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20.2.1975

Dear Pepe

Many thanks for your letter of the 2nd.

You are right: there are many schools of individualists in the philosophy of social science. Thus although both Popper and Homans declare themselves individualists, the former denies the reality of social relations ("Autobiography" p. 14) while the latter declares them to be the very marrow of social life. And whereas Popper refuses to reduce sociology to psychology, Homans tries to do just that.

But this is only one of the points. Another is that, in my view, philosophers usually side with one or the other, but practising sociologists are neither. Even Homans, who claims to be an individualist, deals in social systems -- otherwise he would not be a sociologist.

What you call institutions is what I call systems, groups, or institutions, as the case may be. To me a system, whether social or biological or physical, is a concrete thing behaving as a unit in some respect. On the other hand groups or kinds or classes are not things; likewise institutions are sets of systems (things) not systems. To take your own examples:

(i) a social class is neither a system nor an institution: it is a group, just like an age group or an occupational group or an ethnic group or any other social cell;

(ii) the Society of Jesus is a system proper, because its members are strongly bonded together;

(iii) a fanclub is a very loosely knit system, like the Republican Party (not like the Communist Party) or the Canadian Society for the History and Philosophy of Science.

Neither of these is an institution in my sense of the word. The Press is, and so is Primary Education, likewise Trade and Industry. Each of these is a family of systems (things), hence neither is a thing.

My terminology is not arbitrary but rests on a system of metaphysics which I am working out, and which will be expounded in volumes 3 and 4 of my Treatise on Basic Philosophy. Volume 4 starts with a chapter on systems and ends up with a chapter on sociosystems. I say this because it may have been a mistake of mine to try and summarize some of my ideas on sociosystems in a separate article. On the other hand, whether I expound them at length or shortly, they are bound to be misunderstood by both holists and individualists (except by yourself, who are open minded to the point of recognizing that methodological individualism is a group not a system). As a matter of fact the paper I asked you to read was rejected by Behavioral Science (with holistic leanings) and by the BJPS (which, as you know, has become rather sectarian).