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## Theory and debates in anthropology

Habermas argued that ultimately, explanations in social science rely on “the force of the unforced argument.” In other words, while it may be possible to discount certain explanations in the social sciences, it is ultimately not possible to conclusively prove a specific argument. The best one can do is marshal evidence to support a particular understanding or model.

With this in mind, we will examine several key issues in anthropological theory through the lens of the Captain Cook controversy. In seeking to how the question of whether or not Hawaiians thought Captain Cook was their god Lono, has been approached and understood by anthropologists, we will look at how anthropological explanations are constructed. We will also examine the relationship of theory to explanation and data. How are general models and preconceptions translated into ethnography? How is it possible that the same event can be interpreted in such different ways? What can this teach us more generally about the nature of anthropological knowledge? By what means and authority do anthropologists speak for the people they study? Whose voice is listened to, and why?

This debate will serve as a starting point to explore other issues as well. We will discuss the relationship of anthropological to other forms of writing, and anthropological constructions of Self and Other. We will also look at anthropological complicity in the colonial project and its aftermath.

Although the core of this course will focus on the Captain Cook debate, we will also draw upon other debates and controversies in the history of anthropology to further illuminate these and other issues. These include the publication of Malinowski’s diaries, Turnbull’s portrayal of the Mountain Ik, the Mead/Freeman controversy and the recent Chagnon / Neel Yanomami controversy. Each of these will help us further understand the issues we are interested in, as well other issues in anthropology, such as anthropological responsibilities to the people we work with.

## Suggested readings

The following list is not intended to be exhaustive, and is subject to revision. It is illustrative of the range of sources that this course will draw upon.

American Anthropological Association

- 2002 "Working papers of the AAA El Dorado task force,"  
<http://www.aaanet.org/edtf/index.htm>

Barth, Fredrik and Colin Turnbull

- 1974 "On responsibility and humanity: calling a colleague to account," *Current Anthropology*. 15(1):99-103.

Borofsky, Robert

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Brady, Ivan

- 1983 "Speaking in the name of the real: Freeman and Mead on Samoa," *American Anthropologist*. 85:908-947.

Caton, Hiram

- 1990 *The Samoa reader: anthropologists take stock*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.

Fabian, Johannes

- 1983 *Time and the Other: how anthropology makes its object*. New York: Columbia University Press.  
1999 "Remembering the Other: knowledge and recognition in the exploration of Central Africa," *Critical Inquiry*. 26(1):49-69.

Freeman, Derek

- 1983 *Margaret Mead and Samoa: the making and unmaking of an anthropological myth*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Marcus, George and Michael Fischer, eds.

- 1986 *Anthropology as cultural critique*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Mead, Margaret

- 1928 *Coming of Age in Samoa*. New York: Morrow Quill Paperbacks.

Obeyesekere, Gananath

- 1992 *The apotheosis of Captain Cook: European mythmaking in the Pacific*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.  
1993 "Anthropology and the Cook myth: a response to critics," *Social analysis*. 34:70-85.

Pratt, Mary Louise

1986 "Fieldwork in common places," in *Writing culture: the poetics and politics of ethnography*. James Clifford and George Marcus, eds. pp. 27-50. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Sahlins, Marshall

1985 *Islands of history*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

1995 *How "natives" think: about Captain Cook, for example*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Said, Edward

1978 *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books.

Sanjek, Roger

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Turnbull, Colin

1987 *The mountain people*. New York: Touchstone Books.

Wilson, Peter, et al.

1975 "More thoughts on the Ik and anthropology," *Current Anthropology*. 16(3):343-358.