

## A CRITIQUE OF CLAUDE LÉVI-STRAUSS' PHILOSOPHICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

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[Claude Lévi-Strauss'un Felsefi Antropolojisinin Bir Eleştirisi]

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### ABSTRACT

Claude Lévi-Strauss, one of the leading figures of the 20th-century anthropology, is best known with his application of the structural method to anthropology, a method he borrowed from linguistics, thereby founding the structural anthropology. Although his popularity declined significantly after the emergence of post-structuralism, his influence is still felt in social sciences. This article aims at a critical treatment of his philosophy and structural anthropology, seeking to understand and critique from the perspective of philosophical realism how Lévi-Strauss harnessed miscellaneous philosophical elements, some of which are idealistic, in laying the foundations of structural anthropology. The article examines his philosophy and structural anthropology under five subtitles as the intellectual archaeology of Lévi-Strauss' philosophy, his philosophy itself, his structural anthropology, the application of his structuralism to the analysis of kinship and myths, and his criticism of modernity. Finally, Lévi-Strauss' structural anthropology and its applications are critiqued.

**Keywords:** Lévi-Strauss, philosophical anthropology, structuralism, post-structuralism.

### ÖZET

Claude Lévi-Strauss sosyoloji ve antropolojinin önde gelen isimleri arasındadır. O en çok, dilbiliminden ödünç aldığı yapısalcılığı kullanarak yapısalcı antropolojik geleneği kurmasıyla tanınmaktadır. Geçtiğimiz yarım yüzyılda sosyal bilimlerin en etkili figürlerinden biri olan Lévi-Strauss'un nüfuzu halen bu alanda hissedilmektedir. Bu makale onun felsefesinin ve yapısal antropolojisinin eleştirel bir incelemesini sunmayı ve Lévi-Strauss'un kendi yapısal antropolojisinin temellerini atarken kullandığı bir kısmı idealistik olan felsefi unsurların realist bir eleştirisini yapmayı amaçlamaktadır. Makalede Lévi-Strauss'un felsefesi ve yapısalcı antropolojisi onun felsefesinin entellektüel arkeolojisi, onun felsefesi, yapısalcı antropolojisi, onun yapısalcılığının akrabalık ve mitlere uygulanışı ve onun modernite eleştirisi başlıkları altında incelenmiştir. Son olarak Lévi-Strauss'un yapısalcı antropolojisi ve onun çeşitli alanlara uygulanışı kritik edilmiştir.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Lévi-Strauss, felsefi antropoloji, yapısalcılık, post-yapısalcılık.

## 1. Introduction

Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908-2009) is one of the leading figures of sociology and anthropology. He is best known with his application of the structural method to anthropology, a method he borrowed from linguistics, thereby founding the structural anthropology. Although his popularity declined significantly after the emergence of post-structuralism, his influence is still felt in social sciences. This article aims at a critical treatment of his philosophy and structural anthropology, seeking to understand and critique from the perspective of philosophical realism how Lévi-Strauss harnessed miscellaneous philosophical elements, some of which are idealistic, in laying the foundations of structural anthropology. It examines his philosophy and structural anthropology under five subtitles as the intellectual archaeology of Lévi-Strauss' philosophy, his philosophy itself, his structural anthropology, the application of his structuralism to the analysis of kinship and myths, and his critique of modernity. Finally, Lévi-Strauss' structural anthropology and its applications are critiqued.

## 2. The Philosophy of Lévi-Strauss and His Structural Anthropology

Levi-Strauss oeuvre includes many works. His first major work, *Les Structures Élémentaires de la Parenté* (*The Elementary Structures of Kinship*) was published in 1949, and it immediately gathered

remarkable attention among the French intelligentsia. Working at several French universities, he then published his other major works such as *Tristes Tropiques* (1955), *Anthropologie Structurale* (*Structural Anthropology*) in 1958, *Le Totemisme Aujourd'hui* (*Totemism*) and *La Pensée Sauvage* (*The Savage Mind*) in 1962, *Mythologiques* (*Mythologies*) (in four volumes) (1967-1971), among many others.

## **2.1. Intellectual Archaeology of Lévi-Strauss' Philosophy**

Lévi-Strauss expresses that Marxism, psychoanalysis, and geology are his three mistresses (Leach, 1996, p. 20). In *Tristes Tropiques* (1961, p. 61), he writes that Karl Marx (1818-1883) excited him when he first read him at the age of 17 and that this excitement still continues. He argues that these three fields share the notion that understanding is the reduction of one type of reality to another which is more fundamental, that the most obvious of realities is never the true reality, that true reality is hidden behind the appearances. However, although the influence of psychoanalysis and geology on his thought can be realized in his emphasis on unconsciousness and exoticism, as Leach rightly argued (1996, p. 20-21), the connection of his thought to Marxism is hard to detect. If Lévi-Strauss thinks of his use of dialectical method in his structural analysis as Marxist, it is more of Hegelianism than Marxism. Furthermore, Lévi-Strauss' understanding of history is fundamentally different from that of Marx; while the former almost dismisses the idea that societies change over the time, the latter believes in a dialectical social change unfolding inevitably in the course of history (Leach, 1996, p. 21; Marx, 1977).

It is possible to detect other intellectual influences on the Lévi-Straussian thought. In his work *Structural Anthropology*, Lévi-Strauss argues (1963, p. 31) that linguistics is the social science in which the greatest progress had been made. He was convinced that the underlying cause of the progress in linguistics was the structural method developed by the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) who made a distinction between *la langue* (language) and *la parole* (speech) and argued that, if linguistics is to be a real social science, it has to dismiss the study of speech and instead focus on the study of language which is comprised of universal structures and therefore independent of the speaking subject (de Saussure, 1959). Lévi-Strauss came to admire de Saussure's structural linguistics. He thought that linguistics was the only true social science and thus wanted to elevate anthropology to the level of linguistics by applying the structural method to anthropological fieldwork. He maintained that anthropology should seek to discover the universal

social structures and systems of relations that pre-exist the subject and inescapably shape it (Deliege, 2004, p. 25-26).

De Saussure was not the only major social scientist, from whom Lévi-Strauss was influenced; he also came under the influence of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), whom he saw as the first anthropologist. Lévi-Strauss' interest in Rousseau was due to Rousseau's argument that the savage is pure, unstained by the ills of modernity, an argument that led Lévi-Strauss to think that Rousseau was the first to understand the import of anthropological study of the savage (Deliege, 2004, p. 25). He was convinced that the study of primitive societies will help the modern man understand the man itself, the universal man, structured by the natural forces he is unconscious of. Lastly, apart from Rousseau, Lévi-Strauss was also influenced by Marcel Mauss' (1872-1950) idea that gift is the primary form of social exchange that enables the existence of society (Mauss, 2002). Lévi-Strauss would follow and develop this line of thought and argue that society is based on a system of exchange of goods, words, and women (Lévi-Strauss, 1987). The Rousseauian concept of social contract is also at work here (Rousseau, 1994; Deliege, 2004, p. 26-27).

## 2.2. The Philosophy of Lévi-Strauss

Although Lévi-Strauss regarded himself as an anthropologist, that does not mean that his thought contained no philosophy. On the contrary, his structural anthropological thought seems to be a mixture of idealism (as super-rationalism), naturalism, Cartesianism, anti-humanism, and positivism.

First of all, Lévi-Strauss' thought includes idealistic elements. As Popper indicates (1958, p. 209), the main tenet of idealism is the notion that the empirical world is my idea or my dream, while the opposite of idealism is empiricism that holds that the external world is real in itself. Although Lévi-Strauss does not go so far as to reject external reality, he still argues the external world to be raw material, as Deliege puts it (2004, p. 76), as inchoate mass, which needs to be made meaningful by the *categories of the human mind*. Lévi-Strauss writes in *Tristes Tropiques* (1961, p. 61) that “the goal we are looking for is also the same: a sort of *super-rationalism* in which sense perceptions will be integrated into reasoning and yet lose none of their properties [*italics original*].” This kind of super-rationalism clearly differentiates Lévi-Strauss from radical empiricists, such as David Hume (1711-1776), who hold that the human mind does not make any change on the empirical data it

receives from the external world (Hume, 2007). In this respect, Deliege argues (2004, p. 29), there is a Cartesian tendency in the Lévi-Straussian thought, an emphasis on underlying logic and regularity, in that it is the mind that structures and organizes the external world. It is not the external reality itself that the Lévi-Straussian anthropology studies, but the realization of the human mind in the external reality, and this realization is more of a naturalistic phenomenon, rather than the intended realization of the human will (Deliege, 2004, p. 36). Therefore, the social system for Lévi-Strauss is a kind of naturalistic realization of the capacities of the human mind (Deliege, 2004: 39). Importantly, Lévi-Strauss argues (1961, p. 62) that the mission of the anthropologist is thus to examine experience in terms of its relation to *Being*, not in terms of its relation to oneself. The impact of naturalism on his thought is also evident in his epigraph that he took from Lucretius' (c.100 BCE - c. 1 BCE) *De Rerum Natura* (*The Nature of Things*) in *Tristes Tropiques*. The English translator of this book put a sentence of Lévi-Strauss from within the book on its first page, a sentence which summarizes Lévi-Strauss' scholarly goal (1961): "I have sought a human society reduced to its most basic expression." Deliege argues (2004, p. 40-41) that the reduction of social system to symbolic relations in the Lévi-Straussian anthropology indicates to his underlying philosophical idea that there is an unchanging, universal equilibrium whose structural rules are imposed on humans, which amounts to a certain philosophy of becoming. Such an anti-humanist view of man, dismissive of human will, is usually regarded as an opposition to the humanist emphasis of the French existentialism, especially that of Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980). Indeed Lévi-Strauss disdains (1961, p. 62) existentialism by saying that it is dangerous to elevate one's private fancies to the rank of philosophy, taking aim at the humanism of existentialism. Its anti-humanism is seen by Michel Foucault (1926-1984) as "completing Nietzsche's 'death of God' by the 'death of man'" (Copleston, 1994, p. 412; Han-Pile, 2010). Lévi-Strauss does not reject that man act consciously as well as unconsciously. He rather seeks to go beyond the conscious actions of men, thereby reaching the underlying unconscious universal structures that are limited and may account for all the historical-social changes. Since all the social and cultural institutions are manifestations of these underlying structures, developed societies are no less subject to these structures than the primitive ones. Thus, anthropology is concerned, as Mauss put it, with the total social phenomenon (Copleston, 1994, p. 413).

It was pointed out that Lévi-Strauss sought to elevate anthropology to the level of a true social science like linguistics as he deemed it. However, Lévi-Straussian anthropology, with its

philosophical elements examined above, has been argued by various scholars, by Deliege (2004, p. 137) for instance, to be a philosophy or even a metaphysics rather than a sociological theory. Lévi-Strauss admits that he can be regarded as a “transcendental materialist” or, in Sartre’s terminology, an “aesthete.” In the Lévi-Straussian thought, reason seeks to transcend itself to reach the underlying structures of society, language, and thought. Lévi-Strauss is also an aesthete, according to Sartre, since he studies men as if he studies “ants.” In this respect, Copleston argues (1994, p. 416) that the ultimate aim of the social sciences for Lévi-Strauss is to “dissolve man.” That indicates that Lévi-Strauss’ methodology is methodological holism as opposed to methodological individualism. He seems to presuppose that the society is more than the aggregate of its individual members and deem the “Nature” the ultimate “Being” and reality in the Hegelian sense, thus seeking to understand how it unfolds itself in the manifestations of the societies of *homo sapiens sapiens*. As Copleston pointed out (1994, p. 415), such a metaphysics makes the Lévi-Straussian anthropology encompass not only the whole gamut of social sciences, as social sciences is the study of man with his characteristics, but also philosophy itself since the basic structures of human societies in the Lévi-Straussian anthropology corresponds to the categories of mind, the *a priori* categories in the Kantian sense. As there is no transcendental subject or ego in the Lévi-Straussian naturalist anthropology, the manifestations of men in nature amount more to the productions of unconscious actions of men than their conscious philosophizing.

### 2.3. Structural Anthropology of Lévi-Strauss

Although one can trace the philosophical origins of structuralism as was done above, it is not easy to define structuralism. Ernest Gellner (1925-1995) said that he still could not say what structuralism was after reading and translating Lévi-Strauss’ works into English. Lévi-Strauss himself was not clear about what structuralism indeed was (Deliege, 2004, p. 33). Therefore, it will be in order here to define it after understanding what exactly it does.

One can safely tell that structuralism seeks to discover and analyze the relationship, or rather the ways of relationship, between the world of ideas (mental world) and the world of external reality (material world). Structuralism argues that the human understanding is universally shaped by mental structures; that is, universal mental structures shape our sense-experience. Our mental world is made up mostly of symbols like words and gestures. The ways of relationship between ideas and objects are organized by these structures. For example, what is it that makes possible games like

draughts or chess? It is the *symbolic* meanings of the pieces and the rules rather than their materials itself that make such games possible. The symbols, objects, and the rules altogether work out a game, *structure a system*. Thus, structuralism seeks to discover the universal mental rules that structure human societies which are holistic systems by themselves. The status of these structures are neither imaginary (mental) nor real (material); rather they are symbolic, in between real and imaginary. They let the mental and the real interact with each other.

With its stress on the universal unconscious mental structures that are out there to be unveiled and mathematically modelled, structuralism is, as was previously indicated, theoretically anti-humanist. It is a critique of the subject-centered philosophy that runs across from René Descartes (1596-1650) to Sartre. In this respect, one question imposes itself here—whether structuralism is subject to Zeno’s paradox. That is, if the seemingly-conscious subject is shaped unconsciously by the universal structures, this argument of structuralism itself is also subject to such a determination by the same structures. Put differently, structuralism is also shaped unconsciously by the universal structures, and thus we may doubt its objectivity due to this structuralization.

Leaving behind the ambiguity of structuralism and the criticism of Zeno’s paradox leveled against it, Deliege succinctly defines structuralism (2004, p. 140) as “a movement in the human sciences patterned on a linguistic model that attempts to reduce social phenomena to a formal set of relations.” In this respect, Johnson argues that structuralism is a comprehensive refutation of existentialism. While existentialism focused on the individual experiences, structuralism focused on the structures that are at work in social systems. While existentialism was a new kind of humanism examining conscious individual choices, structuralism was anti-humanist, examining the abstract unconscious actions and production of human beings. While existentialism stressed the impact of historical processes on individuals, structuralism dismissed the role of history and instead focus on the unchanging structures throughout the whole history (Johnson, 1997, p. 238-239).

The Lévi-Straussian structural method was neither inductive nor comparative, the two methods that are employed most in anthropological studies. Lévi-Strauss argued that comparative method required to collect a great amount of data from a great variety of primitive societies, and that the inductive method was untrustworthy. Lévi-Strauss’ method is partly a mathematical modeling of the data gathered from several savage societies and the reduction of this modeling to its most basic meaningful constituents (Deliege, 2004, p. 63-64). In this respect, Lévi-Straussian anthropology had

empiricist elements. It not only speaks about the savages in remote parts of the world, but also tells something about everything human, both primitive and modern, ranging from kinship, cooking, and marriage customs to table manners, fashion, and myths. In other words, anthropological findings about the primitive man concerns the modern man as much as it concerns the primitives (Deliege, 2004, p. 114-115). Therefore, Lévi-Strauss himself defined social anthropology as a science dealing with the “unconscious conditions of social life” (Deliege, 2004, p. 31). Similarly, Turner points out (1975-76, p. 3) to the fact that in the Lévi-Straussian structural analysis there is no distinction made between prelogical and logical mindset. The mind of the savage works in the same way with the modern mind; if there is a difference, it is only quantitative, not qualitative.

After this discussion on the definition and characteristics of Lévi-Straussian structuralism, how structural analysis proceeds may be examined. Structural analysis works in a linear fashion. Firstly, the constituent elements of a social unit should be determined. Then these elements should be modelled as relations, correlations, dichotomies, oppositions, transformations and so on. Afterwards, these should be reduced to their basic structures (Lévi-Strauss, 1963). Lévi-Strauss argues that the real meaning of anything social can only be understood by this analysis. He problematizes the meaning of “meaning” in his work *Myth and Meaning* and argues that the meaning is constructed with the construction of order. In other words, meaning is captured through order. To illustrate this, Lévi-Strauss tells that one should ponder upon what the word “mean” really mean. The most obvious meaning of the word “mean” is the equivalent of something in another language or its definition. Thus, translation comes into play here, but what is translation without the grammatical rules? So, Lévi-Strauss argues that the meaning in the world is achieved through realizing the patterns, the *order*, in nature which has regularity rather than chaos (Lévi-Strauss, 1995, p. 23). He asserts that there is a hidden order, thus a hidden meaning, behind the seemingly-chaotic universe, and the mission of the structural anthropology is to unearth this hidden meaning (Lévi-Strauss, 1995, p. 21).

Deliege argues (2004, p. 36) that Lévi-Strauss is interested in “a formalization, a mathematicalization of social life.” Complex social relations are reduced to models which must have certain characteristics to be deemed structures. A structure, firstly, should have the features of a system; if a certain element of the structure changes, that must cause a change in the other elements. Secondly, similar social relations should be reduced to this model as well. Thirdly, the



first two elements must make it possible to predict the behaviour of the system once there happens a change in one of the elements of the model. And lastly, the model must explain the observed phenomena. For Lévi-Strauss, one of the primary form of models is dichotomies such as the raw and the cooked, the good and the bad, the hot and the cold (Deliege, 2004, p. 39-40). He argues (1961, p. 173) in *Tristes Tropiques* that “dualism may be found elsewhere and on more than one level.”

#### **2.4. Lévi-Strauss’ Application of Structural Analysis to Anthropology**

Lévi-Strauss’ first major application of structural analysis was to kinship systems, whereby he gained his first widespread recognition, in his first major work *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*. Over time in his career, by employing structuralism, he analyzed Indo-European, Sino-Tibetan, African, Oceanic, and American Indian kinship systems (Lévi-Strauss, 1963, p. 64-65). In Lévi-Straussian anthropology, kinship is defined as a social system, composed of a network of relations that make a society possible, and the basis of a kinship system is exchange among men (Deliege, 2004, p. 60). In *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, Lévi-Strauss does not take exchange only to be exchange of good; rather, it is the exchange of words, food, manufactured objects, and most importantly, women (Lévi-Strauss, 1969, p. 61-62). Thus, exchange is a kind of reciprocity that is extended to marriage (Lévi-Strauss, 1969, p. 52-55). As Johnson rightly argues, a theory of exchange is central to the Lévi-Straussian analysis of kinship. Social bonds are constructed with these exchanges among the members of a society (Johnson, 2002, p. 231).

Lévi-Strauss points to the universal prohibition of incest as one of the rules of the exchange of women. By this prohibition, it is possible to make alliances outside of one’s familial group, and thus, societies come into existence. It is for this reason, Lévi-Strauss argues, that incest is a universal taboo (Deliege, 2004, p. 58). Lévi-Strauss writes in *The Elementary Structure of Kinship* (1969, p. 9-10), “It constitutes a rule, but a rule which, alone among all the social rules, possesses at the same time a universal character. That the prohibition of incest constitutes a rule need scarcely be shown.” Lévi-Strauss argues that the prohibition of incest is not the only rule of kinship. Although it is the only *universal* one, there are other rules of kinship. For example, there is a peculiar kind of relationship between a mother’s brother and sister’s son that is not determined by these individuals but imposed on them by the social entity. Lévi-Strauss analyzes all the other relationships between

the relatives or members of a society, seeking to understand the underlying structures, and thus meanings, by reducing these relations to their most basic models (Deliege, 2004, p. 34).

The second field to which Lévi-Strauss applied his structural method was the study of myths. As Johnson indicated (2002, p. 235), Lévi-Strauss' work *The Structural Study of Myths* was the first major application of the structural method to mythical discourse. Lévi-Strauss argues that myths are neither entirely mental nor entirely material; they are in between. The primitive mind gathers *raw data* from the external world and then operates them, thereby making them *cooked data*, on which myths are constructed (Turner, 1975-76, p. 5). The primitive mind, while operating, realizes at first some contradictions and similarities in nature and social life among other complex relations. After this realization, myths are created so as to resolve these contradictions and similarities. Lévi-Strauss initially analyzed the Oedipus myth and utilized it as a template for his subsequent works. At the expense of a long quote, Turner's account (1975-76, p. 5-6) of Lévi-Strauss' structural analysis of the myths will be in order here:

Specific instructions as to how to go about analyzing a myth after all the relevant data are in are as follows. First, break down the story of the myth into its component sentences. Then write each sentence down on an index card bearing a number corresponding to the unfolding of the story. Each card should now show a given subject performing a certain function. This is called a *relation*. Similar kinds of relations are termed *bundles of relations*. Relations within the same bundle will appear diachronically at remote intervals throughout the myth, but when we group them together into their respective bundles we find we have reorganized the myth on a synchronic level. Each relation within the same bundle is given the same number so that the myth can be read as follows. ... What Lévi-Strauss finds is that each bundle focuses on a series of oppositions relating to a single theme—that is, involved in a particular contradiction—usually sociological, theological, economic or political. As the myth proceeds he also finds there is progression from a statement about oppositions in each bundle to a statement about their resolution, but that this resolution is always more apparent than real. What happens is that two opposites with no intermediary relating to a particular contradiction come to be replaced by two 'equivalent' terms (or so the myth would have us believe) which admit of a third one as a mediator. From analyzing many myths in these terms, Lévi-Strauss concludes that the purpose of myth is to provide a logical model capable of overcoming a contradiction—an impossible achievement if the contradiction is real. The 'solution' is usually effected by substituting weaker terms for the oppositions involved in the contradictions dealt with in the myth so as to make the contradictions appear less serious than they

really are (i.e., ‘resolution’ through analogical reasoning). The problem is to deduce the contradictions behind the myth whose oppositions are being weakened in this fashion. To do this one must examine what oppositions are, in fact, being weakened, then locate these oppositions in reality to see if they are in a relation of contradiction within the culture [italics original].

Lévi-Strauss subjected more than 800 North and South American myths to this analysis in his monumental four-volume book *Mythologiques*. It needs to be pointed out that a myth for Lévi-Strauss is more of an unconscious edifice, a story that naturally makes its way into the minds of the primitive men and begins operating in their mind, so to speak, rather than being a conscious creation of them. In other words, a myth is a collective metalanguage that comes into existence rising on the social contradictions, dichotomies, similarities, and other kinds of relations among the primitives (Johnson, 2002, p. 237-238). Although myths are most obvious among the primitives, Lévi-Strauss points out that the structures of primitive thought are same and universal in all societies, primitive or modern, and thus, myths exist in modern societies as well (Leach, 1996, p. 25). Lévi-Strauss already argues that *all lived meaning is mythical*, no matter whether in primitive societies or in modern ones. Therefore, he avers that the modern ideologies are myths (Johnson, 2002, p. 228). Deliege indicates (2004, p. 29) that Lévi-Strauss remained apolitical throughout all his life, and this idea about the meaning and myths probably explains why. Thus, his structural anthropology never aimed at bringing about change in the societies it studied; it only analyzed the ways in which nature unfolds itself in human societies, as it were. Nevertheless, as Lévi-Strauss puts forward in his *Le Crue et le Cui (The Raw and the Cooked)*, that does not mean that myths are arbitrary disorder; on the contrary, there is a certain order, definite structures in myths that are characteristically formal (Copleston, 1994, p. 415). And these structures are always the same in all societies although their content changes from one society to another (Lévi-Strauss, 1995, p. 59), because, as Deliege puts it (2004, p. 96), “the laws governing the way myths operate are the same as those governing the human mind.” Therefore, Lévi-Strauss does not agree with Levy-Bruhl’s argument that the primitives have uncivilized and prelogical minds whereas the moderns have civilized and logical minds, and that the savages cannot distinguish between the mystical and rational whereas the moderns can. For Lévi-Strauss, the primitive and the modern have the same

logical mind qualitatively. The primitive man, just like the modern man, is also a scientist in his own terms in his own collectivistic democratic society (Deliege, 2004, p. 81-81).

## 2.5. Lévi-Strauss' Criticism of Modernity

Lévi-Strauss' primary criticism against modernity originates from his concern about the loss and decay of indigenous cultures, both primitives and the relatively more developed ones. He seeks to protect the indigenous cultures which gradually disappear in the face of the material superiority of modernity, because he thinks that indigenous cultures are purer than the modern ones. In this respect, Lévi-Strauss shares Rousseau's romantic sentiments for the savage man who is merry with his pure life, uncorrupted by the ills of civilization, and with his unchanging time, lacking the modern notion of historical progress. In his *Tristes Tropiques*, Lévi-Strauss laments the vision he witnessed in South America, concluding that the whole of the third had been transformed into a great shanty town. Thus, in that book, he speaks of that corruption (1961, p. 39) as "the filth, *our filth*, that we have thrown in the face of humanity" [italics original]. Lévi-Strauss' writings also demonstrate that he has a certain liking for exoticism. He also says (1995, p. 33) in his *Myth and Meaning* that he is concerned that they are, as moderns, losing the cultural originality of the primitives. Therefore, Deliege dubs (2004, p. 55) Lévi-Strauss a *conservateur* of anything primitive and savage. Lévi-Strauss also argues that the primitive and savage societies lack entropy whereas modern and civilized ones have entropy (Deliege, 2004, p. 54).

## 3. Critique of Lévi-Strauss' Structural Anthropology and Its Applications

Many criticisms have been leveled against Lévi-Strauss' structural anthropology. Firstly, Deliege questions whether Lévi-Strauss is being dogmatic in his use of the structural method. Deliege doubts whether Lévi-Strauss employs the tools of structural method, such as reductionism, models, mythemes etc. for the sake of his taste, because one gets the sense that this kind of over-reductionism is unjustified. Similarly, Turner and Burridge suggest that Lévi-Strauss' method seems to presuppose a spurious uniformity, an unlikely regularity in the social system, thereby dismissing any possibility of the existence of more complex phenomena (Turner, 1975-76, p. 6). Deliege further speaks (2004, p. 40) critically of Lévi-Strauss and writes, "Structuralism is indeed a machine for obliterating time; the idea of structure itself is contrary or at least resistant to change."

Popper's critique of idealism should be invoked here as well. Being a self-identified realist, Popper argues that idealism usually manifests itself as a dangerous pretense of wisdom, as if the idealist understands the undercurrents of history or nature, thereby mystically luring the naive novice into believing that there is a hidden reality behind the *façade* (Popper, 1947; Popper, 1957). Popper also argues (1947) that the idealists usually advocate for a return to what he called a "closed society." Popper of course took aim above all at Hegelian and Marxist historicism, and Lévi-Strauss did not advocate for a return to tribal society, but the latter's liking for tribal societies and dislike of modern ones makes Popper's critique relevant for him as well, Popper's "closed society" corresponding to the tribal and primitive societies in Lévi-Straussian thought.

Another criticism is that of Leach who writes (1996, p. 29) that "he [Lévi-Strauss] consistently behaves as an advocate defending a cause rather than as a scientist searching for ultimate truth." Deliege criticizes (2004, p. 80-81) Lévi-Strauss by arguing that the primitive man that Lévi-Strauss describes seems to be his image rather than the reality, because Lévi-Strauss describes the primitive man almost as a left-wing intellectual, democratic in his own fashion. Furthermore, Deliege maintains that Lévi-Strauss' fieldwork in the Amazon rainforest seems to be cursory rather than in-depth, limited to few weeks of sojourning in each individual place. In parallel to that, Deliege argues (2004, p. 55) that Lévi-Strauss' analysis of the Amazonian savages seems to "merely confirm the old clichés about 'the good savage'." Lastly, it is paradoxical that Lévi-Strauss, a critic of modernity, employs an anthropological method which has a certain Cartesian bent, Cartesianism being one of the elements in the making of modernity.

Due perhaps to these well-founded criticisms, structuralism has gone outmoded in recent decades although it was once very influential not only in France but also worldwide. Its passion has calmed down, and it is difficult today to find a structuralist scholar or philosopher.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Lévi-Strauss' philosophical anthropology is critiqued in this article. As was explained in the section on the intellectual archaeology of his philosophy and structural anthropology, he is a rather eclectic anthropologist, borrowing varied elements from many philosophies, ranging from Cartesianism to linguistics. Although he is usually regarded as an anthropologist, his thought contains philosophical and even metaphysical elements which are examined in this paper. His

philosophy served as the basis of his structural method which seeks to discover and analyze the underlying structures of social life that shape sense-experiences and create social systems. However, his method has several weaknesses as was examined after the treatment of his structuralism.

It is obvious that Lévi-Strauss had once an immense impact on social sciences. He inspired a whole generation of students to wander in the remote parts of the globe, chasing after the hidden structural meanings of the myths and kinship models of exotic cultures. Nonetheless, formidable critics of Lévi-Strauss over the past half a century seem to discourage social scientists from his method, structuralism, revealing the weaknesses in his thought. His anthropology had metaphysical elements that seem to be scientifically unaccounted for, and some of these metaphysical elements are idealistic, which make them further unjustified from a scientific perspective. His over-dedication to the structural method and his alleged over-reductionism need further justification too. His fieldwork seems to be superficial, and some of his arguments sound like confirming clichés. Though still not thrown into oblivion, his structuralism hardly inspires anyone today in an intellectual atmosphere of highly empiricized social sciences. Yet his critique of modernity is brilliant and still relevant today as a significant contribution to postmodern theory, which makes its intellectual edifice valuable to any critical student of philosophy and social sciences.

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