

## Book Reviews

Leach, Edmund. *Social Anthropology*. 254 pp. Glasgow 1982. Fontana Masterguides, Fontana Paperbacks. Price: £2.50.

Sir Edmund Leach is one of the most famous living anthropologists. It is therefore not surprising that he was selected to write the social anthropological volume in this British series designed to survey contemporary fields of knowledge. This is neither a textbook for students nor a set of pronouncements to colleagues; rather, it is an attempt both to inform a well-educated reader what social anthropology is about, and to present the author's personal views as to what a lifetime of social anthropology has meant to him. Leach writes, "I set out to write about the kind of social anthropology which I myself find interesting and to which from time to time I have made a contribution" (7). While this may appear egocentric, as Leach himself implies, he is merely stating bluntly what any such survey is likely to be. Still, his disclaimer that the book's deficiencies are consequently intentional strikes me as disingenuous and illogical. Leach is probably incapable of writing a dull book, and the present volume is laced with provocative and interesting observations. Whether it is a useful introduction to contemporary social anthropology is debatable; it is, however, an interesting disclosure of how Leach thinks and therefore perhaps of more interest to his colleagues than he claims.

The work is divided into ten sections: In a brief introduction Leach indicates that this work will be a personal statement of how he views the field. Leach then (Chapter 1) considers some of the differences in how scholars do and write anthropology, providing a thumb-nail historical sketch of the subject's development and concluding with some questionable distinctions between "cultural" and "social" anthropology as well as between anthropology and sociology, history and natural sciences. In chapter 2 Leach presents a very stimulating discussion of the ways anthropologists have argued for the psychic unity of man, along with an argument pointing out the intellectual and moral dangers inherent in this. In chapter 3 Leach provocatively discusses the issues raised by writers seeking to differentiate mankind from other animals. In a curious chapter (4) entitled "My Kind of Anthropology" Leach contrasts some fieldwork that he likes with some that he does not. He ends indicating that his kind of anthropology is a blend of structuralism and functionalism with a particular emphasis upon the relation between social organization (especially kinship) and economic, political, and cosmological beliefs and ritual. In chapter 5 Leach provides an exposition of the relations between authority, reciprocity, and power, bringing in both aspects of the Maussian notion of total social phenomena and aspects of Lévi-Straussian and Durkheimian ideas about the interplay between culture and nature. In chapter 6 Leach argues that the practices centering on marriage, legitimacy, and affinity provide an especially powerful focus for seeing how the various strands of social behaviour intersect as well as for appreciating the great difficulty of translating concepts such as marriage, family, and kinship cross-culturally. In chapter 7 Leach provides a very brief account of cosmology, mainly in terms of how beliefs underpin social organization. The conclusion is too brief to mean anything much. Leach adds an extensive glossary in which he lists his definitions for many of the terms used in the book. His particular definitions of terms such as *acephalous*, *affinity*, and *bi-lateral kinship* are straight-forward enough; those for other terms such as *divination*, *fitness*, *functionalist empiricism*, and *homeostatic equilibrium*, provide him with opportunities to write miniature critiques on "received opinion."