Anthropology 601  
Ethnology

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[Draft Sample]

Course Goal:

The goal of this course is to introduce graduate students to the theories, methods, and stocks of knowledge that constitute the fundamentals of social and cultural anthropology. The term ethnology, following American and British usage, refers to the theoretical, comparative dimension of anthropology, as contrasted with the descriptive, ethnographic dimension. The two are inseparable in anthropology, however, and the course readings will draw upon classic ethnographies as well as theoretical essays by the great figures in the history of anthropological discourse. As a starting point, we will discuss briefly some of the basic epistemological and ontological issues raised by notions of the social and culture. One of the problems addressed will be the question of whether or not anthropology can ever become a “real” science—in the sense of a predictive, hypothesis testing activity. Then we will pursue a roughly chronological but recursive path through early, classic, and late modern anthropological literature. Our course goal is not just to read some of the great anthropological works from our own current perspective but to attempt also to re-think and re-live earlier schools of thought in context of the intellectual movements in political economy, biology, philology, linguistics, and social theory that were contemporary with them. What questions were considered important, and what models of explanation were available? While it is difficult to go back and understand the early authors in their own terms—and without assuming that our own, latest ideas are always the best (evolutionary progress!)—that is after all what anthropology is about. Even the currently least fashionable versions of anthropological thought—cultural evolution, French structuralism, ethnoscience, functionalism, kinship algebra, etc.—can add depth to our current understanding and raise enduring questions in fresh context. This approach will be particularly appropriate if, as some of the authors we start with would argue, anthropology is not the kind of unified theoretical science that builds on itself but instead has a substantial component of practical wisdom (Aristotle’s phronesis, Bourdieu’s intuitive feel for the game) that derives from context and experience.

Beginning this year, Anth 601 will coordinate with a new course, currently under development, on contemporary anthropological theory, Anth 611, which will be offered in Spring of 2008.
Structure and Evaluation:

The course will be offered in seminar form, and participation is heavily emphasized. Weekly course work includes readings, written précis, student presentations and discussions. Grades are assigned according to the following format: 10 points for facilitating each of two seminar sessions and 40 points each for two exams, a midterm and a final. Each student is required to come to class having read the assigned readings and prepared to discuss them. Each week one or more students will take responsibility for leading discussions of specific readings, providing concise (one or two page) written summaries for distribution to the class. The primary question to be addressed in each case is this: what exactly is the author’s argument, in historical, philosophical context. Comparative and evaluative discussion will follow. In addition to the assigned readings, there are a number of useful books that provide overall perspectives on anthropology, for example, “Visions of Culture” by Jerry D. Moore, “Five Key Concepts in Anthropological Thinking” by Richard J. Perry, “History and Theory in Anthropology” by Alan Barnard, and of course, with suitable caution, Wikipedia entries. Clifford Geertz’s autobiographical essay, “An Inconstant Profession: The Anthropological Life in Interesting Times” in Annual Reviews of Anthropology 2002, 31: 1-19, is also quite helpful.

Schedule of topics:

1. Historical origins and precursors of anthropology
   - Herodotus (on Scythian burial customs): 222-227
   - Hiatt, (origins & early social anthropology) Chpts. 1, 2, & 3 pp. 1-56

2. Theories of the social (I)
   - Flyvbjerg: Part 1 pp. 9-49
   - Berlin on Vico: pp. 21-77

3. Theories of the social (II)
   - Durkheim: conclusion of Elementary Forms: pp. 462-496
   - Latour: Reassembling: pp. 1-87
   - Parsons: (Lemert excerpts 321-328)

4. Theories of Culture
   - Herbert: Introduction and Chpt. 1: pp. 1-74
   - Kroeber & Kluckholn: excerpts (40pp)
   - Clifford: ethnographic surrealism

5. Evolution and early cultural anthropology
6. Morgan, American ancestor of social anthropology
   Fortes: Kinship & Social Order: pp. 18-30

7. Structural-Functionalism
   Malinowski: The Problem of Meaning in Primitive Languages, pp. 297-337;
   Radcliffe-Brown: Joking Relationships (two articles in Africa)

8. Midterm Exam

9. Classic Political Analysis
   Evans-Pritchard: The Nuer: Introduction, Chpts. III, IV.
   Leach: Political Systems of Highland Burma. Foreword, Introductory Note, Chpt. 1.

10. Boas and the American Tradition
    Boas (historical particularism)
    Benedict (patterns of culture)
    Mead & Bateson

11. Structuralism
    Levi-Strauss

12. Cognitive Anthropology & Ethnosciense
    Goodenough: “Rethinking Status & Role”
    Frake
    Conklin
    Bright & Bright

13. Interpretive
    Geertz
    Turner

14. Postmodern debate

Readings:

Berlin, Isaiah

Clifford, James

Durkheim, Emile
Evans-Pritchard, E.E.
Flyvbjerg, Bent
Fortes, Meyer
Frazer, James
Goodenough, Ward
Herbert, Christopher
Herodotus
   425 BCE   The Histories, Book IV. George Rawlinson, trans.
Hiatt, L. R.
Kroeber, A.L. and Clyde Kluckhohn
Latour, Bruno
Leach, E. R.
Maine, Henry
Malinowski, Bronislaw
Morgan, Lewis Henry
Parsons, Talcott
Radcliffe-Brown, A. R.
Tylor, Edward Burnett