Schneider : Critique of the Study of Kinship

16 Conclusion

First I will review and summarize in highly condensed form the salient presuppositions in the study of kinship. Then I will try to state briefly what I see to be the difficulties with the study of kinship. I will conclude by touching lightly on the question of what might be done about it all.

The ideas of kinship as an idiom, the kin-based society, and much of the notion of the privileged position of kinship depend on the idea of kinship itself. But they also depend on another idea. This is the premise that simple societies can be distinguished from complex societies and that a scale of more or less simplicity/complexity can be established. Another way that this is often put is that societies can be distinguished as more or less differentiated. Undifferentiated is simple; differentiated is complex.

Simple/complex is often associated with theories of history, development, evolution, or growth. Such is certainly the case for Maine and Morgan for example. But the simple/complex dimension has also been associated with those who are avowedly antievolutionary and antihistorical like Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown, among others. For these, the simple/complex and related dichotomies represent different modes of organization which have no necessary historical or developmental implications. But it is particularly the simple societies that are said to use kinship as an idiom, to be kin-based because many different tasks have to be done by a single, or a few very simple forms. It is in the nature of kinship—and it is here that kinship per se comes in—that it can and does serve as an idiom, so that the simple, undifferentiated societies can be, and indeed must be, kin-based.

Although the ideas of the kin-based society and the idiom of kinship may, for many scholars, depend in part on their evolutionary, developmental, or historical premises, it is the special qualities of kinship itself that give it its privileged position and that make it necessary, or at least very likely, that the society will be kin-based. The problem really comes down to the nature of kinship itself. How then is kinship understood in the conventional wisdom of anthropology?

First, kinship is one of the four privileged institutions, domains, or rubrics of social science, each of which is conceived to be a natural, universal, vital component of society. Kinship takes its shape in part from being one of these institutions. It is a thing, or a focus of a constellation of varied activities, or it has a primary function, or it constitutes a distinct domain. It is taken as self-evident that it is distinct from the other major institutions, yet also related to them since they all constitute major building blocks out of

which all social systems are constructed. Further, kinship is the specially privileged of the privileged institutions, for it is kinship alone which can serve as idiom for, is the necessary prerequisite to, and out of which, the other three institutions are differentiated.

Second, kinship has to do with the reproduction of human beings and the relations between human beings that are the concomitants of reproduction. The reproduction of human beings is formulated as a sexual and biological process. Sexual relations are an integral part of kinship, though sexual relations may have significance outside kinship and sexual relations per se are not necessarily kinship relations.

Third, sexual reproduction creates biological links between persons and these have important qualities apart from any social or cultural attributes which may be attached to them. Indeed, the social and cultural attributes, though considered the primary subject matter of anthropologists, and of particular concern to social scientists, are nevertheless derivative of and of lesser determinate significance than the biological relations. These biological relations have special qualities; they create and constitute bonds, ties, solidary relations proportional to the biological closeness of the kin (though the correlation between the strength of the tie and the closeness of the kin may not be perfect beyond primary kin). These are considered to be natural ties inherent in the human condition, distinct from the social or cultural.

These, I think, are the three basic axioms used in the study of kinship, and all the rest follows more or less directly from them, though the particular formulation depends on the wider context in which the particular line of development occurs. For example, if the idea of the kin-based society is set in the context of a theory of evolution, it will differ in important respects from the same idea developed in the context of an antievolutionary theory. But the kinship part will trace directly back to these three axioms.

Another example is the Doctrine of the Genealogical Unity of Mankind. The derivation is simple. First, kinship is universal (axiom one). Second, kinship has to do with human reproduction and the relations concomitant to that process. Hence a system of relative products based on the primitives of father, mother, (parent), husband, wife, (spouse), son, daughter (child) is simply developed and extended from that nucleus (axiom two). The genealogy is also universal and follows from both axioms one and two. How far out the genealogy is extended, how it is partitioned, varies from culture to culture, and this follows from that special corollary that the strength of the bonds ("Blood Is Thicker Than Water") diminishes beyond the relations to primary kin. Every culture has a father, mother, husband and wife, son and daughter, but not all of them bother to count mother's mother's mothers' brother's son's daughters' sons.

The Doctrine of the Genealogical Unity of Mankind is one of the most

important and explicit features of the conventional wisdom of kinship studies and as such it deserves special review here. This review will serve to emphasize features of the three axioms which are of strategic importance in evaluating the difficulties with the study of kinship. At the same time it will allow me to bring together some loose ends from the discussion of the relation between social and physical kinship and the chapter on "Blood Is Thicker Than Water."

Biological kinship has been distinguished sharply from social kinship by most anthropologists. This is true even for those few anthropologists who were able to see that biological kinship itself is culturally constructed. For the earlier workers like Morgan and McLennan the actual, natural, biological state of affairs remained constant and given. What changed was man's discovery of the actual, natural, biological state of affairs and his celebration of those as cultural facts as well. Once discovered, man could control those facts and change certain aspects of them. For example, once discovered man could eventually develop what Morgan called the "marriage of pairs" and so establish paternity with a fair degree of likelihood. But before he understood the processes of reproduction, at a time when promiscuity prevailed, there was no way of establishing paternity, nor indeed, could there be any interest in doing so, for the facts of paternity themselves were unknown. So Morgan says that the discovery of kinship was one of the earliest and greatest acts of human intelligence. In the phrase which was widely used later by Radcliffe-Brown, Firth, and Fortes, among many others, this was "the social recognition of biological facts."

In this view the social facts reflected, and thus were in perfect accord with, the biological facts. But with promiscuity, paternity could not be established and so it could not be socially marked. With group marriage, and with marriage understood as sexual relations, men of the group had sexual relations with women of the group and so they were husbands and wives to each other. There was a persistent problem with motherhood in that motherhood, unlike fatherhood, was readily visible and deemed too obvious to overlook. Hence the notion that the group of women married to the group of men could all collectively be "mothers" by virtue of their marriage to the group of "fathers" was inconsistent with the obvious fact of individual motherhood by virtue of pregnancy and birth. This was one of the points where it was obvious that social kinship did not simply mirror biological kinship. Further discrepancies between social and biological kinship were apparent and the forms of social kinship could not be accounted for as Morgan and McLennan tried to, by regarding them as the direct recognition of the biological facts. Where social kinship was different from biological kinship, this discrepancy required some attention. And indeed, it will be recalled that Durkheim, Rivers, and others went to great lengths to show that social kinship in certain cases did not

correlate with physical kinship, though Rivers's argument was flawed in certain crucial respects.

The discrepancy between social and physical kinship was not the only important thrust toward the separation of cultural and physical kinship. Durkheim was insisting with great vehemence and quite persuasively that social facts were sui generis, could not be reduced to other orders of facts but had to be accounted for or explained in social terms.

These may have been two important reasons for the move in the last decades of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth century to sharply separate social from physical kinship, but they were certainly not the only reasons. The social was more and more being differentiated from the psychological in general, and these were well along in being differentiated from physics, ethics, and philosophy in the general intellectual climate of the time. The growing sharp distinction between social and physical kinship was but one part of this more general intellectual movement.

Yet, as I have tried to indicate, there were really two tendencies working against each other to some degree. One was the recognition that social kinship did not simply mirror physical kinship and so the separation of social from physical kinship. The other was the persistent view that natural, biological processes constitute a major determinant, or at least a constraint on any direction that social kinship might take. A particularly well developed formulation of this was the Westermark, Malinowski, Freud view that social kinship was directly determined by the physical or biological conditions of reproduction, in the widest sense. Something more than a vague instinct of motherhood was postulated by Freud and Malinowski: they saw a pattern of interaction between the givens of nature, psychology, and biology and the kinds of experiences in the whole process of socialization and family living which were very convincing in giving a profoundly determinate role to biology, psychobiological processes, and what could be seen as the essential meaning of physical kinship. For almost all social scientists social and physical kinship could not be radically separated, because physical kinship was an important constraint on, or determinant of, social kinship. Not the only one perhaps, but certainly the most important.

In chapter 9 I stressed the problem which those who wished to separate social from physical kinship failed to even raise, much less cope with; if kinship was purely social and in no way physical, how was it to be defined, what was it, how was it to be distinguished from any other kind of social relationship? Durkheim and Van Gennep and Rivers never raised this question, and it might be interesting to speculate why. Speculation is required because to the best of my knowledge, none of these scholars said anything to explain it themselves.

One possible explanation is that I have posed a problem that was not

seen as a problem by these men. Kinship was indeed about human reproduction, but social kinship was to be distinguished from its biological and psychological aspects for purposes of study in its own right. When Durkheim said that "kinship is social or it is nothing" he did not mean that it lost its roots in biology and human reproduction; only that it was now to be treated as a social fact, not a biological fact. Hence he simply assigned the biological aspects of kinship to the realm of the science of biology, just as he had assigned the psychological aspects of suicide to the study of psychology. When he subtracted the psychological aspects of suicide, he still had plenty of social facts left to explain; by setting aside the biological aspects of kinship he still had plenty of social facts to explain.

Second, one might speculate that Durkheim never escaped from the problem of motivation. His view of effervescence and of the functions of ritual and of the compelling nature of religion as embodying values toward which the actor felt (or just naturally developed) an attitude of moral authority all implied that however sui generis such social facts were, they required the cooperation of a motivated human being. Otherwise, like Lévi-Strauss's myths, they had to be seen as inexplicably working their inner logic out independently of any human beings or the involvement of any actors. And Durkheim's treatment of effervescence, ritual, and religion only depended in part on the workings of a cultural logic wholly independent of actors. By the same token, then, Durkheim implicitly depended on some motivating factor, some hidden motor behind kinship to make it work. That motor was probably biology in the form of the axiom that Blood Is Thicker Than Water. But it had to be kept implicit, as motivation was kept implicit while he focused on the social facts, on kinship as social relations.

A third factor which may have entered into Durkheim's position was his differences with Morgan. Where Morgan viewed kinship terms as direct reflections of the actual state of consanguineal relations, insofar as these were known or knowable by the natives, Durkheim rejected this view on the ground that what Morgan deemed to be the crucial relationship—consanguinity—was all too often not taken into account at all or taken into account, but accounted as having minor or no relevance at all. In many societies nonconsanguines are considered relatives and consanguines strangers to one another. Further, in many societies paternity does not exist as a social institution even where there is no doubt about the physical bond between the father and his children. Conversely, a man very frequently considers himself and is considered the father, in the moral and legal sense of the term, of children whom he has not engendered. He affirms that kinship in primitive societies is irreducible to consanguinity, that it depends on causes different from the simple acknowledgment of a specific physical link. This is so even with maternity, he argues, since among many peoples all births are attributed to the reincarnation

of an external soul which introduces itself into the woman's body and becomes the child. The child is therefore much more directly dependent on the dead person of whom he is the reincarnation than on the woman who physically bore him. She plays the role of an intermediary in procreation; she is not the one the newborn child perpetuates. Thus the child is not attached to his mother's family, but to the one to which the dead person belonged during his life, and this is indeed what happens in a number of cases. In short, the social facts simply did not accord with the physical facts, hence the social facts could not possibly be accounted for or determined by the physical facts. (This is paraphrased from Durkheim 1913).

The social facts, however, were still very much the same as they had always been; they concerned domestic arrangements, representations, beliefs, moral and legal concerns with those social relations having to do with reproduction. For Durkheim, I suggest, the problem was to strip physical kinship away from social kinship, leaving kinship as a purely social system. If social kinship was based on anything, it was based on other social facts. And he says that domestic organization is based on fundamentally religious ideas and beliefs (paraphrased from Durkheim 1913). In sum, kinship and domestic arrangements and family remained modeled on the natural, biological processes, but their social aspects had to be treated in social terms and could not be explained by other than social factors. So biology still remained as a model and as a motivating force, just as psychology remained the necessary condition for social solidarity and its motivation.

The situation for Rivers may have been put in rather different terms, but was essentially the same. Rivers was concerned with the development of culture. He started as a confirmed evolutionist, then had a radical conversion to diffusionism. Insofar as kinship was nothing more than a set of biological facts which were only given social recognition, there was not only no problem, but that formulation itself was a major error. The history of kinship could help solve problems in the history of civilization—either with a developmental theory such as Morgan's or with a diffusionist theory such as G. E. Smith's. But biology was not culture. It was the cultural aspects that were the vital data for Rivers. Hence he had to separate social kinship, which was his problem, from physical kinship, which was not. Insofar as his was the most radical rejection of anything biological his was the position that most forcefully cried out for some statement of what exactly kinship was and how it was to be defined if it was not biology or modeled on biological processes. If consistency is the hallmark of small minds, Rivers was indeed a major thinker. In the end, then, the position which I think Rivers occupied, and not entirely consciously by any means, was rather like that of Durkheim. His primary concern was to free kinship from its simplistic formulation as a mere reflection of the state of biological relations of human reproduction and to study it as a social phenomenon—first following Morgan as a developmentalist, later following Smith and the diffusionists as embodying historical information.

I have already stated Malinowski's position fairly I think; social and physical kinship were quite distinct but the former was firmly rooted in the latter through the family and psychobiological processes of reproduction and socialization and the very specific psychobiological needs of human beings. Hence social kinship had to be defined in biological terms because it was largely determined by the facts of biology as these were part of human nature.

In sum, the focus of the efforts for Durkheim, Rivers, and Radcliffe-Brown was to isolate social kinship as a legitimate subject of study, to distinguish it from its biological aspects, but not to disavow the biological component nor to throw the biology out (except for Rivers, who threw it out but kept it in at the same time), but simply to set it aside. For Malinowski the problem was to show in general the ways in which social kinship were determined by its vital psychobiological functions.

In setting the biological aspects of kinship aside, there was no felt need to redefine kinship. It could still be defined as dealing with human reproduction as a social and cultural phenomenon. One could still assume that Blood Is Thicker Than Water but one need not dwell on that part of it. Indeed, for Malinowski and those who followed his sort of functionalism it was more convenient not to dwell on it, for to do so raised the whole question of precisely how specific social forms were constrained or determined by what particular biological conditions by what specific mechanisms, questions which they glossed over with glittering generalities.

As I have indicated, whatever the place of biology, there has been virtual unanimity in defining kinship in terms of human reproduction. Whether purely social for Durkheim, the social as dictated by biological circumstances for Malinowski, a reflection of the facts of consanguinity for Morgan, the social control over the means of human reproduction for Marx, or even the reproduction of social forms for some neo-Marxists or the transmission of rights from generation to generation, kinship is essentially about reproduction. One might say, well, that's how it's been defined. But one might also ask why it has been defined that way, asking at the same time, what is there about reproduction that makes it so salient that it is given a central place among the privileged institutions? Why not, for example, the customs surrounding eating, or a dozen other things universal to human beings and equally vital?

The short, quick answer is that kinship has been defined by European social scientists, and European social scientists use their own folk culture as the source of many, if not all, of their ways of formulating and understanding the world about them. Short and quick as that answer is, and it is essentially correct I think, it is too short and too quick. The longer, fuller answer is back

to the axiom that Blood Is Thicker Than Water. This is certainly a very significant premise in European culture. This is not the place for a full, detailed analysis of this feature of European culture or of its place in the total configuration of that culture, but certain of its features may help to understand why it plays so important a role in social science.

What are called "blood ties" can be understood as the bonds of solidarity that are caused by or engendered by the actual biological connectedness, sometimes figured as genetic, sometimes hereditary, sometimes in emotional terms. Or the notion of blood can be understood as figurative, iconic, but still standing for the bonds of solidarity, bonds which are deeply affective, deeply binding, actually breakable but to be broken under the most unusual, tragic, unforgivable circumstances. Images of the mother's love for her child, and the child for her, of the father's innate or unconsciously dictated preference for his own real child come in also. Other features are closely associated, indeed, are inextricably intertwined. The perpetuation of the self in one's own children, the defeat of death in the continuity of the life one engenders are both images of the ties that bind and the continuity of life. Cooking and care may express these ties, and they also constitute the ties. Kissing and copulation may express these ties but they also constitute them. Obedience and loyalty may express these ties but they also constitute them.

I am trying to avoid any distinction between a kind of social relationship and the meaning of that relationship as expressed in symbols, or the implication that culture merely marks, in iconic or other form, the expression of some more fundamental social relationship which can be stated in abstract terms. Symbols symbolize something, of course. But what they symbolize is symbols, that is, each other. They do not symbolize essences, or deeper meanings, or more fundamental social forms. Even the words we use in analysis are no more "deep" or "fundamental" than that which is analyzed; all we have done is to reformulate in other forms.

So kinship is defined by social scientists, and anthropologists in particular, as having to do with reproduction because reproduction is viewable as a distinct and vitally important feature of social life. Its distinctness, its systematicity, are "given" in the analyst's experience of his own culture—they are demonstrable and self-evident and his not unreasonable assumption is that if we are that way, and if all people are people—deep down and underneath superficial differences of language, dress, and appearance—then all people most hold reproduction in as high value as we do. It is considered to be, after all, as vital a feature of social life as it is of human life itself. But the question is, is this really true of all people? I am not convinced that it is.

Whatever the historical situation may have been, the third axiom, that Blood Is Thicker Than Water, seems to me to be quite explicit for those who worked in the tradition of Westermark, Freud, and Malinowski. Not explicit in the very bald terms in which I have put it, but still clearly discernible. For many others it is more implicit as a necessary assumption about which little is said and consequently no systematic effort is made to bring this presupposition into line with the rest of the presuppositions in the study of kinship. But even for those who strenuously deny it, I think it can be shown to follow from the way in which their studies of kinship proceed. The fact that they deny some of their most important presuppositions should be no surprise, nor should it cause any special consternation. No one can make all of one's presuppositions explicit even in the most elegant theories, and surely there is not very much theory to kinship theory anyway. Finally, I have offered some evidence for the fact that many, from Morgan through Lévi-Strauss, make some explicit statements which suggest that they do indeed hold this premise and that it is indeed a part of their intellectual armory.

It is at this point that the Doctrine of the Genealogical Unity of Mankind can be understood to follow from the three axioms I have outlined, and why that doctrine is so vital a part of the explicit premises of the study of kinship. However sharply social kinship is distinguished from physical kinship, kinship is defined as having to do with human reproduction, and human reproduction is regarded as a biological process entailing sexual relations and some sort of biological or physical bonds between parents and offspring and siblings. It follows that all the time and everywhere there is at least that much that is the same. In these crucial respects fatherhood is the same in every culture; it is, as Scheffler and Lounsbury put it, a matter of engendering. Motherhood is the same in all cultures at all times and places because in its distinctive features, its definition, it is a matter of a child being born of, or engendered by, a woman. The Doctrine of the Genealogical Unity of Mankind is a necessary corollary of the way in which kinship is defined (as reproduction) and the way in which reproduction is understood (as a biological process following sexual intercourse), and the fact that "Blood Is Thicker Than Water" for all human beings (the third axiom). If motherhood differed from one society to another, if there were no universal aspects to fatherhood, there could be no standard genealogy against which to plot particular cultural variants.

So too the privileged position of kinship among the four most privileged institutions follows from the three axioms and their correlates, as well as from the way in which kinship is defined. I have not stressed the view that kinship is a universal of human culture and society partly because it seems to me to be so self-evidently held by so many. Its universality lies both in its functions and in certain of its forms. In this it differs from economics and religion perhaps, depending on how those are defined. But as the definition of kinship and the axioms themselves stress, the genealogy is built of relations which are the same the whole world over; the bonds of kinship are strong, particularly

between primary kin, and are the same the whole world over (both culturally and biologically of course); the "grammar" and "vocabulary" of kinship (which make up the genealogy) are the same the whole world over and onto that framework can be grafted all sorts of disparate meanings and functions yet remain a constant, permitting cross-cultural comparison and yet allowing for the differences between particular cultures. Where politics is only constant in respect to relations of dominance and power, economics with respect to exchange of goods and services or however it may be defined, out of none of these can any "grammar" and "vocabulary" be constructed of the same kind as can be wrought out of the relative products of kinship.

So much, then, for what I see as the presuppositions involved in the study of kinship as it has been practiced by anthropologists since the mid-nineteenth century, if not earlier.

The difficulties which I see in the study of kinship derive from the major presuppositions which I have just discussed as these relate to the aims of anthropology.

Anthropology starts with the proposition that all human beings act and that their actions are in some important part related to the culture they share. A culture consists by definition, in the shared understandings of the ways in which the world or life is, the structure of its existence, which includes how people should act in such a world. Culture is thus a shared system of symbols and meanings; a system of categories and units and the ways in which these are designated and conceptualized; a conceptual scheme; a particular way of constituting reality or the multiple realities of life. This is not distinct from any realities that an observer may postulate. The relation between the reality postulated by the observer and that which is postulated by the particular culture is a separate issue, however important it may be. (For further elaboration of this way of defining culture see Schneider [1968] 1980 and 1976).

Anthropology, then, is the study of particular cultures. *The first task of anthropology,* ***prerequisite to all others,*** *is to understand and formulate the symbols and meanings and their configuration that a particular culture consists of.*

My difficulty with the study of kinship can be summed up simply: the assumptions and presuppositions which the anthropologist brings to the process of understanding the particular culture he is studying are imposed on the situation blindly and with unflagging loyalty to those assumptions and little flexible appreciation of how the other culture is constituted, and with it a rigid refusal to attempt to understand what may be going on between them. The anthropologist has, as part of his culture, his conceptual scheme, a way of ordering his experience of another culture, a way of constructing the reality he believes he is encountering, and he is not easily shaken loose from that secure, reassuring, comfortable, well-worn common language to which he is committed and shares with his community of anthropologists, and which helps to define his place in that community. The anthropologist lives by his culture just as everyone else does, and it is very unnerving to distance oneself from one's culture and community, for this leaves one without a firm anchor in some secure way of occupying a known place in a known world and ways of viewing that world.

The irony, of course, is that it is precisely the anthropologist who is committed to the idea of culture and formulated the one most sacred canon of his trade; to avoid ethnocentric bias; to be open and flexible and to learn and perceive and to avoid the blinding commitments which prevent his sensitive perception of, and appreciation of, the other and how he formulates his reality. This is supposed to be the sine qua non of the professional anthropologist.

More specifically, I have detailed throughout the book particular questions about the presuppositional baggage students of kinship impose on their task. The three axioms I stated earlier in this chapter seem to me to be insupportable. The division of the sociocultural world into institutions, domains, or rubrics of kinship, economics, politics, and religion which are presumed to be universally vital, distinct functions, and the major building blocks out of which all cultures or societies are made assumes a priori what should be the question: of what blocks is *this* particular culture built? How do *these* people conceptualize their world? What functions does *this* culture identify as being universally vital and distinct?

One of the common bits of intellectual legerdemain that the institutional divisions leads to is this: First we assume that kinship, economics, politics, and religion are distinct entitites. Then we proceed to define them so as to stress their distinction. We then approach a particular culture and describe it first in terms of one, then another, then another of these institutional entities. And then comes the great discovery! All of these institutions are inextricably interrelated and intertwined so that in any particular case they cannot be distinguished! What we carefully separate with the left hand we then discover with the right hand has been inseparable all along. At the risk of some exaggeration, it seems to me that this is just what Mauss's "total social fact" consists of: the arbitrary division of society into parts and the subsequent demonstration that the parts are really inseparable because they constitute an integrated whole. What was one to begin with is discovered to have been one all along!

The argument that is sometimes offered in defense of this procedure is that analysis consists of decomposing a whole into its component parts. There can be little to disagree with here. But without pressing the pun too far, it is one thing to decompose an object and quite another to discover what parts it is

actually composed of. It is said that by smashing the atom we break it into its component parts and thus learn what those parts are and what they are made of. This may hold for atoms. But a smashed culture does not break up into its original parts. A culture which is chopped up with a Z-shaped instrument yields Z-shaped parts: a culture which is chopped up with tools called kinship, economics, politics, and religion yields those parts.

The second axiom, that kinship, by definition, has to do with human reproduction and that this is a biological process entailing sexual relations, fails not by reason of its definition, but rather because of the associated assumptions. These are that kinship is everywhere and always a culturally distinct, distinguishable, and highly valued entity. That is, the fact of engendering another human being (to use the Scheffler-Lounsbury phrase) is always a culturally distinct construct and is always given high cultural value. This could be treated as a question, a hypothesis to be tested empirically. But it cannot be done on the literature that is generally available to us today, for almost all of that literature assumes that these are the facts instead of asking if they are or not. I have spoken to many people who have come back from the field and been assured, most sincerely and without conscious deceit, that the people they studied really do have the constructs of kinship, as the second axiom defines them. But on close questioning I usually find that they did very much as I did when I returned to write up my material on Yap. They imposed the notions of kinship on their materials even while actually eliciting that material in the field. Their first unquestioned translations of terms and relationships "find" "mothers" and "fathers," "sons" and "daughters"—kinship—and this is then confirmed by being made consistent with their first assumptions. My own experience in this matter is most compelling, for I did just that and there is a record of publications which I have been required to repudiate here.

It follows from what I have said that the Doctrine of the Genealogical Unity of Mankind is insupportable for the reasons just given. This doctrine assumes that mother is mother the whole world over and that all mothers can be compared by holding one element constant (that they bear children) and then examining the variations. As an American observer, I certainly believe that women have children, and that to do so they must have had sexual intercourse, regardless of what other conditions may be required, such as God's will or being physically capable of conceiving and so on. I certainly believe that Americans, and those sharing European culture generally, as Americans do, believe that that relationship is, if not sacred, at least of immense value. But I am equally convinced that most anthropologists project that particular set of meanings onto all peoples everywhere and since they rarely if ever raise the question, there is no reason to believe that it is universally true as assumed. It has never been tested because it has been assumed to be self-evident.

Embedded in the preceding is a point which should be made explicit. One of the major difficulties with the study of kinship has been the failure to treat meaning and value as problematic variables which need to be discovered in each case, and that an important part of meaning is the context, the configuration of which the problematic element is a part. It is not only a question of the magnitude of the value which is placed on some culturally formulated element. It is the detail of *what* value and *what* meaning in *what* configuration of values and meanings that is the significant set of variables. I tried to bring this point out as strongly as I could in dealing with Scheffler and Lounsbury. It is one of the major shoals on which the Doctrine of the Genealogical Unity of Mankind founders.

The third axiom leads to difficulties which are in part similar to those I have just recited. Blood Is Thicker Than Water is not only axiomatic in studies of kinship, it is a fundamental axiom of European culture. Even if this axiom were true as a biological fact, even if the most extensive scientifically acquired evidence showed it to be true—as true, for example, as the sociobiologists claim it to be, and that is a very strong position—the point remains that culture, even were it to do no more than recognize biological facts, still adds something to those facts. The problem remains of just what the sociocultural aspects are, of what meaning is added, of where and how that meaning, as a meaning rather than as a biological fact, articulates with other meanings. If any biological fact wholly and completely determined every facet of a social fact then there would still be the need to describe what the cultural formulation, value, meaning, conception was in the total configuration of cultural meanings. But even in such a limiting case, that a sociocultural aspect is present makes that part of it something different from the biological part, places it in relation to other sociocultural elements, and therefore poses the sociocultural aspect as problematic.

But the axiom that Blood Is Thicker Than Water does not hold water even for the sociobiologists. I need offer no more evidence for that statement than to call attention to the fact that even the sociobiologists do not claim to be able to account for the so-called extension of kinship. They only claim to account for *some* aspects of *some* of the relations between very close kin. This leaves a good deal to be accounted for.

Let us assume that my criticisms of the study of kinship are generally not far off the mark. What, then, is to be done? One way in which this question has been put to me is: "Well, if you don't like the way we are doing it, how do you suggest we study kinship?" This presupposes kinship, that it is still out

there to be studied and that all we have to do is to study it differently. I cannot take this position, but I can see where others might wish to.

The one ground on which they might proceed is to take kinship as an empirical question, not as a universal fact. One must start with a working hypothesis about what kinship is or how it is to be defined for purposes of such an inquiry. The paradigmatic construct of kinship is that of European culture as this is embodied in the second axiom. This, then, would be the working hypothesis. But it would be necessary to strip away the most troublesome parts of the conventional wisdom about kinship. Specifically, it could no longer be assumed that the genealogical grid is universal or has the same value and meaning in all cultures, nor that functionalist baggage which tries to account for the necessity of kinship while at the same time allowing for its variable forms. Instead, such questions should be set aside for future study. The immediate and salient questions are: Given this definition of kinship, do these particular people have it or do they not? If so, detailed ethnographic evidence must be presented to substantiate that position; if not, specific ethnographic evidence should be presented showing wherein they differ. In the field we must not translate or gloss every relationship between a woman and what appears to be the child she has borne as a mother-child relationship until that translation or gloss has been fully explored by examining in detail how the natives themselves conceptualize, define, or describe that relationship and their construction of just where it stands in the context of their culture. The same goes for the father-child and the marital and all other presumed kinship relations. To repeat, this means that the genealogical grid cannot be assumed but only held as a possible hypothesis. This in turn means that the idea of primary meanings as reflecting the assumed primacy or high value attached to engendering must be treated as a question and not taken as universally true. In other words, the assumption of primary meanings and extensions must either be held in abeyance until it can be shown just which meanings are indeed primary and which are demonstrable extensions for the particular culture being studied, or the whole presumption that there are universal, primary meanings from which all others derive must be set aside. For example, as in the Yapese case, we must find out what *citamangen* means in all its usages and in all contexts in which it occurs. Only then can we ask if any of those meanings are primary, and if so, in what sense, and what is the evidence for that conclusion. It may well turn out (as I believe) that even what is called "referential meaning" is not primary and that primary meaning cannot be ascribed to any particular form of signification.

One more point is important. Value and meaning in the total cultural configuration must be added to the formulation, so that omission of these important variables does not lead the field-worker into the kinds of difficulties I have described. To some extent this will be taken care of by avoiding the

assumptions of universality and the genealogical grid. But more than that is needed. If the culture contains the assumption that sexual intercourse is necessary to human reproduction one cannot just stop there as Scheffler and Lounsbury suggest. This is clear for the older literature, such as Van Gennep (1906) and Durkheim (1913). It is also clear from the Yapese example. The Yapese regard that fact as of relatively minor cultural value and of limited meaning. To merely establish that the culture postulates that one person engenders another is insufficient: is the relationship held to be significant for that very reason or is that just one of the facts of life that are not really important, in terms of which social action is regulated?

There would be a considerable change in the way in which kinship studies proceed if this solution were accepted. It might turn out that European culture does provide a nice model, but that that model does not prove to be very generally applicable. Kinship might then become a special custom distinctive of European culture, an interesting oddity at worst, like the Toda bow ceremony. I think that such a way of dealing with kinship would teach us a great deal.

It might seem that a more radical road would be a general overhaul of the aims and methods of anthropology, but this is not so. The aims and methods of anthropology have always been and are always being sharply criticized and generally overhauled. Structural-functional analysis is not as popular as it was forty years ago. Structuralism has a number of converts, but others who have tried it have already abandoned it for some higher form of hermaneutics or lower functionalism. Various forms of "materialism," some dialectical and others not, are practiced now here and now there. Some anthropologists have been doing "symbolic anthropology," which is very close to, if not identical with, "interpretive anthropology." The differentiation of anthropological aims, approaches, methods, and theory is much greater than it was fifty years ago, and so too is the number of people doing anthropology. But revision, innovation, criticism have been constant throughout the history of anthropology.

The lines along which a general overhaul might be undertaken, then, depend very much on the guiding outlook. But it is at this point that the task of this book is finished. The aim of this book has been to say that the way in which kinship has been studied does not make good sense. Indeed, it is quite unreasonable in certain ways that I have tried to explicate. If that case has been presented my job is done. The case I have presented can be generalized to any anthropology which invokes universals on functionalist grounds or which employs any or all of the four privileged institutions of kinship, economics, religion, and politics. But that is another book.