RADCLIFFE-BROWN LECTURE IN SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Beyond Nature and Culture

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AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL TEXTBOOK recently published in Cambridge states that 'hardly anyone in social anthropology today claims to be a follower of Radcliffe-Brown'.[1] It would be hypocritical for a French anthropologist with a structuralist inclination to challenge this kind of opinion, seemingly quite common in the very country of birth of the great scholar whose name this lecture is honouring. On the other hand, the present occasion affords me perhaps the only appropriate opportunity for confessing that there is at least an aspect of Radcliffe-Brown's work which I found quite stimulating, although it led me astray for a while. Radcliffe-Brown's sociological theory of totemism inspired me some years ago when I was trying to make sense of the peculiar treatment of animals by Amazonian Indians: although actively hunted for food, or feared as predators, animals are nevertheless considered as persons with whom humans can, indeed should, interact according to social rules.

The standard model available at the time for conceptualising relationships between humans and natural kinds was the Lévi-Straussian theory of totemism, that is, the idea that discontinuities between species function as a mental model for organising social segmentation among humans. However, that was patently not the case in Amazonia where the differences between humans and non-humans are thought to be of degree, not of nature, thus echoing Radcliffe-Brown's depiction of totemism, in which, to quote his words, 'the natural order enters into and becomes part

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[1] A. Barnard, *History and Theory in Anthropology* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 73.

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of the social order'.[2] According to him, such a conflation is possible because the relations that the Australian Aborigines establish with natural objects and phenomena are similar to those that they establish between themselves, both sets of relations being predicated on their social structures. Here, then, was a straightforward idea that seemed to account quite well for the type of phenomena encountered in Amazonia. But since sociological totemism is not very common there, and is always found combined with forms of individual relationship with animals treated as persons, I constructed a conceptual hybrid, retaining Lévi-Strauss's theory of totemism for cases like Australia, and using Radcliffe-Brown's theory of totemism to qualify what was in fact a non-totemic relation with natural kinds, which I christened, not very imaginatively, 'animism'. If, according to Lévi-Strauss, totemism uses discontinuities between natural kinds in order to map social relations between humans, my Radcliffe-Brownian hypothesis was that animism uses the elementary categories shaping social practice to map relations between humans and natural objects.[3]

Unfortunately, I was quite wrong on both counts. Friendly critics first made me aware of what I should have seen for myself, namely that this too neat inversion in fact ratified the distinction between nature and society inherent in both the Lévi-Straussian and the Radcliffe-Brownian interpretations of totemism, thus not rendering justice to Amazonian cosmologies where such a distinction is irrelevant.[4] I also came to realise that this duality is equally meaningless in the case of totemism, at least Australian totemism, as I will try to show later. Paradoxically, this is a point of view which Lévi-Strauss endorses too, not in *Le Totémisme aujourd'hui*, of course, but in *La Pensée sauvage*, where he writes, by reference to the totemic system of the Menominee and the Chippewa of the Great Lakes, that, in this case, each totemic group has to be taken in itself, as 'it tends to form a system, not any more with the other totemic groups, but with certain differential properties conceived as hereditary'; 'thus,

[2] A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, *Structure and Function in Primitive Society; essays and addresses* (London, 1952), p. 130.

[3] Ph. Descola, 'Societies of nature and the nature of society', in A. Kuper (ed.), *Conceptualizing Society* (London, 1992), pp. 107–26, and 'Constructing natures: Symbolic ecology and social practice', in Ph. Descola and G. Pálsson (eds.), *Nature and Society: Anthropological Perspectives* (London, 1996), pp. 82–102.

[4] For instance, T. Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment. Essays in Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (London, 2000) and E. Viveiros de Castro, 'Os pronomes cosmológicos e o perspectivismo ameríndio', *Mana*, 2 (2) (1996), 115–44.

instead of two images, one social one natural, . . . what will obtain is a unique but fragmented socio-natural image.'[5]

Finally it took me some more time to understand that my initial mistake stemmed from the fact that I had attempted to derive ontological properties ascribed to beings in the world, and hence the latter's distribution into categories, from relational processes materialised in institutions, instead of doing the reverse. True, I was in good company: ever since Durkheim, it has been the standard practice of anthropologists to grant an explanatory privilege to social forms. Necessary at the time to carve out for the emerging social sciences a domain of their own, this privilege made it inevitable that religious beliefs, conceptions of the person or cosmologies should be ultimately explainable by the social patterns projected onto reality and by the structuring effect of these patterns on the activities thanks to which this reality is objectified and rendered meaningful. By deriving sociological structures from psychological imperatives, Lévi-Strauss was one of the few who tried to escape from this tendency. But the 'laws of the mind' he evokes are so vague that this derivation could not but be inductive; except in the analysis of myths, Lévi-Strauss always starts from the study of institutions in order to proceed 'towards the intellect', never the reverse. Now a system of relations cannot be understood independently from the elements it connects, provided these elements are taken not as interchangeable individuals or already institutionalised social units, but as entities that are endowed *ab initio* with specific properties that render them able or not to establish certain links between them. This is why I felt the urge to forsake the long-standing sociocentric prejudice and to surmise that social realities—i.e. stabilised relational systems—are analytically subordinated to ontological realities—i.e. the systems of properties that humans ascribe to beings.[6] My lecture will be devoted to trying to substantiate this heterodox opinion.[7]

My starting point rests on a philosophical intuition corroborated by ethnography, combined with a thought experiment for which I can find no justification except that it bears interesting anthropological fruits. I borrow the intuition from Husserl's idea that if humans try to experience any form of non-self by leaving out of account the instituted world and

[5] C. Lévi-Strauss, *La Pensée sauvage* (Paris, 1962), pp. 154–5, my translation.

[6] True, some non-human species also ascribe properties (at least relational and behavioural features) to humans and other non-humans; but before they can be included in a general theory of ontologies, a lot of ground remains to be covered.

[7] I am very grateful to Tim Ingold for his insightful comments on an earlier draft of the lecture and for his suggestions of stylistic amendments.

everything it means for them, the only resources that they can avail themselves of are their body and their intentionality.[8] These twin assets, which I prefer to call physicality (in the sense of dispositions enabling a physical action) and interiority (in the sense of self-reflexive inwardness), are not Western constructs generated by the marriage of Greek philosophy with Christian theology and subsequently raised under the rigorous ferule of a long line of Cartesian tutors. According to developmental psychology, the awareness of this duality is probably innate and specific to the human species,[9] a point confirmed by ethnographic and historical accounts: for despite the known diversity of conceptions of the person, notions of physicality and interiority seem to be universally present, although with an infinite variety of modalities of connections and interactions between the two planes. A proof of this would be that there is no known case of a conception of the ordinary living human person that would be based on interiority alone—let us call it a mind without a body—or on physicality alone—a body without a mind—, or not at least, in the latter case, until the advent of materialist theories of consciousness of the late twentieth century. Rather than reducing the distinction between interiority and physicality to an ethnocentric prejudice, one should instead apprehend the specific forms this distinction was given in Europe by philosophical and theological theories as local variants of a more general system of elementary contrasts that can be studied comparatively.

The thought experiment derives from the initial intuition. If we agree that every human is aware of being a combination of interiority and physicality, then one can imagine how an entirely hypothetic subject, devoid of any previous information about the world, might use this equipment to chart his environment through a process of identification. By identification, I mean the elementary mechanism through which this subject will detect differences and similarities between himself and the objects in the world by inferring analogies and distinctions of appearance and behaviour between what he experiences as characteristic of his own self and the attributes he ascribes to the entities which surround him. And since the only tools he can rely upon are his interiority and his physicality, his patterning of the world will be based upon the selective attribution or denial of these attributes to other existing things. The range of identifications

[8] E. Husserl, *Erste Philosophie* (1923–4) 2, *Theorie der phänomenologischen Reduktion* (The Hague, 1959), pp. 61–4.

[9] P. Bloom, *Descartes' Baby: How the Science of Child Development Explains What Makes Us Human* (New York, 2004).

based on the interplay of interiority and physicality is thus quite limited: when confronted with an as yet unspecified *alter*, whether human or non-human, our hypothetical subject can surmise either that this object possesses elements of physicality and interiority analogous to his, and this I call totemism; or that this object's interiority and physicality are entirely distinct from his own, and this I call analogism; or that the object has a similar interiority and a different physicality, and this I call animism; or that the object is devoid of interiority but possesses a similar kind of physicality, and this I call naturalism. These formulae define four types of ontologies, that is of systems of distribution of properties among existing objects in the world, that in turn provide anchoring points for sociocosmic forms of aggregation and conceptions of self and non-self.

Let us now examine some properties of these four modes of identification. Animism as a continuity of souls and a discontinuity of bodies is quite common in South and North America, in Siberia and in some parts of South-East Asia where peoples endow plants, animals and other elements of their physical environment with a subjectivity and establish with these entities all sorts of personal relations, whether of friendship, exchange, seduction, or hostility. In these animic systems, humans and most non-humans are conceived as having the same type of interiority, and it is because of this common subjectivity that animals and spirits are said to possess social characteristics: they live in villages, abide by kinship rules and ethical codes, engage in ritual activity and barter goods. However, the reference shared by most beings in the world is humanity as a general condition, not man as a species. In other words, humans and all the kinds of non-humans with which humans interact each have different physicalities, in that their identical internal essences are lodged in different types of bodies, often described locally as clothing that can be donned or discarded, the better to underline their autonomy from the interiorities which inhabit them. Non-humans see themselves as humans because they are said to believe that they share with the latter the same kind of soul, and yet they are unlike humans because their bodies are different. Now, as Viveiros de Castro pointed out in the case of Amazonia, these specific clothes often induce contrasted perspectives on the world, in that the physiological and perceptual constraints proper to a type of body impose on each class of being a specific position and point of view in the general ecology of relations.[10] Human and non-human persons have an integrally

[10] E. Viveiros de Castro, 'Os pronomes cosmológicos', 117.

'cultural' view of their life sphere because they share the same kind of interiority, but the world that all these entities apprehend and use is different, for each employs distinct bodily equipment.

These differences of bodies are morphological, and thus behavioural, rather than substantial. This is hardly surprising as animic ontologies probably borrow part of their operational schema from the model of the trophic chain. Everywhere in the animic archipelago, one finds the same idea that vitality, energy and fecundity constantly circulate between organisms thanks to the capture, the exchange and the consuming of flesh. This constant recycling of tissues and fluids, analogous to the nutritional interdependence in the synecological process, is a clear indication that all these beings who ingest one another cannot be distinguished by the substances they are made of. And this is why, in animic systems, dietary prescriptions and prohibitions are less designed to favour or to prevent the mixing of reputedly heterogeneous substances—as is typically the case in Chinese or Galenic medicine, for instance—than to favour or to prevent the transfer from the prescribed or the proscribed species of certain anatomical features or of certain traits of behaviour reputedly derived from these features. By contrast, the place that each species occupies in the trophic chain is precisely determined by its organic equipment, since this conditions both the milieu accessible to the species and, through the organs of locomotion and of acquisition of food, the type of resources that can be tapped in this milieu. The form of bodies thus amounts to a bundle of differentiated functions, it is the entire biological toolkit that allows a species to occupy a certain habitat and to lead there the type of distinctive lifestyle by which it is identified.

Although many species share the same or a similar interiority, each one of them thus possesses its own physicality under the guise of a particular ethogram that will determine its own *Umwelt*, in the sense of Jakob von Uexküll: that is, the salient features of its environment are those that are geared to its specific bodily tools as instruments of locomotion, of reproduction, of defence, of acquiring food.[11] This is why metamorphosis plays such an important role in animic systems. For metamorphosis is what allows interactions on a common ground between entities with entirely different bodies, when animals and plants reveal their interiority under a human form in order to communicate with humans—in dreams and visions generally, or when humans—usually shamans and

[11] J. von Uexküll, *Streifzüge durch die Umwelten von Tieren und Menschen: Bedeutungslehre* (Hamburg, 1956).

ritual specialists—don animal clothing in order to visit animal communities. Thus, metamorphosis is not an unveiling of the humanity of animal persons, or a way to disguise the humanity of human persons; it is the culminating stage of a relation where everyone, by modifying the position of observation to which he has been confined by his original physicality, strives to coincide with the point of view according to which he presumes that the other term of the relation apprehends himself: a human will not see an animal as he perceives it normally, but as the animal perceives itself, as a human; and a human is seen as he does not perceive himself ordinarily, but as he wishes to be perceived, as an animal. It is an anamorphosis, then, rather than a metamorphosis.

Let us turn now to the second mode of identification, where some beings in the world share sets of physical and moral attributes that seem to cut across the boundaries of species. I call it totemism, but in a very different sense from the one which has been attached to the term since Lévi-Strauss attempted to debunk the 'totemic illusion'. For totemism is more than a universal classificatory device; it is also, and perhaps foremost, a very original ontology which is best exemplified in Aboriginal Australia. There, the main totem of a group of humans, most often an animal or a plant, and all the human and non-human beings that are affiliated to it, are said to share certain general attributes of physical conformation, substance, temperament and behaviour by virtue of a common origin emplaced in the land. This explains famous counter-intuitive statements which hardly fit within the Lévi-Straussian framework, such as the one reported by Spencer and Gillen, who, when showing to an Aranda man of the kangaroo totem a photograph they had taken of him, received this response: 'this one is exactly like me; as is a kangaroo', leading them to comment: 'Every man considers his totem . . . as the same thing as himself.'[12]

Now, as C. G. von Brandenstein showed in his thorough analysis of the meaning of Australian totem terms, these attributes that cut across species boundaries are not derived from what is improperly called the eponym entity, since the word designating the totem in many cases is not the name of a species, i.e. a biological taxon, but rather the name of an abstract property which is present in this species as well as in all the beings subsumed under it in a totemic grouping.[13] For instance, the

[12] W. B. Spencer and F. J. Gillen, *The Native Tribes of Central Australia* (London, 1899), p. 202.
[13] C. G. von Brandenstein, *Names and Substance of the Australian Subsection System* (Chicago, 1982), p. 54.

Nungar of South-West Australia had two totemic moieties, respectively called *maarnetj*, that can be translated as 'the catcher', and *waardar*, which means 'the watcher', these two terms also being used to designate the totems of these moieties, the White Cockatoo and the Crow.[14] Here, the names of the totemic classes are terms that denote properties that are also used to designate the totemic species, and not the reverse, that is names of zoological taxa from which would be inferred the typical attributes of the totemic classes. It is thus difficult to maintain, at least for Australia, the classificatory interpretation of totemism, since the basic difference is between aggregates of attributes that are common to humans and non-humans within classes designated by abstract terms, not between animal and vegetable species that would provide naturally, by their manifest discontinuities of morphology and behaviour, an analogical template that could be used so as to structure social discontinuities.

And these moral and physical attributes are usually defined with precision. In the case of the Nungar, for instance, humans belonging to the moiety of 'the catcher' are said to have a light-brown skin, round faces and limbs, curly hair and to be endowed with an impulsive and passionate temperament, while members of the moiety of 'the watcher' are said to have a dark and leaden skin, to be very hairy and of a stocky build, with small hands and feet, and to be vindictive, sullen and secretive. Such qualities are not directly inferred from the observation of the White Cockatoo or the Crow; they express, in the domain of moral and physical properties ascribed to humans, repertoires of more abstract, contrasted predicates that these two emblematic species are supposed to express and embody much more clearly than the secondary totem species that are subsumed under them. The two birds are thus prototypes of a kind, not primarily because they are morphologically salient, but because they are the best exemplars of their respective classes in that they allow inferences of properties derived from certain traits of their behaviour and appearance, however tenuous these may be.

As ontologies, animism and totemism reveal contrasting formal features. In animic systems, the continuity of relations between humans and non-humans that is allowed by their common interiority overrides the discontinuity introduced by their physical difference. This explains the relational nature of animic cosmologies and the fact that the identities of human and non-human persons are defined by the positions they occupy

[14] C. G. von Brandenstein, 'Aboriginal Ecological Order in the South-West of Australia—Meanings and Examples', *Oceania*, 47 (3) (1977), 170–86.

in relation to one another. By contrast, Australian totemism is a symmetrical structure characterised by a twofold identity internal to each class of beings—the ontological identity of the human and non-human components of the class by virtue of their sharing elements of interiority and physicality, and the identity of the relations between them, whether of origin, affiliation, similarity or inherence to the class. Totemism thus places on an equal footing interdependent terms and relations, a cause for puzzlement among anthropologists, and the reason why they have interpreted the phenomenon by favouring either the identity of terms—in the case of Frazer and Levy-Bruhl, for instance—or the homology of relations, as Boas or Lévi-Strauss did.

The third mode of identification, which I call analogism, is predicated on the idea that all the entities in the world are fragmented into a multiplicity of essences, forms and substances separated by minute intervals, often ordered along a graded scale, such as in the Great Chain of Being that served as the main cosmological model during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. This disposition allows for a recombination of the initial contrasts into a dense network of analogies linking the intrinsic properties of each autonomous entity present in the world. What is most striking in such systems is the cleverness with which all the resemblances liable to provide a basis for inferences are actively sought out, especially as these apply to crucial domains of life, particularly the prevention and treatment of illness and misfortune. The obsession with analogies becomes a dominating feature, as in ancient China where, according to Granet, 'society, man, the world, are objects of a global knowledge constituted by the sole use of analogy'.[15] However, analogy is here only a consequence of the necessity to organise a world composed of a multiplicity of independent elements, such as the Chinese *wan wou*, the 10,000 essences. Analogy becomes possible and thinkable only if the terms that it conjoins are initially distinguished, and if the power to detect similarities between things is applied to singularities that are, by this process, partially extracted from their original isolation. Analogism can be seen as an hermeneutic dream of completeness and totalisation which proceeds from a dissatisfaction: admitting that all the components of the world are separated by tiny discontinuities, it entertains the hope of weaving these weakly differentiated elements into a canvas of affinities and attractions which would have all the appearances of continuity. But the ordinary state of the world is

[15] M. Granet, *La pensée chinoise* (Paris, 1968 (1934)), p. 297.

indeed a multiplicity of reverberating differences, and resemblance is only the expected means to render this fragmented world intelligible and tolerable. This multiplication of the elementary pieces of the world echoing within each of its parts—including humans, divided into numerous components partially located outside of their bodies—is a distinctive feature of analogic ontologies and the best clue for identifying them. Apart from the paradigmatic case of China, this type of ontology is quite common in parts of Asia, in West Africa, or among the native communities of Mesoamerica and the Andes.

The last mode of identification, naturalism, corresponds to the prevalent ontology of Modernity. Naturalism is not only the idea that nature exists, that certain entities owe their existence and development to a principle that is extraneous both to chance and to the effects of human will. It does not qualify only the advent, conventionally situated in the seventeenth century, of a specific ontological domain, a place of order and necessity where nothing happens without a cause. Naturalism also implies a counterpart, a world of artifice and free will the complexity of which has progressively emerged under the scrutiny of analysts, until it rendered necessary, in the course of the nineteenth century, the institution of special sciences which were given the task of stabilising its boundaries and characteristics: that is, the diversity of expressions of the creativity of humans as producers of signs, norms and goods. Now, if one considers naturalism—the coexistence of a single unifying nature and a multiplicity of cultures—not as the all-embracing template that allows us to objectify any reality, but as one among other modes of identification, then its contrasting properties appear more clearly. For instance, naturalism inverts the ontological premises of animism since, instead of claiming an identity of soul and a difference of bodies, it is predicated upon a discontinuity of interiorities and a material continuity.[16] What, for us, distinguishes humans from non-humans is the mind, the soul, subjectivity, a moral conscience, language and so forth, in the same way as human groups are distinguished from one another by a collective internal disposition that used to be called *Volksgeist* but is more familiar to us now under its modern label of 'culture'. On the other hand, we are all aware, especially since Darwin, that the physical dimension of humans locates them within a material continuum wherein they do not stand out as singularities. The ontological discrimination that excludes from personhood

[16] A point which Viveiros de Castro was the first to make, 'Os pronomes cosmológicos', 129.

non-human organisms that are biologically very close to us is a clear sign of the privilege granted in our own mode of identification to criteria based on the expression of a purported interiority (language, self-consciousness or theory of mind) rather than those based on material continuity.

I want to make clear that these four modes of identification are not mutually exclusive. Each human may activate any of them according to circumstances, but one of them is always dominant at a specific time and place in that it gives to persons who acquired skills and knowledge within the same community of practice the main framework through which they perceive and interpret reality. It is this framework that I call an ontology. Now, each ontology also prefigures a specific type of collective more particularly appropriate to the gathering within a common destiny of the kinds of being that this ontology distinguishes. By collective, a concept I borrow from Latour, I mean a way of assembling humans and non-humans in a network of specific relations, by contrast with the traditional notion of society, which only applies, strictly speaking, to the subset of human subjects, thus detached from the fabrics of the relations that they maintain with their non-human environment.[17]

Taken in that sense, a collective corresponds only very partially to what we usually call a social system. If one takes seriously the various conceptions that peoples have forged of their institutions in the course of history, we have to admit that they seldom isolate the sphere of sociality as a separate regime of existence and norms concerning humans alone. One had to wait for the maturity of naturalism, in the nineteenth century, for a specialised body of disciplines to emerge which would define sociality as its main object of study and attempt as a consequence to detect and objectify this field of practice everywhere, without paying much attention to local conceptions, as if the content and frontiers of this domain were invariably identical to those that we decreed. Now, far from being a founding prerequisite from which everything else is derived, sociality proceeds rather from the process of collecting and assembling into a common whole that each mode of identification predetermines. Thus, the property of being social is not what explains, but what must be explained. If one admits this, if one accepts that the major part of humankind has not, until very recently, made stark distinctions between what is natural and what is social, nor considered that the treatment of humans and the

[17] B. Latour, *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes. Essai d'anthropologie symétrique* (Paris, 1991).

treatment of non-humans belong to entirely different spheres, then one must apprehend the different modes of sociocosmic organisation as a question of patterns of distribution of beings into collectives: who or what is assembled with whom or what, in what way, and for what purpose?

I can only offer a very brief sketch of this patterning and I shall begin with animism. In such systems, all the classes of beings endowed with an interiority similar to that of humans reputedly live in collectives that possess the same kind of structure and properties: they all have chiefs, shamans, rituals, dwellings, techniques, artefacts, they assemble and quarrel, provide for their subsistence and marry according to rules. But these collectives, that are all integrally social and cultural, are also distinguished from one another by the fact that their members have different morphologies and behaviour. Each collective is equivalent to a sort of tribe-species that establishes with other tribe-species relations of sociability of the same type as those that are held legitimate within the given human collective which ascribes its internal organisation, its system of values and its mode of life to the collectives of non-humans with which it interacts. The so-called natural and supernatural domains are thus peopled by collectives with which human collectives maintain relations according to norms that are deemed common to all. For although humans and non-humans may exchange perspectives, they also and above all exchange signs, that is indications that they understand each other in their practical interactions. And these signs can only be interpreted by all parties concerned if they are predicated on common institutions that legitimate them and give them a meaning, thus warranting that the misunderstandings in interspecific communication will be reduced to a minimum. This is why all the isomorphous collectives of humans and non-humans take as their model a specific human collective.

Although the concept of species provides the template for animic collectives, it is a species which hardly corresponds to the definition of modern systematics. True, in both cases, it amounts to a collection of individuals that conform to a type. However, the natural sciences do not take into account the point of view of the members of a species in the characterisation of its attributes and taxonomic boundaries, except perhaps in the basic form of mutual identification that a community of reproduction implies. In the naturalist regime, then, the human species is the only one that has the capacity to objectify itself thanks to the reflexive privilege granted by its interiority, while the members of all the other species remain ignorant of the fact that they belong to an abstract set which has been isolated by the external point of view of the systematician

according to his own classificatory criteria. By contrast, the members of an animic species are reputedly conscious that they form a collective of their own, with distinctive attributes of form and behaviour. And this collective self-awareness is reinforced by the notion that the members of other collectives apprehend them with a point of view different from their own, a point of view which they must appropriate in order to experience themselves as fully distinct. In the naturalist classification, species A is distinguished from species B because species C says so in virtue of its human rational capacity, while in animic identification, I experience myself as a member of species A, not only because I differ from members of species B by certain manifest physical features, but also because the very existence of species B allows me to know I am different since its members hold of me a different point of view from the one I hold of myself. The perspective of the putative classifier must then be absorbed by the classified in order for the latter to see himself as entirely specific.

I will not expatiate on the sociological formula of naturalism, since it is the mode of identification that is most familiar to us and the one that we deem, mistakenly, to be universal: humans are distributed within collectives differentiated by their languages, beliefs and institutions—what we call cultures—which exclude everything that exists independently from them, namely nature and artefacts. The paradigm of collectives is here human society, *by contrast* to an anomic nature. Humans associate freely, they elaborate rules and conventions that they can choose to infringe, they transform their environment and share tasks in the procurement of their subsistence, they create signs and values that they exchange; in sum, they do everything that non-human animals do not do. And it is against the background of this fundamental difference that the distinctive properties attributed to human collectives stand out; as Hobbes says with his robust concision: 'no covenant with beasts'. It is true that social evolutionism has introduced graduations into this original separation from the world of non-humans, graduations that subsist today as prejudices: certain 'cultures' are said to be closer to nature (it has now become a positive trait) because they hardly modify their environment and make do without a heavy institutional apparatus. But no one, even among the most stubborn racists, would be prepared to say that these societies borrow their institutions from animals.

While animism and naturalism take human society as general models of collectives, they do it very differently. Animism is extremely liberal in its attribution of sociality to non-humans, while naturalism reserves the privilege of it to everything that is not deemed natural. In the case of

animism, a Radcliffe-Brownian anthropologist would say that nature is conceived by analogy with culture since the majority of beings in the world reputedly live in a cultural regime, and it is mainly through physical attributes—the morphology of bodies and the behaviours associated with them—that collectives are distinguished from one another. In naturalism, by contrast, common philosophical wisdom has it that culture is conceived as what is differentiated from nature; it is qualified by default. Although both conceptions may appear anthropocentric, only naturalism is really so, since non-humans are tautologically defined by their lack of humanity. It is exclusively in humans and their attributes that the paradigm of moral dignity denied to other beings is held to reside. No such thing can be said of animism, since non-humans share the same condition as humans, the latter claiming as their only privilege the ascription to non-humans of institutions that are similar to their own so as to establish with them relations based on shared norms of behaviour. Animism is thus better defined as anthropogenic, in that it contents itself with deriving from humans only what is necessary in order for non-humans to be treated like humans.

The question of totemic collectives is more complex. Traditionally, totemism has been conceptualised as a form of social organisation in which humans are distributed in interlocking groups that borrow their distinctive characteristics from the realm of natural kinds, either because these groups are supposed to share certain attributes with a set of non-humans, or because they take as models for patterning their internal differences the contrasts between eponymous species. Now, this broadly sociocentric definition has the disadvantage of introducing an analytical dichotomy between social categories and natural categories that appears to be absent from the ontological premises of those paradigmatic totemists that Australian Aboriginal people are. It is more appropriate in that case to say that humans and non-humans are distributed *jointly* in collectives (totemic classes) which are isomorphous and complementary, by contrast with animism wherein humans and non-humans are distributed *separately* in collectives (tribe-species) which are also isomorphous, but which remain autonomous in relation to each other. To return to the example of the Nungar, in the moiety of 'the getter' iconically represented by the White Cockatoo, one does find cockatoos, as well as the human half of the Nungar tribe, but one finds also eagles, pelicans, snakes, mosquitoes, whales, in short an apparently ill-assorted aggregate of species that cannot be matched with any of the groupings of organisms that the environment spontaneously offers to observation. By contrast, an animic

collective such as the Achuar tribe of the Upper Amazon is exclusively composed of Achuar-persons, while among their non-human neighbours, one finds only peccary-persons in the peccary tribe, tapir-persons in the tapir tribe, toucan-persons in the toucan tribe. If the structure and properties of animic collectives thus derive from those ascribed to human collectives, the structure of totemic collectives is defined by the differentials between bundles of physical and moral attributes that are denoted by non-human emblems (the species illustrating the totems), while the properties ascribed to the members of these collectives do not proceed directly from humans or from non-humans, but rather from a prototypical class of predicates, embodied in Australia in the Beings of Dreamtime, which pre-exist their actualisation in specific beings. Although animic collectives differ from one another because of the monospecific recruitment of their members, they are homogeneous as regards their principles of organisation: for the Makuna of Colombia, the tapir tribe has the same type of leader, shaman and ritual system as has the peccary tribe, the toucan tribe and, of course, the Makuna tribe.[18] This is not so with totemic collectives, which are also all different as regards the composition of their members, but which are furthermore hybrid in their contents and heterogeneous in their principles of composition.

This is particularly the case in Australia where a great variety of totemic groupings exists, and where humans can belong simultaneously to several of them. Here again, the contrast is notable with animic collectives which are on the contrary predicated on a species-specific physicality, since the affiliation to each 'society' is based on the fact that all its members share the same physical appearance, the same habitat, the same diet and the same mode of reproduction. It is in animism, not in totemism, that the biological species provides a model for the composition of collectives. And this is so because animic collectives, like biological species, are never integrated into a functional whole at a higher level: above the Achuar tribe-species, the toucan tribe-species, the peccary tribe-species, there is nothing in common, except this abstract predicate that anthropologists who try to make sense of these arrangements call 'culture'. There is no such thing with totemism, where the integrative whole formed by the juxtaposition of the different totemic classes cannot be represented on the basis of the groupings that the natural world proposes: the only available model would be the species, since the genus is a

[18] K. Århem, 'The Cosmic Food Web: human-nature relatedness in the Northwest Amazon', in Ph. Descola and G. Pálsson (eds.), *Nature and Society*, pp. 185–204.

taxonomic fiction, but the species is precisely not liable to be decomposed in contrastive segments that would be analogous to totemic classes. While animism and naturalism take human society as the paradigm of collectives, totemism mixes in hybrid sets humans and non-humans that use one another in order to produce social linkage, generic identity and attachment to places. But it does so by fragmenting the constitutive units so that the properties of each of them become complementary and their assemblage dependent upon the differentials that they present. Such a system is not driven by a Lévi-Straussian classificatory logic nor by a Durkheimian sociocentric logic, but by a principle that may be called cosmogenic. As animism is anthropogenic because it borrows from humans what is necessary for non-humans to be treated like humans, so totemism is cosmogenic in that it derives from sets of cosmic attributes—that is, those which cannot be referred to a particular species—everything that is needed for some humans and non-humans to be included within a single collective.

The forms of collective allowed by the analogic mode of identification are not so specific: in this kind of ontology, the components of the world are so fragmented into a plurality of elements and determinations that their association can take many different guises. In spite of this diversity, however, humans and non-humans always appear as constitutive elements of a wider collective, coextensive with the world: cosmos and society become truly indistinguishable, whatever the types of internal segmentation that such a totality requires in order to remain efficient. For the analogic collective is always divided into interdependent constitutive units which are structured according to a logic of segmentary nesting: lineages, moieties, castes, descent groups prevail here and expand the connections of humans with other beings from the infraworld to the heavens. Although the exterior of the collective is not entirely ignored, it remains an 'out-world' where disorder reigns, a periphery that may be feared, despised, or predestined to join the central core as a new segment that will fit in the slot that has been allocated to it long before: such was the fate of the Amazonian savages bordering the Tawantinsuyu, who, without ever having been subjected to the Lords of Cuzco, belonged to the Anti division of the Inca quadripartition.

Analogic collectives are not necessarily empires or states; some of them are weak in numbers and ignore political stratification and disparities of wealth. They all have in common, however, that their parts are ordered hierarchically, if only at a symbolic level. The hierarchical distribution is often redoubled within each segment, delimitating subsets which are in the

same unequal relation one to the other as the encompassing units. The classical illustration is the Hindu caste system where the general schema of encompassment is repeated within each of the successive levels of subordination: in the sub-castes composing the castes, in the clans composing the sub-castes, in the lineal groups composing the clans. The same structure is found in the organisation into endogamous sections, or *kalpul*, of the Tzotzil and Tzeltal of Chiapas, a sort of segment that can hardly be called a moiety, in that certain communities have three or five of them, but that has all the characteristics of it. The *kalpul* are social and cosmic segments mixing humans and non-humans, as well as corporate units exerting a control on land tenure and on the individuals incorporated under their jurisdiction. When there are only two sections, the most frequent case, their demarcation follows the gradient of the territory at the level of the village, so that the dominant moiety on the ritual, symbolic and demographic planes is located in the upper part, associated with the mountains and the autochthonous divinities that have their abode there, while the lower moiety is linked to the lowlands, to the abundance of crops, and to the world of demons and Whites. The demographic and ceremonial preponderance of the upper moiety is but an expression of a more general pattern of segmentation of the cosmos in pairs of complementary elements, one said to be 'elder', the other 'younger': each 'elder' mountain is thus flanked by a 'younger' mountain, each 'elder' cavern by a 'younger' one, and so on, from fountains to the statues of saints in the village church.

To sum up, the analogic collective is unique, divided into hierarchised segments and in almost exclusive relation with itself, by contrast with the egalitarian and monospecific collectives of animism, and the egalitarian and heterogeneous collectives of totemism that are all bound to enter into relation with each other. It is thus self-sufficient, in that it contains within itself all the relations and determinations that are necessary to its existence and adequate functioning, by contrast with the totemic collective, which is indeed autonomous at the level of its ontological identity, but which requires other collectives of the same kind in order to become functional. For, in an analogic collective, the hierarchy of the elementary segments is contrastive: it is defined exclusively by reciprocal positions. And this is why the segments do not constitute independent collectives as the totemic classes do, since the latter draw from within themselves, from specific sites and prototypical precursors, the physical and moral foundations of their distinctiveness. The moiety of the East only exists because it complements the moiety of the West, while the totemic group of the Kangaroo, even if it may need the totemic group of the Goanna in

many situations, draws from the sole circumstances of its emergence the legitimacy of its absolute singularity.

The segments of an analogic collective are thus thoroughly heteronomical in that they only acquire a meaning and a function by reference to the autonomous whole that they jointly form. It is true that animic collectives also admit a degree of heteronomy, but of an entirely different kind since the external specification obtains through a series of identifications to individual and intersubjective alterities of various origins, not through an overdetermination of the elements by the structure which binds them. The enemy whose alterity I absorb by capturing his head or consuming his body proceeds indeed from a different collective; however his capacity to singularise me is not linked to traits that would be specific to his own collective, but simply to his position of exteriority regarding myself. The members of the tribe-species A differentiate themselves from the members of the tribe-species B, C or D because they perceive themselves as distinctive entities through the perspective that these other tribe-species activate upon them in the course of certain codified interactions. This is why, in the case of animism, there is no predetermination as to the type of collective liable to serve this function of external specification: it may be, according to context, individuals proceeding from one or various tribe-species of animals, from one or various tribe-species of spirits, from one or various tribe-species of humans, or from a combination of all of these. As for the properly physical incorporation of an external point of view, it becomes an occasional luxury, reserved to a few animic collectives only, as is actual cannibalism, the easiest means for achieving that end. In an analogic collective, by contrast, the members of segment A differentiate themselves collectively from members of segment B in that A and B are elements of the hierarchical structure which encompasses them all; in philosophical language, one would say that their positions and relations are the product of an expressive causality. The dependence of the analogic segments on the collective that defines them is thus constitutive of their mode of being; with elements that are intrinsically internal to the collective, they must strive to produce an illusion of exteriority.

In a famous presidential address to the Royal Anthropological Institute, Radcliffe-Brown remarked that 'we do not observe a "culture", since that word denotes, not any concrete reality, but an abstraction'.[19] Quite true.

[19] A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, 'On social structure', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 70 (1940), 1–12, republished in *Structure and Function*, p. 190.

But the same can be said of most anthropological concepts. We do not observe a 'social structure' either, or a kinship system, or the mysterious entelechy that Durkheimians call a *représentation collective*. We only observe what we take as instantiations of what we believe are structured patterns of behaviour and recurrent patterns of thought. Understanding the nature and distribution of these patterns has been our concern for almost a century and a half, whatever our differences as to the level of reality on which they should be found. If, as I surmise, the ambition of anthropology is to contribute with its own methods to the task of elucidating the manner in which humans engage with their surroundings, how they identify and select some properties of the world for their use, and how they transform it by establishing, with elements of it and among themselves, constant or occasional relations of a remarkable but not infinite diversity, then, to pursue such an endeavour, we need to draw up the chart of these relations, to elicit their modes of compatibility and incompatibility, and to examine how they are actualised in ways of being that are immediately distinctive. I found that this task is much easier if one looks at differences rather than resemblances. Not the obvious differences between what we call cultures, the bread and butter of social constructionism, nor the unique mega-difference between humans and non-humans that is used to authenticate all other differences. The differences that count are those that accrue from the network of discontinuities of form, matter, behaviour or function that are offered to our grasp by the movement of the world. Discontinuities that are sometimes straightforward, sometimes barely outlined; discontinuities that we can recognise or ignore, emphasise or minimise, actualise or leave as potentialities; discontinuities which form the framework on which are hooked our relations with what Merleau-Ponty aptly called 'the associate bodies'.[20] I found, in short, that there was no need to presuppose some original fault lines in this network of discontinuities, in particular one that would separate the realm of nature from the abode of speaking creatures; I found that, however useful this constitutional division may have been in triggering the accomplishments of Modernity, it has now outlived its moral and epistemological efficiency, thus making way for what I believe will be a new exciting period of intellectual and political turmoil.

[20] M. Merleau-Ponty, *L'Oeil et l'Esprit* (Paris, 1964), p. 13.