

Copyright Notice

Staff and students of this University are reminded that copyright subsists in this extract and the work from which it was taken. This Digital Copy has been made under the terms of a CLA Licence which allows you to:

- Access and download a copy
- Print out a copy

This Digital Copy and any digital or printed copy supplied to or made by you under the terms of this Licence are for use in connection with this module or course of study. You may retain such copies after the end of the course, but strictly for your own personal use.

All copies (including electronic copies) shall include this Copyright Notice and shall be destroyed and/or deleted if and when required by the University.

Except as provided for by copyright law, no further copying, storage or distribution (including by e-mail) is permitted without the consent of the copyright holder.

The author (which term includes artists and other visual creators) has moral rights in the work and neither staff nor students may cause, or permit, the distortion, mutilation or other modification of the work, or any other derogatory treatment of it, which would be prejudicial to the honour or reputation of the author.

Title of extract: **The Scope of the Subject**

Name of Author: **Evans-Pritchard, E.E.**

Title/Author of book/edition (if applicable): **Social Anthropology. Evans-Pritchard, E.E.**

Name of Visual Creator or other acknowledgement (if applicable):

Journal details –title/Vol/Year (if applicable):

Publisher: **London Cohen and West.**

Pages scanned: **1 - 21**

Course of Study (Module name and number): **Researching Contemporary Cosmologies AHAN7035**

Name of Designated Person
authorising scanning:

E.L. Harris

Date authorised: 04.05.17.

Moodle/Powerpoint

I

THE SCOPE OF THE SUBJECT

I shall endeavour in these lectures to give you a general account of what social anthropology is. I am aware that even among well-read laymen there is a good deal of haziness about the subject. The words seem to arouse vague associations of either apes and skulls or strange rites of savages and curious superstitions. I do not think that I shall have any difficulty in convincing you that these associations are misplaced.

My treatment of the subject must be guided by this awareness. I must assume that some of you are frankly ignorant of what social anthropology is, and that others believe it to be what it is not. Those who have some acquaintance with the subject will, I hope, forgive me if, therefore, I discuss it broadly and in what may appear to them an elementary way.

In this, my first, lecture I shall tell you what is the general scope of the subject. In my second and third lectures I shall trace its theoretical development. In my fourth lecture I shall discuss that part of its research we call fieldwork. In my fifth lecture I shall illustrate the development of both theory and fieldwork by giving you some examples of modern studies. In my final lecture I shall discuss the relation of social anthropology to practical affairs.

I shall throughout restrict my account as far as possible to social anthropology in England, chiefly in order to avoid difficulties in presentation, for were I to give also an account of the development of the subject in continental countries and in America I should be compelled so to

SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY

compress the material that what would be gained in comprehensiveness would not compensate for what would be lost in clarity and continuity. This restriction matters less than it would perhaps do in many other fields of learning because social anthropology has to a large extent developed independently in England. I shall, however, mention foreign writers and tendencies where these have markedly affected the thought of English scholars.

Even within these limits it is not easy to give you a clear and simple account of the aims and methods of social anthropology, because there is often lack of agreement about them among social anthropologists themselves. There is, of course, substantial agreement about many matters, but about others there are divergent opinions, and these, as often happens in a small and new subject, tend to become entangled with personalities, for scholars are perhaps more, rather than less, prone than other people to identify themselves with their opinions.

Personal preferences, when it is necessary to express them, are harmless if openly acknowledged. Ambiguities are more dangerous. Social anthropology has a very limited technical vocabulary, so that it has to use everyday language and this, as we all know, is not very precise. Such words as 'society', 'culture', 'custom', 'religion', 'sanction', 'structure', 'function', 'political', and 'democratic' do not always convey the same meaning either to different people or in different contexts. It would be possible for anthropologists to introduce many new words or to give a restricted and technical meaning to words in common use, but apart from the difficulty of getting their colleagues to agree to these usages, were this done on a large scale anthropological writings would soon become a jargon intelligible only to professional scholars. If we have to choose between steering close to

THE SCOPE

the obscurities of everyday speech and the obscurities of specialist jargon I would prefer to risk the lesser perils of everyday speech, for what social anthropology has to teach concerns everybody and not only those who study it professionally.

Social anthropology is a title used in England and to some extent in the United States, to designate a department of the larger subject of anthropology, the study of man from a number of aspects. It concerns itself with human cultures and societies. On the continent a different terminology prevails. There when people speak of anthropology, which to us is the entire study of man, they have in mind only what we in England call physical anthropology, that is to say, the biological study of man. What we call social anthropology would be referred to on the continent as either ethnology or sociology.

Even in England the expression 'social anthropology' has only very recently come into use. The subject has been taught, under the names of anthropology or ethnology, since 1884 at Oxford, since 1900 at Cambridge, and since 1908 in London, but the first university chair which bore the title of *social anthropology* was the honorary professorship held by Sir James Frazer at Liverpool in 1908. The subject has recently received wider recognition and social anthropology is now taught under that name in a number of universities in Great Britain and in the Dominions.

Being a branch of the wider subject of anthropology, it is generally taught in connection with its other branches: physical anthropology, ethnology, prehistoric archaeology, and sometimes general linguistics and human geography. As the last two subjects seldom figure in degree and diploma courses in anthropology in this country I say no more about them; and all I need say about physical anthropology, since it has a very limited overlap with social anthropology at the present time, is

that it is a branch of human biology and comprises such interests as heredity, nutrition, sex differences, the comparative anatomy and physiology of races, and the theory of human evolution.

It is with ethnology that we have our closest ties. To understand why this is so it is necessary to know that while social anthropologists consider that their subject embraces all human cultures and societies, including our own, they have, for reasons I will mention later, for the most part given their attention to those of primitive peoples. Ethnologists are dealing with the same peoples, and there is consequently a considerable overlap between the two subjects.

It is important to appreciate, however, that though ethnology and social anthropology make their studies very largely among the same range of peoples they make them with very different purposes. Consequently, though in the past no clear distinction was made between ethnology and social anthropology, they are today regarded as separate disciplines. The task of ethnology is to classify peoples on the basis of their racial and cultural characteristics and then to explain their distribution at the present time, or in past times, by the movement and mixture of peoples and the diffusion of cultures.

The classification of peoples and cultures is an essential preliminary to the comparisons which social anthropologists make between primitive societies, because it is highly convenient, and even necessary, to start by comparing those of the same general cultural type—those which belong to what Bastian long ago called 'geographical provinces'.¹ When, however, ethnologists attempt to reconstruct the history of primitive peoples, for whose past historical records are lacking, they are compelled to rely on inferences from circumstantial

¹ Adolf Bastian, *Controversen in der Ethnologie*, 1893.

evidence to reach their conclusions, which, in the nature of the case, can never be more than probable reconstructions. Sometimes a number of different, and even contrary, hypotheses fit the facts equally well. Ethnology is thus not history in the ordinary sense, for history tells us not that events may have happened, but that they did happen, and not merely that events have taken place, but how and when they happened, and often why they happened. For this reason, and because ethnology can in any case tell us little about the past social life of primitive peoples, its speculations, as distinct from its classifications, have limited significance for social anthropologists.

Prehistoric archaeology is best regarded as a branch of ethnology. It attempts to reconstruct the history of peoples and cultures from human and cultural remains found by excavation in geological deposits. It also relies on circumstantial evidence and, like ethnology, can tell social anthropologists little about the ideas and institutions, in which they would be interested, of the peoples whose bones and artifacts it discovers and classifies. Another branch of anthropology, comparative technology, in the main the comparative technology of primitive peoples, is, as it is usually taught, an adjunct of ethnology and prehistory.

Social anthropology has quite a different task to perform. It studies, as I shall soon demonstrate, social behaviour, generally in institutionalized forms, such as the family, kinship systems, political organization, legal procedures, religious cults, and the like, and the relations between such institutions; and it studies them either in contemporaneous societies or in historical societies for which there is adequate information of the kind to make such studies feasible.

So, whereas some custom of a people, when plotted on a distribution map, is of interest for the ethnologist as

evidence of an ethnic movement, of a cultural drift, or of past contact between peoples, it is of interest to the social anthropologist as part of the whole social life of the people at the present time. The mere probability that they may have borrowed it from some other people is not very significant for him since he cannot know for certain that they did borrow it and, even if they did, he does not know when, how, and why they borrowed it. For example, certain peoples in East Africa take the sun for their symbol of God. This to some ethnologists is evidence of Ancient Egyptian influence. The social anthropologist, knowing that it cannot be proved whether this hypothesis is right or wrong, is more concerned to relate the solar symbolism to the whole systems of belief and cult of these peoples. Thus, while the ethnologist and the social anthropologist may make use of the same ethnographic data, they use them for different purposes.

The curricula of university courses in anthropology may be figured by three intersecting circles representing biological studies, historical studies, and sociological studies, the overlapping sections of which are physical anthropology, ethnology (including prehistoric archaeology and comparative technology), and social anthropology. Although these three anthropological disciplines have a common field in primitive man they have, as we have seen, very different aims and methods, and it is through historical circumstances, largely connected with the Darwinian theory of evolution, rather than as a result of a carefully thought out plan, that they are taught together in varying degrees in the universities and are jointly represented in the Royal Anthropological Institute.

Some of my colleagues have indeed expressed themselves dissatisfied with the present arrangement. Some of us would prefer to see social anthropology brought into a closer teaching relationship with psychology or with the

so-called social sciences, such as general sociology, economics, and comparative politics, and others of us with other subjects. The question is complex, and this is not the occasion to discuss it. I will only say that the answer given to it much depends on the view taken of the nature of social anthropology, for there is a broad division of opinion between those who regard social anthropology as a natural science and those, like myself, who regard it as one of the humanities. This division is perhaps at its sharpest when relations between anthropology and history are being discussed. I shall leave consideration of this issue till a later lecture, because it is necessary to know something about the early development of the subject to perceive how the division of opinion has come about.

I have briefly, and in an inevitably discursive manner, outlined the position of social anthropology as a university subject. Having cleared the ground to some extent by so doing, I can now devote myself wholly to social anthropology, for that is the topic I am here to discuss and the only one I am competent to discuss. When therefore for convenience I speak in future of anthropology without the qualification 'social' it must be understood that it is to social anthropology that I refer.

I had better deal right away with the questions 'What are primitive societies?' and 'Why do we study them?' before telling you more precisely what we study in them. The word 'primitive' in the sense in which it has become established in anthropological literature does not mean that the societies it qualifies are either earlier in time or inferior to other kinds of societies. As far as we know, primitive societies have just as long a history as our own, and while they are less developed than our society in some respects they are often more developed in others. This being so, the word was perhaps an unfortunate choice, but it has now been too widely accepted as a technical term to be avoided.

It suffices to say at this stage that when anthropologists use it they do so in reference to those societies which are small in scale with regard to numbers, territory, and range of social contacts, and which have by comparison with more advanced societies a simple technology and economy and little specialization of social function. Some anthropologists would add further criteria, particularly the absence of literature, and hence of any systematic art, science, or theology.¹

We are sometimes criticized for giving so much of our time to the study of these primitive societies. It is suggested that inquiry into problems of our own society might be more useful. This may be so, but for various reasons primitive societies have long held the attention of those interested in the study of social institutions. They attracted the notice of philosophers in the eighteenth century chiefly because they furnished examples of what was supposed to be man living in a state of nature before the institution of civil government. They engaged the attention of anthropologists in the nineteenth century because it was believed that they provided important clues in the search for the origins of institutions. Later anthropologists were interested in them because it was held that they displayed institutions in their simplest forms, and that it is sound method to proceed from examination of the more simple to examination of the more complex, in which what has been learnt from a study of the more simple would be an aid.

This last reason for interest in primitive societies gained in weight as the so-called functional anthropology of today developed, for the more it is regarded as the task of social anthropology to study social institutions as interdependent parts of social systems, the more it is seen to be an advantage to be able to study those societies which are

¹ Robert Redfield, 'The Folk Society', *The American Journal of Sociology*, 1947.

structurally so simple, and culturally so homogeneous, that they can be directly observed as wholes, before attempting to study complex civilized societies where this is not possible. Moreover, it is a matter of experience that it is easier to make observations among peoples with cultures unlike our own, the otherness in their way of life at once engaging attention, and that it is more likely that interpretations will be objective.

Another, and very cogent, reason for studying primitive societies at the present time is that they are rapidly being transformed and must be studied soon or never. These vanishing social systems are unique structural variations, a study of which aids us very considerably in understanding the nature of human society, because in a comparative study of institutions the number of societies studied is less significant than their range of variation. Quite apart from that consideration, the study of primitive societies has intrinsic value. They are interesting in themselves in that they provide descriptions of the way of life, the values, and the beliefs of peoples living without what we have come to regard as the minimum requirements of comfort and civilization.

We therefore feel it an obligation to make a systematic study of as many of these primitive societies as we can while there is still an opportunity to do so. There are a vast number of primitive societies and very few indeed have yet been studied intensively by anthropologists, for such studies take a long time and anthropologists are a very small body.

But though we give chief attention to primitive societies I must make it clear that we do not restrict our attention to them. In America, where social anthropology is better represented in the universities than in the British Empire, a number of important studies of more advanced societies have already been made by American or American-trained anthropologists—in Ireland, in Japan,

SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY

in China, in India, in Mexico, in Canada, and in the United States itself. I shall give you in a later lecture some account of one of these studies, that by Arensberg and Kimball in Southern Ireland.

For various reasons, among them shortage of personnel and the great number of primitive peoples in our colonial empire, British anthropologists have lagged behind in this matter, but they also are broadening their studies to include peoples who cannot in any sense be described as primitive. During the past few years students of the Institute of Social Anthropology at Oxford have been engaged in studies of rural communities in India, the West Indies, Turkey, and Spain, of the Bedouin Arabs of North Africa, and of English village and urban life.

Also, though not to the same extent in recent years, studies have been made by anthropologists, or from an anthropological point of view, in historic societies, literary sources here taking the place of direct observation. I am thinking of such writings as those of Sir James Frazer on the ancient Hebrews and on certain aspects of Roman culture, of Sir William Ridgeway and Jane Harrison on Hellenic subjects, of Robertson Smith on early Arabian society, and of Hubert on the history of the Celts.

I must emphasize that, theoretically at any rate, social anthropology is the study of all human societies and not merely of primitive societies, even if in practice, and for convenience, at the present time its attention is mostly given to the institutions of the simpler peoples, for it is evident that there can be no separate discipline which restricts itself entirely to these societies. Though an anthropologist may be carrying out research among a primitive people, what he is studying among them are language, law, religion, political institutions, economics, and so forth, and he is therefore concerned with the same general problems as the student of these subjects in the

THE SCOPE

great civilizations of the world. It must be remembered also that in interpreting his observations on primitive societies the anthropologist is always, if only implicitly, comparing them with his own.

Social anthropology can therefore be regarded as a branch of sociological studies, that branch which chiefly devotes itself to primitive societies. When people speak of sociology they generally have in mind studies of particular problems in civilized societies. If we give this sense to the word, then the difference between social anthropology and sociology is a difference of field, but there are also important differences of method between them. The social anthropologist studies primitive societies directly, living among them for months or years, whereas sociological research is usually from documents and largely statistical. The social anthropologist studies societies as wholes. He studies their ecologies, their economics, their legal and political institutions, their family and kinship organizations, their religions, their technologies, their arts, *etc.* as parts of general social systems. The sociologist's work, on the other hand, is usually very specialized, being a study of isolated problems, such as divorce, crime, insanity, labour unrest, and incentives in industry. Sociology is very largely mixed with social philosophy at one end and social planning at the other. It seeks not only to discover how institutions work but to decide how they ought to work and to alter them, while social anthropology has mostly kept apart from such considerations.

However, it is not in this sense that I speak of sociology in these lectures, but in the broader sense in which it is regarded as a general body of theoretical knowledge about human societies. It is the relation of this general body of theory to primitive social life which constitutes the subject of social anthropology. This will be evident when I give you some account of its history because much

of our theoretical, or conceptual, knowledge is derived from writings which are in no way, or only indirectly, concerned with primitive societies at all. Therefore I will ask you to keep in mind throughout these lectures two interconnected developments, the growth of sociological theory, of which anthropological theory is only a part, and the growth of knowledge about primitive societies to which sociological theory has been submitted and reformulated as a specialized body of knowledge relating to them.

I must now give you, in the light of this discussion about the place of social anthropology as a department in a wider field of learning, a clearer idea of the kind of problems social anthropologists investigate. A good way of doing this is to tell you some of the subjects about which post-graduate students of anthropology at Oxford have written theses during the last few years.

I give you the titles of a few which have been awarded degrees recently: 'The position of the chief in the modern political system of Ashanti (West Africa), A study of the influence of contemporary social changes on Ashanti institutions.'; 'The social function of religion in a South Indian community' (the Coorgs); 'The political organization of the Nandi' (East Africa); 'The social structure of Jamaica, with special reference to racial distinctions'; 'The function of bridewealth in selected African societies'; 'A study of the symbolism of political authority in Africa'; 'A comparative study of the forms of slavery'; 'The social organization of the Yao of southern Nyasaland' (Central Africa); 'Systems of land tenure among the Bantu peoples of East Africa'; 'The status of women among the southern Bantu' (South Africa); 'An investigation into the social sanctions of the Naga tribes of the Indo-Burma border'; 'The political system of the Murle' (East Africa); 'The political organization of the Plains Indians' (North America); 'A study of inter-state boundary litigation in

Ashanti' (West Africa); 'Aspects of rank in Melanesia'; 'The social organization of the central and eastern Eskimo'; 'Delict in primitive law' (Indonesia and Africa).

You will, I hope, gain from this sample a general impression of the kind of work social anthropologists do. You will note in the first place that there is nothing very exciting about the subjects of these theses, no seeking after the strange or colourful, no appeal to antiquarian or romantic interests. All are matter-of-fact inquiries into one or other type of social institution.

You will observe also that in so far as the theses discuss particular peoples or series of peoples, they are distributed over all parts of Africa, Southern India, Jamaica, the Indo-Burma frontier, North America, the Polar Regions, islands of the Pacific, and Indonesia. I draw attention to this geographical spread because the vastness of the anthropological field, while offering opportunities for research for the most diverse interests, involves, as I will explain later, certain difficulties in teaching and, to an increasing extent, regional specialization. In the narrowest interpretation of its province it includes the Polynesian and Melanesian peoples of the Pacific, the aborigines of Australia, the Lapp and Eskimo peoples of the Polar regions, the Mongolian peoples of Siberia, the Negro peoples of Africa, the Indian peoples of the American continent, and the more backward peoples of India, Burma, Malay, and Indonesia—many thousands of different cultures and societies. On a wider interpretation its boundaries include also the more advanced, but still relatively simple, peoples of near and further Asia, north Africa, and parts of Europe—an almost limitless number of cultures and sub-cultures and societies and sub-societies.

You will also note that the sample includes studies of political institutions, religious institutions, class distinctions based on colour, sex, or rank, economic in-

stitutions, legal or quasi-legal institutions, and marriage, and also of social adaptation, and of the entire social organization, or structure, of one or other people. Social anthropology thus not only covers societies round the globe but also a number of different studies. Indeed, any adequately staffed department of anthropology tries to cover in its courses of lectures on primitive societies at least the minimum and essential topics of kinship and the family, comparative political institutions, comparative economics, comparative religion, and comparative law, as well as more general courses on the study of institutions, general sociological theory, and the history of social anthropology. It gives also special courses on the societies of selected ethno-geographical regions; and it may provide courses besides on such particular subjects as morals, magic, mythology, primitive science, primitive art, primitive technology, and language, and also on the writings of particular anthropologists and sociologists.

It stands to reason that though an anthropologist may have a general knowledge of all these different ethno-geographic regions and sociological disciplines, he can be an authority in only one or two of each. Consequently, as in all fields of learning, as knowledge increases there takes place specialization. The anthropologist becomes a specialist in African studies, in Melanesian studies, in American Indian studies, and so forth. He then no longer attempts to master the detail of regions other than those of his choice, except in so far as it is embodied in monographs explicitly devoted to general problems, perhaps religious or legal institutions, in which he is particularly interested. There is already a sufficiently abundant literature on, for example, the American Indians or the African Bantu for a scholar to devote himself exclusively to the one or the other.

The tendency towards specialization becomes yet more marked when the peoples concerned have a literature or

belong to a wider culture with a literary tradition. If one has any regard for scholarship one cannot be a student of Arab Bedouin or peasants without a knowledge not only of their spoken language but also of the classical language of their cultural hinterland, or of Indian peasant communities without having some knowledge both of the literature of their language and of Sanskrit, the classical language of their ritual and religious tradition. Also, the anthropologist, besides restricting his researches to certain regions has to devote himself primarily to one or two topics if he is to be master of them and not a jack of all trades. One cannot adequately make a comparative study of primitive legal systems without a good background of general law and jurisprudence, or of primitive art without being well-read in the literature of art.

The circumstances I have related make social anthropology difficult to teach, especially when, as for the most part at Oxford, it is taught at the post-graduate and research level. When a large number of students are working on material in widely separated parts of the world and on a wide variety of problems it is often impossible to give them more than very general supervision. Sir Charles Oman tells us that the same situation confronted those Regius Professors of History at Oxford who tried, unsuccessfully, to conduct classes for post-graduates, for, as he wistfully remarks, 'post-graduate students wander at their own sweet will'.¹ However, the situation is not so difficult in social anthropology as it is in history, for social anthropology is more able to generalize and has a body of general theory which history lacks. There are not only many overt similarities between primitive societies all over the world but they can, at any rate to some extent, be classified by structural analysis into a limited number of types. This gives a unity to the subject. Social anthropologists study a primitive society in the same way

¹ Sir Charles Oman, *On the Writing of History*, 1939, p. 252.

whether it is in Polynesia, Africa, or Lapland; and whatever they are writing about—a kinship system, a religious cult, or a political institution—it is examined in its relation to the total social structure in which it is contained.

Before considering, even in a preliminary manner, what we understand by social structure I will ask you to note a further characteristic of these theses, because it brings out a significant problem in anthropology at the present time and one which I shall discuss again in later lectures. They are all written on sociological themes, that is to say, they deal fundamentally with sets of social relations, relations between members of a society and between social groups. The point I want to make here is that they are studies of societies rather than of cultures. There is an extremely important difference between the two concepts which has led anthropological research and theory in two different directions.

Allow me to give a few simple examples. If you go into an English church you will see that men remove their head-dress but keep their shoes on, but if you enter a mosque in a Muslim land you will observe that men remove their shoes but keep their head-dress on. The same behaviour is customary when entering an English house or a Bedouin tent. These are differences of culture or custom. The purpose and function of the behaviour is the same in both cases, to show respect, but it is expressed differently in the two cultures. Let me give you a more complex example. Nomadic Bedouin Arabs have in some, and basic, respects the same kind of social structure as some of the semi-nomadic Nilotic peoples of East Africa, but culturally the two peoples are different. Bedouin live in tents, Nilotics in huts and windscreens; Bedouin herd camels, Nilotics cattle; Bedouin are Muslims, Nilotics have a different kind of religion; and so forth. A different sort of example, and an even more

complex one, would be the distinction we make when we speak of Hellenic or Hindu civilization and Hellenic or Hindu society.

We are here dealing with two different concepts, or two different abstractions from the same reality. Though the definitions which should be given to each and their relation to one another have often been discussed, they have seldom been systematically examined, and there is still much confusion and little unanimity about the matter. Among the older anthropological writers, Morgan, Spencer, and Durkheim conceived the aim of what we now call social anthropology to be the classification and functional analysis of social structures. This point of view has persisted among Durkheim's followers in France. It is also well represented in British anthropology today and in the tradition of formal sociology in Germany.¹ Tylor on the other hand, and others who leaned towards ethnology, conceived its aim to be the classification and analysis of cultures, and this has been the dominant viewpoint in American anthropology for a long time, partly, I think, because the fractionized and disintegrated Indian societies on which their research has been concentrated lend themselves more easily to studies of culture than of social structure; partly because the absence of a tradition of intensive fieldwork through the native languages and for long periods of time, such as we have in England, also tends towards studies of custom or culture rather than of social relations; and partly for other reasons.

When a social anthropologist describes a primitive society the distinction between society and culture is obscured by the fact that he describes the reality, the raw behaviour, in which both are contained. He tells you, for example, the precise manner in which a man

¹ Georg Simmel, *Soziologie*, 1908; Leopold von Wiese, *Allgemeine Soziologie*, 1924.

shows respect to his ancestors; but when he comes to interpret the behaviour he has to make abstractions from it in the light of the particular problems he is investigating. If these are problems of social structure he pays attention to the social relationships of the persons concerned in the whole procedure rather than to the details of its cultural expression.

Thus one, or a partial, interpretation of ancestor worship might be to show how it is consistent with family or kinship structure. The cultural, or customary, actions which a man performs when showing respect to his ancestors, the facts, for instance, that he makes a sacrifice and that what he sacrifices is a cow or an ox, require a different kind of interpretation, and this may be partly both psychological and historical.

This methodological distinction is most evident when comparative studies are undertaken, for to attempt both kinds of interpretation at the same time is then almost certain to lead to confusion. In comparative studies what one compares are not things in themselves but certain particular characteristics of them. If one wishes to make a sociological comparison of ancestor cults in a number of different societies, what one compares are sets of structural relations between persons. One necessarily starts, therefore, by abstracting these relations in each society from their particular modes of cultural expression. Otherwise one will not be able to make the comparison. What one is doing is to set apart problems of a certain kind for purposes of research. In doing this, one is not making a distinction between different kinds of thing—society and culture are not entities—but between different kinds of abstraction.

I have spoken earlier of social anthropology's studying the cultures and societies of primitive peoples, because I did not want at that stage to introduce this difficulty. I have stated it, and I shall have to leave the matter

there, only asking you to bear in mind that there is still uncertainty and division of opinion about it and that it is a very difficult and complex problem. I shall only say further that the study of problems of culture leads, and I think must lead, to the framing of them in terms of history or psychology, whereas problems of society are framed in terms of sociology. My own view is that while both kinds of problems are equally important, structural studies ought to be made first.

This brings me back to the theses once again. Had you read them you would have noted that they have this in common, that they examine whatever it is they set out to examine—chieftainship, religion, race distinctions, bride-wealth, slavery, land tenure, the status of women, social sanctions, rank, legal procedures, or whatever it may be—not as isolated and self-contained institutions but as parts of social structures and in terms of these structures. What then is a social structure? I shall have to be rather vague and inconclusive in answering this question in my introductory lecture. I shall discuss it again in later lectures, but I may as well say right away that, here again, there is much divergence of opinion on the matter. This is inevitable. Such basic concepts cannot be given precise definition. However, if we are to proceed further, I must give you at any rate a preliminary indication of what is generally implied by the term structure.

It is evident that there must be uniformities and regularities in social life, that a society must have some sort of order, or its members could not live together. It is only because people know the kind of behaviour expected of them, and what kind of behaviour to expect from others, in the various situations of social life, and co-ordinate their activities in submission to rules and under the guidance of values that each and all are able to go about their affairs. They can make predictions, anticipate events, and lead their lives in harmony with their

SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY

fellows because every society has a form or pattern which allows us to speak of it as a system, or structure, within which, and in accordance with which, its members live their lives. The use of the word structure in this sense implies that there is some kind of consistency between its parts, at any rate up to the point of open contradiction and conflict being avoided, and that it has greater durability than most of the fleeting things of human life. The people who live in any society may be unaware, or only dimly aware, that it has a structure. It is the task of the social anthropologist to reveal it.

A total social structure, that is to say the entire structure of a given society, is composed of a number of subsidiary structures or systems, and we may speak of its kinship system, its economic system, its religious system and its political system.

The social activities within these systems or structures are organized round institutions such as marriage, the family, markets, chieftainship, and so forth; and when we speak of the functions of these institutions we mean the part they play in the maintenance of the structure.

I think that all social anthropologists would accept, more or less, these definitions. It is when we begin to ask what kind of abstraction a social structure is and what precisely is meant by the functioning of an institution that we meet with difficulties and divergence of opinion. The issues will, I think, be better understood after I have given some account of the theoretical development of social anthropology.