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THE ORIGINAL SIN OF ANTHROPOLOGY*

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The original sin of anthropology was to take for granted that there were two diametrically opposed types of human society: the civilised and the primitive. Anthropology defined itself initially as the science of primitive society. This was a very bad mistake. The term 'primitive society' implies a historical point of reference. It presumably defines a type of society ancestral to more advanced forms, on the analogy of an evolutionary history of natural species. However, it is simply impossible to reconstitute prehistoric social forms, let alone to classify them and to align them in a time series. There are no fossils of social organisation.

We do know that Upper Paleolithic societies were small-scale populations of hunters and gatherers, but there is no way in which the archaeological evidence can establish whether these societies were organised into family groups, or practiced monogamy or polygamy, or worshipped totems, or divided their work between men and women, or were ruled by chiefs. A popular alternative is to treat living populations of hunters and gatherers or nomads as stand-ins for the vanished and unknowable Upper Paleolithic societies. However, there are significant differences in the social institutions and religious beliefs of the Kalahari Bushmen, Amazonian Indians, Alaskan Inuit or Australian aborigines. Even if they did have some common features, these may not have been shared by Upper Paleolithic peoples. After all, thousands of years of history have intervened, a history that has treated modern hunter-gatherers harshly, driving them into inhospitable refuges, obliging them to adapt to disruptive neighbours. When they were studied in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries their lives had been decisively changed by encounters with farmers, pastoralists, traders and missionaries.

Not to put too fine a point upon it, the idea of primitive society is an illusion. Primitive societies – indeed, primitive people – are figments of the Western imagination. This does not mean that notions of the primitive serve no purpose. Like the alternative worlds of science fiction, ideas of primitive society help us to think about our own societies. The primitive, the barbarian, the savage are our opposite numbers. They are what we are not. They are good to think.

Consider the case of Charles Darwin, who famously wrote: 'The astonishment which I felt on first seeing a party of Fuegians on a wild and broken shore will never be

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forgotten by me, for the reflection at once rushed into my mind – such were our ancestors' (C.R. Darwin 1874:919–920). What did Darwin see, and what did he make of it?

In a letter to his sister Caroline written in March 1833, Darwin described the visit he had made with HMS Beagle a few weeks earlier to Tierra del Fuego, an archipelago off the southern tip of South America:

> We here saw the native Fuegian; an untamed savage is I really think one of the most extraordinary spectacles in the world. – the difference between a domesticated & wild animal is far more strikingly marked in man. – in the naked barbarian, with his body coated with paint, whose very gestures, whether they may be peacible [sic] or hostile are unintelligible, with difficulty we see a fellow-creature (C.R. Darwin 1833).

He recorded more detailed observations in his diary. The homes of the wild Fuegians were rudimentary; they slept 'on the wet ground, coiled up like animals'; their food was miserable and scarce; they were at war with their neighbours over means of subsistence. 'Captain FitzRoy could never ascertain that the Fuegians have any distinct belief in a future life'. Their skills 'like the instinct of animals' were not 'improved by experience'. 'Although essentially the same creature, how little must the mind of one of these beings resemble that of an educated man'. And yet they sustained a viable way of life.

> There can be no reason for supposing the race of Fuegians are decreasing, we may therefore be sure that he enjoys a sufficient share of happiness (whatever its kind may be) to render life worth having. Nature, by making habit omnipotent, has fitted the Fuegian to the climate and productions of his country (Keynes 1988:222–224).

Before his encounter with 'untamed' Fuegians on that 'wild and broken shore', Darwin had become acquainted with another kind. The captain of the Beagle, Robert FitzRoy, had visited Tierra del Fuego on a previous voyage, in 1830. There he kidnapped three young men and a girl of about twelve, and took them back with him to England. FitzRoy decided that they were to be educated 'in English, and the plainer truths of Christianity, as the first objective; and the use of common tools, a slight acquaintance with husbandry, gardening and mechanism, as the second' (Hazelwood 2000:67). These were the elements of civilisation: language, religion and technology. One of the party (FitzRoy's favourite) died from a smallpox vaccination. The rest were duly instructed in civilisation by the rector of Walthamstow in London, and three years later they were returned home on the Beagle. FitzRoy intended them to serve as intermediaries for a missionary, who was also on board.[1]

In the course of the interminable voyage, Darwin was struck by the intelligence of York Minster, the older of the two men, and of the girl, Fuegia Basket. He noted that they picked up some Spanish during the ship's stopovers. His particular friend, Jemmy

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1 For a full account of the encounter between Darwin and the Fuegians, see Hazelwood (2000).

Button, the favourite of the sailors, was perhaps less clever, but he was very kind-hearted. When Darwin was sea-sick, Jemmy would 'come to me and say in a plaintive voice, "Poor, poor fellow!"', although he was clearly amused at the thought that the sea could trouble a grown man (C.R. Darwin 1839:260).

The Beagle dropped the Fuegians off near their old campsite. Their re-entry was not easy. Jemmy, in particular, struggled. He had apparently forgotten the Yamana language. Darwin noted, 'It was laughable, but almost pitiable, to hear him speak to his wild brother in English, and then ask him in Spanish ("no sabe?") whether he did not understand him' (C.R. Darwin 1839:220). And he scribbled in the margin of the diary entry: 'Man violently crying along side'. Then he wrote down his reflections:

> It was quite melancholy leaving our Fuegians amongst their barbarous countrymen; there was one comfort; they appeared to have no personal fears. – But, in contradiction of what has often been stated, 3 years has been sufficient to change savages, into, as far as habits go, complete & voluntary Europaeans [sic]. – York, who was a full grown man & with a strong violent mind, will I am certain in every respect live as far as his means go, like an Englishman.

Nevertheless, Darwin was concerned.

> I am afraid whatever other ends their excursion to England produces, it will not be conducive to their happiness. – They have far too much sense not to see the vast superiority of civilized over uncivilized habits; & yet I am afraid to the latter they must return (Keynes 1988:141–142).

Six weeks later the Beagle returned to Tierra del Fuego. Jemmy soon appeared – 'but how altered!', FitzRoy noted.

> I could hardly restrain my feelings, and I was not, by any means, the only one so touched by his squalid miserable appearance. He was naked, like his companions, except a bit of skin about his loins; his hair was long and matted, just like theirs; he was wretchedly thin, and his eyes were affected by smoke. We hurried him below, clothed him immediately, and in half an hour he was sitting with me at dinner in my cabin, using his knife and fork properly, and in every way behaving as correctly as if he had never left us. He spoke as much English as ever, and, to our astonishment, his companions, his wife, his brothers and their wives, mixed broken English words in their talking with him (FitzRoy 1839:324).

Yet Jemmy assured the captain that he was 'hearty, sir, never better'. He was contented, he said, and had no desire to alter his present way of life. Darwin accepted this. 'I hope & have little doubt [Jemmy] will be as happy as if he had never left his country', he wrote in his diary, 'which is much more than I formerly thought' (Keynes 1988:221). For his part, FitzRoy was confident that civilisation had left its imprint. He described the farewell signal fire that Jemmy lit as the Beagle sailed away, and commented that Jemmy's family 'were become considerably more humanized than any savages we had

seen in Tierra del Fuego'. One day a shipwrecked seaman might be saved by Jemmy's children, 'prompted, as they can hardly fail to be, by the traditions they will have heard of men of other lands; and by an idea, however faint of their duty to God as well as their neighbor' (FitzRoy 1839:327).

Jemmy Button and his friends had in effect been the 'object' of an experiment, moving from savagery to civilisation within three years, and, apparently, back again in a matter of weeks. Watching in surprise as the experiment played itself out, Darwin was moved to ask why the Fuegians had not become more civilised on their own initiative. He ventured a sociological explanation. The Fuegians bartered freely and shared everything – 'even a piece of cloth given to one is torn into shreds and distributed; and no one individual becomes richer than another' (C.R. Darwin 1839:281). He recognised that this insistence on exchange was rooted in an assumption of equality. And it was precisely this insistence on equality, he thought, that held the Fuegians back.

When Darwin speculated on the association of equality and backwardness – and by implication on the necessary connection between civilisation and hierarchy – he was making a characteristic move. The primitive is the mirror image of whatever is thought to be quintessentially civilised. Savages are good to think with. Edward Said identified a discourse of Orientalism, which fashioned a stereotype of a feminised, sexually tempting, perhaps defiling Other that legitimated domination (1978). Said's thesis is maddeningly over-generalised and imprecise, but it has proved to be endlessly suggestive, since it is obviously true that colonialism required the rulers to stereotype – and dehumanise – their subjects. However, I am concerned here with something else, with the way in which the idea of the primitive is used to reflect upon ourselves.

Edward Tylor remarked in the first textbook of anthropology, his "Primitive culture", published in 1871, that

> [t]he educated world of Europe and America practically settles a standard by simply placing its own nations at one end of the social series and savage tribes at the other, arranging the rest of mankind between these limits according as they correspond more closely to savage or to cultured life (1871:26).

It is impossible to say whether or not Tylor was being ironic, but in any case the anthropologists were certainly claiming to be the experts on savagery and so, by implication, on civilisation itself. And yet there are no primitive societies! There are no primitive peoples! Darwin himself commented, 'I was incessantly struck, whilst living with the Fuegians on board the "Beagle", with the many little traits of character, showing how similar their minds were to ours' (C.R. Darwin 1874:276). In short, the civilised condition is defined as the opposite of an imaginary primitive state, and so it is equally imaginary. To compare civilised and primitive is to compare two imaginary conditions. And yet to the early British anthropologists these conditions – the civilised and the primitive – seemed to be very real, indeed quite self-evident. Anthropologists studied primitive societies, and their central question was how civilisation had triumphed over

savagery, how science and morality had emerged from the dark ages of superstition and promiscuity. Darwin kept an avuncular eye on the debates of the anthropologists, often referring back to his experience of the Fuegians. He had studied theology at Cambridge and had originally planned to become a clergyman, but by the 1860s he had little interest in religion. On the other hand, he was fascinated by what the anthropologists had to say about the regulation of sexual behaviour. Reproduction was, of course, the core issue in evolutionary theory. But Darwin also had very personal reasons for wanting to understand who should and who should not marry in a civilised society.

On board the Beagle, and more urgently on his return to England after five years voyaging, Darwin had pondered marriage – although not to anyone in particular. In July 1838 he took a sheet of paper, wrote 'This is the Question', and divided the page into two columns. 'M a r r y' he wrote at the head of one, 'N o t M a r r y' at the head of the other. He then laid out a balance sheet of arguments for and against marriage:

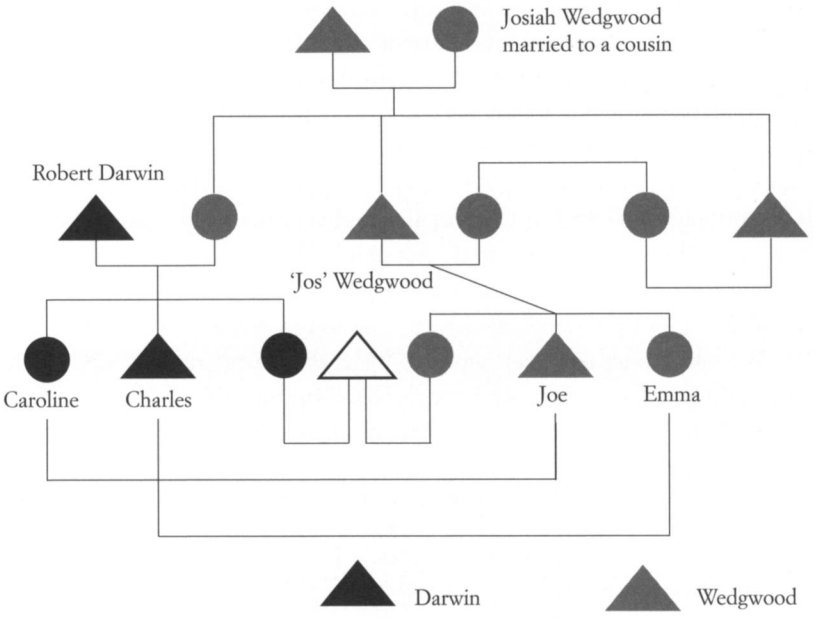
> Constant companion, (& friend in old age) who will feel interested in one, – object to be beloved & played with. – better than a dog anyhow. – Home, & someone to take care of house – Charms of music & female chit-chat. – These things good for one's health. – b u t t e r r i b l e l o s s o f t i m e'.

Companionship was the clincher. 'One cannot live this solitary life, with groggy old age, friendless & cold, & childless staring one in one's face, already beginning to wrinkle. – Never mind, trust to chance – keep a sharp look out – There is many a happy slave –'. And he concluded: 'Marry – Mary – Marry. Q.E.D' (Burkhardt and Smith 1986:444–445).

That question was settled then. Now another very important question had to be faced. Whom should he marry? Darwin soon settled on a daughter of his favourite uncle, his mother's brother, Jos Wedgwood. Only one of Jos's daughters was unmarried and about the right age. This was the youngest Wedgwood daughter, Emma, who was a year older than Charles. Emma was not only his first cousin. She was also his sister-in-law. Her oldest brother had married Charles's sister, Caroline, in 1837. Other romances had been rumoured between the young Wedgwoods and Darwins. Charles's elder brother Erasmus had shown an interest in Emma herself, and perhaps also in her two older sisters (Browne 1996:392). And three of Emma's brothers had been very attentive to Darwin's sister Susan.

When Darwin wrote to Charles Lyell to announce his engagement, he emphasised the family links.

> The lady is my cousin, Miss Emma Wedgwood [...] and [she is also the sister] of the elder brother who married my sister, so we are connected by manifold ties, besides on my part by the most sincere love and hearty gratitude to her for accepting such a one as myself (E. Darwin 1915:1).



The engagement did not come as a surprise to either family. Emma's father – Charles's uncle – wept with joy when Charles asked his permission for the marriage. Charles's father was equally delighted. He was as happy, he wrote to Uncle Jos, as when young Jos married Caroline (Browne 1996:392). It was a match, Emma remarked, 'that every soul has been making for us, so we could not have helped it if we had not liked it ourselves' (Browne 1996:392). In fact, the Wedgwoods had a long-standing preference for marriages between first cousins, and in this they were typical of the rising educated upper-middle class in England.

And yet medical research was beginning to suggest that close-kin marriage had bad consequences for the health of the children. Charles Darwin was obsessively concerned with his own ill-health. Whenever one of his children fell ill, he was inclined to see the same symptoms in himself and to worry that it was the consequence of a hereditary weakness, or perhaps the price of his marriage with a cousin (Browne 2002:277, 279).

Darwin's researches insistently raised questions about breeding and fertility. Between 1868 and 1877 he published three monographs on cross-fertilisation in animals and plants (C.R. Darwin 1868, 1876, 1877) and claimed that

> the existence of a great law of nature is almost proved; namely, that the crossing of animals and plants which are not closely related to each other is highly beneficial or even neces-

> sary, and that interbreeding [i.e., inbreeding] prolonged during many generations is highly injurious.[2]

Darwin thought this was probably true of human beings. It was obviously very important to find out.

His neighbour and ally, the anthropologist John Lubbock, was a member of parliament. In the summer of 1870 Darwin asked him to propose that the census include a question on cousin marriage. He even drafted an argument for Lubbock to put to the House:

> In England and many parts of Europe the marriages of cousins are objected to from their supposed injurious consequences; but this belief rests on no direct evidence. It is therefore manifestly desirable that the belief should either be proved false, or should be confirmed, so that in this latter case the marriages of cousins might be discouraged.[3]

Darwin's son, George, reported that Lubbock's proposition was rejected, 'amidst the scornful laughter of the House, on the ground that the idle curiosity of philosophers was not to be satisfied' (G.H. Darwin 1875a:153). Darwin now asked George to compare the incidence of close-kin marriage in the general population with that among the parents of patients in mental asylums. If it turned out that marriages between close relatives produced a disproportionate number of 'diseased' children, this would 'settle the question as to the injuriousness of such marriages' (G.H. Darwin 1875a:153).

The first step was to find out how common it was in England for first cousins to marry. Apparently nobody knew the answer. George Darwin was given estimates that ranged from ten per cent to one in a thousand. 'Every observer', he concluded, 'is biased by the frequency or rarity of such marriages amongst his immediate surroundings' (G.H. Darwin 1857a:178). Clearly he had to discover the facts for himself. George decided to attempt a scientific survey. It was to be one of the very first statistical studies of a social problem. After an ingenious and complex investigation, he concluded that 4.5 per cent of marriages in the aristocracy were with first cousins; 3.5 per cent in the landed gentry and the upper middle classes; 2.25 per cent in the rural population; and among all classes in London, 1.15 per cent. Summing up, George told his father 'that cousin marriages are at least 3 times as frequent in our rank as in the lower!' (G.H. Darwin 1874)

The next step was to gather statistics from mental asylums. His father wrote on his behalf to the heads of the leading institutions. Several provided detailed responses. These showed no significant difference between the incidence of cousin marriage in the general population and among the parents of patients in mental asylums. Other studies

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2 C.R. Darwin (1868:144). In the revised edition he dropped the qualification 'highly' before 'injurious' (C.R. Darwin 1875:126).

3 Letter Charles R. Darwin to John Lubbock, 17 July 1870. Darwin Correspondence Project; Cambridge University Library. Reproduced in F. Darwin (1887:129).

suggested that the offspring of cousin marriages were also more likely to suffer from blindness, deafness and infertility, but George Darwin found the evidence unpersuasive. In fact, first cousin marriages were, if anything, more fertile than others. He suggested that a man was more likely to marry a cousin if he had many to choose from. First cousin marriage would accordingly be more common among people who came from large – and therefore fertile – families (G.H. Darwin 1874:168–172). Only one small piece of evidence gave George pause. He noted that, among men who had rowed for Oxford or Cambridge, men who were obviously the fittest of the fit, sons of first cousin parents appeared slightly less frequently than might have been expected (2.4 per cent as opposed to 3–3.5 per cent among their peers) (G.H. Darwin 1875b:344–348).

Charles Darwin endorsed his son's conclusions, which were reassuring not only to himself but to the many English people whose family trees featured marriages between cousins. Englishmen could also rest more easily when they considered that Queen Victoria was married to a first cousin, and that several of her descendants had also married cousins.[4]

The question of cousin marriage shaded into a broader debate about incest. There was no crime of incest in England in the nineteenth century. A number of people thought that there should be a law, but the English were uncertain about what did, and what should, constitute incest. Incest was defined as sexual intercourse between people who were forbidden by the church to marry, but the doctrines of the church, mired in centuries of case law and theological argument, were often opaque to ordinary people. It was not always clear why a particular marriage was allowed or prohibited. Henry VIII had changed the laws of England in 1540 to allow the marriage of first cousins, and this reform was followed by most of Europe's protestant states. However, the old, baffling, Catholic rules on the marriage of relatives-in-law were retained. Marriage with a deceased wife's sister was illegal in England until 1907.

Then in 1908 Parliament passed a law to make incest a crime in England. The statute only criminalised sexual relationships between members of the immediate family. And in the following year James George Frazer pointed out that 'among many savages the sexual prohibitions are far more numerous, the horror excited by breaches of them far deeper, and the punishment inflicted on the offenders far sterner than with us' (1909:47). In short, parliament had done the civilised thing.

As the experts on primitive society, Victorian anthropologists were necessarily experts on kinship and marriage, because they took it for granted that the first societies were essentially kinship groups. Henry Maine set out a general law: 'The history of political ideas begins, in fact, with the assumption that kinship in blood is the sole possible ground of community in political functions' (1861:124). As Maine saw it, the

4 Landowners in the House of Lords did not require this reassurance: they knew that the inbreeding of good stock was sound policy.

original primitive society must have been simply the family writ large. He had in mind something like the household of the patriarch Abraham, including several wives, sons and their wives and children, and servants and hangers-on. Other anthropologists imagined a promiscuous horde of kin, without families, without marriage, without even a taboo on incest. McLennan speculated that the most successful bands were made up of marauding warriors. They killed their daughters in order to be able to move more freely. And they captured women from other bands to be their wives. But at least they avoided incest. Edward Burnett Tylor, a Quaker, revolted against this violent scenario. The whole purpose of exogamy was to prevent war by setting up diplomatic alliances between groups. Henry Maine (who was married to his father's brother's daughter) thought that the prohibition of incest was a public health measure. People who had the brains to make fire and to domesticate animals would eventually have recognised that 'children of unsound constitutions were born of nearly related parents' (Maine 1883:228). The fastidious James George Frazer wondered whether finer feelings had not simply prevailed.

Darwin dismissed these speculations. 'The licentiousness of many savages is no doubt astonishing', he conceded. Yet even the lowest savages were not genuinely promiscuous (1874:896). Among the apes, adult males tended to be jealous. Primitive men had probably been equally reluctant to share their females. And incest was abhorred even among 'savages such as those of Australia and South America' with 'no fine moral feelings to confuse, and who are not likely to reflect on distant evils to their progeny'. Darwin thought that primitive men simply found foreign women alluring, 'in the same manner as [...] male deerhounds are inclined towards strange females, while the females prefer dogs with whom they have associated' (1875:104–105). But whatever the original reason for the incest taboo, Darwin was sure that out-breeding groups would be more successful than their rivals. He concluded that avoidance of incest had spread by natural selection (1875:124).

There was, however, a difficulty with the argument from natural selection. E.B. Tylor pointed out that primitive peoples did not ban all marriages between close relatives. Quite often some first cousins were forbidden, while others were actually preferred as marriage partners. The marriageable cousins were usually the children of a brother and a sister: 'cross-cousins', Tylor called them. And he traced cross-cousin marriage back to very ancient days. The original society was imagined as a single undifferentiated band, in which promiscuity reigned. Then the band split into two. Men in one section had to marry women in the other. The children of two brothers belonged to the same section. So did the children of two sisters. However, the children of a brother and a sister – cross-cousins – belonged to different sections. Therefore they could marry one another. Tylor noted that this arrangement broke down as soon as the society became more complex and included more than two sections. However, he suggested that people would have got into the habit of marrying their cross-cousins. The custom would outlive the dual form of exogamy (Tylor 1889).

James George Frazer demonstrated in his usual encyclopaedic fashion that marriage with the mother's brother's daughter was particularly widely distributed. It was found in South India, and elsewhere in Asia, among the Chin and Kachin of Burma and the Gilyaks of Siberia. There were also traces of the custom in America, Africa, Indonesia, New Guinea and Australia (Frazer 1918: Chapter 4). But Frazer had his own ideas about how cousin marriage had come about. In Australia – and Australia represented for the Victorians the degree zero of social evolution – an Aboriginal man had to barter a sister or a daughter in exchange for a wife, for he had nothing else to offer (Frazer 1918:198). If two men were satisfied with the exchange of their sisters, then their sons might exchange sisters in turn. Their wives would be their double cross-cousins – mother's brother's daughters who were at the same time father's sister's daughters. And so the first form of marriage, sister exchange, led to cross-cousin marriage.

There was nothing much to choose between the scenarios dreamt up by Tylor and by Frazer. However, if either one of them was correct, then the institution of the incest taboo almost immediately led to marriage between cross-cousins. And cross-cousin marriage was still common in primitive societies. Did this mean that cousin marriage was primitive, its persistence in Victorian society a throw-back? The Catholic Church prohibited marriage between cousins, up to third cousins. Protestants, however, allowed first-cousin marriage. Which rule was more civilised?

This was a ticklish question for the Victorians. The American anthropologist, Lewis Henry Morgan, became the leading theorist on kin marriage. He wrote with relish about various imaginary types of group marriage, but he did not deal with marriage between cousins, despite the fact that several of his correspondents sent him reports of cousin marriage in Australia, North America and southern India.[5] His most recent biographer, Thomas Trautmann, suggests that Morgan failed to discuss these instances of cousin marriage for a very personal reason. He was married to his mother's brother's daughter. Consequently he was reluctant to label the practice as primitive (Trautmann 1987:243–245).

If only Morgan had been an Englishman! The Queen herself was married to her mother's brother's son. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Edward White Benson, was married to the daughter of his mother's brother's daughter. Darwin, the greatest naturalist of the age, was married to his mother's brother's daughter. The Darwinians had officially pronounced that cousin marriage was safe. However, opinion turned against cousin marriage in the United States from the 1860s. Before the Civil War there had been no laws against first-cousin marriage in any state in the Union. By the end of the

5 Morgan's informant on the Tamil, the Reverend Ezekiel Scudder, pointed out to him that the same term was used for uncle and for husband's father, and suggested that this was appropriate because a person 'is expected to marry an uncle's daughter or son, and thus the two relationships are combined in one' (Trautmann 1987:242–243).

nineteenth century, cousin marriages were prohibited in four states. Others soon followed (Ottenheimer 1996:37, 52–57).

A pioneering critic of cousin marriage was Morgan's friend and mentor, the Reverend McIlvaine (to whom Morgan dedicated his masterpiece, "Ancient society"). In 1866, in a speech to the Pundit Club, a society of intellectuals in Rochester, New York, McIlvaine announced that the practice of cousin marriage had been responsible for the 'degradation and inferiority' of the Tamil and the American Indian peoples. This was because 'the blood, instead of dispersing itself more and more widely, is constantly returning upon itself' (Trautmann 1987:244). Morgan must have been mortified. No wonder he preferred not to think about cousin marriage.

In Britain the reaction against cousin marriage only came much later. In the 1870s, when George Darwin made his study, approximately one marriage in twenty-five was between first cousins in the upper-middle class. The incidence was much higher in some clans, like the Darwin-Wedgwoods. By the 1920s, however, cousin marriage was being routinely condemned by the eugenicists, including another son of Charles Darwin, Leonard – who was himself married to a first cousin once removed – and by the 1930s, in England, only one marriage in 6,000 was with a first cousin.[6]

Yet while cousin marriage became uncommon in England, the anthropologists were increasingly obsessed with it. Cross-cousin marriage became a defining feature of primitive society. Immediately before the First World War, A.R. Radcliffe-Brown set out to demonstrate that among the Australian aborigines a person had to marry a cross-cousin. There were two Australian systems: in one, a man married a first cross-cousin, in the other, he married a second cross-cousin. Each type of marriage generated an appropriate classification of relatives into two sets, roughly speaking 'in-laws' and others.[7] Radcliffe-Brown speculated that the Australian system fitted into

> a single general type of kinship organisation (the Dravidian-Australian type) found over a large area of South India and Ceylon [...] and perhaps over the whole of Australia, and in certain parts of Melanesia [...] possibly dating back to the first peopling of Australia and Melanesia (1927:345).

A generation later, one of the greatest anthropologists of the twentieth century, Claude Lévi-Strauss, published a hugely ambitious study, "Les structures élémentaires de la parenté" (1949), which argued in effect that all the pre-modern societies of the world were organised on the basis of cross-cousin marriage. Or rather, as Marcel Mauss had said, their fundamental rule was reciprocity, their fundamental institution exchange.

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6 Medical Research Council (1935/36:139–140, 1936/37:157–158, 1938/39:81). By the middle of the twentieth century such unions accounted for only 0.004 per cent of the marriages of a middle-class London sample (Firth, Hubert and Forge 1970:191–193).

7 Radcliffe-Brown later elaborated the model, adding new types and sub-types, and his ideas have been the object of much expert commentary. See especially Barnes (1967) and Scheffler (1978).

The most significant exchange was the exchange of women in marriage. This was, in fact, the basis of society itself. And the 'elementary' form taken by the exchange of women was the marriage of cross-cousins.

There are many things to say about Lévi-Strauss's theory – many, many things have been said, of course – but I want to draw attention to two features in particular. First, like the Victorians, and notwithstanding his repeated denials and qualifications, Lévi-Strauss's model assumes that social structures progress from a primitive to a civilised form. His 'elementary' structures are all associated with primitive societies, in which reciprocity rules. There are two types of reciprocity. The simplest form, restricted exchange, is associated with Australia, which, as ever, represents the closest approach to pure savagery. Generalised exchange is more advanced than restricted exchange, and it is found particularly in Asia, as Frazer had pointed out. (Asia was obviously a step up from Australia.) All the elementary systems were contrasted with complex systems – such as our own – which replaced the economy of gift exchange with a market economy. As Marshall Sahlins put it, 'money is to the West what kinship is to the Rest' (1976:216). Civilised and primitive are polar opposites. Second, Lévi-Strauss is really only interested in formal, ideal and (he believed) static structures. This was a characteristic feature of structuralism. Ultra-orthodox alliance theorists were even more idealist than the master. Much to the irritation of Lévi-Strauss, Rodney Needham argued that the "Elementary structures of kinship" was really only about categories and rules – or if it was not, it should have been (e.g., Needham 1971).

To be sure, there are examples of more realistic accounts of cousin marriage in the classical anthropological literature, beginning with Bronislaw Malinowski's notes on cross-cousin marriage in the Trobriand Islands. Most Trobriand adults chose their own marriage partners. Chiefs, however, often arranged infant betrothals for their sons. The Trobrianders were matrilineal. The chief was succeeded by his sister's son. His own son had no place in the new dispensation – unless he was married into the new chief's family. Therefore, as an infant he was betrothed to his father's sister's daughter, making him the brother-in-law of the next chief (Malinowski 1929:80–88).

Isaac Schapera, a student of Malinowski, used a statistical survey to analyse the pattern of kin marriage among the Tswana of Botswana. The Tswana favoured marriage with any cousin, but above all with a mother's brother's daughter. That was the ideology, and there were various proverbs and sayings to back it up. And indeed, marriage with a mother's brother's daughter was fairly common among ordinary Tswana. Nobles, however, preferred marriage with a father's brother daughter. In both cases, the reason was very similar. Men tried to reinforce relationships with powerful kin. For a commoner, these were often mother's brothers. For a noble, the best-placed relatives would be father's brothers.[8]

8 See Kuper (1987: Chapter 6).

Marriage with a father's brother's daughter was also favoured in the Arab world, but it had no place in Lévi-Strauss's theory. The children of two brothers belonged to the same patrilineage. Marriage should be an exchange between men of different groups. So it was ridiculous – a scandal, Lévi-Strauss said – for a man to marry his father's brother's daughter (Lévi-Strauss 1959:13–14). Pierre Bourdieu pointed out, in his chapter on Berber marriage in the "Outline of a theory of practice", that this was a false problem. Lineages do not operate as corporate entities in the marriage market. Analysis should begin rather with individuals operating strategically, playing, more or less skilfully, the hands that they are dealt. Status comes into it, in the Berber case, and gender. Men might want their children to make dynastic marriages. Women have other priorities, and statistically, Bourdieu suggests, women usually win out. In any case, the formal rules do not determine how the game is played. People act selfishly on the whole, but they can usually find some socially acceptable justification for their actions. The marriage itself might be defined in various ways, the genealogies offering different options, kinship terms themselves being open to manipulation.

And there the argument petered out in anthropology. Debates on kinship and marriage had dominated the anthropology journals for a century. They ran into the sand at a very particular moment – Peter Laslett, the pioneer of family history in Britain, described it as 'the time of the Grand Climacteric in the family life of Western societies', when 'consensual unions began to be widespread, abortions to be exceedingly common, contraception to be universal and numbers of births to fall' (1989:843). Conservatives deplored these developments, but they were welcomed by others, particularly feminist theorists.

And in 1968 – a vintage year for revolutionary pronouncements – David Schneider made the even more audacious suggestion that, far from being the defining feature of primitive society, kinship was uniquely civilised. Americans happened to believe that certain relationships are biologically given, and that they are peculiarly important. This was their ideology. It was shared by many Europeans. However, there is no reason to think that any other peoples have developed the same set of ideas.[9] By implication, there was nothing natural about kinship. Perhaps the new reproductive technologies would render biology redundant and anachronistic, and erode what was left of the mythology of kinship in the West.

Anthropologists abandoned the study of kinship systems because they imagined that kinship was coming to an end and that it had, perhaps, always been just an ideological illusion. For much the same reasons, the field was now claimed by social historians. If kinship was vanishing, if gender relationships were in the process of transformation, if procreation was being handed over from nature to culture, then there was a need for

9 Schneider (1968:1984). Cf. Kuper (1999:132–158).

historical reconstruction and commentary. It was now all about us. Comparisons were neglected.

Beginning in the 1970s, there has been a remarkable outpouring of publications on family history (Stone 1981:52). Michael Anderson early distinguished two main trends, a 'sentiments approach' and the 'household economics approach' (1980). In broad and crude terms, the sentiments approach is a way of thinking about developments in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when the nuclear family is supposed to have become more emotionally loaded and more isolated. The household economics approach deals with the simultaneous transformation of the household. Once upon a time, every family ran a family business, as farmers or labourers or craftsmen. With the industrial revolution, the household became simply a unit of consumption.

The family business was, of course, the classic vehicle of Victorian entrepreneurship, binding together several generations of cousins in complex, sometimes fraught combinations. The Rothschilds provide a remarkable instance. The five brothers who established the five branches of the great Rothschild Bank were faced with the problem of continuity. Their solution was to institute a system of intermarriage. Between 1824 and 1877, marriages were contracted by 36 patrilineal descendants of the founder of the House of Rothschild. Thirty of these men and women married cousins, of whom 28 were first or second cousins related through the male line only. In other words, 78 per cent of the marriages were with a father's brother's daughter or a father's brother's son's daughter. These marriages were arranged in order to sustain the partnership between the five branches of the family, and they ceased abruptly when the rise of Prussia and the institution of joint stock companies changed the banking environment (Kuper 2001).

But the Rothschilds were a special case. The Wedgwood pottery was a more typical example of the large Victorian family business, and a closer look at Wedgwood marriages suggests that the materialist view of cousin marriage – that it 'keeps the wealth in the family' – is too simple.

The Wedgwood patriarch, Josiah Wedgwood, had married a cousin in 1764. His wife's father was a particularly successful potter. He did not want his daughter to marry Josiah, who was struggling to establish himself. Josiah was made to wait for years until – as his uncle put it – he could match his cousin's dowry of £4,000 'guinea for guinea' (Wedgwood and Wedgwood 1980:11.).

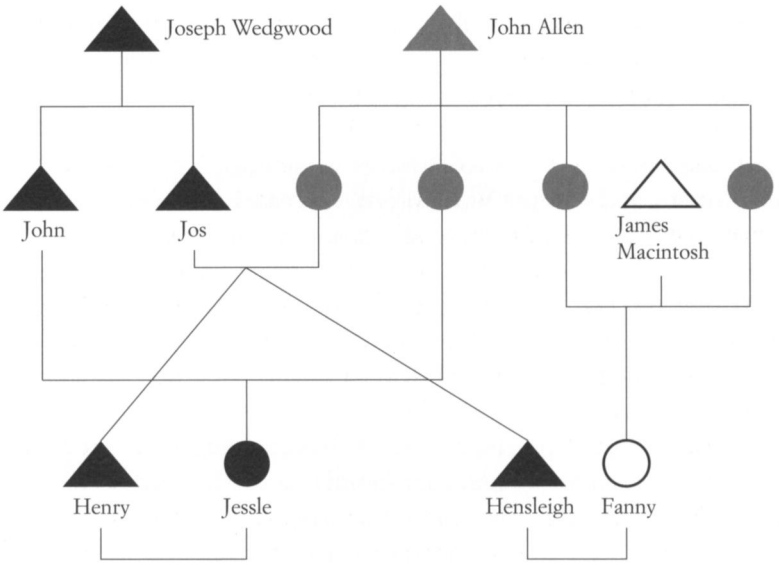
Having started off at the age of fourteen as an apprentice to his brother Thomas, Josiah Wedgwood went on to become the most successful of all the potters in Staffordshire. He innovated, experimented with new processes and materials, organised his production along modern lines, and introduced fresh designs. His factory at Etruria made Wedgwood pottery world-famous. And it was very much a family business. However, Josiah's children did not marry cousins. His eldest sons, John and 'Jos', married two sisters, who were daughters of a wealthy country gentleman named Allen. There was no particular financial advantage to either side in these marriages. While an alliance with the country gentry was a step up socially for the Wedgwoods, Josiah was

not greatly interested in conventional social prestige. He was much happier when his favourite daughter, Susannah, married Robert Darwin, the son of his close friend, Erasmus Darwin, a doctor, natural philosopher and poet, but not a particularly wealthy man, and no businessman.

Robert Darwin was a particular friend of his brother-in-law Jos Wedgwood, the coming man among the younger Wedgwoods. They had an understanding that Jos's eldest son, yet another Josiah Wedgwood, known as Joe, should marry Robert Darwin's daughter, Caroline. Joe was in no hurry to get married, but he went along with his father's wishes eventually. His marriage to Caroline Darwin was celebrated in 1837. He was 42 years old, Caroline was 37. Obviously they were not slaves to passion. Nor were they simply being pushed around by their fathers. But their marriage did make excellent financial sense. Dr Robert Darwin was not only a prosperous physician, like his father Erasmus. He also operated as a private banker, and he had lent a lot of money to Jos. The two men were involved in joint speculations in canals and later in railways. And Robert Darwin advised Jos on most of his financial arrangements, including those within the family. Since Joe was in line to take over the Etruria pottery works, his marriage to Caroline Darwin helped to ensure that important debts and obligations would be kept within the family.

Jos was also perfectly happy when, two years later, his daughter Emma reinforced the alliance with the Robert Darwins by marrying Charles Darwin. Charles had always been a favourite with his uncle. When the engagement was announced, Jos wrote delightedly to Robert Darwin: 'I could have parted with Emma to no one for whom I would so soon and so entirely feel as a father, and I am happy in believing that Charles entertains the kindest feelings for his uncle-father' (E. Darwin 1915:3.). And now he and his friend would be quits. 'You lately gave up a daughter – it is my turn now' (E. Darwin 1915:2.). Nevertheless, the business interests of the two fathers were marginal to this marriage. Charles had no intention of taking on Robert Darwin's banking activities. Emma was not involved in the pottery business. And the fact that she married her cousin made no difference to her marriage settlement. Jos made similar provision for all his married children, some of whom married cousins while others did not.

Two of Jos's other children, Henry and Hensleigh, also married first cousins. Both these cousin marriages were poor financial risks, and they were resisted by prudent fathers. John Wedgwood had been Jos's partner in the pottery, but he was a hopeless businessman, and Jos had to get rid of him. John then went into banking, failed, and had to be bailed out by Jos. Jos was therefore not best pleased when Henry, the least promising of his own sons, married John's daughter, Jessie Wedgwood. Another of his sons, Hensleigh, fell in love with his mother's sister's daughter, Fanny Mackintosh. Fanny's father thought – as it turned out, rightly – that Hensleigh's prospects were poor, and he opposed the marriage for years before eventually giving in and arranging for him to get a civil service post.



So fathers generally paid close attention to financial considerations when their children married, but this was not a necessary reason for cousin marriage, certainly in the Darwin-Wedgwood clan. Nor was it a sufficient reason. In any case, fathers did not always have the last word on marriages. Mothers and sisters were also closely involved in courtship negotiations, and they were less concerned with the family business. Family sentiment mattered more to them. The relationship between siblings was typically very close in middle-class families, particularly between sisters, and between brothers and sisters. Brothers and sisters often formed joint households and maintained close emotional relationships. Cousins were often raised very much in and out of one another's houses, and as they grew up they quite often formed romantic attachments. Their aunts took a great interest in their marriages.

Sister exchange was also common, and quite often two brothers married two sisters. For example, Jos Wedgwood and his brother John married two Allen sisters. Although the relationship between the brothers cooled because of John's failure in the business, the sisters remained close. When Jos's son Henry wanted to marry John's daughter, Jessie, Jos resisted. However, the two mothers, who were, of course, each other's sisters, were all in favour of the match, and they carried the day. Jos's youngest son, Hensleigh, married the daughter of a third Allen sister. His aunt supported him, against her husband (Kuper 2009:129).

By the late twentieth century kinship theory had become unfashionable in anthropology, and most English people had long forgotten that their grandparents or great-grandparents found cousin marriage perfectly respectable. Yet just at this moment, the

debates of the 1870s acquired a fresh relevance. Medical researchers remarked a high incidence of disorders in babies born to recent immigrants to Britain from Pakistan. Was this connected with a preference for cousin marriage?

The general view among geneticists today is that the risk of birth defects or infant mortality is roughly doubled for the children of first cousins. That is not a high level of risk. The geneticists, A.H. Bittles and G. Makoff conclude that 'the risks to the offspring of inbred unions generally are within the limits of acceptability. For first cousin progeny, it also must be admitted that they appear to be in remarkably close agreement with the levels calculated by [George] Darwin in 1875' (Bittles and Makov 1988:164). However, some studies are less reassuring. The authors of a recent prospective survey of Pakistani families in Birmingham suggest that if they 'ceased to marry relations, their childhood mortality and morbidity would decrease by 60%' (Bittles and Makov 1988:216).

George Darwin would have been interested to discover that the medical evidence is still by no means conclusive, but we might well suspect that this debate is not only about health risks. At any rate, it helps to sustain another, broader argument about immigration. Father's brother's daughter marriage is taken to be a defining feature of Islamic culture, and it is blamed not only for overloading the health service but for resistance to integration and cultural stagnation. It is also associated with patriarchy, the suppression of women and forced marriages. An American commentator, Stanley Kurtz – who has a doctorate in social anthropology from Harvard – has even argued that this marriage preference is 'an unexamined key to the war on terror' (2007).

Realistic ethnography is the best antidote to this sort of rhetoric. In Pakistan, and in the Pakistani diaspora, a preference is commonly expressed for marriage within the extended family or *birādarī*. Close relatives do often marry in most regions of Pakistan, although for a variety of rather down-to-earth reasons, and not because the ideology tells them to do so (Hastings 1988). Perhaps unexpectedly, the rate of cousin marriage among Pakistani immigrants to Britain is higher than the rate in rural Pakistan. And the rate of cousin marriage is particularly high among younger British Pakistanis. Around a third of the marriages of the immigrant generation were with first cousins, but well over half the marriages of the British-born generation are with first cousins (Shaw 2001). This is a consequence of British immigration regulations. It is very difficult for people to enter Britain unless they are married to people already here. In most cousin marriages, one partner immigrates to Britain from Pakistan. Alison Shaw found that 90 per cent of the first-cousin marriages in her sample of British Pakistanis in Oxford involved one spouse who came directly from Pakistan (Shaw 2001:327). There are often debts to family members back home who helped to finance the migration, and Roger Ballard points out that if a British-based family refuses a marriage offer from relatives in Pakistan, 'they are likely to be charged with having become so anglicized that they have forgotten their most fundamental duties towards their kin' (1987:27).

I feel a special kinship with these people. My background is Baltic Jewish, and my ancestors emigrated from Lithuania to South Africa at the end of the nineteenth

century. My father's parents were first cousins. My great-grandfather had come to South Africa together with five of his brothers and a sister. His son married the daughter of one of those brothers. My mother's parents were also first cousins. I believe that when my grandfather had established himself he went back home to find a wife, and was then, presumably, pointed in the direction of his cousin.

Once upon a time, British emigrants behaved in the same way. Twenty per cent of marriages among protestant Northern Irish immigrants to the Midwest were with first cousins in the first half of the nineteenth century (Reid 1988:iv). Highland Scots migrants to New Zealand were also strikingly endogamous. What Maureen Molloy calls 'kin group endogamy' reached 70 per cent in some areas, and she remarks that 'it is quite common to find three siblings marrying two sibling cousins and a third cousin or cousin's cousin' (1986:232).

Scots abroad, Berber villagers, Pakistani and East European Jewish migrants, Tswana aristocrats and Victorian élites marry cousins for different reasons, but there are clearly common threads in the marriage strategies in all these cases. However, the analysis of marriage choices is not enough. Marriage preferences have structural consequences. It is probably not a good idea to look for these at the level of a total society, since marriages are very often limited by class or minority status, and political boundaries are unlikely to coincide with barriers to intermarriage. The structural implications of cousin marriage become evident on a smaller scale, at the level of a social network. Systematic intermarriage may guarantee the trust on which complex financial relationships depend, or it may foster patronage. No doubt there are other pay-offs. Often a sense of another sort of affinity, an affinity of values, of social situation, underpins intermarriage. In any case, families that can count on sustained alliances of this sort enjoy a powerful competitive advantage.

Cousin marriages in nineteenth-century England did not, of course, bind an entire society. However, they did contribute to the formation of a new social stratum, which Noel Annan called the 'intellectual aristocracy' (1955). This was not so much a class as a set of clans that persisted for several generations, each with a characteristic occupational speciality and specific political and religious tendencies – the Wedgwood-Darwins, for example. Such clans were highly endogamous. I believe that the rise of the new English ruling class, the Victorian intellectual aristocracy, may be ascribed very largely to their remarkable preference for cousin marriage and sister exchange.

Some final reflections may be in order. First of all, we must include ourselves in our comparisons, and on equal terms. Comparisons must not pit us against them: we and they must always both be included, treated within the same framework. Second, we should pay more attention to these banal encounters, to the taken-for-granted habits of everyday existence, to the 'many little traits of character', in which we find ourselves most alike. Malinowski once remarked that when he came into anthropology the emphasis had been on the differences between peoples. 'I recognized their study as important, but underlying sameness I thought of greater importance & rather neglected. I

still believe that the fundamental is more important than the freakish' (quoted in Young 2004:76). Comparisons should surely focus on the commonalities, at least in the first place. We should therefore compare practices rather than conceptions.

Social anthropology can still aspire to extend the range of the social sciences by testing their propositions in other conditions. Ethnographers should engage ethnocentric social scientists in discussions about the less familiar social processes and views of the world they have studied. Perhaps as we come to know others better, as people with similar capacities, forming societies of a comparable sort, faced with common dilemmas, we may also understand more about ourselves.

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