

# Analysis of the reasons for being responsible for your own choices

## -- If behavior is result of abilities, preferences, genetic inheritance and the outside world

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**Abstract.** The question of whether we should be responsible for our choices has long been debated. Through the analysis of liberalism and determinism, this paper argues that the ideas of "genetic factors and the external world determine our capacity and preferences" does not limit responsibility in reality but increases responsibility, and then discuss the reasons for this view. This discovery refreshes people's understanding of determinism.

**Keywords:** Capacity and preferences; Responsibility; Liberalism; Determinism; Genetic factors and external world.

### 1. Introduction

In this article, through the analysis of liberalism and determinism, the thought that "genetic factors and the external world determine our capacity and preferences" does not limit responsibility in reality but increases responsibility.

Firstly, the responsibility referred to in this paper is not legal or moral responsibility in the narrow sense but political responsibility, that is, the phenomenon of making people do or not do something based on specific power, similar to the discipline mentioned by Foucault (John Randolph Lucas, 1995). The proposition "genetic factors and the external world determine our capacity and preferences" is a deterministic proposition, which seems to point to deterministic ideas that have appeared historically. Nevertheless, this article will demonstrate that liberalism also leads to a regime (Michel Foucault, 2003) that disciplines, controls, shapes, and even create (Jean Baudrillard, 1970) people as the subject (Michel Foucault, 1975). Both these theories (determinism and liberalism) are trying to claim that human is the master of themselves explicitly or implicitly, which are types of subjectivity philosophy. This paper will show that this subjectivity philosophy will paradoxically lead to the subject's subjection.

This article will point out that determinism and modern liberalism have made the same mistakes - the errors of subjectivity philosophy and the original cause of the inflation of responsibility. Besides interpreting the thought "the external world and genetic factors determine our capacity and preferences" in the perspective of subjectivity philosophy, there could also be an interpretation through the lens of anti-subjectivity philosophy. Ultimately, through the discussion of anti-subjectivity philosophy, this article will point out the involuntary of humans and the limitation of liability. This article critiques the philosophy of subjectivity and proposes that man cannot control all contingency and should therefore be held responsible to a limitation.

### 2. Liberalism and determinism and theology

The comparison between liberalism and determinism is aimed to point out their common point of the relationship between humans and the external world. As liberalism believes humans are free and determinism believes the external world ultimately determines humans, they are both subjectivity philosophies that formed a theology with humans replacing God – instead of leading to less responsibility, it increases responsibility.

## **2.1 Liberalism and the duality of human**

"Necro-subjection is inextricably linked to racial liberalism." (Gilberto Rosas, 2019). Liberalism advocates freedom but leads to greater regulation and subservience (political responsibility in this article). In this sense, liberalism also leads to obedience to the external world.

### **2.1.1 Liberalism in the political and legal sense**

Political and legal liberalism is aimed at freedom in the micro-individual sense, pursuing justice in every individual case. Isaiah Berlin's Liberty displayed the two forms of liberty - positive liberty and negative Liberty. The former is to set the goal of a free society and make everyone in the society strive for it, and the latter means the freedom from external restraint on one's action, which affirms the presence of free will and indicates our capacities and preferences can be determined by the subjects of the actions.

The pursuit of positive liberty, which Isaiah Berlin criticized, paradoxically requires sacrificing current freedom. Rousseau's version of the sovereign state (Florian Vauleon, 2014) and Marxist communist society (David James, 2017) are examples of the societies labeled as the ultimate form of positive liberty, which will be named determinism in the latter argument.

Isaiah Berlin supports negative liberty, but it turns out to be fragile and paradoxical in reality. For example, Weimar Republic could not stop the rise of the Nazi Party and the spread of Nazism (Carl Schmitt, 1923). Reducing the vulnerability and improving the extent of safety, and promoting liberty, intense supervision is needed; however, such supervision undoubtedly decreases the degree of freedom - American government increasingly supervised its people after the September 11 attacks (Jon Fasman, 1970). Such involvement of state power proved the safety for liberty but limited liberty at the same time.

### **2.1.2 Liberalism in the economic sense**

Neoliberalism believes that the law should protect human liberty and resist totalitarianism (Friedrich August von Hayek, 1943). Nevertheless, this freedom presupposes the application of Fordism and Taylorism (J Grahl, P Teague, 1989). For example, labor contracts are voluntary in law; management has achieved complete control over the labor process, and workers have lost their autonomy over the labor process; overtime work is a common occurrence in many countries and regions (Takeshi Hayashi, 1996). This leads to what Foucault calls biopolitics, which means that people are included in a specific regime under the guise of freedom. Still, people's capacities and preferences are controlled and depend on power (Michel Foucault, 2003).

### **2.1.3 Liberalism and the duality of human**

The paradox of liberalism is shown because the assertion of human subjectivity causes alienation - the objectification of the subject human.

In the discourse of liberalism, humans pursue freedom, which means that humans pursue the conquest of nature. Nevertheless, human also belongs to conquered nature, which leads to the situation that human conquers. That is, subjectivity equals subjection. In Foucault's words, human replaces God (Michel Foucault, 2008) on the one hand and becomes a tool (Michel Foucault, 1978) on the other hand. The duality of humans in the context of liberalism is shown - being both the subject and the object.

## **2.2 Determinism**

### **2.2.1 Economic determinism**

Different from liberalism, being the central ideology confronting western neoliberalism in the 20th century, economic determinism holds that people's actions and thoughts depend on the economic base (productive forces (technological level and specific means of production) and relations of production (employment relations, system of units)). However, economic determinism also believes that man

can shape this kind of economic foundation, the objective law of historical development can be grasped by man, and man can conquer nature (Joseph Stalin, 1952).

### **2.2.2 Biological determinism**

Darwin's evolution theory and modern genetic programming show that people can grasp and analyze and control their genes and the historical law of species (Margaret Schabas, 2015). Darwin's theory seems superficial to suggest that free competition promotes evolution, but the person's abilities and preferences are integrated into a teleological system (James G. Lennox, 1993).

For example, based on the genetic principles to reduce the incidence of fetal defects to improve the quality of the overall population, eugenics necessarily scientifically limits freedom (Stephen Garton, 2017). Such theory implicitly thinks humans could discover the absolute truth of genes and successfully master the genes, and humans conquer nature in this way.

### **2.2.3 Two types of determinism having two paradoxical features:**

The prerequisite of the two theories is the confidence in succeeding in the conquest of nature. Economic determinism stands for humans can master the historical objective law in economics; in this sense, the realization of an individual's actions and thoughts are determined by the so-called economic basis is the cognition of the mastery of "nature." Meanwhile, biological determinism has the prerequisite of the complete mastery of biological knowledge, that the creature "human" holds no secret towards men. On the one hand, determinism holds that the external world determines humans; on the other hand, a human's entirely conceited grasp and knowledge of these external factors is a human's conquest of nature.

Assuming the external world determines human actions, thus seemingly, humans should not be responsible for their behaviors, according to the "Accountability Principle" in law (the acknowledgment and assumption of responsibility for actions, decisions, and consequences). However, the two types above of determinism have produced a responsibility far beyond average. Therefore, as determinism implies, humans could conquer nature. Such belief leads to the inflation of responsibility, causing death and torment to innocent individuals.

## **2.3 The paradox of the duality of human**

To sum up, both liberalism and the determinism of the 20th century believe that man can conquer nature and believe that man is the subject and at the same time belongs to nature, so man is both a subject and an object. Therefore, in the philosophy of subjectivity, the human being is a paradoxical subject who not only determines everything but is also determined by the world he creates. And because the human cannot conquer nature, such a religion of believing humans as God causes humans to make up all types of responsibilities to disguise our disabilities (Slavoj Žižek, 1989).

## **3. Subjectivity philosophy and anti-subjectivity philosophy and materialism**

The subjectivity philosophy above, no matter liberalism or determinism, believes humans are the subject's core. Liberalism affirms human subjectivity in the perspective of free will and human desire, while determinism affirms human subjectivity in the aspect of human conquest of history and nature (Lawrence Cahoon, 1987). This chapter will discuss why the conquest of nature is a failure and why humans are not the subject of desire, pointing out an anti-subjective philosophical explanation.

First, anti-subjective philosophy recognizes that human beings are not the masters of nature and that human beings are not free. This philosophy neither advocates transcendental liberalism nor presupposes some ultimate historical purpose. Instead, it confronts the liberal and deterministic ideas mentioned above, acknowledging that accidental external worlds or genes determine human beings (Amy Allen, 2000). In this sense, it declares the death of human beings (Michel Foucault, 1966).

### 3.1 The contingency of nature

Louis Althusser criticizes idealism and argues that objects are the unpredictable contingency that forms the unpredictable reality – the Real – the unpredictable moving pattern of atoms forms the world (G.M. Goshgarian, 2007). Consequently, history is fractured instead of being continuous. Therefore, in the sense of nature being contingent, our capacities and preferences are determined by the contingency of the external world and genetic factors that human science cannot grasp.

Therefore, the thought “the external world determines our capacities and preferences and genetic factors” could be explained in an anti-subjectivity way – humans are always finite; thus, humans could not conquer nature. In such context, nature is not the natural landscapes or human settlements in the sense of natural science or social science, but the objects that are not artificial and anti-subjective – things beyond human control. In other words, nature is an external critique of artificial conventions (Leo Strauss, 1965). The search for truth is external; neither ultimate truth exists, nor the nihility caused by the absence of ultimate truth. Instead, humans should externally hold modesty and curiosity towards the search for truth. Further, under Althusser’s system, objects are not the technology or labor tools as the claim of historical materialism of the forementioned determinism, but the unknowable contingency itself. The reason contingency affects history is because it always breaks the pattern of human conventions detected and brings new knowledge to humanity (Louis Althusser, 2006).

For example, the COVID-19 pandemic exposed human ignorance of nature’s unpredictable contingency. Humans were arguing and concluding about the origin of the pandemic and which nation should be responsible for the pandemic, missing the significance of control and slowing down the disease. The origin of the epidemic is often beyond human control, and what human beings should do is not assign blame but discuss what can be done next to minimize the damage.

## 4. Conclusion

This paper cannot develop a rigorous speech on how should take responsibility under this principle based on the accident of Althusser materialism and relevant law philosophy. Instead, this paper will point out a direction when humans face accidental historical events, called events by Slavoj Žižek. We should admit that no matter whether it is the capacity and preferences of individuals or systems, we cannot prevent these "events" from happening because the uncontrollable contingency of history causes it. In such circumstances, humans should not rush to apportion blame but consider how to compensate for the loss and discover new knowledge.

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