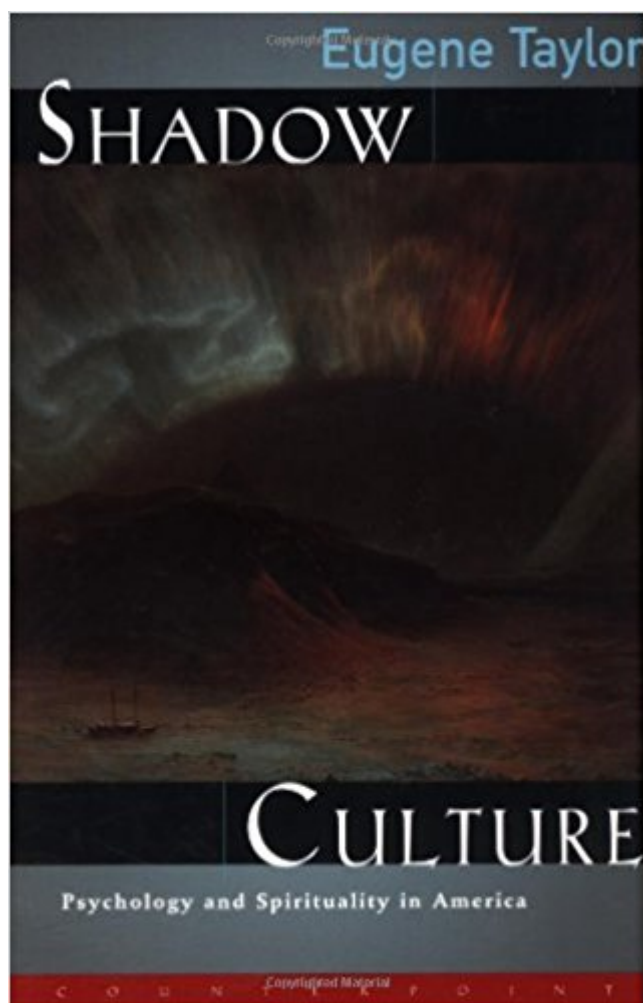


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Shadow Culture: Psychology And Spirituality In America



Synopsis

A modern Varieties of Religious Experience that traces the sources of the New Age movement through three hundred years of "alternative" spirituality America is witnessing a third Great Awakening, an explosion of interest in esoteric and mystical religious experience. Often referred to as New Age or pop psychology-especially by its detractors-this new awakening is a profoundly psychological one, stressing the alteration of consciousness, the integration of mind and body, and the connection between physical and mental health. Shadow Culture finds the roots of the New Age in the sermons of Jonathan Edwards, the writings of Emerson and Thoreau, and the counterculture of the 1960s. It will appeal to anyone interested in the resurgence of spiritualism in America, from New Age seekers to Gnostics, from agnostics to Unitarians, from Swedenborgians to practicing Buddhists.

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Customer Reviews

Although critics would have New Age spirituality deemed trendy and fleeting, author and religious scholar Eugene Taylor offers a convincing testament to the historical worthiness and longevity of the alternative spirituality movement. Taylor, who is a lecturer in psychology at Harvard Medical School, explains that the New Age movement is a historically rooted movement that blends psychology and spirit. In fact, he calls it the "Third Great Awakening" in American religious life--an awakening that always springs from a "shadow culture" (most recently, the counterculture rebellion of the '60s). What makes this a fascinating read is its extensive and smoothly presented research. Taylor

documents the "First Great Awakening," which dates back to the puritans and mystics of the 1600s and 1700s. Stretching forward in time, he presents the "Second Great Awakening," with profiles of leaders such as Emerson and Thoreau. This fascinating discussion elevates the New Age movement to an evolutionary necessity, which will no doubt raise the ire or gratitude of American readers. --Gail Hudson --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Although both of these books focus on the great interest in spirituality in America today, much of which lies outside the predominant religious cultures, they are quite different. Shorto (Gospel Truth: The New Image of Jesus Emerging from Science and History and Why It Matters) considers contemporary psychiatric cases to show how many psychiatrists, psychologists, and psychotherapists have opened themselves to spiritual and religious dimensions. Freud may have dismissed religion, but now the most recent edition of the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual includes an entry for the "religious or spiritual problem." Taylor (William James on Consciousness Beyond the Margin) presents the history, starting in the 1700s, of various spiritual and religious movements that he calls the "shadow culture." They lie in the shadow of prevailing cultures and religions. He discusses Quakers and Shakers, Swedenborgians, Christian Scientists, and many more, and brings us to the current American focus on a seeming connection between psychology and spirituality. Both books are extremely interesting and both tackle challenging and controversial subjects. Both also call for some background on the part of the reader. Highly recommended. A John Moryl, Yeshiva Univ. Libs., New York Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

It is worth a read. The late Dr. Taylor has written a thoughtful and in-depth account of America's Shadow Culture. Decide for yourself if the book has merit. Don't be misled by the myopia of others.

The author's comments on the vitriol from the first reviewer of this book reinforce my earlier suspicions about that person's "shadow" agenda. The above "review" is a clear abuse of the privilege offered by in that it does not refer to the book's content but serves only as a personal whetstone for that individual's puerile and vindictive ax-grinding. It is therefore worthless as a review and should be deleted by the webmasters. That said, onto the more relevant matter of "Shadow Culture": Taylor's articulation of the origins and history of one of the three main streams of psychology is an original and highly readable overview of the third stream of alternative spirituality and psychology (the other two being academic and clinical) which, in my 24 years of reading on the

subject, has never been so well integrated into one volume. As a historian of Psychology and Psychiatry at Harvard, Taylor is a uniquely qualified "white-water raft guide" through the turbulent waters of these streams. We discover that the so-called New Age did not appear fully formed from the brow of the 1960s, but is merely the third irruption of this stream into our cultural consciousness - this time on a global scale, forming what Maslow called, "a world personality... that can adapt to a variety of different cultures but the essence of which transcends the limits of any given culture." (p.269) The latter part of the book, where Taylor explains the division of Humanistic Psychology into three subparts: Transpersonal Psychology; Somatic and experiential therapies; and the radical "therapies" from which emerged anti-psychiatry, critical thinking and the human sciences, should be required reading for all psychology students. A further fragmentation of Transpersonal Psychology is then outlined; divided into Grof's research in altered states, Wilber's "theory of everything" models, and the third and largest group of leaderless people without any one center, single worldview or model, making changes in the crucible of their own daily lives. (This "transmodern" group - estimated at around 44 million in North America-was described in a survey of the emerging "Integral Culture" (Noetic Science Review, Spring 1996).) Taylor ends by envisioning a new era of cross-cultural fertilization between East and West, embracing multiple epistemologies on their own terms and undistorted, this time around, by politically correct cliques of white "sensitive" white new agers from Marin County (my own opinion, supported by W.I. Thompson's book, "Coming into Being" - an excellent companion to this book). Taylor views psychology as a much needed foundation for ALL "knowledge accumulation" incorporating an "iconography of the transcendent" presently lacking in current mainstream psychology. This may lead to a multi-perspectival study of all streams into an "integral psychology" which in turn, this reviewer hopes, may be eventually be replaced by a more radical term... "Psychology". I almost gave this book a 4-star rating instead of 5 as the publisher failed to include an index - a major oversight in a book so rich in references. However Taylor does provide footnotes to each chapter. I hope they rectify this in the next edition. For the record, I am neither a neighbor, relative nor colleague of Dr. Taylor.

"Boring"--the pet phrase of the adolescent who's "little gray cells" have been overstretched by too much stimulation--is far from a correct portrayal of this fine book. It is a deeply intelligent, constantly fascinating, and highly readable account of the entire sweep of American spirituality, folk psychology, and the American visionary tradition from their beginnings in colonial days. From the visionaries and mystics of early 1700s, to the Quakers and Shakers, to Swedenborg, Blavatsky, and the New England Transcendentalists, and on to the Americanization of Jung and Freud, and finally

to the modern transpersonal psychologies and spiritually inspired alternative therapies, this is a record of the passions and history of American spiritual life never before recorded with such clarity. Don't be fooled by trash reviews written by rash undergraduates (of all ages). This is a story without precedent, a landmark in American spiritual and intellectual history written by one of the foremost historians of our age.

Eugene Taylor offers a great explanation of the shadow culture in America since the first Great Awakening in this book. He explains every aspect of the spiritual history of the United States, including the Quakers, Shakers, Transcendentalists, Swamis, and even the counter-culture of the 1960s. I especially enjoyed the section on the Americanization of the theories of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung. I recommend this book to anyone with an interest in psychology or religious studies. As a student of both, I found this book to be an excellent mixture of both disciplines.

I have read this book through and through, and I have read the brief review panning the book and the response by the author, Eugene Taylor. I had two reactions: First, I found the author's "rebuttal" rather spooky. It was a mean-spirited response, not at all polite or -- dare I say -- spiritually enlightened, although the author hints at his own ability to see into the great beyond and to know more than the rest of us who are not blessed with such . . . experiences. He is apparently thin-skinned, and perhaps, after I read this book, I now see that he has reason to be. Which brings me to my second point, my review of the book: I found myself in total agreement with the reviewer from Lincoln, Mass. I'm sorry to say this, but the book is boring. And repetitive. And offers a thesis that is not very original at all. I have read many books on the history of New Age spirituality, and this is just so-so.

Taylor does indeed present an overview of a certain sort of tradition that has not been well-surveyed to this point. His historiography, while not deep, is adequate, given the wide range of material. However, Taylor's own agenda so overwhelms the history that his assessment of particular figures is nearly useless. To contrast broadly the "Western rationalist tradition" with the "Western visionary tradition" - as he does in various ways at every opportunity - is little more than name-calling. His "faith" in something called "pure religious experience" is almost 100 years out-of-date -- has the author not realized that all experience (including religious experience) is shaped by language, culture, and tradition? Unsuspecting readers, beware: a position as a psychiatrist at Harvard does not make up for a history that is little more than an advertisement for his own personal spiritual

predilection.

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