

COSMOLOGIES: RELIGION, SCIENCE & MAGIC

Anthropology 1

RELIGION, SCIENCE & MAGIC

- The very belief systems that help us explain the nature of the world and our place in it.
- How people make sense of HOW and Why things happen.

Small group discussions

1. How are science and religion different? How are they the same?
2. Are superstitions connected to science, magic, or religion? Why? What superstitions are you familiar with?
3. Describe things or practices that you think or hope will bring good luck.

COSMOLOGY

- The study of the universe in its totality and by extension humanity's place in it.
- Cosmology can refer to the cosmos, to heaven, or to the world.
- Physical cosmology
 - branch of physics and astrophysics that deals with the study of the physical origins of the universe and the nature of the universe on its very largest scale.
- Religious cosmology
 - Many world religions have origin beliefs that explain the beginnings of the Universe and life.
- Both religion and science attempt to explain the creation of the world and humanity.

Science

- A rational interrogation of the natural world, based on empirical observations, testing hypotheses, and reproducing results.
- Rational and provable
- Science explains how things happen
- Science's explanation is based on a method of empirical observation.

Religion

- Religion explains the universe by positing the role of supernatural all-powerful all-knowing supreme beings.
- Belief in supernatural forces; a set of formal belief systems affiliated with a set of rituals, institutions, physical space, leaders and practitioners.
- The cultural means by which humans deal with the supernatural or how the supernatural deals with humans.
- Explains why things happen

The Supernatural

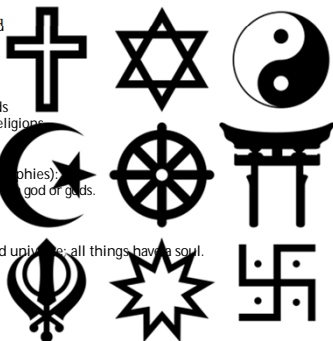
- Refers to forces and phenomena which are not observed in nature, and therefore beyond verifiable measurement.
- If a phenomenon can be demonstrated, it can no longer be considered supernatural.
- Because phenomena must be subject to verifiable measurement and peer review to contribute to scientific theories, science cannot approach the supernatural.

God(s)

- An eternally existent spirit that exists apart from space and time.
- Maybe considered the creator of the world.
- May be considered all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-loving or also destructive, harmful, and malevolent.

GENERAL TYPES OF RELIGION

- Monotheism: Belief in one God
 - Zoroastrianism
 - Judaism
 - Christianity
 - Islam
- Polytheism: Belief in many gods
 - Ancient Greek and Roman religions
 - Vedic traditions in India
 - Several traditions in Japan
- Non-theistic religions (or philosophies):
 - Do not (specifically) believe in god or gods.
 - Buddhism
 - Confucianism
 - Taoism
- Animism: Belief in an animated universe; all things have a soul.
 - Shinto
 - Indigenous belief systems



Ancestor Worship/Veneration

- Based on the belief that deceased family members have a continued existence, take an interest in the affairs of the world, and possess the ability to influence the fortune of the living.
- The goal of ancestor worship is to ensure the ancestors' continued well-being and positive disposition towards the living and sometimes to ask for special favors or assistance.
- Common in Confucian-influenced societies.



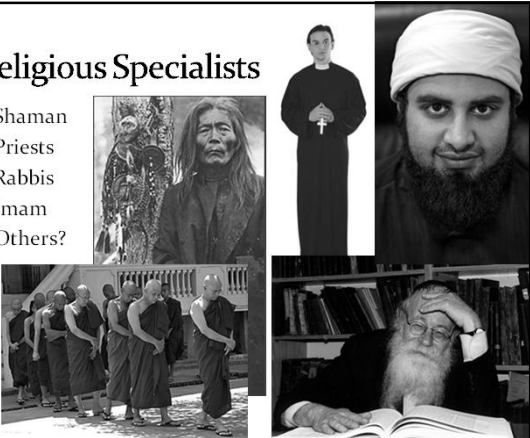
Shamanism



- Similar to animism refers to a range of beliefs and practices that engage the spirit world.
- Requires a specialist – shaman
 - believed to be intermediary between natural and spirit worlds
 - can possibly cure illness, tell fortune, control weather, interpret dreams, astral project (travel to upper and lower worlds)

Religious Specialists

- Shaman
- Priests
- Rabbis
- Imam
- Others?



The collage includes: a shaman in traditional dress, a priest in a black cassock holding a cross, a rabbi with a beard and kippah, and a group of Buddhist monks in a line.

Why Does Religion Exist?

- Humans attempt to understand and, at least, influence or control through a belief in the supernatural that which is otherwise uncontrollable and unexplainable.
- Alleviates anxieties about their helplessness.
- Is practiced with some particular goal in mind:
 - Examples
 - a desire to produce results
 - to guide human action
 - enable people to make decisions about how to act
 - to cure illness
- Provides a model of morality and good behavior
- Enhances social solidarity.

Magic

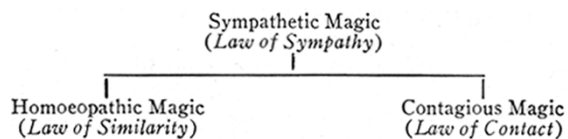
- Belief in the power of humans to intervene in lives, to cause fortune and misfortune, illness, injury.
- Attributes causation to human intervention (not chance, bad luck or coincidence).
- Belief that humans have ability to direct supernatural power.
- Magic explains why things happen.

An Anthropological Theory of Magic



- Sir James George Frazer
 - 1854-1941
 - The Golden Bough, 1922
- Sympathetic Magic
 - "...assumes that things act on each other at a distance through a secret sympathy, the impulse being transmitted from one to the other by means of what we may conceive as a kind of invisible ether..."

Principles of Magic



Homeopathic Magic/Law of Similarity

- Like produces like, or that an effect resembles its cause
- Examples:
 - Ancient Hindu
 - To destroy or eradicate jaundice, eliminate everything that is yellow
 - Destroy an enemy by destroying an image of him/her

Contagious Magic/Law Of Contact

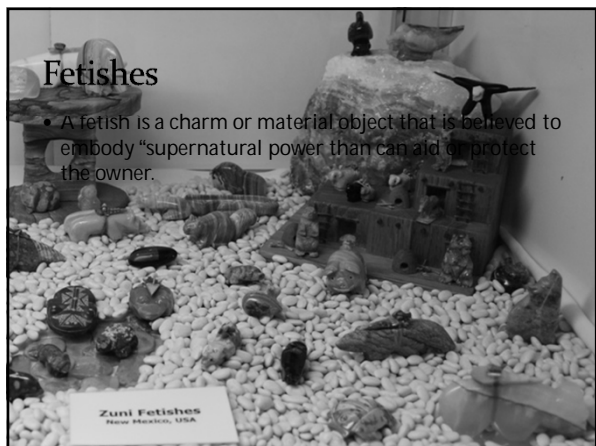
- Parts "severed" from a person (nail or hair clippings, clothes, footprints) if in the hands of the wrong person will allow magic to be worked on the person through the body parts.
- Example:
 - Worldwide superstition that by injuring footprints you injure the feet that made them.

Taboo

- Strong social prohibition (or ban) relating to any area of human activity or social custom declared as sacred or forbidden
 - breaking of the taboo is usually considered objectionable or abhorrent by society
- Breaking a taboo can unleash misfortune and negative consequences.

Taboos As Sympathetic Magic

- Law of similarity (examples):
 - Eskimo/Inuit boys forbidden to play cat's cradle
 - his fingers may get entangled in a harpoon line
 - In parts of Ancient Italy, women forbidden to spin yarn on the highroads or to carry spindles
 - could create wind that will damage crops



Religion, Science and Magic

- What do they have in common?
 - Attempts by humans to classify their world, to break beliefs, behaviors and things into categories:
 - Examples
 - good v. evil
 - sacred v. profane
 - plant v. animal
 - All explain causation, what causes what, and the relationship between things.
 - All assign meanings.
 - Examples
 - Which God is angered
 - Which behavior to correct
 - Demonstrate processes of the natural world.

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