Timmer, Jaap (Macquarie University) – Religion and Ontology: Different Ways of Knowing?

Religion and Ontology: Different Ways of Knowing?
Dr. Jaap Timmer, Department of Anthropology
First Semester, 2015
Tuesdays, 11am – 1.00pm, W6A 708

The Anthropology of Religion has been burgeoning over the last 15 years and at the same time the word 'ontology' is increasingly used in conference panels and in titles of books and articles. In many ways religion and ontology are at the forefront of Anthropology but what do anthropologists mean by these categories? Classically, ontology is a major branch of philosophical study concerning the nature of being, becoming, existence, or reality, as well as the categories of being and their relations. The advent of ontology in anthropology is relatively new and as yet it does not come with a cohesive theoretical framework. At the same time, approaches to the study of what might be termed 'religion' also vary significantly, and the concept 'religion' itself is highly contested. Even when analysing many of the classic loci of the anthropology of religion – such as myth, ritual, and cosmology in small scale societies – many anthropologists avoid the term 'religion' altogether. Often writing instead in terms of 'ontology', they analyse diverse practices, especially the ways in which humans interact with and conceptualise non-humans as agents, as expressions of different modes and models of being and relatedness. This MRes unit provides an orientation to the different approaches and different analytical vocabularies used for varieties of ways of knowing within the emerging fields of 'religion' and 'ontology'.

PART 1 – The Anthropology of Religion
Week One, Tuesday 24 February
Introduction and Holy Hustling

- Werbner, Richard, 2011, 'Introduction' and 'Holy Hustling' in Holy

Hustlers, Schism, and Prophecy: Apostolic Reformation in Botswana, pp. 1-18 and 21- 42. Berkeley: University of California Press.

- Film: Holy Hustling

Week Two, Tuesday 3 March
Missionary Encounters with Pagan Souls

- Viveiros de Castro, Eduardo, 2011, The Inconstancy of the Indian Soul: The Encounter of Catholics and Cannibals in 16th Century Brazil. Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2011.

Week Three, Tuesday 10 March
Missionary Encounters with Modern Souls

- Tomlinson, Matt, 2014, 'The Holy Ghost is About to Fall', in Ritual Textuality: Pattern and Motion in Performance, pp. 22-47. Oxford Ritual Studies. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Week Four, Tuesday 17 March
The Anthropology of Religion

- Lambek, Michael, 2013, What Is "Religion" for Anthropology? And What Has Anthropology Brought to "Religion"? • Cannell, Fenella, 2006, 'The Anthropology of Christianity', in Fenella Cannell (ed.), The Anthropology of Christianity, pp. 1-50. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Week Five, 24 March
The Anthropology of Secularism

- Cannell, Fenella, 2010, The Anthropology of Secularism, Annual Review of Anthropology 39: 85-100

Week Six, 31 March Transcendence

- Robbins, Joel, 2012, Transcendence and the Anthropology of Christianity: Language, Change, and Individualism. Edward Westermarck Memorial Lecture, October 2011. Suomen Antropologi: Journal of the Finnish Anthropological Society 37(2): 5-23.

SEMESTER BREAK

Part 2 – The Anthropology of Ontology

Week Seven, 21 April
Science and Religion

- Latour, Bruno, 2010, 'On the Cult of the Factish Gods', in On the Modern Cult of the Factish Gods, pp. 1-66. Durham London: Duke University Press.
- Miller, Adam, 2013, 'Science and Religion', in Speculative Grace: Bruno Latour and Object-Oriented Theology, pp. 118-122. Perspectives in Continental Philosophy. New York: Fordham University Press.

Week Eight, 28 April
Ontology or Science of Religion?

- Michael W. Scott, 2013, What I'm reading: The anthropology of ontology (religious science?). Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute (N.S.) 19: 859-872.

Week Nine, 5 May
Beyond Nature and Culture – The Schemas of Practice

- Descola, Philippe, 2013, 'The Schemas of Practice' and 'Relations with the Self and Relations with Others', in Beyond Nature and Culture, pp. 91-111 and 112-125. Translated from the French Par-delà nature et culture (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2005) by Janet Lloyd. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

Week Ten, 12 May
Beyond Nature and Culture – Animism Restored and Totemism as an Ontology

- Descola, Philippe, 2013, 'Animism Restored' and 'Totemism as an Ontology', in Beyond Nature and Culture, pp. 129-143 and 144-171. Translated from the French Par-delà nature et culture (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2005) by Janet Lloyd. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

Week Eleven, 19 May
Spirit Worlds and Political Lives

- Pedersen, Morten Axel, 2011, 'Introduction' and 'Shamanic States', in: Not Quite Shamans: Spirit Worlds and Political Lives in Northern Mongolia, pp. 1-41 and 42-80. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Week Twelve, 26 May
The Politics of Ontology

- All papers presented at the roundtable discussion held at the 2013 annual meeting of the American Anthropological Society in Chicago. The purpose of the roundtable was to explore the theoretical positions and methodological projects pursued under the banner of ontology, focusing particularly on the political implications of the "turn," including its potential pitfalls. The papers are available at http://culanth.org/fieldsights/461-the-politics-of-ontology

Week Thirteen, 2 June
Evaluation