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RHP and currency devaluation

In the 4th newsletter Russell speaks of "John Price's resource holding potential (RHP or R)" but, although like other contributors I am an unrepentant neologiser, R is not my term. In fact, one of the advantages of the term R is that it comes from animal behaviour. Behavioral ecologists found it necessary in the equations they developed to describe the evolution of ritual agonistic behavior or pairwise contests. This means that the apparatus for estimating R must exist in the "reptilian brain" of birds and mammals. Not only can reptiles (and fish, of course) estimate their own R and their adversary's R but they must have some mechanism of comparing the two estimates to come up with an estimate of relative R. Therefore we can assume that these calculations are going on in our own brains, well below the level of consciousness, and they are probably going on even when we are in the hedonic mode.

Moving on to Paul Gilbert's point about economics, I think there is a useful analogy between R and a country's financial situation as manifested in the exchange rate of its currency; and the relation between the exchange rate and devaluation helps to illustrate the relation between R and depression. Speculative selling of sterling, say, is the equivalent of catathetic signals, and speculative buying equivalent to anathetic signals. As speculators sell, the value of sterling falls, and the more it falls, the more they sell. This goes on until sterling is devalued, in other words the value of sterling is even further reduced from within. Then speculators stop selling sterling because it is no longer advantageous to do so, and the exchange rate stabilises. Likewise, if other people disparage me with catathetic signals, my R falls until I develop an episode of depression, which consists in part of a further, endogenous, reduction in R. Then others see that my R is so low it is not worth putting me down further and the system becomes stable again.

Even the components of R have analogies in the financial sphere. Part of R is substantive, consisting of real resources like size, strength, skill and allies, and this component is equivalent to real financial resources such as gold reserves. Then there is the ritual component of R which is lowered by catathetic signals and raised by anathetic signals, and this is equivalent to the "confidence" element in the exchange rate mediated by buying and selling. Then there is the endogenous component of R due to mood and this is the equivalent of monetary policy including adjustments of the exchange rate. There is also a situational component of R (such as being on home ground, or being in the right) and this is equivalent to such economic matters as seasonal variations and economic forecasts. In man there is a "group membership" component of R, deriving from our affiliations, and this is equivalent to the linking of exchange rates as in the common market.

We did not have the concept of R when we developed the original pecking equations. It came later when we compared our equations with those of the behavioral ecologists. Once you start thinking about R you realise that we as human beings spend a lot of time and effort adjusting each other's R either upward or downward, and this is what led to the concepts of catathetic and anathetic signals. At first we called them "feel bad signals" and "feel good signals", and it was Michael Chance who suggested we should introduce less informal terms. We considered various possibilities such as aggression, hostility and dominance (although not actually "hostile dominance") but these terms already had meanings and moreover did not express the exact meaning we required, which was that of interpersonal signals which raise and lower R in the recipient. Perhaps we felt like a lady who borrows a nearly new dress from a friend to go to a dance, and then, wondering whether she should use her old accessories, decides no, she will buy new gloves and a new handbag that exactly match her new dress. So we felt borrowing the term resource-holding potential, that it should have new supporting terms that exactly match it.