CHAPTER X

SOCIOBIOLOGY AND 'SACRED ABSURDITY'

In all the visible world we see no chasms
or gaps... we shall find everywhere that
the several species are linked together, and
differ but in almost insensible degrees

John Locke

Bellow's philosophy of Self, Reality, Marriage, Family and
kinship is inextricably bound up with the two distinct strands
of thought evolving in his fiction, of man as 'human' and
'creature.' His characters frequently call and describe one
another as 'creature' or 'animal.' There are extended discussions
of metaphysical and sociological categories; the effervescent
speculation skirting biological concepts anticipates the emerging
discipline of sociobiology which is particularly significant.
Darwin's theory of evolution and Herbert Spencer's agnosticism
enabled men to learn to live without God. With God, went the
glory of the paterfamilias, His divine representative on earth.
Notions of family and social organization have radically changed
since. Bellow's study of the nature of life and the meaning of
man considers pro and con: the problem of universals, determinism
versus indeterminism, creationism versus evolutionism. Spencer
argues that ethical theory must attempt "to provide a means of
reconciling human evolutionary biological nature with the demands
of modern social life"; Huxley thinks "that scientific analyses
of social behavior in lower animals have little to offer in the
way of directions for human conduct, and that human beings, unlike
other animals, are social and moral as a result of conscious
choice rather than inbred biological tendencies;" Bellow is consistently preoccupied with the resolution of these extremities. Steering clear of doctrinaire tendencies, Bellow, like his Zeitland strives towards a 'comprehensive vision' (HW-Z 165). This vision compels our attention to Edward O. Wilson's 

Sociobiology: The New Synthesis that raised a commotion; it has been acknowledged to be the bible of the nascent science, sociobiology. Some biologists have taken exception to Wilson's efforts for purely methodological reasons whereas others have objected on moral or ethical grounds. An amazingly intricate pattern of sociobiological thought emerges in his fiction. References of animal analogy are specific and explicit, as for instance, the mention of the ethologist Konrad Lorenz and his theory of aggression and behavioral phylogeny in Humboldt's Gift. Cantabile, winding through the traffic, menacingly moves towards Citrine with a baseball bat in each hand. Citrine thinks:

But I couldn't believe that Cantabile would batter me down. Not in the street. Not as I waited and bowed my head. And just at that moment I remembered Konrad Lorenz's discussion of wolves. The defeated wolf offered his throat, and the victor snapped but wouldn't bite. So I was bowing my head. Yes, but damn my memory! What did Lorenz say next? Humankind was different, but in what respect? How! I couldn't remember. (HG 81)

Lorenz shows how aggression forms the basis of social bonding; the aggression that Sammler inflicts on the innocent Dr Cosbie in the fury of his kinship passion for the dead nephew. He

represents the archetypal view that there are significant parallels between the behavior of man and that of lower animals. He believes: "Ethology permits the study and observation of man without philosophical, religious or ideological spectacles that presuppose that man is a supernatural being who does not obey the laws of nature; if you know animals well, you know yourself reasonably well."² As Darwin believed: "He who understands (the) baboon would do more towards metaphysics than Locke."³ For his argument for the existence of a phylogenetic program in man that gives 'instruct' a strong role in determining behavior, Lorenz has been accused of justifying violence and aggression as a normal characteristic of human behavior, ineradicable from contemporary society. Clarence Feller going to Madrid in search of some unpublished poems of Manuel Gonzaga tells the refugee that he did not evince interest in modern poetry until he came across the wish to live, that is 'to live as a creature' in Gonzaga's poetry and quotes:

These few bits of calcium my teeth are,
And the few ohms my brain is,
May make you think I am nothing but bony,
Let me tell you, sir
I am like any creature —
A creature. (MM-GM 108)

Gonzaga has made him understand, Clarence tells, how men lose everything by trying to become everything. Roin in A Father-to-be dislikes dissolving in marriage and family; he believes that the life force "in its progress towards its own fulfilment" surges ahead "trampling on our individual humanity, using us for


³Robin Fox, Encounter with Anthropology (Harmondsworth: Peregrine, 1975) 263.
its own ends like mere dinosaurs. Or bees, exploiting love heartlessly, making us engage in the social process, labour, struggle for money, and submit to the law of pressure, the universal law of lawyers, superimposition" (MM 145). Bellow does not just absorb sociobiological thought; he draws on all conceivable branches of knowledge and experience; and invests his characters with a powerful searching vision, a curious dialectic. Bellow's dialectic is not the "merely critical" tool, which Aristotle finds it to be, but "is the coping stone of the sciences, the process by which the mind reaches the highest truth, the ultimate study" that Socrates prescribes for the thinker princes for becoming philosopher kings. Bellow is another Hegel in fiction. Herzog and Sammler's Planet alone are considered in this study; for, it requires a complete book to view the whole of Bellow's Fiction in this light.

Looking at himself in the mirror, Herzog thinks he is exquisite, smashing. "The primitive self-attachment of the human creature, that sweet instinct for the self, so deep, so old it may have a cellular origin" (H 156). He writes to Teilhard de Chardin about his notion of the inward aspect of the elements: that sense organs, even rudimentary sense organs, could not evolve from molecules described by mechanists as inert. "Thus matter itself should perhaps be studied as evolving consciousness," Herzog writes and reaches new heights in speculation as he asks: "... is the carbon molecule lined with thought?" (H 156). "I have neither denied to the brutes," Descartes says," what is vulgarly called life, nor a corporeal soul, or organic sense."4 What he 4 "Dialectic," The Great Ideas of Today I, 1952 ed.

5 "Man," Great Ideas.
has denied them is thought. Should the carbon molecule be lined with thought, as Herzog tends to ruminate Descartes' affirmation of man's uniqueness, his spiritual substance, not corporeal soul, that makes for his reason and free will is jettisoned. It is curious to see Herzog engaged in a no-holds-barred analysis, regardless of its outcome even though he moves in the end towards a conception akin to Descartes. On the other extreme the deliberation is carried to the view of Lucretius for whom nothing exists except atoms and void. Man, in his view, does not differ in any fundamental respect from any other composite thing. The materiality of his soul means that it is as perishable as any composite body. This is the position that Woody, an agnostic takes in *A Silver Dish*. "And everybody had lived by the body" he says "but the body was giving out." That is why his Pop was elemental and "gave such relief from religion and paradoxes" whereas "Mother thought she was spiritual and kidding herself" (HW 214). The whole tradition of western thought seems to divide on the question of man's essence. Darwin, in *The Descent of Man* shows that man possesses no attribute so peculiarly human that some trace of it cannot be found in the higher forms of life. Locke who begins his essay on *Human Understanding* with the remark, "the understanding ... sets man above the rest of sensible beings" states: "Brutes abstract not... The power of abstracting is not in them."6 If the proposition is false that man differs from other animals only in degree, it cannot be true that man originated along with the anthropoid apes by descent from a common ancestor. Conversely, if the Darwinian

6 "Man," *The Great Ideas*. 
theory of man's origin is true, it can never be true that men and brutes differ in kind. Sammler urinates in the washbasin and meditates on the inherent melancholy of animal nature - recalling Aristotle continually in travail (MSP 14). He likens the students hurling abuses at him in Columbia University to spider monkeys defecating into their own hands and proceeds to rail against existentialism and psychoanalysis. 'Who had made shit a sacrament?' he laments. 'What literary and psychological movement was that?' The lessons of evolutionary science, assume that man cannot react to moral urgencies in human life beyond the limits set by his genes. The altruism of family men like Elya, however gives him hope and Sammler eventually moves towards a belief in Providence overcoming the incessant voice of his skeptical self. Nonetheless it is Herzog who, through his relentless dialectical pursuit, gives us the truth about the institution of family. It is an incidental observation that he makes while discussing GNP. Sammler later builds on this belief and expresses his hope that love and kinship will not, after all be lost in this world. What does Herzog reveal about family and kinship? Passing from Tolstoi's idea that "to be free is to be released from historical limitation" to Hegel's view that the essence of human life is to be derived from history and memory, Herzog brushes all this aside as wrong (H 169). He says he wants to give a Great Books course to all statesmen, Nehru, Churchill and Ike. In the midst of the letter he writes to General Eisenhower, he muses at the mention of the latter's Committee report on National Aims. "Suppose, after all, we are simply a
kind of beast, peculiar to this mineral lump that runs around in orbit to the sun, then why such loftiness, such great standards?" (H 169-170). Herzog returns to the letter after this digression and what follows in the letter gives a valid clue to the nature of our research.

It was with such considerations, reading your Committee's report on National Aims,... that I thought of the variation on Gresham's famous Law: Public life drives out private life. The more political our society becomes ... the more individuality seems lost. Seems, I say, because it has millions of secret resources. More plainly, national purpose is now involved with the manufacture of commodities in no way essential to human life, but vital to the political survival of the country. Because we are now all sucked into these phenomena of Gross National Product, we are forced to accept the sacred character of certain absurdities or falsehoods whose high priests not so long ago were mere pitchmen, and figures of derision - sellers of snake-oil.(H 169-170)

What applies to the state naturally applies to the family as well. If one could accept a rational interpretation of history there is no difficulty in appreciating the fact that the State, and on a lower and more basic level the Family are sacred absurdities. Their highpriests, the pitchmen, are none but the Gruners of Sammler's Planet who accumulate wealth and celebrate family ideals through mafia connections. It is a clinching and profound comment on the inevitability of the exercise of power in the form of the state and related, fundamental social establishments like the
family, religion and law. Their indispensability in the social process is thus established by Herzog. Engels would be very unhappy with this conclusion of Herzog, who, after all his analysis, justifies the civilization which has left in the hands of the merchants ("a class that took no part in production, but engaged exclusively in exchanging products") the ominous cult of money, ("the commodity of commodities") and the common law for wrecking the old gentile order. It is ironical, nevertheless, that having confirmed his belief in the sacred character of these absurdities, Herzog resists being sucked into them. Marxism believes that our marriage and family are not natural but exploitative. As a matter of fact, he seeks to steer clear of civilization, and all its appendages, especially marriage and family. Denying himself a third marriage, Herzog chooses to live among the barn owls and thrushes gorging in his mulberry tree. It is this social establishment he has just validated in principle, which seeks to punish him: with a crude exercise of power through Madeleine in the family in the first instance, and then through its 'law' and the police station. Law harasses him in its bid to back up feminine or family tyranny. Bellow's devastating irony reveals the female, the historically defeated female, indulging in a destructive, merciless exercise of power in the father-right civilisation that belongs, in theory, to the male.

Bellow's characters attempt perhaps a New Synthesis with their knowledge of the arts and sciences on the lines of Herbert Spencer, and in recent times, Edward O. Wilson. A rich and exotic

Engels, Origin, 163.

Rogin in A Father-to-Be makes such an attempt but fails.
tapestry of speculative thought emerges in the extended 'socio-
biology debate' between "the old hermit" Sammler and the maverick
Govinda Lal. Sammler thinking about human beings trying to rise
above 'the limitations of the ordinary forms of common life' is
led into profound observations about matter. What if some genius,
Sammler speculates, were to do with 'common life' what Einstein
did with 'matter,' finding its energetics, uncovering its
radiance? This leads him further to reflections about madness,
'the simplest state of availability to ideals' (MSP 119) and
finally to Marx.

In the matter of histrionics, see, for instance, what that furious world-boiler Marx had done, insisting that revolutions were made in historical costume, the Cromwellians as Old Testament prophets, the French in 1789 dressed in Roman outfits. But the proletariat, he said, he declared, he affirmed, would make the first nonimitative revolution.

(MSP 120)

Sammler continues his examination of the Communist acme of the
withering-away-of-the state, no doubt, to deride and blow it to
pieces. Herzog acknowledges the absurdity of our inheritance,
our sacred categories but Sammler apotheosizes them without
reservation. Still denouncing Marxism, he says:

It would not need the drug of historical recollection. From sheer ignorance, knowing no models, it would simply do the thing pure. He (Marx) was as giddy as the rest about originality. And only the working class was original. Thus history would get away from mere poetry. Then the life of humankind would clear itself of copying. It would be free from Art. Oh, no. No, no, not so thought Sammler. Instead
Art increased, and a sort of chaos. More possibility, more actors, more fantasy, more despair. Life looting Art of its wealth, destroying Art as well by its desire to become the thing itself (MSP 120).

Thus Sammler dismisses, after a laborious analysis, 'greatness without models' as inconceivable and just stops short of calling the Marxist revolution nonsense. This is however consistent with his burgeoning hope in the family establishment and the altruism of the capitalist order. To Sammler revolutionary ideals appear as unrealistic as fancies of colonising the moon. 'Before lighting out, before this hop to the moon and outward bound,' Sammler warns, we had better look into some of this' (MSP 120). Again, in his exchange with Lal, Sammler criticises Marx and 'his ideological hashish' and writers like Dickens and Shaw who built their fortunes on social justice and radical ideas. 'Plebians of genius elevate themselves,' he charges, through universal education and cheap printing 'until, soaring from their slums or their little petit-bourgeois parlours, they were addressing worldwide millions' (MSP 170). All this they did with no capital but mental capital. Sammler is happy with Wells in this respect, because he "at least did not demand the sacrifice of civilization" (MSP 171). Earlier he expresses his unhappiness to see "civilization so disliked" (MSP 168). Sammler thus seems to take a definitive standpoint on life and history but not without angst. He observes that Wells inclined to believe that "the minority civilization could be transmitted to the great masses, and that orderly conditions for this transmission were possible. Decent, British-style, Victorian-Edwardian, non-outcast, non-
lunatic, grateful conditions." In other words, non-Marxist. Nonetheless during World War II, Wells too despised "comparing humankind to rats in a sack desperately struggling and biting" (MSP 171). Sammler, having abjured Marxism, is now entirely on the side of the Victorian-Edwardian world order. At this stage of analysis, he pays glorious tributes to his nephew Elya "a good man," now dying, a gentleman cherishing this world view, who has taken care of Sammler and Shula for twenty two years "without a day of neglect, without a single irascible word" (MSP 172). Lal admires Sammler's exposition and calls it "an eschatological point of view." Sammler not caring much for the word" eschatological" shrugs. Eschatological, Sammler certainly is, though much against his will. This becomes evident when, once again he talks about civilization as he tries to persuade Angela to repent to her dying father. Says Sammler: "New York makes one think about the collapse of civilization, about Sodom and Gomorrah, the end of the world... But it is in the air now that things are falling apart, and I am affected by it. I always hated people who declared that it was the end. What did they know about the end? ... But I was flat, dead wrong!" (MSP 244) Sammler's confession and justification of his eschatological bent and the admission of his earlier, in refusing to believe in the collapse of civilization reminds us of Bellow's position as an artist on end-of-the-world visions. Bellow refuses to believe "the apocalyptic interpretation" - the idea that mankind has reached a terminal point - though frightful things, he admits, have happened. He asserts: "Civilization is still there. The prophecies have not been borne out. Novelists are wrong to put
an interpretation of history at the base of artistic creation - to speak 'the last word!' This is not to say that Bellow - assuming that Sammler speaks for Bellow - contradicts himself, as he does apparently. Govinda Lal who has worked for worldwide Technics in Connecticut initiates the next stage of analysis in his rich Oriental voice. He begins with "order" in biological systems and how complex mechanisms reproduce themselves. He begins apologetically and wonders if it could "greatly signify" (MSF 173) to Sammler. But Sammler, tired as he is of his own ideas, takes to the discussion as fish takes to water. The elaborate exchange that follows between them adumbrates the "new comprehensive science, sociobiology, that will straddle the domains currently occupied by the rather notorious black sheep of the scientific family-ethology, sociology, animal behavior and comparative psychology." Bellow attempts in this sprawling debate a philosophy of history and places in perspective the nagging concerns of sociobiology. Curiously Wilson's sensational new book Sociobiology: The New Synthesis came five years after the publication of Mr Sammler's Planet. Observing that Europe after 1789 did not have the space for its mistakes and that as a result, the revolution that followed was ended up in the hands of the madmen, Lal attempts a philosophy of history. He denies all the same that he is a historian. Sammler contends that power not only corrupts but destroys the sanity of the powerful as


well and "allows their irrationalities to leave the sphere of dreams and come into the real world." He is no psychologist, he says, but agrees with Lal that they should venture to make "bold guesses" even outside their chosen disciplines and "should not surrender all to the experts" (MSP 175). To summarise Sammler's views: Man may or may not have been born free, but he cannot exist without his "atomistic chains" (MSP 173). The chemical order which is a fundamental of life is of great beauty. To live without order, therefore is to desire to turn from the fundamental biological governing principle. Which is presumed to be there only to free us, a platform for impulse. "Are we crazy, or what?" he asks. "From order governing principle, the human being can tear himself to express his immense privilege of sheer liberty or unaccountability of impulse. The biological fundamentals like the peasantry, the whole individual considering himself to be a prince. It is the cigale and the fourmi. The ant was once the hero, but now the grasshopper is the whole show" (MSP 175). Taking the cue from Lal's mention of 'order' Sammler cleverly fires his first salvo against the libertarian impulse of the times. He utilises Lal's biological categories for his own value problems and proceeds in his study of ethical naturalism. Coming from a nation of vast multitudes, Lal follows populaton biology and justifies "the Baudelaire desire to get out - get out of human circumstances," the craving "to crack open a closed universe" (MSP 175). "Obviously we cannot manage with one single planet" Lal says, and speaks for the individualistic impulse inherent in man when he continues: "Nor refuse the challenge
of a new experience. We must recognize the extremism and fanaticism of human nature" (MSP 175). Sammler and Lal thus take positions in the first round, the former for order and discipline and probably also for status quo and the latter for impulse and extremism in experience. Sammler seizes the determinism in biological order to promote his personal value system and Lal believes that man infinitely malleable cannot be pinned down in one world. Sammler does not accept Lal's contention that we would condemn ourselves if we did not soar out of this planet where the social species is eating itself up. Questioning Lal's thesis that many members of the species want to die and end it Sammler asks: "Could we say at this point politics is anything but pure biology?" and observes that the talk about the wish to end life "may be only rhetoric" (MSP 175). And, pursuing Sammler's mention about the Celibans in power and their political establishments the world over, Lal booms out the overwhelming truth, as he sees it, about moral imperatives in life.

'Mr Sammler,' said Lal, 'I believe you intimate that there is an implicit morality in the will-to-live and that these mediocrities in office will do their duty by the species. I am not sure. There is no duty in biology. There is no sovereign obligation to one's breed. When biological destiny is fulfilled in reproduction the desire is often to die. We please ourselves in extracting ideas of duty from biology. But duty is plain. Duty is hateful - misery oppressive.' (MSP 175)

Sammler unable or unwilling to counter the authentic observation of a biologist seeks divine intervention. "But being born," he says "one respects the power of creation, one obeys the will
of God - with whatever inner reservations truth imposes." As for duty, however, Sammler says Lal is wrong. "The pain of duty" he asserts "makes the creature upright, and this uprightness is no negligible thing. No, I stand by what I first said. There is also an instinct against leaping into Kingdom Come" (MSP 177). Thus Sammler does not entirely argue in the environmentalist mode, that all social behavior is learned and transmitted by culture. Nor does he take recourse very often to God, to the exclusion of evolutionary science, in his attempt to establish the credentials of his belief system. He imports into his analysis of human behavior, without any hesitation, the basic notions of biological evolution.

Sammler and Lal thus veer round to the idea of 'duty' or its cognate altruism which Wilson defines as "the central theoretical problem of sociobiology." The scene of this high minded debate is the living room of the late Hilda Gruner in Westchester Country and Sammler seeks to validate the principle and philanthropy of his propertied nephew. Ironically, Sammler not much given to the passion of family and kinship in youth now begins to feel closer to such sentiments mainly because of Elya Gruner's benevolence. Lal, on the other hand, who was violently committed to love of kinfolk, as a boy has probably now grown out of it. It is an intriguing reversal of roles. Lal, a melancholy depressed boy used to make violent scenes when visitors had to leave. All parting was to him 'such an emotional ordeal' that he got sick. He felt separation 'as far inward,' as Lal himself puts it, 'as his constituent molecules', and 'trembled in billions of nuclei' (MSP 178). His knowledge of biophysics of vascular

beds has made him believe that "nature, more than an engineer
is an artist. Behavior is poetry, is metaphorical order, is
metaphysics. From the high-frequency tenth-of-millisecond brain
responses in corticothalamic nets to the grossest of ecological
phenomena he says, it is all "the printing out, in mysterious
code, of sublime metaphor." Continues Lal: "I am speaking of
my own childhood passions, and the body of an individual is
electronically denser than the tropical rain forest is dense
with organisms. And all these existences are poems" (MSP 178).
Reverting to the theme of comprehension and consciousness Lal
observes: "what goes on within a man's head is far beyond his
comprehension" in much the same way as a lizard or a rat or a
bird cannot comprehend being organisms. However, owing to
dawning comprehension, he may well feel the unfitness of his
personal efforts. "Therefore, at the lowest a rat in a temple.
At best, a clumsy thing, with dawning awareness of the finesse of
internal organization employed in crudities" (MSP 180-181). For
Lal therefore, man is very much part of the Great Chain and the
difference between him and his ancestors lower down the scale
is primarily a question of degree and not at all of kind. Lal's
approach is consistently scientific; he does not suffer from a
sense of anguish at his findings. But Sammler, once a Marxist
is now on the side of religion and property; he does not feel
easily at home with any one point of view. He confesses, there-
fore, when Shula and Margotte prod him to react as Lal asks for
his 'views,' that he is extremely skeptical of explanations.
"I dislike the modern religion of empty categories," he says
"and people who make the motions of knowledge" (MSP 181). All the same he proceeds to set forth his views and at once tilts at schools of philosophy, without naming them, and their proponents. His 'views': We live in a social and human sea. Inventions and ideas bathe our brains, which sometimes, like sponges, must receive whatever the currents bring and digest the mental protocoe. We sometimes lie under and feel the awful weight of the volume of cumulative consciousness, we feel the weight of the world. The world is a terror, he believes, and modern mankind has become more and more mental, "the realm of nature, as it used to be called, turning into a park, a zoo, a botanical garden, a world's fair, an Indian reservation." Also there are human beings who take it upon themselves to represent or interpret the old savagery, tribalism, the primal fierceness of the fierce, lest we forget prehistory, savagery, animal origins. The real purpose of civilization Sammler believes, is to permit us to live like primitive people and lead a neolithic life in an automated society'(MSP 182). This endless downpour of impressions, this speculative sweep, must be considered in the light of Wilson's observation in the final chapter of his controversial book: "Let us now consider man in the free spirit of natural history, as though we were zoologists from another planet completing a catalog of social species on Earth. In this macroscopic view the humanities and social sciences shrink to specialized branches of biology; history, biography, and fiction are the research protocols of human ethology; and anthropology and sociology together constitute the sociobiology of a single primate species."13

Bellow's fiction certainly serves as the 'research protocol' of human ethology, though not in the advocacy line. Sammler and Lal take the overview of Wilson from a vantage point. Lal embraces the truth of what he sees painful as it is; Sammler suffers from it. "My impatience sometimes borders on rage," he confesses to Lal as he winds up. "It is clinical" (MSP 182). He finds it hard to reconcile himself to the concept of a dying jungle. He longs for order and survival. Torn between two realities, he observes that "the modern revolution has been most thwarted" whereas in the free world it has introduced new kinds of grief and misery. "It is bewildering to see how much these new individuals suffer," he says" with their new leisure and liberty." How to choose one's personal way of life in the midst of unlimited falsehood, unlimited desire, impossible demands on complex realities, revival in childish and vulgar forms of ancient religious ideas, mysteries, all unlimited? That is Sammler's fundamental problem. And the best that one could think of, in his opinion is "to have some order within oneself." What is this order which according to Sammler, is "better than what many call love?" He says: "Perhaps it is love" (MSP 183). Margotte immediately intervenes and asks him to say something about love little realising that it is not romantic or erotic love that he is talking about. This is what Sammler affirms again conclusively at the death of Elya. The much talked about affirmation - of course, "the cant word embraces" and suggests "fetid molecules of doubt"- in Bellow as we see here now is at best the defense mechanism of the battered hero in a tottering world of tumbling realities. It is the passion for bondage primarily in the form 14

of family and kinship. The family must serve as a shock absorber in a world of crudities. This affirmation, costs Sammler a great deal of ideological struggle and metaphysical anguish. The compromise of once-cherished beliefs and values is not a glowing act of pride. Seeing the paradox that inheres in affirmations and denials, he chooses even after setting forth his 'views', to be disinterested. 'It is not for us to say Yes or Nay' he says in the manner of his creator and opts for objectivity. "Not as misanthropes dissociate themselves, by judging, but by not judging. By willing as God wills" (MSP 189). Thus he escapes from the inadequacy of affirmations and denials by taking refuge in God. Sammler tries to evade the odium of being characterised as an ideologue and embraces God, in anguish and perhaps against his will. "I have strong impressions of eternity" he says but is prepared nonetheless to have nothing after death. The intellectual and believer in Sammler are continually at odds. "One's ape restiveness would stop," he says, in death. However he adds. "I think I would miss mainly my God adumbrations in the many daily forms" (MSP 190). In time with his impressions, therefore, Sammler prefers to have" justice on this planet first" but when it comes to it" we must jump off, because it is our human fate to do so" (MSP 190). It is precisely at this moment, that the deluge comes. The recusant Wallace's plumbing blueprint cracks; ironically, Lal who has just given a nihilistic vision of life finds himself astride the flowing pipe and after a struggle restores 'order;' the order breached by the anarchistic son, the 'order' just advocated by Sammler.
Bellow's rare synthesis of the social and biological sciences, apart from his usual metaphysics, shapes his responses to the issue of individualism versus familialism. We must conclude with Bellow's critique of consciousness since we cannot further dwell on sociobiology without overreaching our borders. With all family ties broken or failed, Citrine wants to share his apartment with an Orangutan. But he believes like Locke that an Orangutan friend "would understand less than Humboldt did" (HG 479). He denies that 'the series ends with us' and avers that "we occupy a point within a great hierarchy that goes for beyond ourselves..." and that "the existence of a soul is beyond proof under the ruling, premises." In a brilliant flash of insight Citrine tries to live down the agony of a purposeless life as he says: "On the ruling premises the fate of humankind is a sporting event, most ingenious. Fascinating... The specter of boredom is haunting this sporting conception of history." Tiger and Fox sum up the sporting conception of history as follows.

But that five thousand years which is civilization is, in evolutionary terms, as but an evening gone... It is just an episode.
The order of Primates, our order, is a seventy-million year old episode in the history of the mammals - itself an episode in the history of the vertebrates, itself an episode in the history of organic life.  

Dean Corde tries to escape from 'tragic boredom' (DD111), the specter of boredom (HG 479) that goes, according to Citrine, with the sporting conception of history, by abandoning conscious-

15 Lionel Tiger and Robin Fox, "The Human Biogram" Sociobiology Debate, 60.
ness like the cyclamens he adores. He "took his cue from them and gave up consciousness, he checked out" (DD 62). He takes delight in the "perfection devoid of consciousness, design without nerves" (DD 59). Bellow's critique of consciousness in _The Dean's December_ is a reversal of Allbee's thesis in _The Victim_. Allbee shakes and warns Asa: "Wake up! What's life? Metabolism? That's what it's for the bugs. Jesus Christ, no! What's life? Consciousness, that's what it is" (TV 214). Corde blames the American moral crisis on "the increase in consciousness, also in false consciousness - the increase of theories and discourse, itself a cause of new strange forms of blindness" (DD 124). Citrine is unhappy for allowing himself to be a 'brute' and not trying "to burst from the fatal self-sufficiency of consciousness and put my remaining strength over into the Imaginative Soul" (HG 417). It must be remembered that in Darwinism consciousness is nothing but an adaptive feature skinn, so to say, to the length of the gireff's neck or the monkey's prehensile tail!" The tape-worm consciousness that Corde speaks of with its "identical segments on and on" "crazy and also boring forever and ever" "goes back to the first axiom of nihilism - the high values losing their value" (DD 259). The word 'boring' and its cognates are Bellow's expressions for denoting the dreary emptiness of a meaningless life.

What ultimately emerges from the rambling enquiries of Sammler is the need for 'order,' a disciplined life: kinship and family. Herzog too affirms the same need. But whereas Sammler pontificates, Herzog merely searches truth. For him, the family is a sacred absurdity.