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Symbol and Theory: A Philosophical Study of Theories of Religion in Social Anthropology

John Skorupski

Cambridge University Press (1983)



Authors



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Abstract

Anthropologists have always been concerned with the difference between traditional and scientific modes of thought and with the relationships between magic, religion and science. John Skorupski distinguishes two broadly opposed approaches to these problems: the 'intellectualist' regards primitive systems of thought and actions as cosmologies, comparable to scientific theory, which emerge and persist as attempts to control the natural world; the 'symbolist' regards them as essentially representative or expressive of the pattern of social relations in the culture in which they exist. Dr Skorupski considers in particular the notions of ritual, ceremony and symbol. He shows how their understanding involves and suggests more general philosophical problems of relativism, interpretation, translation, and the connections between belief and action. These are difficult and important problems and require an unusual combination of imagination and interdisciplinary exercise. This book is intended especially for philosophers, social

anthropologists, social theorists and students of comparative religion.

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