



Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays

Bronislaw Malinowski

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Three famous Malinowski essays! Malinowski, one of the all-time great anthropologists of the world, had a talent for bringing together in single comprehension the warm reality of human living with the cool abstractions of science. His pages have become an almost indispensable link between the knowing of exotic and remote people with theoretical knowledge about humankind. An important collection of three of his most famous essays, *Magic, Science and Religion* offers readers a set of concepts about religion, magic, science, rite and myth in the course of forming vivid impressions and understandings of the Trobrianders of New Guinea.

Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays Details

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Author : Bronisław Malinowski

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From Reader Review Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays for online ebook

B says

The book alternates between grand theory and specific generalizations about the Kiriwinians. Soem of the specific stuff is very interesting. Some of it is pretty boring.

The larger theory is not particularly supported, contrary to the assertions in the introduction.

The differences asserted between our culture and the Kirwinians' culture are very interesting. The minus points are because some of it was what caused me to take so long reading it. But I don't know what it was.

Gerhard Venter says

Fascinating stuff!

khavez says

No soy antropolog y por lo tanto mi percepcion del libro no es tan profunda como debiera.Sin embargo es un muy libro, que analiza una parte importante del ser humano, esa parte que parece ser la mas irracional de nuestra sociedad, en lo particular la discusion sobre la utilidad del mito de la religion, fue la parte que mas me gusto, sera por que soy pragmatico

Greg says

This book is really 3 papers delivered by Malinowski on the subject of religion. It is a must-read for any mythologist, mythographer, religious studies major. He has a very engaging style of writing. A very much "wind in the palms" style of ethnography that brings the exotic to life.

W.C. says

I am loving on this book. It describes the way magic in primitive cultures turns into religious ritual as they progress, and gives lots of real-wrold examples of cultures undergoing this transition, and the way it changes their understanding of the world. I would have thought that an organic, myth-rich magical tradition would be hampered by its evolution to abstract ritual, but in actuality most primitive magic was (and is) very perfunctory, even boring. In many cultures it seems the witch doctor is like the modern accountant; he knows what he's doing and does it well, but almost nobody envies him the scope of his work. So cultures go from boring to boring; nothing lost, nothing gained.

Esra says

Isla McKetta says

The initial thoughts about science and religion among native peoples were interesting, but the myths themselves were unembellished enough to be uninteresting and the field observations made me feel like I was watching an ant farm of aliens rather than humans. Oddly, the same effect worked for me in *The War of the Worlds*, but in nonfiction I want more consideration of the humanity that binds rather than the oddity of otherness.

For a look at how Malinowski compares with Martha Gellhorn and Anderson Cooper, check out my full-length book review.

Emily Eck says

If you are an anthropologist u have to read this stuff. It's part if where we came from and how we got to where we are in the field today. But it definitely isn't "light" reading. No paranormal activity or raging sex scenes. But hey, we gotta have at least one foot in reality. Or would Malinowski say otherwise? HmMMMMMM.

Mia says

I picked up *Magic, Science and Religion* as a painless way to get in touch with Malinowski's writing style. In fact it is quite interesting and readable, therefore I shall proceed to longer writings as soon as possible. In this short essay, Malinowski draws similarities and differences between the three, arguing that magic in its specificity and seriousness can be very much like science, with precise rules and "professionals". Religion, on the other hand, is done collectively, each individual takes place no matter how initiated he is.

Donna Tallent says

I first picked this book up for school many years ago and never got around to reading it. While I'm not a big fan of Bronislaw's writing style, as some of it seems a bit naive, I can appreciate everything he wrote about in the book. The essays on *Magic, Science, and Religion* were thought provoking and interesting how he blures the lines of each.

Maria says

20130118 For Social Anthropology 3400 (core requirement), Winter Q 2013.

I am not enjoying this ethnography at all. Not only is it hopelessly antiquated, factually incorrect, and infuriating in its condescending language (members of hunter/gatherer cultures are described as "savages" and "primitives"), but it's also as slow as molasses. Plus, I resent having to read anything that takes me away from studying for my two osteology classes right now. Hrmph.

20130122 Never before have I so deliberately skimmed a book for the bare minimum of comprehension needed in order to pass a college course. I barely even felt guilty about it.

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<http://dar.bibalex.org/webpages/mainp...>

C?r???lu says

A rather disappointing collection. Malinowski was a great ethnographer, but didn't excel at theorizing. I enjoyed only the Baloma essay which deals with the Trobrianders' beliefs about the afterlife and the spirits of the dead. It's rich in detail and smart in analysis. It's truly a piece of classical, old-school anthropology.

The second essay worth reading is the one about the anthropological perspective on war. While its beginning may be boring, the second part is suprisingly interesting, with Malinowski advancing some curious notions. For example, this is how he criticizes totalitarianism:

"The German nation, once leading in science and in art, rich in a highly differentiated regional folklore, peasant life and economic diversity, has now been changed into a large-scale barracks. [...] The progressive extinction of this diversity is the price which Germany, as a nation, had to pay in order to make Germany, the state, so powerful. Nationalism in this modern totalitarian form is pernicious because it has become the greatest enemy of the nation itself".

And there are several other cool ideas in this essay. So read Baloma and the essay on war, ignore the others and you'll lose nothing.

Anna says

RTC

James F says

This is the second book in my reading of Malinowski. In *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* he was entirely descriptive, deliberately eschewing any speculation on origins; in the essays here he is more theoretical.

The title essay, "Magic, Science and Religion" (1925) attempts first to demarcate the domain of magic from science (by which he means loosely the knowledge and skills derived from observation and experience) and

from religion. It has nothing about the origins of science, perhaps because he considers that straightforward and obvious; with regard to the origins of religion, his account is more interesting for his negative observations on previous theories than for his positive ideas. The focus of the article, however, is on magic. His description of magical practices is largely an abridged version of what he says in the two chapters devoted to that subject, and the other observations throughout the book, in *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, with some comparisons to other cultures from the ethnographic literature. His theory of the origins of magic is that it begins with spontaneous emotional responses to stressful situations, the person who makes gestures of stabbing and strangling when thinking of someone he is angry about, for example, which then become standardized and are passed down as traditional magic. He also argues that magic is applied mainly where there is an element of chance or danger, where "science" does not suffice to guarantee success; for instance in the Trobriand Islands, there is a complex magic for canoe building and sailing, but none for the equally complicated but more routine and non-dangerous process of building houses, magic for growing yams but none for coconut palms, for shark fishing but not for ordinary fishing, and so forth. He discusses the role of mythology in validating magic, and sees magic on the other hand as the connection or "bridge" between the age in which the mythology is set and the present. The "bibliographic" essay at the end would make a good reading list for the history of anthropology from Tylor to the 1920s.

The second essay, "Myth in Primitive Psychology" [1926] argues that mythology is concerned not with "explaining" phenomena, whether natural or social, but with justifying or validating them. He points out that many myths tend to be justifications of social relationships, especially those which involve inequalities of wealth, privilege, or power; but in particular, he sees myths as justifying magical practices.

The third essay, "Baloma: The Spirits of the Dead in the Trobriand Islands" [1916], written a decade earlier than the other two, is a description of beliefs about the spirits of the dead (baloma) and the afterlife in the Trobriand Islands, where he did most of his fieldwork. Like the ancient Egyptians, the Trobrianders divide the spirit of the dead person into more than one kind of being. They assign a particular island, Tuma (a real island with three villages) as the abode of the spirits of the dead. The spirits of the dead visit the living, particularly at various festivals, as frequently in many cultures. Here again, much of the interest is negative, in refuting earlier generalizations. The article also contains much discussion of magic in general.

As mentioned, all of Malinowski's fieldwork was in Melanesia, especially the Trobriand Islands, and this is both his strength and his weakness; his strength, in the iconoclastic passages, because the culture of the Trobrianders does not fit with many of the previous beliefs and generalizations of earlier writers, the weakness, in the positive passages, because his own generalizations are based on one particular set of data which does not necessarily correlate with other cultures.
