

MSI PART TWO (7 Jan-Feb 2021)

CONSCIOUS CONTROL: In relation to Human Evolution in Civilization

p. 113 Synopsis of Claim (cf. *Conscious Control*, 1912 p.1f. much expanded)

Henri Bergson's *Creative Evolution* published 1911 in English (with foreword by William James).

Pre-1914 mentality:

- Vitalism – the idea that we are animated by a vital life-force
- Victorian racial theory of human kind
- Creative Evolution – a reaction against Pavlov, that human behaviour is blindly governed by automatic, 'animal' (instinctive) reflexes reacting to outside conditions. GBS was an ardent advocate, see *Man and Superman*, *Back to Methuselah*, *Pygmalion* etc. An optimistic vision of mankind motivated by a universal life-force and self-determinism towards ever higher planes of consciousness. See p. 116.

Eyes, wrong use of p. 114-5

Habit – “a series of acts”, cf. Dewey, series of ‘what nexts’.

Alexander thought that inhibition and, in particular, the inhibition of *fear* was the capacity that distinguished Mankind from the animal kingdom. This was the true measure of evolutionary progress and civilization. In the nineteenth century, nations were regarded as “races”; hence the German race, etc. Each race was progressing at different rates, the British (naturally) were leading and at the top of the evolutionary ladder. Alexander uses the example of someone experiencing the rush and roar of an express train for the first time. When faced with the unfamiliar, the more lowly-evolved would be overwhelmed by fear, whereas the more “civilized” could overcome their instinctive reaction. Alexander probably took James's example of a small child, but regrettably he introduces a racist tone, contrasting white Europeans with “animals and savages” out of communication with reason. Compare James 1890, Vol 2, Chapter 26, ‘Will’, p. 487 to *MSI*, 113-4. (Note, Alexander uses Waldo Emerson's expression.)

(a) Faulty misdirection of energy causing “erroneous misconceptions and faulty posture”. Wrong mental attitude towards life in general and towards the art of living” (115)

(b) The individual's ability to distinguish between reasoned (conscious) v. unreasoned (sub- or partially conscious) actions in the “ordinary acts of everyday life”.

“[T]here is a constant conflict between two great forces, the one (subconscious) [INSTINCT] destined to exercise supreme directive powers during the early stages of human evolution, the other (conscious) [REASON] to supersede this limited direction and finally to prove the reliable guide through the higher and highest stages of the great evolutionary scheme which leads to the full enjoyment of his potentialities. It must be remembered that the former became firmly established during centuries of subconscious direction, holding undisputed sway until the first glimmering of reasoned conscious guidance came in its crudest form to disturb its power, a power which it is destined one day to overthrow. . . . [We must have something more reasoned and definite than that which subconscious direction offers] . . . to enable us to adapt ourselves much more quickly to the new environments which are inevitable in the progress of civilization towards its legitimate goal.” (115-6)

(c) It is owing to this involuntary, and on his part unrecognized, misapprehension, that many malformations and inefficiencies become established, which sooner or later may lead to definite disease.” Rather than being pitied or made to feel helpless by “pernicious sympathy” “he must be made aware that such defects arise from his own fault and are the outcome of his ignorance or wilful neglect.” (117) He must be empowered to help himself.

(d) Means v. ends. “It is essential, in the necessary re-education of the subject through conscious guidance and control, that in every case the “means whereby” rather than the “end” should be held in mind. As long as the “end” is held in mind instead of the “means,” the muscular act, or series of acts, will always be performed in accordance with the mode established by old habits. When each stage of the series essential to the “means whereby” is correctly apprehended by the conscious mind of the subject, the old habits can be broken up, and every muscular action can be consciously directed [cf. “and every muscular action be made consciously” 1912, p.4] until the new and correct guiding sensations have established the new proper habits, which in their turn become subconscious, but on a more highly evolved plane.” (p.117-8; see habits on p. 54)

Mechanical Advantage – cigar box procedure (p.118 note)

The Argument (pp.121-3). Mankind has reached the stage where conscious control is the only way it can keep pace and adapt to rapid change. Alexander introduced the hot topic of eugenics (= “well born”). This pseudo-science was established by Francis Galton, cousin of Charles Darwin. The idea that biology could be used to solve problems of social organisation, population and the future welfare of the race gained wide official backing in the UK and the US. There was a pro-eugenics British Home Secretary, Winston Churchill, when *Man’s Supreme Inheritance* was first published.¹ Some “desirable” aspects of eugenics are still around today but, as Alexander wrote:

“Though I am in sympathy with many principles of Eugenics, I reject this theory as a universal one. . . . And, in the last analysis, it is inconceivable that the prime instinct and desire for reproduction can be overruled at the dictates of any small body of men, or even that such a method, if possible, could be productive of any highly desirable results” (*MSI* 1918/1996, 122; cf. 1910, 97).

For Alexander, nurturing factors, education, could override virtually all inherited differences (see 1910, 101; 1918, 68).

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¹ “When he was Home Secretary (February 1910-October 1911) Churchill was in favor of the confinement, segregation, and sterilization of a class of persons contemporarily described as the “feeble minded.” ‘Churchill and Eugenics’ by Sir Martin Gilbert. International Churchill Society. winstonchurchill.org [accessed 7/02/2021]