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Edited by

[Bron Taylor](#)

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slaughter. Although killing a cock is allowed, the Prophet forbade reviling this fowl because it served the faithful by awakening them to perform their religious duty; the same rule applies to fleas “who awakened a prophet.”

All three scriptures further condemn any manifestation of cruelty *per se* toward animals, which are recognized as creatures of God; however, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam also encourage an instrumental approach to animals, at best, while allowing their arbitrary killing, at worst. Perhaps this was the natural sequence in the process of turning the human race into the apex of divine creation, a creed that does not allow any partners of equal status at the side of human beings. Furthermore, teachers from these traditions condemn the practice of pet keeping, relegating the most favorite among the pets, especially dogs, to the status of unclean or maligned animals. Such antagonism may result from the apprehension of ecclesiastical persons that attachment to pets – which bestows on human beings a complete mastery over these creatures and, in consequence, may bring about higher self-esteem – might have detrimental consequences for the submission of the faithful to an almighty God. No less important, the emotional linkage between a person and his/her pet may weaken human dependence on God’s representatives on Earth, the clergy.

Sophia Menache

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See also: Animal Rights in the Jewish Tradition; Animals; Christianity and Animals; Dogs in the Abrahamic Traditions; Dogs in the Islamic Tradition; Elephants; Francis of Assisi; Hunting and the Origins of Religion; Hyenas – Spotted; Islam, Animals, and Vegetarianism; Primate Spirituality; Serpents and Dragons.

Animism

Coined by the anthropologist E.B. Tylor (1832–1917), the term “animism” refers not to a type of religion but to a theory of religion. Asserting a minimal definition of religion as “belief in spiritual beings,” Tylor argued that

religious belief originated in the primordial mistake of attributing life, soul, or spirit to inanimate objects. Although it has generally been dismissed in the academic study of religion as an obsolete term for describing the belief systems of indigenous people who hold that natural phenomena have souls or spirits, animism has nevertheless persisted in popular usage and academic theory to raise problems about the meaning and value of materiality in religion.

Tylor’s theory of animism was premised on a kind of materialism, since he assumed that materiality by definition was “dead” matter, but his theory was also framed in terms of an ideology of European progress, underwritten by evolutionary science, which bore a strange contradiction. Although Europeans supposedly represented the pinnacle of evolutionary development, they could only know that by comparing themselves to a baseline represented by others who had supposedly not evolved. Like other social evolutionists, Tylor found his evolutionary baseline, the “primitive,” in reports submitted by European travelers, missionaries, and colonial agents about indigenous people, the “savage,” on the periphery of empire. While Europeans according to Tylor’s evolutionary scheme had progressed along a developmental trajectory through animism, polytheism, and monotheism to reach the highest achievements of science, evolving from primitive to civilized, indigenous people of the Americas, Africa, Asia, Australia, and the Pacific had supposedly been left behind by evolution, standing over as savage “survivals” of the primitive.

Although Tylor was only interested in contemporary indigenous religions as data for building a theory of the original, primordial, or primitive animism, his term caught on to such an extent that it became commonplace in European inventories of the religions of the world to identify contemporary adherents of indigenous religions as animists. A recent guidebook for Christian missionaries, for example, asserts that 40 percent of the world’s population is animistic (Van Rheen 1991: 30). While this characterization has often been experienced by indigenous people as denigrating, it has occasionally been adopted as a term of self-identification. In Indonesia and Nigeria, for example, representatives of indigenous religions, struggling in a political arena dominated by Muslim and Christian interests, have sought formal recognition as animists. At the same time, animism has sometimes been adopted as a term of self-identification in New Age, neo-pagan, or environmentalist movements. Without addressing those appropriations of the term, this entry concentrates on the history, rationale, and consequences of animism as a theory of religion.

History of Animism

During the nineteenth century, European social scientists developed different terms – fetishism, totemism, and

animism – for the original religion of humanity, but each term carried the same allegation that “primitives” or “savages” were incapable of assessing the meaning and value of material objects.

The term, “fetish,” for example, emerged out of intercultural trading relations in West Africa in which European traders argued that Africans, unlike European Christians, had no stable system of value in which they could evaluate objects. Overvaluing apparently trifling objects such as feathers, bones, and cloth used in ritual, Africans undervalued the trade goods brought by Europeans. In this context, European Christians referred to African ritual objects as “fetishes,” a term derived from the Portuguese *feitiço*, referring to nefarious instruments of magic and witchcraft (Pietz 1985). The term, “totemism,” according to John Ferguson M’Lennan, referred to communal alliances under the sign of an animal or an object that combined fetishism with exogamy, mixing the inability to evaluate materiality with regulations governing sexuality (M’Lennan 1870). Arguably, the term, “animism,” mixed fetishism not with human sexuality but with animal psychology. The psychology of dogs, in particular, provided the key to a theory of religion based on attributing animation to inanimate objects.

In his popular survey of human evolution, *The Origin of Civilization and the Primitive Condition of Man*, John Lubbock explained that religion originated as the result of the primitive tendency to attribute animation to inanimate objects. To illustrate this primitive “frame of mind,” Lubbock cited evidence from southern Africa, relying on the early nineteenth-century report from the traveler Henry Lichtenstein that the Xhosa in the Eastern Cape assumed that an anchor cast ashore from a shipwreck was actually alive. In a footnote, Lubbock observed, “Dogs appear to do the same” (Lubbock 1889: 287). As Lubbock’s friend and mentor, Charles Darwin, maintained, religion could be explained in terms of dog behavior. Like Lubbock, Darwin observed that dogs characteristically attributed life to inanimate objects. His dog’s attention to a parasol blowing in the wind, for example, suggested to Darwin that the animal assumed that objects were alive. In this animal psychology, therefore, nineteenth-century theorists had a basis for understanding animism as the “primitive” or “savage” propensity to attribute animation to inanimate objects.

Evidence of Animism

In standard accounts, E.B. Tylor’s theory of animism is derived from the “primitive” inability to distinguish between dreams and waking consciousness. When the “primitive” ancestors of humanity dreamed about deceased friends or relatives, they assumed that the dead were still alive in some spiritual form. Out of dreams, therefore, evolved “the doctrine of souls and other spiritual beings in general,” a doctrine that was “rational,”

even if it was a “childish philosophy” enveloped in “intense and inveterate ignorance” (Tylor 1871: I, 22–3).

Where did Tylor get his evidence to support this finding? Instead of observing dogs, Tylor collected accounts about indigenous people, the “savages” who appeared in reports from European travelers, missionaries, and colonial agents. Arguably, Tylor’s most important source was an account of Zulu religion from South Africa, *The Religious System of the Amazulu*, which had been published under the authorship of the Anglican missionary Henry Callaway, although the Zulu Christian convert, Mpengula Mbande, actually provided most of the reports collected in the book. Tylor praised *The Religious System of the Amazulu* for providing “the best knowledge of the lower phases of religious belief” (1871: I, 380).

Certainly, Tylor found evidence of an active dream life among Callaway’s Zulus. Zulus often saw the shade or shadow of deceased ancestors in dreams. However, Callaway’s volume included a detailed account about one Zulu man, an apprenticed diviner, who had become so overwhelmed with visions of spirits that he had described his own body as “a house of dreams” (Callaway 1868–1870: 228, 260, 316). According to Tylor, all Zulus, as “savage” survivals of the “primitive,” were subject to dream visions, but “as for the man who is passing into the morbid condition of the professional seer, phantoms are continually coming to talk to him in his sleep, till he becomes as the expressive native phrase is, ‘a house of dreams’ ” (1871: I, 443). Although Tylor appropriated him as an archetype of the “primitive,” this particular Zulu man, who served Tylor as a “savage” survival of the original “house of dreams” from which religion originated, was James Mbande, the brother of the Christian convert, Mpengula Mbande. Like his brother, James was torn between the Christian mission and indigenous tradition. While Mpengula went one way, becoming a catechist for the mission, James struggled in the other direction, striving to keep an ancestral dream alive under increasingly difficult colonial conditions. In this case, therefore, the “house of dreams” was not a “primitive,” but a colonial situation, the product of contemporary conflicts in southern Africa.

The analysis of dreams, however, did not provide the only evidence for Tylor’s theory of animism. In addition, the involuntary physical phenomenon of sneezing was central to Tylor’s argument. Here again Callaway’s Zulu evidence was definitive. As Tylor observed, sneezing was

not originally an arbitrary and meaningless custom, but the working out of a principle. The plain statement by the modern Zulus fits with the hints to be gained from the superstition and folklore of other races, to connect the notions and practices as to

sneezing with the ancient and savage doctrine of pervading and invading spirits, considered as good or evil, and treated accordingly (1871: I, 104).

From Callaway's account, Tylor derived the ethnographic facts that Zulus thought their deceased ancestors caused sneezing; that sneezing reminded Zulus to name and praise their ancestors; that the ancestors entered the bodies of their descendants when they sneezed; and that ritual specialists, such as Zulu diviners, regularly sneezed as a ritual technique for invoking the spiritual power of the ancestors. These Zulu concepts and practices, Tylor concluded, were remnants of a prehistoric era in which sneezing was not merely a "physiological" phenomenon, "but was still in the 'theological stage'" (1871: I, 104).

Much has been made of Tylor's "intellectualist" theory of religion. Although primitives suffered from primordial stupidity, Tylor argued that they nevertheless exercised their limited intellectual powers to develop explanations of the world in which they lived. Unfortunately, Tylor cited a Zulu source in support of this proposition, Callaway's catechist, Mpengula Mbande, who observed that "we are told all things, and assent without seeing clearly whether they are true or not" (1871: II, 387). Although cited by Tylor as evidence of savage ignorance, Mbande's point in this statement was that most Zulus had not been exposed to Callaway's new Christian gospel. Rather than offering evidence of primordial stupidity, therefore, Mbande was announcing his recently acquired Christian commitment. In any event, Tylor's theoretical work, and his use of Zulu evidence, demonstrated that his theory of the origin of religion was based on an analysis of the body as well as the mind. More animal than human, in this respect, "primitive" religion, as revealed according to Tylor by its survival among contemporary Zulu "savages," had evolved out of a bodily process that was as simple, basic, and involuntary as sneezing. However much it might have been theologized, sneezing marked the physiological origin of religion as animism, the belief in pervading and invading spirits.

Consequences of Animism

In building his theory of animism, E.B. Tylor intentionally disguised the colonial conditions that provided his evidence. Ignoring the social, political, intercultural, and interreligious contexts in which his evidence was embedded was not an oversight. It was a method. According to Tylor, "savage religion" had to be abstracted from its living contexts in order to be used in an evolutionary history of human culture that began with primitive animism. "In defining the religious systems of the lower races, so as to place them correctly in the history of culture," Tylor observed in 1892, "careful examination is necessary to separate the genuine developments of native theology from the effects of intercourse with civilized foreigners"

(Tylor 1892: 283). Any trace of more advanced religious concepts, such as ideas of deity, morality, or retribution in an afterlife, could only have entered "savage" religion, Tylor argued, through such foreign intercourse with "higher" races. Factoring out colonial contacts, relations, and exchanges, he argued, "leaves untouched in the religions of the lower races the lower developments of animism" (Tylor 1892: 298). According to this method, therefore, animism appeared as the original religion – the earliest, the lowest – only by erasing the actual colonial situations in which indigenous people lived. As a result, the theory of animism provided an ideological supplement to the imperial project.

Although it was posed as a scientific explanation of the origin and development of religion, the theory of animism also addressed nineteenth-century European dilemmas about the meaning of materiality. Despite the expansion of scientific materialism, with its implicit challenge to religious belief, the séances of spiritualism were gaining popularity in Europe, promising material proof of spiritual survival of death. Initially, E.B. Tylor considered using the term "spiritualism" for his theory of religion, regarding contemporary spiritualist practices in Europe as a "survival" of prehistoric religion. Like the religious beliefs and practices of indigenous people on the colonized periphery of empire, the spiritualist séance represented an unwarranted persistence in attributing life to dead matter. As a European intellectual problem, therefore, the theory of animism can be situated in the context of nineteenth-century distress about the religious implications of scientific materialism and the scientific implications of a new religious practice such as spiritualism.

At the same time, this theory of the animation of "dead" matter was developed in the midst of the consolidation of commodity capitalism in Europe and North America. The commodity, as Karl Marx provocatively proposed, was not dead matter because it was animated by a "fetishism of commodities," similar to "primitive" religion, which attributed life to objects "abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties" (1974: I, 81). While supplementing the colonization of indigenous people, therefore, the theory of animism was also entangled in European struggles to understand the animation of matter in capitalism.

In the anthropology of religion, some theorists have recently attempted to rehabilitate the theory of animism, restating the argument that religion originated in the basic animistic propensity to project human characteristics of life, thought, and feeling onto the natural world, or redefining animism as a "relational epistemology" through which indigenous people gain knowledge by entering into humanizing relations with the natural world. The history of the theory of animism, however, suggests that this theoretical project has inevitably been entangled in local and global negotiations over the meaning of

materiality. As a point of entry into the study of religion and nature, the theory of animism presents a problem, bearing traces of nineteenth-century European imperialism, colonialism, and capitalism, rather than a solution for our understanding of religious engagements with the natural world.

David Chidester

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- See also: Animism – A Contemporary Perspective; Anthropologists; Bioregionalism and the North American Bioregional Congress; Ecology and Religion; Evolutionary Biology, Religion, and Stewardship; Hunting Spirituality and Animism; Magic; Magic, Animism and the Shaman's Craft; Noble Savage; Radical Environmentalism; Snyder, Gary; Zulu (amaZulu) Ancestors and Ritual Exchange; Zulu (amaZulu) Culture, Plants and Spirit Worlds (South Africa).

SP Animism – A Contemporary Perspective

Animism is a term coined to serve in an argument about the origins of religion, but it has survived the widespread rejection of that theory and now thrives as a label for a particular kind of religion. For E.B. Tylor (1871), the term “animism” summarizes his definition of religion as “belief in spiritual beings.” In its new application, animism now labels a type of religion comparable to other types (e.g., monotheism and polytheism). It is typically applied to religions that engage with a wide community of living beings with whom humans share this world or particular locations within it. It might be summed up by the phrase “all that exists lives” and, sometimes, the additional understanding that “all that lives is holy.” As such the term animism is sometimes applied to particular indigenous religions in comparison to Christianity or Islam, for example. It is also used as a self-definition by some indigenous people and some eco-pagans.

The application of the term animism no longer depends on notions about “spirits” or “supernatural” entities. It has been found helpful in drawing attention to ontologies and epistemologies in which life is encountered in a wide community of persons only some of whom are human. Certainly this new usage shares with Tylor's discussion a concern with materiality and, in this, links animism to wider contestations, for example, about environmentalism and the dichotomous opposition of culture and nature.

In the language of classical European philosophy “person” refers principally to humans and deity. At various times, the question of the personhood of particular groups of humans (Africans and women in particular) has been problematic (e.g., in debates about the recognition and increasing application of human rights). Other beings (animals especially) are problematic in as much as some might be more or less like humans in particular ways (e.g., the feeling of pain, the use of language, or some indicator of intellect or agency) that seem to some theorists to justify the recognition of personhood and thus the extension or recognition of rights. Similarly, Piaget's approach to childhood development (1933) seems to assume that reality is accurately described in English language's use of gendered pronouns (“he” or “she”) for persons, in contrast to a wider range of inanimate objects (“it”). In this theory, children “naturally” project life onto inanimate objects until they reach a more advanced stage of development. Reference to European languages in which personal pronouns are applied to what native speakers of those languages also consider inanimate (e.g., chairs) may not necessarily falsify these notions, especially because the concomitant imputation of gender is neither considered nor meaningful. In these and similar ways, animism is problematic in European-rooted worldviews and discourse. It simultaneously insists on the veracity of Western notions about personhood and materiality, while deni-