

"Free Will." occasional paper

The supposition that man is endowed with some supra-causal power to create by virtue of "will" is the root of the whole difficulty. The technological theory of knowledge would seem to deny the possibility of the power to choose in a free manner. But this denial is only a result of confusing real choices and imaginary choices.

Everyone is aware that he does in fact make choices, in the sense that he chooses among several proffered alternatives. For example, he chooses to use mahogany or pine as the material with which to plank a boat. Choices of this kind may be described as good or bad, better or worse, and there is no misunderstanding about it. His choices serve well or less well in furthering the efficiency of the continuum of which it is a part, and experience verifies the comparative efficiency of his choice. Any disagreements about such choices take the form of bringing the facts to light, and when the facts are equally available to all disputants, agreement is mandatory. Neither party supposes that he can, by "will," impute the properties of mahogany to pine.

This sort of experience with factual sequence keeps man aware that he does in fact make choices, that he does in this very real sense have free will. But when the deep conviction that man is actually supra-evidential and, therefore, creative in a non-causal manner comes into play through the operation called "choice"--and particularly when this conviction or habit emanates into pronouncements about aspects of experience about which there is little evidence at hand-- then the shift is made from real choices to suppositious choices. In this shift, the conclusive evidence that man does make real choices in the technological sense lends itself as unconscious support to the notion that the choices after the shift also are real. The latter are then called "choices" as if they were of a kind with real choices, although the conceptual operation designated by the word is exactly reversed.

The difference between the two kinds of operations is seldom apparent because of the myth that man can give real embodiment by wishing or wanting or by merely "saying the word." Since any word almost invariably can be used to designate a referent established by experience, and since the word may be defined as designating any additional conceptual content the word-user cares to impute, the imputation is seemingly given the same reality as the evidential referent. And it is this "free" ability to designate content by "choice" or "at will" that the objector to the technological approach insists is "free will." Then, shifting back to the fact that people do make choices, he pronounces that the technological theory denies the possibility of free will and that this denial is a contradiction in itself because denying in itself a "choosing" operation. What the objector is doing is this: he is insisting that the imputation has the same reality as the evidential referent. Though the imputation be pure figment, the use of the word with evidential referent is sufficient to give reality to the figment and therefore validity to the figmentation.

The whole of the pre-Darwinian concept of man may be summed up as the theory that man has the capacity to create by figmentation or by arbitrary designation or by "definition." This sort of shifting from the actual to the suppositious, from the real to the unreal, from the existential to the non-existential, has led economists into the fallacy of making efforts to create by definition and then using the "definitions" as basic data in analysis. That analyses so based do not in fact offer real answers to economic problems is notorious. Since economic problems are perforce factual problems, answers must, likewise perforce, run in terms of the facts. And the run of the facts allows no apriorist imputations; the facts themselves are the necessary bases of analysis. When the basic concepts in traditional economic analysis are examined with

alert attention to the kind of shifting noted here from evidential referents to apriorist, arbitrarily imputed “meanings,” the pertinence of the present discussion to economic theory becomes apparent. Consider as examples capital and labor.

Capital: 1) goods, producers’ goods, goods required in the production process, the physical instruments of production;
2) that, by virtue of ownership of which, one has claims on--power to withdraw--goods offered in the market.

The latter (2) is shifted to priority (basic data) as referent by imputing it to the former (1) by identifying them as the same thing. Then, since (1) is irrefutable, (2) is given real substance. It then may be taken as a basic datum, drawing validity from the former. That the two referents are entirely different things is a difficulty the surmounting of which can be explained only on the power to make true by statement, by “willing” it so, by arbitrary definition. And when the identity is questioned, it may still be attained by admitting the distinction and then proceeding in discourse to shift as the occasion requires and thus continue to use (1) as supporting the reality of (2).

Labor: 1) creative effort; activities involved in carrying on the technological process that is the economy;
2) that in return for which one person is paid by other people in claims on---power to withdraw--goods offered in the market; performances that are sold directly in the market and that are determined by the purchaser who retains sovereignty over the character of the activity.

The word “sold” draws solidity and validity of content from the obviously valid referent encompassed in (1). By shifting to the “selling process,” that process achieves “real” substance from the reality of (1). Labor (1) is obviously and inescapably necessary; labor (2) is sold in the market; therefore selling is a necessary function attached to labor. It is even carried to the point of saying that all sales are, at bottom, sales of labor. And the “utility” analysis (with its refinement in marginal utility analysis) is merely a way of calibrating the quantity of labor in other than time units. It too reduces all sales to creative effort with the effort measured in terms of sacrifice or “pain” rather than time units. The two presuppose each other. Then the identity can be worked both ways: a return of claims on the market is ipso facto proof of contribution to the productive process.
