

ETHNOCENTRISM,  
CULTURAL RELATIVITY, AND  
APPROACHES TO ANALYZING  
CULTURE

Anthro 206

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Anthropological Approaches

- Interpretivist
  - Emphasis on culture
  - Meanings and practices
- Structural
  - Emphasis on society/social structure
  - Arrangement of people and things
- Critical
  - Builds on structural approach
  - Focus on causes of inequality/ differential access to resources

---

---

---

---

---


---

---

---

### Culture and Meaning

- culture – a system of meanings and practices for understanding and acting in the world



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Geertz and Cultural Texts

- cultural text - a way of thinking about culture as a text of significant symbols (words, gestures, drawings, natural objects) that carries meaning
- Clifford Geertz
- "thick description"



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Interpretation

- every cultural practice has to be understood on its own terms



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Ethnocentrism and Relativism

- ethnocentrism - the tendency to judge the beliefs and behaviors of other cultures from the perspectives of one's own culture
- relativism - the conviction that a particular culture's behaviors and beliefs can only be understood from the perspective of its own members

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Extreme Relativism

- Extreme Relativism says: "Anything goes. If it is okay in their culture, it is okay."
- This oversimplifies the complexity of making judgments; **anthropologists are not extreme relativists.**
- Morally problematic – we have to critique and condone practices that cause harm
  - ▣ Ex: genocide
- Empirically problematic – assumption that we can never understand another culture

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Worldview and Cosmology

- Worldview - encompassing pictures of reality created by members of a society
  
- Cosmology - that aspect of culture that includes the set of practices of meanings and practices connected to understandings of the origins and organization of the world/universe and humans role in it. A cosmology can involve a supernatural belief system or scientific theoretical models.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Emile Durkheim

- 19<sup>th</sup> century
- French sociologist
- one of the founders of the social sciences
- *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912)



---

---

---

---


---

---

---

---

- morality comes from society
- collective effervescence - the transcendent experience of the social



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

- Durkheim talks about the influence of culture and customs in creating cosmology; society holds influence over the people who comprise the society.
- A force connected with collective experience has power to create shared sense of identity
- Symbols and categories themselves are all meaningful and impact our lives and how we connect ourselves to other people. Symbols are powerful because they recall that cosmology that they refer to – they tie us together to a larger group.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Defining Religion in Anthropology

- Challenging to define
- “Ideas and practices that postulate [assume the existence of] a reality beyond that which is immediately available to the senses” (Bowen 2008).

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Diverse sets of beliefs

- Spirits
- Gods
- Ancestors

Different access, different roles

- Shaman – direct contact with supernatural forces
- Priest – skilled in rituals and guidance

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---