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INEQUALITY, LIMITS AND GROWTH FROM A BIOECONOMIC VIEWPOINT

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Differences between individuals or between groups of individuals are not only normal but also unavoidable phenomena in the biological world. But only within the human species do we find, from the dawn of history on, inequalities of a different nature—social inequalities which have little, if anything, to do with the biological differences. As the earliest social philosophers, Plato and Aristotle, observed, these differences are the source of social upheavals, a point confirmed with perfect regularity by history. Social conflicts of all times have hinged on the economic inequality between social classes, yes, even when the battle cry contained no overtly economic slogans. Other species—the termites, the ants and the bees, as common instances—live in society, but, curiously, are free from any social conflict.

In this paper I propose to explain the fundamental reason for this difference, which singles out the human species, and to use that result for bringing to light the real difficulties that have beset all economic programs aimed at removing economic inequalities between social strata or between nations. I also submit that the solution of tensions of all sorts that exist now in the world and those of a still greater nature that await us in the near future require an entirely different approach than that of standard economics, which insists on relying on the price mechanism and financial transfers exclusively. The new approach, as I have proposed to call it, is *bioeconomics*. [Georgescu-Roegen, 1976] The term is intended to make us bear in mind continuously the biological origin of the economic process and thus spotlight the problem of mankind's existence with a limited store of *accessible* resources, unevenly located and unequally appropriated.

I say "accessible" because, although our spaceship floats on a cosmic sea of energy and matter convertible into life necessities, we can use only a speck of that energy and matter. The "escape" plans which we hear now and then seem to ignore the fact that we can

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