

**Ethnology:** the comparative and analytical study of cultures; cultural anthropology. Anthropologists aim to describe and interpret aspects of the culture of various social groups--e.g., the hunter-gatherers of the Kalahari, rice villages of the Chinese Canton Delta, or a community of physicists at Livermore Laboratory. (See ETHNOGRAPHY for description of the fieldwork method.) Topics of particular interest include religious beliefs, linguistic practices, kinship arrangements, marriage patterns, farming technology, dietary practices, gender relations, and power relations. Cultural anthropology is generally conceived as an empirical science, and this raises several methodological and conceptual difficulties. First is the problem of the role of the observer. The injection of an alien observer into the local culture unavoidably disturbs the latter. Second, there is the problem of intelligibility across cultural systems (radical translation). One goal of ethnographic research is to arrive at an interpretation of a set of beliefs and values that are thought to be radically different from the researcher's own beliefs and values; but if this is so, then it is questionable whether they can be accurately translated into the researcher's conceptual scheme. Third, there is the problem of empirical testing of ethnographic interpretations. To what extent do empirical procedures constrain the construction of an interpretation of a given cultural milieu? Finally, there is the problem of generalizability. To what extent does fieldwork in one location permit anthropologists to generalize to a larger context--other villages in the region, the dispersed ethnic group represented by this village, or this village at other points in time?

*The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, edited by Robert Audi (Cambridge University Press, 1995)