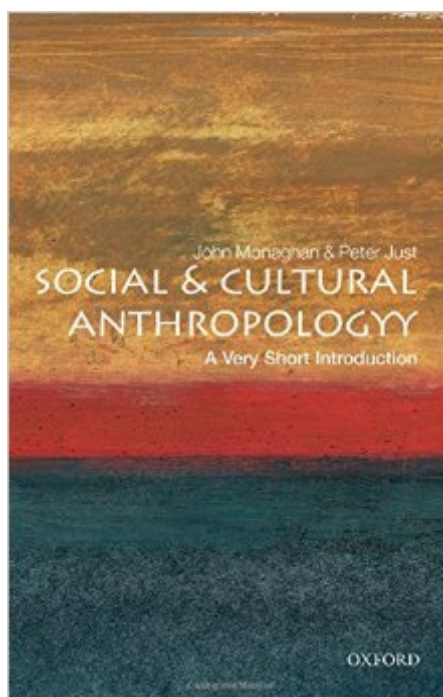


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Social And Cultural Anthropology: A Very Short Introduction



Synopsis

"If you want to know what anthropology is, look at what anthropologists do," write the authors of *Social and Cultural Anthropology: A Very Short Introduction*. This engaging overview of the field combines an accessible account of some of the discipline's guiding principles and methodology with abundant examples and illustrations of anthropologists at work. Peter Just and John Monaghan begin by discussing anthropology's most important contributions to modern thought: its investigation of culture as a distinctively human characteristic, its doctrine of cultural relativism, and its methodology of fieldwork and ethnography. Drawing on examples from their own fieldwork in Indonesia and Mesoamerica, they examine specific ways in which social and cultural anthropology have advanced our understanding of human society and culture. Including an assessment of anthropology's present position, and a look forward to its likely future, *Social and Cultural Anthropology* will make fascinating reading for anyone curious about this social science. About the Series: Combining authority with wit, accessibility, and style, *Very Short Introductions* offer an introduction to some of life's most interesting topics. Written by experts for the newcomer, they demonstrate the finest contemporary thinking about the central problems and issues in hundreds of key topics, from philosophy to Freud, quantum theory to Islam.

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Customer Reviews

This is a great little book to get a first impression of anthropology. The two authors present different historical developments and schools of thought. I had not know anything about this academic field before, but this book made me want to read more. Especially helpful with that were the examples

that pertained to the authors' own fieldwork in Mexico and Indonesia. Reading about bee larvae and onion soup just makes the ideas presented more "real".

This is the first Anthropology introduction I have read that doesn't get bogged down in postmodern academic speak. It was very clear and interesting, with good examples. This was the first VSI I read and it made me fall in love with the series.

I wanted my 100th review to be for something I could wholeheartedly recommend, and this is it. The authors manage, within severe space restrictions, to convey the essential features of their discipline, an outline of its history and development, and an indication of the philosophical and moral issues that it raises. Monaghan's work with the Mixtec of Central America and Just's work with the Dou Donggo of Indonesia are used as sources for the anecdotal details that are used throughout the book to illustrate aspects of anthropology. This is very much a description of anthropology as a practical endeavor, a hands-on discipline whose theories are firmly grounded in the everyday lives of human beings. Broader theoretical contexts, such as are found in Marxism or Structuralism, are touched on but no more. Those are the things you go on to read about after your appetite has been whetted by an excellent introduction such as this.

After disheartening forays into text books and frustration at readers that are either too thematic or otherwise not quite right for a quick orientation in the discipline, I decided to check this out. This is about as perfect a scene-setter as I could ask for for either an intro course or any course that is likely to attract students who do not have an anthropological background. It's pocket-sized, it's affordable, it's readable, and it's SMART. It covers theoretical debates in a straight-forward and understandable way that shows why anyone should care about evolution vs. diffusion (to name one example). This little book does about as good a job as any at showing how (and why) anthropologists and others use the word "post-modernity" (pg 69). The field examples are well chosen and engaging. The chapters are of a length and written in a style students are likely to read. Even better, the authors give enough tantalizing detail that I suspect it will inspire students to read MORE.

As stated by both authors, this book is very short, so it serves to give the reader only a glimpse of what anthropologists do. They spend excruciatingly long time with the populations they want to study ("exotic societies", urban settings - like big corporations), be part of them, and try to observe

in a way as objective as possible. Such prolonged observations are necessary to provide key insights into the working and psyche of the communities being studied. One chapter (Ch.3) is devoted on "culture". Various ways to define "culture" are propounded. By looking into various different cultures, it can be concluded that "each person is simultaneously like some other people, like all other people, and like no other person" (p.40). In the same chapter, the authors try to explain the concept of "Cultural Relativism". Unfortunately, they use a most objectionable example of female circumcision to illustrate their point (p. 51-52), which is erroneous particularly when we now know is a practice that, quite obviously, produces immense psychological trauma. The chapter (Ch.4) on marriage as the way societies regulate sex is informative and consistent with evolutionary psychology. The authors' interpretation of Genesis 38:8-10 is simultaneously amusing and insightful and particularly apt. Ch.5 is devoted on group identity (including non-kin groups, "ethnicity", and "race") and it provides food for thought to those who do not believe in "group selection" at all. The last three chapters are on economy (which includes the authors' short criticism on globalization), religion, and the concept of self-hood. How convincing these chapters are readers can decide themselves. In summary, a short interesting book, to be read with a tiny pinch of salt.

I purchased this to see if it would work as an introduction to anthropology for under graduate students. It might work for higher levels, but it isn't written in a way that is easily understood for those with no grounding in the discipline.

I am very familiar with the study of medicine but I would argue that the topic, in this book, is not usually a part of the teachings of especially, Biomedicine. It should thus be a requirement in the related curriculum as I am of the opinion that the application of the inherent science is, would be, beneficial to recipients of the care. The facts of the various types of differences in people are made very clear and obvious in the subject book. The enumerated differences that are addressed in the book are so intriguing and seemingly so a propos. It should behoove all specialists to concentrate on these principles. The book is rare and special. It informs people in our society of matters of large importance when it comes to the delivery of care, in fact, most important matters which are not commonly known. It therefore makes the reading of this book a must. The readings are educational, and it is most important to acquire the respective knowledge, a requirement which this book magnificently contains and offers. To be sure, I learnt a lot from it.

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