The Prehistory of Religion

Archaeology 226

Section: D100

Term: 2001 Fall

Instructor: Dr Brian Hayden
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Afternoon course
Burnaby campus

Discussion Topics: Course description:

Religion and psychic phenomena have always been important in human cultures in terms of oral history, in terms of ecstatic experiences, and even in terms of major architectural achievements or social institutions. They constitute important forces in the emergence of early states, yet their ultimate validity is widely questioned in contemporary Industrial Society. Why are religion and the emphasis on the supernatural so prevalent among all human societies? Can they be viewed as adaptive? And if so, is religion still adaptive for humans? When did religion emerge and how did it change? These are the basic questions that this course will deal with.

A comparative cultural approach will be used. The inquiry will begin in the Paleolithic and trace developmental stages through the Neolithic, early civilizations, and into the present. Religions will be treated in a comparative fashion. No specific religion will be singled out as being more valid than any others. The emphasis will be on tribal and traditional religions, thus comparatively recent religions such as Christianity will only be touched on briefly.

Grading: Grades for the course will be assigned on the basis of a mid-term exam (40%), a term paper (40%), and exercises (20%).

Required Texts: Eliade, Mircea. 1959. The sacred and the profane: The nature of religion. Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich: New York.

Recommended Texts: none

Materials/Supplies: none

Prerequisite/Corequisite: Any lower division archaeology or anthropology course.

Notes: Deferred grades will be given only on the basis of authenticated medical disability.

This course may be applied toward the Certificate in Liberal Arts (Set 6).

This outline is derived from a course outline repository database that was maintained by SFU Student Services and the University’s IT Services Department. The database was retired in 2014 and the data migrated to SFU Archives in 2015.