EMERGENT EVOLUTION AND THE SOCIAL

When our thinking tends to congeal into two conflicting interpretations we naturally either devote our days to showing why the one must be true and the other false or we seek to escape from both by adopting a new position from which we can view each of the alternatives as a mixture of truth and falsehood. The theory of emergent evolution (Morgan), also called “evolutionary naturalism” (Sellars), “creative synthesis” (Spaulding), “emergent vitalism” (Broad), and “organicism” (L. J. Henderson), is an example of the latter tendency since it is an endeavor to avoid the “nothing but” attitude of naturalism versus supernaturalism, determinism versus freedom, continuity versus discontinuity, mechanism versus vitalism, the many versus the one. It corresponds in philosophy to the resolution of the more special conflict between preformation and epigenesis in embryology. Experimentation on the development of living and study of the phylodgeny of living and extinct organisms have demonstrated that there is both genetic continuity and discontinuity, or the production of novelty in organisms; in other words, that evolution is not only a repetitive but also a creative process. With the increasing tendency to extend the concept of organization, in the sense of the French “agencement,” also to the physical, chemical, psychological and social domains, there arises a strong probability that the various antitheses above mentioned may be resolved in somewhat the same manner as they have been in biology.

But this is all somewhat vague. A more specific statement, applicable to each empirical instance of novelty, has been formulated by the American and British realists, Holp, Spaulding, Sellars, Alexander, C. Lloyd Morgan, H. C. Brown, Conger, Jennings, Gordon, C. K. Ogden and G. H. Parker, who maintain that the unique qualitative character of organic wholes is due to the peculiar non-additive relations or interactions among their parts. In other words, the whole is not merely a sum, or resultant, but also an emergent novelty, or creative synthesis. This conception was long ago advanced by J. S. Mill, G. H. Lewes and Wundt, and since the various sciences are

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