

Cambridge University Press  
978-0-521-80355-7 - Anthropology and the Cognitive Challenge  
Maurice Bloch  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

#### ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE COGNITIVE CHALLENGE

In this provocative new study, one of the world's most distinguished anthropologists proposes that an understanding of cognitive science enriches, rather than threatens, the work of social scientists. Maurice Bloch argues for a naturalist approach to social and cultural anthropology, introducing developments in cognitive sciences such as psychology and neurology and exploring the relevance of these developments for central anthropological concerns: the person or the self, cosmology, kinship, memory and globalisation. Opening with an exploration of the history of anthropology, Bloch shows why and how naturalist approaches were abandoned and argues that these once valid reasons are no longer relevant. Bloch then shows how such subjects as the self, memory and the conceptualisation of time benefit from being simultaneously approached with the tools of social and cognitive science. *Anthropology and the Cognitive Challenge* will stimulate fresh debate among scholars and students across a wide range of disciplines.

MAURICE BLOCH, Emeritus Professor of Anthropology at the London School of Economics, is one of the world's leading anthropologists. He has held a number of academic positions at universities around the world and is currently an associate member of the Institut Jean Nicod of the École Normale Supérieure in Paris engaged in an interdisciplinary research project on comparative epistemics funded by the European Science Foundation. He has published widely on his research interests and his work has been translated into twelve languages. He was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1990.

Cambridge University Press  
978-0-521-80355-7 - Anthropology and the Cognitive Challenge  
Maurice Bloch  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

#### **NEW DEPARTURES IN ANTHROPOLOGY**

New Departures in Anthropology is a book series that focuses on emerging themes in social and cultural anthropology. With original perspectives and syntheses, authors introduce new areas of inquiry in anthropology, explore developments that cross disciplinary boundaries, and weigh in on current debates. Every book illustrates theoretical issues with ethnographic material drawn from current research or classic studies, as well as from literature, memoirs and other genres of reportage. The aim of the series is to produce books that are accessible enough to be used by college students and instructors, but will also stimulate, provoke and inform anthropologists at all stages of their careers. Written clearly and concisely, books in the series are designed equally for advanced students and a broader range of readers, inside and outside academic anthropology, who want to be brought up to date on the most exciting developments in the discipline.

#### **Series Editorial Board**

Jonathan Spencer, University of Edinburgh  
Michael Lambek, University of Toronto and London School of Economics

Cambridge University Press  
978-0-521-80355-7 - Anthropology and the Cognitive Challenge  
Maurice Bloch  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

# Anthropology and the Cognitive Challenge



MAURICE BLOCH

*London School of Economics and Political Science*



CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press  
978-0-521-80355-7 - Anthropology and the Cognitive Challenge  
Maurice Bloch  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town,  
Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi, Mexico City

Cambridge University Press  
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)  
Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9780521803557](http://www.cambridge.org/9780521803557)

© Maurice Bloch 2012

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2012

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data*

Bloch, Maurice.

Anthropology and the cognitive challenge / Maurice Bloch.

pages cm. – (New departures in anthropology)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-521-80355-7 (hardback) – ISBN 978-0-521-00615-6 (paperback)

1. Cognition and culture. 2. Anthropology. 3. Ethnopsychology. I. Title.

GN502.B538 2012

153 – dc23 2012008279

ISBN 978-0-521-80355-7 hardback

ISBN 978-0-521-00615-6 paperback

---

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

---

Cambridge University Press  
978-0-521-80355-7 - Anthropology and the Cognitive Challenge  
Maurice Bloch  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

*This book is dedicated to the memory of the biologist John S. Kennedy, FRS,  
my step-father, with whom I began to discuss many of these issues.*

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-80355-7 - Anthropology and the Cognitive Challenge

Maurice Bloch

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

## Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>page viii</i>
1 Why anthropologists cannot avoid cognitive issues and what they gain from these	1
2 Innateness and social scientists' fears	14
3 How anthropology abandoned a naturalist epistemology: a cognitive perspective on the history of anthropology	24
4 The nature/culture wars	44
5 Time and the anthropologists	79
6 Reconciling social science and cognitive science notions of the 'self'	117
7 What goes without saying	143
8 Memory	186
<i>References</i>	218
<i>Index</i>	230

## Acknowledgements

Two chapters of this book have already appeared in a somewhat similar form. Chapter 6 formed the basis of my valedictory lecture at the Free University of Amsterdam and was published in 2009 as ‘Reconciling Cultural and Cognitive Approaches to the Self and the Person’, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. A modified version was published as ‘The blob’ in the first number of the online journal *Anthropology of the Twentieth Century*. Chapter 5 appeared in a very different form in Portuguese as: ‘Que especie de ser e que os anthropologos assumen estudar. O exemplo da compreensao do tempo’, in Rui Fausto e Rita Marmoto (eds.), *Tempo E Sciencia* (Lisbon: Gradiva).

This book has long been in the making and, as a result, early versions of many of the chapters have been presented to seminars or in the form of lectures in England at the London School of Economics, in the Netherlands at the Free University of Amsterdam and in France at the Collège de France where the bulk of an early version of the book formed the basis of my teaching. The summer school on the self organised for the Institut Jean Nicod of the École Normale Supérieure by Frederique de Vignemont and Elizabeth Pacherie enabled me to develop the ideas which underlie Chapter 6. In the discussions which have followed these various lectures and seminars I have received much help which I cannot fully acknowledge but I wish to express my thanks to these institutions which enabled me to develop my ideas.



## Acknowledgements

Many individuals have commented on earlier drafts of part or all of this book and I would like to particularly thank Rita Astuti, Jennifer Cole, Eva Keller, Gerard Lenclud, Michael Lambek, Christine Langlois, Olivier Morin, Dan Sperber, Charles Stafford, Galen Strawson, Marilyn Strathern and Anne Christine Taylor for their help and criticism.

Special thanks go to the editors of this series, Michael Lambek and Jonathan Spencer, who have heroically borne with me during the long gestation of the text in spite of the fact that I know they disagree with much of what is said here. They made useful and important suggestions for the final version.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-80355-7 - Anthropology and the Cognitive Challenge

Maurice Bloch

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---