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CLAUDE LÉVI-STRAUSS

The Elementary Structures of Kinship

(*Les Structures élémentaires de la Parenté*)

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Translated from the French
by
JAMES HARLE BELL
JOHN RICHARD von STURMER
and
RODNEY NEEDHAM
Editor

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CHAPTER XXIX

The Principles of Kinship

I

Thus, it is always a system of exchange that we find at the origin of rules of marriage, even of those of which the apparent singularity would seem to allow only a special and arbitrary interpretation. In the course of this work, we have seen the notion of exchange become complicated and diversified; it has constantly appeared to us in different forms. Sometimes exchange appears as direct (the case of marriage with the bilateral cousin), sometimes as indirect (and in this case it can comply with two formulas, one continuous, the other discontinuous, corresponding to two different rules of marriage with the unilateral cousin). Sometimes it functions within a total system (this is the theoretically common characteristic of bilateral marriage and of matrilateral marriage), and at others it instigates the formation of an unlimited number of special systems and short cycles, unconnected among themselves (and in this form it represents a permanent threat to moiety systems, and as an inevitable weakness attacks patrilateral systems). Sometimes exchange appears as a cash or short-term transaction (with the exchange of sisters and daughters, and avuncular marriage), and at other times more as a long-term transaction (as in the case where the prohibited degrees include first, and occasionally second, cousins). Sometimes the exchange is explicit and at other times it is implicit (as seen in the example of so-called marriage by purchase). Sometimes the exchange is closed (when marriage must satisfy a special rule of alliance between marriage classes or a special rule for the observance of preferential degrees), while sometimes it is open (when the rule of exogamy is merely a collection of negative stipulations, which, beyond the prohibited degrees, leaves a free choice). Sometimes it is secured by a sort of mortgage on reserved categories (classes or degrees); sometimes (as in the case of the simple prohibition of incest, as found in our society) it rests on a wider fiduciary guarantee, viz., the theoretical freedom to claim any woman of the group, in return for the renunciation of certain designated women in the family circle, a freedom ensured by the extension of a prohibition, similar to that affecting each man in particular, to all men in general. But no matter what form it takes, whether direct or

indirect, general or special, immediate or deferred, explicit or implicit, closed or open, concrete or symbolic, it is exchange, always exchange, that emerges as the fundamental and common basis of all modalities of the institution of marriage. If these modalities can be subsumed under the general term of exogamy (for, as we have seen in Part I, endogamy is not opposed to exogamy, but presupposes it), this is conditional upon the apperception, behind the superficially negative expression of the rule of exogamy, of the final principle which, through the prohibition of marriage within prohibited degrees, tends to ensure the total and continuous circulation of the group's most important assets, its wives and its daughters.

The functional value of exogamy, defined in its widest sense, has been specified and brought out in the preceding chapters. This value is in the first place negative. Exogamy provides the only means of maintaining the group as a group, of avoiding the indefinite fission and segmentation which the practice of consanguineous marriages would bring about. If these consanguineous marriages were resorted to persistently, or even over-frequently, they would not take long to 'fragment' the social group into a multitude of families, forming so many closed systems or sealed monads which no pre-established harmony could prevent from proliferating or from coming into conflict. The rule of exogamy, applied in its simplest forms, is not entirely sufficient to the task of warding off this mortal danger to the group. Such is the case with dual organization. With it there is no doubt that the risk of seeing a biological family become established as a closed system is definitely eliminated; the biological group can no longer stand apart, and the bond of alliance with another family ensures the dominance of the social over the biological, and of the cultural over the natural. But there immediately appears another risk, that of seeing two families, or rather two lineages, isolate themselves from the social continuum to form a bi-polar system, an indefinitely self-sufficient pair, closely united by a succession of intermarriages. The rule of exogamy, which determines the modalities for forming such pairs, gives them a definite social and cultural character, but this social character is no sooner given than it is disintegrated. This is the danger which is avoided by the more complex forms of exogamy, such as the principle of generalized exchange, or the subdivision of moieties into sections and subsections in which more and more numerous local groups constitute indefinitely more complex systems. It is thus the same with women as with the currency the name of which they often bear, and which, according to the admirable native saying, 'depicts the action of the needle for sewing roofs, which, weaving in and out, leads backwards and forwards the same liana, holding the straw together'.[1] Even when there are no such procedures, dual organization is not itself ineffective. We have seen how the intervention of preferred degrees of kinship within the moiety, e.g., the predilection for the real cross-cousin, and even for a certain type of real cross-cousin, as among

[1] Leenhardt, 1930, pp. 48, 54.

the Kariera, provides the means of palliating the risks of an over-automatic functioning of the classes. As opposed to endogamy and its tendency to set a limit to the group, and then to discriminate within the group, exogamy represents a continuous pull towards a greater cohesion, a more efficacious solidarity, and a more supple articulation.

This is because the value of exchange is not simply that of the goods exchanged. Exchange – and consequently the rule of exogamy which expresses it – has in itself a social value. It provides the means of binding men together, and of superimposing upon the natural links of kinship the henceforth artificial links – artificial in the sense that they are removed from chance encounters or the promiscuity of family life – of alliance governed by rule. In this connexion, marriage serves as model for that artificial and temporary 'conjugality' between young people of the same sex in some schools and on which Balzac makes the profound remark that it is never superimposed upon blood ties but replaces them: 'It is strange, but never in my time did I know brothers who were "Activists". If man lives only by his feelings, he thinks perhaps that he will make his life the poorer if he merges an affection of his own choosing in a natural tie.'[1]

On this level, certain theories of exogamy which were criticized at the beginning of this work find a new value and significance. If, as we have suggested, exogamy and the prohibition of incest have a permanent functional value, co-extensive with all social groups, surely all the widely differing interpretations which have been given for them must contain an atom of truth? Thus the theories of McLennan, Spencer and Lubbock have, at least, a symbolical meaning. It will be recalled that McLennan believed that exogamy had its origin in tribes practising female infanticide, and which were consequently obliged to seek wives for their sons from outside. Similarly, Spencer suggested that exogamy began among warrior tribes who carried off women from neighbouring groups. Lubbock proposed a primitive opposition between two forms of marriage, viz., an endogamous marriage in which the women were regarded as the communal property of the men of the group, and an exogamous marriage, which reckoned captured women as the private property of their captor, thus giving rise to modern individual marriage. The concrete detail may be disputed, but the fundamental idea is sound, viz., that exogamy has a value less negative than positive, that it asserts the social existence of other people, and that it prohibits endogamous marriage only in order to introduce, and to prescribe, marriage with a group other than the biological family, certainly not because a biological danger is attached to consanguineous marriage, but because exogamous marriage results in a social benefit.

Consequently, exogamy should be recognized as an important element – doubtless by far the most important element – in that solemn collection of

[1] 'The conjugal regard that united us as boys, and which we used to express by calling ourselves "Activists" . . .' Balzac, vol. X, 1937, pp. 366, 382.

manifestations which, continually or periodically, ensures the integration of partial units within the total group, and demands the collaboration of outside groups. Such are the banquets, feasts and ceremonies of various kinds which form the web of social life. But exogamy is not merely one manifestation among many others. The feasts and ceremonies are periodic, and for the most part have limited functions. The law of exogamy, by contrast, is omnipresent, acting permanently and continually; moreover, it applies to valuables – viz., women – valuables *par excellence* from both the biological and the social points of view, without which life is impossible, or, at best, is reduced to the worst forms of abjection. It is no exaggeration, then, to say that exogamy is the archetype of all other manifestations based upon reciprocity, and that it provides the fundamental and immutable rule ensuring the existence of the group as a group. For example, among the Maori, Best tells us:

> 'Female children of rank, as also male children of that status, were given in marriage to persons of important, powerful tribes, possibly of a quite unrelated people, as a means of procuring assistance from such tribes in time of war. In this connexion we can see the application of the following saying of older times: "*He taura taonga e motu, he taura tangata e kore e motu*" ("A gift connexion may be severed, but not so a human link"). Two peoples may meet in friendship and exchange gifts and yet quarrel and fight in later times, but intermarriage connects them in a permanent manner.'[1]

And, further on, he quotes another proverb: '*He hono tangata e kore e motu, kapa he taura waka, e motu*', 'A human joining is inseverable, but not so a canoe-painter, which can be severed.'[2] The philosophy contained in these remarks is the more significant because the Maori were by no means insensible to the advantages of marriage within the group. If both families quarrelled and insulted each other, they said, this would not be serious, but merely a family affair, and war would be avoided.[3]

II

The prohibition of incest is less a rule prohibiting marriage with the mother, sister or daughter, than a rule obliging the mother, sister or daughter to be given to others. It is the supreme rule of the gift, and it is clearly this aspect, too often unrecognized, which allows its nature to be understood. All the errors in interpreting the prohibition of incest arise from a tendency to see marriage as a discontinuous process which derives its own limits and possibilities from within itself in each individual case.

Thus it is that the reasons why marriage with the mother, daughter or sister can be prevented are sought in a quality intrinsic to these women.

[1] Best, 1929, p. 34. [2] ibid. p. 36. [3] ibid. 1924, vol. I, p. 447.

One is therefore drawn infallibly towards biological considerations, since it is only from a biological, certainly not a social, point of view that motherhood, sisterhood or daughterhood are properties of the individuals considered. However, from a social viewpoint, these terms cannot be regarded as defining isolated individuals, but relationships between these individuals and everyone else. Motherhood is not only a mother's relationship to her children, but her relationship to other members of the group, not as a mother, but as a sister, wife, cousin or simply a stranger as far as kinship is concerned. It is the same for all family relationships, which are defined not only by the individuals they involve, but also by all those they exclude. This is true to the extent that observers have often been struck by the impossibility for natives of conceiving a neutral relationship, or more exactly, no relationship. We have the feeling – which, moreover, is illusory – that the absence of definite kinship gives rise to such a state in our consciousness. But the supposition that this might be the case in primitive thought does not stand up to examination. Every family relationship defines a certain group of rights and duties, while the lack of family relationship does not define anything; it defines enmity:

> 'If you wish to live among the Nuer you must do so on their terms, which means that you must treat them as a kind of kinsman and they will then treat you as a kind of kinsman. Rights, privileges and obligations are determined by kinship. Either a man is a kinsman, actually or by fiction, or he is a person to whom you have no reciprocal obligations and whom you treat as a potential enemy.'[1]

The Australian aboriginal group is defined in exactly the same terms:

> 'When a stranger comes to a camp that he has never visited before, he does not enter the camp, but remains at some distance. A few of the older men, after a while, approach him, and the first thing they proceed to do is to find out who the stranger is. The commonest question that is put to him is "Who is your *maeli* (father's father)?" The discussion proceeds on genealogical lines until all parties are satisfied of the exact relation of the stranger to each of the natives present in the camp. When this point is reached, the stranger can be admitted to the camp, and the different men and women are pointed out to him and their relation to him defined . . . If I am a blackfellow and meet another blackfellow that other must be either my relative or my enemy. If he is my enemy I shall take the first opportunity of killing him, for fear he will kill me. This, before the white man came, was the aboriginal view of one's duty towards one's neighbour . . .'[2]

Through their striking parallelism, these two examples merely confirm a universal situation:

[1] Evans-Pritchard, 1940, p. 183.

[2] Radcliffe-Brown, 1913, p. 151.

'Throughout a considerable period, and in a large number of societies, men met in a curious frame of mind, with exaggerated fear and an equally exaggerated generosity which appear stupid in no one's eyes but our own. In all the societies which immediately preceded our own and which still surround us, and even in many usages of popular morality, there is no middle path. There is either complete trust or complete mistrust. One lays down one's arms, renounces magic, and gives everything away, from casual hospitality to one's daughter or one's property.'[1]

There is no barbarism or, properly speaking, even archaism in this attitude. It merely represents the systematization, pushed to the limit, of characteristics inherent in social relationships.

No relationship can be arbitrarily isolated from all other relationships. It is likewise impossible to remain on this or that side of the world of relationships. The social environment should not be conceived of as an empty framework within which beings and things can be linked, or simply juxtaposed. It is inseparable from the things which people it. Together they constitute a field of gravitation in which the weights and distances form a co-ordinated whole, and in which a change in any element produces a change in the total equilibrium of the system. We have given a partial illustration at least of this principle in our analysis of cross-cousin marriage. However, it can be seen how its field of application must be extended to all the rules of kinship, and above all, to that universal and fundamental rule, the prohibition of incest. Every kinship system (and no human society is without one) has a total character, and it is because of this that the mother, sister, and daughter are perpetually coupled, as it were, with elements of the system which, in relation to them, are neither son, nor brother, nor father, because the latter are themselves coupled with other women, or other classes of women, or feminine elements defined by a relationship of a different order. Because marriage is exchange, because marriage is the archetype of exchange, the analysis of exchange can help in the understanding of the solidarity which unites the gift and the counter-gift, and one marriage with other marriages.

It is true that Seligman disputes that the woman is the sole or predominant instrument of the alliance. She cites the institution of blood brotherhood, as expressed by the *henamo* relationship among the natives of New Guinea.[2] The establishment of blood-brotherhood does indeed create a bond of alliance between individuals, but by making them brothers it entails a prohibition on marriage with the sister. It is far from our mind to claim that the exchange or gift of women is the only way to establish an alliance in primitive societies. We have shown elsewhere how, among certain native groups of Brazil, the community could be expressed by the terms for 'brother-in-law' and 'brother'. The brother-in-law is ally, collaborator and friend; it is the term given to adult males belonging to the band with which an

[1] Mauss, 1925, p. 138. [2] B. Z. Seligman, 1935, pp. 75–93.

alliance has been contracted. In the same band, the potential brother-in-law, i.e., the cross-cousin, is the one with whom, as an adolescent, one indulges in homosexual activities which will always leave their mark in the mutually affectionate behaviour of the adults.[1] However, as well as the brother-in-law relationship, the Nambikwara also rely on the notion of brotherhood: 'Savage, you are no longer my brother!' is the cry uttered during a quarrel with a non-kinsman. Furthermore, objects found in a series, such as hut posts, the pipes of a Pan-pipe, etc., are said to be 'brothers', or are called 'others', in their respective relationships, a terminological detail which is worth comparing with Montaigne's observation that the Brazilian Indians whom he met at Rouen called men the 'halves' of one another, just as we say 'our fellow men'.[2] However, the whole difference between the two types of bond can also be seen, a sufficiently clear definition being that one of them expresses a mechanical solidarity (brother), while the other involves an organic solidarity (brother-in-law, or god-father). Brothers are closely related to one another, but they are so in terms of their similarity, as are the posts or the reeds of the Pan-pipe. By contrast, brothers-in-law are solidary because they complement each other and have a functional efficacy for one another, whether they play the rôle of the opposite sex in the erotic games of childhood, or whether their masculine alliance as adults is confirmed by each providing the other with what he does not have – a wife – through their simultaneous renunciation of what they both do have – a sister. The first form of solidarity adds nothing and unites nothing; it is based upon a cultural limit, satisfied by the reproduction of a type of connexion the model for which is provided by nature. The other brings about an integration of the group on a new plane.

Linton's observation on blood-brotherhood in the Marquesas helps to place the two institutions (blood-brotherhood and intermarriage) in their reciprocal perspectives. Blood-brothers are called *enoa*: 'When one was *enoa* with a man, one had equal rights to his property and stood in the same relation to his relatives as he did.'[3] However, it emerges very clearly from the context that the *enoa* system is merely an individual solution acting as a substitute, while the real and effective solution of the relations between the groups, i.e., the collective and organic solution of intermarriages, with the consequent fusion of the tribes, is made impossible by the international situation. Although vendettas may be in progress, the institution of *enoa*, a purely individual affair, is able to ensure a minimum of liaison and collaboration, even when marriage, which is a group affair, cannot be contracted.

Native theory confirms our conception even more directly. Mead's Arapesh informants had difficulty at first in answering her questions on possible infringements of the marriage prohibitions. However, when they eventually did express a comment the source of the misunderstanding was clearly

[1] Lévi-Strauss, 1948*a*.
[2] Montaigne, 1962, vol. I, ch. XXXI ('Des Cannibales').
[3] Linton, 1945, p. 149

revealed: they do not conceive of the prohibition as such, i.e., in its negative aspect; the prohibition is merely the reverse or counterpart of a positive obligation, which alone is present and active in the consciousness. Does a man ever sleep with his sister? The question is absurd. Certainly not, they reply: 'No, we don't sleep with our sisters. We give our sisters to other men, and other men give us their sisters.'[1] The ethnographer pressed the point, asking what they would think or say if, through some impossibility, this eventuality managed to occur. Informants had difficulty placing themselves in this situation, for it was scarcely conceivable: 'What, you would like to marry your sister! What is the matter with you anyway? Don't you want a brother-in-law? Don't you realize that if you marry another man's sister and another man marries your sister, you will have at least two brothers-in-law, while if you marry your own sister you will have none? With whom will you hunt, with whom will you garden, whom will you go to visit?'[2]

Doubtless, this is all a little suspect, because it was provoked, but the native aphorisms collected by Mead, and quoted as the motto to the first part of this work, were not provoked, and their meaning is the same. Other evidence corroborates the same thesis. For the Chukchee, a 'bad family' is defined as an isolated family, 'brotherless and cousinless'.[3] Moreover, the necessity to provoke the comment (the content of which, in any case, is spontaneous), and the difficulty in obtaining it, reveal the misunderstanding inherent in the problem of marriage prohibitions. The latter are prohibitions only secondarily and derivatively. Rather than a prohibition on a certain category of persons, they are a prescription directed towards another category. In this regard, how much more penetrating is native theory than are so many modern commentaries! There is nothing in the sister, mother, or daughter which disqualifies them as such. Incest is socially absurd before it is morally culpable. The incredulous exclamation from the informant: 'So you do not want to have a brother-in-law?' provides the veritable golden rule for the state of society.

III

There is thus no possible solution to the problem of incest within the biological family, even supposing this family to be already in a cultural context which imposes its specific demands upon it. The cultural context does not consist of a collection of abstract conditions. It results from a very simple fact which expresses it entirely, namely, that the biological family is no longer alone, and that it must ally itself with other families in order to endure. Malinowski supported a different idea, namely, that the prohibition of incest results from an internal contradiction, within the biological family, between mutually incompatible feelings, such as the emotions attached to sexual relationships and parental love, or 'the sentiments which form naturally

[1] Mead, 1935, p. 84. [2] loc. cit. [3] Bogoras, 1904–9, p. 542.

between brothers and sisters'.[1] These sentiments nevertheless only become incompatible because of the cultural rôle which the biological family is called upon to play. The man should teach his children, and this social vocation, practised naturally within the family group, is irremediably compromised if emotions of another type develop and upset the discipline indispensable to the maintenance of a stable order between the generations: 'Incest would mean the upsetting of age distinctions, the mixing up of generations, the disorganization of sentiments and a violent exchange of rôles at a time when the family is the most important educational medium. No society could exist under such conditions.'[2]

It is unfortunate for this thesis that there is practically no primitive society which does not flagrantly contradict it on every point. The primitive family fulfils its educative function sooner than ours, and from puberty onwards – and often even before – it transfers the charge of adolescents to the group, with the handing over of their preparation to bachelor houses or initiation groups. Initiation rituals confirm this emancipation of the young man or girl from the family cell and their definitive incorporation within the social group. To achieve this end, these rituals rely on precisely the processes which Malinowski cites as a possibility solely in order to expose their mortal dangers, viz., affective disorganization and the violent exchange of rôles, sometimes going as far as the practice, on the initiate's very person, of most unfamilial usages by near relatives. Finally, different types of classificatory system are very little concerned to maintain a clear distinction between ages and generations. However, it is just as difficult for a Hopi child to learn to call an old man 'my son', or any other assimilation of the same order, as it would be for one of ours.[3] The supposedly disastrous situation that Malinowski depicts in order to justify the prohibition of incest, is on the whole, no more than a very banal picture of any society, envisaged from another point of view than its own.

This naïve egocentrism is so far from being new or original that Durkheim made a decisive criticism of it years before Malinowski gave it a temporary revival in popularity. Incestuous relationships only appear contradictory to family sentiments because we have conceived of the latter as irreducibly excluding the former. But if a long and ancient tradition allowed men to marry their near relatives, our conception of marriage would be quite different. Sexual life would not have become what it is. It would have a less personal character, and would leave less room for the free play of the imagination, dreams and the spontaneities of desire. Sexual feeling would be tempered and deadened, but by this very fact it would compare closely with domestic feelings, with which it would have no difficulty in being reconciled. To conclude this paraphrase with a quotation: 'Certainly, the question does not pose itself once it is assumed that incest is prohibited; for the conjugal order, being henceforth outside the domestic order, must necessarily develop in a

[1] Malinowski, 1934, p. lxvi. [2] ibid. 1927, p. 251. [3] Simmons, 1942, p. 68.

divergent direction. This prohibition clearly cannot be explained in terms of ideas which obviously derive from it.'[1]

Must we not go even further? On the very occasion of marriage, numerous societies practise the confusion of generations, the mingling of ages, the reversal of rôles, and the identification of what we regard as incompatible relationships. As these customs seem to such societies to be in perfect harmony with a prohibition of incest, sometimes conceived of very rigorously, it can be concluded, on the one hand, that none of these practices is exclusive of family life, and, on the other hand, that the prohibition must be defined by different characteristics, common to it throughout its multiple modalities. Among the Chukchee, for example:

> 'the age of women thus exchanged is hardly considered at all. For instance, on the Oloi River, a man named QI'mIqai married his young son five years old to a girl of twenty. In exchange he gave his niece, who was twelve years of age, and she was married to a young man more than twenty years old. The wife of the boy acted as his nurse, fed him with her own hands and put him to sleep.'[2]

The writer also cites the case of a woman who, married to a two-year old baby and having a child by 'a marriage companion', i.e., an official and temporary lover, shared her attentions between the two babies: 'When she was nursing her own child, she also nursed her infant husband . . . In this case the husband also readily took the breast of his wife. When I asked for the reason of the wife's conduct, the Chukchee replied, "Who knows? Perhaps it is a kind of incantation to insure the love of her young husband in the future".'[3] At all events, it is certain that these apparently inconceivable unions are compatible with a highly romantic folklore, full of devouring passions, Prince Charmings and Sleeping Beauties, shy heroines and triumphant loves.[4] We know of similar facts in South America.[5]

However unusual these examples may appear, they are not unique, and Egyptian-style incest probably represents only the limit. They have their parallel among the Arapesh in New Guinea, among whom infant betrothals are frequent, the two children growing up as brother and sister. But this time the age difference is on the side of the husband:

> 'An Arapesh boy grows his wife. As a father's claim to his child is not that he has begotten it but rather that he has fed it, so also a man's claim to his wife's attention and devotion is not that he has paid a bride-price for her, or that she is legally his property, but that he has actually contributed the food which has become flesh and bone of her body.'[6]

Here again, this type of apparently abnormal relationship provides the psychological model for regular marriage: 'The whole organization of

[1] Durkheim, 1898, p. 63. [2] Bogoras, 1904–9, p. 578. [3] loc. cit.
[4] ibid. pp. 578–83. [5] Means, 1931, p. 360. [6] Mead, 1935, p. 80.

society is based upon the analogy between children and wives as representing a group who are younger, less responsible, than the men, and therefore to be guided. Wives by definition stand in this child-relationship . . . to all of the older men of the clan into which they marry.'[1]

Likewise, among the Tapirapé of central Brazil, depopulation has brought about a system of marriage with young girls. The 'husband' lives with his parents-in-law and the 'wife's' mother is responsible for woman's work.[2] The Mohave husband carries the little girl that he has married on his shoulders, busies himself with household duties, and generally speaking acts both as husband and *in loco parentis*. The Mohave comment upon the situation cynically, and ask, sometimes even when the person concerned is present, whether he has married his own daughter: ' "Whom are you carrying around on your back? Is that your daughter?" they ask him. When such marriages break up, the husband often has a manic attack.'[3]

I myself have been present, among the Tupí-Cawahib of the upper Madeira, in central Brazil, at the betrothal of a man about thirty years old with a scarcely two-year-old baby, still in its mother's arms. Nothing was more touching than the excitement with which the future husband followed the childish frolics of his little fiancée. He did not tire of admiring her, and of sharing his feelings with the onlookers. For some years his thoughts would be filled with the prospect of setting up house. He would feel strengthened by the certainty, growing alongside him in strength and beauty, of one day escaping the curse of bachelorhood. Henceforth, his budding tenderness is expressed in innocent gifts. According to our standards, this love is torn between three irreducible categories, viz., paternal, fraternal, and marital, but in an appropriate context it reveals no element of disquiet or defect, endangering the future welfare of the couple, let alone the whole social order.

We must decide against Malinowski and those of his followers who vainly attempt to support an outmoded position,[4] in favour of those, like Fortune and Williams, who, following Tylor, found the origin of the incest prohibition in its positive implications.[5] As one observer rightly puts it: 'An incestuous couple as well as a stingy family automatically detaches itself from the give-and-take pattern of tribal existence; it is a foreign body – or at least an inactive one – in the body social.'[6]

No marriage can thus be isolated from all the other marriages, past or future, which have occurred or which will occur within the group. Each marriage is the end of a movement which, as soon as this point has been reached, should be reversed and develop in a new direction. If the movement ceases, the whole system of reciprocity will be disturbed. Since marriage is the condition upon which reciprocity is realized, it follows that marriage

[1] Mead, 1935, pp. 80–1. [2] Wagley, 1940, p. 12. [3] Devereux, 1939, p. 519.
[4] Seligman, 1931–2, pp. 250–76.
[5] Fortune, 1932, pp. 620–2; Williams, 1936, p. 169; Tylor, 1889.
[6] Devereux, 1939, p. 529.

constantly ventures the existence of reciprocity. What would happen if a wife were received without a daughter or a sister being given? This risk must be taken, however, if society is to survive. To safeguard the social perpetuity of alliance, one must compromise oneself with the chances of descent (i.e., in short, with man's biological substructure). However, the social recognition of marriage (i.e., the transformation of the sexual encounter, with its basis in promiscuity, into a contract, ceremony or sacrament) is always an anxious venture, and we can understand how it is that society should have attempted to provide against the risks involved by the continual and almost maniacal imposition of its mark. The Hehe, says Brown, practise cross-cousin marriage, but not without hesitation, for if cross-cousin marriage allows the clan-line to be maintained, it risks it in the case of a bad marriage, and informants report: 'Thus some forbid their children to marry a cousin.'[1] The ambivalent attitude of the Hehe towards a special form of marriage is the pre-eminent social attitude towards marriage in any of its forms. By recognizing and sanctioning the union of the sexes and reproduction, society influences the natural order, but at the same time it gives the natural order its chance, and one might say of any culture of the world what an observer has noted of one of them: 'Perhaps the most fundamental religious conception relates to the difference between the sexes. Each sex is perfectly all right in its own way, but contact is fraught with danger for both.'[2]

Marriage is thus a dramatic encounter between nature and culture, between alliance and kinship. 'Who has given the bride?' chants the Hindu hymn of marriage: 'To whom then is she given? It is love that has given her; it is to love that she has been given. Love has given; love has received. Love has filled the ocean. With love I accept her. Love! let her be yours.'[3] Thus, marriage is an arbitration between two loves, parental and conjugal. Nevertheless, they are both forms of love, and the instant the marriage takes place, considered in isolation, the two meet and merge; 'love has filled the ocean'. Their meeting is doubtless merely a prelude to their substitution for one another, the performance of a sort of *chassé-croisé*. But to intercross they must at least momentarily be joined, and it is this which in all social thought makes marriage a sacred mystery. At this moment, all marriage verges on incest. More than that, it is incest, at least social incest, if it is true that incest, in the broadest sense of the word, consists in obtaining by oneself, and for oneself, instead of by another, and for another.

However, since one must yield to nature in order that the species may perpetuate itself, and concomitantly for social alliance to endure, the very

[1] Brown, 1934, p. 28. [2] Hogbin, 1935, p. 330.

[3] Banerjee, 1896, p. 91. As to marriage considered as bordering upon incest, compare the following, written in a completely different spirit: 'Profound sentiment [between husband and wife] would have seemed odd and even "ridiculous", in any event unbecoming; it would have been as unacceptable as an earnest "aside" in the general current of light conversation. Each has a duty to all, and for a couple to entertain each other is isolation; in company there exists no right of the *tête-à-tête*.' (Taine, 1876, p. 133.)

least one must do is to deny it while yielding to it, and to accompany the gesture made towards it with one restricting it. This compromise between nature and culture comes about in two ways, since there are two cases, one in which nature must be introduced, since society can do everything, the other in which nature must be excluded, since it rules from the first – before descent and its assertion of the unilineal principle, and before alliance, with its establishment of prohibited degrees.

IV

The multiple rules prohibiting or prescribing certain types of spouse, and the prohibition of incest, which embodies them all, become clear as soon as one grants that society must exist. But society might not have been. Have we therefore resolved one problem, as we thought, only to see its whole importance shifted to another problem, the solution to which appears even more hypothetical than that to which we have devoted all our attention? In actual fact, let us note, we are not faced with two problems but with only one. If our proposed interpretation is correct, the rules of kinship and marriage are not made necessary by the social state. They are the social state itself, reshaping biological relationships and natural sentiments, forcing them into structures implying them as well as others, and compelling them to rise above their original characteristics. The natural state recognizes only indivision and appropriation, and their chance admixture. However, as Proudhon has already observed in connexion with another problem, these notions can only be transcended on a new and different level: 'Property is non-reciprocity, and non-reciprocity is theft... But common ownership is also non-reciprocity, since it is the negation of opposing terms; it is still theft. Between property and common ownership I could construct a whole world.'[1] What is this world, unless it is that to which social life ceaselessly bends itself in a never wholly successful attempt to construct and reconstruct an approximate image of it, that world of reciprocity which the laws of kinship and marriage, in their own sphere of interest, laboriously derive from relationships which are otherwise condemned to remain either sterile or immoderate?

However, the progress of contemporary social anthropology would be of small account if we had to be content with an act of faith – fruitful no doubt, and in its time, legitimate – in the dialectic process ineluctably giving rise to the world of reciprocity, as the synthesis of two contradictory characteristics inherent in the natural order. Experimental study of the facts can join with the philosophers' presentiments, not only in attesting that this is what happened, but in describing, or beginning to describe, how things happened.

In this regard, Freud's work is an example and a lesson. The moment the claim was made that certain extant features of the human mind could be

[1] Proudhon, 1897, vol. VI, p. 131.

explained by an historically certain and logically necessary event, it was permissible, and even prescribed, to attempt a scrupulous restoration of the sequence. The failure of *Totem and Taboo,* far from being inherent in the author's proposed design, results rather from his hesitation to avail himself of the ultimate consequences implied in his premises. He ought to have seen that phenomena involving the most fundamental structure of the human mind could not have appeared once and for all. They are repeated in their entirety within each consciousness, and the relevant explanation falls within an order which transcends both historical successions and contemporary correlations. Ontogenesis does not reproduce phylogenesis, or the contrary. Both hypotheses lead to the same contradictions. One can speak of explanations only when the past of the species constantly recurs in the indefinitely multiplied drama of each individual thought, because it is itself only the retrospective projection of a transition which has occurred, because it occurs continually.

As far as Freud's work is concerned, this timidity leads to a strange and double paradox. Freud successfully accounts, not for the beginning of civilization but for its present state; and setting out to explain the origin of a prohibition, he succeeds in explaining, certainly not why incest is consciously condemned, but how it happens to be unconsciously desired. It has been stated and restated that what makes *Totem and Taboo* unacceptable, as an interpretation of the prohibition of incest and its origins, is the gratuitousness of the hypothesis of the male horde and of primitive murder, a vicious circle deriving the social state from events which presuppose it. However, like all myths, the one presented in *Totem and Taboo* with such great dramatic force admits of two interpretations. The desire for the mother or the sister, the murder of the father and the sons' repentance, undoubtedly do not correspond to any fact or group of facts occupying a given place in history. But perhaps they symbolically express an ancient and lasting dream.[1] The magic of this dream, its power to mould men's thoughts unbeknown to them, arises precisely from the fact that the acts it evokes have never been committed, because culture has opposed them at all times and in all places. Symbolic gratifications in which the incest urge finds its expression, according to Freud, do not therefore commemorate an actual event. They are something else, and more, the permanent expression of a desire for disorder, or rather counter-order. Festivals turn social life topsy-turvy, not because it was once like this but because it has never been, and can never be, any different. Past characteristics have explanatory value only in so far as they coincide with present and future characteristics.

Freud has sometimes suggested that certain basic phenomena find their explanation in the permanent structure of the human mind, rather than in its history. For example, anxiety would result from a contradiction between what the situation demands and the means at the individual's disposal to

[1] Kroeber, 1939, pp. 446–51.

deal with it, for example, by the helplessness of the new-born child before the afflux of external stimuli. Anxiety would thus appear before the differentiation of the super-ego: 'It is highly probable that the immediate precipitating causes of primal regression are quantitative factors such as an excessive degree of excitation and the breaking through of the protective shield against stimuli.'[1] Indeed, the severity of the super-ego is in no way related to the degree of severity experienced. Inhibition thus gives proof of an internal and not an external origin.[2] To us these views alone seem capable of giving an answer to a question posed very disturbingly by the psycho-analytic study of children, namely that among young children 'the feeling of sin' appears more precise, and better formed, than the individual history of each case would suggest. This would be explained if, as Freud supposed, it were possible for inhibitions in the broadest sense (disgust, shame, moral and aesthetic demands) to be 'organically determined and . . . occasionally . . . produced without the help of education'.[3] There would be two forms of sublimation, one derived from education and purely cultural, the other 'a lower form', proceeding by an autonomous reaction and appearing at the beginning of the latency period. It might even be that in these exceptionally favourable cases it would continue throughout life.[4]

These bold assumptions concerning the thesis of *Totem and Taboo*, and the accompanying hesitations, are revealing. They show a social science like psychoanalysis – for it is one – still wavering between the tradition of an historical sociology, looking, as Rivers did, to the distant past for the reason for the present-day situation – and a more modern and scientifically more solid attitude, which expects a knowledge of its future and past from an analysis of the present. Moreover, the latter is clearly the practitioner's point of view. But it cannot be overemphasized that the path followed in delving into the structure of the conflicts to which a sick man is prone, in order to recreate its history and so arrive at the initial situation around which all subsequent developments took place, is contrary to that of the theory as presented in *Totem and Taboo*. In the one case, the progression is from experience to myths, and from myths to structure. In the other, a myth is invented to explain the facts, in other words, one behaves like the sick man instead of diagnosing him.

V

Despite these presentiments, only one social science has reached the point at which synchronic and diachronic explanation have merged, because synchronic explanation allows the reconstitution of the origin of systems and their synthesis, while diachronic explanation reveals their internal logic and perceives the evolution which directs them towards an end. This social

[1] Freud, 1959, p. 94.
[2] ibid. 1930, p. 116.
[3] ibid. 1938, pp. 583–4.
[4] ibid. p. 625.

science is linguistics, regarded as a phonological study.[1] When we consider its methods, and even more its object, we may ask ourselves whether the sociology of the family, as conceived of in this work, involves as different a reality as might be believed, and consequently whether it has not the same possibilities at its disposal.

The diversity of the historical and geographical modalities of the rules of kinship and marriage have appeared to us to exhaust all possible methods for ensuring the integration of biological families within the social group. We have thus established that superficially complicated and arbitrary rules may be reduced to a small number. There are only three possible elementary kinship structures; these three structures are constructed by means of two forms of exchange; and these two forms of exchange themselves depend upon a single differential characteristic, namely the harmonic or disharmonic character of the regime considered. Ultimately, the whole imposing apparatus of prescriptions and prohibitions could be reconstructed *a priori* from one question, and one alone: in the society concerned, what is the relationship between the rule of residence and the rule of descent? Every disharmonic regime leads to restricted exchange, just as every harmonic regime announces generalized exchange.

The progress of our analysis is thus close to that of the phonological linguist. What is more, if the incest prohibition and exogamy have an essentially positive function, if the reason for their existence is to establish a tie between men which the latter cannot do without if they are to raise themselves from a biological to a social organization, it must be recognized that linguists and sociologists do not merely apply the same methods but are studying the same thing. Indeed, from this point of view, 'exogamy and language . . . have fundamentally the same function – communication and integration with others'.[2] It is to be regretted that after this profound remark its author makes off in another direction, and assimilates the incest prohibition to other taboos, such as the prohibition on sexual relations with an uncircumcised boy among the Wachagga, or the inversion of the hypergamous rule in India.[3] The incest prohibition is not a prohibition like the others. It is *the* prohibition in the most general form, the one perhaps to which all others – beginning with those cited above – are related as particular cases. The incest prohibition is universal like language, and if it is true that we are better informed on the nature of the latter than on the origin of the former, it is only by pursuing the comparison to its conclusion that we can hope to get to the meaning of the institution.

Modern civilization has acquired such a mastery of the linguistic instrument and of means of communication, and makes such a diversified use of them, that we have, as it were, immunized ourselves against language, or at least so we believe. We see language as no more than an inert medium, in itself ineffective, the passive bearer of ideas on which the fact of expression

[1] Trubetzkoy, 1933; 1939. [2] Thomas, 1937, p. 182. [3] ibid. p. 197.

confers no additional characteristic. For most men, language represents without falsifying. But modern psychology has refuted this simplistic conception: 'Language does not enter into a world of accomplished objective perceptions merely to give purely external and arbitrary signs or "names" to individual given objects which are clearly delimited from one another; but it is itself a mediator in the formation of objects. It is in one sense the supreme denominator.'[1] This more accurate view of linguistic fact is not a discovery or a new invention. It merely places the narrow perspectives of the civilized white adult in a vaster, and consequently more valid, human experience, in which 'the naming mania' of the child, and the study of the profound upheaval produced in backward subjects by the sudden discovery of the function of language, corroborate observations made in the field; from which it emerges that the conception of the spoken word as communication, as power, and as action represents a universal feature of human thought.[2]

Certain facts taken from psychopathology already tend to suggest that the relations between the sexes can be conceived as one of the modalities of a great 'communication function' which also includes language. For certain sufferers from obsessions, noisy conversation seems to have the same significance as an unbridled sexual activity. They themselves speak only in a low voice and in a murmur, as if the human voice were unconsciously interpreted as a sort of substitute for sexual power.[3] But, even if one is prepared to accept and use these facts only with reservation (and here we call upon psychopathology only because, like infantile psychology and social anthropology, it allows a more comprehensive way of experiencing the social universe), it must be acknowledged that they receive striking confirmation from certain observations on primitive customs and attitudes. One need only recall that in New Caledonia 'the evil word' is adultery, for 'word' should probably be interpreted as meaning 'act'.[4] More significant evidence is also available. For several very primitive peoples in the Malay Archipelago, the supreme sin, unleashing storm and tempest, comprises a series of superficially incongruous acts which informants list higgledy-piggledy as follows: marriage with near kin; father and daughter or mother and son sleeping too close to one another; incorrect speech between kin; ill-considered conversation; for children, noisy play, and, for adults, demonstrative happiness shown at social reunions; imitating the calls of certain insects or birds; laughing at one's own face in the mirror; and finally, teasing animals, and in particular, dressing a monkey as a man, and making fun of him.[5] What possible connexion could there be between such a bizarre collection of acts?

Let us make a short digression. In a neighbouring region, Radcliffe-Brown came across only one of these prohibitions. The Andaman Islanders believe

[1] Cassirer, 1933, p. 23.
[2] ibid. p. 25; 1944, p. 31 et seq.; Leenhardt, 1946; Firth, 1939, p. 317.
[3] Reik, 1931, p. 263.
[4] Leenhardt, 1946, p. 87.
[5] Skeat and Blagden, 1906, vol. II, p. 223; Schebesta, 1929, *passim*; Evans, 1923, pp. 199–200; 1937, p. 175.

that the tempest is provoked by killing a cicada, or by making a noise when it sings. As the prohibition seems to exist in isolation, and since he avoids all comparative study, in the name of the principle that every custom is explainable by an immediately apparent function, the English anthropologist treated this example on a purely empirical basis: the prohibition, he argues, proceeds from the myth of the ancestor who killed a cicada; it cried out, and night appeared. Consequently, according to Radcliffe-Brown, this myth expresses the difference in value between night and day in native thought. Night creates fear, this fear is reflected in a prohibition, and, as night cannot be acted upon, it is the cicada which becomes the object of the taboo.[1]

If this method were to be applied to the complete system of prohibitions as listed above, each prohibition would require a different explanation. But why then does native thought group them under the one heading? Either native thought must be accused of being incoherent, or we must search for the common characteristic which, in a certain respect, makes these apparently heterogeneous acts express an identical situation.

A native remark puts us on the track. The Pygmies of the Malay Peninsula consider it a sin to laugh at one's own face in a mirror, but they add that it is not a sin to ridicule a real human being since he can defend himself. This interpretation obviously also applies to the dressed-up monkey which is treated as a human being when it is teased, and looks like a human being (just as does the face in the mirror), although it is not really one. This interpretation can also be extended to the imitation of the calls of certain insects or birds, 'singing' creatures, no doubt, like the Andamanese cicada. By imitating them, one is treating an emission of sound which 'sounds' like a word as a human manifestation when it is not. Thus, we find two categories of acts definable as an immoderate use of language: the first, from a quantitative point of view, to play noisily, to laugh too loudly, or to make an excessive show of one's feelings; the second, from a qualitative point of view, to answer sounds which are not words, or to converse with something (mirror or monkey) which is human only in appearance.[2] These prohibitions are all thus reduced to a single common denominator: they all constitute a *misuse of language*, and on this ground they are grouped together with the incest prohibition, or with acts evocative of incest. What does this mean,

[1] Radcliffe-Brown, 1933, pp. 155–6, 333.

[2] The same definition can be made to include all actions classified by the Dayak as *djeadjea* or forbidden, viz., ' "giving a man or animal a name that is not his or its . . . or to say something about him that is contrary to his nature; for example, that a louse dances, or a rat sings, or a fly goes to war . . .; or to say of a man that he had a cat or some other animal for a mother or wife". To bury any living animal and say "I am burying a man." ' (Hardeland, 1859, s.v.; cf. Caillois, 1959.) However, we believe that these acts relate to the positive interpretation which we propose, rather than Caillois's interpretation based on disorder, or 'counter-order' (ibid. ch. III). 'Mystic homosexuality' appears to us a false category since homosexuality is not the prototype of 'the misuse of communications', but is one of its particular cases, for the same reason (but in a different sense) as are incest and all the other acts just enumerated.

except that women themselves are treated as signs, which are *misused* when not put to the use reserved to signs, which is to be communicated?

In this way, language and exogamy represent two solutions to one and the same fundamental situation. Language has achieved a high degree of perfection, while exogamy has remained approximate and precarious. This disparity, however, is not without its counterpart. The very nature of the linguistic symbol prevented it from remaining for long in the stage which was ended by Babel, when words were still the essential property of each particular group: values as much as signs, jealously preserved, reflectively uttered, and exchanged for other words the meaning of which, once revealed, would bind the stranger, as one put oneself in his power by initiating him, something of oneself and acquires some power over the other. The respective attitudes of two individuals in communication acquire a meaning of which they would otherwise be devoid. Henceforth, acts and thoughts become mutually solidary. The freedom to be mistaken has been lost. But, to the extent that words have become common property, and their signifying function has supplanted their character as values, language, along with scientific civilization,[1] has helped to impoverish perception and to strip it of its affective, aesthetic and magical implications, as well as to schematize thought.

Passing from speech to alliance, i.e., to the other field of communication, the situation is reversed. The emergence of symbolic thought must have required that women, like words, should be things that were exchanged. In this new case, indeed, this was the only means of overcoming the contradiction by which the same woman was seen under two incompatible aspects: on the one hand, as the object of personal desire, thus exciting sexual and proprietorial instincts; and, on the other, as the subject of the desire of others, and seen as such, i.e., as the means of binding others through alliance with them. But woman could never become just a sign and nothing more, since even in a man's world she is still a person, and since in so far as she is defined as a sign she must be recognized as a generator of signs. In the matrimonial dialogue of men, woman is never purely what is spoken about; for if women in general represent a certain category of signs, destined to a certain kind of communication, each woman preserves a particular value arising from her talent, before and after marriage, for taking her part in a duet. In contrast to words, which have wholly become signs, woman has remained at once a sign and a value. This explains why the relations between the sexes have preserved that affective richness, ardour and mystery which doubtless originally permeated the entire universe of human communications.

But that atmosphere of feverish excitement and sensitivity which engendered symbolic thought, and social life, which is its collective form, can still with its far-off vision kindle our dreams. To this very day, mankind has always

[1] 'Our scientific civilization . . . tends to impoverish our perception' (Köhler, 1937 p. 277).

dreamed of seizing and fixing that fleeting moment when it was permissible to believe that the law of exchange could be evaded, that one could gain without losing, enjoy without sharing. At either end of the earth and at both extremes of time, the Sumerian myth of the golden age and the Andaman myth of the future life correspond, the former placing the end of primitive happiness at a time when the confusion of languages made words into common property, the latter describing the bliss of the hereafter as a heaven where women will no longer be exchanged, i.e., removing to an equally unattainable past or future the joys, eternally denied to social man, of a world in which one might *keep to oneself.*

Note – Bibliography w/full cites for this chap. available in Consortium Coord. office. ph. 496-3022