

Anthropology 280
Spring 2005
MWF 9:00-9:50

Steiner 107

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Theories of Culture

One of anthropology's main contributions to modern knowledge and discourse is the concept of "culture." In this class we will study the emergence and development of the culture concept, the varying (and sometimes conflicting) views of what culture means and how best to study it, and the ways in which different anthropologists have related culture to other aspects of human experience. We will examine ideas about culture mostly with reference to studies of particular cultures; therefore, the course will also enrich students' knowledge of cultures around the world.

A few clarifications are in order. First, this course is about **Western** ideas concerning society and culture. Like other Western academic disciplines, anthropology is the product of particular features of Western experience and Western mentality (including -- in anthropology's case especially -- interactions with peoples of other cultural traditions). Although other cultural traditions have developed ideas about society and culture, these ideas are not covered in this course. Furthermore, we will pay more attention within Western anthropology to American anthropologists than might a similar course taught in Great Britain or France. Second, course materials are arranged roughly **chronologically**, allowing us to see that ideas do not form in a vacuum but develop and unfold out of the matrix of pre-existing ideas. A chronological organization also allows us to see ideas come, go, and then sometimes reappear in new guises. In addition, we will pay some attention to the socio-political contexts that have given rise to particular ideas and theories about culture. Third, given the course's emphasis on the culture concept, the readings focus mostly on **ethnology and linguistics** rather than on archaeology or biological anthropology, though all four subfields of the discipline will be represented.

Finally, this is not a course about "what theory/theories is/are true." Truthfulness is not a good criterion by which to judge theories. Knowledge is always tentative and partial in any case, and theories are simply ways to expand and order knowledge. As such, they can be more or less useful, and we will be asking in what ways particular theories are useful for helping us see or understand something about society and culture. We will encounter differences of opinion about the usefulness of particular theories, and we will consider why such differences of opinion exist. This discussion will point to an overarching theme of the course, namely the **plurality of theories**. This feature of anthropology (and it is also true of sociology, psychology, history, and some other fields) can seem problematic, and disagreement exists as to whether it is desirable and/or inevitable.

The course begins with a synoptic overview of the history of anthropological theory as presented by Erickson and Murphy, revealing the discipline's overall trajectory and some of the major theoretical issues it has addressed. We then go back to read original articles by major scholars in the field, beginning with publications from the middle of the nineteenth century when anthropology first became defined as a field

of study. We will cover a substantial amount of intellectual ground, and at times names, dates, and theories will seem to fly by rather quickly. However, the succession of authors will gradually reveal the bigger picture, and you will see how their individual contributions define a series of major debates within the field: synchronic versus diachronic, particularistic versus generalizing, emic versus etic, the collective versus the individual, scientific versus humanistic, and idealist versus materialist.

The **pre-requisites** for this course are Anthropology 104 and one 200-level course in anthropology, or permission of instructor.

TEXTS

Paul A. Erickson and Liam D. Murphy, *A History of Anthropological Theory* (2003)
Jerry D. Moore, *Visions of Culture* (2003ed)
R. Jon McGee and Richard L. Warms, *Anthropological Theory: An Introductory History* (3rd ed., 2004)
Articles on course website (abbr. BB)

REQUIREMENTS

Three hourly examinations – (15% each)
Twenty 1-2 paragraph commentaries applying theories to case material
(due at end of relevant class periods) (20%)
Final examination – 9 a.m. Wednesday, May 17 (25%)
Participation in class discussions (10%)

How best to do the reading: The readings you will need to do most carefully are the original essays. The best way to cover them is first to *skim* each essay quickly to get a general view of its contents, then go back and read it more carefully, trying to identify the author's main argument, what theoretical perspective it uses, and how it resembles or differs from other theoretical perspectives you have read before. I will occasionally prepare questions in advance to help guide your reading. The introductions to the sections and McGee and Warms' footnotes are essential reading. Read the Moore book quickly to set the general stage, but do not dwell on specifics. One other thing: it is not advisable to leave the reading go until just before class. In some cases, a fair amount of material is assigned for a particular class, some of it rather dense. Plan ahead.

Participation in class discussion: Hearing yourself talk about what you are studying with others who are studying the same thing is an important part of the learning process in this class. Ideally, you should prepare for participation in discussion. Jot down questions and ideas that occurred to you as you read, and make a few notes about connections among the ideas we are studying. If I have distributed study questions in advance, consider them as you read and have something to say about them. This should only require five to ten minutes after you have finished the

readings. Once in class, listen to what others say, build on it when you can, and stay on the topic unless a topic shift is indicated. Try to push yourself to participate. I try to create an environment where everyone feels comfortable to participate, although I also have no hesitation about calling on people.

ASSIGNMENTS

date ***topic & readings***

1/23 I. The Map Is Not the Territory...But It Can Be Useful

Erickson and Murphy, Preface
McGee and Warms, Introduction

II. A Synoptic Historical Overview of Anthropological Theory

1/25 A. Erickson and Murphy, Chapter 1

1/27 B. Erickson and Murphy, Chapter 2

1/30 C. Erickson and Murphy, Chapter 3

III. Foundational Thinkers

2/1 A. McGee and Warms, "Nineteenth Century Evolutionism"
Charles Darwin and A.R. Wallace (M&W Selection 1)

2/3 B. Herbert Spencer (M&W Selection 2)

2/6 C. Jerry Moore, Chapter 1 (Tylor)
Edward B. Tylor (M&W Selection 2)

2/8 D. Moore, Chapter 2 (Morgan)
Lewis Henry Morgan (M&W Selection 3)
Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (M&W Selection 4)

2/10 E. McGree and Warms, "The Foundations of Sociological Thought"
Moore, Chapter 4 (Durkheim)
Emile Durkheim (M&W Selections 6 & 7)

2/13 F. Max Weber, "The Types of Authority and Imperative Co-ordination"
(1920 [transl. 1947]; BB)

2/15 **** EXAMINATION****

IV. Culture Theory in the Early Twentieth Century

A. Historical Particularism

- 2/17 1. McGee and Warms, "Historical Particularism"
 Moore, Chapter 3 (Boas)
 Franz Boas (M&W Selection 10)
 Franz Boas, "Instability of Human Types" (1911;BB)

FILM: "The Holy Ghost People" (out of class showing; we will draw on this film for future written assignments and discussion)

- 2/20 2. Moore, Chapter 5 (Kroeber)
 Alfred Louis Kroeber, "The Nature of Culture" (1923; BB)

2/22 B. Language and Culture

 Moore, Chapter 7 (Sapir)
 Benjamin Lee Whorf, "The Relation of Habitual Thought and Behavior to Language" (1941; BB)

C. Functionalism

- 2/24 1. McGee and Warms, "Functionalism"
 Moore, Chapter 10 (Malinowski)
 Bronislaw Malinowski (M&W Selection 13)

- 2/27 2. Moore, Chapter 11 (Radcliffe-Brown)
 A.R. Radcliffe-Brown (M&W Selection 14)

- 3/1 3. Moore, Chapter 12 (Evans-Pritchard)
 E.E. Evans-Pritchard (M&W Selection 15)

D. Psychological Anthropology

- 3/3 1. McGee and Warms, "Culture and Personality"
 Moore, Chapter 6 (Benedict)
 Ruth Benedict (M&W Selection 17)

- 3/6 2. Moore, Chapter 8 (Mead)
 Gregory Bateson, "Bali: The Value System of a Steady State" (1949; BB)

3/8 *****MID-TERM EXAMINATION*****

V. Theoretical Diversification At Mid-Century

A. Neoevolutionism and Cultural Ecology

- 3/10 1. McGee and Warms, "Cultural Ecology and Neoevolutionism"
V. Gordon Childe, "Conclusions" (Chapter 12 of *Social Evolution*
(1947; BB)
Moore, Chapter 13 (White)
Leslie White, "Evolutionary Stages, Progress, and the Evaluation of
Cultures" (1947; BB)
- 3/13 2. Moore, Chapter 14 (Steward)
Julian Steward, "The Great Basin Shoshone: An Example of A
Family Level of Sociocultural Integration" (1955; BB)

B. Structuralism and Cognitive Anthropology

- 3/15 1. McGee and Warms, "Structuralism"
Moore, Chapter 17 (Lévi-Strauss)
Claude Levi-Strauss (M&W Selections 26 and 27)
- 3/17 2. McGee and Warms, "Ethnoscience and Cognitive Anthropology"
Harold Conklin (M&W Selection 29)
Stephen Tyler (M&W Selection 30)

3/18-4/2 *** FALL BREAK ***

C. Cultural Materialism

- 4/3 Moore, Chapter 15 (Harris)
Marvin Harris, "Theoretical Principles of Cultural Materialism" (1979;BB)
Marvin Harris (M&W Selection 23)

D. Ecological Systems Approaches

- 4/5 Roy Rappaport (M&W Selection 24)
Kent V. Flannery, "Archeological Systems Theory and Early
Mesoamerica" (1968; BB)

E. Symbolic and Interpretive Anthropology

- 4/7 1. McGee and Warms, "Symbolic and Interpretive Anthropology"
Moore, Chapter 20 (Douglas)
Mary Douglas, "Animals In Lele Religious Symbolism" (1957; BB)

4/10 2. Moore, Chapter 19 (Turner)
Victor Turner (M&W Selection 39)

4/12 3. Moore, Chapter 19 (Geertz)
Clifford Geertz (M&W Selection 37)

4/14 *****EXAMINATION*****

VI. Recent Trends

A. Darwinian Approaches

4/17 1. McGee and Warms, "Sociobiology, etc."
Robert Trivers, "The Evolution of Reciprocal Altruism" (1971; BB)

4/19 2. William H. Durham, "Toward a Coevolutionary Theory of Biology
and Culture" (1979; BB)
Bobbi Low, "Cross-Cultural Patterns in the Training of Children:
An Evolutionary Perspective" (1989; BB)

B. Historical Approaches

4/21 1. Structure and Event
Marshall Sahlins, "Structure and History" (Chapter 5 of Islands of
History, 1985; BB)

4/24 2. Neo-Marxism
Moore, Chapter 24 (Wolf)
Eric Wolf, "On Peasant Rent" (1982; BB)
Eric Wolf, "Culture: Panacea or Problem?" (1984; BB)

C Feminist Anthropology

4/26 McGee/Warms, "Anthropology and Gender: The Feminist Critique"
Sally Slocum (M&W Selection 35)
Eleanor Leacock (M&W Selection 36)

4/28 D. Post-Processualism in Archeology
Ian Hodder, "Post-Processual Archeology" (Chapter 8 in Hodder,
Reading the Past, 1986 ; BB)

5/1 E. Practice Theory

Moore, Chapter 22 (Ortner), Chapter 23 (Bourdieu)

F. Post-Modernism and Post-Culturalism

- 5/3 1. McGee and Warms, "Postmodernism and Its Critics"
 Michel Foucault, "Prison Talk" (1975; BB)
- 5/5 2. Stephen Tyler, "Post-Modern Ethnography: From Document of the
 Occult to Occult Document" (1986, BB)
- 5/8 3. McGee and Warms, Selection 40 (d'Andrade)

5/10 *** CATCH UP DAY ***

5/12 VII. Postscript

 Philip Carl Salzman, "Reflections on Anthropological Theory" (2001; BB)
 Jerry D. Moore, Postscript: Current Controversies, in *Visions of Culture*

5/17, 9 a.m. *** FINAL EXAMINATION ***