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Concerning Cultural Determinism

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whoever he is." An' so he tars his han'pole of his well what 'e draws his water with.

An' Mr. Rabbit come der de nex' night, fer te muddy his water up, an' 'e smack de pole with one han' and it stuck. An' den he says: "Ah got another han'." An' 'e smacked 'im with dat an' it stuck.

So he says: "Ah got a foot." An' he kicked him with one foot. An' when he kicked him with d'other foot, dat foot stuck. Well, when dat foot stuck, he didn' have nothin' den only but his head, so he butted him. So he was hung right, den.

'Long come Mr. Fox, nex' mornin', says: "Mr. Hare, you's de very one who's bin mudd'in' ma water." So 'e says: "'Deed Ah'm not! Ah 'uz jes' walkin' th'ough here las' night an' Ah wanted a drink so bad an' dat jes' what happen'."

An' so he says: "You may fry me, you may bake me, and you may stew me, but, oh man, Lord, don' you th'ow me in dem briar bushes. De briar bushes cut me all up."

So he thought 'e was spitin' Mr. Rabbit. So in de briar bushes 'e th'ow 'im! When 'e looked up at Mr. Fox in de winder, he say: "Kiss ma foot! Ah was bred an' born in de briar bushes!" Out de winder went Mr. Fox, but. . . . No 'e didn'! 'E was jes' gone along by an' 'e never did fin' Mr. Rabbit.

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S. G. ARMISTEAD

Concerning Cultural Determinism

In a review of Leslie White's *The Science of Culture* (JAF, 83:329, 357-358) John Greenway issued a challenge to his readers: "White and I and five or six other gentle people dee-double-dare you others to read [White's book] and thereafter try to write articles on folklore or anthropology that give man any volition in what he does beyond choosing a spotted or striped necktie in the morning." While I do not propose to write an article on either folklore or anthropology per se, I would like to see that an opposing view gets equal time by very briefly sketching some problems with the extreme determinist position represented by White and Greenway.

First, I submit the following dilemma, inspired by Greenway's comments.

1. Either White's opponent is free to agree with him, or he is not.
2. If the opponent is free, that contradicts White's position, for then his opponent's agreement or disagreement with White would be an example of an undetermined social action.
3. If the opponent is not free, then efforts on the part of White or Greenway to convince him of the correctness of White's determinism will be futile, for regardless of whatever argument White presents in favor of determinism, it will have no effect upon the opponent who is now assumed to be determined.
4. Thus, either White is wrong, or if he is right, any efforts on his part to convince his readers that he is right will be self-defeating, even inconsistent with the deterministic thesis.

Second, White's thesis of cultural determinism holds that the actions of individual persons are determined by their culture, which is in turn described as superorganic. Thus, White's version of determination is related to his superorganicism. This being the case, if it were possible to raise serious difficulties for superorganicism, that might in turn cause some doubt of the deterministic thesis. Now there are some shortcomings in the doctrine of superorganicism. First, it is important to notice what the problem is that superorganicism sets out to solve. It is basically a way of explaining the connection be-

tween, on the one hand, what we ordinarily call culture and, on the other hand, individual persons. This is an important problem, a crucial one for social scientists to solve. The explanation proposed by superorganicists is to say that culture and individuals are completely distinct as orders of reality (see White, ch. 5). This is structurally the same kind of solution Descartes proposed for the relation between mind and body, or the same sort of arrangement found in Plato's theory of universals. On the one side we have Mind, Ideal Form, and Culture as a kind of reality *sui generis*, while on the other side we have Body, Concrete Individual, and Person, again in their own different realm of reality. That is to say, the explanation for the relationship between mind and body or culture and person or individual and universal is that they are radically and completely independent in the sense of belonging to different kinds of reality. But given this, it becomes a mystery as to how they can possibly interact. And in White's view, culture does interact with a person—this is the essence of his cultural determinism. By turning to superorganicism as a way of trying to explain the relation between culture and a person, White has, in effect, said that the relation is inexplicable, is a mystery, and this is no explanation.

Finally, a third problem I see for White's approach (superorganicism and cultural determinism) lies in that it doesn't seem to be a scientific theory at all. It is manifestly clear that he intended it to be one. But instead it reads more like what George C. Homans has called a "nonoperating definition."¹ By this term he refers to a description that simply names a phenomenon instead of providing a characterization of a confirmable relationship between two or more variables (a verifiable hypothesis, in other words). There is a convenient criterion by means of which we could discover whether White's theory is an empirical one or simply a handy set of terms. If it is a scientific theory, White should be able to provide us with a set of conditions which it would be possible to observe intersubjectively such that if these conditions were realized, the theory would be disconfirmed. For, if a theory is empirical, it must be possible to disconfirm it just as it must be possible to confirm it. White does sometimes cite what one would take as possible candidates for counter-examples to his view, but his technique usually is to simply define them away in terms of his approach, much like a psychoanalytic student of culture might reply to a critic by saying that the critic's objection shows that he is the victim of repressed Oedipal tendencies. Thus, one is at a loss to know what White would admit as a valid disconfirming instance. If there is nothing he would admit, then he does not offer a scientific theory.

In general, perhaps many people will agree that White and Greenway have pushed a good point too far. Surely we are sometimes coerced, determined if you will, in our actions. But just as surely, we sometimes act as free agents. Often our freedom of action tends to expand given an increase in our awareness of what cultural forces are bearing in upon us. If culture's coercion remains unconscious, or relatively so, we have little opportunity to "take it or leave it." But in most cultures one can find occasions in the life of a person in which he becomes aware of how he has been coerced in some of his actions and decides to either go on as before or to do otherwise. It is no good to reply to this by pointing out that such a decision is culture-bound too. The proponent of free will would not deny that if it means that the person involved uses language. Indeed, all thought is in signs. However, that is no argument against freedom of the will, for one way of using signs is what we call free choice. Or, free choice is an integral part of culture. White

¹ *The Nature of Social Science* (New York, 1967), 10.

is overdoing it in saying that freedom is an illusion, just as (for example), Sartre, representing the other extreme, seems to be overdoing it by sometimes suggesting that cases in which we are determined are illusions. Each kind of event is real, and part of our job is to sort out how and where each category applies in folkloristic or cultural phenomena.

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Whose "Dan Tucker"?

It was our song. That is, it belonged to the people, especially to us children singing at the mouth of Hollybush in Knott County, Kentucky. Hollybush is between (and only a short distance from) Raven (Yes, Poe!) and Pippa Passes (Yes, Browning!).

OLE DAN TUCKER

Ole Dan Tucker wuz a good old man;
Washed his face in a frying pan;
Combed his head with a wagon wheel;
Died with th' toothache in his heel!

Chorus

Git outa th' way for ole Dan Tucker;
Come too late t' git yore supper:
Supper's eat, an' th' dishes washed;
No more supper here, by gosh!

Chorus

Ole Dan Tucker went to town;
Swollered a barrel of molasses down;
Hoops did swell, an' th' barrel did break,
An' he did die with th' belly ache.

Chorus

And for those with more daring there was a variation for the third stanza:

Ole Dan Tucker went to town';
Swallered a barrel of molasses down.
Hoops did break, an' barrel did swell—
Killed Dan Tucker dead as hell!

Chorus

Ole Dan Tucker climbed a tree,
His lord and master for to see.
The limb did break and he did fall;
Never did see his lord at all.

Chorus

Or when the party was really wild—or no adult member of the opposite sex was around:

"Ole Dan Tucker climber a tree,
His lord and master for to see;
Th' limb did break, and he lost his shoe,
And when he struck th' sugar flew."