

SOCIAL DETERMINISM

For the most part, contemporary social scientists think that they can reduce the behavior of individuals to explanations concerning heredity and environment, and that once this is done, nothing further need be said.

Since the factor of heredity is, relatively speaking, a constant, the great emphasis of such social thinking is upon the concept of "the culture". As far as contemporary social science (and here I refer principally to the behaviorist schools) is concerned, their task is done when they have explained, as far as possible, the influence of the social culture upon an individual or any group of individuals.

Such work, excepting its methodological defects, can be both useful and of value in understanding existing societies. However, because of these methodological failures, such thinkers have been led to ignore an equally important field of study: the influence of individuals on the general culture.

The Value of Society

The point is that reductionism in sociology is a fallacious attempt to either reduce individual behavior to general cultural influence or conversely to reduce all of what a person is or does to his own initiative and creativity.

People live in societies because there are great values to be gained from social interaction. People in society gain from commercial trade and even more importantly and fundamentally, they gain from intellectual interaction. No single human being could possibly create on his own the sum of knowledge which has been gained by thousands of millions of minds over a period of thousands of years.

A human infant alone in the wild would surely die in very short order without the aid and comfort of other human beings. And further, even if an infant in such a condition were able to remain alive, he would never develop intellectually or morally; he would never be able to equip himself intellectually on his own for the difficulties which he would encounter.

Considerations such as these make the doctrine of social determinism seem plausible.

The Origin of Culture

Even admitting everything mentioned above to be true, it does not follow that *all* individual behavior is determined by the cultural environment. Great as the importance of culture is, there is still a crucial unanswered question: *Where does human culture come from; how does it arise?*

At one time, the entire human race must have been in a position not very different from that of an infant in the wild. True, people had each other, but this does not explain how culture arose, simply because there was no culture to be transmitted from one person to the next or from one generation to the next.

The only reasonable explanation is that *men* invented culture and since there is no such thing as a collective mind, it is also obvious that some *individual* men must have originally invented each of the elements of culture.

Since people must have invented culture, there is no reason to believe that they do not continue to invent it. Indeed, since people today have inherited all of the knowledge, skills and technique developed in the past, modern man is far better equipped to create cultural innovations than his ancestors.

It then follows that individuals create human cultures and that human cultures can be changed by individuals. If this were not possible, mankind would still be living in the caves and trees from which it originally came.

If it is not true that individuals add to and change human culture, then man must have originally had all of the culture that he was ever going to have. Since this is not the case, it must be possible for any individual to add to or change the cultural environment into which he was born. And if this is true, then it also follows that some human behavior is not determined by the cultural environment. There is another element: individual creativity.

Creativity and Change

This is an important contention. Man *is* a social animal since men live in society for the benefit of social interaction. But in a far more human sense, individuality and creativity pertain to man essentially.

If man is a social animal because of the importance of human culture, and the individual mind is the ultimate source of human culture, it follows that the defining characteristic of men is the ability to create such a culture. Man, then, is essentially a rational animal.

To the extent that any person realizes his potential, i.e., to the extent that any person thinks creatively or critically, his actions are *not* determined by his culture. Rather the opposite is true: The culture is determined by the creative individual.

Even when a person follows the ideas of others, while the existence of those ideas are then a necessary prerequisite for his actions, they are still not sufficient to explain them. Every person is in fact free precisely to the extent that he thinks for himself.

Some, however, argue that *even the individual choice to think* is determined by the cultural environment. But if this proposition is assumed to be true, all sorts of absurdities follow.

Fallacies of Determinism

If all actions are totally determined by prior factors, it follows that no one ever does anything because they think it is right. For instance, the person who proposed the theory of determinism has not done so because he critically examined all of the arguments and evidence. Rather he has done so simply because he *had to*—he was determined to say just what he said.

Similarly, if the theory of determinism is taken seriously, it follows that no one ever says anything because it is true and thus it would be impossible to know what was true and what was not. The theory of determinism thus contradicts the necessary conditions for the truth of any theory: If it is assumed to be true, then it follows that it is impossible to know that it is true!

This does not mean, however, that human actions are exempt in some way from the law of causality. It simply means that man, the rational animal, is the ultimate cause of all human action. And it is obviously true that only when man is the cause of his own actions is it reasonable to say that he is free.

SIL DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLE

Adopted October 1969

As Advocates of Individual Liberty We Affirm:

That every person has an inalienable right to their own life, liberty and property;

That the only proper use of force is in retaliation against those who violate human rights;

That the basic violation of human rights consists of the initiation or the threat of the initiation of force against the individual;

That all proper social organization can only be a consequence of voluntary association between individuals;

That the only economic system consistent with human prosperity and happiness is laissez-faire capitalism;

That the ideologies and instrumentalities of coercive collectivism are the basic threat to human rights and the existence of moral human societies;

And that both moral individuals and moral societies have the obligation to act in their own rational self-interest to protect themselves from those who seek to coercively control, direct and enslave them.

With the apostles of coercion increasingly predominant in the councils of man, it is the duty of all those who value their life, liberty and property to take appropriate action—intellectual and social—to preserve and extend their freedom.

We as libertarians resolve to resist all forms of involuntary collectivism and all programs and activities of government which violate our rights and attempt to take from us the ability to set our own goals and to determine our own destiny.

We work for the day when all individuals are free, and we look forward to a society of peace, plenty and freedom where the individual's rights are truly politically inalienable. As advocates of reason and liberty we seek and will settle for no less than:

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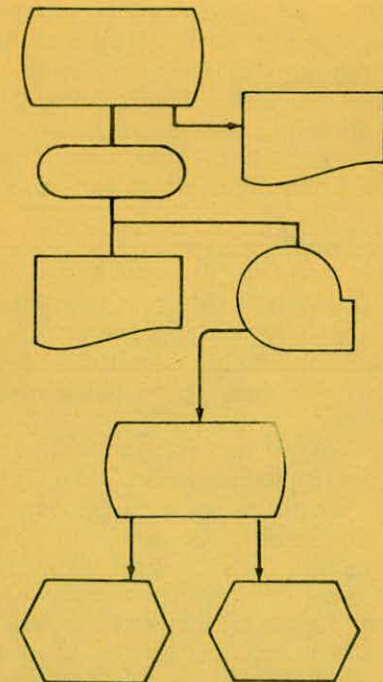
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