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Sociobiology

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## SOCIOBIOLOGY.

*Sociobiology* (or *Biosociology*, as the French author *Carrel* calls it) is the characteristic idea of an epistemology, that regards the empirical research of biological phenomena to be the safest startingpoint for a philosophy of human conduct and understanding that, within the bounds of possibility, may keep free from the pitfalls of subjectivity.

I repeat, "within the bounds of possibility", for it is obvious that nobody, as *Neurath* puts it, can "shed his own skin", and therefore every distinction we make and every assertion we uphold is in the last resort a subjective one, and only valid up to a certain point: even the assertion that there is such a thing as a subject, and that there are other subjects to be compared with it. But on the other hand, I think that when we constantly and honestly bear in mind the "reservatio mentalis" that every distinction is reducible to a relativity and a graduality (not excluding the distinction between "absolutism" and "relativity" itself), we may freely distinguish and compare where we think it advisable. And I beg you to allow me, without renouncing my viewpoint as a relativist, to distinguish between you and me, and between us and other living beings or other "biological entities", if you prefer this, and even between those "biological entities" in general and the so-called non-vital nature, or more correctly the "unstructural" as *Clay* called it, stating that its realm regresses farther and farther according to our means of observation of the mikro- or the makro-phenomena.

And so, once this admitted, we may ask in which way we can expect to reach in our distinctions and assertions that utmost degree of *intersubjectivity* that we are wont to denote as "objectivity". Or at least, to restrict ourselves to more modest aims, how to get a little nearer to that ideal.

And then I think it a first step in this direction trying to look upon manhood and human society from a wider point of view than that of a partaker in the eternal struggle between *self-preserving* and *group-preserving* trends that seems to be an unavoidable attribute to the concept of social life. In other words: to start from general biological considerations and observations to get a better comprehension of human relations.

This point of view does in no way entail the neglecting of the many differences between man and other biological entities but on the other hand it refuses to ignore the no less important analogies between human, animal and botanical life. And above all it has to take into account the *principle of graduality* that is involved by the indivisibility of the investigator's own mind.

This graduality and those analogies are to be observed over the whole range of biological sciences, and so we may speak as well of a *sociomorphology* and a *sociophysiology* as of an empirical (i.e. behaviouristic) *sociopsychology*, but as for studying the laws (if there are any) of human conduct the latter is obviously the most promising. And therefore I will pass over in silence the many investigations made in the last years in the field of the physiological phenomena that influence directly the social relations of man as well as those of the higher animals, to restrict myself to some few remarks on the psychological analogies between the human and the animal or botanical sociology. The more so as I can refer to the excellent essay recently published by Dr. Louise Kaiser on the outlines of modern sociophysiology.

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The first thing that strikes us when observing the forms of social grouping in animal and botanical life is this, that the mutual ratio of the multitude, the virulency and the field of spreading of the different groups is almost constant, in this sense, that this ratio may be subjected to occasional deviations (a plague of grass-hoppers for instance) but almost always returns after a short period in an automatic way to a certain optimum, generally known as the *biological equilibrium* of the groups in question.

But also within the range of the same species and even within that of a smaller group of animals (to restrict ourselves to the zoological field) we may observe a certain state of equilibrium. In so far, that in the behaviour of every unit of the group (colony, herd, flock, troop, etc.) the two tendencies mentioned above: that of preserving its own structural existence and that of adapting itself to the co-existence with other units are constantly counteracting each other in such a way that marked deviations from a certain optimal ratio are automatically neutralized. This optimal ratio or proportion of the heremaneant innate psychical dispositions differs widely from one species to another and may be regarded as typical for each of them (*sociobiological equilibrium*).

This general state of behavioristic equilibrium however does not depend on *innate factors* only, but is modified to a certain extent by external influences, which even may give origin to certain *traditional* types of individual and social conduct reigning within the limits of different groups of biological entities of the same species. In those cases (which are especially observable in human forms of social life, where the influence of tradition is developed strongest), we may distinguish different states of *social equilibrium*, arranged round the (hypothetical) *sociobiological equilibrium* of the species as a whole.

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The study of the conduct of man (whose sociobiological equilibrium

obviously holds a middle rank among those of the higher animals most comparable with it, such as elephants, apes, buffaloes, storks, penguins, a.s.o.) from this stand-point reveals us, that in every aspect of social life, in the technical as well in the ethical, aesthetical or even political field, the trends to self-preservation and to group-preservation are clearly recognisable as its basic factors, although they are often intermingled in an almost inextricable way.

The most important part of this study, to my opinion, is the (often very difficult) distinction between *innate* dispositions (reflexes, instincts, capacities, abilities, talents, etc.) and those acquired *after birth* (conditional reflexes, habits, customs, forms of understanding), but this distinction as well as scientific investigations about these topics in general are checked to a high degree by two circumstances: firstly by the (doubtless innate) aggressive inclination of most species or groups towards others that might compete with them in the struggle for life (*in casu*: the antagonism between man and the higher animals, especially apes and other "ugly" and "despicable" "beasts"), and secondly the linguistic dualism existing between the terminologies in use for human and for animal life, more especially the oppositional difference ordinarily made between the principles of *finality* and *causality*, a difference that may easily be reduced to a mere question of words by circumscribing the so called finality (of the individual, the group or the species) in behaviouristic terms (converging or diverging types of behaviour). And furthermore it seems to me to be of primary importance to make a sharp distinction between the *introspective* knowledge (or fore-knowledge) of our own conduct (*autopsychology*) and our *extrospective* knowledge of the conduct of other beings (heteropsychology).

It would lead me too far now to enter into details about these significant questions, narrowly connected with the well-known concept of *pseudo-problems*, introduced by *Mach* and the *Vienna Circle*, and therefore I will confine myself to expressing as my conviction that the main condition to be fulfilled in order to understand the regularities of human conduct and to detect the means of canalizing it in appropriate directions is to renounce from our overestimation of mankind when compared with other living beings. Man is the "Lord of creation" only from his own standpoint. But that standpoint is a narrow one and from a wider point of view every form of life is equally wonderful and equally magnificent: that of the fish in the ocean or of the bird in the sky as well as that of the microbe in the ditchwater or of the cell in our own body.

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