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Book Review

Tremlett, Paul-François, Graham Harvey and Liam T. Sutherland (eds) 2017. *Edward Burnett Tylor, Religion and Culture*. London: Bloomsbury. 219pp. ISBN: 978-1-3599-9341-5 £85.00 (hbk); ISBN: 978-1-3500-0342-2 £73.44 (e-pub); ISBN: 978-1-3500-0343-9 (e-pdf).

Reviewed by: Jack Hunter, University of Bristol, UK.
jh5895@bristol.ac.uk

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Edward Burnett Tylor, Religion and Culture is a welcome reappraisal of an under-studied pioneer of the anthropology of religion. E. B. Tylor (1832–1917) was the first reader in social anthropology at Oxford University in 1884, and became the first professor of the subject in 1896. He is perhaps best known for his theory of animism (the belief in supernatural beings) as the "minimum definition of religion", and for his broadly evolutionist approach to the study of culture and society. This is usually the extent of anthropology students' exposure to Tylor's work, covered in first-year introductory modules as an example of Victorian armchair anthropology, quickly brushed under the carpet to focus on twentieth-century developments. It is refreshing, therefore, to see a fresh take on Tylor's contribution, influence, and continuing relevance to the anthropology of religion in the chapters presented in this volume. It is also interesting to see the stereotype of Tylor as an armchair researcher challenged through emphasis on his ethnographic fieldwork in Mexico and his explorations of contemporary Spiritualism in London.

The editors have done a wonderful job in putting this volume together. Over the course of ten chapters the reader is skilfully guided through the theoretical, methodological and conceptual implications of Tylor's work. Owing to limitations of space I will briefly discuss a few of the chapters that particularly stood out to me. This review is not comprehensive, therefore, and it is important to point out that there is a great deal more to explore between the covers of this fascinating book.

In his chapter, James Cox presents an overview of the debate that raged between Tylor and his contemporary Andrew Lang (1844–1912) over the theory of "primitive monotheism". Tylor, according to his theory of animism as the origin of religion, posited that the monotheistic world religions (Christianity, Judaism, Islam, etc.) are a later development of primitive animistic thinking—in a sequence running from animism, to polytheism and finally to monotheism. Lang, on the other hand, drawing primarily on missionary reports, argued quite the opposite—that polytheistic and animistic traditions are "degenerations" of a primitive monotheism. Cox concludes his analysis of the debate by pointing out that *both* Tylor and Lang had "followed predetermined ideas about the origin of religion that made their respective conclusions inevitable", and that "[w]hat was lacking in each case

was a concern for the actual communities of believers" they were writing about (p. 12). This is an important reminder for all engaged in the social scientific study of religion—that religion is a *lived* phenomenon, and that when we begin to abstract it we lose sight of its inherent complexity on the ground.

Jonathan Jong's chapter explores the connections between Tylor's intellectualist approach to religion and the more recent cognitive science of religion (CSR), which can be seen as a descendent of Tylor's approach. Indeed, Jong refers to Tylor's approach as a "(Primitive) Cognitive Theory of Religion", and argues that the cognitive science of religion is, in essence, a neo-Tylorean endeavour, though few cognitive scientists are aware of this ancestral connection. What links Tylor's approach to the cognitive science of religion is his emphasis on religious *thought*, that is the way human beings think about (and through) religious concepts, his minimum definition of religion as the belief in supernatural beings (though cognitivist definitions vary somewhat), and his commitment to the "psychic unity of mankind", which Jong points out binds Tylor to contemporary evolutionary approaches to religion. Jong's chapter concludes that it is worth re-visiting the work of pioneers like Tylor: "...not because their answers were right, but because their questions were interesting, and we could do much worse than attempt to provide fresh answers with new methods" (p. 60).

Liam Sutherland's contribution is an analysis of Tylor's minimum definition of religion as the "belief in supernatural beings". Sutherland proposes his own expanded, more inclusive, "Neo-Tylorean" definition of religion as "beliefs and practices based around postulated 'extra-natural' beings, forces and realms" (p. 96). Sutherland's expansion of Tylor's original minimum definition is offered as an etic category that is "clear and minimal enough to allow for comparison between different social and historical contexts" (p. 106). Moreover, this expanded definition overcomes the problem raised by Durkheim and his followers that Tylor's definition of religion inherently excluded non-theistic religions such as Buddhism. Sutherland's chapter is made all the more interesting by the inclusion of a discussion of his own research into the Scottish Inter Faith Council. To conclude his chapter, Sutherland argues that his Neo-Tylorean approach allows for a comparison of the "different ways in which claims about extra-natural beings, forces and realms are socialized by different actors in different contexts, including through the construction of emic categories such as the emic application of religion itself, by making use of an approach designed to stand back from these processes" (p. 102).

Of particular interest, given my own research, was Anne Kalvig's chapter on Tylor's engagement with and discussion of Spiritualism. Tylor's unpublished diary entries, first brought to light by the historian of anthropology G. W. Stocking (1971), reveal that Tylor participated in séances with some of the Victorian era's most influential mediums, including Kate Fox (one of the sisters responsible for the emergence of Spiritualism), Daniel Dunglas Home, and the Reverend Stainton Moses, amongst others. After a séance with Home, for example, Tylor wrote that he had "failed to make out how either raps, table levitation or accordion playing were produced". With Stainton Moses he described how "[his] trance seemed real", and concluded that his experience with Kate Fox was "very curious, and her feats are puzzling to me", noting that her phenomena "deserve further looking into". Tylor's experiences with these mediums forced him to admit, in his own words, "a *prima facie* case on evidence" for the abilities of certain mediums, and to conclude that he could not deny the possibility "that there may be a psychic force causing raps, movements, levitations, etc." (G. W. Stocking, "Animism in Theory and Practice: E.B. Tylor's Unpublished 'Notes on Spiritualism'", *Man* 6(1) (1971): 88–104 (100); see also J. Hunter, "The

Anthropology of the Weird: Ethnographic Fieldwork and Anomalous Experience", in G. Taylor (ed.), *Darklore*, Vol. VI (Brisbane: Daily Grail, 2011), pp. 243–54). Tylor even reportedly went into a trance state himself, much as I did while researching mediums in Bristol. The open-minded attitude expressed in his private diaries seems at odds with the apparent dogmatic socio-cultural materialism of much of Tylor's published work. What makes Kalvig's chapter so interesting is her comparison of Tylor's approach to researching Spiritualism in nineteenth-century London (and attitudes towards such research), with her own fieldwork amongst Spiritualists in Norway and the UK—research that still, in the twenty-first century, so Kalvig explains, "is not prestigious ... and is still not seen ... as a proper object of study for the scholar of religion" (p. 138).

In addition to the chapters discussed above, the book also includes discussions from Graham Harvey on animism and fetishes; Robert Segal on a comparison of Tylor's approach to myth with that of the German mythologist Hans Blumenberg; Miguel Astor-Aguilera on Tylor as an ethnographer; and Katy Soar on the influence of archaeological science on Tylor's evolutionary approach. The book concludes with Martin Stringer's reflections on language, myth and religion, and Paul-François Tremlett's analysis of Tylor's concept of "survivals".

In conclusion, this is an excellent and timely re-consideration of Tylor's work and continuing relevance to the scholarly study of religion. As the editors remind us in their introduction: "...we can revisit the contexts and debates of the late nineteenth century and see in them new connections and insights that link Tylor and his work to present concerns in new and important ways. Moreover, these visitations reveal other Tylors and much more besides" (p. 5).

With any luck, this book will enable students of the anthropology of religion, religious studies, and related disciplines, to go further in their engagement with Tylor's work than the standard textbooks usually allow, and in so doing forge new research trajectories in the study of religion as we continue forward into the twenty-first century.