Anthropological Theory

AN INTRODUCTORY HISTORY

R. Jon McGee & Richard L. Warms

SIXTH EDITION
Table of Contents
[*new in this edition; see preface for details about updates and other changes]
[✓ included in this preview]

✓Preface

*Timeline (contextualizing the readings against the backdrop of world events)

✓Introduction

PART I: HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL THEORY

Nineteenth-Century Evolutionism
1. Herbert Spencer: The Social Organism (1860)
2. Sir Edward Burnett Tylor: The Science of Culture (1871)
3. Lewis Henry Morgan: Ethnical Periods (1877)
4. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels: Feuerbach: Opposition of the Materialist and Idealist Outlook (1846)

The Foundations of Sociological Thought
5. Émile Durkheim: What Is a Social Fact? (1895)
6. Marcel Mauss: Excerpts from The Gift (1925)
7. Max Weber: Class, Status, Party (1922)

PART II: CULTURE THEORY IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

The Boasians
8. Franz Boas: The Methods of Ethnology (1920)


11. Margaret Mead: Introduction to Coming of Age in Samoa (1928)
12. Benjamin L. Whorf: The Relation of Habitual Thought and Behavior to Language (1941)
Functionalism

PART III: THEORY AT MID-CENTURY
The Reemergence of Evolutionary Thought
16. Leslie White: *Energy and the Evolution of Culture* (1943)

Neomaterialism

Structure, Language, and Cognition

PART IV: LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY DEVELOPMENTS
Sociobiology and Behavioral Ecology

Feminist Anthropology

Symbolic and Interpretive Anthropology

Background to Postmodernism
32. Michel Foucault: *The Incitement to Discourse* (1976)

Postmodernism

PART V: TRENDS IN CONTEMPORARY ANTHROPOLOGY
Gender

Globalization

Agency and Structure

References
Index
Preface

Theory is the core of anthropology. Students often do not realize that the ethnographic materials they read in their textbooks and discuss in class are interpretations of data collected by anthropologists whose theoretical training determines the type of questions they ask and the sorts of information they collect. Without a solid understanding of theory, anthropology is reduced to a collection of exotic ethnographic vignettes. With a knowledge of theory, these vignettes become attempts to answer important philosophical and practical problems. Thus it is crucial for anthropologists to understand theory and its historical context.

Students face two choices if they wish to understand the theoretical perspectives that ultimately drive ethnographic fieldwork: They can read classic theoretical articles or they can read someone’s interpretations of those articles. For readers who are not well versed in anthropological theory, neither choice is ideal. We created this volume to provide an accessible means of introducing readers to the past century and a half of theory in anthropology.

We believe that it is essential for students to read original essays by influential scholars whose work has determined the paths in which anthropology has developed. Reading original works promotes depth of understanding and opens possibilities of analysis that even the best books describing theory can never provide. What better introduction to nineteenth century evolutionary thinking than reading Herbert Spencer and E.B. Tylor? To develop an in-depth understanding of Marxist analysis in anthropology what could be more effective than reading Marx, Leacock, or Bourgois? If you are interested in knowing about practice theory or thinking about globalization in anthropology shouldn’t you read the men and women who developed those fields such as Bourdieu, Foucault, Appadurai and Ortner?

Many students find reading original essays extremely demanding. Sometimes we do too. The language is often difficult, and the intellectual disputes, references to other thinkers, and historical contexts may be obscure. We have attempted to make the task less onerous by providing detailed commentary, in close proximity to difficult passages in the original essays, to illuminate obscure references, arcane language, and unfamiliar contexts.

You are now reading the sixth edition of *Anthropology Theory*. McGee and Warms have struggled to refine the book’s approach for over twenty years (the first edition came out in 1996). As we have repeatedly revised this text our goals for the book have grown. *Anthropological Theory* is primarily a textbook designed for students in advanced undergraduate and beginning
graduate classes. However, we have increasingly tried to write a reference work that both students and professionals will want to keep within easy reach. We have done this by writing extensive footnotes on an enormous variety of individuals and topics and providing an extensive two-level index with well over 1,000 entries. You will find basic information on everyone from Leo Frobenius to Daisy Bates, from Ibn Khaldun to Dina Dreyfus (Lévi-Strauss’ first wife). Of course, no book can possibly include information on everyone and everything, but we believe that there is no other single book in anthropology that has as much basic information about as many different theories and people as this volume.

**Approach**

We have assembled a diverse collection of essays by authors we believe are important thinkers in anthropology. We also deliberately favor essays that are ethnographic examples of theoretical positions over those that are simply declarations of theory. We have selected essays that are well written, concise, and accessible. The collection begins in the mid-nineteenth century and ends in 2013. It is divided into sections encompassing well-known theoretical positions that are represented by authors generally considered to be the outstanding spokespersons for their points of view, or essays that are especially vivid illustrations of a perspective. In each section, we have selected essays that fit together either because they illustrate different aspects of a theoretical perspective, or they are good ethnographic examples of a theory.

**Pedagogy**

We have provided extensive support material to help students understand the forty-three essays that make up this volume. Each of the fifteen sections begins with an introduction to acquaint readers with some of the most important advocates of a school of thought, the problems they set out to solve, the methods they used, and the dilemmas they faced. Extensive editorial footnotes that provide additional information to help the reader understand and interpret the reading accompany each essay. In addition to providing definitions, translations of foreign phrases, and historical information, the notes help students trace the intellectual connections among thinkers both inside and outside of anthropology. The notes are meant to inform, raise interesting questions, and foster further creative and original thinking. They make essential but
sometimes difficult information accessible to students and provide some interesting little-known background details. Anthropological theory, even that of a century ago, is alive and vital. We hope our commentary helps readers see it that way.

In this edition, the placement of our notes has been standardized. Notes that simply define words or translate phrases without further commentary are sited immediately following the words or phrases they describe. All other notes are placed at the end of paragraphs. Original notes by the essay’s author appear as endnotes.

No book of theory and commentary can ever be entirely without bias, but we have tried to come as close to this ideal as we can. In our introductions and commentary, we point to both the strengths and weaknesses of each theoretical position. Although astute readers can probably figure out which perspectives we like and which we dislike, we do not intend to promote one theory at the expense of another. In fact, we come from quite different theoretical perspectives, and our ideas have evolved through the years as we teach our theory classes and prepare new editions of this text. Every introductory section and note in this volume was written and rewritten by both of us, and we have been willing to accept substantial criticism and revision of ideas we hold dear.

For us, editing this volume continues to be an exciting process of discovery and interpretation. Research, careful reading, discussion, and argumentation, as well as the comments of numerous reviewers and readers of earlier editions, have greatly deepened our understanding of the works of the great thinkers in anthropology. Writing this book has forced us to rethink what we believed we knew, and in the process we have become better scholars of theory. Selecting these essays and writing the introductions and commentary for them has been profoundly rewarding for us. We hope that reading the essays and our comments will be as productive for students and colleagues.

**New to This Edition**

This edition is one of the most extensive revisions we have done and we owe a great deal to our editor Leanne Silverman for her guidance and vision for the book. The sixth edition contains a great deal of new material. Preparing it has given us a chance to reconsider our selection and ordering of essays, and substantial revisions have been made in the introduction to
each section and the notes for each essay. We have incorporated new information and brought an expanded selection of authors and opinions to the volume. Some of the notable changes in this edition include the following new sections and essays:

- “Boas and His Students: American Anthropology in the Early 20th century” combines material previously found in “Historical Particularism” and “Culture and Personality” and includes new essays by A. L. Kroeber and Ruth Benedict.
- “Cognition, Language, Structure” combines material previously found in “Structuralism” and in “Ethnoscience and Cognitive Anthropology” and includes a new essay by Eugene Hunn.
- “Feminist Anthropology” focuses on the emergence of anthropological concern for women’s roles and issues in the 1960s and 1970s.
- “Gender” that explores feminist and gender studies developed in the 1990s and 2000s and includes a new essay by Holly Wardlow.
- “Globalization” includes a new essay by Jonathan Friedman and Kajsa Ekholm Friedman.
- “Agency and Structure” that includes new essays by Sherry Ortner and Ruth Gomberg-Muñoz.

We have written new introductions to each of the new sections of the book and updated all of the others. For the first time, in this edition, each introduction includes an annotated list of five to ten suggested readings chosen from the most important works in each subject area.

Of course it is impossible to reprint essays from all of the great thinkers who have made significant contributions to anthropology but we discuss many of these in the introductions and in our notes. Thus you will find information about the contributions of people such as Jeremy Bentham, A. C. Haddon, James Frazer, Antonio Gramsci, Monica Wilson, Andrew Vayda, Michelle Rosaldo, Edith Turner and hundreds of others whose work has played a major role in anthropological theory. In particular, we have tried to include information on women who have been influential in anthropology but are often left out of general textbooks. For example, among the scores of scholars newly included you will find information on Elsie Clews Parsons, Dina Dreyfus, Gene Weltfish, Hilda Kuper, Hortense Powdermaker, Roda Métraux, Winifred Hoernle, Monica Wilson, Hildred Geertz, Emily Martin, Sarah Franklin and many others.

We have been particularly gratified by the reactions of readers of the first five editions.
We have received many letters and e-mails from the United States, Canada, and Europe. Both professors and students have asked questions, sent thoughtful commentary, and offered recommendations. We have been able to incorporate some of these into this edition. We deeply regret that editorial constraints and issues of timing and space have prevented us from including more of these suggestions, but we appreciate your feedback and hope you will continue to advise us. As always, you can contact us at rm08@txstate.edu for McGee and r.warms@txstate.edu for Warms.

Acknowledgments

Writing this book has involved the labor and forbearance of many people. First and foremost, we would like to thank our families—Stacie, Jacob, and Hannah McGee and Karen, Benjamin, and Nathan Warms. Without their support, this project would have been impossible. The sixth edition has been written under the direction of a new publisher, Rowman and Littlefield, and with the suggestions and supervision of a new editor, Leanne Silverman. We are very grateful for her advice and guidance.

One unintended consequence of writing this kind of book is that we have had the privilege of having contact with several of the scholars whose work appears in this volume. We are indebted to the many people who made suggestions, reviewed, and commented on the text in various stages of preparation. Our work has benefited greatly from their comments, and our ideas were altered by their insights. We deeply appreciate their advice even though we were not always able to follow it. Since the publication of the first edition of this book we have benefited from the insights and advice of numerous individuals. Earlier editions owed a substantial debt to Roy Rappaport, Marvin Harris, Robert Launay, Roy D’Andrade, Joe Heyman, George Marcus, Naomi Quinn, Claudia Strauss, Ann Stoler, Sally Slocum, Jonathan Friedman, Alan Hanson, and David Valentine. Finally, the current edition would not have been possible without the careful analysis and useful suggestions from our reviewers, and we thank them for the time and energy they put into analyzing our work:

- Alexander Bauer (Queens College, CUNY)
- Julia Cassaniti (Washington State University)
- Robert Cook (Ohio State University)
- Beverly A. Davenport (University of North Texas)
Introduction

Anthropology is concerned with understanding the “other.” Typically anthropologists study the behavior, beliefs, and lifestyles of people in other cultures. Some examine current cultures; others study the remains of past societies to recreate the lives of people who disappeared long ago; still others study primates to see what our closest relatives can tell us about being human. What unites this diverse work is a common ground in some fundamental theoretical ideas concerning biological evolution and social behavior.

We teach both undergraduate and graduate courses in anthropological theory at Texas State University. Each fall as the semester begins, we face the same issues: Some students want to know why if they are studying X (fill in the blank) the theory course is required, and others worry about reading original works by authors and delving into a subject that seems esoteric. Because both matters are important, we begin this book by telling you why we think theory is essential in anthropology and why it is valuable to read original works rather than predigested theoretical summaries.

Why Study Theory?

Theory is critical because, although anthropologists collect data through fieldwork, data in and of themselves are meaningless. Whether stated explicitly or assumed, theories are the tools anthropologists use to decide what is and what is not data. They are used to give meaning to data. Anthropologists’ understanding of the events they record or the artifacts they excavate in the field is derived from their theoretical perspective. It is only through the application of a theoretical perspective that one can interpret designs carved into a rock ten thousand years ago, a cache of silver coins buried with a victim of the plague in 14th century London, or distinguish a wink from a twitch. Theories are the tools anthropologists use to sort the significant from the meaningless.

One’s choice of theory largely determines the data to be collected in the first place. A structuralist interested in the unconscious meaning of mythology probably will not spend too much time studying subsistence patterns. An economic anthropologist might ignore ritual and religion. Without theory, one cannot do anthropology of any sort.

Although this is a book about theory in sociocultural anthropology, the different branches
of anthropology have always freely borrowed ideas from each other and from other sciences. In
the nineteenth century, Herbert Spencer, a sociologist, and Charles Darwin, a naturalist, greatly
influenced each other’s work. Sigmund Freud was well versed in nineteenth-century
evolutionary theories, and his work is imbued with ideas taken from anthropology; anthropology,
in turn, has been greatly influenced by his theories. Sociobiologists study human behavior in
terms of evolutionary biology and cultural adaptations. Symbolic anthropologists and
postmodernists rely on tools developed in the study of literature. In the course of their research,
anthropologists today delve into biology, geology, psychology, history, literature, physics,
chemistry, medicine, and other subjects.

Modern anthropology is built on the work of earlier generations of researchers. Indeed,
anthropologists today ask many of the same questions that occupied scholars in the nineteenth
and early twentieth centuries.

Nineteenth-century theories continue to resonate in popular culture. Have you ever heard
the phrase “survival of the fittest,” for example? It was first used by Herbert Spencer in his 1864
book *Principles of Biology*. Do you think that technology is a measure of a society’s
development? Then you will be comfortable reading Lewis Henry Morgan’s *Ancient Society*,
first published in 1877. To fully comprehend anthropological writing, you must appreciate the
history of the ideas that inform it. These are, ultimately, the principles upon which current work
is based.

Anthropological theory is also important because it helps us think about who and what
we are as human beings. It does this by asking us to consider the ways in which we view and
understand each other. At its most basic level, anthropology asks how we are to understand other
people in the world, those who look different from us and have different languages and customs
(what anthropologists have come to call different cultures). Are such people inferior to us,
superior to us, or just different? Are their cultures unchanging, following their own paths of
evolution, or bound to ours in a grand evolutionary scheme? How should we behave toward such
people?

Studying other cultures has led anthropologists to think deeply and critically about their
own cultures. The process of understanding others led to questions concerning how we are to
understand ourselves. For well over a century anthropologists have offered insights and critiques
into their own cultures. In the past half century they have particularly focused on thinking about
the histories, meanings, and pathways of power of these cultures.

At a second level, anthropology forces us to consider if we, as human beings, are fundamentally part of the natural world. If so, perhaps we can be studied by the scientific methods and principles used by biologists, physicists, and other scholars in the traditional physical sciences. Alternatively, are human beings sufficiently different from the rest of the world that studying them with these methods will produce only trivial and confusing results? If that is true, the skills needed might be creative insight, imaginative interpretation, and empathy—analytic tools traditionally associated with the arts and humanities.

A final level of discourse deals with the otherness of culture itself. By directing us, to the comparison of cultures, anthropology ultimately points toward the study of human nature. If we could strip away the cultural clothing of all peoples, would we be left with some set of basic principles or underlying essence? Would this be equivalent to finding human nature before us in the buff? If so, how are we to understand human culture? Is it that which permits the full and satisfying expression of human nature, or that which prevents human nature from destroying human society?

At some level, all theory in anthropology, whether written in the eighteenth, nineteenth, twentieth, or twenty-first centuries, addresses these essential questions about culture. Sometimes, individual theorists take extreme postures and for a time quiet the voices of those who hold alternative positions. However, no definitive conclusion has ever been reached on any of these issues. Perhaps these questions are ultimately unanswerable by their very nature. But the fact that no authoritative conclusion has been reached does not lessen the importance of the debate, for how we answer these questions has practical applications in our world. The answers determine our understanding of ourselves and our behavior toward others. In a world of instantaneous communication and virtually unlimited capacity for violence, ethnic strife, war, and terrorism, surely these are among the most important questions that face us.

Why Read Original Works?

We believe it is important to read original works for several reasons. First, commentary on a theory cannot replace the original work because commentators unavoidably (and frequently intentionally) place their own interpretations on the material. For instance, Robert Lowie’s 1937 History of Ethnological Theory and Marvin Harris’ 1968 The Rise of Anthropological Theory
are both comprehensive summaries of anthropological theory, but they provide strikingly different perspectives on the field. Each is an ideological document supporting a particular interpretation of the history and proper goals of anthropology.

Second, part of the importance of classic works in theory is their subtlety and complexity. The creation of theory is part of an ongoing dialogue with earlier thinkers, and these essays (and many others) are a portion of that dialogue. As our understanding changes, we return to these older works. Sometimes we find insights that advance our thinking or perceive errors against which we react. Through this process, new theory is generated. When works are summarized or when we read only analyses, the theoretical dialogue is flattened, simplified, and ultimately impoverished.

In this volume, we provide what we believe is useful commentary on the essays we present, but reading such analysis cannot replace careful reading of the original text. As new insights are made, many of our notes may become outdated. The essays themselves have a much longer shelf life.

Finally, a firsthand reading of the original sources helps one avoid inaccuracies. In preparing this text, we have run across numerous cases in which the popularly accepted information passed to us by our professors or found in textbooks was incorrect. Some of the folk wisdom of anthropology consists of half-truths or is frankly inaccurate. We bring this up not to point fingers or assign blame but to suggest that reading original sources can serve as a partial corrective for this problem.

Using This Textbook

This book is designed to help you understand where some of the great minds in anthropology have been before you and to help you formulate your theoretical position in the field today. It is a historical overview of some of the principal developments in culture theory since the 1850s. The book is different from others because it contains our introductions and paragraph-by-paragraph comments to inform your reading and raise interesting points or questions.

Theory texts are problematic because their contents tend to become accepted doctrine. Readers and critics suppose that the authors of such a text have chosen to present those pieces universally considered the most important works in the field. Should you entertain this notion, let
We disabuse you of it. No group of professional anthropologists, however small, will agree on a single set of critical essays. We have selected what we feel are representative articles by individuals traditionally associated with particular theories and works that seem to us to be good examples of theories in practice. An enormous corpus of work in anthropology now exists. We believe that the best way to study anthropological theory is to read as widely as possible. No collection of essays, however artfully chosen, will be able to substitute for years of reading in the field, and that is what is ultimately required for a solid background in theory.

You will find that our commentary on the texts varies from extremely straightforward definitions and explanations to fairly elaborate speculation on the motives of authors and influences upon them. Although it is almost impossible to entirely eliminate mistakes, we have checked our work carefully; when we point to a fact, you may be reasonably certain that it is correct. However, please remember that our interpretations are just that. They are meant to guide your reading, stimulate discussion, call your attention to certain ideas, and get you to think about different issues. You are invited to disagree with them and propose alternatives. If you read through this book and find nothing with which to disagree, you are not reading carefully enough or critically enough.

Although our likes and dislikes may become apparent to the careful reader, we do not intend to promote any particular viewpoint. In fact, we were trained in very different theoretical perspectives (McGee in interpretive-symbolic and Warms in positivist-materialist). We have tried to present the key strengths and weaknesses of each position, but we frequently differ in our interpretations of theory and amuse our students by arguing about them. In short, while we hope that readers will agree with most of what we have written, we have tried to write at least something bound to rile your theoretical sensibilities, no matter who you are. You are invited to disagree with the text and debate us if you wish, or at the very least contact us if you have a question. We can be contacted by e-mail at r.warms@txstate.edu for Warms or rm08@txstate.edu for McGee or by traditional mail at the Department of Anthropology, Texas State University, 601 University Drive, San Marcos, TX 78666.

The Arrangement of Essays and the Notational System

The arrangement of essays presents a surprising number of problems. Should they be arranged strictly chronologically or by intellectual association or descent? If the text is to be
divided into sections, what about those authors who do not quite fit? What about articles that represent more than one area? We have taught our theory course both chronologically and thematically and concluded that a chronological presentation works best. Thus we have chosen to arrange the theories in a rough chronological order to show readers the progression of ideas in cultural anthropology and to demonstrate the relationship between concepts. We have divided our chronology into named sections. Each begins with an introduction describing the theorists represented in the section, the principal ideas presented in their work, and suggested readings should you want to pursue a topic further. However, our scheme is not entirely consistent. Different schools of thought often overlap both intellectually and chronologically. Exploiting these inconsistencies and thinking about other possible arrangements of the text may prove an intellectually useful experience. New arrangements may provide new insights.

Space limitations and, occasionally, copyright regulations have forced us to make difficult decisions about the essays we have reprinted. Essays included in earlier drafts of the book have been removed from the final, and we have added or subtracted essays as our own knowledge base grows. More important, we have occasionally eliminated fairly large passages of some essays or chosen to remove particularly lengthy sets of original footnotes or endnotes. These are not decisions we took lightly, nor do they indicate that we believe the notes and passages removed were of no significance. It was simply a question of choosing between removing notes and passages or losing several entire essays. Although there are good intellectual reasons for selecting either of these options, we believe that most readers are better served by the first. In doing this editing, we have tried to preserve a sense of the original by including notes telling the reader exactly how much text was removed and briefly summarizing the content of the lost passage. We also note how many footnotes appeared in those passages, which allows readers to see the subjects about which the authors wrote notes and those they did not and gives a feel for the frequency and pacing of notes.

Each essay in the volume is accompanied by our notes, which appear as footnotes and are numbered with Arabic numerals. Footnotes or endnotes created by the original authors are indicated by lowercase letters and appear as endnotes to the essays. Where authors have provided references in their work, they appear at the end of the essay. Our own references along with an index appear at the end of the volume.
PART III: THEORY AT MID-CENTURY

Structure, Language, and Cognition

By the middle of the twentieth century American anthropology was largely dominated by materialist approaches, with the exception of the Culture and Personality school, while Marxism and structural functionalism were the primary approaches in Europe. However, by the nineteen fifties the United States and Europe each produced influential perspectives that focused on language and cognition. The American approach was heavily influenced by the cultural relativistic ethos promoted by Franz Boas and his students, while European theory was influenced by the nineteenth century emphasis on cultural similarities and psychic unity.

The concept of psychic unity was deeply entrenched in the evolutionary thinking of nineteenth century scholars. The German ethnologist Adolf Bastian (1826-1905) was particularly influential at this time and his concept of *elementargedanke*, or hereditary elementary ideas was widely adopted in evolutionary reasoning and was critical to the notion of psychic unity. Bastian also proposed that geographic and historical circumstances created different local variations of these elementary ideas that he called *völkergedanken* or “folk ideas.”

For Bastian, cofounder and first Director of the Museum of Ethnology in Berlin, discovery of these elementary ideas was one of the primary objectives of anthropology. This perspective found its way into late-nineteenth century French thinking in the work of Emile Durkheim who studied in Germany from 1885-87. This background is important to understand the work of Lévi-Strauss and his search for the universal structures of human thought.

Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908-2009) almost single-handedly founded the field of French Structuralism. Lévi-Strauss was born in Brussels and grew up in Paris. He studied law and Philosophy at the Sorbonne, graduating with a degree in Philosophy in 1931. In 1935, he accepted a position as a visiting professor of sociology at the University of São Paulo while his wife Dina Dreyfus, served as a visiting professor of ethnology. The couple lived in Brazil from
1935 to 1939, and Lévi-Strauss conducted his only fieldwork during this period. Though Lévi-Strauss rarely mentions her, Dreyfus was an accomplished scholar in her own right. She was born in Milan in 1911 and emigrated with her family to France when she was 13. Dreyfus graduated from the Sorbonne with a degree in Philosophy that included a certificate in anthropology.

Between 1935-1938 while at the University of São Paolo, Dreyfus founded the first ethnological society in Brazil with Mário de Andrade (1893-1945), an important Brazilian poet and ethnomusicologist. In 1936 and 1938 she conducted fieldwork with Lévi-Strauss and her Brazilian colleague Luiz de Castro Faria (1913-2004), who became a critical figure in the development of anthropology in Brazil. In 1938, she left the field because of an eye infection and returned to São Paolo and then to Paris. When war broke out in 1939 Dreyfus separated from Lévi-Strauss but they did not divorce until 1945 when Lévi-Strauss remarried.

During the Nazi occupation of France, Levi-Strauss moved to New York City while Dreyfus participated in the Resistance under the name of Denise Roche. After the war, she became a Professor of Philosophy. She taught at Versailles, at Lycée Moliere, Lycée Fenelon and at the Sorbonne. She was the first female member of the Inspection Générale de Philosophie (the IG evaluates all aspects of philosophy education in French schools at all levels). Dreyfus was particularly interested in education and in popularizing philosophy and in the 1960s she produced television and radio programs that featured conversations with famous philosophers. She died in 1999.

In 1948 Lévi-Strauss returned to France to pursue his Ph.D. at the Sorbonne. His first book, *The Elementary Structure of Kinship* was part of his thesis work.

Lévi-Strauss’s structuralism begins with the assumption that culture was, first and foremost, a product of the mind. Following Bastian and Durkheim he reasoned that since all human brains were biologically similar, there must be deep-seated concepts or ways of thinking that were the same in all cultures. Although he did not use the term “elementary ideas”, the goal Lévi-Strauss set for anthropology was to discover the fundamental structures of human thought. Pursuing this quest, he spent his career conducting cross-cultural studies of kinship, myths, and religion. The titles of his early works *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (1949), *Structural Anthropology* (1959), *The Savage Mind* (1962) show the trajectory of his thinking. *The
Elementary Structures of Kinship (1949), echoes the title of Durkheim’s great work on religion, The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life (orig. 1912).

Lévi-Strauss believed that there were underlying cognitive processes tying cultures together and these could be discovered in bits of information that provide messages about the structure of society. However, each culture was also the product of its own history and its technological adaptation to the world. These processes have combined, altered, transfigured, and modified the original elementary ideas. For Lévi-Strauss, transmitting culture was rather like playing “telephone” or “whispering down the alley” in a crowded bus station. Messages are apt to get jumbled. Lévi-Strauss hoped that by breaking down cultural elements like folktales into their elemental parts he could get beyond this “noise” and return to the original message.

The Prague School of structural linguistics, organized in 1926, also played a supporting role in the development of Lévi-Strauss’ theory. Up to this time the most influential area within linguistics was historical linguistics. However, the Prague School scholars, led by the linguists Roman Jakobson (1896–1982) and Nikolai Troubetzkoy (1890–1938), emphasized the descriptive rather than historical study of language. Strongly influenced by the work of the Swiss semiotician Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913), members of the Prague School emphasized the phonemic study of languages, and promoted the theory that linguistic meaning was built upon binary contrasts between phonemes. This work, and his study of Durkheim, provided Lévi-Strauss with the concept of binary contrasts that was fundamental to his formulation of structural analysis. Following this linguistic model, Lévi-Strauss proposed that the fundamental patterns of human thought also uses binary contrasts such as black-white, night-day, and hot-cold. This insight dovetailed nicely with Durkheim’s and Hertz’s proposition that distinctions such as sacred-profane and right-left were fundamental manifestations of the l’ame collective “collective conscious” or what an English-speaking anthropologist would call culture.

Lévi-Strauss first used the notion of the binary structure of human thought to analyze kinship. In The Gift (1967, orig. 1925), Marcel Mauss had tried to demonstrate that exchange in primitive societies was driven not by economic motives but by rules of reciprocity upon which the solidarity of society depended. In Elementary Structures of Kinship (1969, orig. 1949) Lévi-Strauss took Mauss’ concept of reciprocity and applied it to marriage in primitive societies. He argued that in those societies women were commodities who were exchanged between kin groups. Lévi-Strauss contended that one of the first and most important distinctions people make
was between self and others. This “natural” binary opposition led to the formation of the incest taboo. In this fashion, Lévi-Strauss claimed the binary distinction between kin and nonkin was resolved in primitive societies by the reciprocal exchange of women and the formation of kin networks.

Lévi-Strauss is best known today for his analysis of myth. His interest in mythology was founded in his belief that studying the mythologies of primitive peoples allowed him to examine the unconscious patterning of human thought in its least contaminated form. Much of Lévi-Strauss’ work was on the folktales of indigenous people of South America such as the Nambikuara. He used ethnographic material on the Nambikuara collected by Karl von den Steinen (1855-1929), a German ethnologist and physician who was a colleague of Bastian’s at the National Museum in Berlin. Because he believed that binary oppositions were the basis of human cognition, Lévi-Strauss sorted elements of indigenous stories into sets of oppositions. He also proposed that a fundamental characteristic of human thought was the desire to find a midpoint between such oppositions; a category that transcends and somehow resolves them. In Lévi-Strauss’ view, the elements of myth, like the phonemes of a language, acquire meaning only as a consequence of certain structural relations. Therefore, to uncover the unconscious meaning of myth, the structuralist must break myth into its constituent elements and examine the rules that govern their relationships. In this way the hidden structural elements could be revealed.

Structural analysis was very popular in Europe, but in the United States, beginning in the nineteen fifties, ethnographers proposed a new methodological program for conducting fieldwork: ethnoscientific, or the new ethnography. Ethnoscientists claimed that up to that time ethnography had been unscientific. They complained that there was no single way of doing ethnography. Each anthropologist studied and wrote in his or her own, idiosyncratic way. As a result, ethnographies contained different sorts of information and were not analytically comparable to each other. Further, ethnographers tried to describe native society and native understandings, but they did so using the conceptual categories of Western society. Critics claimed that this distorted the results.

To make anthropology more scientific and ethnographic descriptions more accurate, ethnoscientists argued, anthropologists should attempt to reproduce cultural reality as it was perceived and lived by members of society. To this end, they urged that descriptions of culture be couched in terms of native thought. Understanding native conceptual categories was key to
The ideal ethnoscientific ethnography would include all the rules, principles, and categories that natives must know in order to understand and act appropriately in social situations within their cultures. The underlying theoretical assumption of ethnoscience was that cultures were sets of mental models. It was the job of ethnographers to duplicate the features of those cognitive models so that they could “think like a native.” An ethnographer’s model was presumed correct if it allowed him or her to replicate the way a native categorized phenomena.

Because no one has direct access to another person’s mind, the cognitive principles and models drawn by ethnoscientists were based on what informants told them. Thus, the new ethnography drew heavily on the techniques of linguistic analysis. In particular, ethnoscientists adopted the methodology developed in the 1920s by members of the Prague School of linguistics. Members of the Prague School such as Jakobson and Troubetzkoy were particularly interested in phonology. They studied the phonetic structure of languages by contrasting sounds in order to analyze the features that made sounds distinct. Ethnoscientists incorporated this idea into their research by creating diagrams in which contrasts of meaning could be outlined and the features of native conceptual categories distinguished.

Another set of linguistic principles upon which ethnoscience was based can be traced to the 1930s and the work of Edward Sapir and Benjamin L. Whorf. As we have seen (essay 12) Sapir and Whorf were interested in the relationship between language and thought. In numerous papers and essays they proposed that language was not just a means of communication but also shaped people’s perceptions of the world, an idea later called the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. Whorf wrote:

We dissect nature along lines laid down by our native languages… We cut nature up, organize it into concepts, and ascribe significances as we do, largely because we are parties to an agreement to organize it in this way—an agreement that holds throughout our speech community and is codified in the patterns of our language. (1956:213)

Sapir and Whorf’s emphasis on the interrelationship of language and perception was one element that led ethnoscientists to see a close connection between culture and language. They reasoned that replicating the classification system of any language would give them the ability to view the world in the same way as native speakers of that language. William Sturtevant outlined the fundamental principles of this new approach in his 1964 article, “Studies in Ethnoscience,”
published in *American Anthropologist*. However, other ethnoscientists were already outlining the new research methodologies.

Ward Goodenough (1919-2013) and Charles Frake (1930-) discussed ways to conduct fieldwork and analyze data in this new approach (Goodenough 1956, Frake 1962). The key research instrument was the highly structured interview, aimed specifically at eliciting native conceptual categories, which ethnoscientists called *domains* or *taxa*. They then used a technique called *componential analysis* to determine the definitive characteristics by which the objects and ideas in each domain were sorted. Using this information, the ethnographer could classify information according to native conceptual categories. In theory, data collection in this manner was more systematic and replicable and thus, followers claimed, more scientific.

Early attempts at ethnoscientific analysis such as Floyd Lounsbury’s (1914-1998) 1956 analysis of Pawnee kin terminology concentrated on kinship, but the methodology was easily applicable to other areas and soon applied in a variety of research situations. Notable examples of this are Conklin’s 1954 study of Hanunóo ethnobotany, Frake’s 1961 study of disease categories among the Subanun, Bulmer’s 1967 study of zoological taxonomy in the highlands of New Guinea, and Berlin, Breedlove, and Raven’s 1974 analysis of Tzeltal Maya plant classification.

The ethnoscientists’ focus on understanding the native point of view was not new. In the introduction to *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, Bronislaw Malinowski had written that the final goal of ethnography was “to grasp the native’s point of view, his relation to life, to realize his vision of his world” (1922:25, emphasis in original). The search for the native viewpoint also had strong resonances with Boasian historical particularism. Franz Boas and his students insisted on the uniqueness of each culture. They collected masses of physical data on the material and behavioral existence of the people they studied, and made the doctrine of cultural relativism an item of faith among American anthropologists. Ethnoscientists continued the Boasian insistence on culture being *sui generis* and extended the search for data from the material to the mental, something Boas had first suggested half a century previously.

Ethnoscience, like Boasian anthropology, implied an extreme cultural relativism—an approach that presented problems. Critics maintained that this approach made cross-cultural comparison impossible. If each culture had a unique way of conceptualizing the world and could only be described in its own terms, how could cultures be compared? Lévi-Strauss’
structuralism was seen by some as the answer to this dilemma, but skeptics argued that it was impossible for either ethnoscientists or structuralists to get inside another’s head and see how they think or what they believe.

A further problem concerned individual variation within society. When ethnoscientists said they were trying to re-create cultural reality from a native’s point of view, an obvious question to ask was, “Which native?” Despite these criticisms, ethnoscience was an important factor in the development of at least two other theoretical approaches—cognitive anthropology and symbolic anthropology—that both achieved major prominence in the following decades.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s the focus of ethnoscientific work began to diverge onto different paths. First, instead of simply outlining native categories of thought, anthropologists proposed that by analyzing these, one could learn how the human mind functioned. Using models developed in linguistics, researchers proposed that there were universal cognitive processes that were a product of brain structure. In particular, a 1969 book by Brent Berlin and Pay Kay, Basic Color Terms: Their Universality and Evolution, galvanized research in language and cognition. Berlin and Kay proposed that color perception was innate, thus challenging the linguistic relativism of Sapir and Whorf. Berlin and Kay’s work encouraged further research in areas like ethnobotany and ethnozoology. In this work researchers focused on the way people classified their environments in an attempt to discover other universal patterns of human perception. Eugene Hunn’s essay on Tzeltal Maya animal classification in this section is one of these studies.

A second approach is called cognitive anthropology and is closely related to psychology and neurology. By the mid-1970s, advances in anthropology, psychology, and the field of artificial intelligence had made it apparent that human cognition was much more complex than the models of native classification derived from componential analysis suggested. The earlier focus on domains and taxonomies gave way to schema theory.

A fundamental part of ethnoscience and the basis for componential analysis was the idea that people classified objects in their world by checking off a mental list of essential features (apple = red, round, stem). Rejecting this, cognitive anthropologists argued that people conceptualize by reference to general mental prototypes called schemas, or schemata. Schemas are neurological pathways that humans build thorough life experience. When an athlete practices a skill over and over again until it is automatic they refer to building “muscle memory.”
However, a muscle cannot remember. The athlete has created a schema, a special neurological pathway for that skill. Another way to think of schema is that they are loci for neural processing that enable us to act quickly and without conscious thought. Thinking about where you want to go for lunch is a conscious process. However, a “lunch schema” is activated when you crave a hamburger but are repulsed by the idea of a cricket sandwich. Crickets are not part of the neurological “lunch” pattern you have created.

To explain nonsequential thought processes in areas where thinking is nonlinguistic, cognitive anthropologists and psychologists turned to the concept of connectionism. Those who follow Connectionist theory suggest that knowledge is linked, networked, and widely distributed by mental “processing units” and that we access and analyze information through these mechanisms. Because these units are connected and work simultaneously, we can process information much faster than any computer (Strauss and Quinn 1994:286). Notable scholars in this area are Claudia Strauss (1953-), Naomi Quinn, and Roy D’Andrade.

The essays chosen for this section reflect the development of theory based on structural and cognitive models through the last half century. In the first article, “Four Winnebago Myths: A Structural Sketch,” published in 1960, Lévi-Strauss demonstrates basic aspects of structuralist theory and methodology by comparing four Native American myths collected by Paul Radin. The second essay is by Harold C. Conklin (b. 1926). Conklin began his university education in 1943 at the University of California-Berkeley where he studied under Robert Lowie and Alfred Kroeber. In 1944 he was drafted into the Army and served in the Pacific theater, primarily in the Philippines, where he remained until returning to finish his degree in 1950. He then pursued graduate studies at Yale University studying with Floyd Lounsbury. He earned his Ph.D. in 1955, and began teaching at Columbia that same year. In 1962 Conklin accepted a position at Yale University and he served as Curator of Anthropology from 1974 until 1996 when he retired. He is now a emeritus professor at Yale. Conklin’s 1955 study included here is a classic piece of ethnoscientific work in which he outlines the features by which the Hanunóo categorize colors.

The final essay is by Eugene Hunn (b. 1943). Hunn received his Ph.D. from the University of California-Berkeley in 1973. His research interests throughout his career focused on ethnobiology, and he worked among Tzeltal Maya speakers in Chiapas, Mexico, Native Americans of the Columbia River Basin in the Pacific Northwest, and indigenous Zapotec speakers in Oaxaca, Mexico. Hunn spent his career at the University of Washington-Seattle,
where he is now emeritus professor. In this essay Hunn outlines the taxonomic levels though which Tzeltal Maya categorize types of animals. Very few people care that the Tzeltal do not place bats in their category of animals, however Hunn’s work addresses the question of whether or not humans sort their worlds in universal taxonomic categories. He argues that Tzeltal Maya animal classification has a similar logical structure to Western scientific taxonomy, and hints that this is the result of a universal cognitive process.

Suggested Readings:

Harkin, Michael E.
[This entry is an overview of the life and career of Claude Lévi-Strauss.]

[Hénaff’s book is a comprehensive review of the work of Lévi-Strauss.]

[A biography of Lévi-Strauss.]

[A brief overview of the basic elements of ethnoscience.]

[This book is an ethnobotanical study of the Tzeltal Maya classification of plants.]
[One of the defining essays on the use of componential analysis in ethnosciencce.]

[An overview of the theory and basic concepts of ethnoscience.]