

STUDY GUIDE FOR THE SOAN ANTHROPOLOGICAL THEORY COMPS EXAM

You might want to consider the following suggestions as you prepare for the Anthropological theory section of the comps exam.

- 1) Perhaps the most important and useful exercise is to carefully review the readings (reproduced below) for Anthropology 331, Anthropological Thought and Theory, and of course your notes from that course as well.
- 2) Think about the more theory-oriented parts of *all* your courses, *not* just 331.
- 3) Since 331 utilizes only primary sources, you might find it helpful to look at some of the more synthetic textbooks on theory that have been written over the years. Following is a list of seven such volumes:

Barnard, Alan 2000. *History and Theory in Anthropology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Barth, Fredrik, Andre Gingrich, Robert Parkin, Sydel Silverman. 2005. *One Discipline, Four Ways: British, German, French, and American Anthropology*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Erickson, Paul A. 1998. *A History of Anthropological Theory*. Peterborough, Canada: Broadview Press.

Hatch, Elvin. 1973. *Theories of Man and Culture*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Kardiner, Abram and Edward Preble. 1961. *They Studied Man*. New York: New American Library.

Langness, L. L. 1987. *The Study of Culture*. Novato, CA: Chandler & Sharp Publishers.

Moore, Jerry D. 1997. *Visions of Culture, An Introduction to Anthropological Theories and Theorists*. London: AltaMira Press.

Obviously, you need to read these books very selectively, according to your own strengths and weaknesses, and what will be most helpful in understanding the theories and theorists that have been emphasized in your courses at Carleton.

- 4) Review the following sample questions. The actual questions on the exam will be similar to these, and possibly identical to one or both of them.

Anthropological Theory Exam Study Questions

Question #1:

"First and foremost...every culture must satisfy the biological system of needs, such as those dictated by metabolism, reproduction, the physiological conditions of temperature."

Bronislaw Malinowski

"The imposition of meaning on life is the major end and primary condition of human existence."

Clifford Geertz

Sahlins probably had views such as these in mind when he wrote that "the contest between the practical and the meaningful is the fateful issue of modern social thought." These two statements do indeed contain very different assumptions about what culture is, how it should be studied, and the kind of theories that can best deal with it. Drawing on the theoretical and empirical work of several major anthropologists, discuss the respective approaches to anthropology that follow from these two statements.

Question #2:

You have been asked to write an essay outlining and evaluating the theoretical contributions of American and British anthropologists to an anthropological understanding of our species. You are Claude Levi-Strauss. Write the essay.

Question #3:

"Theory is necessary not only to organize the findings of research so that they make sense but more basically, to determine what questions are to be asked...Theory, therefore, must always be a priori to the empirical observations of the facts. Facts come to mean

something only as ascertained and organized in the frame of a theory. Indeed, facts have no existence...outside such a frame. Questions must be asked before answers can be obtained and, in order to make sense, the questions must be part of a logically coordinated attempt to understand social reality as a whole. A non-theoretical approach is, in strict logic, unthinkable."

Gunnar Myrdal

Using Myrdal's statement as your foil, critically examine the views of major 19th and 20th century anthropologists (including post-modern ones).

Question #4:

"Every time that a social phenomenon is directly explained by a psychological phenomenon, we may be sure that the explanation is false."

E. Durkheim

"Ethnology is first of all psychology."

C. Levi-Strauss

Discuss the apparent contradiction expressed in these statements, illustrating with the work of major anthropologists.

Question #5:

"At the height of the Depression, with shoeless waifs littering the streets of every major city, banking in chaos and manufacturing in decline, a Bohemian immigrant girl was reported saying, 'After all, life is mostly what you wear.'" S. Bayley, *Taste*, p. 142.

Translate this informant's maxim into the language of anthropology, construing "wear" to include bodily adornment in all its forms. Discuss anthropological approaches to the understanding of what the natives "wear", and indicate the direction the discussion should take in order to gain further intellectual control of the question of understanding adornment.

Question #6:

In "The Myth of Functional Analysis as a Special Method in Sociology and Anthropology", Kingsley Davis argues that functionalism isn't a special theory, but rather that it permeates *all* analysis in sociology and anthropology. Evaluate his argument using Spiro's typology of different types of functionalism, being sure to illustrate the typology with specific, empirical examples of each of the six types.

The format of the exam will be to answer one question, which you will choose from two questions asked.

READING LIST FOR ANTHROPOLOGY 331

BOOKS:

Barth, Fredrik, *Models of Social Organization*
Benedict, Ruth, *Patterns of Culture*
Borofsky, Robert, *Assessing Cultural Anthropology*
Bourdieu, Pierre, *The Logic of Practice*
Fisher, James, *Living Martyrs*
Geertz, Clifford, *The Interpretation of Cultures*
Gellner, Ernest, *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion*
Levi-Strauss, Claude, *Structural Anthropology*
Malinowski, Bronislaw, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*
Mead, Margaret, *Coming of Age in Samoa*
Sahlins, Marshall, *Culture and Practical Reason*
Wolf, Eric, *Europe and the People Without History*

ARTICLES:

Abu-Lughod, Lila "Writing Against Culture"
Bilik, Naran "The Ethnicity of Anthropology in China"
Boas, Franz, "Dog Hair"
Clifford, James, "Introduction: Partial Truths"
Firth, Rosemary, review of Margaret Mead and Samoa: The Making and Unmaking of an Anthropological Myth
Freeman, Derek, excerpt from Margaret Mead and Samoa: The Making and Unmaking of an Anthropological Myth
Geertz, Clifford,
 "Being Here" (in Works and Lives)
 "The Growth of Culture and the Evolution of Mind" (in The Interpretation of Cultures)
---- "The Impact of the Concept of Culture on the Concept of Man" (in IC)
---- "Ritual and Social Change: A Javanese Example" (in IC)
---- "The Cerebral Savage" (in IC)
---- "Religion as a Cultural System" (in IC)
---- "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture" (in IC)
---- "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight" (in IC)
---- "Waddling In"
---- "Anti Anti-Relativism"
Gellner, Ernest, "Concepts and Society"
Harris, Marvin, "The Cannibal Kingdom"
---- "Cultural Materialism Is Alive and Well and Won't Go Away Until Something Better Comes Along" (in ACA)

Kaplan, David, and Robert Manners, "Notes on Theory and Non-Theory in Anthropology"
Kuper, Adam, "Culture, Identity and the Project of a Cosmopolitan Anthropology"
Leach, Edmund, "Rethinking Anthropology"
Levi-Strauss, Claude
---- "Structural Analysis in Linguistics and in Anthropology" (in SA)
---- "Social Structure" (in SA)
---- "The Structural Study of Myth" (in SA)
---- excerpt from The Savage Mind
---- "Anthropology and History" (in SA)
Marcus, George E., "After the Critique of Ethnography: Faith, Hope and Charity, but the Greatest of These is Charity" (in ACA)
Marglin, F.A., "Woman's Blood: Life Rhythms and Work Discipline"
Murphy, Robert F., "The Dialectics of Deeds and Words" (in ACA)
Nader, Laura, "Up the Anthropologist"
Narayan, Kirin, "How Native Is a Native Anthropologist?"
Ortner, Sherry, "Theory in Anthropology Since the Sixties"
 "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?"
 "Gender Hegemonies"
Rosaldo, M. "Moral/Analytical Dilemmas Posed by the Intersection of Feminism and Social Science"
Rosaldo, Renato, "Subjectivity in Social Analysis"
Sahlins, Marshall, "Culture as Protein and Profit"
---- "Goodbye to Tristes Tropes: Ethnography in the Context of Modern World History" (in ACA)
Salzman, Philip Carl, "The Lone Stranger in the Heart of Darkness" (in ACA)
Sass, Louis A., "Anthropology's Native Problems: Revisionism in the Field"
Spiro, Melford, "Conclusion" (to *Culture and Gender*)
Vayda, Andrew P., "Actions, Variations, and Change: The Emerging Anti-Essentialist View in Anthropology" (in ACA)
Tambiah, Stanley, "An Anthropologist's Creed"
---- "Rationality, Relativism, the Translation and Commensurability of Cultures"
Wolf, Eric, "They Divide and Subdivide and Call It Anthropology"