cept among Aboriginal tribes. Much more was at stake. The affair had escalated to one of ideological partisanship and anthropological dogmatism, as two opposing world views collided forcefully with each other. On the one hand, there was the orthodoxy of evolutionist thinking which, holding Aborigines as the most primitive people on earth and as representative of the early beginnings of social and cultural evolution, saw them as quite incapable of forming a theological concept of a supreme deity. Such a concept being not too far removed from Christian monotheism, was considered theologically rather too sophisticated to fit the primitiveness of both culture and mind of such people. As Sir James Frazer (1960: 72) was to express this notion: "Among the aborigines of Australia, the rudest savages as to whom we possess accurate information, magic is universally practised, whereas religion in the sense of a propitiation or reconciliation of the higher powers seems to be nearly unknown." Worship of a supreme deity clearly did not fit into this preconception which dominated anthropological thinking for several decades. Not even the work of Spencer and Gillen, Howitt, and Carl Strehlow succeeded in making obvious the fallacy of this doctrine and to convince the scientific world at large of the existence of an intricate religious life in Aboriginal society. It was to be left to Durkheim to change anthropological thinking profoundly. In his "Les formes élémentaires" (1912) he treated Aboriginal religion as a serious matter, worthy of intensive investigation. (However, his treatise had the unfortunate result of biasing anthropology in another way, namely in now perceiving religion as an epiphenomenon of society.)

Sydney Hartland spoke of the "antecedent improbability" that naked savages, who have no organized government and are incapable of counting to seven, should have such an exalted philosophical concept, i.e., a moral, eternal, and omniscient creator figure and judge (1898: 290–329). Arnold van Gennep was similarly unconvinced by the ethnographic records and simply judged the concept to be an exaggeration (by whom?) of an ancestral figure (cited in Schmidt [1912] 1926: 319 ff.)

While the evolutionary perspective could not reconcile itself with the view that Aborigines could possibly have evolved a religious belief intellectually of such disconcerting similarity to Christianity and assumed that, if the ethnographic information was correct, it could only have originated through mission influence, opponents of this view seem to have accepted the ethnographic information at its face value. Some may simply have been more open-minded wishing to let the evidence, or what they took as such, speak for itself, despite the heavy dominance of the evolutionary paradigm in anthropology of that time. Howitt, however, probably because of his awareness of the fact that his work, if it were to gain respectability in anthropological circles, could not openly contradict evolutionism, tried, albeit unsuccessfully, to bring about a reconciliation of his concept of a Supreme Being with the prevalent notion of the Aborigines' primitiveness. His attempt to account for the presence of such a "sophisticated" religious concept by linking it with the "more advanced" social structure of the Aborigines in the south-east (1904: 500, 506), does not sound convincing today. It does not sit well with the discovery of similar beliefs in central Australia and other parts whose Aboriginal groups could not be seen as "more advanced"; nor is the idea of "more advanced" social structures vis-à-vis those supposedly less so considered of much merit nowadays. Besides Aborigines in the south-east do not to a significant extent differ in their social arrangements from groups elsewhere who do not espouse the All-Father belief. However, at the time, this notion was seriously entertained. There are indications that Taplin (1878: 120) already maintained that the High God belief is the remnant of a higher state of culture possessed once by the relevant tribes. Similarly Howitt (1904: 500 and 506), perhaps inspired by Taplin, sees this religious concept represented by those groups who at least in traces have greater social advancement in terms of having developed a chiefly system, who have progressed from group marriage to individual marriage, from matriliny to patriliny, and from a "class system" (?) to "locality" (of descent?).

For whatever reason then, Howitt, Mathews, Parker, and others accepted the authenticity and antiquity of the concept with an amazing lack of scepticism, despite their awareness of ethnographic features which should have raised more than just fleeting doubts. However, such doubts, if they arose at all, were dismissed by them sometimes with what can only be called astonishing carelessness. N. W. Thomas, in a rather confused paper (1905), mentions that several missions had been established in south-east Australia from very early on, but then goes on in what seems a wild non-sequitur, to insist that Baiame was certainly not of mission origin, as though he had just established this beyond a shadow of doubt (52). Similarly in his book "Natives of Australia" (1906) he denies any possible Christian influence (216), though conceding (217) that in one case at least missionary influence is undeniable; but hints that