

#76

THE CAFETERIA

by

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Jules: People should not be restricted from gaining an education because they have children. There should be a day care center on campus to permit mothers and in fact parents in general to attend school unhampered.

Jim: I agree with your sentiments. However, whom would you have pay for this day care center? The tax payer or those benefitting from the service?

Jules: A society as sophisticated and materially affluent such as ours, should provide the means for persons burdened with child rearing to acquire an education. This will benefit the entire community by raising standards of education and eventual productivity. In direct answer to your question, I would say those users of the day care facility should pay inversely to need. The poor, and unemployed and unwed mothers, etc. should pay the least, if at all.

Jim: You mean that those not using the day care center, and by the way that might include many persons with young children, should pay for those who do?

Jules: Well... yes! Because these people really need it and society owes them that!

Jim: The point is that people can choose when to have children - at the very least, their offspring is their responsibility! My wife and I chose not to have children during college. Why should we have to pay - even indirectly - for the poor planning of others?

Jules: First of all, it is the right of all to have children, to expect an education and to have pressing needs satisfied by society. This is even more true in the case of minorities since white society in the past and institutional racism in the present has worked to deny basic human privileges to these people. This must be made-up by society.

Jim: May I answer that statement categorically?

Jules: Yes... go ahead.

Jim: Perhaps it is the right and privilege of all to share in the joys and fulfillment of child rearing. However, with rights come responsibilities. It is a privilege to create and develop another human being. Those who regard this as a burden should avoid having children or suffer the consequences. It is a gross

understatement when I say that, in our age, not all persons need participate in the reproductive process. To force those who have abstained from having children to pay for those who have, is to penalize (and doubly in some cases) those who are cooperating in solving the problem of overpopulation.

Now, I would turn to your implied concept of "social realism." First, that "society" exists as anything other than a super-pedagogical device is to indulge in the fallacy of misplaced concreteness. "Society" is made up of individuals, which by the way are "real," who, imbued with cultural values produced and passed - on by other individuals (past and present), behave and interact with other individuals. The "structures" of such society is determined purely by the decisions of individuals to produce, consume, save, invest, believe, not to believe. To think or not to think, to imitate, imulate or to create and procreate. These individuals have a real effect on the object - world and on each other. Their ideas and their object - transforms may go on even after their death. In other words, "society" could not exist without individuals but the reverse is not true. "Society" is merely a name for the way in which individuals choose to organize themselves. "Society" only appears to have its own separate identity, above and beyond individuals because of the intellectual process of summarizing the size effects of large groups of individuals sharing (often temporarily) certain characteristics. It is a very useful device for intellectual abstraction. However, "society" cannot be a moral - ethical entity. Social elites, groups of individuals who control other individuals and material processes, can be held to account but not "Society." Society cannot be held liable since it does not objectively exist and second the transience of relationships between individuals, as well as the departure of persons from the scene does not permit a logical system of large group accountability. Even if the term "Society" were reduced to signify the power - elite and their supporters as responsible and accountable agents for everyone, we would still have to ask - which "Society" - when? And ultimately it would devolve into a question of who "owes" what to whom?

In the case of taxpayer supported child care centers, the vast majority of persons could justly claim to have had a paternity/maternity suite erroneously filed against them.

By appealing to the fallacious concept of "society" it permits you to impose a blanket penalty on the many to pay for the irresponsibility of a few. Ultimately this promotes any conceivable group to milk "society" for its own quota of "needs." If taken to its logical extreme, this means that everyone can demand others to pay for his "needs" via "society" and its strongarm - government. To me, this appears to be, in principle, nothing less than a totalitarian rip-off.

Jules: That is really selfish and facistic but I am going to answer

your assertions "categorically." Society is very real. It operates like any other system and its sum is greater than its PARTS. And, I can prove this by demonstrating its effects. In contradiction to your naive implication that an individual or individuals could survive without society, I can assure you that without education and material things such as food, shelter and clothing provided by the social system he would not survive! In fact, without the loving 'care of a mother', many children grow up retarded. The separation of mother and infant, and the debilitating environment of state - run orphanages are the outgrowth of very definable social conditions. These include, the exploitation of labor, material poverty produced by the inequitable distribution of goods and services. These are products of capitalist - imperialist society and its sexism, racism, and corporate monopolies on a world scale. These conditions are very real to millions of persons.

In sum, society is real not only because of its very objectifiable effects and conditions, and a discernable macrostructure which transcends the individual in a qualitative organizational way, but because the individual logically depends on society for survival. And this is empirically verifiable throughout history.

And in reply to your cynical comment that asking for day care centers would be, in effect, to slap a paternity suit on society, I would say that those individual members of society are given a unique opportunity to contribute to the future in the development of new persons.

Jules: Without appearing facetious, I would prefer to be a godfather than a groom in a shotgun wedding. In other words, when you "give" a "unique opportunity" to members of society please remember that these are often not optional for the individual but mandatory by law.

More importantly, I would agree that individual interaction in the past and in the present have produced often abhorrent lives for many, this does not, however, prove the real existence of the social phenomenon.

For example, you point to the existence of a "discernable macrostructure" transcending the individual. Law, legal statutes, and the juridical process would certainly comprise a part of this so called macrostructure. But if we look at law, we can empirically identify its individual origins. The mosaic code is ostensibly the law of God, but note well, that God did not diffuse the law simultaneously among the Jews. The "law" did not intrude into their "collective mind." In fact, Moses went alone and returned alone and found little sympathy for the code. Social theorist should take note that though a whole people was released from the bondage, it was one man who codified social mores. This goes for the Napoleonic Code, and the code of Nebuchadnezzar. Even British common-law is based on indivi-

dual litigational precedents.

Now it might be argued that the level of law is dependent on a wider context of cultural and social change. The individual, then would merely represent a focal point of expression, a voice mirroring general changes in let us say the "productive mode" i.e. economic conditions and changes in general social relationships. This represents an elaborate tautology that explains individual human behavior in terms of the sociocultural matrix. Simply, it states that individual accomplishments can only result from conditions of social environment since man is a social animal and hence whatever he does must be a result of the social element.

This is a difficult tautology to disprove because of the influence on individual decision-making by their fellows as well as the state of material conditions. The residual folklore, literature, technology, religion, statecraft, art and architecture does strongly affect the disposition of the individual. This is especially true in the "formative years" of youth. Life is often too short for many persons to develop an articulate expression of their own unique capacities. This works to glibly assign a social determinism to individual motivation, reflection and expression. If individuals commonly lived for centuries, the hyperstatization of the social would probably greatly dominate.

A good example, however, of individual expression which definitely was not of its time and was not a reaction to the social "contradictions" of that "period" was that of Leonardo Da Vinci. His inventions and ideas were so far removed from the world of his peers that no theory of social reality and its attendant determinism can explain away this anomaly. Da Vinci lived largely "in a world" of his own making. Unfortunately, very few persons have had the maturity, intelligence or integrity to match this level of unique expression.

In terms of the history of world demography we should remember that for thousands of years the median age expectancy hovered around thirty years. Those who lived beyond could aspire with a large chance of success to participate in the ruling gerontocracy. Individuation under these conditions had little chance for effective expression. Tradition and coercive status and authority determined one's survival.

Even in our present stage of the "demographic transition" where the world median age expectancy approaches fifty, approximately one-half of the population is under twenty one. And this figure is heavily weighted to those under puberty. This promotes a tendency in individuals to accept a non-individualistic conformist deterministic and coercive view of human nature. This is after all, the psychology of the "child." With very few exceptions, children are coerced and disciplined by arbitrary authorities at home and at school. Conformity within the peer

group is rigid and novelty in behavior and expression by an outsider or on the part of one with low rank in the pecking order, is cruelly disparaged. Status is gained through ascription. Joining and following is practiced daily and ironically enough, this is called the "socialization process." Those who resist "socialization" are slowly reduced to neurological pulp.

These interpersonal relationships and not "social" conditions create a body of intellectual abstractions reflecting a widespread neurosis. The child grows into adulthood no longer mouthing or scribbling four letter words but very complex imprecations about certain kinds of "society." Tremendous fear and hostility are cautiously vented against cleverly constructed mythical "macrostructures." The caution in attacking scapegoats and strawdogs comes from years of having been subjected to the brutality (mental and physical) of the arbitrary and vicious punishment of the irate parent, the brusque and scolding teacher, the street gang whipping, the jeers of other children. This accounts for the timid conformity of many "social" theorists and so called "radical" social activists.

My sampling may have been biased, Jules, but I have noticed a common temperament among those who discount the notion of individual value. They tend to be peevishly self-righteous as if their assumptions about the world were beyond reproof. Most glaring, is their tendency to employ all kinds of grandioseLY abstract concepts such as those of "class," "society," and "institution" while simultaneously demanding that discussion be limited to empirical particulars. Any discussion or questioning of theoretical assumptions are denounced by these "social activists" as an "over abstraction" of the "question." The "question" often being how a particular group can gouge everybody else, via the bureaucracy, for some easy money.

Jules: Well, I really don't have the time to listen to this reactionary crap! It doesn't look like you're going to sign this petition for state funding of a day care center. I don't know how I ever get involved in these conversations anyway! I have to collect signatures!