The history and theory of vitalism

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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

The many admirers of Professor Driesch in England and America will, it is hoped, welcome this succinct account of the Vitalism with which his name is so prominently associated, both in its historical and theoretical aspects.

Students of The Science and Philosophy of the Organism, the Gifford Lectures, 1907-8, by which Professor Driesch is perhaps best known to English readers, will find in Part II. of this book an account of the logical foundations of Vitalism, arranged in a rather different and in many ways easier form.

As the author explains in his Foreword to Part II., all the systematic section has been completely rewritten for the English edition; and its arrangement is precisely the reverse of that adopted in the London Lectures, 1913, which are being published by Messrs. Macmillan almost simultaneously with this work. In the historical section the original text has been left substantially unaltered. This will account for a certain discrepancy between the philosophical views expressed in Part II. and those occasionally implied in the earlier pages—in particular as regards the author's position towards mechanical physics and metaphysics. The change is due to the fact that he no longer believes that
qualitative Energetics can take the place of a real theory of matter (whether mechanical or electro-
dynamical). He now regards a critical metaphysic as possible, and no longer supports any kind of conceptual phenomenalism as the final word of philosophy.

My first debt as translator is, needless to say, to the author himself, with whom I have been in communication throughout the work; whom I also had the advantage of consulting personally during a visit to Heidelberg last summer, and on the occasion of his lecture arranged by Professor James Ward last October in Cambridge; and who has moreover most carefully revised the translation throughout. I wish further to express my special indebtedness to Miss O. H. Persitz, of Newnham College, for invaluable assistance, both philosophical and linguistic, at every stage of my labours.

From the Italian translation of this work by Dr. Stenta of Trieste, I have derived many useful suggestions, one of which is specially acknowledged on page 48; while Dr. R. Assheton, Mr. C. F. Angus, Mr. Wildon Carr, Mr. A. E. Heath, and Mr. K. R. Lewin have very kindly read through portions of the book in proof.

Where an English translation of a work quoted in the text exists—as in the case of Dr. Bernard’s *Kant’s Kritik of Judgment*—I have often availed myself of it without considering acknowledgment necessary.

C. K. OGDEN.

Magdalen College, Cambridge,
March, 1914.
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CRITICAL INTRODUCTION.

THE DIFFERENT KINDS OF TELEOLOGY.

The main question of Vitalism is not whether the processes of life can properly be called purposive: it is rather the question if the purposiveness in those processes is the result of a special *constellation of factors known already* to the sciences of the inorganic, or if it is the result of an *autonomy* peculiar to the processes themselves. For that there is, as a matter of fact, much that is purposive in vital phenomena is merely an immediate deduction from the definition of the concept of purpose itself, and from the application of this definition to living beings.

In the language of everyday life, we designate as purposive such actions as experience shows to contribute directly or indirectly to a definitely desired end—or of which this is at any rate assumed. I judge all purposiveness in actions from my own standpoint: that is to say, I know for myself when my actions deserve the predicate purposive, because I know my own objects. With this I start. The actions of other men I describe as purposive if I understand the object which they have in view: that is to say, if I can imagine that that object could
be my own, and consider them in relation to that object.

But I do not limit the application of the word purposive to the actions of other men: I extend it already in everyday life in two directions: and from this extension arises, on the one hand, the application of the word purposive or teleological to biology in general, and, on the other, the fundamental problem of biology itself.

I describe as purposive a great deal of animal movement, not only in certain of the higher animals whose movements are actually called actions, but also that group of movements which, in view of their constancy and coherence, are usually referred to not as actions but as instincts or reflexes. From these to the movements of plants which turn either towards or away from the light is a very short step, and it is only one step further to describe as purposive also those movements of growth which create out of the germ the complete organisms of animals and plants in a typical succession.

In this way, then, we finally get all phenomena in the living being which can be shown to be directed to a single point, thought of in some sense as an end, subordinated to the purely descriptive concept of purposiveness. From what we have said it will be seen that a certain arbitrariness is unavoidable in the designation of any event as teleological, for we can only proceed here by analogy. This arbitrariness, however, is not of any great consequence, as it may be stated once and for all that the term is used at this stage merely to give a certain orientation and nothing more.
We have already said that, in order to describe a process as purposive, it must be connected with the idea of an end: it is thereby implied that the concept of teleology is extended to many processes of very different kinds, and also that it is limited to the organic in the first place, at least in so far as so-called natural objects in the narrower sense are concerned. For it is only in relation to organisms that the possibility of an end thus arbitrarily postulated can be thought of, at any rate without further consideration. This is due, among other things, essentially to the fact that relation to an end implies two things: in the first place, the special adaptation of the process in question to an end (or better, its position in a system of objects thus typically adapted), and secondly, its appearance in an indefinite number of individuals or examples—in short, its unlimited plurality. This is a postulate which in nature is fulfilled in organic natural bodies, and at the first glance only in them. We can therefore describe very many biological processes as purposive.

We do, however, as a matter of fact, also describe as purposive processes in certain objects which are not organic, but which are not objects of “nature” in the narrower sense—that is to say, in so far as we can speak intelligibly if not strictly of “culture” as an opposition to nature. The processes to which we refer occur in artefacts due to the action of men. Here we have our second extension of the concept purposive of which we spoke, and here we may start with our statement of the fundamental problem of biology.

I do not think it wise to describe machines, as
things, by the term purposive. This word should be retained for processes, but every single process in a machine is purposive. We may call the machine as a whole "practical": it is the result of purposive action, of human action, but it is the fact that it is made for processes that distinguishes it from other human artefacts, from works of art for instance.

There are, then, inorganic things, namely, those made by men, which show us processes deserving the predicate purposive. It is clear that here the purposiveness of each single process rests on the specific order of the specific parts of the machine, and is determined by this order. In other words, each single effect in a machine is only purposive in so far as it is part of a higher specific whole; and this it is in virtue of the constitution or structure of that whole.

Our reasoning has now brought us to a point at which the problem which we have described as the fundamental problem of biology presents itself for consideration. We are confronted by the all important question: are those processes in the organism, which we described as purposive, perhaps only purposive in virtue of a given structure or tectonic, of a "machine" in the widest sense, on the basis of which they play their part, being purposive therefore only in the sense in which processes in a machine made by men are purposive; or is there another special kind of teleology in the realm of organic life?

It will be seen that we must first decide about the ultimate laws of phenomena which we have hitherto described only analogically in a more external
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manner, for it cannot be too often repeated that the mere assertion of purposiveness, mere teleology, to use the general technical expression, is purely descriptive. The term descriptive teleology will therefore be used definitely throughout the whole of this book to designate every descriptive view which deals simply with the existence of purposiveness. Descriptive teleology leaves the most important point still open, for life in particular this question: are the processes of life to be judged teleological only in virtue of their given order, only because a given mechanical form lies beneath them, while every single one is really a pure physical or chemical process— or are the processes of life purposive because of an unanalysible autonomy?

For the future we shall use the terms static and dynamic teleology to mark this opposition, in distinction to merely descriptive teleology.

Static teleology leads to a mechanistic theory of the organism: the process of life and its order is only a special case of those laws which are valid elsewhere and of the general order of the world. The constellation of all the single cosmic elements just happens to be of such a nature that we also get amongst them those processes which are grouped together as "life." According to this view life is only distinctive as a combination and not because of its own laws. The question, whence comes the given order with which static teleology operates, is insoluble; and it is precisely owing to this circumstance that the life-machine does appear to be something different from technical machines whose origin we know, even if the kind of purposiveness is the same in both cases.
Dynamic teleology leads us to what is generally called *Vitalism*; it leads us to the recognition of the "Autonomy of vital processes."

Which of these two views is the right one?

The answer given in earlier times to this question, and the answer which we ourselves give, it is the purpose of this book to set forth; and the object of this introduction has been to prepare for such an exposition.

The result of this introduction, the recognition that is to say that there can be a static and a dynamic teleology gives us a critical reagent, a criterion by which we can test every body of doctrine offered by history: with it we can ask what is the real meaning of any theory, and we can do this even in those not infrequent cases when an author himself is very far from being clear as to the distinction between the concepts descriptive-, static-, and dynamic-teleology.

Our introductory remarks have been written to make easier our historical analysis and in consequence the understanding of the whole: they must be considered entirely as something preliminary and in no way our final view with regard to purposiveness.

Turning, then, to the examination of the earlier Vitalism and its development, we may remark once and for all that our treatment is concerned less with the personal element than with what is typical in the view we may be considering; and that consequently no weight is laid on completeness in the sense of a real history in the narrower sense, while on the other hand a suitable choice of material is of all the greater importance. If in spite of our search for the typical it is impossible for us to make our exposition