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Bron Taylor

primarily because human life may become untenable if such anti-ecological lifeways continue, nor because a creator deity requires an account of how humans have executed their stewardship of the planet. Animist eco-Pagans are primarily on the front lines confronting road building, quarrying, clear-cutting and other exploitative actions, because the community of life is threatened. It is not that only humans can protest or act – although the sight of a human lying in the mud in front of a bulldozer may be a more powerful preventive of destruction than that of a mere animal or plant. In the understanding of many such activists, protest venues might be a location in which humanity confronts itself with conflicting assessments of its place in the scheme of things. Over against the notion that everything is a resource for humanity's benefit (provided either by God or nature) is the understanding that humans are only one species among those whose lives and cultures require sustenance and support. Animists may be inspired by experiences of the participation of elusive otherworld beings, but their primary motive is the celebration of seemingly more mundane relationships.

Tylor's theory of animism has been rejected by most. But contemporary animists do not offer assertions about the origins, development and true nature of all religion, but a focused discussion about particular ways of being related to the world. Like the earlier theory it is entangled with notions of materiality, but now this arises from a challenge to discourses that divide spirit and flesh, soul and body, subject and object, life and matter, supernatural and natural, culture and nature, people and environment, community and resources, and so on. In dialogue with particular indigenous ontologies, epistemologies and cosmovisions, the new animism contests modernist preconceptions and invites the widening of relational engagements generated and enhanced by gift exchanges and other forms of mutuality. In both indigenous and Western forms, animism encourages humans to see the world as a diverse community of living persons worthy of particular kinds of respect.

Animism is, however, more than the recognition of life in those otherwise considered inanimate. This would continue to prioritize what is exceptional to the West and ignore what is self-evident to those who might appropriately be named "animists." In the end, the recognition of life is far too simple to be generative. What is important is the mutual recognition of the ability to reciprocate, relate and engage. Animists are people who encounter other persons, only some of whom are human, as cultural beings. Their various engagements with what might otherwise be considered the environment or nature constitutes a complex of cultural relationships with a large and diverse community. Such worldviews and lifeways proffer exciting possibilities for underpinning relationships with the other-than-human world that contrast dramatically with what is now normal or natural in modernity. Animism promises the enrichment of human cultures by fuller engagement with what is too often taken as background or resource-available to the construction of culture. Instead, animists are those who seek cultures of relationship rooted and expressed in respectful relationships.

Graham Harvey

Further Reading

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See also: Animism; Animism: Humanity's Original Religious Worldview; Bioregionalism and the North American Bioregional Congress; Hunting Spirituality and Animism; Magic; Magic, Animism, and the Shaman's Craft; Radical Environmentalism; Snyder, Gary; Radical Environmentalism; Walker, Alice; Zulu (amaZulu) Ancestors and Ritual Exchange;

P Animism – Humanity's Original Religious Worldview

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the mere fact of evolution had been around for a good long while. Fossil evidence made it clear that species had undergone evolutionary change from ancient times to the present, and most thinkers of the time were perfectly content to leave it at that. The absence of a theory to explain evolutionary change was not felt by them, not experienced as a pressure, as it was by Charles Darwin. The fact alone wasn't sufficient for him. He wanted to know *why* species had evolved over time. He knew there had to be some intelligible mechanism or dynamic that would account for it, and this is what he went looking for – with well known

results. In his *Origin of Species*, he wasn't announcing the *fact* of evolution, he was trying to make *sense* of the fact.

In my mid-twenties I began to feel a similar sort of pressure, but it was a vague and undirected one. The modern Age of Anxiety – the anxiety we're all quite used to living with today – was just being born. In her book *Silent Spring* (1962) Rachel Carson enunciated a startlingly new idea: the pollutants we were so prodigiously pouring into the world didn't just obligingly vanish, they produced changes, and these changes had consequences – very possibly catastrophic ones. Of course everyone takes this for granted now, but at the time this was devastating news. In his book *The Population Bomb* (1968) Paul Ehrlich pointed out that at our present rate of growth, we were going to make the Earth uninhabitable to our own species within a century. Again, a commonplace idea today, but not so then. Overshadowing these things was the fact that we all lived from day to day with the knowledge that at any moment nuclear devastation could rain down on American cities, to be answered by a rain of nuclear devastation on Soviet cities. The end of civilization – perhaps even of human life itself – was a button-push away.

I wasn't satisfied with the conventional explanation of all this, which is that we've ended up badly because of the Industrial Revolution. To my mind, this is like saying that Hamlet ended up badly because he took on Laertes in a fencing match. To understand why Hamlet ended up badly, you can't just look at the last ten minutes of his life, you have to go right back to the beginning of his story. I felt a pressure to do the same with us.

But where is the beginning of our story? This isn't a difficult question to answer. Every schoolchild learns that our story began about 10,000 years ago with the Agricultural Revolution. This isn't the beginning of the *human* story, but it's certainly the beginning of *our* story. It was from this beginning that all the wonders and horrors of our civilization grew.

Everyone is vaguely aware that there have been two ways of looking at the Agricultural Revolution within our culture, two contradictory stories about its significance. The standard version – the version taught in our schools – goes something like this. Humans had been around for a long time, three or four million years, living a miserable and shiftless sort of life for most of that time, accomplishing nothing and getting nowhere. But then about 10,000 years ago it finally dawned on folks living in the Fertile Crescent that they didn't have to live like beavers and bears, making do with whatever food happened to come along; they could cultivate their own food and thus control their own destiny and well-being. Agriculture made it possible for them to give up the nomadic life for the life of farming villagers. Village life encouraged occupational specialization and the advancement of technology on all fronts. Before long, villages became towns, towns became cities, and cities were gathered into kingdoms and empires. Trade connections, elaborate social and economic systems, and literacy soon followed, and *there we went*. All these advances were based on – and impossible without – agriculture, manifestly humanity's greatest blessing.

The other story, a much older one, is tucked away in a different corner of our cultural heritage. It too is set in the Fertile Crescent and tells a tale of the birth of agriculture, but in this telling agriculture isn't represented as a blessing but rather as a curse: a punishment for a crime whose exact nature has always profoundly puzzled us. I'm referring, of course, to the story told in the third chapter of Genesis, the Fall of Adam.

Both these stories are known to virtually everyone who grows up in our culture, from Boston to Beirut to Beijing, including every historian, philosopher, theologian, and anthropologist. But like most thinkers of the mid-nineteenth century, who were content with the mere fact of evolution and felt no pressure to explain it, all these historians, philosophers, theologians, and anthropologists seem perfectly content to live with these two contradictory stories. The conflict is manifest but, for them, demands no explanation.

For me, it did. As evolution demanded of Darwin a theory that would make sense of it, the story in Genesis demanded of me a theory that would make sense of it.

There have traditionally been two approaches to Adam's crime and punishment. The text tells us Adam was invited to partake of every tree in the garden of Eden except one, mysteriously called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. As we know, Adam succumbed to the temptation to sample the fruit of this tree. In one approach, the crime is viewed as simple disobedience. From this point of view, the selection of the knowledge of good and evil for interdiction seems entirely arbitrary. God might just as well have chosen the knowledge of war and peace or the knowledge of pride and prejudice. The point was simply to forbid Adam *something* in order to test his obedience. Under this approach, Adam's punishment – banishment from Eden to live by the sweat of his brow as a farmer – was in effect just a spanking; it doesn't "fit the crime" in any particular way. This is presumably the punishment he would have received no matter what test he failed.

The second approach attempts to make some sort of connection between Adam's crime and his punishment. Under this approach, Eden is conventionally viewed as a metaphor for the state of innocence, which is lost when Adam gains the knowledge of good and evil. This makes sense, but only if the knowledge of good and evil is understood as a metaphor for knowledge that destroys innocence. So with roughly equivalent metaphors at either end, the story is reduced to banality: Adam lost his innocence by gaining knowledge that destroyed his innocence.

The story of the Fall is coupled with a second that is equally famous and equally baffling, the story of Cain and

Abel. As conventionally understood, these two brothers were literal individuals, the elder, Cain, a tiller of the soil, and the younger, Abel, a herder. The improbability that two members of the same family would embrace lifestyles that were completely antithetical should tip us off to the fact that these were not individuals but emblematic figures, just as Adam was (*Adam* merely being the Hebrew word for *Man*).

If we understand these as emblematic figures, then the story begins to make sense. The firstborn of agriculture was indeed the tiller of the soil, as Cain was said to be the firstborn of Adam. This is an undoubted historical fact. The domestication of plants is a process that begins the day you plant your first seed, but the domestication of animals is a process that takes generations; wild animals don't become tame overnight, so the herder Abel was indeed the second-born – by centuries, if not millennia (another reason to be skeptical of the notion that Cain and Abel were literally second-generation brothers). A further reason for skepticism on this point is the fact that the farmers and herders of the period occupied adjacent but distinctly different regions of the Near East. Farming was the occupation of the Caucasian inhabitants of the lush Fertile Crescent. Herding was the occupation of the Semitic inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula to the south.

Another piece of background that needs to be understood is that in very ancient times the farming lifestyle was radically different from the herding lifestyle. Tillers of the soil were by the very nature of their work settled villagers; but herders (by the very nature of *their* work) were nomads, just as many present-day herding peoples are. The herding lifestyle was closer to the hunting-gathering lifestyle than it was to the farming lifestyle.

As the farming peoples of the north expanded, it was inevitable that they would confront their Semitic herding neighbors to the south, perhaps in what is now Iraq – with the predictable result. As they have done from the beginning to the present moment, the tillers of the soil needed more land to put to the plow, and as they have done from the beginning to the present moment, they took it. As the Semites saw it (and it is of course their version of the story that we have in Genesis), the tiller of the soil Cain was watering his fields with the blood of Abel the herder.

That the version we have is the Semitic version explains the central mystery of the story, which is why God rejected Cain's gift but accepted Abel's. Naturally, this is the way the Semites *would* see it. In essence, the story says, "God is on our side. God loves us and the way we live but hates the tillers of the soil and the way they live."

With these provisional understandings in place, I was ready to offer a theory about the first part of the story, the story of Adam's Fall. What the Semitic authors knew was only the *present* fact that their brothers from the north were encroaching on them in a murderous way. They hadn't been physically present in the Fertile Crescent to witness the actual birth of agriculture; this was an event that may have occurred hundreds of years earlier, perhaps even thousands of years earlier. All that was clear to them was that some strange development had saddled their brothers to the north with a laborious lifestyle and had turned them into murderers, and they could only suppose that this development was a catastrophe of some kind.

What they observed about their brothers to the north was this peculiarity: they seemed to have the strange idea that they knew how to run the world as well as God. This is what marks them as our cultural ancestors. As we go about our business of running the world, we have no doubt that we're doing as good a job as God, if not better. Obviously God put a lot of creatures in the world that are superfluous and even baneful, and we're quite at liberty to get rid of them. We know where the rivers should run, where the swamps should be drained, where the forests should be razed, where the mountains should be leveled, where the plains should be scoured, where the rain should fall. To us, it's perfectly obvious that we have this knowledge.

In fact, to the authors of the stories in Genesis, it looked as if their brothers to the north had the bizarre idea that they had eaten at *God's own tree of wisdom* and had gained the very knowledge that God uses to rule the world. And what knowledge is this? It is a knowledge that only God is competent to use, the knowledge that every single action that he might take – no matter what it is, no matter how large or small – is good for one but evil for another. If a fox goes out to stalk a pheasant, it's in the hands of God whether she will catch the pheasant or the pheasant will escape. If God gives the pheasant to the fox, then this is good for the fox but evil for the pheasant. If God allows the pheasant to escape, then this is good for the pheasant but evil for the fox. There is no outcome that is good for both. The same is true in every area of the world's governance. If God allows an early thaw and the valley is flooded, then this is good for some but evil for others. If God holds back the thaw then this too will be good for some but evil for others.

Decisions of this kind are clearly at the very root of what it means to rule the world, and the wisdom to make them cannot possibly belong to any mere creature, like Man, for any creature making such decisions would inevitably say, "Every choice I make will be good for me but evil for all others." And of course this is precisely how the agriculturalist operates, saying,

> If I scour this plain to plant food for myself, then this will be evil for all the creatures that inhabit the plain, but it'll be good for me. If I raze this forest to plant food for myself, then this will be evil for all the creatures that inhabit the forest, but it'll be good for me. If I kill off all the predators who might attack my herds or my flocks, then this will be evil for them but good for me.

What the authors of the stories in Genesis perceived was that their brothers to the north had taken into their own hands the rule of the world; they had usurped the role of God. Those who let God run the world and take the food that he has planted for them have an easy life. But those who are not content with the way God runs the world and want to run it themselves must necessarily plant *their own* food, must necessarily make their living by the sweat of their brow. As this makes plain, agriculture was not the crime itself but rather the result of the crime, the punishment that must inevitably follow such a crime. It was wielding the knowledge of good and evil that had turned their brothers in the north into farmers – and into murderers (for murder comes easy to those who think they know how to run the world better than God).

But these were not the only consequences to be expected from Adam's act. The fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is harmless to God but deadly to Man. It seemed to the authors of these stories that usurping God's role in the world would be the very death of Man.

And so it seemed to me when I finally worked all this out in the late 1970s. This investigation of the stories in Genesis was not, for me, an exercise in biblical exegesis. I'd gone looking for a way to understand how in the world we'd brought ourselves face to face with death in such a relatively short period of time – ten thousand years, a mere eye-blink in the lifespan of our species – and had found it in an ancient story that we long ago adopted as our own and that remained stubbornly mysterious to us as long as we insisted on reading it as if it *were* our own. When examined from a point of view *not* our own, however, it ceased to be mysterious and delivered up a meaning that not only would have made sense to a beleaguered herding people seven or eight thousand years ago but that would also make sense to the beleaguered people of the late twentieth century.

As far as I was concerned, the authors of this story had gotten it right. In spite of the terrible mess we've made of it, we *do* think we can run the world, and if we continue to think this, it *is* going to be the death of us.

In case it isn't evident, I should add that my reading of Genesis is, of course, only a theory. This is what creationists say of evolution, that it's "only a theory, it hasn't been proved," as though this in itself is grounds for dismissal. This misrepresents the point of formulating a theory, which is to make sense of the evidence. So far, Darwin's theory remains the best way we've found to make sense of the evidence, and my own theory has to be evaluated in the same way. Does it make sense of the evidence – the stories themselves – and does it make more sense than any other theory?

But solving this particular riddle only began to alleviate the pressure I felt for answers that were not being looked for at any level of our culture. The philosophical and theological foundations of our culture were laid down by people who confidently believed that Man had been *born* an agriculturalist and civilization builder. These things were as instinctive to him as predation is to lions or hiving is to bees. This meant that, to find and date Man's birth, one had only to look for the beginnings of agriculture and civilization, and these were obviously not very far back in time.

When in 1650 Irish theologian James Ussher announced the date of creation as 23 October 4004 B.C.E., no one laughed or scoffed, or if they did, it was because of the absurd exactitude of the date, not because the date was absurdly recent. In fact, 4004 B.C.E. is quite a serviceable date for the beginning of what we would recognize as civilization. This being the case, it's hardly surprising that, for people who took it for granted that Man began building civilization almost as soon as he was created, 4004 B.C.E. would seem like a perfectly reasonable date for his creation.

But all this was soon to change. By the middle of the nineteenth century the accumulated evidence of many new sciences had pushed nearly every date in sight back by many orders of magnitude. The universe and the Earth were not thousands of years old, they were billions of years old. The human past extended back millions of years beyond the appearance of agriculture and the birth of civilization. Only those who clung to a very literal reading of the biblical creation story rejected the evidence; they saw it as a hoax perpetrated on us either by the devil (to confound us) or by God (to test our faith). For those who accept the evidence of science, however, the notion that Man had been born an agriculturalist and civilization builder had been rendered totally untenable. He had very definitely not been born either one.

This meant that the philosophical and theological foundations of our culture had been laid by people with a profoundly erroneous understanding of our nature, our origins, and our history. It was therefore urgently important to reexamine these foundations and if necessary to rebuild them from the ground up. Except, of course, that no one at all thought this was urgently important – or even slightly important. So human history extended millions of years back beyond the birth of agriculture. Who cares? No one in the ranks of philosophers or theologians felt the sort of pressure that had moved Darwin to go *beyond* mere acceptance of the fact. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin managed to look at the facts and conclude that the phenomenon of Man was still the central event in cosmic history, so the foundations were intact. But then he had a vested interest in preserving those foundations. Even so, his superiors told him in no uncertain terms to leave the matter alone.

In the last century we gained an understanding of the human story that made nonsense of everything we'd been telling ourselves for upwards of three thousand years, but our settled understandings remained completely

unshaken. So what that Man had not been born an agriculturalist and a civilization builder? He was certainly born *to become* an agriculturalist and a civilization builder. It was beyond question that this was our foreordained destiny, and the way we live is the way humans were *meant* to live from the beginning of time. And indeed we must *go on* living this way – even if it kills us.

Facts that were indisputable to all but biblical literalists had radically repositioned us not only in the physical universe but in the history of our own species. That we had been repositioned was all but universally acknowledged, but no one felt any pressure to develop a theory that would make sense of the fact, the way Darwin had made sense of the fact of evolution. I did.

In *Ishmael* I made the point that the conflict between the emblematic figures Cain and Abel didn't end six or eight thousand years ago in the Near East. Cain the tiller of the soil has carried his knife with him to every corner of the world, watering his fields with the blood of tribal peoples wherever he found them. He arrived here in 1492 and over the next three centuries watered his fields with the blood of millions of Native Americans. Today, he's down there in Brazil, knife poised over the few remaining aboriginals in the heart of that country.

I sent a copy of the book to a friend who, by chance, is a historian. He came back to me with a challenge: *How do you know that humans were living tribally 10,000 years ago?* This is an entirely valid question, which I answered this way: *How do you know that wolves were living in packs 10,000 years ago? That whales were living in pods 10,000 years ago? That geese were living in flocks 10,000 years ago? That baboons were living in troops 10,000 years ago? That bison were living in herds 10,000 years ago? That bees were living in hives 10,000 years ago*? Well, of course you don't, and you can't. Social organizations – and that's what we're talking about here – leave no fossils. In the total absence of contrary evidence, however, it's entirely legitimate to assume that wolves, whales, geese, baboons, bison, and bees did not just recently begin living in packs, pods, flocks, troops, herds, and hives. It's legitimate for much the same reason that it's legitimate to assume that the universe did not just recently begin expanding. It's perfectly conceivable – but not at all credible – that the universe just began expanding in the year 1776.

Everything we're able to observe about the world and the universe indicates that things that work don't capriciously change the way they work. It would be absurd to suppose that wolves originally evolved in hives but then capriciously began living in packs instead, that bees originally evolved in troops but then capriciously began living in hives instead. On the contrary, the only thing that makes sense is to assume that the reason we see wolves living in packs today is that they evolved in packs, that the reason we see bees living in hives today is that they evolved in hives. It's self-evident that no species emerges by failing. Every species emerges by succeeding, and natural selection rewards success with stability and longevity. This is why we must assume that hiving for bees represents the success that allowed bees to emerge as a species in the first place.

In the fifteenth century, for the first time, we began systematically exploring the territory beyond the civilized world, and everywhere we went we found people living in tribes – in every region of every continent. We found the occasional civilization as well, of course, but again, wherever we did not find civilization, we found people living in tribes, and there was no doubt in our minds that this social organization predated our own – was more "primitive" than our own.

The tribe among aboriginal peoples is as universal as the flock among geese, and I doubt if any anthropologist questions that it was humanity's original social organization. We didn't evolve in troops or hordes or bands. Rather, we evolved in a social organization that was peculiarly human, that was uniquely successful for *culture-bearers*. It's as reasonable to assume that we evolved as tribal beings as it is to assume that bees evolved as hiving beings. The tribe was successful for humans, which is why it was still universally in place throughout the world three million years later. That it was successful doesn't, by the way, mean it was invulnerable. If we were to explode a hydrogen bomb in the interior of Brazil, we would wipe out hundreds of thousands of species totally, but it would hardly be reasonable to conclude that these species were unsuccessful because they couldn't survive a nuclear explosion.

Our first look into the human past presents us with a resounding challenge to the notion that the way we live was the way humans were somehow *meant* to live from the beginning of time. We *can* live in this hierarchical organization called civilization, just as lions can live in captivity, but saying that this was our inescapable destiny is not much more sensible than saying that the zoo was the inescapable destiny of lions. The tribal organization was natural selection's gift to humanity in the same way that the flock was natural selection's gift to geese.

The elemental glue that holds any tribe together is tribal law. Though this is easy to say, it's less easy to understand, because the operation of tribal law is entirely different from the operation of our law. *Prohibition* is the essence of our law, but the essence of tribal law is *remedy*. Misbehavior isn't outlawed in any tribe. Rather, tribal law prescribes what must happen in order to minimize the effect of misbehavior and to produce a situation in which everyone feels that they've been made as whole as possible. Members of the tribe view their laws as inherently friendly to them, invariably geared to make things better for them, collectively and individually, never worse. For us, of course, the law is an enemy. Collectively, perhaps,

it's possible for us to view the law as society's friend, but for each of us individually, the law is an enemy always poised to pounce on us. This doesn't have to be pointed out to anyone who happens to belong to a racial or ethnic group that's subject to police profiling. But it's true for all of us to a degree. A momentary loss of control or lapse in judgment, a stupid action taken in panic, even an innocent gesture taken the wrong way can put you behind bars.

In *The Story of B* I described in detail how adultery is handled among the Alawa of Australia. If you have the misfortune to fall in love with another man's wife or another woman's husband, the law doesn't say, "This is prohibited and may not go forward." It says, "If you want your love to go forward, here's what you must do to make things right with all parties and to see to it that marriage isn't cheapened in the eyes of our children." It's quite an elaborate process, but it works remarkably well. What makes it even more remarkable is that the process was not worked out in any legislature or by any committee. It's another gift of natural selection. Over countless generations of testing, no better way of handling adultery has been found or even conceivably could be found, because – behold! – it *works*! It does just what the Alawa want it to do, and no one tries to evade it. Even adulterers don't try to evade it – that's how beautifully it works.

Some tribes live under laws that seem grotesque to us, but they don't ask us to live under them. Those laws work for *them* – or they wouldn't be in place. No tribe has ever been found where the people hate their tribal laws. Doubtless there have been tribes where people came to be dissatisfied with their laws, but if so, those tribes have disappeared. In a very real sense, dysfunctional tribes are eliminated by natural selection in the same way dysfunctional species are.

One of the virtues of tribal law is that it presupposes that people are just the way we know they are: generally wise, kind, generous, and well intentioned but perfectly capable of being foolish, unruly, moody, cantankerous, selfish, greedy, violent, stupid, bad-tempered, sneaky, lustful, treacherous, careless, vindictive, neglectful, petty, and all sorts of other unpleasant things. Tribal law doesn't punish people for their shortcomings, as our law does. Rather, it makes the management of their shortcomings an easy and ordinary part of life, which is why the tribe has worked so well for so long.

But during the developmental period of our hierarchical civilization, all this changed very dramatically. Tribal peoples began to come together in larger and larger associations, and one of the casualties of this process was tribal law. If you take the Alawa of Australia and put them together with the Gebusi of New Guinea, the Bushmen of the Kalahari, and the Yanomami of Brazil, they are very literally not going to know how to live. None of these tribes is going to embrace the laws of the others, which may not only be unknown to them but also be incomprehensible to them. How then are they going to handle mischief that occurs among them? The Gebusi way or the Yanomami way? The Alawa way or the Bushman way? Multiply this by a hundred, and you'll have a fair approximation of where people stood in the early millennia of our own cultural development in the Near East.

When you gather up a hundred tribes and expect them to work and live together, tribal law becomes inapplicable and useless. But of course the people in this amalgam are the same as they always were: capable of being foolish, moody, cantankerous, selfish, greedy, violent, stupid, bad-tempered, and all the rest. In the tribal situation, this was no problem, because tribal law was *designed* for people like this. But all the tribal ways of handling these ordinary human tendencies had been expunged in our burgeoning civilization. A new way of handling them had to be invented – and I stress the word *invented*. There was no received, tested way of handling the mischief people were capable of. Our cultural ancestors had to make something up, and what they made up were lists of *prohibited* behavior.

Very understandably, they began with the big ones. They weren't going to prohibit moodiness or selfishness. They prohibited things like murder, assault, and theft. Of course we don't know what the lists were like until the dawn of literacy, but you can be sure they were in place, because it's hardly plausible that we murdered, robbed, and thieved with impunity for five or six thousand years until Hammurabi finally noticed that these were rather disruptive activities.

When the Israelites escaped from Egypt in the thirteenth century B.C.E., they were literally a lawless horde, because of course they'd left the Egyptian list of prohibitions behind. They needed their own list of prohibitions, which God in his thoughtful way provided – the famous ten. But of course ten didn't do it. Hundreds more followed.

No number has ever done it for us. Not ten, not a hundred, not a thousand, not ten thousand, not a hundred thousand. I have no idea how long the list is by now, but I suspect it runs into the millions, and every single year we pay our legislators to come up with more. But no matter how many prohibitions we come up with, they never do the trick, because no prohibited behavior has ever been eliminated by passing a law against it. Every time someone is sent to prison or executed, this is said to be "sending a message" to miscreants, but for some strange reason the message never arrives, year after year, generation after generation, century after century. Naturally, we consider this to be a very advanced system.

No tribal people has ever been found that claimed *not* to know how to live. On the contrary, anthropologists find them to be completely confident that they know how to live. But with the disappearance of tribal law among us, people began to be acutely aware of not knowing how to

live. A new class of specialists came to be in demand, their specialty being the annunciation of how people are supposed to live. These specialists we call prophets.

Naturally it takes special qualifications to be a prophet. You must by definition know something the rest of us don't know, something the rest of us are clearly unable to know. This means you must have a source of information that is beyond normal reach – or else what good would it be? A transcendent vision will do, as in the case of Siddhartha Gautama. A vision led Joseph Smith to the hidden scriptures known as the *Book of Mormon*. A dream will do, provided it comes from God. But best of all, of course, is direct, personal, unmediated communication with God. The most persuasive and most highly valued prophets, the ones that are worth dying for and killing for, have the word directly from God.

But isn't it true (people sometimes ask) that tribal peoples have claimed to have prophets as well? Yes, absolutely, but only when their tribal culture has been destroyed by contact with us; they no longer know how to live and so need the services of a prophet. One of the most famous of these was Wovoka, to whom the means of salvation for his people were revealed in a series of dreams or visions; his Ghost Dance religion would defeat the white man and restore the land to the natives of America.

Although some tribal peoples attribute their laws to culture heroes in the distant past, that's all it is, an attribution, rather like the attribution of fire to Prometheus. They don't consult these heroes about how to live (the way we consult our prophets) any more than the Greeks consulted Prometheus about how to start a fire. They don't have to consult them, because they themselves know how to live. The knowledge is in *them*, not in some remote and inaccessible being.

The appearance of religions based on prophetic revelations is unique to our culture. We alone in the history of all humanity needed such religions. We still need them (and new ones are being created every day), because we still profoundly feel that we don't know how to live. Our religions are the peculiar creation of a bereft people. Yet we don't doubt for a moment that they are the religions of humanity itself.

This belief was not an unreasonable one when it first took root among us. Having long since forgotten that humanity was here long before we came along, we assumed that we were humanity itself and that our history was human history itself. We imagined that humanity had been in existence for just a few thousand years – and that God had been in communication with us from the beginning. So why *wouldn't* our religions be the religions of humanity itself?

When it became known that humanity was millions of years older than we are, no one thought it odd that God had remained aloof from the thousands of generations that had come before us. After all, these were mere savages, unworthy of his attention. The philosophers and theologians of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries weren't troubled by the fact that God disdained to reveal himself until we came along. The fact alone was enough for them, and they felt no pressure to develop a theory to make sense of it. For Christians, it had long been accepted that Christianity was humanity's religion (which is why all of humanity had to be converted to it, of course). It was an effortless step for thinkers like Teilhard de Chardin and Matthew Fox to promote Christ from humanity's Christ to the Cosmic Christ.

On examination of the historical record, however, it seemed to me that there once *was* a religion that could plausibly be called the religion of humanity. It was humanity's first religion and its only universal religion, found wherever humans were found, and it was plausible to suppose that it had been in place for tens of thousands of years. Christian missionaries encountered it wherever they went, and piously set about destroying it. By now it has been all but stamped out either by missionary efforts or more simply by exterminating its adherents. If I am the first to nominate it the most reasonable candidate to stand as the religion of humanity, I certainly take no pride in this, since it's been in plain sight to us for hundreds of years.

Of course it isn't accounted a "real" religion, since it isn't one of ours. It's just a sort of half-baked "pre-religion." How could it be anything else, since it emerged long before God decided humans were worth talking to? It wasn't revealed by any accredited prophet, has no dogma, no evident theology or doctrine, no liturgy, and produces no interesting heresies or schisms. Worst of all, as far as I know, no one has ever killed for it or died for it – and what sort of religion is that? Considering all this, it's actually remarkable that we even have a name for it.

The religion I'm talking about is, of course, animism. The name is our invention, derived from the Latin word for soul or spirit. It came to be applied to the religious notions of primitive peoples in the 1860s and 1870s. An early definition was supplied by Sir Edward Tyler in his book *Primitive Culture*:

> Animism is the doctrine which places the sources of mental and even physical life in an energy independent of, or at least distinct from, the body. From the point of view of the history of religions, the term is taken, in the wider sense, to denote the belief in the existence of spiritual beings, some attached to bodies of which they constitute the real personality (souls), others without necessary connection with a determinate body (spirits) (Tyler in Anderson 1950: 9).

I frankly haven't any idea what that means, and I doubt if you could find anyone to explain it to you in the jungles

of Brazil or New Guinea. When that definition was cobbled together, missionary reports were pretty thick on the ground, but objective anthropological field studies were as yet nonexistent. After decades of trying to understand what so-called primitive people were trying to tell us about their lives and their vision of humanity's place in the world, I concluded that a very simple worldview was at the foundation of everything they were saying: *The world is a sacred place, and humanity belongs in such a world*.

It's simple but also deceptively simple. This can best be seen if we contrast it with the worldview at the foundation of what our own religions tell us. In the worldview of our religions, the world is anything but a sacred place. For Christians, it's merely a place of testing and has no intrinsic value; it's revealingly said that Satan is the Prince of the World. For Buddhists the world is a place where suffering is inevitable. If I oversimplify, my object is not to misrepresent but only to clarify the general difference between the animist worldview and the worldviews of our culture's religions.

For Christians, the world is not where humans *belong*; it's not our true home, it's just a sort of waiting room where we pass the time before moving on to our true home, which is heaven. For Buddhists, the world is another kind of waiting room, which we visit again and again in a repeating cycle of death and rebirth until we finally attain liberation in the state of nirvana. For Christians, if the world *were* a sacred place, we wouldn't belong in it, because we're all sinners; God didn't send his only-begotten son to make us worthy of living in a sacred world but to make us worthy of living in heaven. For Buddhists, if the world were a sacred place, then why would we hope to escape it? If the world were a sacred place, then would we not rather welcome the repeating cycle of death and rebirth?

From the animist point of view, humans belong in a sacred place because they themselves are sacred. Not sacred in a special way, not *more* sacred than anything else, but merely *as* sacred as anything else – as sacred as bison or salmon or crows or crickets or bears or sunflowers.

I sometimes encounter those who resent the idea that our ancestors may have gotten in ahead of us, may have possessed a more sublime vision of the world and humanity's place in it than any of ours. They'll ask, "Well, isn't this just paganism?" or "Isn't this just pantheism?" Meaning, didn't we come up with the same thing? I quarrel with no one's answer to this question, but my own answer is no. Paganism, derived from the Latin word for *country-dweller*, is a farmer's religion and developed from farmers' concerns for the fertility of their land and animals, spawning one god after another to look after one thing after another when appropriately compensated through one kind of a sacrifice or another. If animism were kin to paganism, I'd expect to see it producing similar results, but I've never done so. Varying widely in its details from people to people, animism doesn't automatically posit the existence of one God or many gods or any gods at all. Pantheism declares not only that a specifically singular God exists but that *everything* is God. If anthropological studies of them are to be trusted, tribal animists have no taste for such dogmatic speculations about the nature of God, so I see no grounds for equating animism with pantheism.

The religions of our culture – the so-called Major Religions – are very much ours (and not humanity's), because they answer our particular needs, providing us with ways to rationalize the immutable condition of inequity we experience. Why do a few of us enjoy lives of wealth, power, ease, and luxury while the masses endure lives of poverty, helplessness, toil, and squalor?

Different rationales for this condition developed in the East and West. In the East, under the theory of karma, one's sins and virtues are punished or rewarded in this and subsequent lives; thus if you're born to the life of an untouchable in Bhaktapur, India, where you can never hope to rise to any occupation above cleaning latrines, you have no one to blame but yourself. You have no grounds to envy or hate the Brahmans who shun and despise you; their life of felicity and leisure is only what they deserve, just as your life of poverty and misery is only what you deserve. In this way the arrangement of people into high, middle, and low classes is shown to be justice made manifest in a divinely ordered universe. Buddhism may be seen as offering relief from this rigid posture of resignation to one's lot. Buddha assured his followers that the poor and downtrodden are (or ultimately will be) better off than the rich and powerful, who will find it almost impossible to attain salvation. The poor can live most happily, Buddha said, possessing nothing and living on joy alone, like the radiant gods.

In the West a different rationale was offered by the religions of the Abrahamic tradition – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The meek (that is, the suffering poor) will inherit the Earth, Jesus said, and the kingdom of God will turn the hierarchy upside down; the kingdom of God will belong to the poor, not to the rich, and rulers and ruled will change places, making the first last and the last first. Jesus and Buddha agree that, contrary to appearances, riches don't make people happy. Rather, says Buddha, riches just make them greedy. And the poor shouldn't envy the rich their treasures, which are always subject to being stolen by thieves or eaten up by moths and rust; rather, Jesus says, they should accumulate incorruptible treasures in heaven.

Humanity lived for three or four million years without needing rationales like these, since in the tribal organization – notably nonhierarchical – when times are bad all suffer alike, and when times are good all flourish alike. For two hundred thousand generations of our species,

religions like ours not only didn't exist, they would also have been superfluous and incomprehensible.

Daniel Quinn

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See also: Anarchism; Anarcho-Primitivism and the Bible; Animism; Animism – A Contemporary Perspective; Bioregionalism and the North American Bioregional Congress; Ecology and Religion; Evolutionary Biology, Religion, and Stewardship; Fall, The; Fox, Matthew; Ghost Dance; Magic, Animism, and the Shaman's Craft; Paganism – A Jewish Perspective; Teilhard de Chardin, Pierre.

Anishnabeg Culture

The Algonkian-speaking Anishnabeg (meaning "human beings") of the Great Lakes region of North America includes speakers of the Odawa (Ottawa), Ojibwe (Chippewa) and Potawatomi dialects, now known among themselves as the Three Fires, as well as the Algonquins, to their east. Sharing major features of their religion, language and culture are the Cree who live to their north and west, and the various native peoples who live north and south of the St. Lawrence River, as well as Labrador and Newfoundland; more distantly related are the Pikuni (Blackfoot, Blood), who live east of the northern Rockies.

The Anishnabe reserves (Canada) and reservations (United States) are now located in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, Manitoba and Ontario. Their migration myth speaks of moving from the Atlantic coast along the St. Lawrence River to the Great Lakes. In pre-contact times, the Anishnabeg lived not only in the above areas but along the Atlantic seaboard and the Midwest (Ohio, Illinois, Kentucky) of the present-day United States. In the latter areas, they practiced horticulture and lived in settlements.

Before the effects of contact with Europeans, the Great Lakes Anishnabeg lived a semi-nomadic hunting-gathering lifestyle, traveling by canoe and snowshoe over an established yearly round; for example, traveling to maple forests in early spring when the sap runs and particular lakes in early fall when the "wild rice" ripens. Many traded with more settled peoples, such as the Iroquoian-speaking Wyandot (Hurons), exchanging dried meat and hides for corn and tobacco. Some carried out small-scale horticulture on their own, where the soil and climate was suitable. Some mined copper in shallow pits. Hence, they were familiar not only with towns, but with urban, mercantile centers, such as Cahokia, across the Mississippi from present-day St. Louis, long before Europeans arrived on the scene.

For these people, as hunting-gathering cultures everywhere, "religion," "spirituality" and "nature" are meaningless terms, for each term would include every aspect of their lives; hence, these words do not denote anything distinguishable, in and of themselves. It is impossible for modern humans to fully appreciate what it meant to live in a situation where everything perceivable is undomesticated nature and every facet of nature is individually numinous. Hence, virtually everything observed or done involved a spiritual, ritual interaction with a *manido* (spirit/deity); all one's neighbors shared the same understanding; and one's language reflected these understandings in nuanced, complex ways. Let us, however, attempt to generalize from the contemporary hermeneutic as to how we humans understood the environment as hunter-gatherers.

The world around one – sun, moon, stars, Earth, rivers and lakes, animals, fish, trees, plants, stones (those that are animate), etc. – consists of numinous relatives; we live amidst the divine. These relatives are all more powerful than humans, for humans depend on them for life, but they do not need humans to survive. We need these relations to sacrifice themselves for the many things we require: branches and bark for shelter (wigwams), canoes, baskets and firewood; skin, flesh, bones and sinews for clothing, food, tools and thread; berries, seeds (wild grains), sap and tubers for food, medicine, glue and waterproofing. We encourage our relatives to give themselves to us for these needs by crying to them, asking them to pity us and give us their lives so we may live; in turn, we reciprocate by giving them symbolic gifts, especially tobacco, by honoring them through rituals, by always speaking to them respectfully, and by never wasting their precious gifts. For if we do not, they may not listen to us again or may not come back to life so that they can again sacrifice themselves for our needs.

Humans are so weak and pitiable that not only do we need the gifts of spirits to live, we also need a special, personal relationship with one or more *manido* in order to carry out our functions and for protection from assorted