APPENDIX

G. C. HOMANS:

INDIVIDUALISTIC ORIENTATIONS IN SOCIAL THEORY

The French sociological tradition had basically a collectivistic orientation, whereas the British tradition has been by and large individualistic. One such attempt at individualistic interpretation of sociological theory formation has been G. C. Homans' Social Exchange Theory, which can be regarded as a reaction to Claude Lévi-Strauss' collectivistic exchange theory. In an attempt to understand and appreciate such an individualistic interpretation of a 'social' phenomena, it is first necessary to understand Homans' philosophy of social sciences.

Homans had a basic distrust of sociological theories, because they did not meet the requirement of a theory. A theory of a phenomena, for Homans, is "an explanation of it, showing how it follows as a conclusion from general propositions in a deductive system."¹ Functionalist school has never produced a theory, since no general propositions about the conditions of social equilibrium, no definite conclusions can be drawn. And, Homans argues, any attempt to construct an explanatory theory, results in psychological propositions about the behaviour of men and not 'equilibrium of societies'. To form a theory, according to Homans, all the propositions must take a form of a deductive system. One of them is the proposition to be explained, the other propositions should be either general propositions or statements of the conditions. The to be explained proposition, Homans calls, 'the lowest order proposition', which has to follow from the other propositions. It is only when the lowest order proposition follows from the other propositions logically, that it is said to be explained. Homans considers this to be a theory as he regards the explanation of a phenomenon to be the theory of the phenomenon. "A theory is nothing, argues Homans, - it is not a theory - unless it is

an explanation."  

For Homans, therefore, neither the definition of properties or categories, nor the statement of the relations between the properties, nor the statement about a definite relation between one change and the other, are a criterion to regard the description as a theory. It is only when one has properties, relations between them and the formation of a deductive system that we have a theory.

Functionalism has never met the conditions proposed above, although very many sociologists and functionalists tried their best. Homans believes that they would fail however much they tried. Because the propositions they employ are not functional although they use the word 'function'. Take for instance, 'If it is to survive, or remain in equilibrium, a social system - society - must possess conflict-resolving institutions. By this kind of propositions, sociologists and others attempted to meet the demands laid down by Durkheim. Homans analyses the given propositions and finds that like any other explanation of social phenomena, they do not meet the requirement of 'deductive system'.

Homans concludes the analysis as follows:

Take first the terms equilibrium and survival. If the theorist chose equilibrium, he was able to provide no criterion of social equilibrium, especially 'dynamic' or 'moving' equilibrium, definite enough to allow anything specific to be deduced in logic from a proposition employing the term. When indeed was a society not in equilibrium? If theorist chose survival, he found this, too, surprisingly hard to define. Did Scotland, for instance, survive as a society? Though it had long been united with England, it still possessed distinctive institutions, legal and religious. If the theorist took survival in the strong sense, and said that a society had not survived if all its members had died without issue, he was still in trouble. As far as records went, the very few societies of this sort had possessed institutions of all the types the functions said were necessary for survival. The evidence put in question, to say the least, the empirical truth of the functionalist propositions. Of course the functionalists were at liberty to say: 'If a society is to survive, its members must not all be shot dead,' which was true as true could be but allowed little to be deduced about the social characteristics of surviving societies.

2. Ibid. p.55.
What actually was the task that functionalists claimed to perform? It was an analysis of the social structure of a system in terms of "limited and exhaustive number of functional problems" that any society faces. This task, therefore, was more of framing a conceptual scheme than anything like producing a theory. No logical conclusions could be drawn from their propositions, and hence there was no deductive system in their scheme. What the functionalists were actually busy with was not framing a functionalist theory but producing "a language for describing social structure one among many languages; and much of the work they called theoretical consisted in showing how the words in other languages, including that of everyday life, could be translated into theirs." 1

Homans furthers his cause by proposing an alternative theory. In explaining the social phenomena there is need of employing something more than functional theories, i.e., the general propositions employed in our attempt to explain the social phenomena are of an altogether different kind. For instance, the functionalists claim that the minimum unit of a social analysis is the role, which is a cluster of norms. Homans quotes James Coleman to show how 'norms' are not the governors of social behaviour but they "arise through the actions of men rationally calculating to further their own self-interest in a context of other men acting in the same way." 2 Coleman holds that the central postulate about behaviour is this: each actor will attempt to extend his power over those actions in which he has most interest. With such a beginning a construction of a deductive system to explain the use of a particular norm can be explained. 3 Hence, the propositions of the above example are not functional propositions of sociology, 'they are not statements about the conditions of equilibrium for a society' rather they are statements or propositions describing the behaviour of individuals in a given social system. Therefore, the given explanation is not a sociological or functional explanation, but an explanation in psychology.

2. Ibid., p. 57.
3. Cf. Ibid.
Homans studies such examples to show how every functional explanation is ultimately reducible to psychological or any other type of explanation, i.e., explanation based on models employed in natural sciences. He asserts that "if the very things functionalists take for granted, like norms, if the very interrelationships they empirically discover can be explained by deductive system that employ psychological propositions, then it must be that the general explanatory principles even of sociology are not sociological, but as the functionalists would have them be, but psychological propositions about the behaviour of men," ¹ not about the behaviour of social systems.

Another defect of most of the functionalist theories is that they do not explain social change. Functionals themselves have admitted this. Homans analyses Neil Smelser's explanations of 'social phenomena' and show how it implicitly assumes a deductive system based on psychological behaviour of the interacting individuals.

Homans' conception of psychology has been an eyesore to many sociologists, particularly Peter Ekeh, who accuses him of having three different conceptions of psychology in the development of 'social exchange theory'. According to Ekeh the three conceptions in Homans are: (a) psychology is the study of the behaviour of the individual in the group; (b) an area of study of behaviours common to animals and humans or behavioural psychology; and (c) it is a reference to the behaviour of men as men. ² Granted that in the development of his thinking Homans did conceive of psychology as the study of behaviour of individual in the group or as a reference to the behaviour of men as men, he does not believe that there are exclusively human processes, such as social exchange behaviours. He believes that human behaviour can ultimately be reduced to laws of behavioural psychology, which in turn depends upon animal behaviour. Prof. Homans, being an Skinnerian, strongly upheld

the reductionist thesis. Homans' basic assumption which the
sociologists refuse to accept is that psychological reduc-
tionism is not only possible but also necessary for the proper
understanding of any 'social' behaviour. The resultant beha-
vioural 'sociology' of Homans denies that there is qualitative
difference between animal and human behaviour — there are only
quantitative differences. This is the basic tenet that has been
attacked by most sociologists — and it is the fundamental assump-
tion under which any reductionist theory can work. Sociologists'
attempt to refute such a position on the belief that man is
fundamentally different from other animals because of his
symbolic nature. Consequently, they believe that reduction of
human behaviour to animal behaviour is impossible without the
loss of 'all that is essentially human in man'. Homans on the
other hand, does not accept the phenomenologist characteriza-
tion of 'unique behaviour of man'. There is no society sui
generis apart from and beyond the individuals in a society. It
has been argued by social scientists, and particularly sociolo-
gists, that Homans' position (limiting the scope of scientific
pursuits to observable phenomena) denies the validity of theo-
retical constructs in science and theory construction. One fails
to understand the logic of science that sociologists employ to
prove their contention. They seem to be raising fundamental
questions regarding the nature and scope of science, but fail
to prove the categories (such as society, state, etc.,) which
they reason out, in the same way they fail to dispro
de science should not limit itself to observables. With this
general discussion on philosophy of social sciences, we shall
analyse Homans' individualistic social exchange theory viz-a-
viz holistic social exchange theory.

Historically set, there are two sociological
traditions, namely the individualistic and collectivistic tra-
ditions. The two traditions are centered around British (indi-

guistic) and French (collectivistic) frames of reference.
Although the distinction is not water-tight, we can observe some
outstanding features of sociological schools led by on the one
hand Émile Durkheim and on the other hand by Radcliffe-Brown.
The British tradition gradually became the Anglo-American tradition in sociology. Talcott Parsons analysing the two traditions points out to the following basic features that distinguish the two: Individualistic tradition was concerned with interpersonal matters, here-and-now pleasure seeking hedonism, and it is consumption oriented. Whereas, collectivistic tradition is concerned with matters of relative interpersonal interrelations, inclusion and control of costs in the maximization of benefits, and it is production oriented.

The issue became prominent when the philosophical radicals on the basis of these differences proposed reduction of sociological phenomena to elementary economics and psychology. The philosophical radicals attempted to make social sciences rational sciences by proposing reduction of all social phenomena to laws of human nature.

In this climate of controversy, Claude Lévi-Strauss proposed the ‘social exchange theory’ in *Les Structures élémentaires de la Parenté*. The two basic assumptions of Lévi-Strauss’ theory are: (i) "Social-exchange behavior is human and therefore sub-human animals are incapable of social exchange and, correlativey, cannot provide a model of human social exchange." ¹ (ii) "Social exchange is a supra-individual process and individual self-interests may be involved in it but cannot sustain social exchange processes." ²

Lévi-Strauss maintains both anti-economic and anti-psychologist positions. He rejects J.G.Frazer's contention i.e. 'men exchange their sisters in marriage because that was the cheapest way of getting a wife' which involves the economic concept of exchange. ³ Frazer maintained that social exchange laws are deduced from economic laws which are in turn to be deduced from natural laws of physical or and biological sciences. Consequently, there is no need to distinguish between economic exchange and social exchange. But even if it is granted that

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² Ibid.
³ Cf. Ibid. 44.
there is distinction between the two, social exchange is still a sub-set of economic exchange, i.e. it is not autonomous sphere for social exchange.

Lévi-Strauss disagrees with Frazer claiming that items of social exchange are culturally defined and are remarkable not for their economic intrinsic value as for their symbolic extrinsic value. Further, Lévi-Strauss argues that it is exchange that counts and not things exchanged, and hence the exchange relation comes before things exchanged, and is independent of them. He points out that there are certain types of objects which are appropriate for presents, precisely because of their non-utilitarian value.

Lévi-Strauss rejects psychological position because he sees men as both biological and social individual. He says: "It is the social aspect of man that gives him the ability to engage in such distinctively symbolic processes as social exchange. Man may share certain attributes with infra-human animals, but it is what is unique to him as human, not what he shares with animals, that enables him to engage in social exchange processes." 1 His basic assumption is that what is human is cultural and what is non-human is natural. He goes even to the extent of saying that "no empirical analysis can determine the point of transition between natural and cultural facts, nor how they are connected." 2 Social exchange is defined as normative behaviour, i.e. regulated form of behaviour in the context of social rules and norms. Exchange behaviour which is characteristic of human behaviour is culture oriented, behaviourally creative and dynamic, receives and gives more that what individual gives or receives, and gives meaning or interprets behaviour and actions. Hence, there is exchange transaction. Non-human behaviour is nature oriented, static, can give and receive what animal receives or gives and there is no exchange or reciprocity.

2. Ibid.
Levi-Strauss points out three principles which he regards as the institutional bases of social exchange: (1) Principle of Social Scarcity and Social Intervention. He argues that the scarcity of any product that has symbolic value compels the intervention of society in its distribution. If there is abundance of such a product, then the society leaves it to the natural laws for its distribution. The scarcity of such a product compels the enunciation of rules of exchange. He argues that social scarcity is not the same as economic scarcity. "In social scarcity," he claims, "desired items may be physically available, but they are barred to some actors by social regulations." 3

(2) The Principle of Social Cost of Exchange:— "The cost of social exchange is borne by individual givers and attributed to society, outside of the exchange situation, rather than to the individual receivers inside the social exchange situation," 2 asserts Levi-Strauss. For example, at a banquet the host does not attribute its costs to the guests but to the social custom that requires it.

(3) The Principle of Reciprocity:— This principle defines the patterns of reciprocation practiced in social exchange. By this Levi-Strauss means that "an individual feels obligated to reciprocate another's action, not by directly regarding his benefactor, but by benefiting another actor implicated in a social exchange situation with his benefactor as himself." 3

G. C. Homans begins his exposition of social exchange theory in Social Behavior by comparing the physicist model with his own. The physicist model which is regarded as model par excellence studies 'social behavior of particle in the atom'. 4 Homans' meaning of 'social behavior' is explained in terms of animal behavior. He does not propose any clear

2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p.48.
definition of social behaviour in his social exchange theory, but he formulates a definition for elementary social behaviour which can be applied to more complex social behaviour. Homans believes that what applies to elementary would also apply to complex behaviour. Homans' social exchange theory assumes: (i) "First, the behaviour must be social, which means that when a person acts in a certain way he is at least rewarded or punished by the behavior of another person, though he may also be rewarded or punished by the non-human environment." 1

(ii) "Second, when a person acts in a certain way towards another person, he must at least be rewarded or punished by that person and not just by some third party." 2

(iii) "Third, the behavior must be actual behavior and not a norm of behavior." 3

It is this attributes that humans and animals have in common, according to Homans. He does accept the difference between animal and human behaviour, but at the elementary level human behaviour can ultimately be traced to animal behaviour. The only difference is that human behaviour is more complex. There is, therefore, no qualitative difference between the animal and human behaviour.

Such a position, Homans believes, helps us to understand human behaviour better than the traditional sociological analysis. He points out that "some of propositions (of social exchange) that we shall use in describing and explaining the behaviour of men are more firmly established for other animals, because investigators can more often experiment with animals under controlled conditions than with men." 4 Further he believes "anyone concerned with the unity of science ought to show, when he can, that the propositions holding good within his especial field of interest illustrate those holding good within a wider one." 5 It follows that sociological explanations can be explained only in terms of propositions of

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2. Ibid.
3. Ibid. p.3
4. Ibid. p.17
5. Ibid.
behavioural psychology. Sociologists have unsuccessfully tried to argue differently, claiming without any empirical evidence that there is not only quantitative but also qualitative difference between the animal and human behaviour.

Homans' social exchange theory assumes (a) 'social behavior' involving actors, (animals or humans), is totally reducible to the behaviour of individual actors, and (b) animal behavioural principles are generalizable to human behaviour. Homans' assumptions of social exchange can be best summed up in the following:

In this book we are less interested in individual behavior than in social behavior, or true exchange, where the activity of each of at least two animals reinforces (or punishes) the activity of the other, and where accordingly each influences the other. Yet we hold that we need no new propositions to describe and explain the social. With social behavior nothing unique emerges to be analyzed in its own terms. Rather, from the laws of individual behavior (as in the behavior of the individual animals) follow the laws of social behavior...

Not only shall we adapt the propositions of individual behavior to the social situation, but propositions about pigeons to the human situation... Taking our departure, then, from what we know about animal behavior, we shall state a set of propositions that seem to us fundamental in describing and explaining human social behavior, or true exchange.

It is therefore apparent that Homans will never accept the qualitative difference between human and animal behaviour. In like manner he rejects the arguments of the science of culture, which distinguishes three types of behaviour: (a) instinctually determined behaviour, which is exclusively animal behaviour; (b) conditioned behaviour, which is common to men and animals, and (c) symbolic behaviour, which is exclusively human behaviour. Homans argues in social exchange that one can generalize from animal behaviour to human behaviour. The existence of symbolic behaviour over and above human behaviour is alien to Homans' position. The issue that remains unsolved is the notion of 'symbolic' behaviour which the collectivists hold to be different from other 'forms' of behaviour. Sociologists like

Ekeh forward the following reasons for their belief in the existence of symbolic behaviour over and above conditioned human behaviour. (1) "In conditioned behaviour, past experiences are necessary conditions of present activities, ___ in symbolic behaviour, past experiences are neither necessary nor sufficient conditions of present activities." 1 (2) "Symbolic behavior is behaviorally creative; conditioned behavior is static." 2 (3) "Symbolic behavior is normative behavior i shared by persons within a value system; conditioned behavior is nonnormative behavior and is an attribute of the individual." 3 (4) "Symbolic behaviour makes use of time and space conceptions; on the other hand conditioned behavior cannot make use of time and space conceptions." 4 The four reasons are only hypothetical attempts at a sociological theory construction. Sociologists are at pain to show (a) how past experiences are not necessary for symbolic behaviour; (b) how symbolic behaviour is creative and conditioned behaviour is static; (c) the distinction between normative and nonnormative behavior, and (d) in what sense conditioned behavior cannot make use of space and time conceptions. The four propositions defending the collectivistic position are assumptions of sociological theory that have not been empirically verified. Proposing them as arguments for a collectivistic social exchange theory is begging the question.

Homans' exchange theory was an attempt to integrate behavioural psychology and elementary economics. Being an 'ultimate reductionist' as he labels himself, Homans tried in his social exchange theory, not only to integrate the utilitarian and hedonistic conceptions of life, but go beyond these two. To understand social behaviour as true exchange, Homans points out, behavioural psychology proposes a set of propositions based on experimental studies of nonsocial situations, and elementary economics proposes "a set of propositions

2. Ibid. p.106.
4. Ibid. p.110.
describing the behaviour of men exchanging material goods for money in a so-called perfect market; one in which the behavior of any one buyer or seller has little effect in determining the prices." 1 Homans grants at this stage that "the two sets of propositions, behavioral psychology and elementary economics, are stretched in these respective directions, they seem to me to mesh with one another and form a single set." 2 Homans does not prove how this takes place. Instead, he suggests 'elementary social behavior' independently of behavioural psychology and elementary economics. Homans does not claim that such a social exchange theory 'de facto' exists independently of behavioural psychology or elementary economics, but he merely points out that the two mesh together to form a single set. His failure to explain how the two mesh together to form a single set has been regarded as a weakness of his theory by many sociologists. Homans, however, has instantiated his theory by showing how various concepts from behavioural psychology and elementary economics mesh together in social exchange theory, (for example, punishment(costs), reinforcement(reward)). This combination of the explanations of two sciences is formed by conceptual articulation, which results in explanatory propositions for his social exchange theory.

The arguments against Homans' integration of the two sciences by means of conceptual articulation have been basically three: (a) Homans tries to reconcile them; (b) assumes them to be equivalent without discussion; or (c) mentions one set of concepts but makes no attempt to relate them to their counterparts in other sciences. 3 Notwithstanding the criticisms regarding the practice of social exchange theory and the failure to perfectly 'mesh' together the two propositions of behavioural psychology and elementary economics, Homans should be credited for attempting to explain the collectivistic social exchange theory which presupposes 'proposed'

2. Ibid., p.15.
entities such as 'society', in individualistic terms. Whether Homans has really succeeded in his psychological reduction or not is another matter. If there is a single concrete refutation of Homans' theory, it is not his attempt to 'mesh' together the two sciences, but regarding the very need of combining them. Is there a need of proposing a distinct science called elementary economics? Homans' Social Behavior seems to have failed to be a consistent reductionist. Only in some latter writings that a trend towards 'absolute reductionism' is evident in him, when he seeks to reduce elementary economics to behavioral psychology.