

Two Letters from Radcliffe - Brown to Evans - Pritchard.

We are grateful to Dr. Godfrey Lienhardt, acting in his capacity as literary executor to both Radcliffe - Brown and Evans - Pritchard, for the following previously unpublished letters. The letters are undated, though they were probably written sometime between Radcliffe - Brown's retirement from the chair at Oxford in 1946 and the period shortly after the B.B.C. lectures given by Evans - Pritchard in the winter of 1950, to which Radcliffe - Brown refers in the second letter. The first letter is probably the earlier, but it is not certain to which book of Evans - Pritchard's Radcliffe - Brown is referring.

Dept. of Social Anthropology,  
Dover Street,  
Manchester 13.

Dear E - P,

I shall probably write something about your book. As to my use of historical data I would give as an instance my repeated use in teaching of such things as the data given or used by Glotz and several others on the historical development of law in ancient Greece. As to 'law' I will accept the account given by Kaufman in his 'Methodology of the Social Sciences'. I certainly distinguish between 'empirical' and 'theoretical' laws. Durkheim formulated empirical laws (based on statistics) as to the correlation of suicide with certain other features of social life. Comte called 'the first law of social statics' the theoretical generalisation that there are relations of interdependence amongst the various features of social life. I regard this as a fundamental theoretical law and you certainly used it in the 'Nuer'. A law of a somewhat different kind is the economic law, many times verified, that if in a money economy there is a marked increase in the quantity of money (gold, silver, paper, dogs' teeth, cowries) in circulation without corresponding increase in goods or services available for purchase, the value of money will decrease, or, in other words, money prices will rise. This has been verified in historic societies many times from the occasion when the great increase in the supply of silver from Spain caused inflation in ancient Egypt. I would call it a theoretical, not an empirical law.

In social anthropology at present we have very few laws with the formulation of which I can be satisfied. If you want 'hypothetical' laws you can find an abundance in Nadel's book, and some of them may perhaps some day be established as laws.

I have always thought that Durkheim might have been a real sociologist if he had freed himself from philosophy.\* I should call him a moralist rather than a metaphysician.

Yours ever,  
(signed)

R.B.

A law is general proposition, for which there is believed to be some empirical evidence, asserting some regular relation

between phenomena or events. The typical example of a 'law of nature' has always been the statement 'All men are mortal'.

\*Ginsberg was recently expanding this thesis in a lecture here.

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Endsleigh Hotel,  
Endsleigh Gardens, W.C.I.

Dear E - P,

I am very sorry that I have not been able to get to Oxford, as I had hoped to do. Deterioration in my health has kept me hanging about U.C. Hospital. Now I am in the throes (I think that is the cliche) of packing, which I greatly dislike.

I have been reading my Introduction to the volume on African kinship. I find it is not as bad as I thought it was. I think you should read it and I suggest that you might offer, if not an apology, then a retraction of your statement that in my comparative studies I make no use of historical material. I suspect that the ordinary reader will ask 'Why does this man introduce Anglo-Saxon and Roman systems of kinship and marriage in a book about Africa?' I put in quite a lot of work on Teutonic and Celtic systems and it is a pity to waste it all.

I have written two criticisms of your B.B.C. lectures. I do hope you will not find them too severe. I think a little severity might be called for but I prefer to leave that to the Economist. So I have been as tender as I can in all honesty and sincerity. I feel that you have recently been somewhat led astray, and scientific methodology is something you are not very strong on.

You complained that I had never given an example of a 'law' in social anthropology. It is of course obvious that we do not mean the same thing by the word 'law' and I therefore suspect that I shall never waste my time looking for what you might call a law. But if you will read the Introduction to the African book you will find there more than one example of what I call laws. In science a theoretical law is a guide to investigations, like the law of gravitation or the law of entropy, or the laws of valency in chemistry. I have formulated explicitly a law of prohibited and preferred marriages. There is a law, which it would be difficult to formulate explicitly, implied in my discussion of father-right and mother-right, or rather a combination of two or three laws. What I have to say about generations could, I think be reduced to a certain number of laws. There is an implied law not specifically or explicitly formulated behind my treatment of the principles of unity of the sibling group and unity of the lineage group. You can say, if you will, that all these generalisations are invalid. That provides no reason for thinking that other more intelligent investigators will not be able to formulate valid generalisations. You yourself, in all your work, accept the generalisation of Montesquieu which Comte called 'the first law of social statics', the law that in any society the various features of social life are interconnected so that they form some sort of coherent whole or system. If you reject this theoretical law where are you ?

Yours ever,  
(signed) R. - B