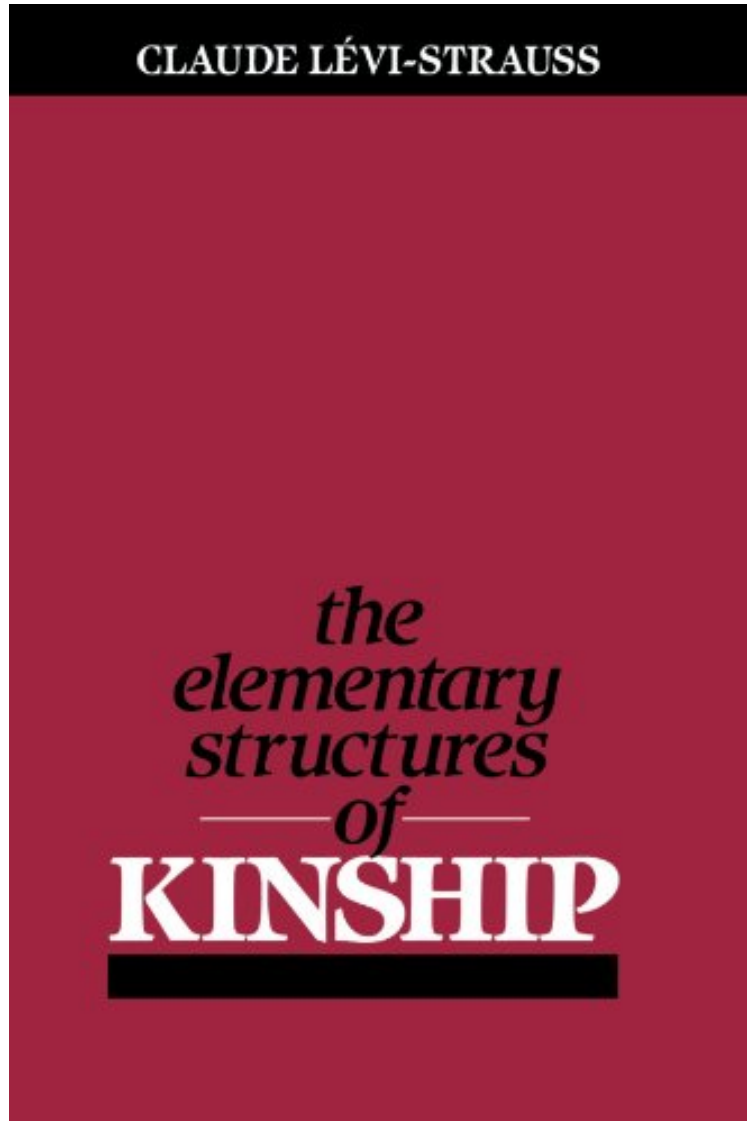


(Free download) The Elementary Structures of Kinship

The Elementary Structures of Kinship

Claude Levi-Strauss

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Claude Levi-Strauss : The Elementary Structures of Kinship before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Elementary Structures of Kinship:

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Understand the Family Understand the WorldBy Martin AsinerIn THE ELEMENTARY STRUCTURES OF KINSHIP, Claude Levi-Strauss sought to discern a universal world order that lurked beneath the surfaces of a bewilderingly large number of primitive tribes from all over the world. He asks the reader to infer from this text that human beings are pretty much the same in all eras in all societies. This reader

involvement is no easy task since Levi-Strauss likes to fill his pages with a complex webbery of charts and figures, all of which are meant to clarify a dense prose style that mentions, analyzes, and compares primitive tribes and clans. Still, the prudent reader probably knew this in advance and was willing to slog patiently to uncover evidence that the human species is not a fragmented and discordant hodge-podge of divergent cultures as the current generation of deconstructionists and relativists so relentlessly press. Rather, a considered reading strongly suggests that the basic building blocks of human society and discourse are founded upon a finite set of kinship rules that do not explain why we are the way we are but do direct us to look past these seemingly divergent rules to apprehend a hidden reality that has always been there from the dawn of recorded history. It is this "hidden reality" that Levi-Strauss seeks to point out. Although Levi-Strauss analyzes the process of how even convoluted systems of kinship structure the flow of possessions, intellectual achievements, and women, he presents his theses using the binary polarities that he learned from his colleague in Structuralism Ferdinand de Saussure, who posited the idea that all of human discourse can only be expressed intelligently by placing paired words back to back separated by a slash: man/woman, hot/cold, death/life and the like. He used this method to categorize on an anthropological level what had heretofore been used only on a linguistic level. Each tribe or clan that he visited had traits that superficially contradicted or negated one another. It was his use of binary polarities that permitted him to view that behind and beneath these contraries lay a nascent Grand Unified Theory that would encompass all of human endeavor. Recent critics of his theory have suggested that Levi-Strauss cherry-picked his terms so as to ensure the desired result. There may be some truth to that, but enough of Levi-Strauss remains bedrock enough to guarantee the ongoing usefulness of his claim that we are all far more alike than different.¹ of 2 people found the following review helpful. The Complexity (but predictable) Results of Elementary (early) Marriage Customs By ernest schusky When Evangelicals insist marriage is between one man and one woman because that is what early marriages were, anthropologists want to cry out, "Don't you ever read our reports?". Anthropologists like Levi-Strauss amply verify that early (or elementary) marriages were unions between groups such as clans or moieties. Proof of this position is demonstrated by the wide spread practices of levirate and sororate (with instances of the levirate filling the Old Testament). When one of the spouses dies, his or her link in the union is automatically filled with a brother or sister. When the union is between moieties (society is divided into two groups) the resulting marriages and descent result in predictable patterns that Levi-Strauss analyzes in detail, as the other reviewers note. Not a book for light reading; I suspect many anthropologists have avoided it, but it is a valuable source for theories of what holds societies together, suggesting that answers lie in the nature of thought, an idea more thoroughly explored in *The Savage Mind* (The Nature of Human Society Series). ernestschusky.com 30 of 31 people found the following review helpful. At root, kinship is exchange and exchange is culture By Christopher P. Atwood In this large and very dense work on kinship, Claude Levi-Strauss advances a distinctive approach to the issues of kinship, one that focuses not on descent (the relation of children to parents) but on marriage ("alliance" in anthropological jargon), seen as the exchange of women between groups. In the 1950s and 1960s, Claude Levi-Strauss's work became an inspiration for a school of "Alliance Theorists" who challenged the British social anthropological world's then-dominant view that descent is primary and alliance a secondary means of reproducing the lineage. Yet Levi-Strauss's analysis of kinship should be of interest to more than just anthropologists; as the Confucians recognized, kinship is the basic equipment of humanity and thus its mechanics are worth the attention of all those interested in understanding humanity. Not that Levi-Strauss makes the task of a would-be reader easy, as he gives the reader little or no help in telling the forest from the trees. His most off-putting habit is to write his chapters like a detective story, in which he assembles a large number of odd features in Australian or Naga or Manchu kinship terms and practices as clues, then considers and discards several possible interpretations, and then only at the end of the chapter "solves" the case, informing the reader of the crucial concepts, terms, and arguments that make sense of the clues. By that time, I'd usually had forgotten the details of the clues and had to go back and review the chapter again. Persistent readers will, however, find the ideas involved profound and important. I would strongly recommend that readers skim the conclusion to chapters first and particularly the conclusion to the large parts first, before heading on to the details. Nothing you do is going to make Levi-Strauss easy but for those interested in issues of the incest taboo and culture, how marriage choice structures societies, or in East Asian, Indian, Southeast Asian, or Australian kinship and social structure, this is an important book.

Professor Lvi-Strauss's first major work, *Les Structures Mentales de la Parenté*, has acquired a classic reputation since its original publication in 1949; and it has become the constant focus of academic debate about central theoretical concerns in social anthropology. It is, however, a long and difficult book for many students to read in French, and its arguments have consequently become known, even among professional anthropologists, largely through critical analysis. It was republished in a revised French edition in 1967 with a new foreword by the author, and it is this text with his further emendations that has been used in this translation. Lvi-Strauss applies his intellectual powers to the perennial problem of incest, which he elucidates by means of the concept of exchange as formulated by Marcel Mauss in his famous analysis of the gift (*Essai sur le don*, 1925). He distinguishes two elementary modes of exchange which govern not only the conventional variety of goods and services but also the transfer of women in marriage: these are

restricted and generalized exchange. With a mass of ethnographic evidence he demonstrates how the formidable intricacy of marriage customs, comprising moral and jural ideas and institutions (which appear to be essentially arbitrary), can be seen as local and historical rules of exchange. Charles Lvi-Strauss traces these rules throughout a vast range of simple societies, chiefly in Australia and mainland Southeast Asia but also in the Americas, in Oceania, and in other parts of the world. To this survey he adds two extended sections on the great civilizations of China and India. He continues with a briefer consideration of the passage from elementary to complex structures, with particular reference to African societies, and concludes with a stimulating chapter on the principles of kinship, exchange as the universal basis for marriage prohibitions, and the formal relations between the sexes as part of a universe of communication. Although much of the work is technical, consisting of detailed analyses of types of social organization with which social anthropologists will be most familiar, it also contains much that will be of interest to psychologists, linguists, and philosophers, and to all who are interested in the possibility and the technique of the structural analysis of human activity. After the successes, moreover, of Lvi-Strauss's subsequent books notably *Structural Anthropology*, *Tristes Tropiques*, *Totemism*, and *The Savage Mind* this new edition of the work which founded his present outstanding reputation will have additional value as a further means of contact with one of the original minds of this century. The translation has been made by James Harle Bell and John Richard von Sturmer, of the University of New England, Australia, and by Rodney Needham, of the University of Oxford. Dr. Needham also acted as general editor and supplied the work with a new general index. He is the translator of Lvi-Strauss's *Le Totemisme aujourd'hui* and author of *Structure and Sentiment* (1962) and numerous papers which have contributed to the recognition of Professor Lvi-Strauss's work in the English-speaking world.

From the Back Cover 'At last one of the most famous generalizing works in anthropology by the field's most stimulating and controversial contemporary figure has been translated, beautifully, and with the enlightening preface of the second French edition.' Choice About the Author Claude Lvi-Strauss (1908-2009) was a French anthropologist and ethnologist, and has been called, along with James George Frazer and Franz Boas, the "father of modern anthropology." His works include *The Savage Mind*, *Structural Anthropology*, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, and *Totemism*.