

Totemism

by

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Translated by

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Toward the Intellect

I

The Tallensi of the northern Gold Coast are divided into patrilineal clans observing distinctive totemic prohibitions. They share this feature with the peoples of the upper Volta, and even with the generality of those of the western Sudan. It is not only a matter of formal resemblance, for the animal species most commonly prohibited are the same over the entire extent of this vast territory, as also are the myths which are invoked to account for the prohibitions.

The objects of the totemic prohibitions of the Tallensi comprise birds such as the canary, turtle dove, domestic hen; reptiles such as the crocodile, snake, turtle (land and water); certain fish; the large grasshopper; rodents such as the squirrel and hare; ruminants such as the goat and sheep; carnivores such as the cat, dog, and leopard; and, finally, other animals such as the monkey, wild pig, etc.

It is impossible to find any common trait among this variety of creatures. Some play an important part in the economic life and the food-supply of the natives, but the majority are negligible in this respect. Many are prized as delicacies by those who are permitted to eat them; and, on the other hand, some are despised as food. No adult would willingly eat grasshopper, canaries, or small edible snakes, though little children, who eat almost any small animals they can lay their hands on, quite often do so. Several of these animal species are regarded as always potentially dangerous in the magical as well as the physical sense. Such are the crocodile, snakes, the leopard, and other wild carnivores. But many, on the contrary, are entirely innocent both in the magical and the physical sense. Some have a place

in the meagre folk-lore of the Tallensi, including such diverse creatures as the monkey, the turtle-dove, and the cat. . . . Incidentally, clans that have the cat as totem show no particular respect towards household cats, nor are household dogs treated differently by people who may and people who may not eat the dog.

The totemic animals of the Tallensi thus comprise neither a zoological nor a utilitarian nor a magical class. All that can be said of them is that they are generally fairly common domestic or wild creatures.¹

This takes us far from Malinowski. But, above all, Fortes brings out a problem which, since Boas, may be glimpsed behind the illusions created by totemism. To understand beliefs and prohibitions of this order it is not enough to attribute a general function to them, viz., as constituting a simple and concrete procedure which is easily transmissible in the form of habits contracted in childhood, in order to display the complex structure of a society. For yet another question presents itself, and one that is probably fundamental, viz., why the animal symbolism? Above all, and seeing that it has been established, at least negatively, that the choice of certain animals is not explicable from a utilitarian point of view, why such a particular symbolism rather than any other?

Let us take the Tallensi case by stages. There are individual animals, or even sometimes geographically localized species, which are the objects of tabus because they are met with in the neighborhood of shrines dedicated to particular ancestor cults. There is no question of totemism here, in the meaning normally given to the word. "Tabus of the Earth" form an intermediate category between these sacred animals or species and the totems, such as the large reptiles—crocodile, python, tree-lizard or water-lizard—which may not be killed near an Earth shrine. They are "the people of the Earth," in the same sense as men are described as people of such and such a village, and they symbolize the power of the Earth, which may be beneficent or maleficent. The question immediately arises why certain terrestrial creatures have been selected and not others. The python, for example, is particularly sacred in the territory guarded by a certain clan.

Moreover, the animal is more than a simple object of a prohibition; it is an ancestor, and to kill it would be almost as bad as murder. This is not because the Tallensi believe in metempsychosis, but because the ancestors, their human descendants, and the resident animals are all united by a territorial link: "The ancestors . . . are spiritually present in the social life of their descendants in the same way as the sacred animals are present in sacred pools or in the locality with which the group is identified." ²

Tallensi society is thus comparable to a fabric in which the warp and the woof correspond respectively to localities and to lineages. Intimately connected as they are, these elements nonetheless constitute distinct realities, accompanied by particular sanctions and ritual symbols, within the general framework of the ancestor cult. The Tallensi know that an individual, in his social capacity, combines multiple roles, each of which corresponds to an aspect or a function of the society, and that he is continually confronted by problems of orientation and selection: "Totemic and other ritual symbols are the ideological landmarks that keep an individual on his course." ³ As a member of a large clan, a man is related to common and distant ancestors, symbolized by sacred animals; as member of a lineage, to closer ancestors, symbolized by totems; and lastly, as an individual, he is connected with particular ancestors who reveal his personal fate and who may appear to him through an intermediary such as a domestic animal or certain wild game:

But what is the common psychological theme in these different categories of animals symbolised? The relations between men and their ancestors among the Tallensi are a never-ceasing struggle. Men try to coerce and placate their ancestors by means of sacrifices. But the ancestors are unpredictable. It is their power to injure and their sudden attacks on routine well-being that make men aware of them rather than their beneficent guardianship. It is by their aggressive intervention in human affairs that they control the social order. Do what they will men can never control the ancestors. Like the animals of the bush and the river, they are restless, elusive, ubiquitous, unpredictable, aggressive. The relations of men with animals in the

world of common-sense experience are an apt symbolism of the relations of men with their ancestors in the sphere of mystical causation. ⁴

Fortes finds in this comparison the explanation for the predominant place assigned to carnivorous animals, those which the Tallensi group together under the term "teeth-bearers," which exist and protect themselves by attacking other animals and sometimes even men: "their symbolic link with the potential aggressiveness of the ancestors is patent." Because of their vitality, these animals are also a convenient symbol for immortality. That this symbolism is always of the same type, viz., animal, is due to the fundamental character of the social and moral code, embodied in the ancestor cult; that different animal symbols should be employed is explained by the fact that this code has different aspects.

In his study of totemism in Polynesia, Firth had already tended toward this type of explanation:

It is a feature of Polynesian totemism that the natural species concerned are generally animals, either land or marine, and that plants, though occasionally included in the list, never predominate. The reason for this preference for animals, it seems to me, lies in the fact that the behavior of the totem is usually held to give an indication as to the actions or intentions of the god concerned. Plants, because of their immobility, are not of much interest from this point of view, and the tendency is then for the more mobile species, endowed with locomotion and versatility of movement, and often with other striking characteristics in the matter of shape, colour, ferocity, or peculiar cries, to be represented in greater measure in the list of media which serve as outlet for the supernatural beings. ⁵

These interpretations by Firth and Fortes are much more satisfactory than those of the classical adherents of totemism, or of its first adversaries such as Goldenweiser, because they escape the double danger of recourse either to some arbitrary explanation or to factitious evidence. It is clear that in so-called totemic systems the natural species do not serve as any old names for

social units which might just as well have been designated in another way; and it is no less clear that in adopting a plant or animal eponym a social unit does not make an implicit affirmation of an affinity of substance between it and itself, e.g., that the group is descended from it, that it participates in its nature, or that it is sustained by it. The connection is not arbitrary; neither is it a relation of contiguity. There remains the possibility, which Firth and Fortes have glimpsed, that the relation is based on a perception of a resemblance. We then have to find out in what this resemblance consists, and on what level it is apprehended. Can we say, with the authors whom we have just quoted, that it is of a physical or moral order, thus transposing Malinowski's empiricism from the organic and affective plane to that of perception and judgment?

We may first note that the interpretation is conceivable only in the case of societies which separate the totemic from the genealogical series: though an equal importance is assigned to them, one may evoke the other because they are not connected. But in Australia they are merged, and the intuitively perceived resemblance which Fortes and Firth call into consideration would be inconceivable by the very fact of this contiguity. In very many of the tribes of North and South America, on the other hand, no resemblance at all is postulated, either implicitly or explicitly; the connection between ancestors and animals is external and historical, they came to be known, encountered, fought against, or associated with. The same is related in many African myths, including the Tallensi. All these facts lead one to search for a connection on a far more general level, a procedure which the authors we have been discussing could scarcely object to, since the connection which they themselves suggest is purely inferential.

In the second place, the hypothesis has a very restricted field of application. Firth adopts it for Polynesia because of the reported preference there for animal totems; and Fortes admits that it holds primarily for certain animals with fangs. But what is to be done with the others, and what about plants, where it is these that are more important? What, finally, of natural phe-

nomena or objects, normal or pathological states, or manufactured objects, all of which may serve as totems and which play a part which is certainly not negligible, and is sometimes even essential, in certain Australian and Indian forms of totemism?

In other words, the interpretation offered by Firth and by Fortes is narrow in two senses. Firstly, it is limited to cultures with a highly developed ancestor cult, as well as a social structure of totemic type; secondly, among these, it is limited to mainly animal forms of totemism, or is even restricted to certain types of animals. Now we shall never get to the bottom of the alleged problem of totemism—and on this point we are in agreement with Radcliffe Brown—by thinking up a solution having only a limited field of application and then manipulating recalcitrant cases until the facts give way, but by reaching directly a level so general that all observed cases may figure in it as particular modes.

Lastly and above all, Fortes's psychological theory is based on an incomplete analysis. It is possible that the animals, from a certain point of view, are roughly comparable to the ancestors. But this is not a necessary condition, nor is it a sufficient condition. If we may be allowed the expression, *it is not the resemblances, but the differences, which resemble each other*. By this we mean that there are not, first, animals which resemble each other (because they all share animal behavior), then ancestors which resemble each other (because they all share ancestral behavior), and lastly an overall resemblance between the two groups; but on the one hand there are animals which differ from each other (in that they belong to distinct species, each of which has its own physical appearance and mode of life), and on the other there are men—among whom the ancestors form a particular case—who also differ from each other (in that they are distributed among different segments of the society, each occupying a particular position in the social structure). The resemblance presupposed by so called totemic representations is *between these two systems of differences*. Firth and Fortes have taken a great step in passing from a point of view centered on *subjective utility* to one of *objective analogy*. But, this progress having been made,

it remains to effect the passage from *external analogy* to *internal homology*.

II

The idea of an objectively perceived resemblance between men and totems would constitute problem enough in the case of the Azande, who include among their totems imaginary creatures such as the crested water-snake, rainbow snake, water leopard, and the thunder beast.⁶ But even among the Nuer, all of whose totems correspond to real objects, it has to be recognized that the list forms a rather bizarre assortment: lion, waterbuck, monitor lizard, crocodile, various snakes, tortoise, ostrich, cattle egret, durra-bird, various trees, papyrus, gourd, various fish, bee, red ant, river and stream, cattle with certain markings, monorchids, hide, rafter, rope, parts of beasts, and some diseases. Taking them as a whole, "we may say that there is no marked utilitarian element in their selection. The animals and birds and fish and plants and artifacts which are of the most use to the Nuer are absent from the list of their totems. The facts of Nuer totemism do not, therefore, support the contention of those who see in totemism chiefly, or even merely, a ritualization of empirical interests."⁷

The argument is expressly directed against Radcliffe-Brown, and Evans-Pritchard recalls that it had previously been formulated by Durkheim with regard to similar theories. What follows may be applied to the interpretation offered by Firth and by Fortes: "Nor in general are Nuer totems such creatures as might be expected, on account of some striking peculiarities, to attract particular attention. On the contrary, those creatures which have excited the mythopoeic imagination of the Nuer and which figure most prominently in their folk-tales do not figure, or figure rarely and insignificantly, among their totems."⁸

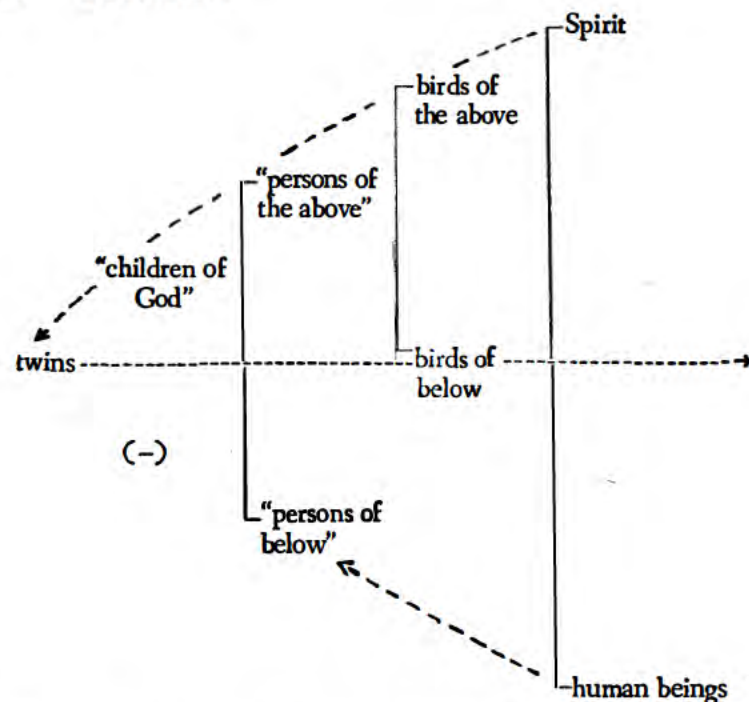
The author declines therefore to answer the question—constantly encountered like a *Leitmotiv* from the beginning of our

exposition—why it is that mammals, birds, reptiles, and trees should be symbols of the relationships between spiritual power and the lineages. The farthest he goes is to observe that certain widely held beliefs might prepare certain things to fill this function: e.g., birds fly, and are thus better able to communicate with the supreme spirit who lives in the sky. The argument does not apply to snakes, even though they are also, in their way, manifestations of Spirit. Trees, rare on the savannah, are regarded as divine favors, because of the shade they afford; rivers and streams are related to water spirits. As for monorchids and animals with certain markings, it is believed that they are visible signs of an exceptionally powerful spiritual activity.

Unless we return to an empiricism and a naturalism which Evans-Pritchard rightly rejects, it has to be recognized that these indigenous ideas are not very significant. For if we exclude the possibility that streams are the objects of ritual attitudes because of their biological or economic function, their supposed relationship with the water spirits is reduced to a purely verbal manner of expressing the spiritual value which is attributed to them, which is not an explanation. The same applies to the other cases. On the other hand, Evans-Pritchard has been able to make profound analyses which allow him to dismantle bit by bit, as it were, the relations which, in Nuer thought, unite certain types of men to certain species of animals.

In order to characterize twins, the Nuer employ expressions which at first sight seem contradictory. On the one hand, they say that twins are "one person" (*ran*); on the other, they state that twins are not "persons" (*ran*), but "birds" (*dit*). To inter-

these expressions correctly, it is necessary to envisage, step by step, the reasoning involved. As manifestations of spiritual power, twins are firstly "children of God" (*gat kwoth*), and since the sky is the divine abode they may also be called "persons of the above" (*ran nhial*). In this context they are opposed to ordinary humans, who are "persons of below" (*ran piny*). As birds are themselves "of the above," twins are assimilated to them.



However, twins remain human beings: although they are "of the above," they are relatively "of below." But the same distinction applies to birds, since certain species fly less high and less well than others: in their own sphere, consequently, while remaining generally "of the above," birds may also be divided according to above and below. We may thus understand why twins are called by the names of "terrestrial" birds: guinea fowl, francolin, etc.

The relation thus postulated between twins and birds is explained neither by a principle of participation after the manner of Lévy Bruhl, nor by utilitarian considerations such as those adduced by Malinowski, nor by the intuition of perceptible resemblances proposed by Firth and by Fortes. What we are presented with is a series of logical connections uniting mental relations. Twins "are birds," not because they are confused with

them or because they look like them, but because twins, in relation to other men, are as "persons of the above" to "persons of below," and, in relation to birds, as "birds of below" are to "birds of the above." They thus occupy, as do birds, an intermediary position between the supreme spirit and human beings.

Although it is not explicitly set out by Evans-Pritchard, this reasoning leads him to an important conclusion. For this kind of inference is applicable not only to the particular relationships which the Nuer establish between twins and birds (which are closely paralleled, moreover, by those which the Kwakiutl of British Columbia conceive of between twins and salmon, a comparison which in itself suggests that in both cases the process is based on a more general principle), but to every relationship postulated between human groups and animal species. As Evans-Pritchard himself says, this relation is metaphorical.⁹ The Nuer speak about natural species by analogy with their own social segments such as lineages, and the relation between a lineage and a totemic species is conceptualized on the model of what they call *buth*, the relationship between collateral lineages descended from a common ancestor. The animal world is thus thought of in terms of the social world. There is the community (*cieng*) of carnivorous animals—lion, leopard, hyena, jackal, wild dog and domestic dog—which includes as one of its lineages (*thok dwiel*) the mongooses, which are subdivided into a number of smaller lineages of little animals (several varieties of mongooses and the lesser felines, etc.). Another collectivity or class or kind (*bab*) is formed of graminivorous animals: antelopes, gazelles, buffaloes, and cows, and also hares, sheep, goats, etc. That of "the footless people" groups the lineages of snakes, and "the river people" unites all animals which live in streams and marshes, such as crocodiles, monitor lizards, all fish, marsh birds and fisher-birds, as well as, furthermore, the Anuak and Balak Dinka peoples, who for the most part are without cattle and are riverain cultivators and fishermen. Birds form a vast community subdivided into a number of lineages: "children of God," "sister's sons of the children of God," and "sons or daughters of aristocrats."¹⁰

These theoretical classifications are the basis of the totemic ideas:

An interpretation of the totemic relationship is here, then, not to be sought in the nature of the totem itself but in an association it brings to the mind.¹¹

Evans-Pritchard has recently reformulated this view more rigorously:

On to the creatures are posited conceptions and sentiments derived from elsewhere than from them.¹²

However fertile these views may be, they are nevertheless subject to reserve in two respects. In the first place, the native theory of twins is too strictly subordinated to Nuer theology: "The formula [assimilating twins to birds] does not express a dyadic relationship between twins and birds but a triadic relationship between twins, birds, and God. With respect to God twins and birds have a similar character."¹³

But a belief in a supreme deity is not necessary to the establishment of relations of this type, and we have ourselves demonstrated them for societies much less theologically minded than the Nuer.* In formulating his interpretation in this way, Evans-Pritchard thus runs the risk of restricting it: like Firth and Fortes (though to a lesser degree), he presents a general interpretation in the language of a particular society, thus limiting its scope.

In the second place, Evans-Pritchard seems not to have appreciated the importance of the revolution achieved by Radcliffe-Brown, some years before the publication of *Nuer Religion*, with his second theory of totemism.† The latter differs from the

* Compare the scheme on p. 80 above with that which we present in "La Geste d'Asdiwal," *Annuaire (1958-1959) de l'École Pratique des Hautes Études, Section des Sciences Religieuses*, p. 20; republished in *Les Temps modernes*, No. 179, March 1961, p. 1099.

† In 1960 Evans-Pritchard still seemed to think that Radcliffe-Brown's contribution to the problem of totemism was confined to his 1929 article (Evans-Pritchard, 1960, p. 19 n. 1).

first far more radically than English anthropologists seem to realize. In our opinion, it not only completes the liquidation of the problem of totemism, but it brings out the real problem, one which is posed at another level and in different terms and which until then had not been clearly perceived, though in the final analysis its presence may be taken to be the fundamental cause of the intense eddies produced by totemism in anthropological thought. It would scarcely be credible, indeed, that numerous and capable minds should have been so exercised without a reasonable motive, even if the state of knowledge and tenacious prejudices prevented them from realizing what it was, or revealed it to them only in a deformed aspect. We have now to turn our attention, therefore, to Radcliffe-Brown's second theory.

III

This theory appeared twenty-two years after the first, without the author emphasizing its novelty, in the Huxley Memorial Lecture for 1951 entitled "The Comparative Method in Social Anthropology." In fact, Radcliffe-Brown offers it as an example of this comparative method which alone will permit anthropology to formulate "general propositions." This is the same way in which the first theory was introduced.¹⁴ There is thus a methodological continuity between the one and the other. But the resemblance ends there.

The Australian tribes of the Darling River, in New South Wales, are divided into matrilineal exogamous moieties called Eaglehawk and Crow. A historical explanation for such a social system may be sought, e.g., that two hostile peoples once decided to make peace, and to secure it agreed that thenceforth the men of one group should marry women of the other, and reciprocally. But as we know nothing about the past of the tribes in question, this kind of explanation is condemned to remain gratuitous and conjunctural.

Let us see rather whether similar institutions exist elsewhere. The Haida, of the Queen Charlotte Islands in British Columbia, are divided into matrilineal exogamous moieties called

Eagle and Raven. A Haida myth tells how, at the beginning of time, the eagle was the master of all the water on the earth, which he kept in a water-tight basket. The raven stole the basket, but as he flew with it over the island the water spilled on to the earth, thus creating the lakes and rivers from which the birds have since drunk and where came the salmon on which men chiefly live.

The eponymous birds of these Australian and American moieties thus belong to very similar, and symmetrically opposed, species. Moreover, there is an Australian myth which very much resembles the one just related. In this, the eaglehawk formerly kept the water in a well that he kept closed with a large stone, and which he lifted when he wanted to drink. The crow discovered this subterfuge, and, wanting to have a drink himself, lifted the stone: he scratched his head, which was full of lice, over the water, and forgot to replace the stone. All the water ran away, forming the rivers of eastern Australia, and the lice changed into the fish which the natives eat. Ought we then to imagine, in the spirit of historical reconstruction, that there were formerly connections between Australia and America, in order to explain these analogies?

This would be to forget that Australian exogamous moieties—both matrilineal and patrilineal—are frequently designated by the names of birds, and that consequently, in Australia itself, the Darling River tribes are merely an illustration of a general situation. The white cockatoo is opposed to the crow in Western Australia, and white cockatoo to black cockatoo in Victoria. Bird totems are also very widespread in Melanesia, e.g., the moieties of certain tribes of New Ireland are named after the sea-eagle and the fish-hawk. To generalize further, we may compare the facts recounted earlier in connection with sexual totemism (and no longer with moieties), which also employs bird or animal designations: in eastern Australia the bat is the masculine totem, the night owl the feminine; in the northern part of New South Wales the totems are respectively the bat and the tree-creeper (*Climacteris* sp.). Finally, it happens that the Australian dualism is also applied to generations, i.e., an individual is placed in

the same category as his grandfather and his grandson, while his father and his son are assigned to the opposite category. The moieties by generations thus formed are usually not given names. But where they are, they may be known by the names of birds, e.g., in western Australia, as kingfisher and bee-eater, or little red bird and little black bird.

Our question "Why all these birds?" is thus widened in its scope. It is not only the exogamous moieties, but also dual divisions of other kinds that are identified by connection with a pair of birds. It is, however, not always a question of birds. In Australia the moieties may be associated with other pairs of animals, with two species of kangaroo in one part, with two species of bee in another. In California one moiety is associated with the coyote and the other with the wild cat.¹⁵

The comparative method consists precisely in integrating a particular phenomenon into a larger whole, which the progress of the comparison makes more and more general. In conclusion, we are confronted with the following problem: how may it be explained that social groups, or segments of society, should be distinguished from each other by the association of each with a particular natural species? This, which is the very problem of totemism, includes two others: how does each society see the relationship between human beings and the other natural species (a problem which is external to totemism, as the Andaman example shows); and how does it come about, on the other hand, that social groups should be identified by means of emblems or symbols, or by emblematic or symbolic objects? This second problem lies equally outside the framework of totemism, since in this regard the same role may be vested, according to the type of community considered, in a flag, a coat of arms, a saint, or an animal species.

So far, Radcliffe-Brown's analysis has reproduced that which he formulated in 1929, which corresponds closely, as we have seen, with that of Boas.¹⁶ But his address of 1951 makes an innovation in declaring that this is not enough, for there remains an unresolved problem. Even if we assume that we can offer a

satisfactory explanation of the "totemic" predilection for animal species, we still have to try to understand why any particular species is selected rather than another:

What is the principle by which such pairs as eaglehawk and crow, eagle and raven, coyote and wild cat are chosen as representing the moieties of the dual division? The reason for asking this question is not idle curiosity. We may, it can be held, suppose that an understanding of the principle in question will give us an important insight into the way in which the natives themselves think about the dual division as a part of their social structure. In other words, instead of asking "Why all these birds?" we can ask "Why particularly eaglehawk and crow, and other pairs?"¹⁷

This step is decisive. It brings about a reintegration of content with form, and thus opens the way to a genuine structural analysis, equally far removed from formalism and from functionalism. For it is indeed a structural analysis which Radcliffe-Brown undertakes, consolidating institutions with representations on the one hand, and interpreting in conjunction all the variants of the same myth on the other.

This myth, which is known from many parts of Australia, has to do with two protagonists, whose conflicts are the principal theme of the story. One version from Western Australia is about Eaglehawk and Crow. The former is mother's brother to Crow, and his potential father-in-law also because of the preferential marriage with the mother's brother's daughter. A father-in-law, real or potential, has the right to demand presents of food from his son-in-law and nephew, and Eaglehawk accordingly tells Crow to bring him a wallaby. After a successful hunt, Crow succumbs to temptation: he eats the animal and pretends to return empty-handed. But the uncle refuses to believe him, and questions him about his distended belly. Crow answers that to stay the pangs of his hunger he had filled his belly with the gum from the acacia. Still disbelieving him, Eaglehawk tickles his nephew until he vomits the meat. As a punishment, he throws him into the fire and keeps him there until his eyes are red and his feathers are blackened, while he emits in his pain the cry

which is henceforth to be characteristic. Eaglehawk pronounces that Crow shall never again be a hunter, and that he will be reduced to stealing game. This is the way things have been ever since.

It is impossible, Radcliffe-Brown continues, to understand this myth without reference to the ethnographic context. The Australian aborigine thinks of himself as a "meat-eater," and the eaglehawk and crow, which are carnivorous birds, are his main rivals. When the natives go hunting by lighting bush-fires, the eaglehawks quickly appear and join in the hunt: they also are hunters. Perching not far from the camp fires, the crows await their chance to steal from the feast.

Myths of this type may be compared with others, the structure of which is similar, although they are concerned with different animals. For example, the aborigines who inhabit the region where South Australia joins Victoria say that the kangaroo and the wombat (another marsupial, but smaller), which are the principal game, were once friends. One day Wombat began to make a "house" for himself (the animal lives in a burrow in the ground), and Kangaroo jeered at him and thus annoyed him. But when, for the very first time, rain began to fall, and Wombat sheltered in his house, he refused to make room for Kangaroo, claiming that it was too small for two. Furious, Kangaroo struck Wombat on the head with a big stone, flattening his skull; and Wombat, in riposte, threw a spear at Kangaroo which fixed itself at the base of the backbone. This is the way things have been ever since: the wombat has a flat skull and lives in a burrow; the kangaroo has a tail and lives in the open: "This is, of course, a 'just so' story which you may think is childish. It amuses the listeners when it is told with the suitable dramatic expressions. But if we examine some dozens of these tales we find that they have a single theme. The resemblances and differences of animal species are translated into terms of friendship and conflict, solidarity and opposition. In other words the world of animal life is represented in terms of social relations similar to those of human society."¹⁸

To arrive at this end, the natural species are classed in pairs

of opposites, and this is possible only on condition that the species chosen have in common at least one characteristic which permits them to be compared.

The principle is clear in the case of the eaglehawk and crow, which are the two main carnivorous birds, though they differ from each other in that one is a bird of prey and the other a carrion eater. But how are we to interpret the pair bat/night owl? Radcliffe Brown admits that at first he was misled by the fact that both fly about at night. However, in one part of New South Wales it is the tree-creeper, a diurnal bird, which is opposed to the bat; it is the feminine totem, and a myth relates that it is this bird which taught women to climb trees.

Encouraged by this first explanation supplied by his informant, Radcliffe Brown then asked, "What resemblance is there between the bat and the tree-creeper?" The native, obviously surprised by such ignorance, answered, "But of course they both live in holes in trees." This is also the case with the night owl and the nightjar. To eat meat, or to live in trees, is the common feature of the pair considered and presents a point of comparison with the human condition.* But there is also an opposition within the pair, underlying the similarity: while both of the birds are carnivorous, one is a "hunter" and the other is a "thief." While they are members of the same species, cockatoos differ in color, being white or black; birds which similarly live in holes in trees are distinguished as diurnal and nocturnal, and so on.

Consequently, the division eaglehawk/crow among the Darling River tribes, with which we began, is seen at the end of the analysis to be no more than "one particular example of widespread type of the application of a certain structural principle,"¹⁰ a principle consisting of the union of opposites. Th

* As we have gone a little beyond Radcliffe-Brown's account it may be asked in what respect the life of birds which live in holes in trees recall the human condition. There is at least one Australian tribe, as a matter of fact, which names its moieties after the parts of a tree: "In the Ngeumb tribe Gwaimudthen is divided into nhurai (butt) and wangue (middle), while Gwaigulir is equivalent to winggo (top). These names refer to different portions of the shadow of a tree and refer to the positions taken up in camping . . ." (Thomas, 1906, p. 152).

alleged totemism is no more than a particular expression, by means of a special nomenclature formed of animal and plant names (in a certain code, as we should say today), which is its sole distinctive characteristic, of correlations and oppositions which may be formalized in other ways, e.g., among certain tribes of North and South America, by oppositions of the type sky/earth, war/peace, upstream/downstream, red/white, etc. The most general model of this, and the most systematic application, is to be found perhaps in China, in the opposition of the two principles of Yang and Yin, as male and female, day and night, summer and winter, the union of which results in an organized totality (*tao*) such as the conjugal pair, the day, or the year. Totemism is thus reduced to a particular fashion of formulating a general problem, viz., how to make opposition, instead of being an obstacle to integration, serve rather to produce it.

IV

Radcliffe-Brown's demonstration ends decisively the dilemma in which the adversaries as well as the proponents of totemism have been trapped because they could assign only two roles to living species, viz., that of a natural stimulus, or that of an arbitrary pretext. The animals in totemism cease to be solely or principally creatures which are feared, admired, or envied: their perceptible reality permits the embodiment of ideas and relations conceived by speculative thought on the basis of empirical observations. We can understand, too, that natural species are chosen not because they are "good to eat" but because they are "good to think."

The gap between this thesis and its predecessor is so great that we should like to know whether Radcliffe Brown appreciated it. The answer is perhaps to be found in the notes of lectures he delivered in South Africa, and in the unpublished manuscript of an address on Australian cosmology, the last occasions for the expression of his thought before he died in 1953. He was not the man to admit with good grace that he might change his mind, or to recognize possible influences. Yet it is difficult not to remark,

in this respect, that the ten years which preceded his Huxle Memorial Lecture were marked by the drawing together of anthropology and structural linguistics. For those who took part in this enterprise it is tempting at least to think that this may have found an echo in Radcliffe-Brown's thought. The ideas of opposition and correlation, and that of pair of opposites, have long history; but it is structural linguistics and subsequent structural anthropology which rehabilitated them in the vocabulary of the humane sciences. It is striking to meet them, with all their implications, in the writings of Radcliffe Brown, who, as we have seen, was led by them to abandon his earlier positions which were still stamped with the mark of naturalism and empiricism. This departure, nevertheless, was not made without hesitation, and at one point Radcliffe-Brown seems uncertain about the scope of his thesis and the extent of its application beyond the area of the Australian facts: "The Australian idea of what is here called 'opposition' is a particular application of the association by contrariety that is a universal feature of human thinking, so that we think by pairs of contraries, upwards and downwards, strong and weak, black and white. But the Australian conception of 'opposition' combines the idea of a pair of contraries with that of a pair of opponents."²⁰

It is certainly the case that one consequence of modern structuralism (not, however, clearly enunciated) ought to be to rescue associational psychology from the discredit into which it has fallen. Associationism had the great merit of sketching the contours of this elementary logic, which is like the least common denominator of all thought, and its only failure was not to recognize that it was an original logic, a direct expression of the structure of the mind (and behind the mind, probably, of the brain) and not an inert product of the action of the environment on an amorphous consciousness. But, contrary to what Radcliffe-Brown tends still to believe, it is this logic of oppositions and correlations, exclusions and inclusions, compatibilities and incompatibilities which explains the laws of association, not the reverse. A renovated associationism would have to be based on a system of operations which would not be without similarity to Boole's

algebra. As Radcliffe-Brown's very conclusions demonstrate, his analysis of Australian facts guides him beyond a simple ethnographic generalization—to the laws of language, and even of thought.

Nor is this all. We have already remarked that Radcliffe-Brown understood that in a structural analysis it is impossible to dissociate form from content. The form is not outside, but inside. In order to perceive the rationale of animal designations they must be envisaged concretely, for we are not free to trace a boundary on the far side of which purely arbitrary considerations would reign. Meaning is not decreed: if it is not everywhere it is nowhere. It is true that our limited knowledge often prevents us from pursuing it to its last retreats; for instance, Radcliffe-Brown does not explain why certain Australian tribes conceptualize the affinity between animal life and the human condition by analogy with carnivorous tastes while other tribes frame it in terms of common habitat. But his analysis implicitly presupposes that this difference itself is also meaningful, and that if we were better informed we should be able to correlate it with other differences, to be discovered between the respective beliefs of two groups, between their techniques, or between the relations of each to its environment.

In fact, the method adopted by Radcliffe-Brown is as sound as the interpretations which it suggests to him. Each level of social reality appears to him as an indispensable complement, without which it would be impossible to understand the other levels. Customs lead to beliefs, and these lead to techniques, but the different levels do not simply reflect each other. They react dialectically among themselves in such a way that we cannot hope to understand one of them without first evaluating, through their respective relations of opposition and correlation, *institutions, representations, and situations*. In every one of its practical undertakings, anthropology thus does no more than assert a homology of structure between human thought in action and the human object to which it is applied. The methodological integration of essence and form reflects, in its own way, a more necessary integration—that between method and reality.