

Chapter Themes	Presents an anthropological perspective on religion, including debates over the definition of religion, the social functions of religion, the diversity of religious non-human entities and human specialists, and religious behavior such as ritual, myth, and prayer
Chapter Learning Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Understand what it means to study religion anthropologically, and why this is a difficult task• Realize why familiar Western/Christian terms and concepts cannot be unproblematically applied to other religions• Know a variety of anthropological definitions of religion, and why definitions matter• Be able to explain the modular or composite approach to religion• Appreciate how religion represents an extension of society to include non-human agents as well• Know the major social functions of religion• Be able to name and describe the major categories of non-human and super-human religious agents and the “types” of religions they constitute• Understand the different kinds of human religious specialists and what sorts of tasks they perform• Comprehend the role of symbols in religion, and how religion is often not symbolic for its members• Be able to discuss ritual as a specialized form of social interaction• Know the types of ritual and Turner’s notion of the ritual process

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Understand Malinowski’s view of myth as a social charter• Appreciate the performance qualities that make different styles of religious language unique and powerful
Chapter Highlights	<p>Religion is another case of a cultural ontology—what kinds of beings or entities or agents exist, including non-human and super-human ones</p> <p>Studying religion anthropologically means maintaining cultural relativism, which is difficult because, unlike other aspects of culture, members ordinarily regard their religion as “true”</p> <p>Part of a relativistic approach to religion is using appropriate terms and concepts; it cannot be assumed that all religions use the same terms and concepts</p> <p>There are many social definitions of religion, emphasizing different aspects of religion (myth, ritual, organization, beings, etc.)</p> <p>An emerging approach to religion sees it as a composite of various building blocks or modules—behavioral and psychological--each of which has its non-religious counterpart</p> <p>Anthropologically, religion is essentially the extension of social relationships beyond humans to include (at least some) non-humans, seen as super-humans</p>

Anthropology is most interested in the social construction and function of religion, which can be condensed to three: explanation, control, and legitimation

A key component of religions is the entities or agents in the religion; these include beings (humans, dead ancestors, spirits in natural beings/objects/phenomena, and gods) and forces

Human religious specialists possess various kinds of unique knowledge and power in the religious realm

Religions often function through symbols that store meaning and power, but for members of a religion, symbols are often literal and real expressions or instantiations of religious facts or forces

Religious ritual is formalized behavior in regard to non-human/super-human agents

Religious ritual is a special case of ritual in general, which operates through an “interaction code” that communicates and seeks a response

There are diverse kinds of rituals, depending on their characteristics and goals

Victor Turner identified a ritual process that achieves changes in the status

	<p>of the participants or subjects of ritual</p> <p>Religious myths are narratives of the actions of non-human/super-human agents; they often contain origin stories, but Malinowski argued that their function is less to explain the past than to guide the present</p> <p>There are other forms of religious language besides myth, including prayers, spells, chants, songs, and even special ritual languages</p> <p>At least as important as the contents of religious language and behavior is the performance quality of these phenomena, including who performs, when and where it is performed, who may observe the performance, and the special elements of the performance (e.g. in language, rhythm, rhyme, repetition, formulaic items, sound effects, etc.)</p>
<p>Chapter Key Terms</p>	<p>Ancestor spirit, Animatism, Animism, Contagious magic, Deism, Diviner, Ghost, Liminality, Monotheism, Myth, Oracle, Pantheism, Polytheism, Prayer, Priest, Prophet, Rite of intensification, Rite of passage, Ritual, Sacrifice, Shaman, Sorcerer, Soul, Sympathetic magic, Theism, Totemism, Witch</p>