title, and he worked with us on its final draft.” On 22 January 1898, for example, Durkheim wrote to Mauss that “you already have enough to show the inadequacy of Smith’s theory.” The following July, Durkheim cautioned Mauss not to ignore the extent of Smith’s achievement: “to have isolated communion as an essential element of sacrifice was indeed an enormous step forward. The mistake,” he then added, “was to think that this was the only element.” And again, in August, Durkheim wrote to Mauss urging him to grant attention the process of desacralization as well as that of sacralization: “it’s this second element of sacrifice in particular that Smith and his school have misunderstood. So I wonder if it’s not this element more than any other that we should emphasize. I think this is the important part of your contribution. For then sacrifice is seen quite differently. It contains, in an indistinct state, a duality (perhaps more) and this duality is very important, for it allows us to understand everything that emerged from it.”<sup>62</sup>

Considering this spirit of rather active editorial oversight, it is noteworthy that Hubert and Mauss’s essay on sacrifice is mentioned only once throughout the many pages of *Les Formes élémentaires*, where Durkheim, discussing the “positive cult” in general and representative and commemorative rituals in particular, sought to emphasize the “functional ambiguity” of sacrifice. Hubert and Mauss, Durkheim observed, “have shown how the sacrifice of communion, that of expiation, that of a vow and that of a contract are only variations of one and the same mechanism.” Having said this, however, Durkheim then added that this ambiguity is in fact “much more primitive, and in no way limited to the institution of sacrifice,” demonstrating that “the real function of a rite does not consist in the particular and definite effects which it seems to aim at and by which it is ordinarily characterized, but rather in a general action which, though always and everywhere the same, is nevertheless capable of taking on different forms according to the circumstances.” This, Durkheim then emphasized, is precisely what is required by his new theory of religion:

If the real function of the cult is to awaken within the worshippers a certain state of soul, composed of moral force and confidence, and if the various effects imputed to the rites are due only to a secondary and variable determination of this fundamental state, it is not surprising if a single

rite, while keeping the same composition and structure, seems to produce various effects. For the mental dispositions, the excitation of which is its permanent function, remain the same in every case; they depend upon the fact that the group is assembled, and not upon the special reasons for which it is assembled. . . . The confidence they feel convinces them that the desired result is or will be obtained by the means employed. . . . Thus, the apparent efficacy will seem to change while the real efficacy remains invariable, and the rite will seem to fulfill various functions though in fact it has only one, which is always the same.<sup>63</sup>

This, of course, is an apt account of what Durkheim would describe just months later as the “dynamogenic” quality of religion—its capacity to inspire confidence, ardor for life, enthusiasm, power to resist hardship—in short, its power as a source of action rather than knowledge. Apparently this conception of religion was already the substance of Durkheim’s lectures on the origins of religion at the Sorbonne in 1906 and 1907.<sup>64</sup> But as we have seen, they are no part of Durkheim’s writings on religion up to and including 1899. Our attention is thus quite naturally drawn to Durkheim’s pivotal essay, “Sur le totémisme” (1902).

#### UNE FORCE SECOURABLE: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE INTICHIUMA

IT REQUIRES only a limited knowledge of Durkheim’s life and works to realize how deeply his interests were affected by Frazer’s interpretation of the evidence contained within Spencer and Gillen’s *Native Tribes* (1899). First, and most immediately, Frazer had denied the universality of totemism and its long-undisputed connection with exogamy, even as Durkheim had firmly committed himself to both just one year earlier. Second, Frazer had suggested that some of society’s most powerful interdictions had been rationally and purposefully constructed following an earlier period of permissiveness. That the origin of such interdictions lay in the “collective unconscious” and that primitive societies could hardly be characterized as “permissive” had been among Durkheim’s central arguments in *De la division du travail social* (1893). Third, and perhaps most alarmingly, Frazer had suggested that the essential function of totemism was to provide for economic needs and that this was also its sufficient explanation. The fifth chapter of *Les Règles de la méthode sociologique* (1895), of course, had been written to oppose such “teleological” confusions of the function of a social fact with its cause and to insist that needs and desires, while they might hasten



or retard social development, cannot themselves “create” social facts at all. Frazer’s indiscretions might have been dismissed as simply another British utilitarian blunder but for the undeniable significance of Spencer and Gillen’s first volume. As the long-awaited and exhaustively detailed study of a people more primitive than any previously observed, their volume was the closest thing to a “crucial experiment” that Victorian anthropology had to offer, and as we have seen, Spencer had (with only minor reservations) repeatedly confirmed and supported Frazer’s interpretation through their subsequent, extended correspondence. A growing Durkheimian pique is already evident in Mauss’s reviews of both works in the third volume of *L’Année sociologique*,<sup>65</sup> and one may assume that they were topics of lively discussion in Durkheim’s second lecture course on religion at Bordeaux, *Les Formes élémentaires de la religion* (1900–1901). It was in “Sur le totemisme” (1902), however, that Durkheim’s fully developed answer to *Native Tribes* and its Frazerian interpretation eventually appeared.

“Until recently,” Durkheim began, “all we knew of totemism was confined to scattered, fragmentary information, taken from very different societies that could scarcely be related to one another except by artificial means. For a totemic system in its unity and completeness had never been directly observed.” This, of course, was the significance of Spencer and Gillen’s *Native Tribes of Central Australia* (1899), whose authors had observed “a truly totemic religion” and described it “in all its complexity. Here we are no longer in the presence of partial, disoriented rites, but rather that of a collection of beliefs and practices that form a whole, and of which the totemic nature is incontestable.” This discovery, Durkheim continued, “has necessarily led scholars to revise the idea of totemism they had formed; and no one proceeded in this with more revolution and perfect scientific impartiality than James George Frazer.” Here Durkheim was referring particularly to “The Origin of Totemism” (1899), as well as the second edition of *The Golden Bough* (1900), where Frazer, “recognizing that the traditional notion of totemic religion had to be completely transformed,” tried to show that “the facts contradicted certain fundamental propositions about totemism which he himself had helped to establish.” By a “remarkable coincidence” (which, as we have seen, was hardly a coincidence), Spencer and Gillen had “arrived independently at the same conclusion.”<sup>66</sup>

Totemism “lies at the root of a multitude of institutions,” Durkheim emphasized, so that the radical transformation of our understanding of totemism called for by Frazer “cannot fail to require other reforms in the most disparate directions—e.g., all questions relating to the origins of kinship, marriage, sexual morality, indeed, even social organization, would be posed in new terms and would have to be subjected to study all over again.”

Durkheim thus set himself the task of carefully examining both Spencer and Gillen's evidence and Frazer's interpretation (his second theory of totemism) to see whether "the facts observed permit the interpretation proposed, or whether there is not another interpretation which is preferable." Before Spencer and Gillen, the "two essential canons" of totemism were those described in Frazer's 1887 book—the (religious) prohibition against killing and eating the totemic animal or plant, and the (social) prohibition of marriage between individuals of the same totem. But it was precisely these two institutions that Spencer and Gillen had been unable to find in the totemism practiced by the undeniably primitive Arunta. How, then, is totemism to be characterized? Frazer's answer, as we have seen, lay in his analysis of a "curious ceremony" called the "*intichiuma*," which he understood as "a sort of magical cooperation, whose consequence is the maintenance or increase of the alimentary resources of the society; and since almost everything in nature serves as the totem of some group, the maintenance and development of almost every natural force is overseen by a clan." Understood in this way, Durkheim emphasized, totemism "loses nearly all its religious character, and becomes instead a sort of economic enterprise."<sup>67</sup>

It was this last feature of Frazer's interpretation that particularly concerned Durkheim, who argued instead that "if there is a fact which stands out in Spencer and Gillen's book, it is that the milieu in which the Aruntas live is deeply marked by religiosity, and that this religiosity is of an essentially totemic origin. The territory is completely covered with sacred trees and groves, with mysterious caves where the objects of the cult are piously conserved. These holy places," Durkheim insisted, are approached "only with a feeling of religious terror," but they are the focus of totemic rituals, and it is to these places that "totemic legends are attached." This was a strong reading of Spencer and Gillen's account of the places where the Arunta *churinga* were stored, and just months later, they would dismiss his interpretation categorically. But while Durkheim acknowledged that the Arunta have only a "confused idea of the religious forces on which they act," these forces were, to him, religious nonetheless: "What is essential," Durkheim insisted, "is that the rites of the Arunta are comparable at every point to those found in incontestably religious systems; thus they proceed from the same ideas and feelings and, as a consequence, it is arbitrary not to apply to them the same designation."<sup>68</sup>

It was to rescue totemism as a *religious* institution, therefore, that Durkheim opposed Frazer's more rationalist, utilitarian, and economic interpretation; to do this successfully, he had to show that Frazer's original conception of totemism (the one that preserved its "two essential canons") had been right

all along. Since Durkheim had firmly committed himself to the primitive interdependence of totemism, exogamy, and the system of organization by clans just four years earlier, it's not surprising that he began with the "social" aspect of totemism: "The question merits our attention all the more," Durkheim added

as the whole problem of sexual morality is implied therein. Indeed, if it were established that totemism, while still primitive, was reconciled with the practice of endogamy, we would have to conclude that exogamy is completely independent of totemic beliefs; and we have shown in an earlier volume of this journal that, depending on how the causes of the primitive separation of the sexes are conceived, the origin and nature of modesty, of sexual feeling, in short, the unique place taken by these sorts of relations in the moral and aesthetic life of societies is explained quite differently.<sup>69</sup>

Before presenting his case against Frazer, however, Durkheim laid its foundation by appealing to two rules of method: when a proposition has behind it the authority of "rather extended experience," it is "contrary to all method to renounce it too quickly on the simple discovery of a fact that appears to contradict it"; and if such a fact is ever "to prevail against such a mass of harmonious observations," it must necessarily have "but one meaning, and one meaning alone." Before Spencer and Gillen's discovery of the Arunta, Durkheim then reminded his readers, the coexistence of totemism and exogamy "had been proven in an innumerable multitude of cases," indicating at the very least that Frazer's new theory should be treated cautiously; Durkheim then added that the beliefs and practices of the Arunta were in fact susceptible to an alternative explanation: "Instead of a perfectly pure model of the totemic regime," Durkheim suggested, "could not Arunta totemism be, on the contrary, a subsequent and perverted form?" The location of the Arunta at the very center of the continent, Durkheim admitted, implies that they have had less contact with advanced civilizations than their coastal counterparts, but "the social system of inferior societies," he added, "is . . . capable of evolving and transforming itself by means other than the influence of more civilized peoples." In fact, "many reasons" (such as their greater sense of unity, their forms of political organization, the relative refinement of their matrimonial relations, etc.) led Durkheim to believe that "the Arunta have behind them a long historical past, and that they are among the most advanced of Australian peoples."<sup>70</sup>

The primary weapon in Durkheim's attack on Frazer was thus an appeal to evolution, which placed Spencer and Gillen's "facts" in different contexts,

thus altering (and in some cases reversing) their meaning and significance. In their remarks before the Royal Anthropological Institute in 1898, for example, Spencer and Gillen had described the Arunta as divided into two exogamic “moieties” (Durkheim used the term “phratries”) but had added that (because representatives of each totemic clan are included in both moieties) marriage is permitted between members of the same clan. To rescue the notion of primitive exogamy and its intimate connection with totemism, therefore, Durkheim had only to argue that the “phratric” had been the original form of the totemic clan, which, in the course of its subsequent evolution, had become segmented into secondary clans with representatives in each phratry. If we assume this, Durkheim explained, “then there was at least a moment when marriage was forbidden between members of the same totemic society; and thus it is not true that, among the Arunta, the totem has always been without influence on marriage nor, above all, that totemism generally implies endogamy.”<sup>71</sup>

If the phratric had evolved from an originally exogamous, totemic clan, of course, then there must have been a period when the subsequently endogamous groups within it were not dispersed between the two phratries; in fact, Durkheim found “strong reasons” for suggesting that each of these groups was once wholly within one phratric or the other—the unequal dispersal of each group between the two phratries, the selection of the *alatumja* from the phratric to which the majority of each totemic group belongs, the retention of the *churingas* within the same phratric, and so on. But “what transforms this (already so highly likely) hypothesis into a certainty is that the popular traditions support it. *In these traditions,*” Durkheim emphasized, “*the ancestors of the Arunta are described as divided into a certain number of totemic groups which, if not always, at least in the majority of cases, are composed of individuals who all belong to the same phratric.*” To these reasons Durkheim then added the observation that with the exception of the Arunta, this is currently the form of social organization found in all Australian tribes: “If all these considerations are brought together—that this organization is extremely general; that even today the Arunta come near it quite naturally; and that previously they approximated its features still more—then one will no longer hesitate to admit that there was once a time when this organization existed among them in its pure state.”<sup>72</sup>

As Durkheim understood, the difficulty here was that these same traditions described a more distant past in which the Arunta practiced clan endogamy, as well as a subsequent, less distant past in which, as the consequence of self-conscious social reform, these clans were organized into two exogamous phratries.<sup>73</sup> And it was precisely here that Durkheim found Robertson Smith’s ritual theory of myth particularly useful. These traditions

are “systems of representations,” Durkheim insisted, “invented in large part by the popular imagination in order to somehow render existing practices intelligible to the mind. . . . Legends whose meaning is so dubious cannot be opposed to the harmonious collection of precise facts just enumerated.” One might object, of course, that these same traditions were among the “precise facts” in question, but Durkheim’s real reason for dismissing Spencer and Gillen’s evidence here was that it was ill-fitted to his more fundamental, uniformitarian preconceptions about the nature of social institutions; that is, the phratry “plays too large a role in their religious life, is too closely associated with the totemic cult, constitutes too vital an element of their social organization to be some sort of adventitious institution, introduced tardily and externally into their social system.” How, then, did exogamy—once the rule of both clan and phratry—cease being the rule of the first while remaining the rule of the second? In other words, how did parts of each clan come to be represented in both phratries, thus permitting clan endogamy? Durkheim’s answer, which was again a rather ad hoc appeal to the more traditional view of totemism held by McLennan, Smith, and the early Frazer, was that the Arunta had once practiced matrilineal descent combined with patrilocal habitation, a precarious arrangement that required children to live with their fathers only to be separated from them to join their mothers on religious and social occasions. This inherently unstable institution eventually gave way, in a veritable “revolution,” to patrilineal descent, which in turn required each phratry to cede one of its clans to the other in order to integrate children within the phratry of their fathers.<sup>74</sup>

This “revolution” postulated by Durkheim to account for certain anomalous features of the *social* aspect of Arunta totemism was then extended to account for its equally anomalous *religious* features. The current toleration with respect to the eating of the totem, for example, was conveniently explained as a result of the weakening of the structure of Arunta society, itself a consequence of the shift from matrilineal to patrilineal descent. Interestingly, Durkheim appealed to precisely the same principle appealed to by Frazer (the consubstantiality of clan member and totem) to support precisely the opposite argument (that men could not possibly have killed and eaten their totems in an earlier, more stable social order). The traditions that described the clan’s ancestors as eating their totems with impunity, like those which described them as practicing endogamy, were again dealt with through an appeal to the ritual theory of myth, in this case as the mythological elaboration of that part of the *intichiuma* in which a portion of the totem was ceremonially consumed by each member of the clan. This ceremony, Durkheim insisted, was the same totemic sacrament postulated by Robertson Smith, and not in the magical sense proposed by Frazer but

in the genuinely mystical and religious sense originally intended by Smith himself. Durkheim was convinced that totemism simply could not exist without the prohibition against killing and eating one's totemic animal; the man and his totem are bound together not just by kinship but by a "substantive identity." It is "a general rule that the members of the same clan are bound to mutually respect their life; and in fact," Durkheim emphasized, "this respect is so consistent with the nature of things that attempts to the contrary are very rare. As a result, once the animal was considered as of the same substance as the man, as belonging to the same social group, it was necessarily forbidden to kill it." Alluding to Frazer's 1899 paper at the Royal Anthropological Institute, and anticipating the argument that he and Mauss would present in "De quelques formes primitives de classification" (1903), Durkheim insisted that this prohibition did not require that primitive peoples first recognize that animals do not eat their own kind but rather only that they observe themselves and then "extend to their fellow animals the feelings that they had for their fellow human beings. And since they saw no essential difference between the first and second," Durkheim concluded, "the extension could be produced quite naturally."<sup>75</sup>

Just as the alimentary prohibition had constituted an anomaly within Frazer's theory, however, it was now incumbent upon Durkheim to explain its opposite: the ceremonial eating of the flesh of the totemic animal; it was here that Durkheim's familiarity with Smith's *Lectures* served him best. Before *Native Tribes*, he observed, the ethnographic literature on totemism suggested that it consisted almost exclusively of negative practices (taboos, abstentions, interdictions, etc.), but in the *intichiuma*, we have clear evidence of the positive aspect of the cult (prestations, communal sacrifices and feasts, dances, etc.). In short, Durkheim redescribed the *intichiuma* on the model of Smith's ancient Semites, "in which the habitual temper of the worshippers is one of joyous confidence in their god, untroubled by any habitual sense of human guilt, and resting of the firm conviction that they and the deity they adore are good friends, who understand each other perfectly, and are united by bonds not easily broken"<sup>76</sup>—a mystical, sociological description of the Australian data that contrasted sharply with Frazer's economic, utilitarian interpretation. Durkheim then insisted that the positive aspect of the rite was considerably more primitive than those negative practices (particularly Frazer's economic restrictions) previously studied. Primitive peoples are insufficiently rational to coordinate diverse economic activities toward the system of cooperative magic postulated by Frazer, he argued, and the primitive clan is insufficiently autonomous and self-sufficient to establish loose, artificial economic bonds with other clans. The magical, economic interpretation of the *intichiuma* was thus a

later construction imposed upon a rite whose original meaning had been religious, and the totem was sacred (or taboo) because clansmen needed periodically to “revivify their quality” through a communal, totemic sacrament. If only for this reason, the totemic species could not be allowed to die out. The *intichiuma*, Durkheim concluded, is a rite “analogous to those which, in the most developed religions, have for their end the maintenance of the life of the god.”<sup>77</sup>

This was all quite ingenious, of course, a “strong misreading” of the Australian evidence that placed Spencer and Gillen’s “facts” in new contexts and thus altered their meaning and significance. Not surprisingly, Baldwin Spencer responded negatively, writing to Frazer from Melbourne on 24 July 1903, that it “appears to be most difficult to write an account like ours without conveying a wrong idea. Durkheim writes on sacred groves and caves and spots so sacred that they are only approached by the native in fear and trembling. . . . His whole article is full of misconceptions.”<sup>78</sup> Durkheim had found a new vocabulary (which was in some ways an older vocabulary) for redescribing the nature and significance of totemism and its place within primitive religion generally. Without sacrificing the pivotal distinction between sacred and profane, this new language introduced the positive cult and raised it above its negative counterpart, granting it evolutionary and causal priority. The Frazerian focus on interdictions, prohibition, and taboo that had characterized Durkheim’s writing on religion since the mid-1890s was now replaced with a focus on those elements that he would later describe as constituting the “dynamogenic” quality of religion.

This change in Durkheim’s thought was, of course, reflected in those writings not directly concerned with totemism. In the preface to the second edition of *Les Règles* (1901), for example, Durkheim had already reduced his emphasis on the role of “constraint” in the definition of social facts. “The coercive power that we attribute to the social fact,” Durkheim there emphasized, “represents so small a part of its totality that it can equally well display the opposite characteristic. For, while institutions bear down upon us, we nevertheless cling to them; they impose obligations upon us, and yet we love them; they place constraints upon us, and yet we find satisfaction in the way they function, and in that very constraint.” If the first edition of *Les Règles* (1895) did not define social facts in terms of this “special attachment,” Durkheim added, it is “purely and simply because it does not reveal itself in easily perceptible external signs. The good possesses something more internal and intimate than duty, and is in consequence less tangible.”<sup>79</sup>

This later, more qualified version of social realism is equally perceptible in “La Détermination du fait moral” (1906), where Durkheim balanced his earlier, determinedly Kantian analysis of moral facts with a more eudae-

monic emphasis. While acknowledging that some notion of duty or obligation is one of the primary characteristics of the moral rule, for example, Durkheim now added that “in opposition to Kant, . . . we shall show that the notion of duty does not exhaust the concept of morality. It is impossible for us to carry out an act simply because we are ordered to do so and without consideration of its content. For us to become the agents of an act it must interest our sensibility to a certain extent and appear to us as, in some way, *desirable*.” This *élan* or even enthusiasm with which we perform a moral act, Durkheim added, “takes us outside ourselves and above our nature. . . . It is this *sui generis* desirability which is commonly called *good*.” This dual character of moral facts, inspiring feelings of both duty and desire, is also found in the idea of the sacred: “The sacred object inspires us, if not with fear, at least with respect that keeps us at a distance; at the same time it is an object of love and aspiration that we are drawn towards. Here, then,” Durkheim concluded, “is a dual sentiment which seems to be self-contradictory but does not for all that cease to be real.”<sup>80</sup>

In 1902, Durkheim had moved from Bordeaux to the Sorbonne, where, four years later, he offered a second lecture course on religion, *La Religion: Les Origines*. Although these (like the Bordeaux lectures of 1894 and 1895) would never be published, an outline of their content was published in the *Revue de philosophie* in 1907, providing a sense of the direction of Durkheim’s thought as well as the sources on which he would increasingly depend. In the seventh volume of *L’Année sociologique*, for example, Mauss had published his “Esquisse d’une théorie générale de la magie” (1904), which treated the second edition of *The Golden Bough* as paradigmatic for those who had understood magic as the earliest form of human thought, as distinct from and prior to religion, and as a kind of protoscience. The difficulty for Frazer’s argument, Mauss objected, is that the two criteria whereby Frazer distinguished between magic and religion (that magical rites are “sympathetic,” and that magic constrains while religion conciliates) simply failed to do the job. Numerous rites that are clearly “religious,” for example, invoke the sympathetic principle that “like begets like.” Religious rites also constrain, for “in most of the ancient religions, the god was unable to prevent a rite from accomplishing its end if it had been faultlessly executed.” Nor is it true that “all magical rites have a direct action,” since spirits and even gods may be involved in magic. And finally, spirits and gods “do not always automatically obey the orders of a magician” who, on the contrary, “is often forced to supplicate to them.” Searching for an alternative distinction, Mauss pointed out that religion “has always created a kind of ideal towards which people direct their hymns, vows, sacrifices, an ideal which is bolstered by prescriptions”—a positive collective ideal that magic typically avoids. In opposition



to Frazer, therefore, Mauss eventually arrived at a “provisionally adequate definition” that looked back to Robertson Smith and forward to the famous definition of *Les Formes élémentaires*. A magical rite, he suggested, “is *any rite which does not play a part in organized cults*—it is private, secret, mysterious and approaches the limit of a prohibited rite.”<sup>81</sup> Indeed, Durkheim observed, citing Mauss’ essay in his lecture-course at the Sorbonne, “il n’y a pas d’église magique.” Religion is thus “a system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things” with the added stipulation that these beliefs and practices are “common to a well-defined collectivity.”<sup>82</sup>

Apart from Hubert and Mauss, the most important source for the Sorbonne lectures was Codrington’s description of the Melanesian belief in *mana* (1890), whose significance, as we have seen, had been further articulated in Marett’s essays “Pre-Animist Religion (1900) and “From Spell to Prayer” (1904). For example, again attacking Frazer, Durkheim insisted that “individual” totemism was derivative while “collective” totemism, primary and that the principle underlying the latter must thus be understood. The diversity of things that serve as totems, Durkheim explained, suggests that their sacred quality lies not in some material attribute but rather in their participation in something neither material nor perceptible—*une force anonyme et impersonnelle*. This was a tolerable description of Codrington’s *mana*, which had in turn become the foundation of Marett’s Jamesian attack on Frazer’s associationist psychology. Since the totem is only the sensible form under which the primitive man conceives of this anonymous, impersonal force, Durkheim agreed with Marett, then to explain this force is to explain totemism. What, then, are its characteristic features? It is clearly external, Durkheim observed, standing outside the individual, imposing duties, obligations, and rules of conduct upon him. But Durkheim also appealed to his recently discovered “positive cult,” *une force secourable* that elevates the individual above himself, maintaining and strengthening the life within him. “The believer who feels in harmony with his god,” Durkheim observed, using words and phrases that would mark his 1913 address before the Société française de philosophie, “draws from this belief a new strength, and faces the difficulties of life with greater energy.” This *activité vivifiante* occurs primarily (though not exclusively) in those situations where the clan has recently been gathered together or where the group has a particularly strong sense of its own existence; only society has the capacity not only to regulate and constrain our behavior from the outside but also to act within us, in such a way as to lift us above ourselves—in short, to make us stronger. Durkheim discovered a solution to a problem that had confounded Smith himself—the *cercle vicieux*, whereby the gods are presumed to nourish and assist mere mortals while simultaneously depending upon their sacrifices.

To the devout Smith, this had seemed a “detestable view of the gods,” and though willing to admit that it was at least implicit in the earliest sacrificial communion, he suggested that it had become prominent only much later, when the original meaning of the rites was forgotten and sacrifice had indeed become (as Tylor and Frazer would have had it from the start) little more than a “bargain for divine favor.” But by 1907, Durkheim had decided that the *cercle* was not *vicieux* after all. Once we recognize that “god” is simply “society” apotheosized, he explained, the paradox of a sacrifice made to one who is also its substance is resolved—for society can live without individuals no more than the individual can live without society.<sup>83</sup>

### THE DURKHEIMIAN SYNTHESIS

IT WAS only in the early twentieth century, therefore, that Durkheim finally contrived this new way of speaking about religious phenomena. The empiricist rhetoric notwithstanding, Durkheim did not simply “apply” Smith’s theories to the new Australian “evidence.” Rather, he conceived what Harold Bloom might call a “strong misreading” of Smith’s themes and metaphors, which he then used to redescribe Australian beliefs and practices in a more secular idiom. The fullest articulation of this new vocabulary, of course, is *Les Formes élémentaires*, which is by any standard a “classic text” in the history of social thought. Ostensibly an analysis and explanation of Australian totemism, the book’s real concerns were both more general and more specific. Generally, Durkheim wanted to understand “the religious nature of man” and to reveal “an essential and permanent aspect of humanity.”<sup>84</sup> More particularly, however, Durkheim was concerned to establish the theoretical foundations for a purely secular morality for the Third French Republic. This had been the goal of free-thinking French intellectuals since the Enlightenment, and even Durkheim’s preferred means (political and educational reform rather than revolution) had also been embraced by the *philosophes*. From the outset, however, Durkheim labored to avoid these associations, emphatically denying that his focus on primitive religion was the consequence of any “Voltairean” hostility to religion. In part, this caution was strategic, for in the late nineteenth century, French anticlericalism was not unmixed with nostalgia for the moral uniformity of the medieval community, so that a frontal, rationalist attack on “superstition” could not succeed. For his caution, however, Durkheim also gave two more theoretical arguments. First, alluding to the second chapter of *Les Règles*, he observed that hostility toward religion was “unscientific,” for it prejudged the results of the investigation and rendered its outcome

suspect. Second, and more important, Durkheim considered such hostility “unsociological,” for an essential postulate of sociology is that institutions not grounded in “the nature of things” cannot survive, and thus none can rest on an error or a lie. Although the specific symbols by which a religion represents reality might appear absurd, the mere existence of longstanding beliefs and practices assures us that they “hold to reality and express it,” which is why the sociologist must go beneath the symbol and uncover the reality that the symbol represents and that affords it meaning. No religion is false, therefore, although all invite redescription.

For this purpose, Durkheim found his earlier definition of religion excessively formal and inattentive to the content of religious representations. So he set about constructing a new definition, beginning with the distinction between sacred and profane things that, as we have seen, was an extension of Frazer’s notion of taboo. *Sacred* things, Durkheim began, are those isolated and protected by powerful interdictions; *profane* things are those that must be kept at a distance from their sacred counterparts. Religious *beliefs* are representations that express the nature of sacred things and their relations either with one another or with profane things; religious *rites* are rules of conduct that prescribe how one should behave in the presence of sacred things. Where “a certain number of sacred things sustain relations of coordination or subordination with each other in such a way as to form a system having a certain unity,” the beliefs and rites in question constitute a *religion*. But Durkheim understood that magic, no less than religion, includes sacred and profane things, beliefs and rites, not to mention dogmas, sacrifices, lustrations, prayers, chants, and dances. And (pace Frazer) the beings and forces invoked by the magician are not only similar to those addressed by religion but are frequently the same. So it was here that Durkheim appealed to Hubert and Mauss’s essay on magic (1903), insisting that throughout history, magic and religion have frequently exhibited a marked repugnance for each other, implying that any definition of the latter should find some means of excluding the former. For Durkheim, this means was the insistence, in Smith’s *Lectures*, that religion was a public, social, beneficent institution, while magic was private, selfish, and at least potentially maleficent.<sup>85</sup>

Armed with this new definition of religion, which reduced the emphasis on obligation and constraint while increasing that on the independent, explanatory power of representations, Durkheim set out in search of its most primitive, elementary form. The difficulty here was that even the most primitive religions of which we have any direct knowledge are themselves the products of a long, complicated process of social evolution and thus exhibit a profusion of beliefs and practices based upon a variety of “essen-

tial” principles. To discover the “truly original” form of the religious life, therefore, we must “descend by analysis beyond these observable religions, to resolve them into their common and fundamental elements, and then to seek among these latter some one from which the others were derived”—in short, to construct a hypothetical origin from which these later religions might have derived. Here two contrary origins had been proposed, based on the two common elements—the worship of nature (“naturism”) and the worship of spiritual beings (“animism”)—found among their observable descendants. The difficulty of accounting for the confusing properties of observable religions, Durkheim observed, thus resolves itself into two, mutually contradictory evolutionary hypotheses: either animism was the most primitive religion and naturism its secondary, derivative form, or the cult of nature stood at the beginning of religion and the cult of spirits was a peculiar, subsequent development.<sup>86</sup>

This had been a question for Durkheim as early as his 1886 review of Herbert Spencer’s *Ecclesiastical Institutions* (1885), where he had objected to Spencer’s derivation of naturism from animism as the consequence of an “error of language,” suggesting instead that naturism had been both primary and independent.<sup>87</sup> But in *Les Formes élémentaires*, Durkheim objected to both. If the animistic hypothesis is to be embraced, three parts of the argument must be considered: the suggestion that the idea of the soul was formed without borrowing elements from any prior religion; the account of the way in which souls become spirits, and thus the objects of a cult; and the derivation of the cult of nature from the worship of ancestral spirits. Durkheim’s doubts about the autonomous origin of the idea of the soul had already been raised by the Australian evidence suggesting that primitive thought found that the soul, while independent of the body under certain specific conditions, is in fact more intimately bound to the organism than the animistic hypothesis would suggest. But even if these doubts could be removed, Durkheim added, the theory assumes that dreams are explicable on but one savage interpretation (the “second self”), when in fact the interpretative possibilities are innumerable; if this objection is overcome, Durkheim went still further, we would have to understand why savages, otherwise so practical and unreflective, were driven to “explain” their dreams in the first place.

The “very heart of the animist doctrine,” however, was its second thesis—its explanation of how souls became spirits and eventually the objects of a cult. But even if the analogy between sleep and death were sufficient to suggest that the soul survives the body, this still would not explain why the soul would then become a “sacred” spirit, particularly in light of the enormous gap that separates the sacred from the profane, as well as Frazer’s

observation that the approach of death is assumed to weaken rather than strengthen the vital energies of the soul. But Durkheim's most important objection again involved an appeal to evolution. Briefly, if the first sacred spirits were souls of the dead, then the lower the society under investigation, the greater should be the place granted to the ancestor cult; but in fact, the ancestor cult is clearly developed only in relatively advanced societies, while it is completely lacking among the most primitive Australian tribes. Finally, even if ancestor worship *were* primitive, the third part of the animist theory (the transformation of the ancestor cult into the cult of nature) is untenable. Not only is there little evidence among primitive peoples of the complicated analogical reasoning on which this part of the theory depends; neither is there evidence among those practicing nature worship of those characteristics (such as anthropomorphic spirits or spirits exhibiting at least a few of the attributes of a human soul) that their derivation from ancestor worship would logically suggest.

But the clearest refutation of the animistic hypothesis lay in one of its unstated, but implied, consequences. Briefly, not only would it mean (as Durkheim himself believed) that religious symbols provide an inexact expression of the realities to which they refer, it would mean that religious symbols are the products of the vague, ill-conceived hallucinations of our dream experience and thus (as Durkheim most clearly did *not* believe) that they have no foundation in reality at all. Law, morality, even scientific thought itself, Durkheim reminded his readers, were born of religion, have long remained confounded with it, and are still somewhat imbued with its spirit. For Durkheim, it was simply inconceivable that an institution that has held "so considerable a place in history, and to which, in all times, men have come to receive the energy which they must have to live, should be made up of a tissue of illusions." In this sense, Durkheim considered the animistic hypothesis inconsistent with the scientific study of religion itself, for a science always applies itself to some real phenomenon of nature, while animism reduces religion to a mere hallucination. What sort of science is it, Durkheim asked, whose principle discovery is that the subject it studies does not exist?<sup>88</sup>

The advantage of Müller's naturistic hypothesis, therefore, was that it based religion on a real experience (the primitive encounter with the forces of nature), which was sufficient to arouse religious ideas in the savage mind. But to Durkheim, this was no less deficient than the animistic theory. He was clearly familiar with the criticisms of the philological premises of this theory that had been advanced by the social evolutionists, but for the most part, he left these to one side, focusing instead on objections similar to those he had used against the animistic hypothesis. Even if natural phenomena are

sufficient to produce a sense of awe or admiration, for example, Durkheim insisted that this was still insufficient to explain the religious orientation toward sacred things, including the absolute interdiction that governs relations with their profane counterparts. Frazer had pointed out that the savage need not regard these forces as superior to his own, rather imagining that he can manipulate them to his own advantage through ritual practices; again, the earliest objects of such rites were not in fact the principal forces of nature at all but rather humble animals, plants, and inanimate objects. Durkheim's primary objection, however, was that the naturistic theory (like its animistic counterpart) would reduce religion to little more than a system of hallucinations. Admittedly, primitive peoples reflect on the forces of nature from the outset because they depend upon these for their survival. But this, Durkheim added, is exactly why these reflections could not be the source of religious beliefs and practices. For the beliefs about nature to which these reflections gave rise were palpably false, so that any course of practical activity based upon them would necessarily be unsuccessful, in turn undermining faith in the beliefs themselves. The important place granted to religious beliefs and practices throughout history, Durkheim thus repeated, is evidence that they respond to some reality, and one other than that of physical nature.<sup>89</sup>

Here we see something old and something new. What is old is Durkheim's social realism, most famously asserted in *Les Règles* (1895), but more subtly and revealingly developed in *L'Éducation morale* (1925) and *L'Évolution pédagogique en France* (1938). These lectures in particular make it clear that Durkheim's social realism had a political objective, which was to secure the allegiance of French citizens to the precarious Third Republic by reforming education and replacing the "oversimplified rationalism" of Descartes with the language of real, concrete things. "It would be absurd," Durkheim explained, "to sacrifice the real, concrete, and living being that we are to a purely verbal artifact. We can only dedicate ourselves to society if we see in it a moral power more elevated than ourselves."<sup>90</sup> In *Les Formes élémentaires*, phrases like "tissue of illusions" and "system of hallucinations" occupy roughly the same position and perform approximately the same function that phrases like "pure verbal artifact" and (to make the Cartesian allusion obvious) "idées claires et simples" occupy and perform in Durkheim's writings on education. The point was the same—if love of the republic was to become a secular religion, replacing the social and intellectual functions of Catholicism, then it must be based not simply on words and ideas but, like the church itself, on a concrete social reality. What was new (and in some ways at odds with his social realism) was Durkheim's flirtation with a vocabulary of religious belief and practice that was increasingly pragmatic.

Even in his lectures on education, there is already the hint that social realism was more a rhetorical strategy than a metaphysical commitment to the discovery of Nature's Own Language. With his increased emphasis on the independent explanatory power of representations in "Représentations individuelles et représentations collectives" (1898), and especially his embracing of Marett's (and thus, indirectly, James's) arguments in opposition to Frazer's interpretation of the Australian evidence, these hints and flirtations became more frequent (although they fully blossomed only in the conclusion to *Les Formes élémentaires*).

Whether from dreams or nature, both the animistic and naturistic theories tried to construct the idea of the sacred from the facts of individual experience; in an argument that paralleled Kant's attack on empiricist ethics, Durkheim insisted that this was why both had to fail: "Since neither man nor nature have of themselves a sacred character," Durkheim argued, "they must get it from another source. Aside from the human individual and the physical world, there should be some other reality, in relation to which this variety of delirium which all religion is in a sense, has a significance and an objective value." In other words, beyond animism and naturism, there must be "another sort of cult, more fundamental and more primitive, of which the first are only derived forms or particular aspect." This was totemism, whose emblems, animals, plants, clan members, and other objects might be sacred *in varying degrees* but are all sacred *in the same way*, as the consequence of some common principle that they all shared. So totemism is not a religion of animals or emblems at all but rather of an anonymous, impersonal force (Codrington's *mana*), immanent in the world and diffused among its various material objects. To explain totemism is thus to explain the belief in this force, and since the sensations aroused by the sacred totemic objects are themselves insufficient to inspire such powerful religious emotions, they must do so as the symbols or expressions of something else.

This "something else" was, of course, the clan, "personified and represented to the imagination under the visible form of the animal or vegetable which serves as totem." God, in short, was the apotheosis of society. Society is both physical and morally superior to individuals, and they fear its power and respect is authority. But (appealing again to the "*cercle vicieux*" that had disturbed Robertson Smith) society cannot exist except in and through the individual *conscience*, and thus it both demands the sacrifices of its members and periodically strengthens and elevates the divine principle within them. This is especially true during periods of collective enthusiasm, when the power of society is particularly perceptible. Indeed, it was during such extremely rare gatherings of the entire Australian clan that the religious idea itself seems to have been born, which explains why its most important

religious ceremonies continue to be observed only periodically, when the clan as a whole is assembled. It was this succession of intense periods of “collective effervescence” with much longer periods of dispersed, individualistic economic activity, Durkheim argued, that gave rise to the belief that there are two worlds (the sacred and the profane) both within us and within nature itself.<sup>91</sup>

But how does this belief give rise to totemism? The real cause for the individual’s sense of self-transcendence, Durkheim explained, is the gathering of the clan itself. But this is too complex for the primitive mind to grasp, and since he sees around him the symbols of the real cause (engraved emblems of the totem), he naturally fixes his confused social sentiments on these clear, concrete objects from which the physical power and moral authority of society seem to emanate. Just as the soldier who dies for his flag in fact dies for his country, so the clan member who worships his totem in fact worships his clan. To the ancient formula *primus in orbe deos fecit timor*<sup>92</sup> (the “fear-theory” of religion advanced by Hume and defended in various ways by Tylor and Frazer), Durkheim offered the alternative of Robertson Smith, insisting that primitive man does not regard his gods as hostile, malevolent, or fearful but rather as friends and relatives who inspire a sense of confidence, strength, and well-being. And to Tylor and Frazer’s “primitive philosopher,” who rationally but mistakenly peopled his environment with spirits in order to account for otherwise inexplicable phenomena, Durkheim offered an alternative worshipper who, though mistaken concerning the precise nature of their cause, is not at all mistaken in thinking that his beliefs correspond to something that *really does* (both physically and morally) transcend his own, quite limited powers.<sup>93</sup> Durkheim’s argument was not simply that symbols *express* social sentiments but also that they *create* these sentiments, thus making society possible. Collective representations presuppose the reciprocal action and reaction of individual minds, something inconceivable without collective symbols: “In all its aspects and in every period of its history,” Durkheim thus argued, society “is made possible only by a vast symbolism.”

Its overt reference to Tylor and Frazer notwithstanding, this account of the role of symbols in society was developed largely in response to the French philosopher, psychologist, and anthropologist Lucien Lévy-Bruhl (1857–1939), who had embraced many of the sociological elements of Durkheim’s thought while rejecting its residual rationalism. In *La Morale et la science des mœurs* (1903), for example, Lévy-Bruhl (like Durkheim in the late 1880s) had stressed the need for detailed empirical studies of moral ideas in the most diverse societies in order to understand how these ideas were adapted to different social structures. And again like Durkheim,



Lévy-Bruhl saw these studies as a preliminary step to the construction of a secular “science of ethics” that would provide the foundation for future social reforms. As his interests broadened into anthropology, however, Lévy-Bruhl’s respect for the diversity of cultures led him to believe that different societies might exhibit different “types” of mentality altogether, as exemplified in the differences between civilized Europeans and their most primitive counterparts. Here again Lévy-Bruhl embraced Durkheim’s notion of collective representations, insisting that these modes of thought were not in any sense the product of individual ideas, but his hostility to Tylor’s notion that primitive thought is merely a rudimentary form of its more civilized descendant ultimately led him to the more extreme view that preliterate societies are different from their modern European counterparts not just in degree but “in kind.” In *Les Fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures* (1910), for example, Lévy-Bruhl characterized primitive mentality as “prelogical”—governed by a “law of participation” whereby something might be both itself and something else simultaneously. In Australian totemism, for example, savages ignore the distinctions between animals, vegetables, and inanimate objects (granting rocks a sex, for example, or a star a soul) and thus give rise to elaborate mythologies in which each being partakes of the properties of the others.

Durkheim’s response was that, if we truly embrace the notion that society is a system of symbolic representations, this apparently “prelogical” character of primitive thought simply disappears. For once a clan is symbolized by a species of animal, we can understand how the animal might be thought of as a relative of the clan’s human members and how both might be assumed to “participate in the same nature.” This was important, for it became the foundation of Durkheim’s famously radical conception of the origins of scientific thought. To say that one thing is the cause of another, he argued, is to establish relations between them, to suggest that they are bound together by some natural, internal law. But like Hume, Durkheim was convinced that sensations alone could never disclose such lawlike connections between things, and like Kant, therefore, he argued that the human reason itself must supply them, thus enabling us to understand cause and effect as “necessary” relations. The great achievement of primitive religion, Durkheim then suggested, is that it constructed the first representation (Lévy-Bruhl’s “law of participation”) of what these relations might be, thus rescuing us from our enslavement to mere appearance and making science and philosophy possible; religion could do this, he added, only because it is a form of *collective* thought, which imposes a new way of representing reality for the old manipulation of purely individual sensations. So between religion and science (and, pace Lévy-Bruhl, between savagery and civilization) there can

be no abyss, for while the former applies its logical mechanisms to nature more awkwardly than the latter, both are made up of the same collective representations.<sup>94</sup>

How did ideas of the soul, spirits, and gods evolve from the “more essential conceptions” already described? Here Durkheim appealed to the “conceptional” aspect of totemism (which Frazer had made the basis of his third theory), describing the Australian belief that souls enter and animate the bodies of newborn children not as “special and original creations” but rather as the souls of dead ancestors of the clan, whose reincarnation in turn explains the phenomenon of pregnancy and birth. To such ancestors, as we have seen, superhuman powers and virtues are attributed, rendering them sacred; most important, they are conceived by the natives under the forms not of men but of animals and plants, which could now be explained as a form of “individualized *mana*,” the totemic principle incarnate. Like so much of Durkheim’s work, this provided an empirical, sociological answer to a philosophical question. In this primitive idea of the soul, we find the earliest conception of a problem (the “duality of human nature”) that had perplexed philosophers and theologians for centuries; by explaining its origin sociologically, we better understand some of its derivative ideas (such as the theological idea of immortality and the more philosophical notion of personality). The idea of the soul’s immortality, for example, cannot be explained by the human demand for a future state of just retribution, for primitive peoples clearly have the idea while making no such demand. Nor can it be explained as the result of the fear of death, an event to which the savage is relatively indifferent and from which, in any case, his particular notion of immortality would afford little relief. Nor can it be explained by the appearance of dead relatives or friends in our dreams, for such an occurrence is too infrequent to account for so powerful and prevalent a belief. Finally, the failure of these explanations is particularly embarrassing in that the idea of the soul does not seem to imply the soul’s survival. For as the soul is intimately bound to the body, the death of the latter would seem to preclude the survival of the former. This embarrassment is relieved, Durkheim explained, if we assume that the soul is simply the individualized representation of the totemic principle, for the clan *really does* outlive its individual members and is thus in some sense “immortal.” The belief in the immortality of the soul was thus the earliest, symbolic means whereby savages represented to themselves the truth that society continues to live while they must die.<sup>95</sup>

For Durkheim, the subsequent evolution of religious belief is one in which the focus of worship becomes increasingly powerful, personal, and international. Since the idea of souls is inexplicable without postulating

original, “archetypal” souls from which the others are derived, for example, the savage imagines mythical ancestors or “spirits” at the beginning of time, who are the source of all subsequent religious efficacy. When the clans come together for the initiation ceremonies, the savage similarly seeks an explanation for the homogeneity and generality of the rites performed; the natural conclusion is that each group of identical ceremonies was founded by one great ancestor, the “civilizing hero” of the clan, who is now venerated by the larger tribe as well. Finally, where the tribe as a whole, gathered at such ceremonies, acquires an especially powerful sentiment of itself, some symbol of this feeling is sought. As a result, one of the heroes is elevated into the “high god,” whose authority is recognized not only by the tribe thus inspired but by many of its neighbors as well. The result is a “truly international deity” whose attributes are similar to those of the gods of the higher religions of more advanced civilizations. But Durkheim emphasized that this “great tribal god” (which Lang had mistakenly placed at the earliest stage of religious evolution) is only an ancestral spirit who, after a long evolutionary process, has finally won a preeminent place. These ancestral spirits, of course, are only entities postulated in the image of the individual souls whose origin they are destined to explain, and these souls, in turn, are only the form taken by the impersonal forces that we find at the very foundations of totemism, as they individualize themselves in the human body. The unity of the system, Durkheim concluded, “is as great as its complexity.”<sup>96</sup>

Turning from belief to ritual, Durkheim reminded his readers that sacred things are those separated from their profane counterparts, adding that the “negative” cult of taboos, prohibitions, and abstentions is designed to maintain this condition. Sacred foods, for example, are forbidden to profane persons, while profane foods are forbidden to sacred persons; certain objects cannot be touched or even looked at; certain words or sounds cannot be uttered; and certain activities, particularly those of an economic or utilitarian character, are forbidden during the performance of religious ceremonies. Their diversity notwithstanding, however, all these forms are guided by the same simple formula: that the religious and the profane life cannot coexist in the same time or space. Paradoxically, the negative cult performs a positive function: because sacred things are separate from their profane counterparts, an individual cannot enter relations with the first without purifying himself of the second, so the negative cult lays down the conditions for access to its “positive” counterpart. In the initiation ceremony, for example, the neophyte is submitted to a variety of negative rites whose net effect is to radically transform his moral and religious character, to “sanctify” him and ultimately admit him to the sacred life of the clan. But here again, Durkheim insisted, religion is only a metaphorical expression

for society. By enabling us to increase our powers and transcend ourselves, society demands our sacrifice and self-abnegation, suppresses our instincts, and does violence to our natural inclinations. There is a “ruthless asceticism” in all social life, therefore, which is the foundation of all religious asceticism. Finally, Durkheim’s explanation of this negative cult depended heavily on what he called “the contagiousness of the sacred,” whereby religious forces escape their original locations and flow to other objects within their range. Doing so, of course, they contradict their own nature, which is to remain separated from the profane, and thus a system of restrictions is necessary to keep the two worlds apart. But how is contagiousness *itself* to be explained? Contagiousness, Durkheim answered, is a property of those forces (such as heat, electricity, etc.) that enter bodies *from without* rather than constituting an intrinsic part of their nature; this is precisely what his own theory implies, for religious forces do not inhere in the individual but are rather brought to it by the collective representations of society.<sup>97</sup>

This brought Durkheim to the “positive” cult and the *intichiuma* ceremony, whose significance, articulated by Spencer, Gillen, and Frazer, had been the stimulus for his later sociological theory of religion. In central Australia, he explained, there are two sharply divided seasons—one long and dry, and the other short and extremely wet. When the second arrives, the vegetation springs up, animals multiply, and what had been a sterile desert abounds with flora and fauna; it is at the arrival of this “good” season that the *intichiuma* is celebrated. Each clan has its own *intichiuma*, and the celebration has two phases. The object of the first is to assure the abundance of that animal or plant that serves as the clan’s totem, something achieved by striking together certain stones (sometimes drenched with the blood of clan members) and scattering grains of dust that assure the fertility of the animal or plant species. The second phase begins with an intensification of the interdictions of the negative cult (clan members who could ordinarily eat their totemic animal or plant in moderation can no longer eat or even touch it) and concludes with a solemn ceremony in which representatives of the newly increased totemic species are ritually slaughtered and eaten by the clan members. The exceptional interdictions are then lifted, and the clan returns to its normal existence.<sup>98</sup>

For Durkheim (although, as we have seen, not for Frazer), the significance of the *intichiuma* was that it contained the essential elements of the most fundamental rite of the higher religions (sacrifice) while also confirming the revolutionary theory of the meaning of that rite advanced by Robertson Smith. An older theory of sacrifice, epitomized in Tylor’s *Primitive Culture* (1871), was that the earliest offerings were “gifts” presented to the god by his worshippers, but such a theory, Durkheim insisted, fails to explain two

important features of the rite: first, that its substance was food, and second, that this food was shared by both gods and worshippers at a common feast. Smith's theory, by contrast, emphasized that in many ancient societies this kind of commensality was believed to create (and periodically re-create) a bond of kinship, and that the earliest sacrifices were joyous feasts in which the bond of kinship uniting gods and worshippers was reaffirmed by participation in the common flesh. The second phase of the *intichiuma*, Durkheim argued, is precisely such a communal feast; in the Australian rite, he added, the object of this communion is clear: the revivification of the totemic principle (society) that exists within each member of the clan, symbolized by the sacrificial animal or plant. This in turn accounts for the temporal aspect of the rite, for the totemic principle would naturally seem to be weakened after a long, dry period and most completely renewed just after the arrival of rain and vegetation. As the Eucharist implies, analogous practices could be found among many more advanced peoples. The *intichiuma*, Durkheim concluded, "is closer to us than one might imagine from its apparent crudeness."<sup>99</sup>

But Durkheim did not embrace Smith's views without reservation. A devout Calvinist, Smith had found the idea that the gods receive physical pleasure from the offerings of mere mortals a "revolting absurdity," insisting that this idea had no part in the original meaning of the rite and emerged only much later with the institution of private property.<sup>100</sup> But in the first phase of the *intichiuma*, Durkheim found precisely this idea (that the totemic species requires the performance of certain rites in order to reproduce itself), and thus he argued that the complete sacrificial act is *both* an offering *and* a communion. Nor was this a mere quibble, for the notion of interdependence was crucial to Durkheim's sociological theory of religion. The correspondence of the *intichiuma* ceremonies to the intermittent character of the *physical* environment of central Australia (long dry spells punctuated by heavy rainfall and the reappearance of animals and vegetation) is duplicated by the *social* life of the Australian clans (long periods of dispersed, individual economic activity, punctuated by the intensive communal activity of the *intichiuma* itself). Because sacred beings exist only at the sufferance of collective representations, we should expect that their presence would be most deeply felt precisely when men gather to worship them and "partake of the same idea and the same sentiment." Again, therefore, the native is not mistaken—the gods really do depend upon their worshippers, even as the worshippers depend upon their gods, for society can exist only in and through individuals, even as the individual gets from society the best part of himself.<sup>101</sup>

Durkheim's treatment of imitative and piacular rites also deserves attention. The first involves movements and cries whose function, guided by

the principle of “like produces like,” is to imitate the animal or plant whose reproduction is desired. This, of course, was Frazer’s “sympathetic magic,” based on associationist psychology and underwriting his own interpretation of the *intichiuma*. But abstract laws of psychology, Durkheim objected, cannot explain specific, concrete social phenomena, and once we place these imitative rites within their social context, we see that they are explained by the natives’ shared feeling that they actually *are* their totemic animal or plant and that this should be demonstrated whenever the clan gathers. Rather than a magical, utilitarian rite to be explained by associationist psychology, therefore, the imitative rite is a moral, religious phenomenon to be explained sociologically. This argument—that the principle “like produces like” originates in collective representations rather than individual mental associations—in turn supported Durkheim’s theory of the origins of scientific thought. The two essential elements of causality, for example, are the idea of efficacy (an active force capable of producing some effect) and that of necessity (an a priori judgment that this cause produces its effect *necessarily*). The prototype of the first idea, as we have seen, is collective force (*mana*) objectified and projected onto external things, while the second is the obligatory nature of the rites presumed to effect the periodic reproduction of the totemic species. What is obligatory in action, Durkheim argued, cannot remain optional in thought, and thus society imposes a logical precept (like produces like) as an extension of the ritual precept essential to its well-being. In this way, Durkheim claimed to have reconciled Kant’s epistemology with that of Hume, showing how the necessity and universality of our causal judgments could be retained and accounted for: “The imperatives of thought,” Durkheim concluded, “are probably only another side to the imperatives of action.”<sup>102</sup>

Piacular rites, on the other hand, often follow some misfortune that has befallen the clan, and they are characterized by sadness, fear, and anger. Rather than the product of spontaneous emotion, however, Durkheim emphasized that these are a duty imposed by the group and sanctioned by severe penalties, and their obligatory character is to be explained in the same way as their more joyous counterparts. When someone dies, for example, the clan assembles, which arouses collective representations reflecting its sense of loss while simultaneously reaffirming the sense of its own permanence and solidarity. However inspired he had been by Robertson Smith’s joyous communal sacrifice, therefore, Durkheim rejected Smith’s argument that the sense of sin and expiation was a late product of higher religions, insisting instead that it was implicit in the sentiments of fear and misery that accompanied any injury to the clan. This in turn helps us to understand what Durkheim called the “ambiguity of the sacred”: the fact

that sacred things may be good, pure, benevolent, and propitious but also evil, impure, and malicious. Robertson Smith, of course, had been acutely conscious of this, as well as the fact that while these two categories of things are sharply separated, there is also a kinship between them. Both are sharply segregated from profane things, and frequently, through a mere change of external circumstances, an evil or impure sacred thing might be transformed into its good and pure counterpart. Durkheim acknowledged that Smith had an “active sentiment” of this ambiguity but added that Smith had never explained it. This was of course unfair to Smith who, as we have seen, described the difference between gods and demons as one between deities that enjoyed stable, institutionalized relations with men (religion), and those that could be approached only by individuals for private, asocial purposes (magic). In any case, Durkheim’s explanation was slightly different: evil powers are the symbolic expression of collective representations excited by periods of grief or mourning and the resulting gatherings of the clan, and they are transformed into their more benign counterparts by that reaffirmation of the permanence and solidarity of the group effected by the ceremonies thus celebrated. These two extremes of the religious life are thus the two extremes through which all social life must pass. Ultimately, Durkheim thus concluded, “it is the unity and diversity of social life which make the simultaneous unity and diversity of sacred beings and things.”<sup>103</sup>

#### RELIGION, SCIENCE, AND PRAGMATISM

THE CONCLUSION of *Les Formes élémentaires* was concerned primarily with the relation between religion and science. Social scientists who have attempted to “explain” religion, Durkheim began, have typically considered it a system of *beliefs*, of which religious *practices* are an external, material expression; this in turn has led to the concern that these beliefs might be irreconcilable with those of modern science. The problem with this approach is that does not correspond to the believer’s own account of the nature of his religious experience, which has less to do with *thought* than with *action*: “The believer who has communicated with his god,” Durkheim emphasized, “is not merely a man who sees new truths of which the unbeliever is ignorant; he is a man who is *stronger*. He feels within him more force, either to endure the trials of existence, or to conquer them.” The mere ideas of an individual are clearly insufficient to this purpose, so only the repeated acts of the cult can give rise to “impressions of joy, of interior peace, of serenity, of enthusiasm which are, for the believer, an experimental proof of his beliefs.”<sup>104</sup> While he would not use the phrase itself until 1913, this was what

Durkheim meant by the “dynamogenic quality of religion”—that religion is a form of *action* with the capacity to elevate a man above himself, to make him “stronger.” This conception had characterized Durkheim’s sociology of religion since his “discovery” of the positive cult, which had been bound up with his embracing of Robertson Smith’s *Lectures* in response to Frazer’s interpretation of Spencer and Gillen.

But where did the phrase itself—which appears nowhere else in Durkheim’s writing—come from? And what can this tell us about the lines along which Durkheim’s religious thought was developing in the early years of the twentieth century? The answer lies in the work of the French psychologist Charles Féré (1852–1907), a student of Charcot and later collaborator with Binet who, in *Sensation et mouvement* (1887) described some experiments that attracted the interest of William James. Féré was interested in the effect of sensory stimuli on muscular activity and arranged a series of experiments in which a “self-registering dynamometer” (a device for measuring mechanical force) was used to measure the strength of the muscular contractions of a subject’s hand under a variety of different stimuli. Ordinarily, James reported in *Principles of Psychology* (1890), the maximum strength remained relatively constant from day today, but if the subject received a “sensorial impression” simultaneously with the contraction, the strength of the contraction typically increased, a reinforcing effect that quickly received the name of “dynamogeny.” James was particularly impressed that a large variety of stimuli (heat, cold, pricking, itching, faradic stimulation of the skin, lights of particular colors, musical notes proportional to their loudness and height, odors and tastes, etc.) all seem to have this “dynamogenic” quality whereby the subject was unconsciously, and quite literally, “made stronger.”<sup>105</sup>

For James, as for Durkheim, these experiments had obvious significance for our understanding of religious phenomena. In the eighth lecture of *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), which was not surprisingly the first of three dealing specifically with the psychology of religious conversion, James described the young St. Augustine as a classic example of what he called a “discordant personality” or “divided self.” The story is familiar to every reader of the *Confessions* (c. 400)—Augustine’s Christian mother and pagan father; his physical migration from Carthage to Rome to Milan; his intellectual migration from Manicheism to skepticism to Neoplatonism, which left his “inner self . . . a house divided” and led eventually to the famous, decisive event in the garden at Milan, where he heard the child’s voice say “*Sume, lege*” (take and read) and, opening the Bible at random, he read the passage that seemed divinely sent to relieve his spiritual conflict.<sup>106</sup> “There could be no more perfect description of the divided will,”



James observed, “when the higher wishes lack just that last acuteness, that touch of explosive intensity, of *dynamogenic quality* (to use the slang of the psychologists), that enables them to burst their shell, and make irruption efficaciously into life and quell the lower tendencies forever.” And even if such conversion experiences can be explained naturalistically, James went on to argue, we should assess them pragmatically, in terms of what he called their “value” or “fruits for life.”<sup>107</sup>

There can be little doubt that this was Durkheim’s source. After describing these “impressions of joy, of interior peace, of serenity, of enthusiasm which are, for the believer, an experimental proof of his beliefs,” he went on to refer specifically to *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, adding that “together with a recent apologist of the faith, we admit that these religious beliefs rest upon a specific experience whose demonstrative value is, in one sense, not one bit inferior to that of scientific experiments, though different from them. We, too, think that ‘a tree is known by its fruits,’ and that fertility is the best proof of what the roots are worth.”<sup>108</sup> Durkheim was not in any serious way a pragmatist—on the contrary, his lecture course on pragmatism at the Sorbonne in 1913 and 1914 was designed to distance himself (and his students) from the pragmatists, especially James. But like the pragmatists (especially Dewey), Durkheim insisted that religious experience and practice were far more important than ideas and doctrines, for the reality on which religion depends is not the result of metaphysical speculation but of concrete social action; because all societies need to periodically reaffirm their collective sentiments, Durkheim was also convinced that there was something “eternal” in religion, destined to outlive the particular symbols in which it had previously been embodied.

If religion is thus a mode of action, of course, it remains a mode of thought as well, and (pace Lévy-Bruhl) one not different in kind from scientific thought. Like science, for example, religion reflects on nature, man, and society, attempts to classify things, relates them to one another, and explains them; as we have seen, even the most essential categories of scientific thought (such as causality) are religious in origin. Scientific thought, in short, is but a more perfect form of religious thought, and Durkheim argued that the latter would gradually give way before the advances of the former (including those advances in the social sciences that extend to the scientific study of religion itself). But if science is thus religious in its origins, and religion itself is but the apotheosis of society, then all scientific thought has social causes. All logical thought, Durkheim explained, is made up of *concepts*—generalized ideas that are distinguished from sensations by two important characteristics. First, unlike our sensations, which succeed one another in a never-ending flux and cannot be repeated, our concepts are

relatively stable, remaining the same for long periods of time. Second (again unlike our sensations, which are held privately and cannot be communicated), our concepts are impersonal, and provide the necessary means by which all communication becomes possible. Since concepts are held in common and bear the mark of no individual mind, they are clearly the products of the collective mind, and if they have greater permanence and stability than our individual sensations, it is because they are collective representations, which respond much more slowly to environmental conditions. It is only through society, therefore, that people become capable of logical thought; this explains why the “correct” manipulation of such concepts carries a moral authority unknown to mere personal opinion and private experience.<sup>109</sup>

Durkheim’s theoretical ambitions here were not limited to providing a sociological explanation for those concepts that Kant had described as “empirical.” Far more than this, Durkheim claimed to have provided an explanation for Kant’s “categories of the understanding” (such as time, space, cause, force, causality, etc.) as well. In one sense, these categories are simply concepts that are so stable and so impersonal that they have come to be seen as immutable and universal, but in another sense, they differ from other concepts because they not only have social causes but also express social things—“the category of class was at first indistinct from the concept of the human group,” Durkheim argued, “it is the rhythm of social life which is at the basis of the category of time; the territory occupied by the society furnished the material for the category of space; it is the collective force which was the prototype of the concept of efficient force, an essential element in the category of causality.”<sup>110</sup>

How have these categories—the preeminent concepts by which all of our knowledge is constructed—been modeled upon social things, and how do they express them? Precisely because the categories must perform this permanent, preeminent function, Durkheim answered, they must be based upon a reality of equally permanent, preeminent status, a function for which our shifting, private, individual sensations are clearly inadequate. But is society itself adequate to this purpose? How do we know that the categories, modeled on social things, provide an accurate representation of nature? Here Durkheim flirted with the pragmatist critique of epistemological realism, but it was precisely here that the social realism he had so laboriously constructed throughout his earlier career came into play. First, he answered, society is itself “a part of nature,” and since “nature cannot contradict itself,” we might reasonably expect that categories modeled on its realities will correspond to those of the physical world (an answer that anticipates both Lévi-Strauss and the early Wittgenstein).<sup>111</sup> Second, insofar as the concepts founded in any particular group must reflect the peculiarities of its special

situation, we might reasonably expect that the increasing “internationalization” of social life will purge these concepts of their subjective, personal elements, so that over time we come progressively closer to truth not in spite of society’s influence but because of it.<sup>112</sup>

Like Kant, therefore, Durkheim denied that there was any conflict between science, on the one hand, and morality and religion, on the other. For also like Kant, Durkheim felt that both are directed toward universal principles and that both thus imply that, in thought as in action, man can lift himself above the limitations of his private, individual nature to live a rational, impersonal life. What Kant could not explain (because he considered it beyond explanation) is the *cause* of this dual existence that we are forced to lead, torn between the sensible and intelligible worlds that, even as they seem to contradict each other, appear to presume and even require each other as well. But to Durkheim the explanation was clear. We lead an existence that is simultaneously both individual and social, and as individuals we can live without society no more than society can live without us.

If *Totemism and Exogamy* was thus the grand compendium of the evolutionary anthropological obsession with totemism, preserving intact and side-by-side whole arguments that contradicted each other (including earlier views with which Frazer no longer agreed), *Les Formes élémentaires* was its almost Thomistic synthesis, bringing together the theories of McLennan, Spencer, Tylor, Müller, Frazer, Smith, Jevons, Lang, Marett, Codrington, Fison and Howitt, Spencer and Gillen, Hubert and Mauss, James, Lévy-Bruhl, and others; weaving them all together; and, with an utterly seductive Cartesian clarity, resolving their difficult, seemingly intractable contradictions, all within the framework of Durkheim’s grand theoretical vision. Like Frazer, Durkheim had discovered a secular idiom in which to redescribe Robertson Smith’s ingenious theory of a primitive totemic sacrament, but unlike Frazer, Durkheim had preserved its collectivist, irrationalist presuppositions, as well as their emphasis on ritual rather than belief, on action rather than thought. These would remain basic elements of social-scientific theory long after the purposes for which they were conceived had been forgotten. But even as Durkheim brought these materials together in his study, serious doubts had been expressed over the very existence of the phenomenon it claimed to explain, and a new generation of anthropologists was losing interest in the social evolutionary vocabulary within which the questions themselves had seemed so important.

# 5

## TOTEMISM AS NEUROSIS



### THE DEVELOPMENT OF PSYCHOANALYSIS

**E**VEN AS *Les Formes élémentaires* appeared, Sigmund Freud was preparing the four essays that would become *Totem and Taboo* (1913), a book that covered much of the same ground, relied on many of the same sources, and, of course, came to radically different conclusions concerning the nature and significance of Australian totemism. Freud was born on 6 May 1856, about two and a half years after Frazer and less than two years before Durkheim, in the small Moravian town of Freiberg. His father, Jacob, was “a generally impecunious Jewish wool merchant” whose family had lived for a long time in Cologne, then fled east to Lithuania to escape the persecution of Jews in the late Middle Ages, and eventually migrated back into Austria in the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> At the time Freud was born, his family occupied a single rented room in a modest house and by most measures of the time would have been considered poor.

Tangled domestic networks were common when early death from disease or in childbirth was frequent and widows and widowers often remarried promptly, but the complexities facing the young Freud were exceptional. In 1855, for example, when Jacob married Amalia Nathansohn (his third wife and Sigmund’s mother), he was forty (twice her age). Emanuel, the older son from his first marriage, was older than Amalia and had a wife and children of his own (including John, just a year older than Sigmund, and his earliest childhood companion, friend, and occasional enemy). Philipp, the second son from the same marriage, was just one year younger than

Amalia, lived nearby, and to the young Freud seemed better matched to his mother than did his father. The resulting confusions were not insignificant, for Freud's mind "was made up of these things—his young mother pregnant with a rival [his sister Anna], his half brother in some mysterious way his mother's companion, his nephew older than himself, his best friend also his greatest enemy, his benign father old enough to be his grandfather. He would weave the fabric of his psychoanalytic theories from such intimate experiences. When he needed them, they came back to him."<sup>2</sup>

Freud had been circumcised just a week after his birth, and in his *Autobiographical Study* (1925) he noted that his parent were Jews, adding (in a manner Peter Gay has called "visibly scornful of coreligionists who had sought protection from anti-Semitism in the haven of baptism") that "I, too, have remained a Jew."<sup>3</sup> This was Judaism without religion, of course, for in his quest for assimilation, Freud's father had already emancipated himself from the Hasidic practices of his ancestors and would eventually discard almost all religious observances, so that Freud would later recall that his father had allowed him to grow up "in complete ignorance of everything that concerned Judaism." But Jacob was never ashamed of being Jewish and did not try to deny it. On the contrary, he continued to read the Bible at home, in Hebrew, and spoke Hebrew as well as he spoke German. Almost as soon as he could read, Freud himself acquired the enduring fascination for the Hebrew Bible, later reflected in works like *Totem and Taboo* and *Moses and Monotheism* (1939). If not a "believing" Jew, therefore, Freud remained a "psychological" one, with a mystique of membership in the Jewish community which, in the face of Christian (and particularly Roman Catholic) anti-Semitism, helps to explain his powerful antireligious animus.<sup>4</sup> For the first two years of his life, Freud was cared for by a Roman Catholic nursemaid whom Freud's mother recalled as an ugly, devout, and clever woman who told Sigmund pious stories and dragged him to church. Freud himself would later describe her as sharp and demanding, adding that he had loved her nonetheless and that she was his teacher in sexual matters. But this early attachment ended when the nursemaid was arrested for petty theft and sent to prison. "That Catholic nurse-maid," Gay emphasizes, "old and unprepossessing as she was, had meant much to Freud, almost as much as his lovely mother. Like some figures who were to engross his fantasy life later—Leonardo, Moses, to say nothing of Oedipus—the young Freud enjoyed the loving ministrations of two mothers."<sup>5</sup>

Shortly after this event of the nursemaid, Freud's family moved briefly to Leipzig and then, in 1860, to Vienna, the city with which he has been irrevocably associated ever since. "Most observers," Gay has thus observed, "have in fact seen psychoanalysis, like its founder, not just as an urban, but

as a specifically Viennese phenomenon.” But Freud himself would have had none of this. When the French psychologist Pierre Janet (Durkheim’s classmate at the *École Normale Supérieure* and a lifelong friend) suggested that psychoanalysis could have arisen only from the “sensual atmosphere” of Vienna, Freud considered the remark both malicious and anti-Semitic. Gay thus added that Freud might have developed his ideas in any city endowed with a first-rate medical school and an educated, affluent public large enough to provide him with a steady stream of patients. Vienna of course afforded him all of these things, but it also remained “the theater of hardship, repeated failure, prolonged and hateful solitude, unpleasant incidents of Jew-hatred.”<sup>6</sup> Nor did the move alleviate the family’s economic difficulties, in part because Amalia gave birth to five more children in the next six years and also because of the indictment, conviction, and imprisonment of Josef Freud (Jacob’s brother) for trading in counterfeit rubles. Jacob’s grief and embarrassment were probably mingled with anxiety, for there is evidence that he and his sons by an earlier marriage were implicated in Josef’s schemes. The incident undoubtedly had a traumatic effect on the young Sigmund, for he disliked his uncle Josef, who invaded his dreams, and Freud observed that the incident had made his father’s hair turn grey within just a few days.<sup>7</sup>

Freud’s father was likable, generous, open to pleasure, and incurably optimistic—in general “a small merchant with insufficient resources to cope with the industrializing world around him”—and Sigmund’s attitude toward him was ambivalent, as reflected in a famous recollection that later both troubled and fascinated the son. When the young Freud was about ten, his father began taking him along on his walks, which afforded him the opportunity to talk about the past and to emphasize how much life had improved for Austrian Jews. In one rather pathetic story, the father described himself walking down the streets of Leipzig wearing a new fur cap when a Christian anti-Semite confronted him, knocked the cap into the gutter and shouted “Jew, off the sidewalk!” Asked by his son how he responded, Jacob replied simply that he had stepped into the street and picked up his cap. This submissive response, Freud later recalled, “did not seem heroic to me.” Toward his mother, Freud’s feelings were deeper and more passionate. Later in life, he would recall that his libidinal attachment for her had begun at the age of two and a half (the incident in question actually took place when he was closer to four) and that he had been sufficiently jealous of his younger brother Julius to wish him dead. Gay suggests that Freud never fully worked out the meaning of his passionate, unconscious ties to this “commanding maternal figure,” and though many of his patients were women and he wrote much about them, he liked to say that women had remained a “dark continent.” In any case, it was this “doting, energetic,

and domineering mother, far more than his pleasant but somewhat shiftless father, who equipped him for a life of intrepid investigation, elusive fame, and halting success.”<sup>8</sup>

A series of political reforms in the 1860s had improved the legal position of Austrian Jews and made Vienna extremely attractive to immigrants from eastern Europe. This had in turn inspired an anti-Semitic reaction, exploited by liberal demagogues like Karl Lueger who in 1895 became mayor of Vienna. Freud was of course a pessimist about human nature and, like Durkheim, instinctively suspicious of any merely political solution to social and psychological problems. But despite the hypocrisy of Austrian liberalism rendered palpable by Lueger’s political success, Freud himself became a liberal, in part because liberalism had been good for Austrian Jews but also because he saw a greater danger from the aristocracy and especially the church. “As a self-respecting bourgeois,” Gay reminds us, Freud “was impatient with arrogant aristocrats and, even more, with repressive clerics. He viewed the Church of Rome and its Austrian minions as the principal obstacles in the way of full Jewish integration into Austrian society. . . . The luxuriant growth of populist racial anti-Semitism provided him with new targets of hate, but he never forgot the old enemy, Roman Catholicism.”<sup>9</sup>

A staggeringly precocious child, Freud was first in his class for the last seven years at his gymnasium. Heinrich Braun, who would go on to become one of Austria’s most prominent Social Democratic politicians, was a slightly older schoolmate, and under his influence Freud considered the study of law and a career in liberal politics. In his *Autobiographical Study*, however, Freud tells us that during same period he was inspired by Darwin and Goethe, who together turned him in the direction of medicine. With apparent justification, Gay has been skeptical about this “mythmaking” statement, for in the same document, Freud acknowledged, first, that neither then nor later in life had he felt any particular desire to be a physician; second, that he was moved instead by a curiosity about “human concerns”; and, third, that he had not yet grasped the importance of observation as the means by which this curiosity might be satisfied.<sup>10</sup> To be a scientist, Gay emphasizes, would require sublimation—the control of his passionate, speculative, and imaginative intellect in order to achieve distance and objectivity—and this would require hard-won discipline. For years in the future, therefore, Freud’s letters, confessional scientific papers, and recorded conversations would “echo with a certain fear of losing himself in a morass of speculation, and with a powerful wish for self-control.” Medicine, in short, “was part of Freud’s self-conquest.”<sup>11</sup>

A medical degree at the University of Vienna normally took five years, but Freud’s insatiable curiosity about “human concerns” meant that he

took a bit longer. Entering the university in 1873, at the age of seventeen, he obtained his degree only eight years later. "As to the first year at the university," he wrote to Eduard Silberstein, "I shall spend it entirely in studying humanistic subjects, which have nothing at all to do with my future profession, but which will not be useless to me." Freud thus attended the lectures of Franz Brentano (1838–1917), the philosopher and psychologist who had just arrived from the University of Würzburg. Brentano was also a Roman Catholic priest who, in 1864, had recommended that the proposed doctrine of papal infallibility be rejected. Once the doctrine was officially proclaimed by the First Vatican Council (1870), Brentano discovered other doubts about other Catholic doctrines, and in 1873 he resigned from the priesthood, then the church, and finally from his position at Würzburg. Within a year of arriving in Vienna, he had published *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, which embraced the work of the British empiricists and did much to strip psychology of metaphysics and establish it as a science of mental phenomena. His residual Christian beliefs were a sufficient cause for Freud to question some of his early atheistic assumptions, but after working through Brentano's philosophy, he returned to lifelong unbelief. Still, Freud's thinking about religion had been stimulated and raised to a more sophisticated plane, and Brentano's psychology left "significant deposits" in Freud's mind as well.<sup>12</sup>

Aside from attending Brentano's lectures, Freud was at this time reading the works of Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–1872), who, initially a student of theology at Heidelberg, had moved to the University of Berlin in 1824 and fallen under the spell of Hegel. In his *Thoughts on Death and Immortality* (1830) and especially *The Essence of Christianity* (1841), Feuerbach had argued that the attributes we attach to God (will, power, love, justice, etc.) are simply our own abstracted and perfected "projections," by which we transfer, to an alien, external object, the best aspects of ourselves. In Feuerbach's critique, religious belief and practice is thus a kind of self-alienation, a giving away of the self to the divine Other. In a way that surely impressed Freud, however, Feuerbach's project also had a more positive dimension. First, he emphasized that of all animals, only man was a "species-being" (a species to himself as both object and subject) as well as a "homo-religiosus" (a species that self-consciously constructs and objectifies his ideal conception of himself in the form of an alien God). Second, by reducing Christianity to anthropology, Feuerbach hoped to make this process of unconscious self-alienation both conscious and comprehensible (in fact, *The Essence of Christianity* was originally to have been titled "Know Thyself"), thus liberating human beings from their illusions and educating them about their true nature. "Among all philosophers," Freud wrote to Silberstein, "I worship and admire this man the most."<sup>13</sup>



The superb faculty of medicine at the University of Vienna included Carl Claus, head of the Institute of Comparative Anatomy; Ernst Brücke, a famous physiologist; Hermann Nothnagel, head of the Division of Internal Medicine; and Theodor Billroth, a celebrated surgeon, gifted amateur musician, and friend of Brahms. To parochial Vienna, these luminaries lent an air of intellectual distinction and sophistication, attracting scores of students from the rest of Europe as well as the United States. The first year of Freud's medical studies coincided with a wave of anti-Semitism that awakened his Jewish self-awareness, and he was grateful for the liberalism of scientists like Brücke, who had many Jewish friends and was hostile to Roman Catholicism, and Nothnagel, who was a founder of the Society for Combating Anti-Semitism. Freud's earliest research experience took place in comparative anatomy, under the guidance of Claus. One of Darwin's most effective disciples in the German language, Claus had been brought to Vienna to modernize the university's department of zoology and had soon obtained funds for an experimental station for marine biology in Trieste. Some of these funds were budgeted for student research in the laboratory, and Freud was sent there in March 1876 to test the recent assertion of a Polish scientist, Simone de Syrski, that eels (long thought to be hermaphroditic) in fact possessed gonads. Freud's initial efforts failed, and it was only through numerous, laborious dissections that he was able (albeit partially and inconclusively) to confirm Syrski's claim. But the exercise provided Freud with his first experience in thorough and precise observation and thus with the kind of sustained, concentrated attention he would find indispensable in listening to his patients.<sup>14</sup> It was in the physiological laboratory of Ernst Brücke, however, that Freud found his intellectual bearings. While a medical student in Berlin, Brücke had joined with Emil du Bois-Reymond and Hermann von Helmholtz to form a positivist school of physiology that dismissed "all pantheism, all nature mysticism, all talk of occult divine forces manifesting themselves in nature," and focused instead on physical and chemical forces whose movement and effects could be measured. The influence of the school spread rapidly, and soon its followers dominated the scientific journals and occupied prestigious chairs in leading universities. When Freud later deserted physiology for the study of the human mind, he took these principles with him, and they help to explain the heavily mechanistic perspective of his 1895 proposal for a scientific psychology.

For six years, Freud flourished in Brücke's laboratory until he met and became engaged to Martha Bernays in April 1882. Martha's widowed mother had doubts about Freud's suitability. While Martha's family had little money, they at least had social status, and Freud had neither (nor the prospect thereof). And while Martha had been raised as a strictly obser-

vant Orthodox Jew, Freud was not merely an indifferent unbeliever but a principled atheist who demanded that his fiancée free herself from superstitious nonsense. Still, he understood that a middle-class household required a stable, substantial source of income, that the only source of such an income was private practice, and that to establish such a practice, he would need clinical experience with patients. On Brücke's advice, therefore, Freud left the physiology laboratory in the summer of 1882 to become an aspirant (a low-level clinical assistant) in Vienna's General Hospital. For the next three years, Freud moved from one department to another, sampling a variety of specialties and gradually improving his position, but he remained financially insecure. By early 1883, he had arrived in the department of the brain anatomist and psychiatrist Theodor Meynert, a strict determinist for whom the mind obeyed an underlying order that awaited the discoveries of psychiatry. Although Freud's research for Meynert was almost exclusively in cerebral anatomy, he began to concentrate on psychiatry, and in March 1885, attracted by the reputation of the French neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot (1825–1893), applied to his faculty for a travel fellowship that would allow him to spend six months in Paris.

In 1862, Charcot had begun a lifelong association with the Salpêtrière Hospital, where in 1882 he opened what became the greatest neurological clinic in Europe and began using hypnosis to treat hysteria. The term "hysteria" derives from the Greek *hysteria* ("uterus"), which reflects the ancient (and mistaken) notion that it was a specifically female disorder resulting from uterine malfunctions. Charcot's hysterics suffered from an endless variety of sensory, motor, and psychic torments whose only common thread was their lack of dependence upon any organic or structural pathology, which suggested that some underlying psychological anxiety had been unconsciously "converted" into a physical symptom. Charcot had revolutionized the treatment of hysteria, in part by diagnosing it as a genuine disease that afflicts men as well as women but also by relieving its symptoms through the ancient (and controversial) technique of hypnosis. The antiquity of the technique notwithstanding, the therapeutic use of hypnosis began only in the late eighteenth century, when the German physician Franz Mesmer (1734–1815) suggested that human health was affected by an invisible bodily fluid that acted according to the laws of magnetism (hence "animal magnetism") and could be manipulated by any trained person. Mesmer himself was soon discredited, but "mesmerism" continued to attract the curiosity of medical practitioners until the mid-nineteenth century, when the English physician James Braid coined the term "hypnosis." In the 1880s, an obscure country physician named Ambroise-Auguste Liébeault argued that hypnosis in fact involved no physical forces or physiological processes

whatsoever and was rather a combination of psychologically mediated responses to suggestion. This view in turn received the authoritative support of Hippolyte Bernheim, professor of medicine at Strasbourg, so that by the time Freud arrived in Paris, he had already persuaded himself that (despite its unsavory reputation) the hypnotic state was an authentic psychological phenomenon and one that might be useful in therapy. "What impressed me most of all while I was with Charcot," Freud later wrote,

were his latest investigations upon hysteria, some of which were carried out under my own eyes. He had proved, for instance, the genuineness of hysterical phenomena and their conformity to laws . . . , the frequent occurrence of hysteria in men, the production of hysterical paralyses and contractures by hypnotic suggestion and the fact that such artificial products showed, down to the smallest details, the same features as spontaneous attacks, which were often brought on traumatically.<sup>15</sup>

Learning that Charcot needed a German translator for his lectures, Freud wrote and offered his services, thus gaining entrance to the circle of the great man's personal acquaintances. Uncertain of his spoken French (but fortified with cocaine), Freud attended receptions at Charcot's palatial home, and soon learned that even among its French supporters, hypnotism remained controversial. Charcot, for example, considered the hypnotic state an artificially produced neurosis that could be induced only in hysterics, while Liébeault and Bernheim insisted that hypnosis is purely a matter of suggestion, to which everyone must be susceptible. For several years, Freud vacillated between the two, translating Charcot's *Lectures on the Diseases of the Nervous System* in 1886 and Bernheim's *On Suggestion and Its Applications to Therapy* just two years later. In general, he leaned toward Charcot's view, but when he sought to improve his technique in hypnotic suggestion, he visited Bernheim in Nancy. Upon returning to Austria, Freud presented his report and almost immediately resigned from the hospital, married, and opened a private practice. But now his problem was less to choose between Bernheim and Charcot than to get the Viennese medical establishment to take him seriously at all.

During his years in Brücke's laboratory, Freud had met Josef Breuer (1842–1925), a successful, affluent, highly cultivated physician who, in December 1880, had begun treating a twenty-one-year-old woman named Bertha Pappenheim (a friend of Martha Bernays). Highly intelligent and, like Martha, the child of a restrictive, traditional Jewish family, Bertha's problems had been precipitated earlier in the year by the fatal illness of her father, to whom she was strongly attached. While caring for him, she had

begun to experience symptoms including loss of appetite, coughing, squinting, headaches, partial paralyses, and the loss of sensation. Under Breuer's care, her symptoms grew more bizarre, including mental lapses, somnolence, mood shifts, hallucinations, and speech impediments, and when her father died in April 1881, these symptoms became still more exaggerated. But eventually Breuer learned that if he placed her in a hypnotic state, she could trace each of her symptoms to the specific incident that had given rise to it during her father's illness; in this way, all of her symptoms were literally "talked away [*wegerzählt*]"—a procedure Bertha herself described as "chimney sweeping" or, more famously, the "talking cure." In one particularly acute episode, Bertha experienced an hysterical pregnancy, suggesting that the child was Breuer's. At that moment, Freud later told Stefan Zweig, Breuer had held the key to psychoanalysis in his hand but, either unable or unwilling to use it, let it slip from his grasp. "With all his great mental endowment," Freud observed, "he had nothing Faustian about him. In conventional horror he took flight and left the patient to a colleague."<sup>16</sup> Bertha eventually recovered to lead a remarkable career as a leading feminist and social worker for Jewish women's organizations. But Freud's relationship with Breuer deteriorated, and as "Anna O." in Freud and Breuer's *Studies in Hysteria* (1895), Bertha's story would suppress many details.

"It was one thing," Gay summarizes, "to recognize hysterical conversion symptoms as the meaningful response to particular traumas, and the neurosis as not simply a flowering of some hereditary disposition but a possible consequence of a stifling environment. It was quite another thing to admit that the ultimate origins of hysteria, and some of its florid manifestations, were sexual in nature."<sup>17</sup> Freud himself was not yet prepared to dismiss the possibility that the symptoms of his hysterical patients were, at least partially, the consequence of heredity, but increasingly he began to look for some early trauma as the source of their strange disabilities. Because these experiences were hidden from the patients themselves, they were revealed only in only the most oblique ways, so that for Freud, listening became not just an art but a method. Until the early 1890s, this included hypnosis, which broadened and deepened patients' field of consciousness, reduced their resistance to their memories and facilitated their expression, and advanced the cathartic process. But Freud increasingly sought "the mysterious element that was at work behind hypnotism," which explained its efficacy. This element was "transference"—the patient's feeling of affection for the therapist that, based on no real relation between them, rather reproduced the patient's unconscious fantasies and persuaded the patient of the existence and power of repressed sexual impulses. Rather than hypnotizing his patients, therefore, Freud asked them to abandon themselves to "free association"—to

dismiss any conscious direction to their thoughts and simply say whatever came into their heads. By simply letting his patients speak in this manner, listening carefully to their apparently meaningless associations, and then seeking deeper levels of meaning, Freud found could achieve the same cathartic effects. By 1892, the basic elements of the psychoanalytic method were in place.<sup>18</sup>

In the 1880s, some of Freud's teachers and colleagues (such as Breuer, Charcot, the Viennese gynecologist Rudolf Chrobak, and others) had hinted that nervous disorders always seemed to involve what Breuer called "*secrets d'alcôve*"—traumatic sexual experiences that had somehow been repugnant to consciousness and thus "forgotten" by the sufferers themselves. The case histories that Freud contributed to *Studies in Hysteria* already suggested, however faintly, that his patients' symptoms had sexual origins; as he continued to reflect on the role of memory in the formation of nervous ailments, he gradually pushed the traumatic incident further and further back in the patient's experience. By early 1896, Freud was writing a paper that claimed, on the basis of thirteen cases, that the traumas causing hysteria "must belong to early childhood (the time before puberty), and their content must consist of an actual irritation of the genitals (proceedings resembling coitus)." This was the infamous "seduction theory," to which Freud committed himself again on 21 April 1896, in a paper titled "The Etiology of Hysteria," read before a select and rather hostile audience at the local Society for Psychiatry and Neurology. By May 1897, Freud himself had begun to have reservations, and by mid-September he had confided to a friend that he was losing confidence in the seduction theory. Some of his doubts arose from his difficulty in bringing the treatment of certain patients to a successful conclusion, but others came from recognition that his theory implied that sexual misconduct was almost universal among the adult male Viennese population. Freud did not abandon the seduction theory immediately, and he continued to believe that some of his neurotic patients had been sexually victimized by their fathers. But he also opened his mind to the possibility that his patients' revelations were in part the products of their imaginations and fantasies. At almost the same time, Freud began his own self-analysis, using the method of free association and the material provided by his memories, slips of the tongue or pen, forgotten names, titles, or passages from literature and, perhaps most important, his dream experience. By October 1897, he had discovered his own Oedipal conflicts and had generalized these to early childhood. Throughout the following year other insights followed, including the unconscious feeling of guilt, the stages of sexual development, the causal link between internally generated myths and religious belief, the "family romance" in which so many children

develop grandiose fantasies about their parents, the revelatory nature of slips and bungled actions, the power of repressed aggressive feelings, and the intricate mechanisms of dream production.

The culmination of this intense self-analysis was *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899), a monumental work that even in its first edition provided an exhaustive bibliographic survey of the literature on dreams, a summary of the fundamental ideas of psychoanalysis, an abundance of case studies, and a comprehensive theory of the mind. A difficult read, it sold only 351 copies for the next six years, and the second edition appeared only ten years after the first. Yet Freud always considered it his most significant work, writing near the end of his life that it contained “the most valuable of all the discoveries it has been my good fortune to make.”<sup>19</sup> Its central concept was “dream work,” whose function is to transform unacceptable impulses and memories into “a story harmless enough to blunt their edge and permit their utterance” and whose tools included complex (albeit unconscious) intellectual activities like condensation, displacement, representation, symbolization, and “secondary revision.”

For our purposes, however, the most significant element of *The Interpretation of Dreams* was its introduction of an idea—the Oedipal complex—that would lie at the very heart of *Totem and Taboo*. “In my experience,” Freud began, “the chief part in the mental lives of all children who later become psychoneurotics is played by their parents. Being in love with the one parent and hating the other are among the essential constituents of the stock of psychical impulses which is formed at that time and which is of such importance in determining the symptoms of the later neuroses.” In a way that he would repeat and expand in *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901) as well as *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905), however, Freud then extended this observation about the mental lives of neurotics to human beings generally, insisting that all are able “to create something absolutely new and peculiar to themselves.”<sup>20</sup> It is only if we assume that the centrality of the parental role in the mental lives of children has “universal validity,” Freud insisted, that we can explain the “profound and universal power” of Sophocles’ great tragedy itself. Alternative explanations—such as the idea that *Oedipus Rex* is a “tragedy of destiny” whose effect derives from the unequal contrast between divine destiny and human will—run aground on the palpable failure of later dramatists, attempting to reproduce this contrast in their own works, to produce anything resembling Sophoclean effects. “If *Oedipus Rex* moves a modern audience no less than it did the contemporary Greek one,” Freud thus argued, the explanation must be that its effect lies not in the contrast between divine destiny and human will but “in the particular nature of the material on which that

contrast is exemplified,” in something that “makes a voice within us ready to recognize the compelling force of destiny.”

In fact, the destiny of King Oedipus moves us “only because it might have been ours.” No less than *Oedipus Rex*, our own dreams suggest that our fate is “to direct our first sexual impulse towards our mother and our first hatred and our first murderous wish against our father.” By slaying his father and marrying his mother, therefore, Oedipus shows us the fulfillment of our own childhood wishes. But there is a difference: unlike the unfortunate Oedipus, we have succeeded in detaching our sexual impulses from our mothers and in forgetting our jealousy of our fathers. In Oedipus, these “primaevial wishes of our childhood” have been fulfilled; for precisely this reason, we “shrink back from him with the whole force of the repression by which those wishes have since that time been held down within us. While the poet, as he unravels the past, brings to light the guilt of Oedipus, he is at the same time compelling us to recognize our own inner minds, in which those same impulses, though suppressed, are still to be found.” No less than Oedipus, therefore, we live “in ignorance of these wishes, so repugnant to morality, which have been forced upon us by Nature, and after their revelation we may all of us well seek to close our eyes to the scenes of our childhood.”<sup>21</sup>

The significance of Freud’s argument here can hardly be overestimated. By insisting both that psychoneurotics are able to create “something absolutely new and peculiar to themselves” and that in doing so their feelings of love and hatred toward their parents differ only in degree from those of normal children, he had simultaneously reaffirmed both the Platonist argument that self-knowledge is the prerequisite to any full and complete life and the Nietzschean argument that such an enlarged life might be a work of art. But for Plato and Nietzsche, such lives were the disposition of only the few. Freud, by sharp contrast, had indeed “democratized genius” by granting each of us a creative unconscious.<sup>22</sup> This Freudian democratization, as we shall see, would be extended to primitive peoples as well. But first Freud had to develop his theory of the sexual etiology of the neuroses.

Freud’s interest in sexuality went back to the early 1890s, and even then he was hardly alone. As early as 1845, in a pamphlet on bordellos, an obscure provincial German physician named Adolf Patze had observed that “the sexual drive already manifests itself among little six-, four-, and even three-year-old children.” In 1867, the more famous English psychiatrist Henry Maudsley ridiculed the notion that “the instinct of propagation” does not become manifest until puberty. Richard von Krafft-Ebing’s *Psychopathia Sexualis* appeared in 1886, becoming a publishing success as well as a classic in the scientific study of sexual perversion, while Havelock Ellis’s *Man*

and *Woman* (1894) was followed almost immediately by the first volume of *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (7 vols., 1897–1928), a virtual encyclopedia of human sexual biology, behavior, and attitudes. If Freud knew nothing of Patze, he was certainly aware of Maudsley, Kraft-Ebing, and Ellis, and after the mid-1890s, he began to “tentatively” consider the idea of infantile sexuality.<sup>23</sup> In a paper called “The Aetiology of Hysteria” (1896), he emphasized early childhood in the development of important phenomena of later sexual life.<sup>24</sup> James Strachey, Freud’s translator and editor, has emphasized that the “gist” of the discussion of the Oedipus complex in *The Interpretation of Dreams* had already been advanced by Freud in a letter to Wilhelm Fliess as early as 15 October 1897 and that a “still earlier hint” at the discovery of the Oedipus complex had been included in a letter of 31 May 1897.<sup>25</sup> “A theory of sexuality,” Freud wrote to Fliess in October 1899, “may become the next successor to the dream book.”<sup>26</sup> More than any other, Freud’s “sex book”—*Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905)—would become the foundation for his psychological theory of religion.

Freud began with a discussion of sexual aberrations, immediately introducing a concept that would play a crucial role in *Totem and Taboo*. The existence of sexual needs in animals (including human beings), he observed, is understood by biologists on the analogy of nutrition (or hunger), and since everyday language has no more specific alternative, science has instead embraced the word “libido” to refer to this sexual instinct. But if everyday language lacks a word for this particular kind of “hunger,” popular opinion has quite definite ideas about the nature and characteristics of the sexual instinct: it is absent in childhood and emerges at the time of puberty; its manifestation is the irresistible attraction exercised by one sex upon the other; and its aim is presumed to be sexual union (or at least to lead in that direction). These views, Freud then argued, “give a very false picture of the true situation. If we look into them more closely we shall find that they contain a number of errors, inaccuracies and hasty conclusions.” As the first step in such a closer examination, Freud introduced two technical terms: the “sexual object” (the person from whom sexual attraction proceeds) and the “sexual aim” (the act toward which the sexual instinct tends).

Freud’s discussion of the sexual *object* began with Plato’s *Symposium*, where Aristophanes suggested that the earliest human beings were divided into two halves (man and woman) and that these are always striving to unite again in love. This poetic fable, Freud suggested, is indistinguishable from the popular view of the sexual instinct, but in fact, there are many men whose sexual object is a man rather than a woman and many women whose sexual object is a woman rather than a man. Such “inversions” take a variety of different forms, from which we may assume that the sexual



instinct is at first independent of its object and has little to do with its attractions. A second type of variation concerning the sexual object of the instinct, in which the object is a sexually immature person or an animal, appears even among those who are “normal” in all other respects, teaching us the related lesson that the sexual instinct is among “the least controlled by the higher activities of the mind.” Without yet attempting an explanation of these deviations with regard to the sexual object, therefore, Freud focused on the contingent nature of the relationship between object and instinct and thus on the insignificance of the former to the latter: “Under a great number of conditions and in surprisingly numerous individuals, the nature and importance of the sexual object recedes into the background. What is essential and constant in the sexual instinct,” Freud concluded, “is something else.”<sup>27</sup>

The normal sexual *aim* is taken to be “the union of the genitals in the act known as copulation,” leading to “a release of sexual tension and a temporary extinction of the sexual instinct—a satisfaction analogous to the satiation of hunger.” But even in normal cases, Freud observed, we find intermediate relations (such as looking, touching, kissing, caressing) on the road to copulation, which are recognized as preliminary sexual aims. “Perversions” might thus be defined as sexual activities that either: extend anatomically beyond the regions of the body designed for sexual union; or linger over the intermediate relations to the sexual object that ought normally be rapidly traversed on the way to sexual union. Anatomical extensions, of course, are the rule rather than the exception, for it is only rarely that the valuation of the sexual object stops at its genitals. On the contrary, the appreciation (Freud called it “overvaluation”) not only extends to the whole body of the sexual object and involves every sensation derived from it, but it spreads into the psychological sphere as well, so that the subject become “intellectually infatuated” with the mental achievements and perfections of the sexual object. In some cases, the normal sexual object is actually replaced by another object that bears some relation to it, but which is itself entirely unsuited to serve the normal sexual aim. “Such substitutes,” Freud noted *en passant*, “are with some justice likened to the fetishes in which savages believe that their gods are embodied.” But Freud’s more important point here was not to relate childhood sexuality to the religious practices of primitive peoples but merely to insist that some element of fetishism is almost always present in normal love, especially where the normal sexual aim seems unattainable or its fulfillment is prevented through internal or external repression. Finally, such frustrations of the sexual aim also encourage the tendency to linger over the intermediate relations to the sexual object, transforming them into new sexual aims (touching, seeing, etc.) that

might become the source of neuroses or even be “sublimated” into art or other “higher” cultural activities.<sup>28</sup>

Because the sexual instinct has been assumed to be absent in early childhood, Freud observed, the study of the sexual instinct has focused more on heredity (and thus on an individual’s ancestors) than on his childhood, and those scattered remarks in the literature about “precocious sexual activity” in young children (including erections, masturbation, and even activities resembling coitus) have been treated as exceptional events, “as oddities or as horrifying instances of precocious depravity.” This mistake, which Freud considered responsible for our continuing ignorance of the fundamental conditions of sexual life, has two causes. The first is that scientists themselves, as the result of their own upbringing, have been influenced by considerations of bourgeois propriety; the second is an important psychological phenomenon: the peculiar amnesia that hides the earliest beginnings of childhood up to the ages six to eight, which itself has eluded further investigation. “Why,” Freud asked rhetorically, “should our memory lag so far behind the other activities of our minds? We have, on the contrary, good reason to believe that there is no period at which the capacity for receiving and reproducing impressions is greater than precisely during the years of childhood.”<sup>29</sup>

As he had in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud here again extended to all of us the discoveries he had made through his treatment of neurotics. There is no doubt that the germs of sexual impulses are already present in the newborn child, he insisted, and that these continue to develop, but their development is then overtaken by a progressive process of suppression that, in turn, is periodically interrupted by the further advances of the sexual instinct. It is during this period of “sexual latency” that mental forces (feelings of disgust or shame, the claims of aesthetic and moral ideas, etc.) are built up, functioning like dams that impede the flow of the sexual instinct. The activity of infantile sexual impulses continues throughout, but their energy is diverted to other ends. This is the mechanism Freud described as “sublimation.” On the one hand, the sexual impulses cannot be utilized during early childhood, for the reproductive functions have been deferred, but on the other hand, these impulses seem “perverse”: they arise from erotogenic zones and derive their activity from instincts that, considering the direction of the subject’s development, can only arouse unpleasurable feelings. Consequently, these impulses evoke opposing forces (“reacting impulses”) that, in order to suppress this unpleasure effectively, construct the mental dams mentioned above: disgust, shame, and morality.<sup>30</sup>

This opened the door to Freud’s detailed description of the various aspects of infantile sexuality, which he described as essentially autoerotic;

that is, as characterized by the self-stimulation of the erotogenic zones of the child's own body, with the goal of achieving pleasure or satisfaction. But Freud almost immediately entered an important (and, to a bourgeois mentality, shocking) qualification. Under the influence of seduction, he observed, children can become "polymorphously perverse"—bluntly, they can be led into all possible kinds of sexual irregularities, indicating that "an aptitude for them is innately present in their disposition. There is consequently little resistance towards carrying them out, since the mental dams against sexual excesses—shame, disgust and morality—have either not yet been constructed at all or are only in course of construction, according to the age of the child." Moreover, in spite of its predominantly autoerotic character, infantile sexuality already exhibits components that involve other people as sexual objects, scopophilia (pleasure in looking), exhibitionism, sadism, masochism, and so on. These activities reach their first peak at about three to five years of age, when children begin to exhibit the first signs of the instinct for knowledge or research. Freud emphasized that this instinct, which would play a large role in his classic study of Leonardo da Vinci (see below), is not among the elementary instinctual components, nor is it exclusively a part of sexuality. The child's early sexual research, Freud emphasized, is guided not by *theoretical*, but rather by strictly *practical*, interests. The riddle of "where babies come from," for example, which is introduced by the arrival of another child (and thus a potential competitor for the love and care of the mother), is of great concern. The male child's discovery that some among his peers lack a penis gives rise to castration anxiety, while the female child's realization that she is among the deprived causes penis envy. But these early efforts at sexual research inevitably leave two elements undiscovered: the fertilizing role of semen and the existence of the female orifice—so that the frustrated child eventually renounces the research, often leaving behind a permanent injury to the instinct for knowledge.<sup>31</sup>

With puberty, changes occur that are destined to give infantile sexual life its final, normal shape. Previously autoerotic, the sexual instinct now finds an object, so that "a new sexual aim appears, and all the component instincts combine to attain it, while the erotogenic zones become subordinated to the primacy of the genital zone." Even before the somatic conditions of puberty are present, Freud added, the parents' affection for their child might have awakened his sexual instinct prematurely; for the child, the simplest course would seem to be choosing as his sexual object the same person whom he has loved previously. But sexual maturation is postponed, so that the child might erect the barrier against incest and thus take into himself the moral precepts that expressly exclude the person whom he has

loved in childhood. Freud was abundantly clear that respect for this barrier is a demand made by society, which “must defend itself against the danger that the interests which it needs for the establishment of higher social units may be swallowed up by the family.” For this reason, society seeks to loosen the connection of each individual (but especially adolescent boys) to the family. It is in the world of ideas, however, that the choice of an object is first accomplished; in that fantasy world, the child inevitably chooses the parent of the opposite sex.<sup>32</sup> This, of course, gives rise to feelings of jealousy and hatred toward the father—the Oedipal complex to which Freud had briefly alluded in *The Interpretation of Dreams* and which would become the central idea of *Totem and Taboo*.

### THE FREUDIAN ANIMUS

“NEITHER IN my private life nor in my writings,” Freud wrote shortly before he died, “have I ever made a secret of being an out-and-out unbeliever.”<sup>33</sup> So for Freud it was belief, not unbelief, that needed to be explained. Instances of this commitment appear in Freud’s groundbreaking works just after the turn of the century. In *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901), for example, he assumed that the “conscious ignorance and unconscious knowledge” of the motivations behind accidental psychic events (slips of the tongue, willful forgetting, etc.) are two of the causes of religious superstition. “Because the superstitious person knows nothing of the motivation of his own chance actions,” he emphasized, “and because the fact of this motivation presses for a place in his field of recognition, he is forced to allocate it, by displacement, to the external world.” As a consequence, “the mythological view of the world, which extends a long way into the most modern religions, is nothing but psychology projected into the external world.” Through the psychological study of the unconscious, we might explain “the myths of paradise and the fall of man, of God, of good and evil, of immortality, and so on, and to transform metaphysics into metapsychology.” Anticipating an argument he would later apply in his studies of the psychotic Daniel Paul Schreber (1911) and *Totem and Taboo* (1913), Freud compared religiosity and paranoid delusion. “When human beings began to think,” he observed, they were “forced to explain the external world anthropomorphically by means of a multitude of personalities in their own image; chance events, which they interpreted superstitiously, were thus actions and manifestations of persons.” In doing so, they behaved “just like paranoiacs, who draw conclusions from insignificant signs given them by other people, and just like all normal people, who quite rightly base their

estimate of their neighbours' character on their chance and unintentional actions. It is only in our modern, scientific but as yet by no means perfected *Weltanschauung*," Freud concluded, "that superstition seems so very much out of place; in the *Weltanschauung* of pre-scientific times and peoples it was justified and consistent."<sup>34</sup> Again, in *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905), Freud recalled a "definitely blasphemous" joke told by Heinrich Heine on his deathbed. When a friendly priest reminded Heine of God's mercy and gave him hope that God would forgive him his sins, He replied: "Bien sûr qu'il me pardonnera: c'est son métier." Heine's implication was: "Of course he'll forgive me. That's what he's there for, and that's the only reason I've taken him on (as one engages one's doctor or one's lawyer)." So in this dying poet, Freud explained, "a consciousness stirred that he had created God and equipped him with power so as to make use of him when the occasion arose. What was supposed to be the created being revealed itself just before its annihilation as the creator."<sup>35</sup>

During the same year, Freud's notes included a terse entry—"Religion as ob[sessive] neurosis—Private religion"—which was soon expanded into his first, exploratory exercise in the psychology of religion, "Obsessive Actions and Religious Practices" (1907). Though hardly the first to note the resemblance between obsessive actions and religious ceremonies, Freud was convinced that this was more than superficial, so that an understanding of the origin of "neurotic ceremonials" might, by analogy, allow him to draw inferences about the psychology of the religious life. These "ceremonials" consist in making small adjustments (such as additions, restrictions, arrangements, etc., always carried out in the same manner) to particular everyday actions. In the ceremonial of going to bed, for example, "the chair must stand in a particular place beside the bed, the clothes must lie upon it folded in a particular order; the blanket must be tucked in at the bottom and the sheet smoothed out; the pillows must be arranged in such and such a manner; and the subject's own body must lie in a precisely defined position. Only after all this may he go to sleep." To us as well as the neurotic, these adjustments appear to be meaningless formalities, but the neurotic is incapable of giving them up, for any deviation from the ceremonial produces intolerable anxiety. And because neurotic ceremonials involve adjustments primarily to the neurotic's private, solitary activities, they can develop and remain concealed for long periods of time, leaving his other social behavior unaffected. (Freud was thus convinced that physicians actually see only a fraction of those who suffer from such ailments.) Even interruptions of the ceremony are badly tolerated, and the presence of other people during its performance is almost always prohibited. This special conscientiousness with which the ceremonial is carried out, as well as the anxiety which in-

evitably follows its neglect, Freud observed, identify the ceremonial as a “sacred act.”<sup>36</sup>

To Freud, the resemblance between neurotic ceremonials and religious rituals—the qualms of conscience brought on by their neglect; their complete isolation from all other actions; the conscientiousness with which they are carried out in every detail, etc.—seemed obvious. But he also acknowledged differences, some of which were so glaring that they made the comparison a sacrilege. These included the greater individual variability of neurotic ceremonials; their private as opposed to public and communal nature; and above all, the fact that the minutiae of religious ceremonies are full of significance and symbolic meaning, while those of neurotics appear foolish and senseless. But it was precisely this last, sharpest difference between neurotic and religious ceremonials, Freud observed, that disappears when (with the aid of psychoanalysis) we penetrate to the true meaning of obsessive actions. For then we find that “the obsessive actions are perfectly significant in every detail, that they serve important interests of the personality and that they give expression to experiences that are still operative and to thoughts that are cathected with affect.”<sup>37</sup> Obsessive actions and ceremonials perform these functions either by direct, historical representation or by its indirect, symbolic counterpart; what are represented, and thus require interpretation, are the most intimate (and primarily sexual) experiences of the patient. But if obsessive actions are always meaningful, one condition of the illness is that the person obeying a compulsion carries it out without understanding this, so that he can become aware of this meaning only through psychoanalytic treatment. Similarly, while priests and scholars may be familiar with the meaning and significance of religious rituals, Freud observed, the motives that compel most believers to participate in these practices are unknown to them.

What motives lie behind obsessive actions? The sufferer from these obsessions behaves as if he were dominated by a sense of unconscious guilt whose origin lies in early mental events, but this guilt is constantly being revived by temptations in the present that, combined with the idea of punishment, yield a lurking sense of anxiety and the expectation of misfortune. When the ceremonial is first constructed, the patient is still conscious that he must do certain things lest such misfortunes befall him, and in general, he is still aware of the nature of the expected misfortune, but already he is unaware of the connection between the occasion on which this expectant anxiety arrives and the misfortune that it threatens. So a ceremonial begins as a kind of defensive, protective measure, not unlike those found in religious beliefs and practices—the insistence of believers that they’re all sinners, and the pious observances (prayers, invocations, etc.) with which such people begin daily acts.

The cause of neurotic obsessions, which is the repression, in early childhood, of a natural sexual impulse, suggests an even stronger connection between neurosis and religion. For in the course of this repression, Freud explained, a “special conscientiousness” is created and directed against the instinct’s drive for expression, but this “psychical reaction-formation” feels insecure, for it is constantly threatened by the instinct “lurking in the unconscious.” These drives of the instinct are experienced as temptations, while the process of instinctual repression generates anxiety, which soon gains control over the individual’s future in the form of expectant anxiety. Only partially successful at best, Freud emphasized, this repression constantly and increasingly threatens to fail, so that “fresh psychical efforts are continually required to counterbalance the forward pressure of the instinct.” Obsessive and ceremonial actions thus serve two functions: first, as defenses against temptations, and second, as protections against anxiously awaited misfortunes. As a defense against temptations, obsessive actions soon fail and are replaced by prohibitions whose purpose is avoid situations in which temptations might arise. Similarly, ceremonials represent conditions under which something not yet absolutely forbidden is permitted. Since obsessive actions also represent a kind of compromise between the conflicting forces of the mind, they reproduce some of the pleasure they are designed to prevent. In sum, they serve the repressed instinct as well as the agencies that repress it; as the illness progresses, actions originally concerned with maintaining the defense come increasingly to resemble “the proscribed actions through which the instinct was able to find expression in childhood.”<sup>38</sup>

Many of these features of neurotic obsessions, ceremonials, and prohibitions, Freud then observed, can be found in the religious life as well. Like a neurosis, for example, the formation of a religion seems to be based on the suppression or renunciation of certain instinctual impulses. In the case of religion, however, these impulses are not exclusively components of the sexual instinct but are rather egoistic, self-seeking, and socially harmful instincts (albeit often with a sexual component as well). A sense of guilt following temptation and an expectant anxiety in the fear of divine punishment, of course, have been familiar elements in religious belief for much longer than they’ve been acknowledged in the treatment of neuroses. And just as in the case of neurotics, the suppression of instinct is an inadequate and interminable process in religion; indeed, “complete backslidings into sin are more common among pious people than among neurotics,” and these “give rise to a new form of religious activity, namely acts of penance, which have their counterpart in obsessional neurosis.”<sup>39</sup>

In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud had introduced the concept of psychical displacement, whereby the “dream work” converts unacceptable

impulses and memories into a story harmless enough to blunt their edge and permit their utterance. Now he insisted that the same process dominates the production of neurotic obsessions, ceremonials, and prohibitions. "It is already clear from the few examples of obsessive actions given above," Freud summarized, "that their symbolism and the details of their execution are brought about by a displacement from the actual, important thing on to a small one which takes its place." In religion there is a similar tendency in the same direction to displace psychical values so that the ceremonials of religious practice gradually become the essential thing, pushing aside the underlying thoughts; this is why religions are constantly subject to reforms, which attempt retroactively to restore the original balance of values. Even the "character of compromise" that obsessive actions reveal in their role as neurotic symptoms has its counterpart in religious observances, when we consider "how commonly all the acts which religion forbids—the expressions of the instincts it has suppressed—are committed precisely in the name of, and ostensibly for the sake of, religion."

In view of these numerous similarities and analogies, Freud concluded, we might reasonably consider obsessional neurosis as an "individual religiosity" and religion as a "universal obsessional neurosis." The progressive renunciation of "constitutional instincts" (whether sexual or egoistic) is one of the foundations of human civilization; some part of this renunciation, Freud added, is effected by the religions of civilization, which require the individual to sacrifice his instinctual pleasure to the deity. Moreover, many of the things that mankind has renounced in the name of God are still permitted in his name (like religiously sanctioned matrimony), so that the transference of socially harmful instincts to God was the means by which man freed himself from their domination. To Freud, this in turn explained why so many human attributes, together with the misdeeds that follow from them, were ascribed to the ancient gods. Nor is it a contradiction, Freud added, that man was still not permitted to justify his own failing through an appeal to the divine nature.<sup>40</sup>

Shortly after the publication of this paper, Freud again turned his attention to religion and culture in *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood* (1910). Freud's interest in Leonardo was evident as early as 9 October 1898, when he mentioned in a letter to his friend Wilhelm Fliess that the great Renaissance painter was "perhaps the most famous left-handed individual" and someone "not known to have had any love-affairs." In 1907, responding to a questionnaire about his favorite books, Freud mentioned D.S. Merezhkovsky's 1902 study of Leonardo; on 17 October 1909, he wrote to Jung that one of his patients seemed to have Leonardo's constitution (albeit not his genius), adding that he was planning to read Smiraglia Scognamiglio's *Ricerche*



e *Documenti sulla Giovinezza di Leonardo da Vinci, 1452-1482* (1900), which particularly dealt with the artist's youth. On December 1, Freud gave a talk on Leonardo before the Vienna Psycho-Analytic Society, and by April 1910, the Leonardo book was finished.<sup>41</sup>

Freud's initial and most general assumption was that no person was so great as to be disgraced by being subject to laws of psychology, but his particular interest in Leonardo derived from two other facts. First, Freud was struck by the fact that his subject so thoroughly combined the genius of the artist with that of the scientist and engineer. In the Renaissance, of course, people were familiar with the convergence of a variety of talents and abilities in a single individual, but Leonardo, in Freud's mind, was almost alone in his dissection of the dead bodies of horses and human beings, his construction of flying machines, and his studies of the nutrition of plants and their reactions to poisons. In studies like these, Freud insisted, Leonardo "departed widely from the commentators on Aristotle, and came close to the despised alchemists, in whose laboratories experimental research had found some refuge at least in those unfavourable times." Second, related to this, Freud noted that Leonardo was always a slow painter and thus could never become reconciled to the fresco, which required rapid work while the surface was still moist; as his scientific studies progressed, he found it increasingly difficult to paint and draw at all. Freud connected these two observations to Leonardo's apparent resistance to passion and sexuality. This "postponement of loving until full knowledge is acquired," Freud added in a remark that might equally have applied to himself, "ends in a substitution of the latter for the former. A man who has won his way to a state of knowledge cannot properly be said to love and hate; he remains beyond love and hatred." The artist, Freud added several pages later, "had once taken the investigator into his service to assist him; now the servant had become the stronger and suppressed his master."<sup>42</sup>

In Leonardo, therefore, we find the "instinct for knowledge" (recall the discussion in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*) developed to an excessive strength. In such cases, psychoanalysis teaches us to expect two other things: that this instinct was already active in early childhood; and that it had probably been reinforced by sexual instincts, so that it might later take the place of an adult sexual life. So Freud not only argued that Leonardo's scientific activities were works of sublimation (the immediate goals of the sexual instinct were replaced with others more highly valued and not specifically sexual), but he also explained how this particular kind of sublimation might take place. It is a commonplace, for example, that small children are constantly asking questions of all kinds. But these questions, Freud insisted, are mere circumlocutions, designed to replace the *real* question (usu-

ally prompted by the arrival of a sibling) that the child *wants to* ask but *does not*: Where do babies come from? The urgency of this question leads the child into that period of infantile sexual research that Freud had discussed in the *Three Essays*. Initially repressed and seemingly forgotten, the instinct for research survives and eventually expresses itself in one of three different ways. First, the research might suffer the same fate as sexuality itself, leaving the child's curiosity inhibited, limiting the free activity of his intelligence, and causing neurotic inhibition. Second, where intellectual development is sufficiently strong to resist repression, the satisfaction that accompanies the ordering and explaining of things might replace sexual satisfaction in later life, producing neurotic compulsive thinking. And third, in "the rarest and most perfect" adaptation, the sexual instinct escapes repression by being sublimated into curiosity and then scientific research, avoiding both neurotic inhibition and compulsive thinking. Leonardo's powerful instinct for research, together with the atrophy of his sexual life, made him a model of this third type of adaptation. "The core of his nature, and the secret of it," Freud concluded, "would appear to be that after his curiosity had been activated in infancy in the service of sexual interests he succeeded in sublimating the greater part of his libido into an urge for research."<sup>43</sup>

Freud then turned to a more detailed, psychoanalytic interpretation of Leonardo's "work of sublimation." Discussing the flight of vultures in his notebooks, Leonardo had suddenly digressed to report a memory from his early childhood in which a vulture flew down to his cradle, forced open his mouth, and struck his lips many times with his tail. Not surprisingly, Freud suggested that this was not a memory but a fantasy, formed at a later date and then transposed back into Leonardo's childhood. Such fantasies (as Freud had already argued in *The Interpretation of Dreams*) might distort the past but still represent its reality; as such, they are analogous to the myths and legends of ancient societies: "In spite of all the distortions and misunderstandings," Freud argued, such myths and legends "still represent the reality of the past: they are what a people forms out of the experience of its early days and under the dominance of motives that were once powerful and still operate today; and if it were only possible, by a knowledge of all the forces at work, to undo these distortions, there would be no difficulty in disclosing the historical truth lying behind the legendary material." Similarly, what someone like Leonardo thinks he remembers from his childhood "is not a matter of indifference; as a rule the residual memories—which he himself does not understand—cloak priceless pieces of evidence about the most important features in his mental development."<sup>44</sup>

What, then, are we to make of Leonardo's childhood "memory" of a vulture visiting his cradle? The tail, Freud explained, is one of the most familiar

symbols and substitutive expressions for the male sex organ, while the fantasy of a vulture opening a child's mouth and beating at its lips represents the act of fellatio. Leonardo's fantasy thus resembled many of the dreams and fantasies Freud had discovered among women and "passive" homosexuals (those who play the part of women in sexual relations) and thus both disguised and concealed his memory of sucking (or being suckled) at his mother's breast, "a scene of human beauty that he, like so many artists, undertook to depict with his brush, in the guise of the mother of God and her child." Leonardo's "memory" was thus a passive homosexual fantasy, an interpretation supported by biographical accounts of him as a man "with homosexual feelings," while the vulture itself was Leonardo's mother, an interpretation supported analogically on the evidence of ancient myth and religion. For ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics represent the mother with the picture of a vulture, an association born of the belief that all vultures were female and became impregnated by the wind during flight; the Egyptians also worshipped a mother goddess (Mut), who was represented as having the head of a vulture.<sup>45</sup>

How does Egyptian religion help us to understand Leonardo's fantasy? First, Freud explained, we may assume that Leonardo (an avid reader of ancient texts) was familiar with the Egyptian connection between the vulture and motherhood and thus would have understood that he was a "vulture-child" (as an illegitimate child, he had a mother but no father until the age of five), as well as recalling the pleasures he had experienced at his mother's breast. The religious representation of the Madonna and child would have reinforced this memory, helping Leonardo to identify with the infant Christ; this, Freud insisted, is the real significance of Leonardo's fantasy: "If it is true that the unintelligible memories of a person's childhood and the phantasies that are built on them invariably emphasize the most important elements in his mental development," Freud explained, "then it follows that the fact which the vulture phantasy confirms, namely that Leonardo spent the first years of his life alone with his mother, will have been of decisive influence in the formation of his inner life." As a consequence, Leonardo began at an early age to become a researcher, "tormented as he was by the great question of where babies come from and what the father has to do with their origin."<sup>46</sup>

But why was the content of Leonardo's fantasy (the mother as a vulture) cast into a homosexual situation (a vulture with a penis)? Here again Freud appealed to ancient Egyptian religion, and particularly the process of fusion and syncretization in which Mut (the vulture-headed mother goddess) became androgynous, acquiring an erect male phallus to go along with her breasts. This combination of male and female characteristics is also found

in Leonardo's fantasy, but Freud believed that Leonardo had learned this not from his ancient texts but from his own infantile imagination. The early sexual researches of the male child often focus on his penis, which he considers so valuable and important that he can't imagine its absence in people (females) who otherwise resemble him so completely. The male child thus assumes that all people, including females, possess a penis like his own, which leads to an intense desire to see the female genitalia. Having done so, the child still can't accept the possibility that females lack a penis, and thus he assumes, first, that it will soon appear, and then later, that it must have been cut off. This leads the child to fear that he, too, will suffer the same fate (castration anxiety); under the influence of this fear, he comes to despise the unhappy creatures on whom this cruel punishment has already fallen.

These observations led Freud to some more general observations about the origin of religion. In modern societies, he observed, the genitals are "pudenda," objects of shame and even disgust, whose function is denied and concealed. But in primitive societies, they were the pride and hope of human beings, were often worshipped as gods, and transmitted their divine functions to newly learned human activities. As these societies evolved, their basic nature was sublimated, and official religion hid their sexual nature from the general consciousness. But even the most advanced religions of modern societies, Freud insisted, contain the survivals of this earlier stage of social evolution. Appealing analogically to the biological principle that "ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny," Freud then argued that the mental development of the individual repeats the course of human development; thus the vulture's tail in Leonardo's fantasy and the androgynously formed mother goddess are derived from the same psychological source—the child's assumption that his mother has a penis.

Recalling that Leonardo was probably emotionally if not actively homosexual, Freud suggested that the most striking feature of his fantasy is his passive (being suckled) rather than active (sucking) role, indicating that his childhood relationship with his mother was the cause of his later, sublimated homosexuality. This observation provided Freud with his more general explanation for the cause of homosexuality, which he discovered in an early, extremely intense erotic attachment for the mother. Such an attachment, he added, is often inadvertently encouraged by an excessive tenderness on the part of the mother, as well as the absence of the father from his proper familial role. In effect, therefore, homosexuality is a kind of narcissism or auto-eroticism. As the child grows older, he must repress his love for his mother, which leads him to identify with her and take her as the model in whose image he will choose new objects of his love. While the homosexual might seem to pursue other men as his lovers, he is actually

running away from other women, who might lead him to be unfaithful to his ideal, repressed image of his mother. And this, Freud argued, explains one of the most enigmatic of Leonardo's artistic creations—the *Mona Lisa*, and particularly her smile. Art critics, he reminds us, have often noted that this smile combines the most perfect representation of the contrasts that dominate the erotic life of women—reserve and seduction, the most devoted tenderness and a ruthless and demanding sensuality. Leonardo, according to Freud, was fascinated by this smile precisely because it awoke in him something that had long lain dormant in his mind—an old memory that, after all, was not in fact a memory but a fantasy.

In Freud's understanding of religion, of course, it was not Leonardo's mother but his father who took center stage. For Freud, the sparse, chilly record of the latter's death in Leonardo's notebooks was significant (his father had been absent until Leonardo was five, and when he returned became a formidable rival for his mother's attentions). Leonardo thus had a lifelong compulsion to copy and outdo his father. In his paintings, this had a negative effect. Leonardo created them and then cared no more about them, just as his father had not cared for him, but in his scientific work, it not only prolonged those sexual researches (inhibited by his father) that he had pursued as a child but led to his dismissal of traditional authority (the father) and embracing of nature (the mother). And in Leonardo's religious views, it yielded a skepticism that rivaled Freud's own. Psychoanalysis, Freud explained, teaches us that a personal God is nothing more than an exalted father and that people tend to lose their religious beliefs when their father's authority breaks down. This is why religion protects some people against neurotic illness: it removes the paternally imposed sense of guilt, while the unbeliever must grapple with guilt on his own. Freud thus embraced the view that Leonardo's paintings took from sacred figures the last remnant of their connection to the church, using them instead to represent powerful human emotions; and "the reflections in which he has recorded the deep wisdom of his last years of life," Freud concluded, "breathe the resignation of the human being who subjects himself to . . . the laws of nature, and who expects no alleviation from the goodness or grace of God. There is scarcely any doubt that Leonardo had prevailed over both dogmatic and personal religion, and had by his work of research removed himself far from the position from which the Christian believer surveys the world."<sup>47</sup>

Even as Freud was reading the proofs of his Leonardo essay, he had begun to reflect on the distinguished Saxon jurist and paranoiac Daniel Paul Schreber, whose case was in some ways similar to that of Leonardo. Neither of these "analaysands," for example, was actually treated or even seen by Freud—for Leonardo, he had the notebooks, paintings, and drawings, and for Schreber,

he had only an autobiographical memoir (albeit an extraordinary one). Like Leonardo, Schreber was homosexual, which allowed Freud to continue his exploration of a theme that interested him deeply during this period. When Freud stumbled on Schreber in the fall of 1909, he had also been interested in paranoia for at least two years, and Schreber (like Leonardo before him) rapidly became an obsession. Finally, like Leonardo, Schreber was a source of great pleasure for Freud, who (with Jung) called him “the wonderful Schreber” and jokingly suggested that he “should have been made a professor of psychiatry and director of a mental hospital.”<sup>48</sup>

Schreber’s father was Daniel Gottlob Moritz Schreber, an orthopedic physician, prolific author, and well-known educational reformer who invented the “Schreber Geradehalter,” a device made of boards and straps designed to improve the posture of young children, as well as a coldwater health system, indoor gymnastic systems, outdoor play systems, and a systematic lifelong diet guide. But as a parent, Moritz was less successful, one of his sons committing suicide and the other becoming psychotic. Moritz himself entered a deep depression ten years before his death in Paul’s teens. Paul himself, born in 1842, enjoyed a distinguished career in Saxony’s legal system, first as a civil servant and later as a judge. In 1884, he suffered his first mental breakdown, attributing it to overwork and recovering fairly quickly. But he then began to suffer from delusionary hypochondria, spending several weeks in a mental hospital. By December 1884, Schreber was a patient at the University Psychiatric Clinic in Leipzig, where he was successfully treated by Dr. Paul Flechsig, who would eventually become the object of many of his paranoid delusions. Within six months, Schreber was discharged as cured, to be appointed to the bench in the following year. By 1893, a man of undeniable competence, he had risen to Saxony’s highest court, where he served as a presiding judge.

Soon, however, Schreber began to complain of insomnia and, at the age of fifty-one, suffered another disastrous breakdown and attempted suicide. By late November 1893, he had returned to the Leipzig Clinic, where he was treated for psychosis and then transferred to the more brutal Sonnenstein Asylum. It was during this period, “as an account of what he believed were his unique experiences and as a plea for release,” that Schreber wrote his *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness* (1903). The book was instantly recognized as remarkable, a report “from the borderline between sanity and madness,” an account of “what it is to be forsaken by everything familiar and real, and of the delusionary world that gets invented in its place.”<sup>49</sup> Released from the asylum in July 1902, Schreber soon suffered another breakdown and spent his last years in a mental hospital, dying in April 1911. But his *Memoirs* would become the most written-about document in all of psychiatric

literature. Jung, who was particularly interested in psychosis, soon drew Freud's attention to it. By the fall of 1909, Freud had told his friend and colleague Karl Abraham that he was in the midst of "thickest work" and had "penetrated a little more deeply into paranoia."<sup>50</sup> During the summer of 1910, Freud took Schreber's *Memoirs* with him to Italy, working on it in Rome and then later, through the fall, in Vienna. The result was his "Psychoanalytic Notes Upon an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia," which was completed sometime before December 1910.

The psychoanalytic investigation of paranoia, Freud began, presents special difficulties for physicians who, like himself, were in private practice: since they could offer treatment only if there was some prospect of therapeutic success, these doctors could accept patients suffering from paranoia only briefly if at all. Freud thus acknowledged that he had rarely been able to obtain more than a superficial view of the structure of paranoia. In fact, the psychoanalytic study of paranoia would be impossible if the patients themselves did not possess the peculiarity of betraying (albeit in a distorted form) precisely those things that neurotics keep hidden: "Since paranoiacs cannot be compelled to overcome their internal resistances," Freud explained, "and since in any case they only say what they choose to say, it follows that this is precisely a disorder in which a written report or a printed case history can take the place of personal acquaintance with a patient."<sup>51</sup> For these reasons, Freud argued that it is legitimate to attempt a psychoanalytic interpretation of a patient whom he had never seen (Schreber) but whose "case history" (Schreber's *Memoirs*) was publicly accessible.

In addition to providing an account of his mental illness, Schreber's book was an attempt to secure his release from the Sonnenstein. This required Schreber to file legal appeals in a Dresden court, and since Schreber's physicians were no less determined to keep him interned, the book's addenda include several medical reports written for the court by Dr. Guido Weber, a neuroanatomist and the superintendent of the Sonnenstein. Freud was particularly interested in Weber's report of 1899, which begins by describing Schreber's symptoms upon arriving at the Leipzig clinic in late November 1893. These included hypochondria, hallucinations of persecution, hyperesthesia, extreme sensitivity to light and sound, visual and auditory hallucinations, attempts at suicide, and so on. Gradually, Weber reported, these delusions took on a "mystical and religious character": for example, Schreber communicated directly with God; devils were playing games with him; he saw "miracles," heard "holy music," and eventually believed that he was living in another world.

Transferred to the Sonnenstein, Schreber at first exhibited the same collection of symptoms, together with a rigid demeanor that left him "com-

pletely inaccessible and shut off in himself.” Within a year he began to loosen up and speak coherently, although he continued to lack interest in serious conversation. What Weber particularly tried to make clear to the court, however, was that paranoia was often characterized by “a more or less fixed elaborate delusional system” that exists side by side with “complete possession of mental faculties and orientation.” Indeed, Schreber appeared

neither confused, nor psychically inhibited, nor markedly affected in his intelligence . . . he is circumspect, his memory excellent, he commands a great deal of knowledge, not only in matters of law but in many other fields, and is able to reproduce it in an orderly manner, he is interested in political, scientific and artistic events, etc., and occupies himself with them continuously . . . , and little would be noticeable in these directions to an observer, not informed of his total state.

Yet Schreber was undeniably

filled with pathological ideas, which are woven into a complete system, more or less fixed, and not amenable to correction by objective evidence and judgment of circumstances as they really are; the latter still less so as hallucinatory and delusory processes continue to be of importance to him and hinder normal evaluation of sensory impressions.<sup>52</sup>

But it was the particular nature of these pathological ideas that interested Freud and made his study of Schreber’s *Memoirs* an important step in the development of his views on totemism. For Schreber felt that he had been called by God to redeem the world, to return human beings to their lost state of blessedness. Nerves in a state of exhaustion like his own, he explained, have the capacity to attract God, although the things that God communicated to him were inexpressible in human language, as they lie outside all human experience. “The most essential part of his mission of redemption,” Weber reported, “is that it is necessary for him first of all to be transformed into a woman.” This is not to say that Schreber wished to be changed into a woman; rather, it was a command that he be so transformed, an evolutionary process that might take decades or even centuries. Already, Schreber insisted, masses of “female nerves” had been transferred into his body, from which (through immediate fertilization by God) new human beings would come forth. Only when this process was complete and all human beings had been redeemed, would he be able to die a natural death. In the meantime, not only the sun but also the trees and the birds (the “remains of human souls transformed by miracles”) spoke to him in human



voices. As the object of divine miracles, communicated to him through “rays” to which only he was receptive, Schreber was “the most remarkable human being that ever lived on earth.”<sup>53</sup>

Two themes in Weber’s report struck Freud as particularly important. The first was Schreber’s assumption of the role of redeemer, a fantasy often found at the core of religious paranoia. The second, which made this redemption dependent upon Schreber’s being previously transformed into a woman, was unusual and at least initially bewildering, as it diverged widely from the historical (Christian?) myth that his fantasy set out to reproduce. Weber’s report quite naturally assumed that Schreber’s ambition to play the part of the redeemer was the primary motive force of his delusional complex and that his emasculation was secondary—a means for him to do so. But Freud insisted that his careful study of Schreber’s *Memoirs* suggested, on the contrary, that the idea of being emasculated was the primary delusion. In short, Schreber began with a sexual delusion of persecution, in which the role of persecutor was assigned to Flechsig; only later was this sexual delusion transformed into a religious delusion and that role taken over by God himself.<sup>54</sup> The religious delusion itself, Freud added, is extremely interesting. Before his illness, Schreber had been a skeptic, never able to persuade himself of the existence of a personal God. (In the *Memoirs*, he even mentioned this fact as an argument in favor of the objective reality of his delusions). But a careful reading of the *Memoirs*, Freud argued, suggests that if one were to scratch the redeemer, one might still find the skeptic. For there is a flaw in the order of things: “the nerves of living human beings particularly when in a state of high-grade excitation, have such power of attraction for the nerves of God that He would not be able to free Himself from them again, and would thus endanger His own existence.”<sup>55</sup> Schreber believed that his was such a case, that he had threatened God and aroused His instinct for self-preservation, that God does not understand living men and has caused Schreber great suffering, and that his illness is “a struggle between [him] and God, in which victory lies with [him], weak though he is, because the order of things is on his side.”<sup>56</sup>

The other element of Schreber’s religious delusion to which Freud gave considerable attention was the “state of bliss,” the life after death to which the purified human soul is raised, a life of uninterrupted enjoyment through the contemplation of God. While this is not very original, Freud admitted, Schreber added an intriguing distinction between a male and a female state of bliss. The latter, in particular, seems to consist in an uninterrupted feeling of “voluptuousness,” upon which Schreber built his hopes an eventual reconciliation with God. “The rays of God abandon their hostility,” Freud explained, “as soon as they are certain that in becoming absorbed

into [Schreber's] body they will experience spiritual voluptuousness." A religious skeptic and sexual ascetic before his illness, Schreber thus became a believer and sensualist afterward. But just as his newly discovered religiosity was of a peculiar kind, so the sexual enjoyment he found was unusual. Rather than the sexual liberty of a man, Schreber now experienced the sexual feelings of a woman, taking up a feminine attitude toward God (indeed, he felt that he was God's wife).<sup>57</sup> The two principle elements of Schreber's delusional system—his transformation into a woman and his favored relation with God—were thus united.

The cause of this delusional system, Freud argued, lay in Schreber's feminine (passive homosexual) wish fantasy, which was formed in early childhood when its initial object would have been someone important to him (Freud suggested Schreber's brother). At Leipzig, Flechsig reminded Schreber of his brother, becoming a surrogate object for him. Sexually ascetic in his earlier years, Schreber experienced an intense resistance to this fantasy, which led to a defensive struggle and eventually a delusion of persecution. "The person he longed for [Flechsig] now became his persecutor," Freud explained, "and the content of his wish-fantasy became the content of his persecution." But how are we to explain the ascent from Flechsig to God, the religious element of this delusional system? Since the persecutor Flechsig was originally a person whom Schreber loved, Freud argued, then God must be the reappearance of someone else whom Schreber loved, and probably someone of greater importance. Freud's conclusion was thus that the "God" of Schreber's delusions was in fact his father (just as Flechsig stood for his brother), for which he provided additional support from the parallels between Schreber's father and his God, as well as his difficult relationships with both.<sup>58</sup>

Reading Salomon Reinach's *Cultes, Mythes, et Religions* (1908) shortly after completing his study of Schreber, Freud discovered some mythological associations in one of Schreber's delusional beliefs, which he described in a brief postscript to the original study. In his *Memoirs*, Freud recalled, Schreber had described his peculiar relationship to the sun (for Freud, a sublimated father symbol), which spoke to him in human language and thus revealed itself as a living being. Schreber abused the sun, shouting threats at it, and as he did so, its rays turned pale before him; after his "recovery," Schreber boasted that he could gaze at the sun without difficulty and without being dazzled by it, something that had formerly been impossible for him. From Reinach, Freud now learned that the natural historians of the ancient world attributed this power only to the eagle who, "as a dweller in the highest regions of the air, was brought into especially intimate relation with the heavens, with the sun, and with lightning." And the eagle "puts his

young to a test before recognizing them as his legitimate offspring. Unless they can succeed in looking into the sun without blinking, they are cast out from the eyrie.”<sup>59</sup> And this led Freud to his earliest known reference to totemism. What is here ascribed to the eagle, he argued, is in fact an ancient custom of human beings—an ordeal, a test of lineage, a rite of passage. The assumption underlying these trials “leads us deep into the totemistic habits of thought of primitive peoples.” The totem, Freud explained, is an animal (or a natural force animistically conceived) that the tribe regards as its earliest ancestor and thus does not harm, kill, or eat (the animal, of course, reciprocates in all respects). The eagle who makes his young look into the sun and requires of them that they not be dazzled by its light, therefore, is behaving as though he were himself a descendant of the sun, submitting his children to a test of the ancestry. Similarly, when Schreber boasted that he could look into the sun without being dazzled, he had rediscovered the “mythological method” of expressing his filial relation to the sun, once again supporting Freud’s theory that the sun is a symbol of the father.

For our purposes, the connections between Schreber’s delusional system and totemism described in this postscript could hardly be more significant. Although it would soon collapse, Freud’s friendship with Jung was still strong, and thus he could support Jung’s assertion that “the mythopoeic forces of mankind are not extinct” but rather give rise, in the neuroses, to the same psychological products we find among primitive peoples. More specifically, referring his readers back to his essay “Obsessive Acts and Religious Practices,” Freud added that “the time will soon be ripe” for a fully psychoanalytic explanation of the origins of religion. The closing lines of Freud’s brief postscript should thus be read carefully: “In dreams and in neuroses,” Freud reminded his readers, “we come once more upon the child and the peculiarities which characterize his modes of thought and his emotional life. And we come upon the savage too,” he completed his proposition, “upon the primitive man, as he stands revealed to us in the light of the researches of archaeology and of ethnology.”<sup>60</sup>

## FOLK PSYCHOLOGY AND THE COLLECTIVE UNCONSCIOUS

IN SEPTEMBER 1913, when the four essays constituting *Totem and Taboo* were brought together into a single volume, Freud described them as “a first attempt on my part at applying the point of view and the findings of psychoanalysis to some unsolved problems of social psychology [*Völkerpsychologie*].”<sup>61</sup> As such, they offered a “methodological contrast” to the two sources that Freud

himself acknowledged as their immediate stimuli. The first was the work of Wilhelm Wundt (1832–1920), who had applied the hypotheses and working methods of nonanalytic, experimental psychology to social psychology; the second was “the Zurich school of psycho-analysis,” which had tried to solve the problems of individual psychology with the aid of materials derived from social psychology. The significance of these sources for Freud’s psychology of religion can be brought out by considering two specific works which appeared just months before *Totem and Taboo*: Wundt’s *Elements of Folk Psychology* (1912) and Jung’s *Psychology of the Unconscious* (1912).

Born in Neckarau (a suburb of Mannheim), Wundt endured “a sober childhood and a serious youth, unrelieved by fun and jollity, which prepared the young Wundt for the endless writing of the ponderous tomes which eventually did so much to give him his place in history.” After studying physiology at the universities of Tübingen and Heidelberg (1851–56), Wundt transferred to the university of Berlin to study with Johannes Müller, the greatest living physiologist and “father of experimental physiology,” as well as Emile Du Bois-Reymond, the founder of modern electrophysiology. Returning to Heidelberg in the fall, Wundt took his doctorate in medicine and then stayed on as an instructor from 1857 to 1864, the period in which he developed his epistemological views. Just as Müller had insisted that physiology is a physical science, for example, Wundt insisted that physiological psychology’s status as a science as well. Initially he seemed to have embraced Johann Friedrich Herbart’s *Psychology as a Science* (1824–25), but for Wundt (unlike Herbart), psychology was an *experimental* science. In 1858, the great Helmholtz arrived from Bonn, and the two worked together in Helmholtz’s laboratory for the next thirteen years, but aside from mutual respect and admiration (Helmholtz was eleven years Wundt’s senior), little seems to have come from this relationship. In 1862, Wundt published the final volume of his *Contributions to the Theory of Sense Perception*, which some consider the beginning of experimental psychology, and, promoted two years later to associate professor, he became the presumed successor to Helmholtz’s chair of physiology. When Helmholtz left for Berlin in 1871, however, Wundt was passed over for the physiologist Willy Kühne. Wundt thus accepted the chair of inductive philosophy at the university of Zürich and, in 1875, was called to the chair of philosophy at Leipzig. This was important, for it brought Wundt into the discipline (philosophy) where psychology was supposed to belong, but he had come from physiology. So began the odd German institution whereby experimental laboratories grew up as adjuncts to chairs of philosophy.<sup>62</sup>

Granted space in 1875 for the experimental demonstrations related to his lectures, within four years Wundt had established the Physiologische

Institute, the world's first laboratory for experimental psychology. In 1881, he also founded *Philosophische Studien*, the first effective journal of experimental psychology. From both Europe and the United States, a steady stream of philosophers and psychologists made their pilgrimage to Wundt's laboratory, not the least of whom was the young Durkheim, whose visit in 1886 led him to think that philosophical problems might be dealt with by the methods of the so-called positive sciences. In the same year, Wundt's *Ethics* provided a stunning example of precisely this approach, examining the philosophical problems of ethics in light of "the facts of the moral life." In particular, Wundt traced moral ideas back to their evolutionary origins, first to ancient law, then further to early unconscious norms and customs, and finally to utterly primitive religious practices.<sup>63</sup> Above all, he insisted that the origins of custom, law, and ethics lay in practices that were both collective and unconscious, thus inspiring the development not only of Durkheim's "social realism" but some of the underlying assumptions of his *Elementary Forms* itself.

If Wundt's *Ethics* thus inspired Durkheim, it was his *Folk-Psychology* (10 vols., 1900–1920) that interested Freud. At about midcentury, a group of anthropologists and psychologists led by Theodor Waitz (1821–1864), Heymann Steinthal (1823–1899), and Moritz Lazarus (1824–1903) had conceived the project of combining the study of language, religion, and custom into a single, unified whole. Waitz's *Anthropologie der Naturvölker* (6 vols., 1859–72), originally conceived as the empirical foundation for the author's philosophy of religion, had provided much of the (admittedly meager) ethnographic substance for Durkheim's *De la division du travail social* (1893) as well as *Les formes élémentaires*. Wundt, however, particularly emphasized Lazarus and Steinthal's *Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft*, founded in 1859 with the intention of publishing essays concerned with "the discovery of the laws of ethnic psychology" and reports of "historical, ethnological, geological, and anthropological facts," and also to study language "not as the philologist or the empirical linguist, but in order to discover, with the aid of physiology, the psychological laws of language."<sup>64</sup> Wundt's *Folk-Psychology* was a vast compendium of the results of this project, attempting a scientific explanation for the development of all higher mental processes; and in 1912, between the publication of the fourth and fifth volumes, Wundt published his *Elements of Folk-Psychology*, a more synchronic and synthetic treatment of the vast evolutionary field traversed in the ten volumes of the longer work.

For Wundt, the need for a "folk psychology" arose from the limitations of its individual counterpart. Child psychology could never solve the problems of psychogenesis, he believed, for "the child is surrounded by influ-

ences inseparable from the processes that arise spontaneously within its own consciousness.” But folk psychology, by studying the various stages of mental development still observable among primitive peoples, enables us to explain “the mental products which are created by a community of human life and are, therefore, inexplicable in terms merely of individual consciousness, since they presuppose the reciprocal action of man.” In the first stage, whose description owed more to Rousseau than to Hobbes, the most primitive people lived in peaceful, occasional affiliations called “hordes,” where the fear of demons associated with illness and death gave rise to the idea of taboo. This was followed by a second, totemic stage, characterized by tribal organization and specific customs and norms; a third stage of national heroes and gods; and finally the age of the great world religions and transnational empires. The beliefs that dominate the second, totemic stage suggest that the relation of animal to man is the reverse of what obtains in modern culture. Rather than man having dominion over the animal, the animal, whose deeds and activities arouse wonder, fear, and adoration, rules the man. Like Tylor, Wundt considered totemism a branch of animism; that is, the animal acquires this special status because it is inhabited by the souls of the dead, and this in turn makes the animal an ancestor whose name is that of the group and whose flesh is taboo except on special, ceremonial occasion of totemic sacrifice. Wundt also noted that these totemic ideas affect the society’s forms of social organization—marriage (exogamic), family (matrilocal), and descent (matrilineal). But the role of this totemic stage, albeit universal, is largely transitional, between “the age of primitive man” and “the era of heroes and gods”; the elements carried over from the thought world of totemism to its successor are mere fragments (such as the sacred animals of the ancient Babylonians and Egyptians, the prophetic significance attached to the actions or properties of animals among other cultures, the magical ideas associated with particular animals, etc.).<sup>65</sup>

The second source from which *Totem and Taboo* drew inspiration was the work of Carl Gustav Jung (1875–1961), whose association with Freud was more intimate and considerably more problematic as well. Born in 1875 in Kesswil, a small Swiss village on Lake Constance, Jung came from a family composed primarily of ministers, theologians, and professors. Between the ages of four and twelve, he experienced dreams and visions that, exacerbated by his mother’s moody instability and the discord between his parents, would haunt him throughout his life. Arguably susceptible to a straightforward Freudian interpretation, these experiences seem to have been the images of a young boy’s burgeoning but repressed sexuality, set within a puritanical atmosphere and thus forced into the unconscious, eventually culminating in an adolescent fear of and eventual capitulation

to something both obscene and blissful. But Jung resisted this interpretation, understanding them rather as direct revelations from God, in which he was told that the traditional teachings of religion would no longer provide spiritual sustenance and that illumination would be his if he obeyed God's admittedly incomprehensible commands. Jung thus found himself estranged from the conventions of institutionalized religion, "cut off from the Church and from [his] father's and everybody else's faith. In so far as they all represented the Christian religion," he added, "I was an outsider. This knowledge filled me with a sadness which was to overshadow all the years until the time I entered the university."<sup>66</sup>

Jung entered the University of Basel in 1895 with the intention of studying natural science but soon turned to medicine, and, intrigued by Krafft-Ebing's *Lehrbuch der Psychiatrie* (1890), as well as the séances of his fifteen-year-old cousin, Hélène Preiswerk, he was quickly drawn to psychiatry. Declining an offer in internal medicine at Munich, therefore, Jung moved instead to Zurich where, in December 1900, he became assistant to Eugen Bleuler at the prestigious Burghölzli Mental Hospital. A student of Charcot, Bleuler was one of the most famous psychiatrists of his day—he introduced the terms "autism" and "ambivalence" into the psychiatric vocabulary and replaced the outmoded and inaccurate "dementia praecox" with the more appropriate "schizophrenia." With Bleuler's support, Jung advanced rapidly, becoming his deputy in 1905 and a lecturer in psychiatry at the University of Zurich in the same year. Asked by Bleuler to report to the staff on Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*, Jung was soon incorporating ideas from Freud's "dream book," as well as his earlier studies in hysteria, into his own research. As Jung's interest in Freud's theories intensified, he applied them to his study of schizophrenia, the psychosis in which he specialized and that made his reputation. In the preface to his *On the Psychology of Dementia Praecox* (1906), Jung thus referred to the "brilliant conceptions" of Freud, who had "not yet received his just recognition and appreciation."<sup>67</sup> In April of the same year, Jung sent Freud his paper on word association, and months later, a copy of his book on schizophrenia. Both flattered and impressed, Freud invited Jung to visit him in Vienna, and in March 1907, they spent the day together, talking for thirteen hours without interruption. Mutually intellectually infatuated, their friendship, sustained largely by correspondence, would last for almost six years.<sup>68</sup>

Initially, Freud considered Jung his ablest and most important pupil, the man destined to carry his work forward in the future. If this feeling was utterly sincere, it also involved practical considerations. Not only had Jung's research at the Burghölzli independently supported Freud's theories at a time when Freud was still generally reviled within the academic communi-

ty, but Jung was neither Austrian nor Jewish, which helped psychoanalysis refute charges of intellectual and sectarian elitism and thus attract a wider following. Jung initially reciprocated with respect and filial devotion, for Freud's dominating personality amply compensated for Jung's disappointment in his own ineffectual father, so that soon after their first meeting, Jung expressed the hope that their friendship would not be one "between equals" but rather between "father and son." No less than Freud's, Jung's feelings were doubtless mixed with considerations of practical advantages. It was at Freud's instigation (and not without resistance from his Viennese followers), for example, that Jung in 1908 was appointed the chief editor of the first psychoanalytic periodical, the *Jahrbuch für psychoanalytische und psychopathologische Forschungen* and in 1910 became first president of the International Psychoanalytic Association.

But soon their relationship grew more problematic. To Freud, it became clear that their association was increasingly Oedipal (the "son" held parricidal feelings toward his "father" and wished to replace him). To Jung, it was equally clear that Freud sought to restrict his intellectual independence. As early as 5 October 1906, commenting on the criticisms of Freud's theories made by the Cologne professor of criminology Gustav Aschaffenburg, Jung wrote to Freud suggesting that "though the genesis of hysteria is predominantly, it is not exclusively, sexual," and one month later, in a formal reply to Aschaffenburg, he admitted to finding Freud's theories "somewhat one-sided." Even Jung's *Psychology of Dementia Praecox* (1907), which he had sent to Freud and which led to their first meeting, expressed reservations: "Fairness to Freud," Jung there observed,

does not imply, as many fear, unqualified submission to a dogma; one can very well maintain an independent judgment. If I, for instance, acknowledge the complex mechanisms of dreams and hysteria, this does not mean that I attribute to the infantile sexual trauma the exclusive importance that Freud apparently does. Still less does it mean that I place sexuality so predominantly in the foreground or that I grant it the psychological universality which Freud, it seems, postulates in view of the admittedly enormous role which sexuality plays in the psyche.<sup>69</sup>

By 1910, Jung had come to suspect that, for Freud, the "dogma" of the sexual etiology of the neuroses had come to replace his latent and repressed religious feelings; to Jung, a dogma, whether of sexuality or of religion, held no relationship to scientific judgment.

But it was Jung's *Psychology of the Unconscious* (1912) that proved decisive in completing the breach between Freud and Jung. In 1911, Jung pub-



lished the first part in the same volume of the *Jahrbuch* with Freud's essay on Schreber. Freud received it well, writing in November that "it is the best thing this promising author has written, up to now, though he will do better." But Jung was aware that the second part, in which he clearly broke with Freud's theory of the libido, "would cost me my friendship with Freud." Still, Jung made little effort to smooth things over: after returning from a series of lectures at Fordham University, in November 1912 he wrote to Freud that his own new version of the libido theory had "won over many people who until now had been put off by the problem of sexuality in neurosis." The bitterness inspired by this letter, as well as by the *Psychology of the Unconscious*, was still evident in Freud's *On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement* (1914).<sup>70</sup>

The *Psychology of the Unconscious* is a study of the schizoid fantasies of a young American woman (pseudonymously known as "Miss Frank Miller"), originally collected and published in 1906 by a friend of Jung's named Théodore Flournoy. "Miss Miller" was a woman of extraordinary suggestibility, with an enormous capacity for identification and empathy expressed in a variety of dreams, fantasies, and visions. It was a commonplace of psychoanalysis that such dreams and fantasies were libidinal signs, that they contained a hidden meaning emanating from the unconscious and expressed some kind of erotic conflict born of a traumatic experience in early childhood. Freud's therapeutic method was thus reductive and retrospective, tracing the symptoms back to early childhood in order reconstruct their root causes. Jung considered Miller's symptoms the early, unconscious manifestations of a severe psychic disorder, and he began (as Freud would have) by gathering information about her personal history and the details of her dreams and fantasies. But Jung also insisted that such dreams and visions were not simply the symptoms of pathological complexes but were rather entirely normal and constructive psychic functions. Indeed, they represented a specific mode of thought ("fantasy thinking") to be distinguished from the "directed thinking" of consciousness and science, which is concerned with matching language to the external world.

For Jung, this "fantasy thinking" not only constituted a shift away from the materialist, utilitarian demands of the present but also a dramatic step backward, to a more ancient way of thinking, into a still deeper level of the mind he called the "collective unconscious." In *Totem and Taboo*, as we shall see, Freud himself recognized that the unconscious contains the residues of an archaic heritage—the "memory-traces of earlier generations"—even acknowledging his debt to Jung. But for Freud, these memory-traces were the reenactment, in each individual life, of the primal Oedipal drama, while Jung expanded this inheritance to include the most ancient and universal

“fantasy thoughts” of human beings. For Jung, therefore, Miller’s dreams and visions did not rest on personal, repressed, libidinal memories but on this deeper level of the unconscious; his treatment of her disorder focused not only on her personal history, dreams, and images but also on historical and anthropological references, archeological findings, literary sources, myths, fairy tales, and so on—in short, on anything that might shed light on the nature and character of her symptoms. Unconscious contents, in short, were not identical to repressed contents; on the contrary, they represented a deeper, more ancient level of the mind.

Jung thus redescribed the psyche as divided into three parts, or “tiers.” The first was consciousness, which is directly accessible to the individual and contains those attitudes through which he adjusts to the outside world. The second was the “personal unconscious,” which is acquired by the individual during his own lifetime and is unique to him. This included those infantile drives and desires that Freud had enumerated in his theory of repression, as well as any psychic material that had not yet reached consciousness but has the capacity to do so (Freud’s “preconscious”). And the third was the “collective unconscious,” which does not depend upon personal experience and thus cannot be personally acquired. This, as we have seen, includes contents that might never enter the individual’s consciousness but are primordial images common to all human beings. The collective unconscious is thus the impersonal and transpersonal foundation of the psyche, undergirding both consciousness and the personal unconscious. Jung’s postulation of this third element of the psyche has been criticized for embracing a Lamarckian theory of the inheritance of acquired characters, and there are passages where he speaks of “archetypal” experiences being “engraved” on our psychic constitution through “endless repetition.” But as Michael Palmer has suggested, Jung’s “archetype” more typically refers not to an inherited idea but rather to an inherited mode of psychic functioning, a “pattern of behavior” or “disposition of mind.”<sup>71</sup>

This “three-tiered” concept of mind clearly conflicted with Freud’s theories. But it was not yet the cause of the break between Jung and Freud. The real cause was Jung’s attack, in the second section of the *Psychology of the Unconscious*, on Freud’s theory of the libido—the central concept of Freudian psychology—reducing its sexual component and replacing it with a more generalized notion of “psychic energy.” Jung acknowledged that Freud’s exclusively sexual interpretation of libido explained a great deal about neuroses, in which reality is not lost so much as it is falsified. But a purely sexual conception of libido could not account for schizophrenia, where the patient’s real world (including his erotic interest) is replaced by one of archaic images and fantasies. Jung also insisted that childhood sexu-

ality manifests itself only between the first and fourth years of age, thus arguing that there is a “presexual” stage of human development during which the central preoccupation is with the biological functions of nutrition and growth. Where Freud saw an infant sucking at his mother’s breast as an essentially sexual act, therefore, Jung saw it as a nutritive function subservient to the instinct for preservation and thus devoid of any sexual connotation. This in turn discredited any attempt to explain the neuroses of children by reference to a sexual trauma that occurred in this presexual stage.

This led to Jung’s famous “energetic concept of the libido,” to his redefinition of neurotic illness, and, more specifically, to his rejection of Freud’s claim that religion is a neurosis. According to Jung, the three-tiered mind was also “a relatively closed system,” not epiphenomenal, and thus irreducible to merely physical processes, but rather functioning as a *sui generis* phenomenon with its own unique, highly dynamic form of energy. Like its physical counterpart, however, psychic energy is known only through its manifestations or effects. We can know that it is, but not what it is. The libido, in other words, is a conceptual necessity required for the explanation of certain psychic phenomena, abstracted from our experience of its manifestations and effects but inherently unknowable in itself. From the observation of its effects, however, we can say that the libido operates according to certain principles (those of “opposites,” “equivalence,” “entropy,” etc.) and also moves in two general directions: “progression,” the forward movement that satisfies the efforts of the conscious mind to adapt to its circumstances; and “regression,” the backward movement that satisfies the needs of the unconscious to reactivate its archetypal content.

No less than Freud, Jung recognized that the autonomous power of the unconscious, not held in check, might overwhelm the conscious mind, producing neuroses or psychoses. But Jung also insisted that the mind need not always be protected from the unconscious forces dredged up during the process of regression; on the contrary, the regressive movement of psychic energy reveals possibilities for personal growth, renewal, and regeneration—all essential to the ongoing development of the human personality. For Jung, therefore, a neurosis should be described not as the pathological consequence of repressed childhood sexual trauma but simply as a “disturbance within the distribution of libidinal energy,” a failure of reciprocity between the progressive demands of the conscious mind and the regressive demands of its unconscious counterpart. From this it followed that the real goal of therapy should be to resolve this disharmony between the conscious and unconscious minds, which is done by confronting the contents of the first with that of the second, thus provoking their interaction and helping them achieve their proper equilibrium. Whatever form the neurosis might

take, therefore, it points to its own therapy. The patient should simply be enjoined to follow the path of the neurosis, letting himself be led into the world of his unconscious by the very thing that torments him, which Jung famously described as the “process of individuation.”<sup>72</sup>

With these significantly revised notions of libidinal energy and the meaning of neurosis, it was inevitable that Jung would disagree profoundly with Freud’s understanding of religion. For Freud, as we have seen, the primary cause of neurosis was the repression of infantile sexual impulses, and in the case of religion, this was best seen in the obsessional forms of religious ritual, where the believer seeks to assuage his sense of Oedipal guilt in relation to the father. Jung does not deny that religious beliefs and practices can be neurotic, nor does he deny that such neuroses might in some cases be explained by sexual repression. But for Jung, it is not just sexuality but rather a more general imbalance within the distribution of psychic energy that explains neuroses. From this, it follows that religion (like any other human disposition) will be neurotic when it upsets the psychic equilibrium but will not be neurotic where no such disruption occurs; in the latter case, the study of religious experience is not the analysis of sexual repression and sublimation but rather the investigation of a fundamental, natural, and even therapeutic psychological process, in which the individual seeks self-knowledge, self-regulation, and self-fulfillment. By reducing all religion to neurosis, Jung argued, Freud had not only misunderstood its function but, more seriously, denied the existence of a whole dimension of human experience (the collective unconscious) that alone affords human beings some intuition of the ultimate meaning of life.<sup>73</sup>

#### AMBIVALENCE, MURDER, AND THE TOTEMIC SACRAMENT

THEIR COEXISTENCE in his title notwithstanding, Freud emphasized that the two phenomena in question—totems and taboos—would not be treated alike in the four essays to follow. The analysis of the second, he explained, “is put forward as an assured and exhaustive attempt at the solution of a problem,” while the treatment of the first more modestly indicates only “what psychoanalysis can at the moment contribute to the elucidation of the problem of the totem.” Why this difference? Although taboos are expressed in a negative form and directed toward other subject matter in the present, Freud explained, they still exist. Taboos “do not differ in their psychological nature from Kant’s ‘categorical imperative,’ which operates in a compulsive fashion and rejects any conscious motives.” Totemism, by

contrast, “has been long abandoned as an actuality and replaced by newer forms. It has left only the slightest traces behind it in the religions, manners and customs of the civilized peoples of today and has been subject to far-reaching modifications even among the races over which it still holds sway.” If taboos “still exist among us,” Freud argued, totemism is something “alien to our contemporary thinking.” Nonetheless, Freud believed that the original meaning of totemism might still be deduced by investigating those “vestiges” and “hints” of it that survive in our children.<sup>74</sup>

Prehistoric man, Freud began in the first of the essays in *Totem and Taboo*, is known to us through various kinds of evidence, including those people still living—“savages” or “half-savages”—who stand closer to primitive man than we do and whose mental life affords a well-preserved picture of an early stage of our own development. By comparing the psychology of such peoples (of which we learn from social anthropology) with that of neurotics (of which we learn through psychoanalysis), we should be able to illuminate the more familiar facts of both sciences. Like Frazer (from whom most of his ethnographic data were drawn) and Durkheim, Freud’s focus here was on the Aborigines of Australia, “the most backward and miserable of savages, . . . the youngest continent, in whose fauna, too, we can still observe much that is archaic and that has perished elsewhere.” What particularly struck Freud about these “savages,” however, was epitomized in this first essay’s title: their “horror of incest,” which Freud set against the smug background of European moral condescension: “We should certainly not expect that the sexual life of these poor, naked cannibals would be moral in our sense,” he observed, “or that their sexual instincts would be subjected to any great degree of restriction. Yet we find that they set before themselves with the most scrupulous care and the most painful severity the aim of avoiding incestuous sexual relations. Indeed, their whole social organization seems to serve that purpose or to have been brought into relation with its attainment.” This last sentence served Freud as an introduction to his survey of totemism’s most characteristic features, taken largely from Frazer’s *Totemism and Exogamy* (1910), although touching on works by Long, Lang, McLennan, and Wundt as well. His approach here was consistently cautious and tentative. Of the universality of totemism, for example, he observed only that “many investigators” are inclined to consider it a “necessary phase of human development”; of its origin, he acknowledged that “there are a number of theories . . . but no agreement”; and of its sheer complexity, he emphasized that those races in which totemism exists today are all found in various stages of transition, decay, or disintegration, so that there is scarcely a general statement about them which “does not call for exceptions or contradictions.”<sup>75</sup>

But again, Freud observed, there is one peculiarity of totemism that attracts the psychoanalyst above all others: "In almost every place where we find totems we also find a law against persons of the same totem having sexual relations with one another and consequently against their marrying." Exogamy, in short, is somehow related to totemism, for virtually all totemic groups permit sexual relations only outside the clan. Yet there is apparently nothing in the concept or attributes of the totem that would lead us to anticipate such a "sternly maintained prohibition"—this despite the strength of the connection between totemism and exogamy. The violation of the prohibition, for example, is avenged by the whole clan, as if it were a danger that threatened the community itself. Passing love affairs that produce no children are punished to the same degree, suggesting that the practical concern for offspring is not its cause. Finally, the prohibition extends well beyond the bounds of blood kinship to all members of the same totemic clan; yet blood relatives of different clans may enjoy sexual relations with impunity. In this "horror of incest," these savages exhibit a "striking agreement" with the mental lives of neurotic patients. From psychoanalysis, for example, we learn that a boy's earliest love objects are incestuous—his mother and his sister. These objects are of course forbidden, and as the boy grows older, he liberates himself from this attraction. But the neurotic, by contrast, exhibits some degree of psychic infantilism, either by failing to liberate himself from these childhood attractions (developmental inhibition) or by returning to them (regression), so that the incestuous fixations of the libido continue to play the principal part in his unconscious mental life. And it is these same incestuous wishes, Freud emphasized, which "are still regarded by savage peoples as immediate perils against which the most severe measures of defence must be enforced."<sup>76</sup>

Surrounded by prohibitions, this horror of incest raises questions about the nature of primitive taboos, which became the subject of Freud's second essay. Like Durkheim, Freud emphasized that the meaning of "taboo" seems to diverge in both positive and negative directions—on the one hand, it refers to things that are sacred or consecrated and, on the other, to things that are dangerous, forbidden, or unclean. The restrictions that surround things taboo also differ from both their religious and moral counterparts—unlike the first, they are not based on divine ordinance but seem to impose themselves automatically, and unlike the second, they are not part of a larger system of abstinences for whose observance reasons are provided. "Every sort of thing is forbidden," Freud noted, but savages "have no idea why, and it does not occur to them to raise the question. On the contrary, they submit to the prohibitions as though they were a matter of course and feel convinced that any violation of them will be automatically met by the

direst punishment.” What explains these mysterious prohibitions? Again like Durkheim, Freud emphasized that certain persons and things seem to the savage to be “charged with a dangerous power, which can be transferred through contact with them, almost like an infection” (Durkheim’s “contagiousness of the sacred”), that some people or things have more of this power and others less, and that the danger is proportional to the amount possessed. The strangest fact of all, Freud observed, is that “anyone who has transgressed one of these prohibitions himself acquires the characteristic of being prohibited, as though the whole of the dangerous charge had been transferred over to him. This power is attached to all *special* individuals, such as kings, priests or newborn babies, to all *exceptional* states, such as the physical states of menstruation, puberty or birth, and to all *uncanny* things, such as sickness and death and what is associated with them through their power of infection or contagion.” Yet however strange, he added, repeating his earlier allusion to Kant, “the moral and conventional prohibitions by which we ourselves are governed may have some essential relationship with these primitive taboos and . . . an explanation of taboo might throw a light upon the obscure origin of our own ‘categorical imperative.’”<sup>77</sup>

As he had in the case of incest, Freud now introduced a psychoanalytic interpretation of the concept of taboo, retracing the same steps he had followed in “Obsessive Actions and Religious Practices.” Consider the four-stage process involved in a typical case of the obsessional neurosis known as “touching phobia”: first, in very early childhood, the patient shows a strong desire to touch his genitals; second, this desire is met with an external prohibition against carrying out the particular kind of touching; third, this prohibition finds powerful internal support, which proves stronger than the instinct that seeks to express itself in the touching; fourth, the prohibition does not abolish the instinct but merely represses it, banishing it into the unconscious. “Both the prohibition and the instinct persist,” Freud emphasized, “the instinct because it has only been repressed and not abolished, and the prohibition because, if it ceased, the instinct would force its way through into consciousness and into actual operation. A situation is created which remains undealt with—a physical fixation—and everything else follows from the continuing conflict between the prohibition and the instinct.” The resulting psychological condition is one of ambivalence: the patient constantly wishes to perform an act in relation to an object but at the same time feels that he should not. Moreover, this ambivalence cannot be overcome, for the conflict is localized in the patient’s mind in such a way that the two opponents cannot confront one another. The persistent desire to touch is unconscious, while the “noisily conscious” prohibition, imposed in early childhood and its reasons thus forgotten, resists any attempt to

dismiss it by rational means. The “mutual inhibition” of these two conflicting forces produces tension, this tension seeks release, and this leads to the performance of obsessive acts which are clearly a compromise—on the one hand, they are signs of remorse or attempts at expiation while, on the other, they are designed to compensate the instinct for what it has been denied. Over time, Freud added, these obsessive acts “fall more and more under the sway of the instinct and approach nearer and nearer to the activity which was originally prohibited.”<sup>78</sup>

The prohibitions of taboo are frequently of a secondary, more displaced and distorted kind, Freud observed, making it difficult to get at their roots, and there is no point in asking savages to tell us the real reasons for their prohibitions, for these are clearly unconscious. Still, following the model of obsessive neuroses, we can reconstruct their historical development. The very existence of such powerful prohibitions, for example, suggests that they must have concerned activities toward which there was some strong inclination; we may also assume that they are very ancient, that they were transmitted from generation to generation by means of parental and social authority, and perhaps eventually (here Freud seems to echo the more Lamarckian implications of Jung’s *Psychology of the Unconscious*) became “organized” in an inherited psychological endowment. “Who can decide whether such things as ‘innate ideas’ exist,” Freud asked rhetorically, “or whether in the present instance they have operated, either alone or in conjunction with education, to bring about the permanent fixing of taboos?” From the very persistence of the taboo, it is also clear that the original desire to do the prohibited thing must still persist; from this, in turn, we may assume that these savages have an attitude of ambivalence toward their taboos. “In their unconscious,” Freud argued, “there is nothing they would like more than to violate them, but they are afraid to do so; they are afraid precisely because they would like to, and the fear is stronger than the desire. The desire is unconscious, however, in every individual member of the tribe just as it is in neurotics.”<sup>79</sup>

The two most important taboos in totemism are that no member of the clan may kill the totemic animal, and that members of the same clan may not have sexual relations with one another. The significance granted to these prohibitions suggests that they must be among the oldest, most powerful of human desires; the fact that they coexist in totemism suggests that they have the same cause; and the fact that taboo is contagious (it might be attached to an act or an object, to the person who violates the taboo, to persons in particular states or conditions, to these states or conditions themselves, to impersonal objects, etc.) suggests that they share some single attribute. What single dangerous attribute remains the same under all these



conditions? Freud's answer was that they share the quality of exciting the savage's feelings of *ambivalence* by tempting him to transgress the prohibition. The person who has violated the taboo, for example, becomes taboo himself because he possesses the dangerous quality of tempting others to follow his example. As we shall see in Freud's treatment of animism, this ambivalence also accounts for the phenomenon of religious projection: survivors' feelings of hostility toward a deceased loved one can be "externalized" by attributing these feelings to spirits of the dead.<sup>80</sup>

A taboo, however, is not a neurosis. On the contrary, as Freud had observed in *Three Essays*, it is a social institution. What, then, is the relationship between obsessional neuroses and taboos? Freud's answer began by noting an apparent difference. Primitive peoples, he observed, fear that those responsible for violating a taboo will be punished by serious illness or death, while neurotics fear that if they perform some forbidden action, a punishment will fall on someone else (albeit someone close and dear to them). In this sense, Freud observed, the primitive man seems to behave egoistically, and the neurotic more altruistically. If the person responsible for violating the taboo is not automatically punished, however, the savages feel that, collectively, they are all threatened by the outrage and hasten to carry out the punishment themselves. The "mechanism" of this solidarity, Freud insisted, is the same one we have already discussed—the fear of an infectious example, of the temptation to imitate, of the "contagiousness" of taboo. If one person succeeds in gratifying the repressed desire, the same desire will be kindled in all other members of the community. In order to avoid such temptations, therefore, the envied transgressor must be deprived of the fruit of his enterprise. But the very act of punishing this transgressor also affords those who carry it out the opportunity to commit the same outrage under the guise of expiation. This same mechanism, Freud argued, lies at the foundation of the criminal justice system, and because it assumes that the same prohibited impulses are present in both the criminal and in the avenging community, it confirms the ancient religious principle that, at the end of the day, we are all miserable sinners.

How, then, are we to account for the surprising nobility of the neurotic, who fears nothing on his own account but everything for those he loves? Not surprisingly, Freud considered such altruistic impulses secondary and derivative. At the beginning of the neurosis, the threat of punishment applied (as with savages) to the patient himself, who invariably feared for his own life. Equally invariably, however, the patient felt a hostile impulse against someone he loved, even a wish that this person should die. This hostility was repressed by a prohibition, and this prohibition in turn attached itself to some specific act representing an attack on the loved person. But

the process goes still further: “the original *wish* that the loved person may die,” Freud observed, “is replaced by a *fear* that he may die. So that when the neurosis appears to be so tenderly altruistic, it is merely *compensating* for an underlying contrary attitude of brutal egoism.” Again, in the case of the neurotic, the fear of touching invariably derives from the childhood desire to touch one’s genitals, while in taboos, the prohibition against touching concerns attacking, getting control, asserting oneself. If there is a prohibition against touching a chief (or anything that has been in contact with him), for example, this reflects hostile impulses that are often sublimated in elaborate ceremonial precautions. The sexual instinct thus predominates in obsessional neuroses, while social instincts are more characteristic of the institution of taboo. But the social instincts, Freud added, “are themselves derived from a combination of egoistic and erotic components into wholes of a special kind.”<sup>81</sup>

This comparison of obsessional neuroses and taboo helps us to understand the relationship between different forms of neurosis and cultural institutions and to see how the study of the psychology of neuroses might be important for any understanding of the growth of civilization. For if neuroses exhibit striking similarities to the great social institutions of art, religion, and philosophy, they also seem to “distort” these institutions: for example, a case of hysteria is a caricature of a work of art, a paranoiac delusion is a caricature of a philosophical system, an obsessional neurosis a caricature of a religion, and so on. These “distortions,” Freud explained, are a consequence of the fact that neuroses are themselves “social structures,” attempting to achieve by private means what is attained in society by collective effort. This is the significance of the sexual etiology of the neuroses, by contrast with the social instincts that guide the institution of taboo. For sexual satisfaction is essentially a private matter for each individual, and sexual desires are incapable of uniting human beings to meet the demands of self-preservation. This asocial nature of the neuroses lends expression to their most fundamental purpose, which is to escape an unsatisfying reality by taking flight into a more pleasurable world of fantasy. “The real world,” Freud concluded this second essay, “is under the sway of human society and of the institutions collectively created by it. To turn away from reality is at the same time to withdraw from the community of man.”<sup>82</sup>

Freud’s third essay turned to the nature and significance of animism, which he regarded not simply as an explanation of a particular phenomenon, but as a system of thought, a complete psychological *weltanschauung* that “allows us to grasp the whole universe as a single unity from a single point of view.” In the history of the human race, Freud added, there have been only three great “pictures of the universe”—the animistic, religious,

and scientific—and of these, the first is the most “consistent and exhaustive” and provides us with “a truly complete explanation.” Animism thus preceded religion but contained the foundation on which religions were later built. What particularly interested Freud about animism, however, was its *practical* character. Men could not have created this “first system of the universe” out of “pure speculative curiosity,” but only out of some practical need to subject natural phenomena as well as other human beings to one’s will, which led to “a body of instructions upon how to obtain mastery over men, beasts, and things.”<sup>83</sup> Embracing Tylor’s description of magic as “mistaking an ideal connection for a real one,” Freud provided two examples of this kind of mistake. The first was what Frazer had called “imitative” or “homeopathic” magic (such as making an effigy, so that what is done to the effigy is done to the person it represents), whose “operative factor” is the similarity between the act performed and the result anticipated. The second was Frazer’s “contagious” magic (obtaining a part of the enemy or an object belonging to him, so that, again, what is done to the object is done to the person represented), whose operative factor is the affinity or contiguity of the act and the presumed result. But as similarity and contiguity are “the two essential principles of processes of association,” Freud reasoned, “it appears that the true explanation of all the folly of magical observances is the domination of the association of ideas.” Or as Frazer had put it in the third edition of *The Golden Bough*, savages “mistook the order of their ideas for the order of nature, and hence imagined that the control which they have, or seem to have, over their thoughts, permitted them to exercise a corresponding control over things.”<sup>84</sup>

This “associative theory of magic,” Freud complained, explains only the paths along which magic proceeds, telling us nothing of its true essence, of the nature of the misunderstanding whereby it replaces the laws of nature with the laws of psychological association. But the real explanation for magic, Freud argued, will be found not by dismissing the associative theory but rather by pursuing it further. For the motives that underlie magical practices, Freud argued, are obviously human wishes. All that is necessary to explain magic, therefore, is primitive peoples’ immense belief in the power of their own wishes. Children hold a similar belief, Freud reminded his readers, and because their motor efficiency is still undeveloped, they attempt to satisfy their wishes through hallucinations and later through play. But the wishes of an adult savage are accompanied by will, which he uses to represent the situation “in such a way that it becomes possible to experience the satisfaction by means of what might be described as motor hallucination”—the performance of magic. The principle governing the magical practices of savages, therefore, is analogous to that governing the thoughts

of children—an overwhelming belief in the power of their own wishes. But the phrase that Freud used to describe it, the “omnipotence of thoughts,” came from a third, therapeutic context, where one of Freud’s obsessional neurotics had used it to describe his own symptoms. It is among obsessional neurotics, Freud added, that this “omnipotence of thoughts” survives most visibly, but in fact it is found in all neuroses to some degree. For among neurotics, what determines the formation of symptoms is the reality not of experience but of thought: “Neurotics live in a world apart,” Freud emphasized, where “they are only affected by what is thought with intensity and pictured with emotion, whereas agreement with external reality is a matter of no importance.” This omnipotence of thoughts has “unrestricted play in the emotional life of neurotic patients” and, together with the superstitions and rituals of their daily lives, indicates their resemblance “to the savages who believe they can alter the external world by mere thinking.”<sup>85</sup>

Recalling his earlier emphasis on animism as a complete “system of thought,” therefore, Freud postulated a three-stage history of intellectual progress. In the earliest, animistic stage, human beings ascribe omnipotence to themselves; in the second, religious stage, these powers are transferred to the gods (although this transfer is incomplete, as human beings reserve the power to influence the gods through prayer, sacrifice, etc.); and in the third, scientific stage, human beings give up their pretensions to omnipotence, acknowledging their weakness and submitting to the laws of nature (although a vestige of the primitive belief in omnipotence persists in our faith in the power of the human mind and scientific knowledge). Freud then reminded his readers of the three-stage theory of the development of the libido that he had advanced in *Three Essays*: in the earliest, auto-erotic stage, the separate components of sexuality work independently of one another to obtain pleasure and are directed not toward any external object but rather toward the subject’s own body; in the second, narcissistic stage, these independent components come together and find their object in the subject’s own ego; and in the third stage, an external object (the child’s parent of the opposite sex) is at last chosen (although the narcissistic organization is never completely abandoned). Freud then brought the two theories together, suggesting that the animistic stage of human thought corresponds to narcissism both chronologically and in its content; the religious stage corresponds to that in which an external object is chosen; and the scientific stage corresponds to that in which the subject reaches maturity, renounces the pleasure principle, and adjusts himself to reality.

Magic—the technique of animism—thus attempts to impose the laws of psychology on the laws of nature. In this attempt, Freud emphasized, spirits need not play any role, although spirits might be taken as the ob-

jects of magical manipulation (and as he acknowledged, no society had been found that was completely without the belief in spirits). Quite consciously, therefore, Freud left room for Marett's "pre-animistic" thought, in which spirits as yet had no place; this in turn placed the focus on that step whereby savages, who had previously ascribed omnipotence solely to themselves, transferred some of this power to spirits and thus laid foundations for the second, religious stage of thought. What might have induced a savage to make this first act of renunciation? Like Schreber's "rays of God," Freud's answer began, spirits and demons are simply projections of the savage's own emotional impulses, with which he populates his external world and thus encounters his own internal mental processes again (albeit outside himself). This tendency is increased when the projection offers some promise of mental relief, as occurs with the unconscious emotional ambivalence that arises with the death of a beloved relative. Here Freud seemed to agree with Tylor and other writers for whom the earliest spirits were evil and for whom the idea of the soul arose from the strong impression made by death on the survivors. But for Freud, the significance of death lies not in "the intellectual problem with which death confronts the living" but rather in "the emotional conflict into which the survivors are plunged."<sup>86</sup>

What are we to make of the fact that such animistic conceptions constitute a "system of thought"—indeed, the first complete theory of the universe? Here Freud simply reminded his readers of the argument of *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), including the distinction between "manifest" and "latent" content, the "dream work," and "secondary revision." The last, in particular, suggests that "there is an intellectual function in us which demands unity, connection and intelligibility from any material, whether of perception or thought, that comes within its grasp; and if, as a result of special circumstances, it is unable to establish a true connection, it does not hesitate to fabricate a false one." In both animism and dreams, "a rearrangement of the psychical material has been made with a fresh aim in view; and the rearrangement may often have to be a drastic one if the outcome is to be made to appear intelligible from the point of view of the system." For Freud, therefore, a "system" is constituted by the fact that at least two reasons can be discovered for each of its products, one based upon the premises of the system (which might thus be delusional), and a second, concealed reason, which is the real and truly operative one. Once we have penetrated beyond the first and into the second, Freud suggested, we shall perhaps discover that what we ought now to know about the mental life of children—that we have grossly underestimated its fullness and delicacy of feeling—might equally be said of our attitude toward the psychology of animistic peoples.<sup>87</sup> If Freud had indeed "democratized genius" by granting each of us a creative unconscious, he did no less for "savages."<sup>88</sup>

“The more incontestable became the conclusion that totemism constitutes a regular phase in all cultures,” Freud began the fourth and most important essay of *Totem and Taboo*, “the more urgent became the need for arriving at an understanding of it and for throwing light upon the puzzle of its essential nature.” In particular, any satisfactory theory of totemism should be both historical and psychological: it should describe the conditions under which totemism developed as well as the psychological needs to which it lends expression. But unfortunately, Freud complained, “everything connected with totemism seems to be puzzling,” so that “almost any generalization that could be made on the subject of totemism and exogamy seems open to question.” From the perspective of a psychologist, some of the explanations for totemism were “too rational and took no account of the emotional character of the matters to be explained,” others were “based on assumptions which are unconfirmed by observation,” and still others relied on material that might be “better interpreted in another way.” All writers seemed to have less difficulty refuting the views of others than in defending their own. Even his own introductory summary of the institution (taken largely from Frazer’s *Totemism*), Freud admitted, was open to the charge that it merely expressed his own arbitrary preferences, for even Frazer would no longer accept it.<sup>89</sup>

To this state of confusion, Freud argued, psychoanalysis can bring reason and understanding. Children, like savages, show little trace of the arrogance that leads civilized adults to draw a rigid line between their own nature and that of animals. Occasionally, however, a strange rift occurs in these otherwise good relations—a child suddenly and unpredictably becomes frightened of a particular species of animal. This “animal phobia” usually concerns a species in which the child has previously shown a special interest, sometimes through picture books or fairy tales, although it has nothing to do with any particular animal of the species; it is a common (and possibly the earliest) form of psychoneurotic illness found in children. Because of the difficulty of analyzing very young children, Freud acknowledged that no detailed examination had yet been made of animal phobias, but in the few cases that have proved accessible, the same pattern had repeatedly emerged. The children were always boys, and their fear, which had merely been displaced onto the animal, ultimately related to their fathers. More specifically, the boy considered the father a competitor for the affections of his mother and feared his father’s anger as a consequence. This induced the boy’s hatred for his father, although he continued to feel love and admiration toward the father as well, an emotional ambivalence that could be relieved only by displacing his fear and hostility onto some father substitute. This displacement, however, does

not resolve the ambivalence but merely extends it to the animal, toward whom the boy now reacted with fear and hostility, on the one hand, and love and admiration, on the other. In fact, Freud added, savages themselves describe the totem as their common ancestor and primal father. By suggesting that the totem animal represents the father, therefore, all Freud had done was “to take at its literal value an expression used by these people.”<sup>90</sup>

What are the consequences of viewing totemism in this psychoanalytic light? If the totemic animal is the father, Freud answered, then the two principal totemic taboos (not to kill the totem and not to have sexual relations with a woman of the same totem) coincide with the two crimes of Oedipus (killing his father and marrying his mother), as well as with the two primal wish of the male child (to kill his father and have sexual relations with his mother). And this remarkable coincidence suggests that the origin of totemism is to be found in the Oedipal situation. Pursuing this possibility, Freud turned to a feature of the totemic system that he had not yet mentioned—Robertson Smith’s communion theory of sacrifice. Freud agreed with Smith that the sacrificial animal was undoubtedly a totem and was therefore sacred; he also agreed with Smith that the function of sacrifice was thus to reaffirm the bond of kinship that existed between the god and his worshippers. Why, then, is such a powerful, binding force attributed to the ritual sacrifice of the totemic animal as well as the communal eating of its flesh and drinking of its blood?

Freud answered this question by asking another. Why does the *intichiuma* include both mourning and rejoicing over the death of the totemic animal? Briefly, because “the ambivalent emotional attitude, which to this day characterizes the father-complex in our children and which often persists into adult life, seems to extend to the totem animal in its capacity as substitute for the father.”<sup>91</sup> To these observations about the *intichiuma* (the putative Australian embodiment of Smith’s primitive totemic sacrament), Freud then joined ideas drawn both from Darwin’s *Descent of Man* (1871) and J. J. Atkinson’s *Primal Law* (1903). In Darwin’s speculations about the earliest stage of human society, for example, we find, not totemism, but rather “a violent and jealous father who keeps all the females for himself and drives away his sons as they grow up.” This stage, of course, had never been observed but was rather a matter of conjecture. The most primitive form of social organization that had been observed, however, was totemic—bands of males whose members have equal rights and are subject to the restrictions of the totemic system, including descent through the mother.

Might this second form of social organization have evolved from the first? And if so, how? Here Freud contrived a story:

One day the brothers who had been driven out came together, killed and devoured their father and so made an end of the patriarchal horde. United, they had the courage to do and succeeded in doing what would have been impossible for them individually. (Some cultural advance, perhaps, command over some new weapon, had given them a sense of superior strength.) Cannibal savages as they were, it goes without saying that they devoured their victim as well as killing him, The violent primal father had doubtless been the feared and envied model of each one of the company of brothers: and in the act of devouring him they accomplished their identification with him, and each one of them acquired a portion of his strength. The totem meal, which is perhaps mankind's earliest festival, would thus be a repetition and a commemoration of this memorable and criminal deed, which was the beginning of so many things—of social organization, of moral restrictions and of religion.<sup>92</sup>

To make this story plausible, Freud added, we need only assume that these brothers were filled with the same feelings of ambivalence that are found in our children and our neurotic patients: they hated their father (who was a formidable obstacle to their craving for power and their sexual desire for their mother), but they loved and admired him as well. After they had killed him, this love and admiration (previously suppressed) made itself felt as guilt and remorse, and, ironically, the father became stronger in death than he had been while alive. In accordance with the psychological process of "deferred obedience," Freud explained, what had previously been prevented by the living father was now prohibited by the sons themselves. "They revoked their deed by forbidding the killing of the totem, the substitute for their father," Freud explained, "and they renounced its fruits by resigning their claim to the women who had now been set free. They thus created out of their filial sense of guilt the two fundamental taboos of totemism, which for that very reason inevitably corresponded to the two repressed wishes of the Oedipus complex. Whoever contravened those taboos became guilty of the only two crimes with which primitive society concerned itself."<sup>93</sup>

All human morality, Freud thus insisted, begins with totemism. But the two taboos of totemism were not on an equal footing. The first (the law protecting the totem animal) was based entirely on emotions and had no practical justification. The father had actually been killed, and the deed could not be undone. But the second taboo (the prohibition of incest) had both an emotional and a practical foundation. For sexual desire, far from uniting people, divides them. While the brothers' initial motivation was to overcome their father, after his death they still remained rivals: "Each of them would have wished, like his father, to have all the women to himself.



The new organization would have collapsed in a struggle of all against all, for none of them was of such overmastering strength as to be able to take on his father's part with success." If the brothers were to live together—in short, if society itself were to survive—they had to establish the law against incest, "by which they all alike renounced the women whom they desired and who had been their chief motive for dispatching their father."<sup>94</sup>

But if society thus depends upon the second taboo, religion depends on the first—that against taking the life of the totem animal. For having chosen an animal as a substitute for their father, the sons also found in this symbol the opportunity to express their enduring sense of guilt and remorse. "They could attempt, in their relation to this surrogate father, to allay their burning sense of guilt," Freud explained, and "to bring about a kind of reconciliation with their father. The totemic system was, as it were, a covenant with their father, in which he promised them everything that a childish imagination may expect from a father—protection, care, and indulgence—while on their side they undertook to respect his life, that is to say, not to repeat the deed which had brought destruction on their real father." From totemism, these features were carried over into more advanced religions, as was the ambivalence epitomized in the totemic meal: "Thus it became a duty," Freud observed, "to repeat the crime of parricide again and again in the sacrifice of the totem animal, whenever, as a result of the changing conditions of life, the cherished fruit of the crime—appropriation of the paternal attributes—threatened to disappear."<sup>95</sup>

Freud's discussion of the subsequent evolution of the more advanced religions focused on two "threads": the totemic sacrifice and the relation of the son to the father. The first began from the foundation laid by Robertson Smith, that sacrifice was the earliest religious act, which itself reiterated the still more primitive totemic feast. The meaning of both acts, Freud emphasized, was sanctification through participation in a common meal. But in sacrifice, he added, there was also something new—"the clan deity, in whose supposed presence the sacrifice is performed, who participates in the meal as though he were a clansman, and with whom those who consume the meal become identified." How does this god, previously a stranger, arrive in this situation? One answer, Freud suggested, is that the concept of God had emerged (from some unknown source) and had so thoroughly taken control of religious life that the more primitive totem meal had to be adapted to this concept. But the psychoanalysis of individual human beings, Freud objected, "teaches us with quite special insistence that the god of each of them is formed in the likeness of his father, that this personal relation to God depends on his relation to his father in the flesh and oscillates

and changes along with that relation, and that at bottom God is nothing other than an exalted father."<sup>96</sup>

In this case, however, the father is represented twice in the sacrificial ritual—once as God and then again as the totemic animal being sacrificed. How is this possible? And what does it mean? Freud's answer was that the god himself was first the totem animal and only later became the god as a consequence of some fundamental change in man's relation to the father. What was this change? Briefly, the jealousy and bitterness of the sons that had led them to kill the father gradually declined, while their longing for the father increased, so that "it became possible for an ideal to emerge which embodied the unlimited power of the primal father against whom they had once fought as well as their readiness to submit to him."<sup>97</sup> As primitive egalitarian democracy declined, the veneration felt for particular individuals increased, so that soon certain men were, in effect, deified on the model of the primal father; with the introduction of father-deities, a fatherless society gradually became a patriarchal one, a restoration of the primal horde that returned to fathers their former rights.

In the primitive act of sacrifice, therefore, the father is indeed represented twice (as the god and again as the totemic animal victim), corresponding to the two, chronologically successive meanings of the ritual. In the sacrifice, expression is found for both the sons' ambivalent attitude toward the father and the subsequent victory of their feelings of affection over those of hostility. "The scene of the father's vanquishment," Freud emphasized, "of his greatest defeat, has become the stuff for the representation of his supreme triumph. The importance which is everywhere, without exception, ascribed to sacrifice lies in the fact that it offers satisfaction to the father for the outrage inflicted on him in the same act in which that deed is commemorated." As time went on, of course, the animal gradually lost its sacred character, and the sacrifice lost its connection with the totem feast, becoming a simple offering to the deity, an act of renunciation in favor of the god. Soon God had so completely transcended mere human beings that he could be approached only through the intermediary of the priest. As divine kings are introduced into the patriarchal structure of society, the authority of the previously deposed and recently restored father reaches its climax, but even as the sons submit to these surrogate fathers (gods and kings), the emotional ambivalence (affection and hostility) so characteristic of the earliest religious beliefs and practices endures. Through all the ages of history, Freud summarized, we can trace "the identity of the totem meal with animal sacrifice, with theanthropic human sacrifice and with the Christian Eucharist, and we can recognize in all these rituals the effect of the crime

by which men were so deeply weighted down but of which they must none the less feel so proud.”<sup>98</sup>

Freud was acutely aware that this theory depended upon assumptions he shared with Jung, and especially the hypothesis of the collective unconscious: “In particular,” he acknowledged,

I have supposed that the sense of guilt for an action has persisted for many thousands of years and has remained operative in generations which can have had no knowledge of that action. I have supposed that an emotional process, such as might have developed in generations of sons who were ill-treated by their father, has extended to new generations which were exempt from such treatment for the very reason that their father had been eliminated.<sup>99</sup>

But without such a conception, Freud argued, social psychology itself would be impossible; that is, unless psychological processes are carried on from one generation to another, each generation would need to acquire its “attitude to life” anew, and there would be no progress. This in turn raised two other questions: How much are we to attribute to this kind of psychological continuity? And by what means are the mental states of one generation passed on to the next? Here Freud acknowledged that social psychology had shown little interest in this problem, and thus little was known. But “part of the problem,” he ventured, “seems to be met by the inheritance of psychical dispositions which, however, need to be given some sort of impetus in the life of the individual before they can be roused into actual operation.”<sup>100</sup>

A second objection came from within psychoanalysis itself. Briefly, Freud had argued that the earliest moral precepts and prohibitions of primitive societies had emerged in response to a deed, followed by guilt, remorse, and “deferred obedience,” and also that this same sense of guilt both persists within and accounts for the behavior of neurotics. But in the unconscious of neurotics, some psychoanalysts have argued, we find not actions but emotions: “What lie behind the sense of guilt of neurotics are always psychical realities and never factual ones. What characterizes neurotics is the fact that they prefer psychical to factual reality and react just as seriously to thoughts as normal persons do to realities.” Might not the same have been true of savages? Might not the mere, hostile impulse against the father, the simple fantasy of killing and eating him, have been enough to produce the guilt and remorse that led to totems and taboos? Freud certainly recognized the attractiveness of this alternative psychoanalytic hypothesis: “In this way we should avoid the necessity for deriving the origin of our cultural legacy, of which we justly feel so proud, from a hideous crime, revolting to

all our feelings. No damage would thus be done to the causal chain stretching from the beginning to the present day, for psychical reality would be strong enough to bear the weight of these consequences."<sup>101</sup>

But Freud was not one to be seduced by the fact that some hypotheses are merely more palatable than others. For it is simply not accurate, he argued, to suggest that obsessive neurotics are responding to merely psychic rather than factual realities: "In their childhood," Freud emphasized, these neurotics "had these evil impulses pure and simple, and turned them into acts so far as the impotence of childhood allowed. Each of these excessively virtuous individuals passed through an evil period in his infancy, a phase of perversion which was the forerunner and precondition of the later period of excessive morality." And as with neurotics, Freud continued, so with savages. In the beginning, psychical reality coincided with factual reality; in short, "primitive men actually *did* what all the evidence shows that they intended to do." Even the differences between neurotics and savages reinforce this conclusion drawn from their similarities, for neurotics are above all inhibited in their actions, so that the thought is a more or less complete substitute for the deed, while savages are above all uninhibited, their thoughts passing directly into their actions. "And that is why," Freud concluded, "without laying claim to any finality of judgment, I think that in the case before us it may safely be assumed that 'in the beginning was the Deed.'"<sup>102</sup>

Like Durkheim, therefore, Freud understood religion within the evolutionary anthropological framework and also believed that its meaning and significance could be revealed through the reconstruction of totemism as religion's most primitive form. Each had been driven to his final conception of this ur-religion through the reading of Frazer, albeit in different ways—Durkheim reacting against Frazer's rational, utilitarian interpretation of Australian totemism, Freud responding more favorably to Frazer's connection between totemism, exogamy, and the incest taboo. And each felt that religion was a vast, powerful system of symbols, hiding important truths about human nature and society that could be discovered and revealed by the methods of sociological or psychological science. In the end, however, their conceptions of religion were fundamentally at odds. Returning to the work of Robertson Smith to find an answer to Frazer, Durkheim had embraced an understanding of religion that was more benign, considering it the source not merely of beliefs and practices but of action and self-transcendence, raising each of us above ourselves and making us stronger; because we must always act and must always strive to act above ourselves, Durkheim believed that religion would never disappear. For Freud, however, the origin of religion was to be found in the Oedipal complex, in filial ambivalence toward the father, in the collective inheritance of guilt over

his murder and its reenactment in each child, generation after generation, whose first sexual object is his mother and who thus feels jealousy and hostility toward his father. Ruthlessly suppressed, the guilt over this act and this fantasy became the source of religion, and so to be religious must always mean to be ill. The purpose of *Totem and Taboo*, therefore, was fundamentally therapeutic, to effect some kind of cure through the rediscovery, in the past and within ourselves, of the original primal deed. To do so is to fulfill Plato's and Nietzsche's injunctions, now extended from the few to the many, to know ourselves and thus to enlarge our lives.

Finally, these two classic works of Durkheim and Freud also shared one other important characteristic, for both had been published at least two years after the very existence of totemism itself had been brought into serious question. This suspicion—that the central elements of totemism had been forged together not by Australian Aborigines but retrospectively, in the imaginations of Victorian anthropologists—was at least implicit in Tylor's "Remarks on Totemism" (1898). But these suspicions grew as anthropologists began to consider alternatives to the larger social evolutionary vocabulary itself, and they became crystallized in "Totemism: An Analytical Study" (1910), written by the anthropologist A. A. Goldenweiser (1880–1940). By considering the content of that essay, as well as the intellectual perspective from which it was written, we might at last bring this curious story to some sort of conclusion.

## CONCLUSION

### THE SECRET OF THE TOTEM



A. A. Goldenweiser began his “Analytical Study” with Frazer’s *Totemism* (1887), which he described as “a little classic,” a work “in which the leading principles of that ethnic phenomenon received their first systematic elaboration. In the light of what subsequent years brought us of good and evil in totemistic research and theory,” he added, “the outline of the subject given by Frazer a quarter of a century ago must be regarded as little short of prophetic.” Following a brief summary of Frazer’s own description of the central features of totemism, Goldenweiser noted that despite their occasional disagreements (and Frazer’s own shifting stance), Frazer’s view of totemism had been largely shared by more recent writers like Haddon and W. H. R. Rivers. “As a whole,” Goldenweiser observed, these writers “joined hands with Lang, [Northcote] Thomas, and Hartland in regarding totemism, with its several features, as an integral phenomenon, both historically and psychologically. This attitude is reflected in the way various authors deal with the so-called ‘survivals’ of totemism,” he added, “where from the presence of some region of one or two of the ‘symptoms’ of totemism, or of the fragments of such symptoms, they infer the existence in the past of totemism in its ‘typical form’; that is, with all its essential characteristics.”<sup>1</sup> The purpose of Goldenweiser’s essay, of course, was to insist that no such “integral phenomenon” existed—or, indeed, ever had.

Goldenweiser first asked his readers to consider each of the “main features” of totemism: an exogamous clan; a clan name derived from the totem;

a religious attitude toward the totem; taboos against the killing, eating, and sometimes merely touching or seeing the totem; and a belief in descent from the totem. The justification for regarding these as “organically related,” he then observed, “is not *a priori* obvious. An analysis of such features, as found among various primitive tribes, may demonstrate their essential independence of one another, historically or psychologically, or both. We should then have to realize that any attempt at dealing with totemism without due realization of the essential independence of its constituent parts must result in grave misconceptions.”<sup>2</sup> To demonstrate this, Goldenweiser brought together the most detailed ethnographic data available for the two areas (central Australia and British Columbia) that had provided information for the “more speculative” works of writers like Frazer, Durkheim, and Freud. For only the first two features of totemism (exogamy and totemic names) could Goldenweiser find any agreement between the two regions; even there, he cautioned his readers that “the seductiveness of superficial resemblances in ethnic data” might disguise more fundamental differences of “historical process” and “psychological setting.” While “a certain religious attitude” is found in both areas, he again acknowledged, in Australia this extends beyond mythological beliefs to animals and plants, while in British Columbia it is found only in ceremonies and myths. Similarly, in Australia we find taboos and the belief in descent through this clan totem, while in British Columbia taboos are absent altogether, and the belief in descent is found, in a “somewhat veiled form,” in only some of the tribes. Finally, each of the regions includes in its “totemic complex” certain elements (such as magical ceremonies and the belief in reincarnation in Australia, guardian spirits and totemic art in British Columbia) not included in the other, implying a certain cross-cultural elasticity with regard to those elements considered essential to totemism. “Exogamy, taboo, religious regard, totemic names, descent from the totem,” Goldenweiser summarized, “all fail as invariable characteristics of totemism. Each of these traits, moreover, displays more or less striking independence in its distribution; and most of them can be shown to be widely-spread ethnic phenomena, diverse in origin, not necessarily coordinated in development, and displaying a rich variability of psychological make-up.”<sup>3</sup>

More specifically, Goldenweiser hoped to draw attention to a fundamental flaw in the way that the study of totemism had been carried on for almost a half-century. For once it is acknowledged that the constellation of phenomena called “totemism” in fact comprises elements that are independent of one another and coexist in any single culture only occasionally if at all, then any attempt to describe the “correlated historical development” of totemism must necessarily fail as the history of something that

does not, in fact, exist. Similarly, any attempt to relate its “features” and “characteristics” to one another psychologically and still further to derive one from another according the psychological laws must also fail, as describing a psychological “complex” that, again, does not exist and never did. In fact, he argued, most of the important forms of human activity, belief, and self-expression might be included in the composition of the “totemic complex.” But if totemism thus includes everything, Goldenweiser asked, is totemism itself anything in particular? Or has the name “totemism” been applied to one set of features here, to another set there, and still elsewhere to both sets combined? “One point, at least, is quite clear: if we continue to use the term ‘totemism,’ we may no longer apply it to any concrete ethnic content; for, while almost anything may be included, no feature is necessary or characteristic.”<sup>4</sup>

Yet Goldenweiser’s project was not entirely negative. While he rejected any attempt to identify totemism with any particular element or sum of elements, he remained receptive to the possibility of understanding it as the association of particular elements within particular contexts. The important emphasis here was on the word “association” (by contrast, for example, with “juxtaposition”) for within each totemic combination “forces are at work which tend to correlate the several heterogeneous elements.” Goldenweiser emphasized that these associations are particularly intimate. In Australian totemism, for example, the *intichiuma* ceremony is inseparable from the taboos, the belief in soul incarnation makes no sense without the *churinga* and rules of descent, and none of these can be understood independently of the clan form of social organization. Totemism thus assumes the character of an organic whole, he explained, and this in turn prompts “the illusion that the units thus found associated necessarily belong together; that they either are always associated with each other, or are not units at all, but merely different aspects of one fundamental phenomenon.”<sup>5</sup> If “totemism” is to be defined at all, therefore, Goldenweiser insisted that it be defined not as the sum of certain concrete elements but rather as a *relation* among various elements according to their contexts.

Most important for our purposes, Goldenweiser was also convinced that “the religious side” of totemism was “very weak” and thus should play no part in the definition of the phenomenon itself. Totemic crests, for example, have little religious value, and totemic names have none whatsoever. Moreover, even among tribes in which the religious side is present, it appears to be so contingently rather than necessarily, for these tribes do not differ substantially from totemic tribes in which the religious element is nonexistent. If (pace Durkheim) the word “totemism” were thus to be used to designate a relationship between certain religious and certain social phenomena, Goldenweiser



thus argued, it would immediately exclude a large number of clans and tribes whose beliefs and institutions are undeniably, and unmistakably, “totemic.” To include such instances, therefore, Goldenweiser dismissed the adjective “religious” and placed increased emphasis on the “object and symbols” that represent “certain emotional values for the people to whom they pertain.” Hence his final definition: “*Totemism is the tendency of definite social units to become associated with objects and symbols of emotional value.*”<sup>6</sup>

It seems odd to describe Goldenweiser’s essay as a “watershed” in the history of our subject, for it appeared almost simultaneously with Frazer’s four-volume *Totemism and Exogamy* (1910), and both *Les formes élémentaires* (1912) and *Totem and Taboo* (1913) still lay in the future. In his preface to *L’État actuel du problème totémique* (1919), the French ethnographer and folklorist Arnold van Gennep could still write that totemism, which had already “taxed the wisdom and the ingenuity of many scholars,” might “continue to do so for many years.”<sup>7</sup> Just a year later, however, Robert Lowie’s *Primitive Society* (1920) supported Goldenweiser in general while suggesting that he was still insufficiently skeptical about totemism—that his definition of totemism as the “socialization of emotional values” still failed to do justice to the variety of attitudes held by tribesmen toward their totems, casting doubt on the existence of an empirical connection between totemic names and the clan form of social organization, and so on—and eventually concluding: “I am not convinced that all the acumen and erudition lavished upon the subject has established the reality of the totemic phenomenon.”<sup>8</sup>

After Lowie’s textbook, Claude Lévi-Strauss observed, such skepticism about totemism simply increased. The 1923 edition of A.L. Kroeber’s *Anthropology*, for example, still contained numerous references to totemism, but no necessary connection between totems and the clan form of social organization was suggested. And while the 1948 edition of the same text ran to 856 pages, the 39 pages of the index contained only a single, incidental reference to “totemism.” Similarly, Lowie’s *Introduction to Cultural Anthropology* (1934) devoted but a half page to totemism, and his *Social Organization* (1948) mentioned the word itself only once en passant. Similarly, in his *Social Structure* (1949), G.P. Murdock dismissed the relevance of totemism to the formal structuring of social relations as “comparatively slight.” By the appearance of *Le Totémisme aujourd’hui* (1962), Lévi-Strauss could compare totemism to hysteria, “in that once we are persuaded to doubt that it is possible arbitrarily to isolate certain phenomena and to group them together as diagnostic signs of an illness, or of an objective institution, the symptoms themselves vanish or appear refractory to any unifying interpretation.” The “totemic illusion,” Lévi-Strauss proclaimed, had simply been “liquidated.”<sup>9</sup>

This liquidation, however, was related to other, more fundamental changes in the overall perspective of anthropology that had been taking place over the previous half century. After his *Researches on the Early History of Mankind* (1865), for example, Tylor had largely turned his focus to the evolutionary study of culture (especially language, myth, religion, and material culture), leaving the study of kinship and social organization to writers like McLennan. But in 1888, he read a paper at a meeting of the Anthropological Institute entitled “On a Method of Investigating the Development of Institutions,” which George Stocking, in his superb study of the historical development of anthropology after that date, describes as “a powerfully condensed summary representation of twenty-five years of social evolutionary argument.” But Stocking immediately adds that this was decidedly not the “prospective exemplar of an ascendant paradigm” but rather the “retrospective exemplar of a paradigm about to enter a period of decline.” However important, widely cited, and influential, Tylor’s paper “can as well be read as the beginning of a period of questioning of the assumptions of ‘classical evolutionism,’ a period of criticism, doubt, recantation, and conversion which over the next several decades was to lead to what has been called ‘the revolution in anthropology.’”<sup>10</sup>

One of the issues at stake in this revolution concerned the classification of apparently similar cultural practices. Evolutionary, “armchair” anthropologists like Frazer, Durkheim, and Freud were inclined to the view that two apparently similar practices, whatever the cultures or geographic locations in which they appeared, were but two instances of the same practice; employing the evolutionary vocabulary of “psychic unity,” universal “stages of development,” the “doctrine of survivals,” and so on, a plausible relation among these instances could be fashioned. With the emergence of academically trained ethnographic fieldworkers, however, the tendency was increasingly to see these practices as separate examples of two, quite different phenomena. It should be obvious that Goldenweiser’s essay affords an example of this second, more recent tendency of professional ethnography, as well as a link to the increasingly American critique of evolutionary anthropological presumption. As a Russian émigré educated first in Kiev but then at Harvard and Columbia, Goldenweiser had been one of the first students of Franz Boas (1858–1942), who, more than any other individual, was responsible for the revolution that anthropology would soon experience.

Born in Minden, Westphalia, in an increasingly conservative Bismarckian Prussian culture, Boas was the sickly child of liberal Jewish parents who still adhered to the ideals of 1848. Boas spent most of his time with books, developing interests in physics and geography that he pursued at the universities of Heidelberg, Bonn, and Kiel. For his doctoral dissertation in

physics, Boas performed experiments dealing with the absorption of light by different samples of distilled water. Frequently, he discovered, the results of his experiments seemed to hinge on his own, subjective judgment as an observer, and he complained in the dissertation of the difficulty of assessing the relative intensities of two lights that differed slightly in color. In effect, there were two problems—that of thresholds below which differences in stimuli produce no perceptible sensory difference; and that of “just noticeable differences” in sensory stimuli—both of which were central to the “new philosophic discipline” of psychophysics that had been established twenty years earlier by Gustave Theodor Fechner (1801–1887). After taking his Ph.D. in 1881, Boas published several articles based on his experiments, arguing that there are always *situational* factors (such as the mental state of the experimental subject) that affect the perception of each stimulus and thus the comparability of different perceived stimuli; more fundamentally, the various differences that psychophysics assumed to be *quantitative* (such as the intensity of light) were in fact *qualitative*. Boas thus expressed skepticism over the very possibility of a general measure of all perceptions or of a general law governing the relationship of stimulus and perception.<sup>11</sup>

Boas’s interest in geography derived from what Stocking has called an “intensive emotional interest in the phenomena of the world.” In nineteenth century Germany, there was considerable overlap between geography (particularly the historical geography of Karl Ritter, whose focus was on the interaction of man and environment and the effort to formulate a “law of migrations” that governed the population movements of primitive peoples) and ethnology (particularly the preevolutionary ethnology of Adolf Bastian, which was concerned with “the origin and diffusion of nations”). Working with Theobold Fischer, a disciple of Ritter, Boas was led in the direction of “an holistic, affective understanding of the relationship of man and the natural world.”<sup>12</sup> Finally, a letter of April 1882 suggests that philosophy had also become a major interest during Boas’s last four semesters at Kiel. Boas was especially influenced by the revival of Kant that had begun twenty years earlier—he was close enough to Benno Erdmann, a leading Kant scholar, to send him offprints of his articles on psychophysics and to receive detailed comments in reply, and he was close friends with the neo-Kantian philosopher Rudolf Lehmann. If physics led Boas to questions about the perception of sensory stimuli and historical geography led him to questions about the relations of man with his environment, then Kantian philosophy led him in a similar direction: to questions about the interpretive activity of the human mind in relation to the objects it observed in the external world.

Psychophysics, historical geography, and philosophy thus conspired in Boas’s decision to set out on an ethnographic expedition to study the Es-

kimos of Baffinland (between Greenland and the Canadian mainland), a “geographically pertinent problem” that also had epistemological implications—briefly, “the relationship of men’s knowledge of the land and the actual topography—i.e., between perception and reality—in what he hoped was a relatively uncomplicated environmental situation.”<sup>13</sup> Once described as a “conversion experience” involving an abrupt and profound theoretical reorientation, the impact of Boas’s Baffinland expedition has more recently been understood as a natural growth and extension of his earlier views, including those described above, and also as the confirmation of attitudes Boas had brought with him from Germany. From his parents, Boas had acquired a cultural outlook in which equality of opportunity, education, political, and intellectual liberty, the rejection of dogma, the search for scientific truth, the identification with humanity, and the devotion to its progress were part of a single posture that was “at once scientific and political.” The more conservative climate of Bismarckian Germany in the early 1880s, with its crass opportunism, materialism, and anti-Semitism, had threatened these values and alienated Boas from his German homeland; this in turn explains his enormous attraction to Eskimo culture, with its emphasis on sharing and cooperation, high degree of integration and inclusion of its members, lack of hypocrisy and pretense, and so on.

However gradually, therefore, Boas’s interests began to shift away from geography and toward the study of history and ethnology. Returning from Baffinland, he took a job at the Royal Ethnographic Museum in Berlin, where he came under the influence of Bastian and Rudolf Virchow. In this stimulating atmosphere, Boas increasingly felt that “the phenomena such as customs, traditions, and migrations are far too complex in their origin, as to enable us to study their psychological causes without a thorough knowledge of their history.” By late spring, having qualified as docent in physical geography at the University of Berlin, Boas was off to British Columbia on another field trip, which would bring him into contact with the people who would become the focus of all his later anthropological work—the Kwakiutl Indians of Vancouver Island. The focus reflected Boas’s increased interest in history and ethnology rather than geography: “I considered it necessary to see a people among which historical facts are of greater influence than the surroundings,” Boas recalled one year later, “and selected for this purpose Northwest America.”<sup>14</sup>

In 1887, Boas returned not to Germany but to New York, where he accepted a position as geography editor of *Science* magazine. But his interest in geography continued to wane as his interest in ethnology grew, and to this interest he brought a new perspective, highly critical of the basic assumptions of social evolutionary theory. This was already evident in the spring of 1887, in a series

of letters he exchanged with Otis Mason and John Wesley Powell over the principles of arrangement in ethnological museums. According to the dominant ethnological conception held by Mason, all human beings had certain generic needs or desires that had to be satisfied, and while the tools they used to satisfy these might vary from stage to stage, a museum should classify tools by their function into family, genera, and species and arrange each tool type according to the sequences of evolutionary development from simple to complex. But to Boas, such a functional classification was premature and based solely on “analogies of the outward appearance” that would preclude the inductive gathering of evidence. Arguing instead that each tribal culture was a “subjectively perceived whole” and that individual artifacts could be understood only within the larger context of such cultural wholes, Boas insisted that all the materials of a single tribe or tribal region be grouped together. Boas had in effect “subordinated the lawgiving function of the physicist to the descriptive and explanatory function of the historian-cosmographer.”<sup>15</sup>

The significance of this gradual shift in Boas’s thought can be illuminated by considering, successively and progressively, three of his essays. The first, “On Alternating Sounds,” was written in the fall of 1888, shortly after Boas had returned from a second field trip to the Pacific Northwest. Among the Kwakiutl, Boas had had to transcribe native languages he had not heard before and whose structure was unfamiliar. Inevitably, he found himself transcribing words differently on different occasions: he transcribed one Eskimo term successively as “*Operniving*,” “*Upernivik*,” and “*Uperdnivik*,” another as “*Kikertákdjua*,” “*Kekertákdjuak*,” and “*Kekertáktuak*,” and so on. Evolutionary philologists had understood these so-called alternating sounds of the Kwakiutl and other tribes as the surviving remnants of the “vague” and “fluctuating” language of Paleolithic man, thus reinforcing late Victorian assumptions about the evolutionary inferiority of non-Europeans. But Boas suspected that the problem lay in the fact that each of the component sounds of the native utterances were actually slightly different from those sounds that (because his own ear was more accustomed to them) he had “heard.” But this suspicion was placed in a broader context when, on returning from the field, he read an experimental report on the problem of “sound-blindness” written by Sara Wiltse, a student of G. Stanley Hall’s at Columbia. Wiltse had dictated polysyllabic words to young children, asking them to write down what they had heard. The results, Boas noted, were unsatisfactory, as the children failed to grasp the sequence of the component sounds. Sounds, in short, “are not perceived by the hearer in the way in which they are pronounced by the speaker.”<sup>16</sup>

Why this misunderstanding? The nature of the sounds we produce, Boas explained, depends on the position of the “sound-producing organs” as well

as the force with which the air passes out of the mouth or nose. Through long practice, we learn to produce certain combinations of sounds by placing our organs in certain positions and expelling a certain amount of air, but however extensive our practice, these positions and amounts of air are never be exactly the same but vary slightly from one utterance to the next. The vibration of air that corresponds to each sound stimulates the tympanum of the listener, of course, who thus “perceives” the sound, but the listener also “apperceives” the sound, according to those he has heard before. Psychophysicists had long recognized that stimuli that were measurably distinct were often perceptually indistinguishable and also that the range of stimuli that might thus prove indistinguishable varied with factors like the interval between the stimuli or the subject’s degree of attention; to these two factors, Boas now added the “unexpectedly great influence of practice” discovered in the Pacific Northwest: hearing sounds in a language he had not previously encountered, the field philologist “apperceived” them according to the more familiar sounds in his own language. The “misspellings” of the field ethnologist, Boas thus concluded, “are due to a wrong apperception, which is due to the phonetic system of our native language.” Alternating sounds, in short, do not exist, but are rather alternating apperceptions of one and the same sound.<sup>17</sup>

A second essay, “The Limitations of the Comparative Method of Anthropology” (1896), dealt with one of the most important discoveries of Victorian anthropology: that “human society has grown and developed everywhere in such a manner that its forms, its opinions, and its actions have many fundamental traits in common.” Before this discovery, Boas recalled, it was assumed that anthropology could only record the curious customs and beliefs of strange peoples, but the recognition that general laws govern the development of all societies implied that an understanding of these laws might help us to advance the growth of civilization. This change of theoretical perspective, Boas then observed, has been accompanied by one of method. Before the discovery of these general laws of social development, the similarities discovered among different cultures were considered proof of their historical connection. Since their discovery, however, such similarities have been treated as evidence of the uniform workings of the human mind in all times and places. But such research “makes the assumption that the same ethnological phenomenon has everywhere developed in the same manner. Here lies the flaw in the argument of [this] method,” Boas emphasized, “for no such proof can be given. Even the most cursory review shows that the same phenomena may develop in a multitude of ways.”<sup>18</sup>

To illustrate this methodological flaw, the first example that Boas chose was totemism. Almost universally, he began, primitive tribes are divided

into clans that have totems, a form of social organization that has arisen independently over and over again, suggesting that the “psychical conditions of man” favor the existence of a totemic organization of society. But from this, it does not follow that totemic clans have developed everywhere in the same manner. Some say that they arise from the association of independent clans, for example, while others claim that they arise by the disintegration of growing tribes, and so on. We simply cannot say that the occurrence of the same phenomenon is always due to the same causes, nor can we say that the human mind obeys the same laws everywhere. Instead, the causes from which the phenomenon developed must be investigated, and comparisons must be limited to those phenomena that are clearly the effects of the same causes. Totemic clans that have developed through association, for example, must be treated separately from those that are the consequence of disintegration. “In short,” Boas summarized, “before extended comparisons are made, the comparability of the material must be proved.”<sup>19</sup>

Far more than a simple methodological caveat, Boas’s argument cut to the very heart of social evolutionary theory. Applied to the apparently universal elements of human societies, the assumption that similar phenomena must always have developed from the same causes “leads to the conclusion that there is one grand system according to which mankind has developed everywhere,” and that “all the occurring variations are no more than minor details in this grand uniform evolution.” But since similar phenomena might often have developed from dissimilar causes, then “we must also consider all the ingenious attempts at constructions of a grand system of the evolution of society as of very doubtful value, unless at the same time proof is given that the same phenomena must always have had the same origin. Until this is done,” he added, “the presumption is always in favor of a variety of courses which historical growth may have taken.” Boas was not sacrificing the nomothetic goals of anthropology to a merely descriptive approach. On the contrary, he argued for a synthesis of the comparative and historical methods and reaffirmed the need to seek the laws that govern the growth of human culture, the processes by which certain stages of culture have developed, and the reasons why such customs and beliefs exist. But for Boas, the “much safer” method to this end was that anticipated in his correspondence with Mason and Powell, that is, a “detailed study of customs in their relation to the total culture of the tribe practicing them, in connection with an investigation of their geographical distribution among neighboring tribes.”<sup>20</sup>

Twenty years later, Boas extended these methodological principles to the specific problem of “The Origin of Totemism” (1916). The occasion for this essay was an efflorescence of references to the so-called American theory

of totemism, for which Boas (together with Alice Fletcher and Charles Hill-Tout) had been held responsible by writers including Frazer and Durkheim. "This theory," Boas observed, "is based on the idea that the clan totem has developed from the individual manitou [guardian-spirit] by extension over a kinship group." Boas acknowledged that in the late 1890s, he had pointed out the analogy between the "totem legend" and the "guardian-spirit tale" among the Kwakiutl and had even "suggested that among this tribe there is a likelihood that under the pressure of totemistic ideas the guardian-spirit concept has taken this particular line of development." But it was Hill-Tout and Fletcher, Boas emphasized, who expanded this observation about the Kwakiutl into a more general "American theory" of the origin of totemism that Frazer and Durkheim attributed to all three. "Their interpretation of my remarks," Boas added, again referring to Frazer and Durkheim, "is undoubtedly founded on their method of research, which has for its object an exhaustive interpretation of ethnic phenomena as the result of a single psychic process."<sup>21</sup>

What did Boas really think about the origin of totemism? Briefly, Boas explained that he believed in analogous psychological processes among all peoples where "analogous social conditions" prevail, but he emphatically did not believe that "ethnic phenomena" are simply the expressions of these psychological laws. The actual processes, Boas insisted, "are immensely diversified," so that "similar types of ethnic thought" might develop in quite different ways. In particular, he denied that one could "generalize from the phenomenon found among the Kwakiutl [to] all totemic phenomena." Here Boas had two principles in mind. First, the phenomena that anthropologists compare "are seldom really alike." That we call certain tales "myths" and certain activities "rituals," for example, does not prove that "these phenomena, wherever they occur, have the same history or spring from the same mental activities." On the contrary, "the selection of the material assembled for the purpose of comparison is wholly determined by the subjective point of view according to which we arrange diverse mental phenomena." From this first principle, a second follows: To justify the inference that these phenomena are in some sense "the same," their alleged comparability must be demonstrated by some other means. And this is something that is never done. The phenomena themselves contain no indication that they had a common origin, and when we do examine their causes, "we are led to the conclusion that we are dealing with heterogeneous material."<sup>22</sup> The unity we find in totemic phenomena, therefore, is purely subjective.

It was no accident, of course, that Boas's 1916 essay so closely resembles Goldenweiser's argument of 1910. For Goldenweiser was not only Boas's student, but his 1910 essay had been a doctoral thesis written under Boas's



supervision at Columbia. “I quite agree with the view of Doctor Goldenweiser,” Boas thus confirmed, “who holds that the specific contents of totemism are quite distinct in character in different areas.” The customs allegedly held in common by various totemic peoples include taboos, names, symbols, or religious practices that are, in their special forms, quite distinct for different totemic areas; there is simply no evidence that all these customs belong together or are necessary elements of what Goldenweiser had called the “totemic complex.” “Since the contents of totemism as found in various parts of the world show such important differences,” Boas insisted, “I do not believe that all totemic phenomena can be derived from the same psychological or historical sources. Totemism is an artificial unit,” he concluded, “not a natural one.”<sup>23</sup>

That totemism was a natural and objective (by contrast with a artificial and subjective) phenomenon had of course been the recurrent theme of McLennan, Robertson Smith, Frazer, Durkheim, and Freud. As Boas explained (and as Lévi-Strauss later understood perfectly), their mistake was to confuse two, quite different problems. The first was the frequent identification of human beings with animals and plants, which concerned very general questions about the relationship between man and nature and extended beyond religion into primitive art and magic as well. The second, quite different problem was the designation of groups based on kinship, which in some cases had been achieved with the names of animals and plants but might also have been effected in other ways. In the sense embraced by Frazer, Durkheim, and Freud, Boas emphasized, “totemism” included only those cases where these two problems coincided; and though Boas felt that this coincidence was not completely random, he insisted that it was utterly contingent. If the recognition of kinship groups (and thus of exogamy) is universal, therefore, totemism is not. And since the antiquity of an ethnic phenomenon might reasonably be judged by its universality, we are justified in assuming that exogamy is older than totemism.

In fact, Boas believed that exogamy was the primitive condition from which totemism arose—if it arose at all. When exogamy existed in a small community, Boas explained, certain conditions must have emerged with the demographic expansion of the group. If social cohesion was very slight, for example, individuals might easily have passed out of the group, so it would have remained limited to the kinship group “in the narrow sense of the term.” In cases like these (exemplified by Boas’s Eskimos), there would have emerged a large number of small, coordinate, independent family groups, from which totemism could *never* have arisen. But if the tribe had greater social cohesion and, despite the growth of population, the idea of incest remained associated with the whole group, it would have become im-

portant to immediately recognize an individual as belonging to the group. This could have been achieved by extending the significance of terms of relationship, so that members of the exogamic group could be distinguished from the rest of the tribe. This need might have been met by granting, to all members of the group, some mark of recognition (such as the name of some animal or plant) and thus totemism, under these conditions but not others, would have emerged from exogamy.<sup>24</sup>

As Lévi-Strauss observed a half-century later, Boas's argument came down to an insistence that some kind of classificatory system of social organization is a necessary condition of totemism. Totemism could never have evolved among the Eskimos because their social organization is "nonsystematic" and for those communities with more systematic forms of social organization, the use of animal and vegetable names for their exogamic groups was simply a particular, contingent case of "a method of differential designation, the nature of which remains the same whatever the type of denotation employed."<sup>25</sup> Nor was this reduction of totemism to what might be called "the human predisposition to classify things" entirely new, for in his brief "Remarks on Totemism" (1898), Tylor had already deplored McLennan's extension of the significance of totemism beyond *Primitive Marriage* (1865), where it was incidental to his study of exogamy, to "The Worship of Animals and Plants" (1869–70), where it reappeared as "the great principle of early religion, as well as early society." Despite the frequency of their close combination, Tylor had thus warned Frazer, exogamy "can and does exist without totemism, and for all we know was originally independent of it"<sup>26</sup>—a caveat quickly ignored in the wake of Spencer and Gillen's *Native Tribes* (1899), with its account of what Frazer took to be the Robertson Smith's "totem sacrament." Tylor's remarks "could have obviated many divagations," Lévi-Strauss lamented, "if they had not been so much out of fashion."<sup>27</sup>

But fashions change, of course, and as we have seen, social evolutionary theory had already entered "a period of questioning, criticism, doubt, recantation, and conversion" that would culminate in "the revolution in anthropology."<sup>28</sup> The relationship between this revolution and the "accelerated liquidation" might be understood as a simple connection between assumptions, questions, and answers. It has become a commonplace of the historiography of science, for example, that no serious research can take place in the absence of some basic, commonly-accepted assumptions about the nature of things. From what has gone before, it should be clear that the writers I have discussed indeed shared such assumptions about "what the world is like," including the beliefs that all human societies pass through the same developmental stages; that all human beings have a common psychological nature; that the differences in their beliefs and practices might thus

be explained by placing them at the appropriate steps of the evolutionary ladder; that similar beliefs and practices discovered in different times and places might be usefully compared; that their similarity might be referred to independent autonomous creation rather than historical diffusion; that irrational or dysfunctional institutions might be explained as “survivals,” in later evolutionary stages, of beliefs and practices that were once useful and reasonable; and so on.

In the history of science, the function of such consensual agreement has been to delimit the field of potentially interesting questions (which is of course infinite) to a more manageable set of questions of particular interest to the scientific community. Within the presumptions of social evolutionary theory, for example, it became reasonable and important to ask questions like: What is the essential nature of religion? What was its earliest and most elementary form? How did religion come into being? What were its causes? How did more advanced and complex religions evolve from this origin? Which elements of these more advanced religions might be understood as the “survivals” from this more primitive form? Does magic evolve from religion? Or does religion evolve from magic? Or do they each have an independent origin and subsequent development? What has been the evolutionary relationship between science, on the one hand, and religion and magic, on the other? What has been the evolutionary relationship between religion and various forms of primitive social organization (exogamy, patriarchy, matriarchy, monarchy, etc.)? Did totemism precede exogamy, which was thus derived from it? Or did exogamy evolve from totemism?

To these questions, of course, the “secret” of the totem not only promised answers that might illuminate the nature of primitive peoples and their institutions but also afforded an evocative, discursive object with which the late Victorians might speak and write about themselves, about their ambivalence over imperial claims of western Europe relative to the “Orient,” about the “spiritual” claims for Christianity by contrast with the more “materialistic” beliefs and practices of its Semitic predecessors, about the conditions of civilization relative to “savagery,” and about the need for sexual repression as the foundation of civil society. With its connection to exogamy and thus to sexual repression, its germs of a communal rite and thus of the central rite of Christianity, and its forms of social organization and thus the conditions of society itself, totemism was a powerful object to think with; the fact that these qualities were so temporally or spatially distant, so mysterious that they often seemed almost to fade into evanescence merely increased the elasticity and thus conceptual utility of their descriptions and redescriptions, making them adaptable to an ever-wider range of imagined interests and purposes.

This elasticity and conceptual utility of the totemic secret, however, was always constrained by its status as an answer to questions posed by social evolutionary theory. As “armchair anthropologists” like Frazer, Durkheim, and Freud gave way to academically trained ethnographers, as the beliefs and practices of different peoples in different times and places gradually came to seem less similar, and as the focus of anthropological scrutiny moved away from universal stages of development toward particular beliefs and practices in particular cultures in particular times and places, the basic assumptions of social evolutionary theory lost any semblance of consensual authority. A new generation of anthropologists and ethnographers discovered new areas of agreement on which to base their research and began asking questions quite different from those that had seemed so compelling to Frazer, Durkheim, and Freud. This is not to say that people stopped asking about the origin of religion, or its earliest form, or whether exogamy or magic preceded it, and so on. But those who asked it were increasingly assumed to be either undergraduates or members of the lay public, who had not passed through graduate departments and been sufficiently socialized to know that these are simply not “good questions.” To have a theory about the origin and significance of totemism became increasingly to have an answer to a question that anthropologists no longer asked.

Responding to this suggestion—that these classic writers were concerned more with their own questions rather than with ours—one might reasonably ask why we should continue to read them at all. For the traditional justification for their study has been that these writers are in some sense our contemporaries, that they communicate with us directly, and that their works contain answers to questions that are permanent, timeless, and constitutive of the discipline itself. But there is also an alternative justification,<sup>29</sup> which discovers the value of reading these writers in the very things that separate their assumptions, questions, and answers from our own. For to learn that what were once assumed to be powerful, undeniable, permanent truths were in historical fact the merest contingencies of a particular context is surely to learn a more general truth, not just about the past, but about ourselves.



## NOTES



### INTRODUCTION

1. Kuhn, *Structure*, 1–7; Stocking, *Race, Culture, and Evolution*, esp. 1–12; and Skinner, “Meaning and Understanding,” 3–53.
2. Durkheim, “Lettres,” 606–7, 612–14; translation mine.
3. Turkle, *Second Self*, 11–12
4. Avoiding the term “paradigm,” which is heavily laden with natural scientific baggage, Stocking suggests that we instead describe social evolutionism as a “tradition of inquiry of interpretation” (*Victorian Anthropology*, xiv). My own preference, which helps us to think about our reconstructions of the past as a certain kind of “conversation,” is for Rorty’s “final vocabulary” (see Rorty, “Private Irony,” 73; and “Historiography of Philosophy”).
5. See Jones, *Development*, 172–301.
6. See Darnton, “Intellectual and Cultural History,” 327–54.
7. See Jones, “On Understanding a Sociological Classic,” 279–319; “On Quentin Skinner,” 435–67.
8. See Skinner, “Meaning and Understanding,” 5–6.

### 1. TOTEMISM AS ANIMAL WORSHIP

1. Eusebius, *Preparation*, 16c. In fact, this method had been used by many earlier writers, including Aristides, Justin Martyr, Tatian, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen (from whom Eusebius also quoted at length).
2. Eusebius, *Preparation*, 17b–d, 28a–b, 34d, 41b.
3. Payne, preface, x.

4. Cumberland, *Sanchoniatho*, 24.
5. See Gallatin, *Synopsis*, 109.
6. Long, *Voyages*, 110–12.
7. Long, *Voyages*, 87–88.
8. Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, 81–83.
9. Grey, *Journals*, 228–29.
10. Grey, *Journals*, 229; Gallatin, *Synopsis*, 109–10.
11. Grey, *Journals*, 242.
12. Grey, *Journals*, 223–24.
13. Whately, *Introductory Lectures*, 111–13, 122, 158.
14. See Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, 11–12.
15. See Burrow, *Evolution and Society*, 7.
16. See Jones, *Development*, 172–231.
17. Burrow, *Evolution and Society*, 15–16.
18. Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, 19.
19. Burrow, *Evolution and Society*, 54, 41–42.
20. Burrow, *Evolution and Society*, 21, 97–99.
21. Whately, “On the Origin,” 34.
22. Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, 87.
23. Burrow, *Evolution and Society*, 145.
24. Maine, *Ancient Law*, 7.
25. Maine, *Ancient Law*, 112.
26. Maine, *Ancient Law*, 115–16.
27. Maine, *Ancient Law*, 122–23.
28. Maine, *Ancient Law*, 126. If only in passing, Maine had already pointed to the importance of sacrifice in bonding these otherwise disparate groups together. Those who formed the various political groups, he observed, “were certainly in the habit of meeting together periodically, for the purpose of acknowledging and consecrating their association by common sacrifices. Strangers amalgamated with the brotherhood were doubtless admitted to these sacrifices; and when that was once done, we can believe that it seemed equally easy, or not more difficult, to conceive them as sharing in the common lineage.” This would become a central focus of Robertson Smith’s *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites* (1889).
29. Maine, *Ancient Law*, 144.
30. Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, 127–28.
31. Davie, *Democratic Intellect*, 115.
32. Rivière, “Introduction,” viii.
33. McLennan, “Law,” 255–56.
34. McLennan, “Law,” 261.
35. McLennan, “Law,” 259, 260.
36. McLennan, “Law,” 263, 264.
37. Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, 165.
38. Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, 166.

39. Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, 74.
40. McLennan, "Early History," 523.
41. McLennan, "Early History," 522.
42. McLennan, *Primitive Marriage*, 11, 12.
43. McLennan, *Primitive Marriage*, 23–24, 45.
44. McLennan, *Primitive Marriage*, 52–53.
45. Grey, *Journals*, 225.
46. McLennan, *Primitive Marriage*, 113.
47. McLennan, *Primitive Marriage*, 114–15.
48. McLennan, *Primitive Marriage*, 115, 116n.
49. McLennan, *Primitive Marriage*, 140.
50. McLennan, *Primitive Marriage*, 158.
51. McLennan, *Primitive Marriage*, 89.
52. McLennan, *Primitive Marriage*, 227.
53. McLennan, *Primitive Marriage*, 260; Maine, *Ancient Law*, 126.
54. Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, 167.
55. Lubbock, "Primitive Condition," 375–76, 382.
56. Argyll, *Primeval Man*, 199–200.
57. Lubbock, "Primitive Condition," 396, 398.
58. Lubbock, "Primitive Condition," 398, 396, 409n1.
59. Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, 169.
60. McLennan, "Early History," 524, 525.
61. McLennan, "Early History," 526–27.
62. McLennan, "Early History," 531–33.
63. McLennan, *Primitive Marriage*, 113; Grey, *Journals*, 225.
64. McLennan, "Kinship," 227–28n.
65. McLennan, "Totem," 753.
66. See Deane, *Worship*, 441–58.
67. Fergusson, *Tree and Serpent Worship*, iii, 6.
68. McLennan, "Tree and Serpent Worship," 627, 635, 637.
69. Fergusson, *Tree and Serpent Worship*, 2.
70. McLennan, "Tree and Serpent Worship," 640.
71. McLennan, "Worship of Animals and Plants," 407; Cumberland, *Phoenician History*, 24.
72. McLennan, "Worship of Animals and Plants," 408.
73. In "The Worship of Animals and Plants," McLennan frequently used the Latin "gens" (pl. "gentes") to refer to stock-groups. The Roman gens was a clan, or group of families, linked together by a common name and the belief in a common ancestor—something quite similar, but not identical, to the Australian stock-group. To avoid confusion, I've tried to use the latter term consistently throughout.
74. McLennan, "Worship of Animals and Plants," 413.
75. Grey, *Journals*, 228–29.
76. McLennan, "Worship of Animals and Plants," 414–15, 422.



77. Tylor, *Researches*, 118, 124, 370.
78. This term originated with George Ernst Stahl (1660–1734), whose posthumous *Theoria Medica Vera* (1737) seemed to Tylor to revive (in modern scientific form) the classic theory that identified the vital principle and the soul. Because Tylor understood animistic beliefs as having a special relationship to the development of ideas of the soul, he preferred “animism” to both “spiritualism” (a particular modern sect) and “fetishism” (the more common term used by Lubbock and McLennan). See Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 1:426.
79. Tylor, “On Traces,” 87, 90, 92.
80. Tylor, *Researches*, 281–82; “Remarks,” 138.
81. McLennan, “Worship of Animals and Plants,” 423.
82. McLennan, “Worship of Animals and Plants,” 562.
83. McLennan, “Worship of Animals and Plants,” 563–69.
84. Feldman and Richardson, *Modern Mythology*, 242.
85. McLennan, “Worship of Animals and Plants,” 209–10.
86. McLennan, “Worship of Animals and Plants,” 210.
87. McLennan, “Worship of Animals and Plants,” 211.
88. McLennan, “Worship of Animals and Plants,” 213–14.
89. Lubbock, *Origin*, 134, 133.
90. Lubbock, *Origin*, 292.
91. Lubbock, *Origin*, 248–49, 187.
92. Tylor, *Primitive Culture* 1:418–24, 425.
93. Tylor, *Primitive Culture* 1:429, 499–502.
94. Cited in Tylor, *Primitive Culture* 2:221.
95. Tylor, *Primitive Culture* 2:221, 229.
96. Tylor, *Primitive Culture* 2:234, 235, 236.
97. Tylor, *Primitive Culture* 2:236–37.
98. Tylor, “Remarks,” 138.
99. See Lévi-Strauss, *Totemism*, 12.
100. Many of these arguments can be found in *Studies in Ancient History* (1876; 2nd ed., 1886), which contains all of *Primitive Marriage* as well republications of old articles and several new essays.

## 2. TOTEMISM AS SACRAMENT

1. See Darlow, *William Robertson Nicoll*, 41.
2. Black and Chrystal, *William Robertson Smith*, 26.
3. Black and Chrystal, *William Robertson Smith*, 34.
4. Strahan, *Andrew Bruce Davidson*, 89, 280–81, 92.
5. Strahan, *Andrew Bruce Davidson*, 92.
6. Black and Chrystal, *William Robertson Smith*, 79, 84–8.
7. Hick, “Revelation,” 190; Temple, *Nature, Man, and God*, 314.

8. Hick, "Revelation," 191.
9. Smith, "Prophecy," 98, 101–3. Smith's biographers indicate in a note (Black and Chrystal, *William Robertson Smith*, 97n1) that "Prophecy and Personality" was read and discussed at the New College Theological Society on January 25, 1868, adding that "only a fragment of the paper now survives." They added the subtitle "A Fragment" when they published his essays and lectures (also in 1912).
10. Smith, "Christianity," 123, 132.
11. Black and Chrystal, *William Robertson Smith*, 106.
12. Harris, *Tübingen School*, 111–112.
13. Ritschl, *Positive Development of the Doctrine*, 205–7.
14. Ritschl, *Positive Development of the Doctrine*, 212, 1, 27, 138–39.
15. Ritschl, *Positive Development of the Doctrine*, 219–26; Reardon, *Liberal Protestantism*, 26.
16. Ritschl, *Positive Development of the Doctrine*, 8, 10.
17. Black and Chrystal, *William Robertson Smith*, 111–13.
18. Smith, "Theological Society," 141, 157, 149.
19. Black and Chrystal, *William Robertson Smith*, 116.
20. Black and Chrystal, *William Robertson Smith*, 120–21.
21. Smith, "On the Question of Prophecy," 166.
22. Smith, "What History Teaches," 212–13, 222, 229–30, 232.
23. Black and Chrystal, *William Robertson Smith*, 134–70.
24. Black and Chrystal, *William Robertson Smith*, 125, 180.
25. Smith, "Bible," 548–49.
26. Black and Chrystal, *William Robertson Smith*, 190.
27. Drummond and Bulloch, *The Church in Late Victorian Scotland*, 60, 69.
28. Drummond and Bulloch, *The Church in Late Victorian Scotland*, 71.
29. McLennan, "Worship of Animals and Plants," 212.
30. Smith, "Animal Worship," 456–57, 458.
31. Smith, "Animal Worship," 458.
32. Smith, "Animal Worship," 467, 469–70.
33. Smith, "Animal Worship," 477.
34. Smith, "Animal Worship," 482–83.
35. Black and Chrystal, *William Robertson Smith*, 370, 382.
36. Smith, *Old Testament in the Jewish Church*, vi.
37. Smith, *Kinship and Marriage*, v–vi.
38. Smith, *Kinship and Marriage*, 3, 4–5.
39. Smith, *Kinship and Marriage*, 26–27, 51–52, 69–70, 119, 121–22, 175.
40. Smith, *Kinship and Marriage*, 180–81.
41. Smith, *Kinship and Marriage*, 183–84.
42. Smith, *Kinship and Marriage*, 187.
43. Smith, *Kinship and Marriage*, 207, 212.
44. Smith, *Kinship and Marriage*, 178, 217, 218.
45. Smith, *Kinship and Marriage*, 222.

46. Smith, *Kinship and Marriage*, 223.
47. Frazer, "Taboo," 15, 16–17.
48. Black and Chrystal, *William Robertson Smith*, 495.
49. Frazer, *Totemism*, v, 2.
50. Frazer, *Totemism*, 2–3, 3.
51. Frazer, *Totemism*, 38–39, 49.
52. Frazer, *Totemism*, 85.
53. Frazer, *Totemism*, 87–89.
54. Frazer, *Totemism*, 95–96.
55. Stocking, *After Tylor*, 134.
56. Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, v.
57. Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, 1–2.
58. Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, 3–4, 482–83, 5, 9, 12–13.
59. Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, 16, 17.
60. Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, 18.
61. Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, 20, 21.
62. Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, 22–23, 82–83.
63. Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, 24, 29.
64. Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, 32, 33–34.
65. Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, 35, 39, 42–43.
66. Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, 53–54.
67. Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, 54–55.
68. Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, 84–87.
69. Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, 89, 90, 121–22.
70. Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, 130, 124–25, 134–35.
71. Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, 143, 152, 445–52.
72. Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, 160–61, 163–64.
73. Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, 154–55.
74. Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, 213.
75. Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, 214–45, 255.
76. Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, 260, 262, 264.
77. Lukes, *Émile Durkheim*, 240.
78. Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, 272, 27–34.
79. Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, 286.
80. Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, 288–89, 313.
81. Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, 392, 393, 395–96.
82. Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, 439–40.

### 3. TOTEMISM AS UTILITY

1. Frazer, "Letter to J. F. White, December 15, 1897."
2. Frazer, "Letter to J. F. White, December 15, 1897."
3. Frazer, "Memories of My Parents," 132.

4. Ackerman, *J. G. Frazer*, 7.
5. Ackerman, *J. G. Frazer*, 13–15.
6. Ackerman, *J. G. Frazer*, 20–21.
7. Ackerman, *J. G. Frazer*, 22, 41–51.
8. Ackerman, *J. G. Frazer*, 26–30.
9. Ackerman, *J. G. Frazer*, 54, 57.
10. Frazer, “On Certain Burial Customs,” 103.
11. Ackerman, *J. G. Frazer*, 93, 63–64.
12. Frazer, “On Certain Burial Customs,” 64–97.
13. Frazer, “On Certain Burial Customs,” 102.
14. Ackerman, *J. G. Frazer*, 122.
15. Frazer, *Golden Bough* (1890), 1:2.
16. Ackerman, *J. G. Frazer*, 95.
17. Frazer, *Golden Bough* (1890), 1:viii–ix.
18. Ackerman, *J. G. Frazer*, 81.
19. Frazer, *Golden Bough* (1890), 1:x–xi.
20. Ackerman, *J. G. Frazer*, 517–18.
21. Frazer, “William Robertson Smith,” 206–7.
22. Frazer “Letter to J. F. White, December 15, 1897.”
23. Burrow, *Evolution and Society*, 241n2.
24. Frazer, *Golden Bough* (1890), 1:2–3.
25. Frazer, *Golden Bough* (1890), 1:8–9, 12.
26. Frazer, *Golden Bough* (1890), 1:30–31.
27. Frazer, *Golden Bough* (1890), 1:32, 51, 56–105.
28. Frazer, *Golden Bough* (1890), 1:109–10, 115–16.
29. Frazer, *Golden Bough* (1890), 1:121–22.
30. Frazer, *Golden Bough* (1890), 1:215.
31. Frazer, *Golden Bough* (1890), 1:223.
32. Frazer, *Golden Bough* (1890), 1:37–38, 62.
33. Frazer, *Golden Bough* (1890), 1:85, 89–90.
34. Frazer, *Golden Bough* (1890), 2:148, 206.
35. Frazer, *Golden Bough* (1890), 2:242–43, 297, 342–43.
36. Frazer, *Golden Bough* (1890), 2:295–96, 370.
37. Ackerman, *J. G. Frazer*, 100, 106.
38. Ackerman, *J. G. Frazer*, 129.
39. Stocking, *After Tylor*, 15–16.
40. Stocking, *After Tylor*, 17, 18.
41. Stocking, *After Tylor*, 20.
42. Stocking, *After Tylor*, 21–22, 23.
43. Stocking, *After Tylor*, 23.
44. Stocking, *After Tylor*, 25.
45. Stocking, *After Tylor*, 26; Fison and Howitt, *Kamilaroi and Kurnai*, 132–33.
46. Fison and Howitt, *Kamilaroi and Kurnai*, 165, 169–70.
47. Stocking, *After Tylor*, 29.

48. Stocking, *After Tylor*, 45–46.
49. Codrington, *Melanesians*, vii, 123.
50. Stocking, *After Tylor*, 44.
51. Codrington, *Melanesians*, 118–19n1, 120.
52. Evans-Pritchard, *Theories*, 52, 5.
53. Jevons, *Introduction*, 3–5.
54. Jevons, *Introduction*, 21–22.
55. Jevons, *Introduction*, 94–95.
56. Jevons, *Introduction*, 101.
57. Stocking, *After Tylor*, 51.
58. Lang, “Mythology,” 140, 141.
59. Lang, “Mythology,” 142.
60. Lang, “Mythology,” 143–45.
61. Lang, *Custom and Myth*, 216.
62. Lang, “Mythology,” 141.
63. Lang, *Custom and Myth*, 228–40.
64. Lang, *Custom and Myth*, 226–27.
65. Stocking, *After Tylor*, 55.
66. Lang, *Myth, Ritual, and Religion* 1:58, 60.
67. Lang, *Myth, Ritual, and Religion* 1:105.
68. Stocking, *After Tylor*, 56.
69. Lang, *Cock Lane*, ix–x.
70. Lang, *Cock Lane*, 335.
71. Lang, *Making of Religion*, 281, 329.
72. Tylor, “Remarks,” 138.
73. Tylor, “Remarks,” 4.
74. Tylor, “Remarks,” 4, 138.
75. McLennan, *Primitive Marriage*, 113–15.
76. Tylor, “Remarks,” 139.
77. Tylor, “Remarks,” 141.
78. Tylor, “Remarks,” 141–42.
79. See Tylor, *Primitive Culture* 2:242.
80. Tylor, “Remarks,” 144–45.
81. Ackerman, *J. G. Frazer*, 181.
82. Tylor, “Remarks,” 147–148.
83. Jevons, “The Place of Totemism,” 375–76.
84. Jevons, “The Place of Totemism,” 379–83.
85. Stocking, *After Tylor*, 89. This was despite uncovering a secret aboriginal cache of carved wooden boards and stones that, in the spirit of ethnocentric generosity, Horn replaced with modern steel implements. The Horn Expedition thus unwittingly desecrated one of the aborigines’ most sacred institutions, to be illuminated later by Spencer and Gillen.
86. Stocking, *After Tylor*, 90.
87. Marett and Penniman, *Spencer’s Scientific Correspondence*, 3.

88. Spencer and Gillen, *Native Tribes*, vi.
89. Ackerman, *J. G. Frazer*, 154.
90. Frazer, "William Robertson Smith," 206.
91. Marett and Penniman, *Spencer's Scientific Correspondence*, 4–6.
92. Marett and Penniman, *Spencer's Scientific Correspondence*, 7–8, 11.
93. Marett and Penniman, *Spencer's Scientific Correspondence*, 24–25, 26–27.
94. Marett and Penniman, *Spencer's Scientific Correspondence*, 28.
95. Marett and Penniman, *Spencer's Scientific Correspondence*, 29.
96. Ackerman, *J. G. Frazer*, 160, 181.
97. Ackerman, *J. G. Frazer*, 156.
98. Marett and Penniman, *Spencer's Scientific Correspondence*, 26, 31–32.
99. Marett and Penniman, *Spencer's Scientific Correspondence*, 33–34.
100. Marett and Penniman, *Spencer's Scientific Correspondence*, 34–35.
101. Ackerman, *J. G. Frazer*, 157.
102. Marett and Penniman, *Spencer's Scientific Correspondence*, 36–37.
103. See Frazer, *Golden Bough* (1900) 1:133–34.
104. Marett and Penniman, *Spencer's Scientific Correspondence*, 41.
105. Marett and Penniman, *Spencer's Scientific Correspondence*, 38, 39.
106. Spencer and Gillen, *Native Tribes*, 280.
107. Frazer, "Observations on Central Australian Totemism," 282–83.
108. Frazer, "Observations on Central Australian Totemism," 284, 286.
109. Frazer, *Golden Bough* (1900) 1:200, xv.
110. Frazer, *Golden Bough* (1900) 1:30–31.
111. Frazer, "Origin of Totemism," 648, 657.
112. Frazer, *Golden Bough* (1900) 1:xvi.
113. Frazer, "William Robertson Smith," 206.
114. Hubert and Mauss, *Sacrifice*, 4.
115. Frazer, *Golden Bough* (1900) 1:xviii–xix.
116. Frazer, "Origin of Totemism," 835–36.
117. Frazer, *Golden Bough* (1900) 1:xix–xx.
118. Frazer, *Golden Bough* (1900) 1:xiv.
119. Ackerman, *J. G. Frazer*, 169.
120. Ackerman, *J. G. Frazer*, 169–72.
121. A reference to Tylor's "Remarks on Totemism," presented before the Royal Anthropological Institute in May 1898 (see above).
122. Ackerman, *J. G. Frazer*, 180, 181.
123. Ackerman, *J. G. Frazer*, 181.
124. Stocking, *After Tylor*, 164.
125. Marett, "Pre-animistic Religion," 8.
126. Marett, "Pre-animistic Religion," 9–11, 14–16.
127. Marett, "Pre-animistic Religion," 22–32.
128. Stocking, *After Tylor*, 166.
129. Marett, "From Spell to Prayer," 34.
130. Marett, "From Spell to Prayer," 38, 41, 43.

131. Marett, "From Spell to Prayer," 48, 49.
132. Marett, "From Spell to Prayer," 50–51.
133. Marett, "From Spell to Prayer," 67–84.
134. Ackerman, *J. G. Frazer*, 203.
135. Marett and Penniman, *Spencer's Scientific Correspondence*, 75.
136. Frazer, "Beginnings of Religion and Totemism," 162.
137. Frazer, "Beginnings of Religion and Totemism," 162–63, 171.
138. Frazer, "Beginnings of Religion and Totemism," 453.
139. Frazer, "Beginnings of Religion and Totemism," 455–56.
140. Frazer, "Beginnings of Religion and Totemism," 456–57.
141. Frazer, "Beginnings of Religion and Totemism," 460–61.
142. Ackerman, *J. G. Frazer*, 206.
143. Marett, "Is Taboo a Negative Magic?" 90–91.
144. Marett, "Conception of *Mana*," 129.
145. Marett, "Sociological View of Comparative Religion," 159–60, 160–61.
146. Marett, *Birth of Humility*, 12–13.
147. Marett, *Birth of Humility*, 28, 29.
148. Ackerman, *J. G. Frazer*, 226–27.
149. Ackerman, *J. G. Frazer*, 227–28.
150. Ackerman, *J. G. Frazer*, 228.
151. Frazer, introduction to *Apollodorus*, xxvii–xxviii.
152. Frazer, preface to *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, by B. Malinowski, 395–96.
153. Stocking, *After Tylor*, 170.

#### 4. TOTEMISM AS SELF-TRANSCENDENCE

1. Durkheim, "The Problem of Religion," 4–5, 6.
2. Durkheim, "The Problem of Religion," 8.
3. Lukes, *Émile Durkheim*, 41.
4. Durkheim, *Suicide*, 160.
5. Lukes, *Émile Durkheim*, 48; Mayeur and Rebérioux, *Third Republic*, 118.
6. Potts and Charlton, *French Thought*, 71; Crawford, *Boutroux*, 94.
7. Boutroux, *Contingency*, vii, 151–52.
8. Boutroux, *Contingency*, 166–67.
9. Durkheim, "Lettres," 612–13.
10. Boutroux, *Contingency*, 151–52, 172.
11. Durkheim, "Course in Sociology," 47, 48.
12. Boutroux, *Natural Law*, 198.
13. Durkheim, *Division*, 256–82.
14. Lukes, *Émile Durkheim*, 296, 7–8.
15. Boutroux, *Natural Law*, 199–200.
16. Boutroux, *Natural Law*, 158–59.

17. Boutroux, *Science and Religion*, 196–97.
18. Durkheim, “Science et religion,” 57.
19. Boutroux, *Science and Religion*, 62; emphasis added.
20. See Momigliano, *Essays*, 339, 337, 326.
21. Durkheim, *Division*, 130.
22. Lukes, *Émile Durkheim*, 54.
23. Davy, “Durkheim,” 8.
24. Renouvier, *Science* 2:240, 243–44.
25. Jones, *Development*, 112–71.
26. See Durkheim, “Du rôle,” 25–26.
27. Lukes, *Émile Durkheim*, 66–67.
28. Durkheim, review of *Ecclesiastical Institutions*, 18, 23.
29. Durkheim, review of *Ecclesiastical Institutions*, 19, 21, 23.
30. Durkheim, review of *Ecclesiastical Institutions*, 22.
31. Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, 474, 479.
32. Durkheim, review of *L'Irréligion*, 26, 25.
33. Durkheim, review of *L'Irréligion*, 32.
34. Durkheim, review of *L'Irréligion*, 36.
35. Durkheim, review of *L'Irréligion*, 37.
36. Durkheim, *Division*, 230. The precise point at which Durkheim became aware of the growing literature on totemism is unclear. Mauss tells us that during the first six months of his leave-of-absence from the Lycée de Saint-Quentin (in 1885 and 1886), Durkheim renewed his friendship with Lucien Herr, the philosopher and librarian of the École Normale, who is said to have then brought Durkheim's attention to Frazer's *Encyclopedia Britannica* article on totemism. But this makes no sense, for as we have seen, the *Britannica* article appeared only in volume 13 of the ninth edition (1888), and even the book-length version appeared only in October 1887. See Lukes, *Émile Durkheim*, 183n13.
37. Durkheim, *Division*, 49, 118–19, 130.
38. Durkheim, “Rules,” 143, 153.
39. From 1905 through 1907, the Catholic philosophy journal *Revue néo-scholastique* published a series of articles by the Belgian priest Simon Deploige attacking Durkheim's elevation of “society” to a power superior to that of the individual. Durkheim responded in a series of letters to the editor, and it is from these that this now famous passage is taken. Deploige's articles were subsequently published as *Le Conflit de la morale et la sociologie* (1911). Durkheim's hostile review of that work in *L'Année sociologique* contains a similar reference to “all that we owe to Robertson Smith and to the works of the ethnographers of England and America” (Durkheim, review of *Le Conflit de la morale et de la sociologie*, 326).
40. Pickering, *Durkheim's Sociology of Religion*, 62, 70.
41. Durkheim, *Suicide*, 170, 218–21.
42. Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, 405–6.



43. Durkheim, preface to *L'Année sociologique*, volume 1, 341, 342.
44. Durkheim, *Incest*, 13–14, 15.
45. Durkheim, *Incest*, 57.
46. Durkheim, *Incest*, 69, 71.
47. Durkheim, *Incest*, 71–72, 77–78, 85–86.
48. Durkheim, *Incest*, 88–90.
49. Durkheim, *Incest*, 98–99.
50. Durkheim, *Incest*, 103.
51. Durkheim, *Incest*, 109.
52. Durkheim, preface to *L'Année sociologique*, volume 2, 350–51.
53. Lukes, *Émile Durkheim*, 240; Pickering, *Durkheim's Sociology of Religion*, 72.
54. See Durkheim, *Les Regles*, 75–83.
55. Durkheim, “Concerning the Definition,” 76–79, 85.
56. Durkheim, “Concerning the Definition,” 88–93.
57. Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, 55.
58. Durkheim, “Concerning the Definition,” 99n24.
59. Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, 18.
60. Durkheim, “Concerning the Definition,” 99n25.
61. Hubert and Mauss, *Sacrifice*, 1, 5–6.
62. Besnard and Fournier, *Lettres*, 96, 106, 162, 174; translation mine.
63. Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, 430–31.
64. Durkheim, “Cours d'Émile Durkheim” (1907).
65. Mauss, review of *The Native Tribes of Central Australia*, 213–15; review of “The Origin of Totemism” and “Observations on Totemism,” 219–20.
66. Durkheim, “On Totemism,” 82.
67. Durkheim, “On Totemism,” 83, 86.
68. Durkheim, “On Totemism,” 87, 88.
69. Durkheim, “On Totemism,” 88.
70. Durkheim, “On Totemism,” 89–90.
71. Durkheim, “On Totemism,” 92.
72. Durkheim, “On Totemism,” 94, 95; see Spencer and Gillen, *Native Tribes*, 120–21.
73. Spencer and Gillen, “Some Remarks,” 276–77.
74. Durkheim, “On Totemism,” 96, 98–112.
75. Durkheim, “On Totemism,” 112–15.
76. Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, 255.
77. Durkheim, “On Totemism,” 117.
78. Marett and Penniman, *Correspondence*, 84–85.
79. Durkheim, *Rules*, 47n4.
80. Durkheim, “Moral Facts,” 36, 48.
81. Mauss, *Magic*, 20–21, 24.
82. Durkheim, “Cours d'Émile Durkheim,” 533.
83. Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, 392–96; Durkheim, “Cours d'Émile Durkheim,” 103–8, 636–37.

84. Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, 13.
85. Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, 39–50, 56–60.
86. Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, 64–65.
87. Durkheim, review of *Ecclesiastical Institutions*, 23n1.
88. Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, 87, 88.
89. Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, 97–102.
90. Durkheim, *Moral Education*, 257.
91. Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, 107, 218–19, 236–51.
92. “Fear in the world first created the gods” (Statius).
93. Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, 255–62.
94. Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, 264, 269, 270–71.
95. Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, 303–4.
96. Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, 332–33.
97. Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, 355–61, 365.
98. Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, 368–77.
99. Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, 381–85.
100. Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, 396.
101. Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, 386–92.
102. Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, 393–405, 412.
103. Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, 420, 442–49, 453–55, 460.
104. Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, 464.
105. James, *Principles*, 379–80.
106. St. Augustine, *Confessions*, 170, 177–78.
107. James, *Varieties*, 145 (emphasis added), 191.
108. Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, 465.
109. Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, 479–87.
110. Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, 488.
111. See Lukes, *Émile Durkheim*, 440.
112. Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, 493.

## 5. TOTEMISM AS NEUROSIS

1. Gay, *Freud*, 4.
2. Gay, *Freud*, 6.
3. Freud, *Autobiographical Study*, 6.
4. Rieff, *Freud*, xiv.
5. Gay, *Freud*, 7.
6. Gay, *Freud*, 10.
7. Freud, *Dreams*, 109–12.
8. Gay, *Freud*, 11–12.
9. Gay, *Freud*, 17.
10. Freud, *Autobiographical Study*, 6–7.
11. Gay, *Freud*, 25–26.

12. Gay, *Freud*, 28, 29, 526.
13. Gay, *Freud*, 28.
14. Gay, *Freud*, 32.
15. Freud, *Autobiographical Study*, 11–12.
16. Gay, *Freud*, 67.
17. Gay, *Freud*, 66.
18. Freud, *Autobiographical Study*, 27–28.
19. Freud, preface to the 3rd rev. ed., xxxii.
20. Freud, *Dreams*, 294.
21. Freud, *Dreams*, 296–97.
22. Rieff, *Freud*, 35.
23. Gay, *Freud*, 144.
24. Freud, *Three Essays*, 42.
25. Strachey, *Freud*, 297n1.
26. Gay, *Freud*, 142.
27. Freud, *Three Essays*, 1, 14–15.
28. Freud, *Three Essays*, 16, 19, 20–22.
29. Freud, *Three Essays*, 39, 41.
30. Freud, *Three Essays*, 44.
31. Freud, *Three Essays*, 57, 63.
32. Freud, *Three Essays*, 91.
33. Gay, *Freud*, 526.
34. Freud, *Psychopathology*, 329–331.
35. Freud, *Jokes*, 137.
36. Freud, “Obsessive Actions,” 18.
37. Freud, “Obsessive Actions,” 19.
38. Freud, “Obsessive Actions,” 22, 23.
39. Freud, “Obsessive Actions,” 23.
40. Freud, “Obsessive Actions,” 24.
41. Gay, *Freud*, 3–4.
42. Freud, *Leonardo*, 11, 23, 25.
43. Freud, *Leonardo*, 30.
44. Freud, *Leonardo*, 35.
45. Unfortunately, Freud’s speculations about the significance of the vulture in ancient Egyptian culture rest on a German mistranslation of the Italian word *nibbio*, which Leonardo had used in recounting his childhood memory. For *nibbio* means “kite” (not “vulture”), and so Freud’s analogical connection between Leonardo’s fantasy and ancient Egyptian religion lacks any empirical foundation. See Gay, *Freud*, 273.
46. Freud, *Leonardo*, 44.
47. Freud, *Leonardo*, 85.
48. Gay, *Freud*, 277.
49. Dinnage, introduction to *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness*, xiii, xviii.
50. Gay, *Freud*, 278.

51. Freud, "Psychoanalytic Notes," 84.
52. Weber, "Addenda A," 332–33.
53. Weber, "Addenda A," 333–35.
54. Freud, "Psycho-analytic Notes," 94.
55. Schreber, *Memoirs*, 24.
56. Freud, "Psycho-analytic Notes," 103.
57. Freud, "Psycho-analytic Notes," 105, 107.
58. Freud, "Psycho-analytic Notes," 123, 126–34.
59. Freud, "Psycho-analytic Notes," 158.
60. Freud, "Psycho-analytic Notes," 159–60.
61. Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, xxvii.
62. Boring, *History*, 317–23.
63. Wundt, *Ethics*, 150–51.
64. Jones, *Development*, 202.
65. Wundt, *Elements*, 4, 3, 6–8, 139.
66. Palmer, *Freud and Jung*, 88.
67. Gay, *Freud*, 199–200.
68. Stevens, *Jung*, 12.
69. Palmer, *Freud and Jung*, 94.
70. Freud, *History*, 68–69.
71. Palmer, *Freud and Jung*, 100.
72. Palmer, *Freud and Jung*, 108.
73. Palmer, *Freud and Jung*, 111–12.
74. Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, xxviii, xxix.
75. Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, 4, 6n2.
76. Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, 23.
77. Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, 28–29.
78. Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, 38–39.
79. Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, 40–41.
80. Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, 80.
81. Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, 91–92.
82. Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, 93.
83. Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, 97.
84. Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, 104.
85. Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, 105, 108–9.
86. Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, 115–16.
87. Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, 123.
88. Rieff, *Freud*, 35.
89. Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, 134–35.
90. Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, 160–61, 163.
91. Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, 175.
92. Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, 176.
93. Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, 178.
94. Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, 178–79.

95. Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, 179–80.
96. Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, 182.
97. Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, 184.
98. Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, 186, 191–92.
99. Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, 195.
100. Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, 196.
101. Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, 197–98.
102. Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, 199, 200.

## CONCLUSION. THE SECRET OF THE TOTEM

1. Goldenweiser, "Totemism," 179, 182.
2. Goldenweiser, "Totemism," 183.
3. Goldenweiser, "Totemism," 266.
4. Goldenweiser, "Totemism," 267.
5. Goldenweiser, "Totemism," 270.
6. Goldenweiser, "Totemism," 275.
7. Lévi-Strauss, *Totemism*, 4. Lévi-Strauss added that van Gennep's book comprised "a curious mixture of erudition, partiality, and even incomprehension, allied to unusual theoretical boldness and freedom of speculation."
8. Cited in Lévi-Strauss, *Totemism*, 5.
9. Cited in Lévi-Strauss, *Totemism*, 1.
10. Stocking, *After Tylor*, 10
11. Stocking, "From Physics to Ethnology," 142–3.
12. Stocking, "From Physics to Ethnology," 141–2.
13. Stocking, "From Physics to Ethnology," 144.
14. Stocking, "From Physics to Ethnology," 153.
15. Stocking, "From Physics to Ethnology," 156.
16. Boas, "On Alternating Sounds," 73.
17. Boas, "On Alternating Sounds," 76.
18. Boas, "Limitations," 270–71, 273.
19. Boas, "Limitations," 275.
20. Boas, "Limitations," 275–76.
21. Boas, "Origin," 316. See Frazer, *Totemism and Exogamy* 4:48; Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, 246.
22. Boas, "Origin," 316–17.
23. Boas, "Origin," 318.
24. Boas, "Origin," 320–21.
25. Lévi-Strauss, *Totemism*, 12.
26. Tylor, "Some Remarks," 139, 148.
27. Lévi-Strauss, *Totemism*, 13.
28. Stocking, *After Tylor*, 10.
29. See Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding," 66–67.

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