Eight Theories of Religion

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Why do human beings believe in divinities? Why do some seek eternal life, while others seek escape from recurring lives? Why do the beliefs and behaviors we typically call "religious" so deeply affect the human personality and so subtly weave their way through human society? Revised and updated in this second edition, *Eight Theories of Religion* considers how these fundamental questions have engaged the most important thinkers of the modern era. Accessible, systematic, and succinct, the text examines the classic interpretations of religion advanced by theorists who have left a major imprint on the intellectual culture of the twentieth century. The second edition features a new chapter on Max Weber, a revised introduction, and a revised, expanded conclusion that traces the paths of further inquiry and interpretation traveled by theorists in the most recent decades.

Eight Theories of Religion, Second Edition, begins with Edward Burnett Tylor and James Frazer--two Victorian pioneers in anthropology and the comparative study of religion. It then considers the great "reductionist" approaches of Sigmund Freud, Emile Durkheim, and Karl Marx, all of whom have exercised wide influence up to the present day. The discussion goes on to examine the leading challenges to reductionism as articulated by sociologist Max Weber (new to this edition) and Romanian-American comparativist Mircea Eliade. Finally, it explores the newer methods and ideas arising from the African field studies of ethnographer E. E. Evans-Pritchard and the interpretive anthropology of Clifford Geertz. Each chapter offers biographical background, theoretical exposition, conceptual analysis, and critical assessment. This common format allows for close comparison and careful evaluation throughout. Ideal for use as a supplementary text in introductory religion courses or as the central text in sociology of religion and courses centered on the explanation and interpretation of religion, *Eight Theories of Religion*, Second Edition, offers an illuminating treatment of this controversial and fascinating subject.

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