

The Anthropological Study of Religion

Key words:

Anthropology	worldview	totem
holism	cosmology	social structure
participant observation	values	pre-state and small-scale
culture	beliefs	society
cultural relativism	animism	social stratification
ethnocentrism	emic/etic	ethnography

Introduction

1. Describe anthropology, its subject matter, its methods, and its four major subfields. Describe the perspective anthropology takes on religion (practices vs doctrine).
2. Explain what it means to say that anthropology is holistic.
3. Explain cultural relativism and ethnocentrism.
4. Discuss the definition of religion. When did religion begin? What is the earliest evidence for religious practices?
5. What are the functions of religion?
6. Describe the distinguishing features between the major world religions and the belief systems of small-scale societies.

Harris

1. According to Harris, why is animism universal?
2. Explain what Harris means when he says religious practices vary the the social structure? Use his discussion of beliefs about ancestors and their relationship with the living to explain this.

Mystical Power And Mystical Beings

Dorothy Lee

1. Explain why, according to Dorothy Lee, the holistic perspective of anthropology is especially important when studying non-Western religion. Would this also be true for western societies?
2. Use the Hopi way of life to explain how religion is interwoven with economic activities, art, and worldview, according to Dorothy Lee?

Hopi: Songs of the Fourth World

1. Describe the cosmology and worldview of the Hopi Indians. Describe their way of life.
2. Do the Hopi have religion? Explain your answer.
3. What is a **kachina**?

Myth, Symbolism, and Tabu

Key Words:

myth	mana
reify	emic / etic
symbol	tabu (taboo)

Sharp: Steel Axes

1. Who are the Yir Yoront? Where do they live? How did they live?
2. What was the role of the traditional stone axe in the Yir Yoront culture in interpersonal relationships, its use as a totem, and symbolic expression of male dominance?
3. How did the traditional religion of the Yir Yoront work against change, such as the adoption of new items of technology?
4. What was the result of the introduction of steel axes in Yir Yoront culture? What does that suggest for interaction with traditional cultures today?

Video: Power of Myth with Joseph Campbell

1. Describe the differences Campbell discusses between Hindu worldview and the Western worldview. Name the symbol Campbell uses to illustrate this.
2. What commonalities does Campbell see in myth across cultures? What does this imply about universal experiences?

Leonard & McClure

1. Briefly describe the approaches to studying myth (functional, literary, comparative, symbolic, ethnographic).

Dubisch

1. Describe how Dubisch argues that the health food movement is a religion. Be sure to identify her definition of religion. Include a discussion of taboo, mana, and promise of salvation in your answer.
2. Explain how health food adherents undergo a religious conversion.
3. What is a "mazeway resynthesis" and what does it have to do with the health food movement?

Hoodfar

1. Where and when did veiling originate?
2. What were the early meanings associated with the veil?
3. Hoodfar says in Muslim culture veiling is a "lived experience" with multiple meanings.
4. List a few of the meanings veiling has in Muslim society and contrast with Western meanings.
5. What was the impact on women when the government of Iran outlawed the veil?
6. Describe how women can use the veil to manage interactions with men. Explain how it can be an instrument of women's power.

Douglas

1. Explain taboo (tapu). Where does the term/concept come from?
2. What does it mean to say that taboo systems are not static? Why does Douglas call it a "system"?
3. How does taboo operate? What is the role of classification? How do taboos prevent societies from falling into chaos?
4. Why does Douglas say it is hard for Westerners to understand taboos?