



Short Communication

The Essence of Human Societies: Purpose of Life, Challenges, Opportunities, Limited Power of States

Gácsi Zoltán

Institute of Nuclear Research of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Debrecen, 4027 Bem tér 18/c, HUNGARY

Available online at: www.isca.in

Received 10th October 2012, revised 15th October 2012, accepted 16th October 2012

Abstract

A new definition of life is given, the purpose of life is stated, and then relations in the most general sense are used to define the environment and to establish groups of people ranging from families to human societies. Challenges and opportunities in human life are emphasized along with clear statement on the general and acceptable role of political forces, thus proposing the awareness of limitations governing institutions of states should respect.

Keyword: Definition and purpose of life, challenges, societies, political responsibility, limited power of states.

Introduction

Despite the vast amount of knowledge about human societies, the causes and consequences of so many events in our daily life are apparently beyond the comprehension of most of us and there are groups of people and institutions who readily take advantage of such a prevailing ignorance. Moreover, the true motifs of political struggles and activities are rarely candid and quite a number of states in the world seem to overplay their role putting excessive burden on their citizens and ripping them off of their freedom to pursue happiness. As surprising as it is, a really significant problem is that a transparent elucidation of fundamental aspects of human societies is missing or not evident to millions and millions of people in many places of the world, with tremendous, often catastrophic consequences. This is especially true for societies whose history has been rather transitional in the last several decades (East-European nations, among others, are rather good examples), where the system of values, their civilization and culture as a holistic whole, has been changing and can be described as meta-stable at best. It is, therefore, also the social, even historical task of “arm-chair” philosophers and sociologists to reach out and explain what their words really mean in everyday life.

Goal

The major purpose of this communication is to construct a thread of thoughts to follow in an understanding of what lies behind the activities, driving forces, and features of the present day societies, political events, and operation of states. I strive to use common words and expressions, furthermore, only a basic familiarity with the concepts of set theory is assumed.

Discussion

Since the meaning and purpose of life seem to be trivial, overlooked, neglected, or philosophically deemed naïve, a definition of life will serve as our starting point. Life is responsive self-reproduction.

Trifonov proposes a slightly different definition: “Life is self-reproduction with variations.” He also observes that “The philosophical disputes are often about terminology (which term is better to use) at the expense of essence” We may want to keep this in mind¹. It is now assumed that »responsive« describes the perception of and appropriate reaction to any kind of events and circumstances that a living object faces time after time, in order to maintain or increase the probability of its successful self-reproduction.

Simple observations indicate that inanimate objects do not reproduce themselves. Their space and time coordinates (life lines) are determined directly by the laws of physics and chemistry (Neglecting interactions with living objects, for instance: one kicks a ball, or builds a brick house, etc.) In contrast, the life lines of living objects (entities, systems) often seem to contradict these fundamental laws. For instance, one stands up from a chair, or a small seed may grow into a big tree, if the circumstances are favorable.

After these introductory comments, a trivial statement should now be proposed. The purpose and/or meaning of life are sustaining it (otherwise life vanishes). In a different terminology, the essence of life is to maintain its existence.

The next step involves a description of what the *environment* designates. A living entity is an element of one or more sets of

similar and/or different elements. On those sets, numerous relations of quite general character can be defined that furnish basis for mutual or perhaps even exclusive influences (on the life lines of the entities) and then for possible reactions. These sets together with their relations can be regarded as the environment in general sense.

An important statement should be put forward here, which appears to be easily overlooked and neglected. A living entity is an element of its own environment, and some relations work or are valid on a single living entity as well. The gentle reader is encouraged to pause here and contemplate about how far-reaching consequences of this claim may have.

Certain relation(s) may help to make distinction between elements of sets. Distinct elements may have specific common relations, which might include some, certain, or even all relations of those elements. These common relations can be defined in advance or found while studying these elements. Elements possessing such common relations can be regarded as a group and the groups may have identifying names. A few trivial and general examples are, e.g.: inanimate objects, living organisms, plants, animals, human beings, men, women, children, ideas, actions, events, societies, natural languages, cultures, religions, etc.

Perhaps one of the most important feature of a living element is that it is related to itself (let us call it self-relation). Some illustrative examples are: a cell may divide itself, or someone can think or dream. An inanimate object is related only to other (living or inanimate) elements. Here, dispute may arise: one may state that living entities possess inanimate bodies and so-called spirits in them. Of course, then the spirit should be considered as the living entity. Nevertheless, this approach would not influence the conclusions to be drawn in the present essay.

We consider here environments with subsets of living entities. A multitude of relations between the elements in these environments can function and their number and character may change in time and space. Relation may involve one, two, or arbitrarily many elements, and can take any imaginable role of dynamic nature. As an example one may think of Conway's "Game of Life", which can be extended into three (or more) dimensions, and, at the same time, slightly or even significantly changing the rules of the game².

Let us assume that the meanings of the words »significant«, »effect«, and »similar« need no rigorous definition here. Living entities placed in space and time on the Earth will be the subject of our discussion below. They are characterized with mean-life, or typical lifespan during which their locality may or may not change, which in turn has significant effect on their life. Based on the outlined terminology and narrowing our approach even further, we may now focus on human societies on the Earth in the present era.

Living human beings (persons, for brevity) and all of their relations with elements in their environment at a given point or range on their life line are the subjects of our remaining discussion. A person's life may go through places on the Earth from their birth (or inception – which may depend on what relations we choose to describe a person) to their death, or even beyond, again, depending on the chosen relations. Just as an example, their teachings are also carried on, preserved, remembered – at least to some extent - in their progeny. An important property has just appeared: memory, which is also a kind of relation in its own right, and is an example of self-relation as well.

From the point of view of a single person, the exact location on his or her time line plays significant role in determining the dynamics of the individual's present and future life. His or her relations with the environment start from the inception in the womb of the mother. Just to name a few of these relations: cells are inside an organ (inside a woman who lives somewhere in the geo-sphere, within her environment), they collect chemical substances from the organ, they grow, divide, multiply, change, differentiate, specialize, etc. A person grows up, refines his or her relations, typically will produce offspring, who in turn then will produce their own children, and life will be maintained, if this process does not cease for whatever reasons. It is important to note that the inception requires a sperm cell as well. It carries a great deal of stored information (evolved through many generations) that together with those of the mother will serve as a very sophisticated system of rules governing the slowly but always changing relations of the person to be born and live in the world.

One of the most fundamental rules of a person's life is that he or she is a living entity entailing everything what it means, first of all, let us re-emphasize it, one has to carry on living. Related to this rule is that the principal motivation for human activity is to pursue happiness, which is actually a high level of self-relation, quite probably associated only to persons. Le Deoux discusses human feelings in detail³. At this point, it is worth hypothesizing that happiness is achieved when people find that their progeny is successful in sustaining its life, or is at least prepared to produce its own progeny.

A subset of the relations can have significant effect on the dynamics of the elements in the set of objects. These special relations may be called interactions. Interactions of persons may serve as a means of ordering them into groups. Such groups of persons are, e.g., family, relatives, classes of children in school, internet communities, mobs on the streets in a demonstration, travelers in a train or plane; furthermore we may also mention classes in societies, ancient tribes, modern political parties, or expanding further: nations, races of people, etc. They always have similar relations and, as just mentioned, interactions. We may think of these as the means of binding people together in their classification. An intriguing analogy from the thermodynamics of phases and their transitions deserves our

attention here that might help to gain a deeper insight into the structure of societies.

What relations can then be the interactions in the human life? Perhaps one of the most fundamental is a person's relation to his or her environment in the Nature on the Earth: day or night, cold or warm, dry or wet, all alone or together with others, hungry and thirsty or not, etc. There are then higher levels of interactions as well: sensing, feeling, fear, pain, joy, attention, memory, thinking, attraction, aversion, association, sorting, weighing, preferring, teaching, learning, suffering, attack, defense, robbery, judgment, punishment, comforting, helping, etc. These interactions can be considered as challenges and/or opportunities - which together may be called as possibilities (of life). The importance of challenges in the development of human societies cannot be overemphasized. Perhaps even the observable differences in cultures can be largely understood by studying the different challenges (and, of course, opportunities) people represented by those cultures had to go through in their history.

In this terminology, we may say: similar or common possibilities may bind people together, which binding can have more than just classification effect: people bound together may respond together to those possibilities, and it has many consequences, familiar to the everyday person and is a major pillar of the construct we call community. A few example are e.g.: defense against attackers (be it a global virus or just a burglar from the neighborhood) or against natural disasters; taking advantage of sharing tasks in accordance with differentiation, division of labor, specification, training, capabilities, on personal and/or environmental basis; etc. As a result of some specific possibilities in history, we learned about ancient Greek city-states, serfdoms and kingdoms of the Middle Ages, then states of industrialized nations, etc. In the history of mankind, numerous bounds appeared and then vanished. Reasonably so, since environmental stimuli influencing their life do change. Obviously, life and history are dynamic. One aspect prevails, though, and that is that people are grouped together on the basis of common relations, which may be considered as a process or protocol for forming a community. Sharing common relations enhances their one-to-one relations (social relations), leading to and resulting in the formation of a society, the strength of which is indicated, among other features, by coherent communication. A coherent communication is crucial for determining critical mass or size of group of people, be it a couple of people or a large family of societies. If coherence is only short-ranged in space and time and incoherence sets in, then critical size is not attained, decay and weakening of the group will result, instead of increment and fortification. Here, analogy with classical nucleation theory in condensed systems

can substantiate these ideas⁴. Based on and taking advantages of the social relations, the groups of people have social perception of the possibilities their community may face in their environment and also of the necessary or advantageous steps they have to take to respond to those possibilities. As a manifestation or institutionalization of such a social perception or awareness is well represented by, for instance, a council of sages, a body of governors, a group of elected representatives, parliaments, governments, armies, firefighters, an ad-hoc team of rescuers, and so on.

Based on this logic, the role of these state institutions should then be limited and simply to serve the needs of the communities to find and give answers to the possibilities they face. In a less stringent society, such a role is more or less focused on only to challenges a society faces and the opportunities are left to its members to take advantage of.

Interpreting this in the everyday politics, the required way of conduct of every statesman and politician is then that they keep asking the question, what challenges do people of society face, what should be done about it. Essentially, that is how human life should go on in a minimalistic way.

Conclusion

In summary, setting out from what life and environment can be on the Earth, we find how common relations can serve as means of classifications, and come to a simple construct of the group of people we may call a society, in the life of which challenges and opportunities play significant role. Division of labor or rationalization results in institutions whose role should be limited to finding responses to challenges the members of a society face day after day and to try to convert those challenges to opportunities for the people.

References

1. Trifonov E.N., Definition of Life: Navigation through Uncertainties, *J. of Biomolecular Structure and Dynamics*, **29**, 647-650 (2012)
2. Gardner M., The fantastic combinations of John Conway's new solitaire game 'life', *Sci. Am.*, **223**, 120-123 (1970)
3. Le Deoux J., Rethinking the Emotional Brain, *Neuron*, and references therein **73**, 653-676 (2012)
4. Kashchiev D., Nucleation: Basic Theory with Applications, Butterworth-Heinemann, Oxford, (2000)