

ANT4034: HISTORY OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL THEORY

Spring 2015 Syllabus

Michael Heckenberger, PhD (mheck@ufl.edu).

Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology

Location & Time: MAT 0108; T: 7-8 (1:55-3:50); TH: 7 (1:55-2:45)

Office Hours: T: 12:00-1:45; TH: 10-10:40; 2:50-3:30

I. Summary

This is a survey course of anthropological theory over the past 150 years. The course is structured in a chronological and linear sense that follows the required textbook (*Engaging Anthropological Theory*, 2013) and some additional readings from seminal figures in the discipline (*Visions of Culture Reader*). This necessarily conflates many divergent views into a paradigmatic mold that did not reflect the variation and genealogy of many ideas. In other words, these are selected works, and we will also discuss the ideas presented by each in terms of why these readings or views and not others were selected, what this says about society at the time of these anthropologists and how they inflected anthropological thought. Finally, we address where anthropology is and where it is going in the 21st century, particularly in terms of what it can contribute to broader society?

II. Objectives

- Provide a chronology of major theoretical developments in anthropology since its inception as a discipline in the late nineteenth century to the present day;
- Introduce major figures and schools in anthropological theory, including seminal readings;
- Place anthropological theory in the contemporary world, notably including the historical and political nature of theory;
- Consider anthropological research in personal terms of actual anthropologists, their feelings, emotions and personalities, and as a social relation
- Consider the place of anthropology and research, in general, as an important element of civil society.

III. Course Overview

Anthropologists have used an extremely wide range of viewpoints to consider humans across the globe, notably those from other places and times. The term, meaning study of humans in Greek, first became widely used to refer to the techniques and interests of a few scholars in the late 19th century, with the first university course taught in the discipline in 1895, by George Perkins at the

University of Vermont, soon followed by the first program in anthropology established by Franz Boas, the father of American anthropology, at Columbia University in 1896.

The stated mission of anthropology is understanding human cultural and biological diversity in all times and places, which most anthropologists see as a critical means to promote tolerance and social equality. Thus, many anthropologists accept as part of their professional credo a commitment to human rights, which is in part due to the fact that anthropologists have traditionally studied marginalized groups in distant and exotic places, the colonies, and among disadvantaged social groups in modern society or what anthropologist Faye Harrison (UF) calls “the other within.”

Anthropology in North America is sub-divided into sub-disciplines: cultural, linguistic, biological and archaeological. These are broad enough in scope as to compare well to discrete disciplines. Anthropology shares this meta-disciplinary quality with ecology. Both disciplines adopted their holistic and interdisciplinary perspective due to the fact that they were the last major disciplines to be defined in the natural and social sciences in the 20th century: the only seats left were at the head of the table, what was left was a holistic and interdisciplinary view. Add to this the increasingly specialized technical skills, genetics, forensic anthropology, archaeological science and quantitative methods, there seems to be little hope that a disciplinary consensus should emerge, at least in methodological terms. What is generally shared is the commitment to objectivity and comparison, the focus on historical and cultural context, and the essential critical stance of social theory.

The wide range of things that anthropologists study, human biological and cultural variation, language, archaeology, and a host of specialized studies (e.g., genetic, psychological and forensic anthropology), results in a very eclectic approaches and concepts. Likewise, the concepts of cultural relativism and ethnocentrism introduced by Boas and the first generation American anthropologists, which most practitioners still see as central to the discipline, result in a lack of consensus on themes and methods. Therefore, as Eric Wolf rightly acknowledged, it is this “identity ‘crisis” that is the identity of anthropology. This differs from natural and exact sciences and how they define theory, as agreed upon things. Theory is used in many ways, but there is a basic contrast between theory as seen in the sciences, as things that we agree about (positivism), as opposed to how it is viewed in the social sciences and humanities, which focus on difference, interpretation and paradox, or what we reasonably disagree about. This relates to the fundamental difference between the study of the natural world and the study of human beings and society, which became a topic for philosophical debate at the time anthropology was emerging as a discipline in the late nineteenth century.

In short, theory means different things to different people, and disciplines. Theory in anthropology, in large part, is about how people differ. The process of research, as often as not, leads to things that are more widely agreed upon but as often as not through raising new questions rather than resolving older one. Questions morph into other problems through time, in large part due to changes in broader society. Nonetheless, there are some “big” questions that have occupied anthropological thought over the past century and a half, since the idea of anthropology began to take on form, several questions that seem to reinvent themselves from generation to generation: e.g., explanation versus understanding; nature versus nurture; characteristic features or natural groups of human social and cultural practices; emergent properties, scale and networks; and, who can and should speak for others or ethics, which anthropologists must also grapple with more than most other scholars and citizens.

This class attempts to situate anthropological theory in broader social theory, asking: What is philosophies of science do anthropologists promote? Clifford Geertz once said that cultural anthropology was a “license to poach,” and while much of anthropology studied exotic places and past times, “peddlers in the strange,” the “accumulated cunning” of the past century of anthropological research has made vital contributions to understanding both the diversity of human experience and also the implications of this for addressing real world problems. Thus, while many of the important issues in anthropology cannot be resolved in unequivocal terms or by building blocks, established givens, but the “accumulated cunning” of anthropology has made major contributions to all areas of knowledge, even if through critique.

What also links anthropologists, more than high level theoretical aspirations or meta-theory, is a commitment to ground-based research, which requires local solutions and middle-range or bridging arguments that are themselves theoretically motivated. In most of the cases discussed here it was the field experiences of each investigator, as well as the political and scholarly climate of the times they wrote, that dictated what they said. This often turned on highly personal issues of the researcher. This class promotes theory that is built from the on-the-ground realities of anthropological fieldwork, particularly ethnography and archaeology, and careful attention to both historical and cultural context. It also recognizes the diversity of perspectives, which are always bound to the social, cultural and political values and interests of scholars and the people with whom anthropologists work. The position here is that the 20th century modernist vision that anthropology should be about science, or about contextual studies, which include historical and interpretive studies, or as critique of dominant social values and interest, including academic culture, as if one will arise victorious, 21st century anthropology is guided by recognition of multi-vocality and dialogue in hybrid knowledge production industries.

Required Readings: There is one required textbook and one required reader. The course is organized into 15 segments that correspond to each chapter of the textbook, which will be discussed in sequence each week, in most cases supplemented by chapters of classic works in reader. There are no additional readings, but occasional internet materials may be circulated, particularly based on student participation.

Required Text: *Engaging Anthropological Theory: A Social and Political History*, Mark Moberg, Routledge, 2013

Required Reader: *Visions of Culture: An Annotated Reader*, Jerry Moore, Altamira, 2009

Weekly Outline:

Week 1: Introduction; EAT Chapter 1;

Week 2: Claims & Critiques; EAT Ch. 2 (select 5 questions from quiz 1 & 5 from quiz 2);

Week 3: Early Anthropology; EAT Ch. 3/quiz 3;

Week 4: Marx; EAT 4/4;

Week 5: Durkheim & Weber; EAT 5/5;

Week 6: Spencer, Darwin & Evolution; EAT 6/6; Reader: ch. 1 (Tylor), 2 (Morgan);

Week 7: Boas; EAT 7/7; reader 3 (Boas), 5 (Kroeber);

Week 8: Culture & Personality; EAT 8/8; reader 6 (Benedict), 7 (Sapir), 8 (Mead);

Week 9: Structural Functionalism; EAT 9/9; reader 9 (Mauss), 10 (Malinowski), 11 (Radcliff-Brown);

Week 10: De-colonization and Anti-structure; EAT 10/10; reader 12 (Evans-Pritchard), 18 (Turner);

Week 11: White and Steward; EAT 11/11; reader 13 (White), 14 (Steward);

Week 12: Cultural Materialism; EAT 12/12; reader 15 (Harris), 16 (Leacock);

Week 13: Interpretive and Structuralist; EAT 13/13; reader 17 (Lévi-Strauss), 19 (Geertz), 20 (Douglas);

Week 14: POMO Turn; EAT 14/14; reader 23 (Bourdieu), 24 (Wolf), 25 (Sahlins);

Week 15: Contemporary Theory; EAT 15/15; reader 21 (Fernandez), 22 (Ortner).

IV. Evaluation & Attendance

Evaluation:

Chapter Quizzes (70 points): At the end of each chapter there are true/false self-quizzes; all chapter quizzes will be submitted by each student at the start of each T class meeting; questions should be submitted in hard-copies accompanied by a maximum 50 word justification clearly based on chapter material (chapter 1 and 2 are combined week 2). Five quizzes can be submitted on TH meeting each week without penalty, but 9 of the 14 quizzes must be turned in by the T due date. There are a total of 70 questions worth one point each:

Ethnographic Activities (30 points); to be announced in second week of class

General grade summary: A =90-100; B=80-89; C= 70-79; D=60-69; E=<60 will receive a non-passing grade (E). Incompletes must be worked out in advance.

Attendance: As a small class, attendance is very important. This class does not require 100% attendance, however attendance is required and monitored. Greater than 5 absences will be penalized by a one point reduction for each absence. Weekly attendance is required unless arranged with instructor ahead of time; one unexcused weekly absence (missing T and TH any week) amounts to a 3 point reduction; 2 weeks a 6 point reduction; and 3 weeks a 9 point reduction; 4 weeks or more of non-attendance will result in a non-passing grade. The student will be notified after 3 unexcused weekly absences and informed that they risk a non-pass.

Reading assignments are due on T and, in five cases, on TH; these are to be handed in as hard-copies at the beginning of class and will be the basis for weekly attendance, i.e., not turning in assignments in class on T or TH (in 5 cases) will constitute a weekly absence.

Missed Work: As noted, one class grace period for make-up of missed quiz will be accepted in 5 of 14 quizzes. All quizzes are due on T, but 5 will be accepted without penalty on TH class meeting of each week. If not received on TH, these will constitute a weekly absence, if the student didn't attend T class and arrange for extended missed work with instructor. Longer term make-up arrangement, including >5 quizzes after T due date or longer periods for five automatic one-class extension, must be made with the instructor before or during the week of assignment or documented emergency cases.

V. Policies

Policies for grade point averages: <http://www.registrar.ufl.edu/catalog/policies/regulationgrades.html>
Also note that a grade of C- does not count for credit in major, minor, Gen Ed, Gordon Rule, or college basic distribution credit (see <http://www.isis.ufl.edu/minusgrades.html>).

Academic Honesty, Student Responsibilities, Student Conduct Code: Students are required to do their own work on quizzes. The penalty for cheating is to receive no points for that exam and in serious cases the incident will be reported to the Student Honor Court. The student is responsible to review the UF Student Responsibilities Guidelines, available online.

Special Accommodations: Students requesting disability-related academic accommodations must first register with the Disability Resource Center (<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/>). The Disability Resource Center will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation to the Instructor when requesting accommodation.