The Bear and the Barber

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HUMAN SOCIETIES HAVE EVOLVED A NUMBER OF MEANS for allowing their members to express affiliation with the group into which they were born. Among these we shall single out two strongly contrasted ones. In one case, a given individual will make such a statement as 'I am a bear', in the other case he will make such a statement as 'I am a barber'. One case exemplifies the so-called 'totemic' groups, the other the caste system. My purpose is to examine the nature of the structural relationship—if there be one—between the two.

The words 'bear' and 'barber' were not chosen at random. Barbers cut and shave other people's hair, while—at least among the Chippewa Indians—people born in the Bear clan were reputed to have long, thick hair and never to grow bald. This doubly inverted relation—presence or absence of a given trait on the one hand, in respect to self or other on the other hand— plus perhaps an opposition between nature and culture (since the kind of hair one grows is a natural trait, while to remove it is a cultural custom), this threefold relation then is endowed, as I shall try to show, with an inner meaning since it symbolizes so to speak the structure of the scheme I am about to develop.

As a preliminary, I should like to caution the reader with regard to my use of the word 'totemism'.

Although I shall use it freely in the course of my talk, I fully endorse the general trend that has prevailed for a good many years among anthropologists to consider that there is no real institution which corresponds to the term 'totemism' and that totemistic theories proceed from an arbitrary carving out of the objective facts. Nevertheless, it would be too easy simply to discard all past and present speculations concerning what is generally referred to as 'totemism'. If so many scholars whom we all admire have been, as it were, fascinated by the idea of 'totemism', it is probably because, at a deeper level than the one they have been mistakenly considering, phenomena arbitrarily put together to make up a pseudo-institution are endowed with some inner meaning which makes them worthy of interest. This I believe was first discovered by Radcliffe-Brown, whose position in respect to 'totemism' started by being a purely negative one in his early paper, 'The Sociological Theory of Totemism' (1929), but who twenty-two years later in his Huxley Memorial Lecture entitled 'The Comparative Method in Social Anthropology', without reverting in the least to a conception of 'totemism' as an actual institution, succeeded nevertheless in unravelling the importance of the use of animal and plant names to characterize the relationship between the segments of human society. But this process led Radcliffe-Brown to modify considerably his earlier conception of this relationship.

In 1929, he believed that primitive people attached an intrinsic importance to

animals for the reason that, as food, they were supposed to arouse man's spontaneous interest; whereas, in 1951 it was his theory that both animals and plants were to be regarded as mere figures of speech—symbols as it were. Thus, while in 1929, Radcliffe-Brown believed that interest was conferred upon animals and plants because they were 'eatable', in 1951 he saw clearly that the real reason for this interest lay in the fact that they are, if I may use the word, 'thinkable'. It is interesting to note that each one of these two successive theories is in one way more abstract and in another way more concrete than the other. The first theory is more abstract since all animals which can be consumed are merged into a vague category characterized by the one single aspect that has been abstracted: that of constituting merely animal food. From this point of view, animals that can be eaten are all regarded as similar, while men who partake of this common food are also held to be similar. Thus the link between the distinction of biological species and the segments of society is not perceived, though this first theory is also more concrete, since it only envisages the point of view of practical utility and physiological need. In its turn the second theory is more abstract, since it relies far less on the animals themselves than on the discovery that these animals or plants, or rather their properties, can be put to use as symbols to express contrasts and oppositions. Nevertheless, it is more concrete, because we are now asked in each special case to look for a definite reason which can account for the selection of a given animal and not of any other. So the choice made by one culture among the whole gamut of animals and plants which are empirically present becomes a means to express differences between men.

If Radcliffe-Brown's second theory is valid, as I believe it to be, we must admit that behind what was erroneously called 'totemism' lie three very precise ideas. First, the idea of a culturally discrete set, that is, a segmentary society; second, the idea of a naturally discrete set, that is, the awareness of the empirical discontinuity of the biological species and third, the idea that there is some kind of homology between the above two systems of differences. Therefore totemic ideas appear to provide a code enabling man to express isomorphic properties between nature and culture. Obviously, there exists here some kind of similarity with linguistics, since language is also a code which, through oppositions between differences, permits us to convey meanings and since in the case of language as well as in that of 'totemism', the complete series of empirical media provided in one case by vocal articulation, and in the other by the entire wealth of the biological world, cannot be called upon, but rather (and this is true in both cases) only a few elements which each language or each culture selects in order that they can be organized in strongly and unequivocally contrasting pairs. Such being the answer, we may be in a position to solve the problem raised by Boas (1914) in his paper 'Mythology and Folk-tales of the North American Indians', where he says, 'the essential problem regarding the ultimate origin of mythologies remains—why human tales are preferably attached to animals, celestial bodies and other personified phenomena of nature.' The answer lies, so it seems, not, as the functionalist school assumes, in the utilitarian properties of biological species as mankind conceives them, but rather in their logical properties, that is, their ability to serve as symbols expressing contrasts and oppositions. This was demonstrated for a limited area by Dr Freeman (1961) in his recent paper 'Iban Augury', in which he shows how the Ibans by selecting a few species of birds out of a very large set provided by their forest environment, and by selecting

for each species a very small number of significant properties, have been able to use these differential elements by opposing them and also combining them so as to convey different messages.

Having cleared up these general problems, I shall now enter into my subject proper. When going over the work of early investigators in Australia, I was struck by the fact that approximately between 1830 and 1850, these authors, although they knew that Australian sections and sub-sections were probably connected with the laws of intermarriage, nevertheless believed them to differ in rank; and to describe them, they frequently used the word 'caste'. This, I think, should not be neglected. In the first place, because there may have been something more 'caste-like' in these divisions than what was subsequently found among interior, mostly desert, people and because it seems obvious that even from a superficial point of view there is something similar between Australian tribes and caste societies; each segment performs a special task which benefits the community as a whole and which is complementary to functions that devolve upon other segments. This appears clearly among the Australian tribes described by Spencer & Gillen in which moieties or clans are bound together by a rule of reciprocity. The Kaitish and the Unmatjera, who are northern neighbours of the Aranda, know of rules that require an individual who gathers wild seeds in a territory belonging to a totemic group named after those seeds, to obtain permission from its head before consuming them; according to these rules, each totemic group is obliged to provide others with plants or animals whose 'production' it allegedly controls. Thus the totemic food prohibition appears to be in such a case merely a negative way of expressing a positive obligation towards the others. This is clearly shown in a few well documented examples presented by Spencer & Gillen (1904, pp. 159–60). The lone hunter belonging to the Emu clan cannot touch the bird, but in company he can and must kill it so as to present it as food to hunters belonging to other clans, and conversely the hunter belonging to the Water clan is permitted to drink alone, but when in company he can drink only if the water is presented to him by members of the opposite moiety. Among the Warramunga too each totemic group is held responsible for the natural species consumed by other groups. The Warramunga and the Walpari have secondary prohibitions against consuming the maternal totem but these are lifted when food is obtained from the opposite moiety. Generally speaking, and for each totem, there is a threefold distinction between those groups who never consume it because it is their own totem, those that may consume it when obtained from the opposite moiety (in case it should be the maternal totem), and those that can consume it in all circumstances, because it is not their totem. The same is true for the sacred wells which women may never approach, while uninitiated men, though they may approach them, may not drink from them, while still other groups of uninitiated men may both approach the wells and drink of the water, providing it is offered them by men belonging to the group that is allowed to drink freely.

Notwithstanding these similarities between totemic groups and castes, it is clear that the line which I have followed so far is too general to be convincing. It is well known that castes and totemic groups are widely different and opposed institutional systems, that one is linked with the highest cultures and the other with the lowest cultures with which anthropologists are acquainted. In a traditional way, totemism is

linked to exogamy in its strictest forms, while in a game of free association, ninety-nine out of a hundred anthropologists would probably associate the word 'caste' with the word 'endogamy'.

Thus the distinctive character of the extreme cases is clear, but would these appear as extreme if we could dispose of intermediary forms? In earlier writings I have tried to show that exchange in human society is a universal means of ensuring the interlocking of its constitutive parts and that this exchange can operate at different levels among which the more important are food, goods and services, and women. Two cases should be distinguished, however. Sometimes the three forms (or two of them) are called upon, so to speak, to cumulate their effects and to complement each other, either positively or negatively. In the second case, one form only is retained because it supplements the others. A good positive example of the first case is provided by those Australian groups where exchange of women and food prohibitions (which, as we have seen, can be equally well expressed as an obligatory exchange of foods), reinforce each other, and we find a negative example of the same phenomenon in some parts of Melanesia and in peasant Europe of the past, where endogamy or exogamy unwillingly practised seems to be connected with what we may call 'endo-agriculture', that is, an extreme unwillingness to exchange seeds. Turning now to the second case, we may perhaps be permitted to consider the type of structure to be found in the so-called Crow-Omaha kinship systems as being in diametrical opposition to the Aranda systems in so far as, in the former, everything not forbidden is allowed, while in the latter the exact opposite is true: everything not allowed is forbidden. Now if this be granted, it is rather remarkable that in an African group such as the Nandi of Kenya, whose kinship system has been classified rightly or wrongly by Radcliffe-Brown as Omaha, there should be an extraordinary development of clan prohibitions bearing upon food and costume, and accompanied by individual marriage prohibitions based, not on clan affiliation, but on peculiar events pertaining to the individual history of each prospective groom and bride, which means that, in such a case, the structural arrangement of the alliance network—if any—would result from statistical fluctuations, exactly as happens with rules of marriage of the Crow-Ohama type. Let us consider a final example: that of the Baganda such as described by Roscoe (1911). We are told that the Baganda had about forty clans, each possessing two totems, the first one being subject to food prohibition 'so as to make it available to others in greater quantity', which is a modest counterpart of the Australian belief that, by refraining from consuming its totem, each clan acquires the power to multiply it. As in Australia too, each clan was linked to a territory which, in the case of the Baganda, was usually a sacred hill. In addition, each clan had a great many privileges, obligations, and prohibitions as, for instance, eligibility to kingship and other dignities, providing kingly wives, making and caring for regalia, providing other clans with certain kinds of food, and also special occupations. The Mushroom clan, for instance, was said to be sole maker of bark cloth and all the blacksmiths were supposed to come from the clan of the Tailless Cow. In such cases, we may well ask ourselves whether we are dealing with totemic clans, occupational castes, or with an intermediary form pertaining to both these types. Let us tackle this problem through application of our axiomatic principle.

We have seen that the so-called totemic concept amounts to a belief in an homology

not between social groups and natural species, but between differences existing, on the one hand within the social system, and on the other within the natural system. Two systems of differences are conceived as isomorphic, although one is situated in nature, and the other in culture.

Let us now suppose that in addition to an homology of relationships, we have an homology of terms, and going one step further, that the homology of relationships shifts and becomes an homology between terms. The result will no longer be that Clan 1 can be held to differ from Clan 2 as for instance, Eagle differs from Bear, but that Clan 1 is in itself like Eagle and Clan 2 in itself like Bear. The system of differences will continue to exist, but, first, it will be conceived in reference to nature instead of to culture, and second, exogamy will inevitably break down because it implies that while women are sociologically conceived of as being different, they are naturally (though unconsciously) conceived of as similar, or else they could not be exchanged.

It so happens that this theoretical transformation may be exemplified by concrete examples. In volume 5 of the Haddon-Rivers Expedition to Torres Straits (p. 184) we find that at Mabuiag, for instance, 'A definite physical and psychological resemblance was postulated for the human and animal members of the clan. There can be little doubt that this sentiment reacted on the clansmen and constrained them to live up to the traditional character of their respective clans.' Thus the Cassowary, Crocodile, Snake, and Shark clans were reputed to love fighting, while the Shovel-nosed Skate, Ray and Sucker-Fish clans were said to be peaceable. Intermediate between the fierce and the gentle clans was the Dog clan, which was thought to be sometimes pugnacious and sometimes pacific, just like real dogs. The men of the Crocodile clan were said to be very strong and ruthless, while the men of the Cassowary clan were reputed for their long-legs and their ability to run fast, like real cassowaries. Similar observations have been made in North America among Eastern Indians such as the Delaware, the Menomini, and the Chippewa. Among the latter, people of the Fish clan were reputed to be long lived, frequently to grow bald or to have thin hair, and all bald people were assumed to come from this clan. People of the Bear clan had long, thick, coarse hair that never turned white; they were said to be bellicose and quick to anger. People of the Crane clan had loud, ringing voices. Orators were always supposed to come from this clan (Kinietz 1947).

From a theoretical point of view, we may now appraise the implications of these two opposite conceptions. In the first hypothesis, society on the one hand, nature on the other, will each retain its systematic integrity. Social segments will be referred to social segments; each natural species will be referred to other natural species. In the second hypothesis, instead of two 'horizontal' systems situated at different levels, we shall have a plurality of 'vertical' systems, considerably impoverished in fact, since instead of *two systems* each consisting of *numerous elements* we shall have *numerous systems* each consisting of *two elements*, heterogeneous (one natural, one cultural) instead of homogeneous (entirely natural or entirely cultural). Should this interpretation prove to be true, it should be possible, first to translate or re-code a 'totemic' system into a caste system and conversely, and also to give concrete examples of societies which have actually done so. This is what I intend to exemplify now.

Tribes of the Muskogi linguistic group in the South-Eastern United States such as,

for instance, the Chickasaw and the Creek, did have clans and moieties the first of which were perhaps exogamous and the second endogamous. In any case moieties were noted for overt manifestations of exclusivism that bordered on hostility. Ritual was jealously guarded by each moiety and members of another moiety who had witnessed a ceremony, even inadvertently, were put to death (an attitude recalling that held by the Aranda in relation to their cult groups). What is even more important, moieties were said to differ by their respective ways of life and their disposition of mind; one was said to be warlike and to prefer open country, the other one to be peaceable and to live in the woods. They may also have been hierarchized, as is suggested by some of the names under which they were known, one moiety being called 'their-hickory-choppings', meaning that they had substantial lodges, while the other moiety was called 'their worn-out place', meaning that it consisted of inferior people living mostly under trees and in the woods. These differences were both more complex and more marked between clans, lineages, and hamlets. When informants were called upon to describe these secondary units, they used as a kind of leit-motiv, practically always the same words. 'These people had ways of their own . . . they were very peculiar . . . different from all others . . . they had their own customs.' These peculiarities were said to belong to different types: environment, economic activities, costume, food preferences, talents and tastes.

For instance, people of the Raccoon clan fed mostly on fish and wild fruits. Those of the Panther clan lived in mountains, avoided water, which they greatly feared, and fed on game. People of the Wild-Cat clan slept in the daytime, hunted by night since they were gifted with an especially keen sight, and were not interested in women. Those of the Bird clan woke up before daylight: 'they were like real birds in that they would not bother anybody . . . the people of this clan have different sorts of minds, just as there are different species of birds . . . they had many wives . . . they did not work at all, but had an easy time going through life and went anywhere they wanted to . . . they had many offspring, as birds have.'

People of the Red-Fox clan lived only in the woods, made a living by stealing from other people . . . doing whatever they liked. The 'Wandering Iska' or 'No-Home Iska' were a shiftless people 'who did not want to own anything . . . they did not do anything for themselves . . . they were healthy looking, strong, for they did not do anything to run themselves down . . . they moved very slowly . . . they thought they were going to live forever . . . they did not care how they dressed or appeared . . . sometimes they wore dirty dresses . . . they were beggars and lazy'.

The same kind of differences are emphasized between hamlets, for instance the Bending-Post-Oak-House Group lived in the wood, they were not very energetic, they loved to dance. They were prone to anxiety, had no foresight, were early risers, and made many mistakes, while people of the High-Corncrib House Group were not much esteemed by others but thought a great deal of themselves: 'They were industrious, raised large crops, did not hunt much, bartered corn for venison. They were very wise, people of one mind, truthful, and they knew a great deal about the weather.'

All these statements, which I have borrowed from Swanton (1928), cannot be taken literally. They refer to a period when the traditional culture had already broken down and were obtained from old informants. They clearly belong to folk ethnology since,

theoretically, it would be impossible for a human society to mimic nature to such an extent without running the risk of breaking down into several distinct groups hostile to one another. However, the testimony collected by Swanton is so rich, so concordant even when it comes from different tribes, that it must contain if not the literal truth at least the expression of a conceptual model which must have existed in the minds of the natives.

Allowing for these restrictive considerations, these statements have a threefold importance. In the first place, they describe what appears to have been a kind of caste system. In the second place, castes and their mutual relationships are being coded, so to speak, according to a natural model, after the diversity of natural species, as happens with totemic groups; and in the third place, from an historical point of view, these Muskogi tribes constituted a kind of link between the 'true' totemic societies of the Plains and the only 'true' caste-societies which are known to have existed in North America, such as the Natchez. Thus, I have established so far that in two parts of the world traditionally conceived as 'totemistic', Australia's so-called 'totemic' groups can be interpreted as occupational groups, while in America, social segments which can actually function as castes, were conceived after a 'totemic' model.

Let us now shift to India, also a classical land, though of castes rather than totemic groups. Here, instead of castes being conceived after a natural model, vestiges of totemic groups tend to be conceived after a cultural model. But before exemplifying this point let me remind the reader that I am using the word 'totemic' in such a way as to be able to leave entirely aside the question of whether or not there are actual vestiges of totemism in India. From my present point of view, the problem is irrelevant since, when I make loose usage of the term totemism, I never refer to a past or present institution but to a classificatory device whereby discrete elements of the external world are associated with discrete elements of the social world. Bearing this in mind, we may be struck by the fact that whereas so-called 'totemic' names in Bengal are mostly of animal or vegetable origin, further south an increasing proportion of names borrowed from manufactured objects is to be found. For instance the Devanga, who are a caste of weavers in Madras, use very few plant names for their clans and almost no animal names, but rather names such as buttermilk, cattle-pen, money, dam, houses, collyrium, knife, scissors, boat, clay lamp, female cloth, clothes, ropes for hanging pots, old plough, monastery, cart, funeral pyre, tile, etc., and the Kuruba of Mysore who have sixty-seven exogamous clans, with few plant and animal names, designate them by names such as, among others, drum, booth, cart, cup, woollen thread, bangle, gold, pick-axe, hut, gold ring, bell-metal, coloured border of a cloth, stick, blanket, measure, metal toe-ring, moustache, loom, bamboo tube, lace, ring, etc. (Thurston 1909).

These manufactured objects are not only used as clan names, but they also receive attention, and serve to express obligations and prohibitions as in totemic systems. It is true that the use of manufactured objects as totemic names is well known elsewhere in the world, particularly in Northern Australia and in some parts of Africa, very good examples having been recently (1961) presented for the Dinka by Dr Lienhardt in his book *Divinity and Experience*. However, this never happens to such an extent as in India. Thus it seems that while in America castes confusedly conceived have been contaminated by totemic classifications, in India, where products or symbols of occupational activities

are clearly differentiated as such and can be put to use in order to express differences between social groups, vestiges or remnants of totemic groups have come to make use of a symbolism that is technological and occupational in origin.

This appears less surprising when one attempts to express Australian institutions (the first ones which we have envisaged) differently, and in a more direct way, in the language of the caste system. What we have done thus far was to compare Australian totemic groups one to another from the standpoint of their specialization in control of a given animal or vegetable species, while occupational castes 'control' the technical activities necessary to the well-being of the whole group.

There are nevertheless two differences. In the first place, a potter caste makes pots, a laundryman caste does actual laundry work, and barbers do shave. The performances of Australian totemic groups, however, are unreal, imaginary, and even though the participants believe in their reality, we shall see later that this characteristic makes a great deal of difference. In the second place, the connexion between the sorcerer and the natural species that he claims to control is not of the same type as the link between the craftsman and his product. Only in mythical times did the animals or plants actually originate from the ancestor's body. Nowadays, kangaroos produce kangaroos and man can only help them to do so.

But the similarity is much stronger if we adopt a different point of view. An Australian section or sub-section actually produces its women for the benefit of the other sections, much as an occupational caste produces goods and services which the other castes cannot produce and must seek from this caste alone. Thus, it would be inaccurate to define totemic groups and caste systems as being simply one exogamous and another endogamous. These are not real properties existing as such, but superficial and indirect consequences of a similarity which should be recognized at a deeper level. In the first place, both castes and totemic groups are 'exo-practical': castes in relation to goods and services, totemic groups in relation to marriage. In the second place, both remain to some extent 'endo-practical': castes by virtue of the rule of endogamy and Australian groups as regards their preferred type of matrimonial exchange, which being mostly of the 'restricted' type, keeps each tribe closely self-contained and, as it were, wrapped up in itself. It would seem that allowing for the above restrictive considerations, we have now reached a satisfactory formulation, in a common language, of the relationship between totemic groups and castes. Thus we might say that in the first case—totemic groups—women, that is, biological individuals or natural products, are begotten naturally by other biological individuals, while in the second case—castes—manufactured objects or services rendered through the medium of manufactured objects are fabricated culturally through technical agents. The principle of differentiation stems in the one case from nature and in the other from culture.

However, this kind of parallelism would be purely formal and without any concrete basis, for occupational castes are truly different from one another as regards culture, and also complementary. The same cannot be said, as regards nature, of exogamic groups which specialize, so to speak, in the production of women belonging to different 'species'. Occupational activities are true social species; they are objectively distinct. Women, on the other hand, even when they are born in different sections or subsections, belong nevertheless to one and the same natural species.

Social logic appears at this point to be caught in a dialectical trap. The assumed parallelism between natural products (actually, women) and social products is wholly imaginary. This explains why exogamous groups are so often inclined to define themselves as totemic groups, for over and above exogamy they need an objective model to express their social diversity. In societies where division of labour and occupational specialization do not exist, the only possible objective model has to be sought in the natural diversity of biological species; for there are only two objectively given models of concrete diversity: one on the level of nature, made up by the taxonomic system of natural species, the other on the level of culture, made up by the social system of trades and occupations.

The rules of exogamy establish an ambiguous system which lies somewhere in between: as regards nature, women are all alike, and only as regards culture may they be claimed to be different.

If the first point of view prevails, that is, when men borrow from nature their conceptual model of diversification, they must unconsciously abide also by a natural model of womankind. Exogamous groups make the overt claim that women are culturally different and, consequently, may be exchanged. But actually, they can only be exchanged because, at a deeper level, they are known to be similar. This provides an explanation to what I have said earlier and permits, so to speak, to deduce exogamy from more general principles.

Conversely, when the overt conceptual model is cultural, as in the caste system, women are acknowledged to be similar only within the limits of their respective social groups and this being projected on to the natural plane, their exchange between groups consequently becomes impossible.

In other words, both the caste system and the so-called totemic systems postulate isomorphism between natural and cultural differences. The validation of this postulate involves in each case a symmetrical and inverted relationship. Castes are defined after a cultural model and must define their matrimonial exchange after a natural model. Totemic groups pattern matrimonial exchange after a cultural model, and they themselves must be defined after a natural model. Women, homogeneous as regards nature, are claimed to be heterogeneous as regards culture, and conversely, natural species, although heterogeneous as regards nature, are claimed to be homogeneous as regards culture, since from the standpoint of culture, they share common properties in so far as man is believed to possess the power to control and to multiply them.

In totemic systems, men exchange culturally the women who procreate them naturally, and they claim to procreate culturally the animal and vegetable species which they exchange naturally: in the form of foodstuffs which are interchangeable, since any biological individual is able to dispense with one and to subsist on the others. A true parallelism can therefore be said to exist between the two formulas, and it is possible to code one into the terms of the other. Indeed, this parallelism is more complex than we believed it to be at the beginning. It can be expressed in the following tortuous way: castes naturalize fallaciously a true culture while totemic groups culturalize truly a false nature. 'False' in two respects: first, from a natural point of view, women belong to one and the same natural species; and second, as a natural species, men do not have the power to increase and control other natural species.

However, this symmetry can never be rigorous; soon enough it reaches its limits. During their procreative period, women are naturally equivalent; anatomical structure and physiological function are, grossly speaking, identical in all female individuals. On the other hands, foods are not so easily replaceable. Speaking of the Karuba of Mysore, Thurston quotes the Arisana gotram which bears the name of turmeric. But since it is not easy to go without turmeric it has adopted as its food-prohibition *korra* seeds which can be more easily dispensed with. And in his book already referred to, Dr Lienhardt states something similar about clans whose divinity is the giraffe. This is an all-important food, and instead of prohibiting it, these clans content themselves with avoiding to shed its blood. The same limitation exists with occupational castes. They too have to remain to some extent endo-functional, in order to render themselves the services they give to others. Otherwise who is going to shave the barber?

By way of conclusion I should like to emphasize four points. First, totemism which has been formalized in what may be called the 'language of primitiveness' can equally well be formalized in the 'language of castes' which were thought to be the very opposite of primitiveness.

Secondly, in its social undertakings, mankind keeps manoeuvering within narrow limits. Social types are not isolated creations, wholly independent of each other, and each one an original entity, but rather the result of an endless play of combination and re-combination, for ever seeking to solve the same problems by manipulating the same fundamental elements. This game always consists in a give-and-take, and what is given or taken must always belong either to the realm of nature (natural products) or to the realm of culture (goods and services), the exchange of women being the only formula that makes it possible to overcome this duality. Thus exchange of women not only ensures a horizontal mediation between groups of men, it also ensures a mediation, which we might call vertical, between nature and culture.

Thirdly, as we have seen, the tremendous differences existing between totemic groups and caste systems, in spite of their logical inverted similarity, may be ascribed to the fact that castes are right and totemic systems are wrong, when they believe that they provide real services to their fellow groups. This should convince us that the 'truth-value' is an unavoidable dimension of structural method. No common analysis of religion can be given by a believer and a non-believer, and from this point of view, the type of approach known as 'religious phenomenology' should be dismissed.

Lastly, by analysing a specific example, I have attempted to validate a methodological approach which I have been trying to follow in France and which Dr Leach is following in England. According to this approach societies are not made up of the flotsam and jetsam of history, but of variables; thus widely different institutions can be reduced to transformations of the same basic figure, and the whole of human history may be looked upon merely as a set of attempts to organize differently the same means, but always to answer the same questions.

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