TOTEMISM, METAPHOR AND TRADITION: INCORPORATING CULTURAL TRADITIONS INTO EVOLUTIONARY PSYCHOLOGY EXPLANATIONS OF RELIGION

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Abstract.   Totemism, a topic that fascinated and then was summarily dismissed by anthropologists, has been resurrected by evolutionary psychologists' recent attempts to explain religion. New approaches to religion are all based on the assumption that religious behavior is the result of evolved psychological mechanisms. We focus on two aspects of Totemism that may present challenges to this view. First, if religious behavior is simply the result of evolved psychological mechanisms, would it not spring forth anew each generation from an individual's psychological mechanisms? Yet, Australian Totemism, like other forms of Totemism, is profoundly traditional, copied by one generation from the prior ones for hundreds of generations. Regardless of personal inclinations, individuals are obligated to participate. Second, it is problematic to assume that all practitioners of Totemism actually believe their religious claims. We propose an alternative explanation that accounts for the persistence of Totemism and that does not rely on an assumption that its practitioners are preliterate or naive because they have strange beliefs. We focus on Totemism as a cultural mechanism aimed at building and sustaining social relationships among close and distant kinsmen.

Keywords: evolutionary psychology; religion; Totemism; tradition

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Of all the exotic practices encountered by early European travelers to Australia, perhaps the most perplexing was Totemism, or the insistence by Aboriginal peoples that some of them were kangaroos, while others were witchety grubs, blackbirds, and so on. Both Sigmund Freud and Emile Durkheim were so struck by these reports that they each proposed that Totemism was the earliest form of religion. Totemism, and the theories set forth to explain it, stayed at the center of the study of religion for several generations of anthropologists (see Merlan 1989).

The second half of the twentieth century, however, saw a "trend of avoiding the term 'totem'" (von Brandenstein 1974, 6). In 1972, leading a seismic shift away from early ideas of Totemism, David M. Schneider wrote:

. . . anthropologists used to write papers about Totemism. . . . Goldenweiser and others then demolished that notion and showed that Totemism simply did not exist. . . . It became, then, a non-subject. In due course Claude Lévi-Strauss wrote a book about that non-subject, in which he first explained that it was a non-subject and therefore could not be the subject of the book. (Schneider 1972, 51)

Recently, evolutionary and cognitive psychologists renewed interest in Totemism by including it in their attempts to explain religion (Atran 2002; Blackwell 2005; Knight and Power [and Mithen] 1998). Although their explanations differ in the details, they share the common premise that religious behavior is the consequence of certain evolved psychological mechanisms that cause an individual to hold religious beliefs. This explanation seems not to address the fact that the religious behavior constituting Australian Totemism is profoundly traditional, having been copied from ancestors, apparently for hundreds of generations. Regardless of their personal inclinations, individuals were socially obligated to participate in Totemic rituals. Second, these scholars also assume that practitioners of Totemism believe their religious claims—for example, they believe they actually are members of their totemic species. This assumption, as we argue here and have argued elsewhere (Palmer, Coe, and Wadley 2008), is problematic.

In light of these challenges, we present an alternative model of Totemism that focuses on the identifiable effects of religious behavior, particularly the effect of religion on social relationships between distant kin.

THE PROBLEM OF RELIGIOUS BELIEF

We have proposed elsewhere (Steadman and Palmer 1995; Palmer and Steadman 2004) that the first step toward an explanation of religion is to restrict explanations only to identifiable religious behavior. This means refraining from speculating about religious beliefs, the existence of which cannot be proven to be either true or false. According to the *Shorter Oxford Dictionary*, *belief* means "mental assent to or acceptance of a proposition, statement, or fact, as true, on the ground of authority or evidence" (cited in Hinde 1999, 34). *Religious* beliefs, because they "are not subject to em-

pirical verification" (Hinde 1999, 34), can be defined as mental assent to or acceptance of a supernatural proposition or statement on the grounds of authority. We are asserting not that people do not have religious beliefs but rather that, as they are internal mental phenomena, religious beliefs are not subject to observation—equally by anthropologists and coreligion-ists—and therefore are problematical as factors that can help explain religious behavior. What is observable is a religious or supernatural claim and the social response to that claim.

Assertions about what others believe are so ubiquitous in human discourse that they usually go unquestioned. Thus, it is not surprising that probably the most widely accepted definition of *religion* among social scientists is something along the lines of "belief in the supernatural" (see Steadman and Palmer 1995; Palmer and Steadman 2004). However, as William Baum points out, the frequency with which "religious beliefs" are used to explain behavior "in everyday talk" does not constitute evidence that such causes can actually be identified (1994, 46).

Authors' claims about the beliefs of the people they study, like those about supernatural things, usually are supported only by citing people's statements. Many authors have pointed out problems with this "simplistic approach to religious belief" (Hilty 1988, 243), which assumes a direct equation between people's statements and their beliefs. Edward Evan Evans-Pritchard (1965, 7) warned that "statements about a people's religious beliefs must always be treated with the greatest caution, for we are then dealing with what neither European nor native can directly observe" (see also Hahn 1973; Saler 1973; Kirsch 2004).

Often scholars assume that the problem of identifying beliefs can be solved indirectly, merely by determining if other behaviors are consistent with the stated beliefs. This approach recognizes the potential difference between the observable behavior of talking and the belief alleged to exist inside the mind of the individual. Authors following this approach distinguish what people *say* they believe, referred to as "explicit belief" by Pascal Boyer (2001) and Justin Barrett (2004) and "doctrine" by Ian Keen (1994), from their actual internal beliefs, or "implicit beliefs," which are asserted to be identifiable through nonverbal behaviors. Evans-Pritchard, for example (1937, 261), cites the Azande's consultation of the poison oracle before making important decisions in support of his claim that they believe in its efficacy. The use of seemingly consistent behavior to justify assertions about belief is common, yet, clearly, someone without such a belief could still claim to have the belief and, in the case of the Azande, consult the oracle. Further, it is far from certain that inconsistency between professed belief and subsequent behavior demonstrates the absence of belief (see Palmer 1989).

Several authors appear to have come close to recognizing this profound problem in the scientific study of religion but have failed to acknowledge

it fully, perhaps because of an inability to see any alternative. Roy A. Rappaport (1999, 262) recognized that what identifiably distinguishes religious ritual from nonreligious ritual is not beliefs but supernatural claims, or what he calls "unverifiable propositions" (see also Needham 1972; Sperber 1996). This implies that the behaviors of believers and nonbelievers would be indistinguishable and would have the same effects. However, Rappaport, evidently unable to see a way to study religion without assuming beliefs, continues to insist on "assuming" that "some" participants must believe (1999, 262). This response illustrates Thomas G. Kirsch's observation that "it seems problematic for anthropologists to work with the notion of 'belief,' although it is equally difficult to work without it" (2004, 700). We suggest that it is possible to work without unverifiable notions of religious belief and that the key to doing this is to view religious talk as *denied metaphor*.

RELIGIOUS BEHAVIOR AS DENIED METAPHOR

In light of the problem of identifying belief, what is needed is an explanation of religious behavior that is restricted to what can be observed. Although it is possible that when a person *says* she believes she is a member of the same species as her totem animal she is experiencing "mental assent" to these propositions, what can be identified, by both social scientists and "believers," is the communicated acceptance of another person's claim about something supernatural. What we can identify is that the individual who hears the claim repeats the claim. This leads us to suggest that religious behavior is distinguished, and hence definable, by a type of particularly powerful communication: the communicated acceptance by one individual of another individual's "supernatural" claim, a claim whose accuracy is not verifiable by the senses (Steadman and Palmer 1995; Palmer and Steadman 2004; Palmer, Steadman, and Wadley 2005).

"Communicated acceptance" is an admittedly clumsy phrase. It is necessary, however, to make a crucial distinction between what is actually observed when we label human behavior religious, and the common practice of asserting the existence of some particular belief. When someone asserts that individual *A* believes a supernatural claim (for example, "God exists"), he has not actually observed individual *A*'s belief in God. Rather, he has observed individual *A* behaving in some manner that communicates acceptance of, or agreement with, the claim that God exists. Examples of such behaviors would include individual *A* saying "I believe in God," or "Amen," or "Yes, God exists," or exhibiting any of the nonverbal behaviors that humans routinely use to communicate their acceptance of, or agreement with, a statement (such as nodding their head).

The crucial point is that behaviors that communicate acceptance of any statement can be observed by the senses, and their observation does not

require any assumptions about the beliefs of individual *A*. The observer recognizes that the communication of acceptance has taken place not by identifying beliefs but by observing the behavior of the potential receivers of the communication (the individuals who hear the "Amen" or see the nod of the head).

If individual *B*, who made the original claim that God exists, smiles and says "Amen" back to individual *A* while patting individual *A* on the shoulder, we would conclude that *A* communicated acceptance of the claim "God exists." Thus, we would say that individual *A* engaged in religious behavior. If individual *B* frowns and tells *A* that it is a great sin to use sarcasm when talking about God, we would conclude that *A* did not communicate acceptance to *B*; we would not say that *A* had engaged in religious behavior. Instead, we would say that *A* had used a tone of voice that communicated scepticism and denial (Wadley, Pashia, and Palmer 2005). Although we are accustomed to describing these two scenarios by saying that *A* believes in God in the first example, and *A* does not believe in God in the second, all we really observe is behavior and its influence on the behavior of others. This distinction becomes clear when it is realized that *A* may not have believed in God while communicating acceptance in the first example, and may have believed in God while communicating sarcasm in the second example.

Our focus on identifiable religious behavior instead of religious belief in no way trivializes religion. Religious behavior is, without question, often as emotional as any aspect of human life, and people sometimes choose to suffer and even die rather than communicate scepticism or denial of certain supernatural claims. This is perfectly consistent with our approach to religious behavior, because we see religious behavior as being crucial to the social relationships that are of utmost importance to humans. Specifically, we suggest that the distinctive property of communicating acceptance of a supernatural claim is that it communicates a willingness to accept the influence of the speaker nonskeptically. Communicating a willingness to accept the influence of others promotes cooperation, because the acceptance of another individual's influence is necessary to the working "together" that defines cooperation (Webster's Dictionary 1981, 124; Axelrod 1984).

To understand how communicating acceptance of supernatural claims communicates a willingness to accept the speaker's influence, it is necessary to first acknowledge that supernatural claims, by definition, are not demonstrably true. The next step is to realize that religious supernatural claims are asserted to be true. Thus they can be seen as metaphors. The use of any metaphor facilitates communication by making claims more interesting and therefore, as advertisers have long recognized, more influential. What distinguishes religious supernatural claims from ordinary metaphors is that their metaphorical status is denied; that is, they are asserted to be true. Religious behavior is a specific kind of communication, a metaphor

that is denied to be a metaphor. The key question is, What does the claim that a metaphor is not a metaphor—that it is, instead, true—add to the communication?

This explicit, communicated acceptance of a claim that cannot be verified by the senses communicates a willingness to suspend scepticism—to suspend the critical use of the senses to examine the accuracy of an assertion. Thus, it communicates a willingness to accept another person's influence nonskeptically. Indeed, the collusion, and hence cooperation, including what is termed *reciprocal altruism* (Trivers 1971; Ridley 1996), engendered by communicating acceptance of religious claims may be the fundamental function of religious behavior.

We suggest that the most significant proximate effect of religious behavior, the effect that has led to its persistence, lies in its encouragement of enduring, family-like cooperation between distant kin, kin in different families (Steadman et al. 1996), or, more recently (during the past few thousand years), between nonkin (Steadman and Palmer 1995; Palmer and Steadman 2004). The most important immediate effect of religion, an effect identifiable to outside observers, is that communicating acceptance of a supernatural claim regularly creates cooperation like that between a parent and a young child and, consequently, sibling-like cooperation between coacceptors. Close kinship terms, such as father, mother, brother, sister, and child, are metaphors regularly used to foster these relationships.

Both Richard Alexander (1979) and Robert Trivers (1985) have stressed that parents can increase their own reproductive success by encouraging their offspring to cooperate with one another, and Alexander has observed that "the potential significance of parental manipulation may assume remarkable proportions" (1974, 337). The encouragement of cooperation among descendants promotes not only the number of surviving offspring but also the "number of descendants alive after some very large number of generations" (Dawkins 1982, 184; see Palmer and Steadman 1997; Palmer, Steadman, and Coe 2006; Van Pool, Palmer, and Van Pool 2008; Coe 2003). This is because religious behavior often is traditional, meaning copied from one generation to the next, transmitted from parent and grandparent to child and grandchild. When religious behavior promotes cooperation among descendants who have copied the religious behavior from their ancestors, the cooperation increases the ability of those descendants to survive and leave more descendants of their own. It is this effect on cooperation that can account for the persistence of religion and religious behavior through the generations.

This focus on the effects of communicating acceptance of supernatural claims generates testable predictions about the effects of communicating acceptance of various specific kinds of supernatural claims (Steadman and Palmer 1994; Steadman, Palmer, and Tilley 1996; Steadman 1975; 1985; Palmer 1989; Steadman and Palmer 1997) as well as the effects of skepti-

cism and denial of supernatural claims (Wadley 1999; Wadley, Pashia, and Palmer 2005). The importance of focusing on the identifiable effects of denied metaphor may be clearest in the study of Totemism.

TOTEMISM

In the broadest sense, the term *totem* refers to the use of some nonhuman category (usually a species of animal or plant) as the name or label for one or more persons or things (Keen 2004, 428; Levi-Strauss 1963). Totem names and labels are used in a wide variety of ways in many human societies, and many of these uses are not considered religious (calling someone a pig, for example). It is important to keep the diversity of the term's usage in mind when approaching the Totemism of Australian Aboriginal peoples, because this essay is concerned only with a specific type of Totemism known as Ancestral Totemism, which is focused on Totemic ancestors: "In Aboriginal cosmologies totemic classification schemes were often linked to naming systems and to Totemic ancestors" (Keen 2004, 428; see Strehlow 1947, 1). Even given this limited focus, there is enormous regional variation within Ancestral Totemism, as was true of many aspects of precolonial life in Australia (Butlin 1993; Kendon 1988; Harvey 2001). Much of the variation in Ancestral Totemism concerns whether the categories of codescendants are associated with Totemic ancestors patrilineally or matrilineally, or both (Hiatt 1996, 200; Elkin 1964; Scheffler 1978). In some areas, the names of Totemic ancestors also distinguish sections or subsections, and these variations may have spread from one region to the next (McConvell 1985). There also is the possibility that the exact forms of Ancestral Totemism were changed by colonialism (MacDonald 1998; Langton 1998, 110; Kolig 1981; Edwards 1998a; Sansom 1980; Keen 2004; Eisenstadt 1956; Hiatt 1986; 1996; 1998; Kuper 1988; Stanner 1989; Swain 1993; Radcliffe-Brown 1926).

Despite this complexity, even those attempting to document the variations of Totemism recognize that Ancestral Totemism apparently was a common and important form of Totemism found in most, if not all, of Aboriginal Australia. This Ancestral Totemism can be defined as "The identification of a group and its individual members to a totemic ancestor" (Keen 2004, 428). Totemic ancestors can be defined as "beings who lived long ago, who were the ancestors of the people of a region in general or of specific groups" (Keen 2004, 428).

Because the Totems examined in this paper are names for, or are associated with, common ancestors, they symbolize the relationship between the kin who are the codescendants of those ancestors. That is, "The Ancestors are totems for their clans, thereby providing a link to contemporary people" (Clarke 2003, 17). The religious behavior referred to as Ancestral Totemism, then, is distinguished by the communicated acceptance of the claim

that an ancestor, and hence his or her descendants, have a supernatural relationship with a category of plant or animal. The totem is said to be either associated with the name of the common ancestor distinguishing the category or to be itself the name of the ancestor (see Radin 1957).

Thus, in Ancestral Totemism, a set of currently living codescendants, often referred to as a "clan," is said to be made up of individuals who are kin to each other by virtue of their descent from a common Totemic ancestor who lived in the distant past during a time often referred to as "The Dreaming." Philip A. Clarke states, "Whenever I have asked Aboriginal people to explain The Dreaming they have mostly responded in the same manner; it is the story of their old ways, how the land was formed, what they used to do and what they learned from their grandparents' generation about their Ancestors" (2003, 16).

Similarly, Theodor Georg Heinrich Strehlow writes that "Aranda myths . . . are simple and brief accounts of the lives of the totemic ancestors" and describes the efforts taken to "preserve the original myth in its traditional form through the passing centuries" (1947, 1). The Dreaming ancestors "are considered to still influence Aboriginal Australia" (Clarke 2003, 16). This is because:

A clan is tied to species whose prototypical powers were locally active during The Dreaming. . . . A clan is held to have existed continuously since The Dreaming. . . . Groups answering to much of this description have been recorded in most of Australia. . . . In principle, therefore, present-day clansmen should be able to trace their ancestry back in the male line to a founding figure dwelling in or immediately after The Dreaming. (Maddock 1972, 29)

The complexity of Ancestral Totemism is increased because the "category" of codescendants identified by their ancestral totem does not actually constitute a social "group" (Keen 2004, 133–34). First, "the identity and boundaries of groups [such as bands or tribes] were often ambiguous" (Keen 1994, 63; see Keen 2004; Berndt 1966; Elkin 1964; Strehlow 1947; Radcliffe-Brown 1931; Wheeler 1910; Palmer, Fredrickson, and Tilley 1997). Further, individuals with the same ancestral totem name did not constitute a "group" of any kind because they are scattered like "strings" or "networks" (Keen 1994, 63) of social relationships between individuals across large areas. Thus, there existed "a structure of overlapping, interlocking and open social networks rather than a segmentary structure of clearly defined groups" (Keen 1994, 63). Although the common reference to Totemic "clans" may be the best word to use for the category of codescendants sharing the same ancestral totemic name, Keen (1995) points out that even this term may have connotations that are not appropriate for the Australian example. For example, clans often are referred to as if they were distinct groups instead of mere categories of individuals (Palmer, Fredrickson, and Tilley 1995; 1996; 1997; Palmer and Wright 1997; Soltis, Boyd, and Richerson 1995).

Now comes the question: What makes Totemism religious? What exactly is the difference between nonreligious and religious Totemism? Many would probably assert that in religious Totemism people actually believe their supernatural claims that they are members of their totemic species, while in nonreligious Totemism they do not. Before applying our alternative approach to Totemism, let us examine where the assumption of belief (or disbelief) led some of the previous attempts to explain Totemism.

Previous Explanations of Totemism: Assuming Belief.   Early explanations of Totemism (Durkheim [1912] 1961; Freud [1913] 1950) were based on the assumption that participants really believe their totemic claims, an assumption that continues to be made (Hippler 1978). Lester Richard Hiatt writes, "The ritual activities of each cult centre on stone or wooden artefacts (*tjurunga*) believed to be transmutations of totemic ancestors" (1971, 78). In some instances, anthropologists have seen totemic claims as clearly metaphorical, yet they insist that the Australian Aboriginal people believe the claim to be literally true. For example, Harold W. Scheffler states that in Totemism "concepts of kinship" are "incorporated metaphorically into Australian cosmology" in order to claim a "metaphoric 'father-child' relationship . . . to the Dreamtime being" (1978, 531, 527). However, while Scheffler himself considers these claims to be mere metaphors, he apparently agrees with Strehlow's (1964) claim that individuals are "believed [by Aboriginal Australians] to have been completely recreated in the image of these totemic ancestors" (cited by Scheffler 1978, 10; see Ratha and Behera 1990).

The same assumption of belief is implied in recent evolutionary and cognitive psychological explanations of Totemism. The debate between Steven Mithen on one side and Chris Knight and Camilla Power on the other (Knight and Power [and Mithen] 1998) concerning the naturalness of anthropomorphic thought is a debate over the evolutionary explanation of why some people believe that they are members of their totemic species. Both sides appear to agree that such belief exists, and, as Mithen phrases it, such belief is "simply a product of cognitive fluidity" (Knight and Power [and Mithen] 1998; see Boyer 1996; 2001; Winkelman 2004; Guthrie 2001). Similarly, Bradd Shore asserts that this belief "can easily be shown to be rational in both the *empirical* and *contextual* senses of the term" (1996, 170).

Such debates over why practitioners of Totemism believe they are members of their totemic species ignore the fact that people behave in ways that clearly demonstrate that they distinguish between humans and members of totemic species. Discriminating between humans and kangaroos obviously is necessary for survival, and humans (no less than kangaroos) demonstrably recognize great differences between the two categories.

Previous Explanations of Totemism: Assuming Disbelief.   An alternative means of dealing with the puzzle of Totemism is to shift from assuming

that Aboriginal people believe their statements to the equally unverifiable assumption that they do not believe their statements about totems, that Totemism is nothing more than the use of ordinary metaphor as a convenient means of classification. Morton Pedersen asserts that totemic categories of people are only "homologous" to the category of the actual totemic species, and thus Totemism is simply a convenient metaphor used to make sense of the social world (Pedersen 2001, 420). This explanation fails to account for what needs to be explained: why practitioners of Totemism deny that their metaphorical talk is metaphorical.

Nurit Bird-David (1999) makes the similar assertion that Totemism is not really a puzzle because people do not mean that the totemic species is actually kin; when Totemists say they are kin with something, they mean only that they interact in a certain way. The woman who gave birth to them, the anthropologist doing field work among them, or a member of another species all are referred to as kin because they interact in the same way. Again, this fails to explain why Totemists assert that they mean their claims instead of admitting they are just metaphor.

Bird-David's explanation is similar to an earlier explanation put forth by Edmund Arnold Leach, that the apparent puzzle of Totemism is merely the result of people using words differently in different cultures: "Australian Totemism . . . has fascinated but baffled several generations of anthropologists. . . . Australian aborigines classify the categories of human society by means of the same words which they use to classify the categories of Nature. It is only because we use words in a different way that we find this strange" (Leach 1966, 406–7). The problem with this explanation is that it is simply not true. As previously described, we do use words in this way, as the mascots of sporting teams demonstrate. The puzzle of religious Totemism cannot be explained by pretending that it involves no more than the ordinary use of metaphor. However, neither can it be explained by pretending that it has no similarities with the use of ordinary metaphor. To explain religious Totemism requires an explanation of why the metaphors involved are denied to be metaphors.

The Descendant-Leaving Strategy Model: Totemism as Denied Metaphor. In contrast to approaches based on the assumption of belief, our descendant-leaving model focuses on the identifiable behavior that distinguishes Totemism and the identifiable effects of that behavior. We suggest that, consistent with our definition of religion, it is certain talk that identifiably distinguishes religious from nonreligious Totemism.

The first step in understanding this explanation is to realize that Ancestral Totemic names, like all ancestral names, identify kin. Australian Ancestral Totemic names, like ancestral names everywhere, are determined at birth by, or more accurately depend on, the particular names of one's actual parents. Kinship relationships, as they are based on genealogy and

hence birth, are always relationships between individuals, whether or not such individuals form groups. As Evans-Pritchard pointed out, this means that "any kinship relationship must have a point of reference on a line of ascent, namely a common ancestor" (1940, 106), and "two persons are kin when one is descended from the other . . . or when they are both descended from a common ancestor" (Radcliffe-Brown 1950, 4). All offspring of any member of a particular clan (set of individuals with the same ancestral name) are identifiably codescendants, regardless of where they reside (Palmer and Steadman 1997). Patrilineal and matrilineal identification are fundamentally the same: Both identify individuals with ancestors and hence codescendants. Names of Totemic Ancestors, like all descent names, can be used to identify many more kin than just those bearing the same descent name because any two individuals who can trace their ancestry to ancestors with the same descent name can be recognized as kin to one another (Palmer and Steadman 1997, 44).

The actual cooperation between kin, when there is any, is a separate phenomenon, independent of their identification as kin. The use of a metaphorical Totemic name embellishes an ancestral name, making it more interesting. It is the denial that the Ancestral Totemic name is a metaphor that promotes cooperation because it turns the metaphor into a supernatural claim. The supernatural claim implies that the totem is not a metaphor, that it is literally true. The acceptance of such a claim implies a denial of one's senses, one's own observations, and hence communicates the acceptance of the influence of the persons making the claim.

Like many other types of religious behavior, we suggest that the most significant effect of Totemism, the effect that has led to its persistence, is in its encouragement of enduring family-like cooperation between distant kin, kin in different families.

Other traditional behavior related to Totemism, such as the telling of traditional stories or myths about the totemic Ancestors, dressing in costumes that represent the totem and performing the totem's behavior in rituals, and accepting prohibitions and taboos in regard to the totem, have the effect of further promoting cooperation by elaborating and emphasizing the (denied) metaphor. Although there are many different types of Aboriginal myths, and each may have a multitude of explanations, some myths clearly act as "charters" for moral behavior (Hiatt 1975, 5–7). The most significant identifiable effect of Australian Ancestral Totemism is that the rituals and myths, by promoting social behavior among the participants, help to convert identified genealogical relations into cooperative social relationships.

Despite its complexity and regional variation, kinship in Aboriginal Australia clearly was important everywhere, and this importance continues to a great degree despite the dramatic influence of colonialism (MacDonald 2003). Keen writes, "Kinship took a central place in the organisation

of Aboriginal economies because it was, and continues to be, the chief mode of organizing people and their social relationships," and goes as far as to state that before colonization "kinship and society were co-extensive" (Keen 2004, 174; Maddock 1972). Similarly, Adam Kendon writes, "Kin relationships govern every aspect of social life in Australian Aboriginal society" (1988, 330), and Adolphus Peter Elkin states that kinship "is the basis of behaviour; indeed, it is the anatomy and physiology of Aboriginal society" (Elkin 1964, 56; see also Elkin 1979, 85; Radcliffe-Brown 1931, 43). The connection between kinship, ancestors, and traditions is seen in this statement by Keen (2004, 135):

In Aboriginal societies kinship relations . . . were based on the obvious facts of maternity, doctrine about paternity and conception, marriage, the definition of kin terms, and rules and conventions about how people in certain relations ought to behave towards one another. The domain of totemic ancestors and ancestral things . . . had stories and doctrines about those beings, and ceremonies re-enacting their actions, at its heart.

The traditions accompanying the Ancestral Totemic names that promote cooperation among kin often are referred to as Ancestral Law, although Ancestral moral codes might be a more accurate term (see Coe and Palmer 2006). In a study emphasizing the diversity of Aboriginal societies, Keen writes, "We shall see the people of several of the regions, perhaps all of them, shared a concept that can be translated as 'ancestral law' or the 'proper way' having its origin in the intentions and actions of the totemic creator ancestors" (2004, 244).

The connection between the proper way and cooperation is also made clear when Keen states, "Networks of regional cooperation underpinned the sharing of ancestral law" (2004, 244) and when Hiatt asserts that "traditional values and expectations' include 'the ethic of generosity'" (1982, 23; see also Elkin 1964, 118). Specific examples of parents telling their offspring traditional stories that "taught them to share" can be found in Nganyintja Ilyatjari's account of storytelling (1998, 4). By communicating acceptance of myths as being literally true, and participating in accompanying rituals, cooperation is encouraged not only between individuals within the same totemic category but also between individuals in different categories who are able to trace kinship through the category.

CONCLUSION

All living organisms are influenced profoundly by ancestors. Not only do they acquire genes from their ancestors, but many animals acquire, and hence are influenced by, their ancestors' behaviors. When they repeat those behaviors, the behaviors become traditional (that is, copied from one generation to the next) (Avital and Jablonka 2000). Thus it can be argued that

the most powerful, identifiable influence on all organisms, including humans, is their ancestors, living and dead.

In humans, the influence of traditions has become uniquely and overwhelmingly powerful. Humans have left descendants not by mere reproduction but by carefully influencing their living descendants for many years through transmitting traditions. Traditions regularly include the encouragement of cooperation among codescendants, including distant ones. Religion also regularly includes such encouragement. Living ancestors, such as parents and grandparents, actively influence their living descendants directly through rewards and punishments (Castro and Toro 2004). Although parents may have no conscious awareness of the long-term implications of their behavior, when offspring transmit the behaviors they have copied from their parents to their own offspring, the original parental behavior can influence distant descendants yet to be born (Coe 2003; Coe, Aiken, and Palmer 2005; Thornhill and Palmer 2000).

Despite the overwhelming importance of traditions in human existence for tens of thousands of years, titles such as "Aranda Traditions" (Strehlow 1947) or "Traditional Aboriginal Society" (Edwards 1998b) may become rare because the word *tradition* has become controversial in anthropological writings (Keen 2004; Tonkinson 1984; 1991; Mosko 2002; Sansom 2001; Sissons 1993; Tan 2003; Douglas 2003). This should not direct attention away from the important role actual traditions (behavior copied from ancestors) have played in human existence.

Australian Aboriginal peoples of today are descendants of ancestors who came to Australia probably between 40,000 (Hart, Pilling, and Goodale 1988; Berndt 1982) and 50,000 (Clarke 2003) years ago. Such a span of time involves at least two thousand generations (Gallagher 1992, 17). While change has taken place during this period, an appreciation of the role of tradition is necessary to understand the behavior of Aboriginal Peoples throughout this period (Morphy 1990; 1991; 1998; Steadman and Palmer 1994; Sansom 1982). As Ronald M. Berndt states, Aboriginal societies have not "come down into the present encapsulated, unchanged, in their traditional mantle," but the change that has occurred has been limited by factors, foremost among these "religion" (Berndt 1982, 1). We suggest that the traditional nature of Totemism limits change.

NOTE

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