Social theory can be described as a collection of conversations that researchers have with each other as they attempt to engage the experienced world. The conversations have been going on for some time, and it does not take long for anyone who becomes involved in them to recognize they have a history. Social theorists, be they living or dead, have made a point of remembering who speaks or spoke to whom and why. There is also a dialogue that takes place between the living and the dead, or between the scripts of past researchers who have written their conversations in books and the speaking/reading/writing of the living. The community of dialogue, occasioned by each conversation, accomplishes its own theoretical perspective. Conversations engage each other, taking twists and turns as their contexts prove capable or incapable of bearing the weight of new conversation partners. The desire to facilitate the conversation with new partners gives rise to methods, which in turn are challenged, interrogated, and eventually reformulated.

One of the more powerful theoretical investigations in contemporary conversations is (and contains) a method of interrogation which entails a moment of disruption in order to investigate otherwise hidden processes of repression and displacement. It is a method Tomoko Masuzawa has used to probe the historical conditions of the modern scholarly study of comparative religions. In Search of Dreamtime seeks to expose the way the modern study of religion is situated, which is to say, she sets out to look at its origin. By origin she intends to follow Freud, however, and address not an empirical moment of conversations past but that “something else” which is presupposed by the conversations present, and which is itself non-unitary. It is the process of derivation rather than the state before things are derived that is the goal of her quest of origins.

Still following Freud, she will argue that modern scholarship of religions effects a displacement of the quest for origins (or the memory of the origins of religion) which is a tell-tale sign of repression (29). It is formulated as a

1. I wish to thank Dale T. Irvin for the conversations that are this review.
primary precept which Masuzawa goes so far as to identify with biblical (read "religious") authority: "Thou shalt not quest for the origin of religion" (2). The repressed desire which the precept seeks both to conceal and displace is nothing less than "a powerful, profoundly delusionary image of who we are as students of religion, or rather, as 'Western man'" (177). The compelling power of the image is found in its capacity to delude "us" into thinking that theory and methods mediate between a (modern) researcher/subject and the (primitive) researched/object, "propelling the 'Western man's' will to knowledge ever further toward its world-historical destiny" (177).

An emancipatory project of sorts is undertaken through interrogating not the origins of religion itself then, but the origins of the scholarship of religion in the work of Durkheim, Müller, and Freud. At the end of her study Masuzawa concludes that it might even seem perverse that she should have "to go back to these dusty old texts and their exceedingly bizarre meditations" in order to arrive at the present (179). With explicit and intended Freudian irony, Masuzawa describes the purpose of her project as answering the ghosts who come back to haunt us in order for them to be forgotten. "Ought we not know, after Freud, that we do not repeat only to make present again a past irreparably lost, but we repeat and remember, so that we may be released from the grip of our memory?" (30)

But whose memory is this? One of the three ghosts Masuzawa seeks to interrogate is that of Emile Durkheim. One's interrogation is always as good as one's questions (Durkheim 1966) and what is left out of this story is critical information for the understanding of any conversation, any theory: motivation for research. Durkheim's project in his own context was to help French civilization survive secularization. He and his community of dialogue sought to help create a new moral order, a new religious framework that some have since called civil religion. To do that he had to understand how the previous moral order had been kept, concluding that modern society kept order through a division of labour historically rooted in (or hidden in the sacralization processes of) religion (Durkheim 1984: 119, 231; Morris 1987: 108). What Durkheim saw, he saw through a profoundly blended areligious Jewish-Christian lens. It was no secret, least of all to himself, that his conversation partners shared his sociopolitical goals and his lens. His sense of urgency allowed little tolerance for unequally yoked conversation partners.

For Durkheim, then, choosing to remember the past and choosing conversation partners with whom to do so was a political activity. For him, as well as for many of us today, the production of social theories of religion was and is attached to an effort to make the world a better place. This reconstruction of the world is played out in a particular set of practices. It is not difficult to understand how this entails struggling with the ghosts of dead theorists, as Masuzawa does. One senses in reading her pages that she is dissatisfied with