This course introduces students to the history of anthropological theory. Starting with classic texts, we will begin our travel through time in the 19th century, ending the semester with the “ontological turn.” The organization of this course is somewhat chronological, but it is not meant to suggest a teleological progression. Instead, the course is organized to show how ideas grow out of debates.

Theory is both a tool and an activity. It simultaneously explains and unsettles. Because different frameworks enable different ways of seeing the world, studying theory can involve transformations with every step, big or small. In the course of this semester, you are encouraged to relate our discussions to contemporary ethnographies you are reading for other classes, to any research project you may be working on, and to general observations of the world around you.

Learning Outcomes

1. Students will acquire familiarity with major theoretical approaches in anthropology.
2. Students will have a better understanding of the relativity of perspectives.
3. Students will sharpen their analytical skills by observing how professional thinkers think.
4. Students will acquire tools for questioning common sense.

Required Readings

Readings will be posted on Blackboard, but I encourage you to get your own copy of Readings for a History of Anthropological Theory, available at the CU Bookstore.

Resources

The following titles are not required reading, but they may be helpful in clarifying concepts and ideas.


**Tips for reading original texts**

The most important thing is to try. Simply “showing up” is a great start. At minimum, you need to do the work moving your eyeballs across sentences and down paragraphs, letting yourself get immersed in a given text.

At another level, it is also important to read actively. Keeping questions in mind is helpful: how does the author express him or herself? What are some commonly recurring words and phrases? Where does the author take you through the logical development of an idea, and where does the author make a more definitive point? Are there passages that stand out as especially important or revealing? Does the author offer concrete examples to illustrate?

**Evaluation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Item</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Midterm paper</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>March 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final paper</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>May 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation and attendance</td>
<td>15%</td>
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Midterm paper questions will be posted 12 days before the due date. Final paper questions will be posted 15 days before the due date.

All assignments must be submitted to VeriGuide. Assignments without a signed declaration from VeriGuide will not be graded.
Week 1 (January 8)
Course Introduction

No readings.

Week 2 (January 15)
Marx and Weber: Materialism versus Idealism


Week 3 (January 22)
Durkheim and Mauss: Social Cohesion and Integration


- Émile Durkheim, Introduction to *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, in *Readings for a History of Anthropological Theory* (1915)

- Marcel Mauss, excerpts from *The Gift*, in *Anthropological Theory: AnIntroductory History* (1925)

Week 4 (January 29)
The Birth of Modern Anthropology: How to understand difference?


February 5

No class. Happy Chinese New Year!

Week 6 (February 12)
British Social Anthropology: Or, there is a rational explanation for everything

- Meyer Fortes and E. E. Evans-Pritchard, Introduction to African Political Systems, in Readings for a History of Anthropological Theory (1940)

Week 7 (February 19)
Culture and Personality (American Cultural Anthropology)

- Margaret Mead, Introduction to Coming of Age in Samoa, in Readings for a History of Anthropological Theory (1928)
- Ruth Benedict, “The Individual and the Pattern of Culture,” in Patterns of Culture (1934)

MIDTERM PAPER DUE: March 4

Questions will be posted Wednesday morning February 20 by 12:00 noon. Paper is due to the department office on March 4, by 5:30 p.m.

Week 8 (February 26)
Review week

- No readings.

Week 9 (March 5)
Claude Lévi-Strauss and the Idea of Structure

- Claude Lévi-Strauss, “Structural Analysis in Linguistics and in Anthropology,” in Anthropology in Theory (1963)
- (OPTIONAL) Claude Lévi-Strauss, “Social Structure,” in Anthropology in Theory (1952)

Week 10 (March 12)
Cultural Ecology


- Marvin Harris, “The Riddle of the Sacred Cow,” in *Good to Eat: Riddles of Food and Culture* (1985[1960])


Week 11 (March 19)

Symbolic Anthropology, Part I: Systems of thought


_clip from *Witchcraft among the Azande* (André Singer, Granada Television)

Week 12 (March 26)  

Symbolic Anthropology, Part II: Symbols as active force


- Clifford Geertz, “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture” and “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight,” in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973)

Week 13 (April 2)  

Power and Practice


- Michel Foucault, “Panopticism,” in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975)

_clip from *Modern Times* (Charlie Chaplin)

Week 14 (April 9)  

“The Erosion of Classic Norms”


Week 15 (April 16)

**Rethinking Nature/Culture, Rethink Everything**


**FINAL PAPER DUE:** May 2

Questions will be posted Wednesday morning April 17 by 12:00 noon. Paper is due to the department office on May 2, by 5:30 p.m.
## GRADE DESCRIPTORS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Criteria for 1) the course and 2) for coursework</th>
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| A     | 1) Outstanding performance on all learning outcomes.  
          
          2) The work has creatively synthesized course materials and key ideas in an original way. The argument is logical and cohesive, the discussion is well-organized, and the writing is clear. The work goes beyond merely summarizing key ideas, using original texts in a strategic way. The work differentiates between the position of the author versus the position(s) the author wishes to challenge. Concrete evidence corresponds to statements and claims. |
| A-    | 1) Generally outstanding performance on all (or almost all) learning outcomes.  
          
          2) The work synthesizes course materials and key ideas in an original way, but there are areas for improvement. |
| B-range | 1) Substantial performance on all learning outcomes, OR high performance on some learning outcomes which compensates for less satisfactory performance on others, resulting in overall substantial performance.  
          
          2) The work demonstrates a solid grasp of course materials and key ideas. There are areas for improvement with respect to building a cohesive argument, organizing the discussion, communicating clearly, and/or identifying relevant evidence. There is some confusion over what position the author has taken versus the position(s) the author wishes to challenge. |
| C-range | 1) Satisfactory performance on the majority of learning outcomes, possibly with a few weaknesses.  
          
          2) The work shows some effort, but course materials have not been sufficiently engaged or the paper fails to directly address the prompt. The argument and the writing is not clear. |
| D-range | 1) Barely satisfactory performance on a number of learning outcomes.  
          
          2) The work shows little effort to engage course materials. There are major problems with clarity of argument and writing. |
| F     | 1) Unsatisfactory performance on a number of learning outcomes, OR failure to meet specified assessment requirements.  
          
          2) The work has failed respond to the assignment prompt. |
POLICIES

Participation

Participating in class is extremely important. Asking questions and making comments not only contributes to generating a class discussion, it is also a way of trying out ideas and working through the material for your own sake. Getting comfortable with speaking up in class is important in learning how to think. Us professors are not here to “transmit” ideas to you. We are not here to “pour” content into your brain. We would like for you to go beyond regurgitation of course materials in your written assignments, and learning to contribute to class discussion, learning to integrate multiple perspectives during class discussion, will help you strengthen your independent thinking skills. I fully encourage questions and comments, because your questions and comments will serve both the class as a community, as well as yourself.

Opinions vs. Arguments

There is a difference between opinion and argument. Your personal viewpoints are welcome during class discussion, but your papers will be evaluated based upon your ability to formulate an argument rather than your ability to express an opinion.

An argument is analytical. Arguments propose relationships between variables, and they support assertions being made with empirical evidence – either ethnographic data, or, in the case of studying theory, passages from original texts that illustrate how a particular theorist formulated an idea.

There is also a difference between opinion and perspective. An opinion usually contains some kind of judgment about how the world should or should not operate. A perspective, on the other hand, is a way of looking at the world. In other words, having perspective involves the ability to see patterns and themes, or differences and divergences, which may not be obvious at first glance. Having an opinion is easy. Having the insight that comes with perspective is much harder.

Late Submissions

Papers submitted after the due date will suffer a fraction of a grade deduction for every day it is late. For example, an A- will become a B+, a B will become a B-, et cetera.

Academic Honesty

The Chinese University of Hong Kong places very high importance on academic honesty, and adopts a policy of zero tolerance on cheating in examinations and plagiarism. Any such offence will lead to disciplinary action including possibly termination of studies at the University. Students should know how to properly use source material and how to avoid plagiarism. Students should read the detailed guidelines and examples for the acknowledgement of sources in the University’s website at http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academic honesty. Students are required to submit all papers through VeriGuide, which is also explained at the above website.