



The School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography presents:

Mary Douglas Memorial Lecture

Wednesday 3rd June 2015 6pm

Mary Ogilvie Lecture Theatre, St Anne's College
56 Woodstock Road, Oxford OX2 6HS

The Societalization of Social Problems: Recent Social Crises and the Civil Sphere

Jeffrey C. Alexander

Lillian Chavenson Saden Professor of Sociology, Yale University

Drawing from cultural sociology, this lecture develops a theory of “societalization” to explain social reaction to three recent, globally significant upheavals – the financial crisis, church pedophilia, and media phone-hacking. While these problems were endemic for years and even decades, they had failed to generate broad crises: Reactions were confined inside institutional boundaries and handled by intra-institutional elites according to the cultural logics of their particular spheres. When intra-institutional strains become interpreted as challenges to civil discourse and interests, there is societalization. Inter-sphere boundaries become tense and there is widespread anguish about social justice and the future of democratic society. A war of the spheres ensues and, eventually, there is movement back to steady state. Societalization cannot prevent the future eruption of social strains. In a differentiated and plural society, tensions between spheres is endemic, and civil repair depends upon the possibilities generated by societalization.



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The annual lecture, in memory of Dame Mary Douglas (1921-2007), is sponsored by the School of Anthropology & Museum Ethnography at the University of Oxford, the Department of Anthropology at UCL, the Royal Anthropological Institute, and St Anne's College, Oxford.

For queries or to register to attend please contact:
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