THE PROBLEM OF DETERMINISM: A SOCIOLOGICAL SOLUTION

Contemplating the possibility of determinism, the social philosopher, Isaiah Berlin, wrote:

> . . . the changes in the whole of our language, our moral terminology, our attitudes toward one another, our views of history, of society, and of everything else will be too profound to be even adumbrated. The concepts of praise and blame, innocence and guilt and individual responsibility . . . are but a small element in the structure, which would collapse or disappear. If social and psychological determinism were established as an accepted truth, our world would be transformed more radically than was the teleological world of the classical and middle ages by the triumphs of mechanistic principles or those of natural selection. Our words – our modes of speech and thought – would be transformed in literally unimaginable ways; the notions of choice, of responsibility, of freedom, are so deeply embedded in our outlook that our new life, as creatures in a world genuinely lacking in these concepts, can, I should maintain, be conceived by us only with the greatest difficulty.[1]

Although written perhaps with a touch of hyperbole, this quote indicates the seriousness with which some philosophers have viewed the problem of determinism, a concern which has not abated in the last twenty years since the above passage was written. The number of publications on the issue has if anything increased, partly due to the growing success of the natural sciences, particularly in the fields of genetics and human biology. However, in spite of the proliferation of writing on the subject, one leading authority – J.O. Urmson – has concluded, that "no solution to these problems has been found which commands anything approaching general consent."[2]

The nub of the problem has been very succinctly summarized by J.R. Lucas in his book, *The Freedom of the Will.*

> We have a profound conviction of freedom. We know we are free. Yet when we think of ourselves from a scientific point of view, we do not see how we can be free. It would be a denial of science, we feel, to make man an exception to the universal laws of nature, and say that although everything else could be explained in terms of cause and effect, men were different, and were mysteriously exempt from the sway of natural laws.[3]

From the vast literature on the subject, and from everyday experience, it does seem that the majority of people do have a sense that both determinism and free-will are true, in spite of what appears to be a fundamental contradiction between them. The aim of this paper is to put forward a sociological resolution to this apparent contradiction. This will necessarily only touch on topics of great complexity, and will cover material from a number of disciplines, without being able to do full justice to any of them. The problem has of course had profound impact on the development of the social sciences, starting with the application of Kant's distinction between the "laws of freedom" and "laws of nature" in the nineteenth century. This led to the creation of the two separate disciplines

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[1] Isiah Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty,* 1969, p. 113.

[2] J.O. Urmson and Jonathon Rie (eds.), *The Concise Encyclopaedia of Western Philosophy*, 1989, p. 113.

[3] J.R. Lucas, *The Freedom of the Will,* 1970, p. 1.

Geisteswissenschaften and *Naturwissenschaften,* phenemonological and positivistic sociology respectively. Additionally there have been a number of sociologists who have attempted to integrate these two perspectives, including Max Weber and Talcott Parsons. This proliferation of approaches has generated much controversy.

Determinism first became an issue in its modern form in the seventeenth century, although even then, Hobbes could write that the problem had already given rise to "vast and insoluble volumes".[4] Although it had been discussed in fragmentary form by some of the early Greek philosophers – particularly Epicurus – its first major presentation was in a religious context. A number of early Christian thinkers tried to reconcile the paradox of an omnipotent and omniscient God, who both predetermined the fate of the universe – including that of man – and created at the same time the capacity for free-will.[5] This led to numerous controversies in Christian theology, culminating in a polarisation of doctrine between the Calvinist belief in predestination, and the free-will Arminianism of the Quakers and Universal Baptists.

The success of the natural sciences in astronomy and other areas, led Descartes to adopt a mechanistic view of the material universe, which inevitably raised the question of the application of this mechanical principle to man himself. Descartes' solution to this problem was his well-known dualism, between mind and matter. Mind – or consciousness – was the basis of an "I" that was capable of acting freely, independently of the laws of nature. The body was seen by Descartes as a part of the material world, raising the issue of the relationship between mind and body – a problem he never successfully resolved. This dualism was rooted in Greek and Christian thinking, and Descartes' "mind" was the notion of the soul written in new language. The major difficulty faced by Descartes was how could the non-material substance of mind interact with and influence the material body? Descartes argued that the mind was equivalent to an internal pilot guiding the machinery of the body, operating in the pineal gland, the seat of the mind-body interaction. The unsatisfactory nature of this solution was clear even to Descartes himself, but he defined the problem in terms familiar to us today, largely because of his understanding of the principle of causality as applied to the natural sciences.[6]

As a part of this dualism, Descartes postulated a thinking "I", a self which was the origin and basis of all free action. He was influenced by Aristotle's notion of an "originating principle of action", capable of generating its own actions. This idea of an "originator" has been key in all the discussions on free-will and determinism; most defenders of free-will have argued for a human capacity for originating totally free action, and rooted this capacity in a "self", "mind", "person" or other form of individual identity. All these concepts arose historically out of the notion of an individual soul, which was central to both Greek philosophy and Christian theology. The soul was an essential and substantial spiritual self, created by God – and thus lying outside of the realm of nature, with its deterministic laws. In practice, there was a great deal of controversy about the nature of the soul, both in Greek and Christian thinking, a subject which we will return to later.

With the rise of science, it became necessary to substitute secular for religious language. The concepts of the mind and the self replaced that of the

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[4] Quoted in Ted Honderich, *The Consequences of Determinism,* 1990, p. 84.

[5] B.A.O. Williams, 'Freedom and the Will', in D.F. Pears (ed.), *Freedom of the Will,* 1963, pp. 5, 6.

[6] John Cottingham (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Descartes,* 1992.

soul, although they involved the use of the same basic assumptions: that the self/mind was a simple, unitary essential "I", capable of initiating free action. This change in language did not resolve the basic contradiction – the mind/body problem – and in fact raised new difficulties by postulating the self as an empirical reality subject to scientific scrutiny. It was Hume who first rigorously examined the concepts of the self and mind from an empirical point of view. From an analysis of mind, he concluded that "what we call a *mind*, is nothing but a heap or collection of different perceptions, united together by certain relations, and supposed though falsely, to be endowed with a perfect simplicity and identity."[7] Similarly, with the concept of self, he argued that "when I turn my reflection on *myself,* I never can perceive the *self* without some one or more perceptions, nor can I ever perceive anything but perceptions."[8] He criticized Descartes for his assumption that the mind was a substance of unitary identity, pointing out that "everything that exists, is particular: and therefore it must be our several particular perceptions that compose the mind."[9] A similar conclusion has been reached in our own day by Ryle who has argued that the conventional notion of the mind/self is nothing but the "ghost in the machine".[10]

Hume and subsequent thinkers saw that when the mind and self were analysed empirically they dissolved as unitary entities, and became sets of highly complex particular perceptions lacking any observable unity. Hume based his conclusions on subjective introspection, but an objective neurological and biological analysis involves equal difficulties for the concepts of a unitary mind and self. The same conclusion applies to existing sociological and social-psychological analyses of the mind and self; for example, in Mead's work, both mind and self arise out of a process of social interaction, and originate through a pattern of role taking and linguistic communication. The self is seen as being constituted as an "I", defined as the spontaneous, unique individual, and the "Me" which is a reflection of the "Generalized Other", the composite of all social expectations. When Mead's work is examined in detail, it turns out that the "Me" and "Generalized Other" are not unitary phenomena, but are concepts reflecting specific roles that individuals enter in to, giving multiple sets of self-definitions.[11] It is for this and other reasons that contemporary philosophers – even those sympathetic to arguments of indeterminism – have referred to the idea of a self, ego or mind as "dreadful and bizarre" and "extravagant". This scepticism about the self has reached a point where a current *Dictionary of Philosophy* has referred to it as "an obsolescent technical term."[12]

Hume was aware of the practical difficulties that ensued from this dissolution of the unitary self and mind. He had argued that causality could not be validated through inductive analysis: a perceived regularity could not guarantee the existence of a causal pattern outside acts of perception. His way of dealing with all these problems was his well-known resort to everyday life: "It is not . . . reason, which is the guide of life, but custom."[13] Elsewhere he appealed to nature as a practical guide: "Nature has . . . doubtless esteemed it an affair of too great importance, to be trusted to our uncertain reasonings and

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[7] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* [Book 1], 1962, p. 258.

[8] Ibid., p. 329.

[9] Ibid., p. 349.

[10] Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, 1949, pp. 15, 16.

[11] See George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self and Society,* 1934.

[12] Anthony Flew (ed.), *A Dictionary of Philosophy,* 1979, p. 299.

[13] Hume, *op.cit.*, p. 343.

speculations."[14] Hume himself thus was able to accept the disturbing consequences of his own analysis with some equanimity, but his contemporaries were less happy with his conclusions. In particular, Kant concluded that Hume's work had undermined the philosophical basis of all knowledge, including the foundations of morality and individual freedom.

Kant's reaction to the problems raised by Hume was to resort to the two realms defined by Descartes, but to refashion this duality in a much more subtle and complex way. He postulated a phenomenal world of experience, not unlike Hume's, which was subject to the empirical laws of science and the principles of causality. All that could be observed and experienced was a part of this realm of nature, but in order for knowledge of this realm to be valid, Kant argued that it was necessary to postulate certain *a priori* categories of knowledge which could only be understood through the faculty of reason. Reason is the ultimate grounding and source of all continuity in human existence: "Reason is present in all the actions of men at all times and under all circumstances, and is always the same."[15] It was through reason that man could find a point of fixture, a principle invoked as a bastion against the flux of experience that Hume had discovered in his philosophy. Almost as important for Kant was the *a priori* category of freedom, that lay at the core of his moral ideas. All these categories were of a transcendental nature, and could not be derived from experience or empirical evidence. It was impossible according to Kant to know anything about the metaphysical content of these transcendental categories, as they could only be apprehended by rational understanding and not through empirical experience. The ultimate basis for all the categories was *practical necessity*: without them, it was impossible to establish a philosophical basis for either knowledge or moral freedom.[16]

Kant had succeeded in removing some of the more obvious difficulties in Descartes' dualism, but at the cost of transferring the ultimate realities – noumenal self, reason and freedom ("things-in-themselves") – to the empty realm of the transcendental. Although Kant's solution was radically different to Hume's, they both shared an appeal to practical necessity as a final resting point, although for Kant it was a formal part of his philosophy, whereas for Hume it was a form of almost perplexed resignation. Kant's postulate of the two realms of "nature" and "freedom" was associated with appropriate forms of causation – natural necessity and the causality of freedom. All empirical human acts were subject to the laws of nature, and according to Kant there were no exceptions to this rule. All acts could however be viewed from both standpoints, so that an act was both naturally caused, while at the same time originating from a free choice of the noumenal self.[17] The former was empirically observable, but the latter could only be abstractly postulated through transcendental reason.

Kant's solution to the problem of determinism – the creation of two realms – was unsatisfactory on a number of accounts. Firstly, it was a transcendental solution, and therefore had an obscure, remote quality. Secondly, and most importantly, the noumenal self which was the originating source of freedom, was a non-empirical postulate, and therefore subject to the same objection as Descartes original formulation. Kant had initially seen the self as "a

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[14] Ibid, p. 238.

[15] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 1933, p. 478.

[16] Ibid, p. 343; Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 1956, pp. 5, 6.

[17] Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, pp. 464, 467.

spiritual, enduring, incorruptible being"[18] – the soul – but later in his philosophy was content to postulate it merely as a transcendental category. Kant defined the soul as having the following qualities: "l. The soul is *substance.* 2. As regards its quality it is *simple.* 3. As regards the different times in which it exists, it is numerically identical, that is, *unity* (not plurality). 4. It is relation to *possible* objects in space."[19] The fourth point was necessary to deal with the problem of the soul interacting with the empirical world of nature, but it was in effect self-contradictory: Kant had defined the noumenal soul as being outside space and time, so how was it possible for it to influence the material world of nature? Kant's retreat into the transcendental postulate does not in any way solve this problem, and the formulation has failed to satisfy most philosophers. However, I will be arguing later, using sociological arguments, that it is possible to restate Kant's thesis in a much more acceptable and valid form.

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Most philosophers writing on determinism have recognized that it is not a theory which can be proved true or false, but rather is a set of heuristic assumptions making possible the practice of science, at least in its classical form. It is impossible to falsify its premises, as any falsification of a particular hypothesis or theory, leads to further attempts to give causal explanations of the phenomenon in question. It is the source of the fruitfulness of science, that it never abandons its quest for explanation on the grounds of a particular failure. It is the basis of its aggressiveness, laying claim to all areas of experience, and given the hypothetical nature of scientific truth, it is unlikely to ever lose this dynamic quality, at least in the foreseeable future.

The reason why determinism has been taken so seriously is not because its major thesis has been proved to be true, but rather because of its successes in the natural sciences. In particular, the spectacular results in research in genetics and human biology in the last thirty or forty years, has given rise to the unease expressed by Berlin and quoted at the beginning of the paper. The explanations given by biology and genetics are in classical causal form, e.g. some of the recent work on genetic diseases such as muscular dystrophy, specifically defining muscular degeneration as an effect of a particular defective gene. In sociological terms, deterministic assumptions can be said to be a "functional pre-requisite" for the practice of classical science, a pre-requisite which is in the form of fundamental premises rather than testable hypotheses.

The major difficulty with this line of argument is the emergence of quantum mechanics in twentieth century physics. This is subject of much controversy and obscurity, so that Feynman, one of the leading contributors to the development of relativistic quantum field theory, could write, "nobody really understands quantum field theory."[20] Physicists have been unable to agree amongst themselves whether or not quantum mechanics is fundamentally indeterminist, as Bohr and Heisenberg, two of the authors of the Copenhagen Statement, argued, or whether as Einstein believed "God does not play dice with the universe". The dispute continues unabated, and a number of physicists have continued to search for "hidden variables" in order to give a complete

[18] Keith Ward, *The Development of Kant's View of Ethics,* 1972, p. 72.

[19] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 1933, pp. 330. 331.

[20] Quoted in Euan Squires, *The Mystery of the Quantum World,* 1986, p. 122.

deterministic account of quantum mechanics. It is clearly beyond the competence of an outsider to comment on what is such highly specialized and difficult work.

However, a number of scholars have pointed out that the problems of interpreting the behaviour of sub-atomic phenomena do not appear to apply to the macroscopic level of reality.[21] And this is ironically confirmed by Heisenberg: in describing the death of a physicist colleague, he stated that "I cannot doubt but that the beginning of his illness coincided with those unhappy days in which he lost hope in the speedy completion of our theory of elementary particles. I do not, of course, presume to judge which was the cause and which the effect."[22] So in practice, Heisenberg was forced to resort to deterministic language when talking about his own experience. As indicated by Hume, we assume the principle of determinism applies to our everyday lives, particularly in its physical aspect. And it is for this reason that the problem of determinism will not go away, in spite of the emergence of quantum mechanics in contemporary physics.

The success of biology and neurology as disciplines in recent decades has led to a great deal of discussion of the mind/ body problem, focussing on the brain and its relationship to consciousness. This has become a matter of some controversy, but it is universally agreed that there is a very close relationship between brain and mental activity. The most coherent and consistent explanation of this relationship is that known as identity theory. There are a number of variants, but I will confine myself to a discussion of the form which I believe can lay the foundations for a solution to the mind/ body problem. The starting point is Frege's doctrine that certain terms of language have both reference and sense. The most familiar example is the relationship between the Morning Star and the Evening Star; they are in fact the same star (having the same reference) but because they are perceived at different times (morning and evening), they have a different sense. In other words, the same phenomenon is described in different language because it was viewed from different perspectives, the identity of the two stars not being realized when the two separate names were coined.

Similarly, it is argued by identity theorists that brain processes and consciousness are identical, the one being viewed from the outside, the other from inside. Consciousness is the process of the brain – it is merely that which is experienced from the inside. The term coined by the analytical behaviourists – privileged access – is germane to this formulation; the person in question has a privileged access to the private experience of consciousness because it can only be experienced from the inside. From the outside, this experience will be described in neurological and biological terms, and so we have the language of the subject (inner consciousness) and that of the objective observer (neurology and biology) – both referring to the same, identical phenomena.[23]

This deceptively simple formula raises a host of problems, but I believe all these can be solved through careful analysis. Firstly, the most simple types of identity – for example pain – can clearly be seen to refer to the same phenomena. A toothache arising from caries caused through bacteriological infection and transmitting information to the brain (biology and neurology) is subjectively experienced as pain (consciousness). The first is an objective explanation in causal language, made by the outside observer; the second is a subjective account of consciousness made by the person undergoing the biological experience from

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[21] See for example Ted Honderich, *Mind and Brain,* 1990, p. 105.

[22] Werner Heisenberg, *Physics and Beyond,* 1971, p. 236.

[23] See Edgar Wilson, *The Mental as* Physical, 1979 and D.M. Armstrong, *A Materialist Theory of Mind*, 1968.

the inside – and of course, they refer to the identical phenomena. Similarly with hunger and sexual desire (subjective experiences) – they are identical to certain physiological and neurological states which can be defined objectively and scientifically. Acts of cognition likewise can be readily analysed in this way; for example, a person opening his eyes from sleep and seeing an object (a picture) – this can be described either as: 1. an act of consciousness or 2., a physiological movement of the eyes and the activation of certain brain processes. (Patterns of sleep, dreaming etc have been analysed through encephalograph measurements.) Both these descriptions refer to an identical event, merely using different language, depending on perspective.

These examples do not pose major problems for identity theory, but there is more difficulty with subjective phenomena such as intentions, purposes and facts of choice. Identity theory works well with obvious physical events, but becomes more difficult to accept with subtle and complex phenomena of a less obviously physical nature. There are two reasons for this: 1. The difficulty of locating the phenomena in question or, 2. The problem of giving any kind of coherent explanation of them. Although it is not possible to precisely locate a subjectively described phenomenon such as (say) an intention, it is clear that it must be located in principle in the brain, even it is not possible (at least not on current knowledge) to identify it with a specific neurological process. Empirically, we can address this point by asking, if not in the brain, where else would it be located? And we may add from a scientific point of view, if it is located in the brain, it must necessarily be a physical phenomenon.

The second point is more serious. One of the major criticisms of identity theory is that it does not do justice to "the indispensability of the mental".[24] It is unclear exactly what this phrase refers to – possibly the sheer subjective conviction of consciousness and mental experience. This itself is no objection to identity theory, but it does contain an implication which is valid. "The indispensability of the mental" implies a Cartesian insistence on consciousness as the basis of knowledge and individual identity, with the tacit assumption that it is the foundation of a self capable of moral choice. Most accounts of identity theory, are unable to give a coherent explanation of what we might call the moral dimension of experience, so that for example, one of the most persuasive recent expositions of the theory, virtually eliminates moral choices and intentions from its analysis.[25] We are thus returned to the central dilemma of this paper: how can a deterministic account of human behaviour – such as the identity theory – be reconciled with notions of free-will?

The answer is contained within identity theory itself. There are two ways of describing events: one in the language of the subject, the other in the language of the objective observer. This has most eloquently been summarized by J.R.Lucas:

> Free-will belongs to the agent's language, determinism's to the spectator's. I, as an agent, perform some actions freely: he, as a spectator, may predict events correctly. But I am not he; to be an active participator is not the same as to be an observer from the sidelines, and actions and events are logically very different; and therefore . . . no conflict can arise between my belief as an agent that I am acting freely and his certainty, as a spectator, that events will follow their pre-established course; since the

[24] Honderich, *Mind and Brain*, p. 105.
[25] Wilson, *op.cit.*

> key concepts of the opposition must be formulated in different languages, no contradiction between them can arise.[26]

Lucas was writing from the perspective of analytical philosophy, with its emphasis on "linguistic games", and the function of language regarding the activities of separate linguistic communities. Kant's distinction between the phenomenal and noumenal self is very similar, referring to the separate realms of natural necessity and freedom. None of these accounts give a satisfactory explanation of the existence of these separate modes of experience, but they all agree that they are based on *practical necessity.* For Hume it was the inevitability of nature and communal living; for Kant it was the necessity of practical reason; and for Wittgenstein and his followers, it was the functions of language for social life. Kant had summarized his philosophy when he wrote: "Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe ... the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me."[27] This way of viewing the problem points us in the direction of a correct solution to the problem of determinism: the existence of two separate *social roles* – that of the *objective observer* and that of the *moral self.*

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There are innumerable and conflicting definitions of social role in the literature, but it can be defined as a set of normative expectations (obligations and rights) structured around a particular social position. In modern society, it is virtually impossible to escape the tensions which arise out of the above two role perspectives. This is not only because of the ubiquity of activities influenced by the natural sciences, but also because of the growth of bureaucratic and legal procedures which give rise to a rationalising perspective linked with the objective attitude. In law it is now common to appeal to deterministic criteria in mitigating the consequences of criminal behaviour; the law is of course the main area in which the notion of personal responsibility is activated, but appeals to mitigating medical and psychological handicaps have become increasingly common in the last few decades. The debate about capital punishment illustrates this theme: those who view it as a deterrent see it in term of objective consequences, whereas those demanding revenge and punishment are adopting the moral and subjective perspective. In legal situations, whether to define behaviour morally or medically is largely a question of choosing the language and assumptions of the two role attitudes. There is no intrinsic or technical criteria for making this choice, it must by the very different nature of the two perspectives, be a matter determined by other criteria: sympathy, social position, power and the ability to manipulate others to give favourable definitions.

The attitudes and behaviour in the two role situations will be fundamentally different: in one sense, we can say that the person fulfilling these two roles will feel him or herself to be a different person in the two situations. The two roles will elicit distinctive perceptions, emotions and physical responses, and if required to describe role behaviour, will generate different languages.

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[26] Lucas, *op.cit.*, p. 17.

[27] Emmanuael Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason,* 1783, Conclusion, [Translated by Lewis White Beck]

Of course, there are many considerations other than role behaviour in these situations, and in any one instance there will inevitably be a mixture of role responses. Social roles are clusters of ideal, normative expectations, which in practice are hardly ever enacted in pure form. There are innumerable other variables which determine any one type of behaviour, but for our purposes, it is sufficient to note that the distinction between objective observer and moral self is both logically valid and empirically fruitful. The role of the moral self is however more significant than that of objective observer, and is the most fundamental role in human society, with universal applicability. We are here dealing with matters of great complexity, and it will only be possible to touch on the most significant features of the moral self.

One complication in the analysis of the objective observer and the moral self roles is the prevalence of magical thinking in the earliest stages of human cultural evolution, which inhibited objective realism as well as complicated the analysis of the moral self. For example, James Morrill, who spent thirteen years living with the aborigines of Queensland in the middle part of the nineteenth century, described some of their beliefs as follows

> The moon *(werboonburra*), they say is a human being, like themselves, and comes down on the earth, and they sometimes meet it in some of their fishing excursions. They say one tribe throws it up and it gradually rises and then comes down again, when another tribe catches it to save it from hurting itself . . . They think the falling stars indicate the direction of danger, and that comets are the ghosts or spirits of some of their tribe, who have been killed at a distance from them, working their way back again . . . They think all the heavenly bodies are under their control; and that when there is an eclipse, some of their tribe hide it [the sun] with a sheet of bark to frighten the rest . . . But they are very uneasy during its continuance. They pick up a piece of grass and bite it, making a mumbling noise, keeping their eyes steadily fixed on it till it passes over, when they become easy again and can go to sleep comfortably. They think they have power over the rain *(durgun*) to make it come and go as they like.[28]

There is no doubt that magic was ubiquitous in tribal societies, although a number of anthropologists have pointed out that a belief in magic was limited by the existence of economic technology, which ensured a degree of objectivity. However, the existence of magic affected both the practice of objective realism and the attribution of personal responsibility. We are told of the Australian aborigines that "they do not suppose that any one dies from natural causes, but [always] from human agencies", with a number of examples given of individuals punished and killed on account of the alleged use of magic.[29] Additionally, magic was frequently used as a mode of punishment or retaliation. If as Levy-Bruhl and others have argued, the ubiquity of magic eclipsed the distinction between individual self and a universal, spiritual and mystical reality, personal responsibility would be impossible. In practice, all tribal peoples do make such distinctions, so that for example, as Evans-Pritchard tells us of the Azande, "if you tell a lie, or commit adultery or steal ... you cannot elude punishment by saying that you were bewitched."[30] Tribal peoples do universally ascribe spiritual qualities to the self, but it is the necessity of individual responsibility which limits

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[28] James Morrill, *Sketch of a Residence Among the Aboriginals of Northern Australia,* 1864, pp. 19, 20.

[29] B. Malinowski, *Magic, Science and Religion,* 1948.

[30] E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*, 1937, p. 74.

the extent of magical belief, and, along with technology, is responsible for the beginnings of objective realism.

However, some anthropologists – in particular Levy-Bruhl – have argued that no distinction was made in tribal societies between the individual self and other subjectively defined realities, and an authority of the stature of Marcel Mauss, has concluded that a full sense of the individual self only arose in the modern period. This is a matter of some controversy, and Mauss, who was very familiar with the anthropological evidence, qualified this conclusion by writing that

> In no way do I maintain that there has ever been a tribe, a language, in which the term 'I', 'me' *(je, moi)* . . . has never existed, or that it has not expressed *something* clearly represented . . . it is plain, particularly to us, that there has never existed a human being who has not been aware, not only of his body, but also at the same time of his individuality, both spiritual and physical.[31]

Steven Lukes has pointed out, if we leave aside more arcane theoretical considerations, there is a parallel in "everyday conceptions of the person", in our own culture and those ranging from classical China through to tribal Africa.[32] The notion of an individual self is universal, and is as important and significant in tribal societies, as it is elsewhere. Reactions to death of a particular individual indicate that people in tribal societies display as much, if not more, grief than do modern Europeans. However, many tribal societies appear to confer less status on very young children and to some extent the very elderly, and therefore less importance is attached to loss of life in these categories than with other persons.

The pervasiveness and ubiquity of the concept of self requires special explanation. Our starting point must be the analysis of practical necessity, or to use a sociological term, functionality. Functionalism has been criticized because of the teleological nature of much of its argument, as well as its conservative ideological bias. It is however possible to restate to the tenets of classical functionalism so as to overcome these objections. The seeds of this restatement are to be found in a passage by one of the founders of modern functionalism, Wilbert E. Moore:

> The explicit introduction of system survival as a test of necessary consequences of human action and the structural mechanisms for producing those results perforce appealed to an evolutionary perspective. The argument must essentially be that various behaviours appear in human aggregates, some of which support or improve the viability of those aggregates and others that do not. Through natural selection those that contribute to system operation survive, and others are rejected. The same argument can be made for whole societies, whether in competition with other societies or simply coping with the challenges of the nonhuman environment. In the early explicit formulations of what came to be called "functional requisite analysis" this evolutionary assumption was not articulated.[33]

This formulation of functionalism places it squarely in the Darwinian tradition, removing its teleological aspect, and allowing for objective causal analysis. Socially structured behaviour is seen as analogous to a biological structure; its existence is explained through natural selection, so that only those behaviours which enable social

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[31] Marcel Mauss, 'A Category of the Human Mind: the Notion of the Person, the Notion of the Self", in Michael Carrithers et.al. (eds.), *The Category of the Person,* 1985, p. 3.

[32] Steven Lukes 'Conclusion', in Carrithers, *op.cit.*, p. 297.

[33] William E. Moore, 'Functionalism', in Tom Bottomore and Robert Nisbet (eds.), *A History of Sociological* Analysis, 1978, p. 342.

systems – and their individual members – to survive, will be selected. This process of selection is independent of human intention or meaning, although obviously human beings can rationally assess the probability of a particular mode of action ensuring their survival. The latter is associated with the role of the objective observer, which also ensures the survival of both individuals and societies. But much human social behaviour will not fall within this rational category, and this will include aspects of the role of the moral self. Given the non-rationality of much of the behaviour associated with this role, its universality must be explained in terms of its capacity to meet certain fundamental functional pre-requisites.

This approach can be linked with the revival of interest in cultural evolution, as well as the more recent development by Popper and others of evolutionary epistemology. Popper and Eccles have touched on the evolution of consciousness and the self as follows:

> What is usually described as the unity of the self, or the unity of conscious experience, is most likely a partial consequence of biological individuation – of the evolution of organisms with inbuilt instincts for the survival of the individual organism. It seems that consciousness, and even reason, have evolved very largely owing to their survival value for the individual organism . . . The activity of the self, or the consciousness of self leads us to the question of what it does; of what function it performs, and so to a biological approach to the self.[34]

Popper and Eccles are undoubtedly correct in emphasizing the biological basis of the self, and it is the physical separateness of individuals which forms the primary condition for an individual self. It is this biological fact which makes individuals crucial for all social structures and their functioning; the individual necessarily is the focus of all social action, and it is this fact which lays the foundation for the universality of the individual self. Popper has quite correctly pointed out the need to look at the functions of the self to fully understand the phenomenon, but his biological emphasis only provides an initial statement of the problem, and what is required to complete the analysis is a sociological perspective.

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The reference to the unity of the self must be our starting point. All the concepts that have been discussed in this regard – self, soul, ego, personal identity – are essentially the same phenomenon. It is only with such a category and social role, that continuity and consistency in thinking is possible, and this forms the basis of "a thinking, willing I . . . an essence that 'posits' its own acts, 'generates' and possesses psychic realities as its very own and is responsible for them . . . the abiding and supporting principle of all . . . conscious life."[35] The fundamental function of such a unified self is that it enables individuals to be held responsible for their actions, and thus forms the basis of all moral and social action. A self which can be held responsible for its actions constitutes the indispensible functional pre-requisite for all normative and social behaviour, and without meeting this pre-requisite, it would be impossible for any group or social system

[34] Karl Popper and John Eccles, *The Self and Its* Brain, 1977, pp. 108, 114.
[35] Walter Brugger and Kenneth Baker, *Philosophical Dictionary,* 1976, p. 381.

to survive. It is thus for this reason that the concept of a private self or soul is found in all societies, for without this concept and primary social role, no society could continue to exist. The moral self is a social role which creates the coherent and organized set of attitudes which constitutes individual identity, the ego and the self. The major obligation attached to the role is the personal responsibility which underpins all normatively regulated social life; the major right, is the capacity for personal freedom. In order to be held personally responsible, it is necessary to have the freedom to enact that responsibility.

The anthropologist, Paul Radin, has perhaps most clearly recognized the importance of personal responsibility and freedom in tribal societies:

> Now the concept of *person* in aboriginal society involves a number of definite things. This is not due to any mystical or philosophical interest on the natives' part, but flows from the purely practical consideration that they wish to know with whom they are dealing and the nature of the person's responsibility. In civilizations where a belief in reincarnation, ancestor-identification, transformation, multiple souls, etc., is involved in the concept of personality, the nature of an individual's responsibility for a given act is of paramount importance.[36]

This tacitly concludes that language used is secondary to the social reality; the assumption of individual responsibility exists even where it is not articulated explicitly.

According to Radin, although it is social groups who have formal legal responsibility in tribal society, it is individuals who in practice are held responsible, particularly for those most highly personal of activities, murder and marriage.[37] These are the most dramatic examples, but in fact, the concept of personal responsibility is ubiquitous, as without it, even minor forms of social life would be impossible. This can be illustrated through Colin Turnball's study of the Mbuti pygmies. Turnball describes an incident in camp late one evening:

Moke, very quietly, and talking as if only to the hunters but never lowering his arm or taking his eyes off Asuk, said, "That is a completely bad man. I have been watching and I have seen with my eyes, and my spirit (*roho*) makes me speak. He makes noise all the time, and he is the cause of all the noise in the camp. I would like to throw him out forever." [38]

Although responsibility is individual, the quality and context of it is different in tribal societies to what it is in modern European societies. Radin tells us

> That there is a "spiritual" side to a wrongdoer's state of mind is obvious but no feeling of sin, in the Hebrew-Christian meaning of the term, is present. All that is demanded is the realization that an individual has offended against the harmony of communal life. His punishment means the harmony has been re-established . . . Human beings can disport themselves as they will. If they are ridiculous, they will be laughed at; if they commit crimes, they will be punished and then, if they wish, they may commit some more.[39]

This should not be read to imply that there is a lack of internalisation of moral codes amongst tribal peoples; Radin specifically tells us while discussing a myth,

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[36] Paul Radin, *The World of Primitive Man*, 1953, p. 114.
[37] Ibid, p. 290.
[38] Colin Turnball, *The Forest People,* 1961.
[39] Radin, *op.cit.*, pp. 249, 257.

in which a man kills his wife and child during a period of famine, that "he judges and punishes himself. It must be so if society is to persist."[40] Individual responsibility is found in all societies, it is its quality and context which differs: tribal societies emphasize social harmony to a much greater degree than do contemporary European ones. Radin probably over-estimates the degree of individual responsibility in such societies; even in marriage and murder where he believes it to have been particularly strong, it was often the family or wider social unit which took responsibility, and certain categories of individual – for example women – lacked the power and personal independence necessary for the exercise of full responsibility. However, Radin is probably correct in his conclusion that all individuals, with full adult status, were held responsible for their actions in the last resort.

This transition from the status of childhood to that of adulthood is universal, and is linked to becoming a responsible subject:

> Full status was conferred on an individual at puberty and we all know the elaborateness of these rites and their ubiquity. A person was then truly functioning sociologically. He was responsible for his actions; he had to face life independently, and he could marry and raise children.[41]

To hold someone responsible for their actions implies that the person in question is capable of independent action. It has been generally recognized that this form of voluntary action must entail an absence of physical constraint, and also an assumption of personal causality. The term causality is not used here in the classical mechanical sense, but rather with the primary meaning given to it by Aristotle: an attribution of motivation to independent agents. Nevertheless, we can say historically, the assumption of personal causality laid the foundation for the eventual development of objective realism, with its complete separation of subject and object.

This separation was only fully achieved with the development of modern science, which was a part of that process of rationalization which eclipsed magical thinking, at least in the mainstream of European culture. This has led to a crystallisation of the modern self, with the virtual elimination of the projected subjectivity which was involved in animism and magic. But this in no way diminishes the underlying continuity of the moral self found throughout human history, based on the necessity of individual responsibility. Perhaps the greatest difference between the tribal and modern self is the extension of the category of personhood to very young children. In some tribal societies, young children are not considered full persons, and are sometimes killed during periods of great scarcity, through infanticide and other practices. This is consistent with our definition of a person in terms of responsibility, which in turn is linked to a capacity for practical action in economic and other spheres. The extension of personhood to young children is itself a sociological phenomenon, but that takes us away from our main concern, which is the analysis of the role of the moral self and its relationship to determinism.

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[40] Ibid, p. 330.
[41] Ibid, p. 80.

In 1962, Peter Strawson wrote, "Freedom and Resentment", a paper which initiated the modern debate about the problem of determinism. It is impossible to do justice to the complexity and subtlety of Strawson's argument with a brief summary, but an indication of its central theme is given in the following quotation:

> What I want to contrast is the attitude (or range of attitudes) of involvement or participation in a human relationship, on the one hand, and what might be called the objective attitude (or range of attitudes) to another human being, on the other. Even in the same situation, I must add, they are not altogether *exclusive* of each other; but they are profoundly opposed to *each other.* To adopt the objective attitude to another human being is to see him, perhaps, as an object of social policy; as a subject for what, in a wide range of sense, might be called treatment; as something certainly to be taken account, perhaps precautionary account, of; to be managed or handled or cured or trained . . . The objective attitude . . . may include repulsion or fear; it may include pity or even love. But it cannot include the range of reactive feelings and attitudes which belong to involvement or participation with others in inter-personal human relationships; it cannot include resentment, gratitude, forgiveness, anger, or the sort of love which two adults can sometimes be said to feel reciprocally, for each other.[42]

Strawson's contrast between the objective and participating attitudes is very similar to the distinction between the roles of objective observer and the moral self, except that Strawson emphasizes intentionality rather than personal responsibility, and he is not interested in a formal analysis of the two sets of attitudes. For Strawson, individuals can engage in emotionally reactive relationships because of their capacity to express intended and meaningful behaviour as free agents. To adopt the objective attitude towards a person is to remove their capacity to be fully human, to depersonalize them, and to reduce them to the status of objects. Strawson recognizes that adoption of this objective attitude can allow the suspension of normal moral responses which might have humane consequences depending on the situation, but his main interest is the indispensability of the reactive attitude for the continuation of human relationships.

This analysis of the objective attitude has led to what Honderich has termed dismay at the consequences of determinism.[43] Honderich has extended Strawson's analysis to include the "life hopes, personal feelings, knowledge, moral responsibility, actions and principles, and the general moral standing of agents."[44] It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss these themes, but it sufficient to note that all these problems, like those outlined by Berlin earlier, stem from a belief that determinism undermines the possibility of free, independent action. Only the existence of a self acting as an ultimate "originator", without the interference of the mechanical effects of determinism, can guarantee the individual freedom which will not result in dismay. Anything else will reduce man to the status of a depersonalized object, incapable of genuine humanity. Honderich has attempted to solve this problem by postulating the possibility of self-affirmation, but this very solution requires the assumption of a self which is at the very centre of the problem itself.

The solution to the problem is contained in the recognition that the moral self is a social role that is totally distinct from that of the objective observer. Although both these social roles are subject to deterministic analysis – as are all forms of

[42] P.F. Strawson, 'Freedom and Resentment' in Gary Watson (ed.), *Free* Will, 1982, p. 66.
[43] Honderich, *op.cit.*
[44] Ibid, p.3.

empirical reality when viewed from the perspective of the objective observer – the roles themselves generate entirely different modes of experience.

It might be argued that from the point of view of the objective observer the postulate of a moral self is an illusion, because it assumes a freedom of action which conflicts with the assumptions of determinism. And it is the scrutiny of the role of the moral self from the viewpoint of the objective observer that has given rise to the problem of dismay, outlined by Honderich and others. But the problem only arises through role confusion: from the viewpoint of the moral self, freedom is not an illusion – it is an indispensible necessity of personal and social life. In our roles as moral selves, determinism is irrelevant, and as reality is shaped largely by our role experiences, it is with the acceptance of this reality that the problem of dismay disappears. This has some similarity with Hume's acceptance of the reality of everyday life, except the dimension of role analysis allows us to understand much more clearly and profoundly the nature of this solution, and in certain respects it is closer to Kant's postulate or two realms than Hume's voluntaristic position.

In practice, role confusion is not just a personal matter, but is also sociologically determined. The role of objective observer has become much more prominent in our society through the growth of science, technology and medicine, and this almost inevitably has led to role conflict. In contemporary psychiatry, the mainstream theoretical perspective is deterministic, both in the biological/ behavioural schools, and psychoanalytical/ psychodynamic ones. The language used is that of the objective observer, but inevitably the terminology of the moral self is introduced because of the nature of the disciplines. Strawson observed this when noting

> . . . the strain in the attitude of a psychoanalyst to his patient. His objectivity of attitude, his suspension of ordinary moral reactive attitudes, is profoundly modified by the fact that the aim of the enterprise is to make such suspension unnecessary or less necessary. Here we may and do naturally speak of restoring the agent's freedom.[45]

The aim of the psychoanalyst is to restore the capacity of the patient to become an independent person, to cease being a clinical object, but to become a full subject, capable of free and responsible action. This illustrates that most psychiatric disciplines use the concepts and assumptions of both role models in their work, but this is not inevitable. Behavioural therapy tends to deny the subjectivity of the patient, and sees its work in purely objective, physiological terms,[46] whereas existentialist therapy almost exclusively emphasizes the freedom of the subject. In this sense, existentialist therapy is a contradiction in terms, as in its pure form, it refuses to acknowledge terms such as mental illness, patient cure and the concept of therapy itself.[47] Definitions will of course vary depending on which role model is adopted, so that for example during the First World War, soldiers who refused to stay and fight in the trenches were either classified as malingerers and therefore punished, or defined as suffering from shell-shock and given medical treatment. The first treated the individual as a moral self, the second viewed him as a clinical object.

From the army's point of view – leaving aside ethical considerations – there is the practical question as to which role definition was most effective in getting soldiers to return back to the trenches. Likewise we can ask whether psychoanalysis

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[45] Strawson, *op.cit.,* p. 75.
[46] B.F. Skinner, *Beyond Freedom and Dignity,* 1971.
[47] Thomas Szasz, *The Myth of Mental* Illness, 1962.

or the existentialist attitude – or a combination of both – is more effective in bringing about personal independence. The psychoanalyst will classically take the former role and concentrate on the causally determined sequence of events which take place in childhood; the existentialist will adopt the position of the moral self, and emphasize freedom and personal responsibility. In practice, the effectiveness of the different role definitions will depend on a number of factors, including the expectations of patients and persons concerned.

It has become a commonplace to see bureaucracy as a source of the type of alienation that can be associated with the objective attitude. The dominance of bureaucracy and the devaluation ·of individual responsibility, may have been one of the factors in the collapse of Soviet Communism – all systems need to attribute personal responsibility to function effectively.

Kafka's description of the bureaucratic nightmare is reminiscent of Heidigger's notion of "unauthenticity" – a depersonalized and objectivised mode of being – a concept not all that different from Marx's alienation and Weber's "disenchantment of the world". The existentialists have given some of the most persuasive descriptions ·of personal alienation, and to quote Galen Strawson on Camus, "When *l'etranger* alludes to one of his desires, it is half as if he were recounting a fact about a feature of the world which is extraneous to him – a spectator to his own actions.[48] For existentialists the immediate resolution of this type of alienation is the restoration of the potency associated with a full acceptance of personal responsibility and the freedom of the moral self.

Sociological factors are of course crucial in both determining patterns of alienation and the conditions necessary for their resolution. A capacity for freedom is inextricably linked with the structure of power in any society which in turn is shaped by its economic and social conditions. For example, in order for women to be full and free subjects, they not only have to achieve equal status with men, but also have to acquire the freedom which comes with the abolition of economic scarcity and political oppression. The same would apply to slaves, lower castes and all oppressed groups.

Power is a critical dimension in the overcoming of this form of alienation, as power is intrinsically linked with the capacity for self-determination and the independence necessary for full personal responsibility and individual freedom. Ultimately the freedom of any one individual is linked with the freedom of all, but this is to raise a theme beyond the scope of the present paper. However it is appropriate to end with a positive conclusion: the distinction between the objective observer and the moral self resolves the problem of determinism, and in doing so, provides a clear intellectual foundation for the existence and practice of individual responsibility and freedom, along with the personal self-affirmation which flows from it.

[48] Galen Strawson, *Freedom and Belief*, 1986, p. 234.