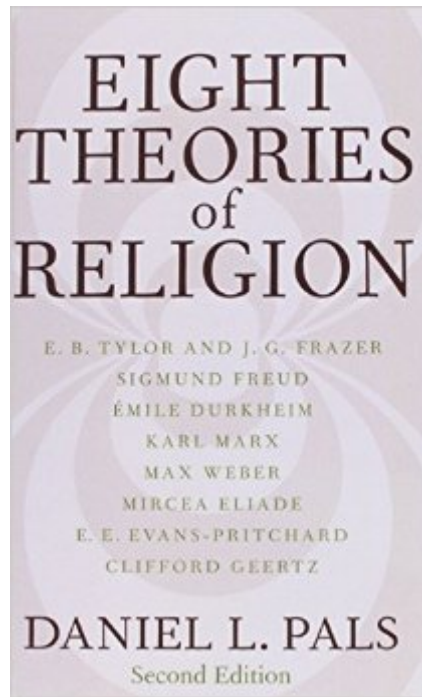


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# Eight Theories Of Religion



## Synopsis

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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I actually needed this book for my Introduction to Religion class but I'm sure I will keep it even after I am finished with the class. Pals breaks down the theories into their simplest forms and makes them so easy to understand. He summarizes each theorist's section with an analysis and a critique which makes the interpretation of the text that much easier. This is a wonderful book and I would suggest it to anyone looking for possible explanations of some of the world's most popular religions...

After reading *Eight Theories of Religion*, I'm left with the feeling that I am not qualified to review the book. Nevertheless, it filled a void that seems to accompany any attempt to study religion. I have quickly exhausted theology as redundant twaddle. Valid histories are hard to find that are not written by Christian apologists with evangelical agendas. That leaves the question: why religion in the first place? Why do people believe in imaginary beings and miracles? Why are people willing to kill and die for it. Why is history saturated with it? Hence, the need for a book like *Eight Theories of Religion*. ETR begs the question what do we mean by a theory of religion? Daniel L. Pals leaves the bulk of the answer to that question for the concluding sections of his book. Meanwhile, the individual chapters must serve as demonstrative examples of what is meant by theory. For the most part, the approaches are social and anthropological with possibly the exception of Freud. Pals admits that modern techniques of psychology, cognitive science, and evolutionary theories of human behavior are valid, but unfortunately they are not present in his book. All in all ETR is a very rewarding book, even if it does not fulfill my need for explanation and origins. I suppose many would say that what I am looking for doesn't exist, but I believe that it does exist. Simply asking how religion functions and where it may have originated is not ultimately constructive. Nevertheless, I would not demote Pals' text. It is quality work and well worth the effort.

Pals' "Eight Theories" (originally "Seven Theories") is a great resource for both undergraduate and graduate students. I've used this text at both levels. People around me sometimes wonder what exactly I am doing studying comparative religion. I usually say, "I study theories of religion." Pals'

book is exactly this- an overview of the major theories of religion (why it exists, why it came to be, what purpose it serves...).

This was a very interesting book that I bought for my Philosophy of Religion class. I did not like that class so much, but this book helped me get through most of my essays and it did teach me a lot on various religions and why they believe in what they believe in.

Pals helps make confusing scholarship eloquent in a fairly comprehensive, dispassionate approach that helps interested non-academics like myself grasp some of the basic ideas and theories in religion. He painstakingly sets up each philosopher's claims, notes gaps in their reasoning, provides criticisms to each theory, and includes a pretty decent bibliography. If only I read this book in college!

great book and Pals uses his creativeness to cover the major philosophers and scientists in a particular order to demonstrate intellectual evolution (intelligence evolves as time passes and we learn from previous ages) and he also brings out how the fact the philisophers (as most humans) try to "prove" THEIR experiences in life as they perceive it. The perception complicates their objectiveness. For instance, Freud was an atheist so Freud was out to prove there is no God. Freud did not want to reveal "truth" but only what HE thought was truth. Whether it is truth or not, was irrelevant to him and many others. Each philosopher builds on the previous with a critical critique of each by Pal and the others. I thought this was a great book and easy to read (unlike other philosophy books which are extremely difficult) 5 stars for Pals!

Had to buy this for a class. Turns out this is an interesting book that I'll be keeping on my shelf.

I purchased this book in hopes of delving into a different perspective in regards to how and why religion is so much a part of humanity. It was a nice read in that it offers eight varied theories for human reasoning and the approach to explain why we practice religion and look to higher powers. From the concept of anthropology to the socio make-up of the primitive to the complex societies, these eight seperate selections provide excellent insight. Though it certainly does not try to persuade the reader one way or the other in the belief of any particular deity, it does help one to better understand why there is a need within a tribe or more complex for such things. The book is an excellent starting point for further research and certainly encourages one to look beyond the simple answers we have come accustom to. I found the cultural anthropology quite interesting, but was not

overly enthused with the use of Freud.

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