

Bron Taylor

The précis for "The Evolution of Religion II" focuses research on the important quest to understand the emergence of religious perceptions and practices through the theory of evolution, including a number of disciplines that draw strongly on it. Much of this attention properly focuses on the phenomena's earliest roots and draws on the cognitive sciences and evolutionary psychology. I have been especially interested, however, in how 'religions' (broadly understood to include the affective and spiritual dimensions of human experience) are and are not changing in response to evolutionary understandings. Moreover, I have been researching the extent to which evolutionary and ecological understandings are being grafted onto longstanding religions or becoming wellsprings of new religions, or at least, are kindling new forms of religion-resembling perceptions and practices. I have also sought to understand to the extent to which these hybrids or spiritualities, which are rooted in or at least cohere with evolutionary theory, are spreading and gaining cultural traction and influence, and if so, where, how, and to what extent. Toward this end I have conducted extensive historical and ethnographic research into environmental subcultures and orchestrated (and co-authored) the most comprehensive review of research of scientific research yet undertaken, investigating the role of religion in hindering and promoting ecologically adaptive behavior.

Specifically, in my presentation I will argue that since Charles Darwin published *On the Origin of Species* in 1859, a new, global, earth religion has been rapidly spreading around the world. Such religion draws on evolutionary theory. Whether it involves conventional religious beliefs in non-material divine beings, or is entirely naturalistic and involves no such beliefs, it considers nature to be sacred, imbued with intrinsic value, and worthy of reverent care. Those having affinity with such spirituality generally have strong feelings of belonging to nature, express kinship with non-human organisms, and understand the world to be deeply interconnected. I labeled this sort of spirituality, or worldview Dark Green Religion in a recent book with the subtitle *Nature Spirituality and the Planetary Future* (Univ. of California Press, 2010). In my presentation I will illustrate my argument with a wide variety of examples of such religious (and religion-resembling) cultural innovation, focusing on individuals promoting such nature spirituality (including artists, scientists, filmmakers, photographers, surfers, and environmental activists) as well as institutions (including museums, schools, and the United Nations). After this, I will argue that the comprehensive review of research that I co-authored, and that has been published in *Conservation Biology* and *The Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* in late 2016, provides tantalizing evidence that these 'dark green' worldviews do indeed have significant and global cultural traction and growing influence, at least within the world's relatively well educated sectors. Finally I will backtrack to theories regarding the evolutionary roots of religion and more in an effort to account for the strengths of these emerging spiritual forms. I hope the presentation will stimulate discussion, including about future, collaborative research possibilities, among those in attendance.