



Change

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Change is inevitable, as Heraclitus said many years ago. Science has gone a long way towards predicting change in nature. However, change in society is much more unpredictable: it is governed by culture with its thoughts and beliefs about the world. This is because humans are blessed (?) with consciousness, something which allows them to accept or reject the findings of science, as well as those of religion, mythology, folklore, or whatever else passes for knowledge in any given society. Thus, the social world is always controlled by an ideology, resting in both the subjective and intersubjective world. Science can provide useful information in this respect, as long as it does not believe that it is discovering mechanistic truths about society, such as those discovered about nature, at least in the Newtonian framework.

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Social change is both intended and unintended in this respect. Intended change is easy enough to ascertain, but unintended change is more difficult to explain because of the complexity of modern societies. After the Renaissance, a new ideology was necessary and science with its symbolic use provided that legitimation. This can be seen especially in neoclassical economic theory, an ideology that has been mathematized in order to present itself symbolically as a science. Here the assumption is that the “free” market will automatically establish an equilibrium beneficial to all of society and that government “interference” in the form of central planning will obstruct this mechanism. This assumption has been criticized extensively both by Marx, as well as in heterodox and Post-Autistic Economics. But this ideological debate still plagues the modern world and must be confronted in any attempt to make it more just and equitable.

This problem is further complicated by the fact that not all members of society will accept change. Here the question of power enters. Power grants the ability to some members of society to allow or block change. Power rests in a ruling class, a group of people designated as leaders because they have seized power by force or through ideological means, both of which require control over the means of communication and education. Thus, social change must confront both a ruling ideology as well as a ruling class.

The question is, can the need for power be understood beyond this framework? Recent research suggests that the consciousness of death, which “plagues” only human beings, motivates those with excessive need for power. Some humans believe that if they can control all things in nature and society, they will achieve immortality, and they block any movement that questions their power and threatens this illusion. This is a key additional element that must be confronted in any attempt to bring happiness to the world, something which Epicurus understood over 2000 years ago, when he insisted that people must not only learn to live simply but also confront the reality of death. Thus, confronting the money Gods and the fear of death must motivate any movement for social change in today’s world.

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