

THE "Dakota-Iroquois" type of kinship nomenclature—in which mother's brother is called "uncle" and his children "cousin" and in which father's sister is called "aunt" and her children "cousin"—is closely associated with tribes organized into clans, either matrilineal or patrilineal. The Crow type of kinship terminology—in which mother's brother is an "uncle," and his children "son" and "daughter," and father's sister is an "aunt," and her children "father" and "aunt"—is closely associated with matrilineal clans but not with patrilineal clans.¹ The Omaha type of nomenclature—in which mother's brother is "uncle," and his children "uncles" and "mothers," father's sister is "aunt," and her children "sister's son and daughter"—is associated with a patrilineal, but not with a matrilineal,¹ clan system.² Thus we have the following facts: 1. There are three types of kinship nomenclature intimately connected with clan organization. 2. Of these, one is adaptable to either matrilineal or patrilineal clans, whereas each of the other two is adaptable to only one kind of unilateral descent. 3. The Crow and Omaha systems on the one hand are distinguished from the Dakota-Iroquois system on the other by the fact that in the former two the principle of generation is ignored at many points in the classification of relatives—one has "fathers," "aunts," "brothers," etc. on each generation level—whereas in the latter system this principle is observed throughout.

From a consideration of these facts two questions arise: 1. Why is it that some kinship systems disregard the principle of generation while others observe this principle? 2. Why is it that some tribes with matrilineal (patrilineal) clans have the Iroquois³ (Dakota) type of terminology while other tribes, also with matrilineal (patrilineal) clans, have the Crow (Omaha) type?

Professor Robert H. Lowie, who has, perhaps, concerned himself with problems of kinship terminologies more extensively than any other American anthropologist of our day, has raised these questions in his article *Relationship Terms*. But his answer is virtually limited to the suggestion: "It is conceivable that the Omaha and Crow varieties of the bifurcate merging type depend upon *additional factors that may some time be discovered*" (p.

¹ There may be exceptions to this rule as there are to other generalizations in science.

² See *The Distribution of Kinship Systems in North America*, by Leslie Spier (Univ. of Washington Publications in Anthropology, Vol. I, No. 2, Seattle, 1925); article *Relationship Terms*, by R. H. Lowie, in *Encyclopedia Britannica* (14th ed.) for a description of types of kinship nomenclature.

³ We may refer to the Dakota-Iroquois system as Iroquois when it is associated with matrilineal clans, Dakota when associated with patrilineal.

89; italics ours). Returning to the problem some years later,⁴ Lowie explains the merging of generations in the designation of maternal uncle and maternal uncle's son among the Omaha and the Miwok by citing the fact that in each tribe a man is permitted to marry the daughter of his wife's brother. But this form of marriage would not explain why, in the Omaha type, father's sister's children are called "sister's son and daughter," instead of "cousin" or "sibling." Moreover, this sort of explanation would not be applicable to such a people as the Hopi (with the Crow type) who do not permit marriages of this sort.

Professor Lowie goes on to say that it might be necessary to find "additional determinants" to "explain all occurrences of the phenomenon."

But to advance special theories, each based upon an "additional determinant," to account for special instances in which the Crow or Omaha types occur is not enough. It is like having one theory for falling leaves, another for meteorites, a third for snow flakes, and so on. What is needed is, of course, a general theory that will embrace all "special instances" just as one formula embraces all instances of falling bodies. We are confronted here with one problem, not several. The questions—Why do some kinship systems observe the principle of generation in the classification of relatives while other systems violate it at points? Why do some tribes with matrilineal (patrilineal) clans have the Iroquois (Dakota) type of kinship terminology while other tribes, also with matrilineal (patrilineal) clans have the Crow (Omaha) type of nomenclature, are merely aspects of a single problem. We propose to solve this problem with a single theory.

A kinship nomenclature is a mechanism whose function is the classification of relatives. Among tribes having the bifurcate merging type of nomenclature (the Dakota and Omaha, the Iroquois and the Crow), there are two agencies, each having as one of its functions the classification of relatives: the family and the clan (gens).⁵ Thus members of the tribe are classified

⁴ In *Cultural Anthropology: a Science* (American Journal of Sociology, Vol. XLII, No. 3, Nov. 1936).

⁵ By "family," we mean a bilateral social unit based on marriage; it includes primarily parents, children, and, secondarily, kindred on both sides. This is a composite of Lowie's definitions which may be found on p. 63, *Primitive Society*; p. 246, *Introduction to Cultural Anthropology*; p. 53, *The Family as a Social Unit* (Proceedings of the Michigan Academy of Arts and Sciences for 1932, Ann Arbor, 1933).

By "clan (or sib)" we mean a unilateral kinship group, one formed by reckoning descent on one side of the family only. A clan is one of a number of structurally equivalent segments into which a tribe may be divided. Each clan distinguishes itself from the others by a name. Clans are exogamous except when very young and undeveloped, or when very old, after they have begun to decay and disintegrate.

in accordance with two different principles: the one with reference to the constellations of relatives which we call families; the other with reference to tribal segments, clans. Since both clan and family are engaged, at one point, in doing the same thing—classifying relatives—and since they proceed from different points of reference, they are rivals, competitors, so to speak, in the game of relative-classification. Thus a person might be designated by a kinship term because of a family relationship, or he might be designated because of his clan affiliation, depending upon which principle, family or clan, was the more influential.⁶ Among the Hopi, for example, I (a male) call my father's sister's son "father." I call the son of my father's sister's daughter "father." In fact, I call *all* males in my father's clan "father." I do not designate these individuals "father" because of their position in the constellation of relatives which is my family. I designate them as I do because of *clan* ties.⁷ The systems of terminology which "override the generation principle" do so because the clan predominates over the family as the agency which determines how the relative shall be designated at those points where the generation principle is violated.

Now the question arises, why is it that in some tribes with clans the generation principle is violated while in other tribes with clans it is not?

The family is a much older institution than the clan; everywhere the clan has been preceded, in point of time, by the family.⁸ Clans did not appear in the earliest stage of social evolution; they came later.⁹ But this does not mean, of course, that "the clan evolved out of the family," for it did not. Each institution has had its own generative forces, each its own history.¹⁰

⁶ Dr Elsie Clews Parsons has called attention to this "rivalry" at the Keresan pueblo of Laguna, New Mexico. In her *Laguna Genealogies* (Anthropological Papers, American Museum of Natural History, Vol. XIX, Pt. V, New York, 1923) she has a section entitled *Preference of clan to kin terms*, which begins, "In several cases, I noted that terms due to clan connection were preferred to terms due to kin connection," p. 210.

⁷ It was Professor Lowie who made the first extensive study of Hopi kinship. The "clan concept," he concluded, "has exerted a deep influence upon it [Hopi kinship nomenclature]," *Hopi Kinship*, Anthropological Papers, American Museum of Natural History, Vol. XXX, Pt. VII, New York, 1929, p. 383.

⁸ "While no people lacks the family, many societies are without clans," R. H. Lowie, *An Introduction to Cultural Anthropology*, p. 256. Also, "the bilateral family is an absolutely universal institution; on the other hand, the unilateral sib has only a restricted though wide distribution." Lowie, *Primitive Society*, p. 147.

⁹ "Clans do not arise in the very earliest stage of society, but on somewhat higher levels . . .", Lowie, *An Introduction to Cultural Anthropology*, p. 256.

¹⁰ Why clans came into existence is an important question, to be sure, but one that need not be discussed here since it is irrelevant to our argument. We accept the clan as "given."

The clan, like many other social institutions, has a beginning, a period of infancy, of maturity, and of senescence.¹¹ At a certain stage of cultural development it disappears completely.¹² Thus a resume of social evolution would run as follows: in a very early, if not the earliest stage of development we find the family, but not the clan. At a later, more advanced stage (or "on higher levels," to use Professor Lowie's phraseology) clans appear in some cultures.¹³ Clans develop from incipience to maturity, and finally die out at still higher levels of cultural development. Thus, at a certain stage of social evolution, we find some peoples with both family and sib organization. This is the situation which concerns us here.

In its infancy a clan system would play an insignificant role in the society of which it was a part; it would exert little influence upon the kinship nomenclature.¹⁴ As it grew and matured, however, as it became more influential, the clan system would exert more and more influence upon the kinship nomenclature¹⁵ until it had triumphed over the family as a classifying agent at various points. Thus the "additional factors" that Professor Lowie thinks may "some day be discovered" which will explain why some types of nomenclature "override the generation principle" and others do not, turn out to be fairly simple: *the type which violates the generation principle is an outgrowth of the type which does not, and is due to the influence of a fully mature, influential clan system. When the clan system is young and weak the kinship system will be of the Dakota-Iroquois type, regardless of the sex in which descent is reckoned. As the clan system develops, however, and comes to*

¹¹ ". . . what is true of the sib scheme in full swing cannot possibly be true of the nascent sib," Lowie, *Primitive Society*, p. 162.

" . . . the Greeks are known to have passed through a period in which they were organized into sibs. But this may simply indicate that at a certain level the sib system tends to decay . . . ", *Ibid.*, p. 147.

¹² Lowie speaks of clans "ultimately disappearing under a strong centralized government," *An Introduction to Cultural Anthropology*, p. 256. Similarly, Professor E. Sapir says that ". . . the clan tends to atrophy with the growth of political institutions . . . ", *Anthropology and Sociology*, in *The Social Sciences and their Interrelations*, Wm. F. Ogburn and Alexander Goldenweiser, eds. (New York, 1927), p. 107. Their observations are not novel, however. The great American evolutionist, Lewis H. Morgan, made the same observations and illuminated the whole problem of the obsolescence and disappearance of the clan many years before Lowie and Sapir were born.

¹³ But not necessarily in *all* cultures. Segmentation of a tribe may take a form other than the clan form, as, e.g., in the New Mexican pueblos of Isleta and Taos.

¹⁴ "An institution . . . may not yet have had time to assert itself terminologically," Lowie, *Relationship Terms*, p. 89.

¹⁵ "There can be little doubt that when a sib organization is once firmly established it will react upon the method of designating relatives . . . ", Lowie, *Primitive Society*, p. 162.

*exert its influence more and more upon the social life of the tribe, the Dakota-Iroquois terminology will be transformed into the Crow type in a matrilineal society and into the Omaha type in a patrilineal society.*¹⁶

To be sure, the expression of the "clan principle" or of the "family principle" in the classification of relatives will always be conditioned by many factors such as occupation, mode of residence, marriage customs, and so on, as Professor Lowie has aptly pointed out. But, variation of expression does not mean lack of uniformity of principle, or absence of principle. The fact that smoke rises and rain falls does not mean that there is no law of gravitation. The fact that lead falls more rapidly than cotton does not mean lack of uniformity in the law which describes falling bodies. The fact is that the law which describes falling bodies describes an *ideal* situation; it does not describe any real event. In the "practical application" of the law of falling bodies one has to take account of the factors which condition its concrete expression, such as density of the atmosphere or other medium through which the body falls, specific gravity and shape of the body, etc. So also in "using" our theory of the principles operative in kinship systems, one has to take account of all the factors which, in any given situation, condition the concrete expression of these principles.

Furthermore, we must call attention to the fact that *how the Crow and Omaha types of nomenclature are brought into existence, and why this or that tribe possesses the Crow or Omaha type, are two different matters.* A tribe may have the Crow type of terminology because it has developed it within itself, or because it has borrowed it from some other tribe.¹⁷ Thus it would be *possible* for a tribe to possess the more advanced type of kinship terminology through borrowing, while another tribe in which the clan system is actually more highly developed, possesses the less advanced type of terminology because it has not progressed sufficiently to develop it within its own resources, and has not acquired it through borrowing.¹⁸ Hence, an apparent discrepancy of this sort would not, of itself, invalidate our theory. Nor

¹⁶ In societies where the clan is relatively undeveloped and unimportant, the clan organization is only partially expressed in the kinship terminology; the *presence* of clans is reflected, but the *gender* of the clans remains undisclosed. But as the clan system develops and grows in importance, the *gender*, matrilineal or patrilineal, of the clans is impressed upon the kinship nomenclatures *as well*.

¹⁷ Professor Lowie has very aptly drawn this distinction, pointing out the fact that when we have accounted for the possession of a trait by a certain tribe by showing that it has borrowed the trait in question, we have not in any way shown how the trait came into being in the first instance, *Cultural Anthropology: a Science*, p. 317.

¹⁸ Similarly, a tribe might habitually use and even work metals secured from other peoples and yet be technologically inferior, in general, to a tribe that used no metals at all.

would a statistical statement showing "percentages of tribes" following this or that course be anything but misleading since we could not know, in most cases, whether a phenomenon observed in a number of tribes is to be regarded as a one or as a many.¹⁹ The evaluation of the theory must come from (1) an analysis and comparison of representative cultures such as those of the Iroquois and the Hopi, the Ojibwa and the Omaha; (2) a study of the functions of clans and families with reference to kinship classification, and (3) a consideration of the processes of social evolution.

A theory is of value if it illuminates, if it explains, if it makes things intelligible. It must, of course, have a maximum possible correspondence with observed fact. But if it contributes understanding it is valuable, and provides a new basis for further exploration into the unknown. This is what we claim for our theory. It sheds light where there was obscurity. It yields understanding where there was perplexity. It illuminates aspects of kinship systems and of social organization alike. Therein lies its value.

The explanation that we have offered is, of course, one inspired by an evolutionary view of culture: institutions, cultures, grow, develop, evolve. The fundamental process in cultural (superorganic) phenomena as well as in organic and even inorganic,²⁰ phenomena is, in the judgment of the present writer, evolutionary. The application of the viewpoint and principles of the philosophy of evolution is as essential to the solution of many problems in culturology as it is in biology or physics.²¹

Professor Lowie has been one of the most assiduous and vigorous opponents of evolutionism in culture among twentieth century²² anthropolo-

¹⁹ "The statistical technique has been proved inadequate in several respects. . . . Tylor does not seem to distinguish between cases reducible to a single place of origin and others where several or many foci are probable," Lowie, *The History of Ethnological Theory* (New York, 1937), pp. 79-80.

²⁰ Stars evolve and "die." (See article *Stellar Evolution*, by the distinguished astronomer Henry Norris Russel, in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 14th ed.) The disintegration of radioactive substances is an example of evolutionary process in the inorganic realm. Then there is evolution of the universe, discussed, e.g., by R. A. Millikan, Sir James Jeans, Abbe Lemaitre, De-Sitter, A. S. Eddington, et al, in the proceedings of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, 1931.

²¹ See, *Science is Sciencing*, by the present writer (*Philosophy of Science*, Vol. 5, No. 4, 1938).

²² Lowie's *Primitive Society*, written, as he implies in the preface, to take the place of the evolutionist Morgan's *Ancient Society*, is, perhaps, the outstanding anti-evolutionary treatise in American anthropology. See, e.g., his expressive statement in the last chapter, which closes with the declaration that civilization is but "a thing of shreds and patches," "a planless hodge-podge," "a chaotic jumble."

gists, who, by and large, are either anti-evolutionists²³ or non-evolutionists. Having repudiated the philosophy and principles of evolution in culture, Professor Lowie is, naturally, unable to discern things which are illumined by the lamp of evolutionism alone. We venture to suggest that this is why he has failed to see the significance of the relationship between the Dakota and Iroquois types of nomenclature on the one hand and the Omaha and Crow types on the other.

This is all the more remarkable because Professor Lowie has grasped all of the important relevant facts and has seen their significance singly. He has seen that certain types of kinship nomenclature are associated with clans. He has seen, furthermore, that when a clan system is "firmly established," it will react upon the method of designating relatives. Where the sib organization is firmly established, he says, "all males in the father's sib are addressed as father."²⁴ Thus he sees, in this instance at least, that the violation of the generation principle is *associated with*, if not *due to*, a "firmly established" (i.e., highly developed) clan system. Professor Lowie is aware of the fact that clans do grow, develop, evolve, from birth, infancy, through maturity, until "at a certain level . . . [they] tend to decay." His language is often that of the evolutionist; he speaks of "stages of culture," "higher levels." Yet so imbued is he with the philosophy of anti-evolutionism which has dominated American anthropology during the present century, that although he has all of the pieces, he cannot put them together,²⁵ and is obliged to cast about for "additional factors."

We hardly need to look for "additional factors" in order to render intelligible to us kinship terminologies that are already known to us, if by "additional factors" we mean merely more facts. To be of use, of course, the additional facts would have to be of a new kind, not merely "additional": another example of this or that type of nomenclature added to the scores of examples that we already possess would not help us. Darwin needed no facts for the formulation of those principles now known as Darwinism which were not common knowledge in 1840, or even earlier. Darwin's great achievement was not the discovery of facts, but the formulation

²³ Paul Radin speaks of the opponents of the evolutionary school as "anti-evolutionists," *The Method and Theory of Ethnology* (New York, 1933), p. 4.

"The work of Dr. Boas and his school has destroyed completely the social evolutionary schemes of Morgan and Tylor," C. W. M. Hart, in *Social Evolution and Modern Anthropology*, in *Essays in Political Economy in honor of E. J. Urwick*, H. A. Innis, ed. (Toronto), p. 113.

²⁴ *Primitive Society*, p. 162.

²⁵ For in his article *Relationship Terms* and in his still more recent *Cultural Anthropology: a Science* (1936), he has shown that he has not reached the solution.

of a theory that would make already known facts intelligible.²⁶ And what are the chances of new and qualitatively different facts pertaining to kinship systems coming to light in the future? After many decades of investigation in all parts of the world and among all kinds of cultures, it seems hardly likely, to say the least, that "something new will turn up" in this field, especially in view of the rapid disappearance of primitive cultures. To hold out, therefore, the hope of discovering some new element that will solve our problems for us is as vain as it is misleading. What we need in American ethnology today is not additional facts, but interpretations of the facts we already possess in abundance.²⁷

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²⁶ "Science advances in two ways, by the discovery of new facts, and by the discovery of mechanisms or systems which account for the facts already known. The outstanding landmarks in the progress of science have all been of the second kind," Sir James Jeans, in article *Relativity*, in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, (14th ed.). Interestingly enough, this article follows immediately upon that of Professor Lowie, *Relationship Terms*.

²⁷ ". . . the main difficulty of ethnology today lies not in the lack of data but in its uncertainty as to what to do with the material already in hand. The science has plenty of limited objectives, but is weak in its conceptual framework . . .", Ralph Linton, *The Present Status of Anthropology*, p. 246, in *Science*, Vol. 87, March 18, 1939.