To make sure a person in his village doesn't get sick a Yanomamo shaman will spend most of the morning and evening chanting, dancing and taking the hallucinogen, ebene.

Yet, people in his village still get sick and die.

Why do the Yanomamo still follow the shaman?

More over, why do men put themselves through the training to become a shaman? And then daily take drugs and generally exhaust themselves trying keeping the village healthy?

Two basic questions to be asked from the previous example:

1 Why do people believe in the supernatural, in general?
2 Why do people still believe their rituals when they don't work?
Religion and Human Society: Theories

- One way that anthropologists have attempted to answer these questions is to ask the very basic question of "why religion"?
- Religion can’t be a collection of useless tales and fantasies
- Rather religion must have some adaptive value for the human species

Religion and Human Society: Theories

- There are three basic classes of explanation for religion:
  - Intellectual
  - Psychological
  - Social

Religion and Human Society: Theories - Intellectual Functions

- The intellectual theory assumes that all humans need explanations for the world around them
- Religion provides a frame work for answering the why questions that people ask about the world
Religion and Human Society: Theories- Intellectual Functions

- Religion provides an answer for the inexplicable or incomprehensible
- Religion, then, comes evolves with the increase intellect (and curiosity) of Homo sapiens
- Some scholars believe that religions will disappear with advances in science

Religion and Human Society: Theories- Intellectual Functions

- Problems with the intellectual theory:
- Religion appears to have other functions than providing explanations for events and phenomena
- Many scientists are religious
- Religion seems to augment science in some areas

Religion and Human Society: Theories- Psychological

- This theory's basic assumption is that people need a way to handle stress
- Stress is brought about in times of:
  - trouble (war, natural disaster, thunder storms, etc)
  - sadness (death, or misfortune)
  - injustices (bad luck, theft, etc)
Religion and Human Society: Theories- Psychological

- Religion provides an explanation for why these bad things have occurred
- The explanation then acts to reduce stress
- By having a reason for why something bad occurred people can also act in a proactive manner to prevent bad things happening

- Malinowski believed that religion (including magic) serves to give people confidence when the chances of success are low
- Things that people have superstitious beliefs about:
  - Fishing
  - Batting
  - Volcanoes

Religion and Human Society: Theories- Psychological

- Religion also provides a way to understand death
- The reasoning is that humans are aware of their own mortality and beliefs about an afterlife reduces anxiety about one's mortality
Religion and Human Society: Theories - Psychological

- Problems with the theory:
  - Not all cultures believe that the afterlife is an enjoyable experience
  - Some societies see the afterlife as something to be feared as your existence is as a ghost

- Other problems:
  - Though religion can operate to reduce stress it can also serve to increase stress:
    - The Yanomamo spend a good portion of the day performing preventative rituals
    - Some people worry if they are going to heaven or hell in the afterlife

Religion and Human Society: Theories - Social

- The social theory states that religion helps societies maintain harmonious social relationships between individuals and groups
- Religion encourages people to respect the rights of others and act peacefully towards those who share your beliefs
Religion and Human Society: Theories- Social

- The ten commandments can be seen as an outline for moral acts and how people ought to act towards one another
- Five of the commandments deal directly with social relations
- Other biblical passages deal with social regulation

Religion and Human Society: Theories- Social

- Emile Durkheim believed that the main function of religion was to create what he termed social solidarity
- Meaning that religion has the effect of bringing people together and enhancing a sense of unity and a general belief that their culture is the correct way to live

Religion and Human Society: Theories- Social

- When a group of people share a set of religious beliefs their society is more cohesive and functions better than those groups that don't share a common set of beliefs
Religion and Human Society:
Theories- Social

- Evidence to support Durkheim?
- Sosis conducted a survey of 18th century communes in the U.S.
- Religious communes did much better in terms of years survived and in retaining members than secular communes