**1. Language in Thought and Action**

People who think of themselves as tough-minded and realistic tend to take it for granted that human nature is selfish and that life is a struggle in which only the fittest may survive. According to this philosophy, the basic law by which people must live, in spite of their surface veneer of civilization, is the struggle of the jungle. The “fittest” are those who can bring to the struggle superior force, superior cunning, and superior ruthlessness.

The wide currency of this philosophy of the “survival of the fittest” enables people who act ruthlessly and selfishly, whether in personal rivalries, business competition, or international relations, to assuage their consciences by telling themselves that they are only obeying a law of nature. But a disinterested observer is entitled to ask whether the ruthlessness of the tiger, the cunning of the fox, and obedience to the law of the jungle are, in their *human* applications, actually evidence of *human* fitness to survive. If human beings are to pick up pointers on behavior from the lower animals, are there not animals other than beasts of prey from which we might learn lessons in survival?

We might, for example, look to the rabbit or the deer and define fitness to survive as superior speed in running away from our enemies. We might point to the earthworm or the mole and attribute their fitness to survive to the ability to keep out of sight and out of the way. We might examine the oyster or the housefly and define fitness as the ability to propagate our kind faster than our enemies can eat us up. In *Brave New World*, Aldous Huxley described a world designed by those who would model human beings after the social ants. The world, under the management of a super-brain trust, might be made as well integrated, smooth, and efficient as an ant colony and, as Huxley shows, just about as meaningless. If we simply look to animals in order to define what we mean by “fitness to survive,” there is no limit to the subhuman systems of behavior that can be devised: we may emulate lobsters, dogs, sparrows, parakeets, giraffes, skunks, or the parasitical worms because they have all obviously survived in one way or another. We are still entitled to ask, however, if *human* survival does not revolve around a different kind of fitness from that of the lower animals.

Because of the wide acceptance of competition as the force which drives our world, it is worthwhile to look into the present scientific standing of the phrase “survival of the fittest.” Biologists distinguish between two kinds of struggle for survival. First, there is the *interspecific* struggle, warfare between different species of animals, as between wolves and deer, or men and bacteria. Second, there is the *intraspecific* struggle, warfare among members of a single species, as when rats fight other rats or human beings fight each other. A great deal of evidence in modern biology indicates that those species that have developed elaborate means of intraspecific competition often make themselves unfit for interspecific competition, so that such species are either already extinct or are threatened with extinction at any time. The Peacock’s tail, although useful in sexual competition against other peacocks, is only a hindrance in coping with the environment or competing against other species. The peacock could therefore be wiped out overnight by a sudden change in ecological balance. There is evidence, too, that strength and fierceness in fighting and killing other animals, whether in interspecific or intraspecific competition, have never been enough in themselves to guarantee the survival of a species. Many mammoth reptiles, equipped with magnificent offensive and defensive armaments, ceased millions of years ago to walk the earth.

If we are going to talk about human survival, one of the first things to do, even if we grant that people must fight to live, is to distinguish between those qualities that are useful in fighting the environment and other species (for example, floods, storms, wild animals, insects, or bacteria) and those qualities (such as aggressiveness) that are useful in fighting other people. There are also characteristics important to human survival that do not involve fighting.

The principle that if we don’t hang together we shall all hang separately was discovered by nature long before it was put into words by Benjamin Franklin. Cooperation within a species (and sometimes with other species) is essential to the survival of the most living creatures.

Human beings are *talking* animals. Any theory of human survival that leaves this fact out of account is no more scientific than would be a theory of beaver survival that failed to consider the interesting uses a beaver makes of its teeth and flat tail. Let us see what talking － human communication － means.