

AN ARGUMENT AGAINST ECONOMIC DETERMINISM

EDITORS LAND AND FREEDOM :

Irving M. Kass has given what he believes to be "a scientifically demonstrable calculation" of economic determinism (May-June issue). His calculation has only convinced me of its falsity. He says:

"As a demonstration of accuracy I propose that we predict complete Prohibition, fully enforced, by 1956. Modern machinery becoming more powerful will demand sobriety or grave disaster. Several such disasters will force opinion towards Prohibition (abhorrent to the writer). This is a scientifically demonstrable calculation. The force is beyond my will or wit. It is Super-conscious."

How can Mr. Kass be certain that the future will bring more complicated machines, instead of the simplification of machines? How could he prove that people will prefer poison bootleg booze in place of bona-fide businesses which are forced to produce good quality alcoholic beverages in order to remain in business? If Mr. Kass had made his prediction fourteen years ago, instead of today, wouldn't he be embarrassed now? May he not be embarrassed in 1956?

The greatest obstacle in the path of the economic determinists is the factor of human nature. What will people choose in the future? How can any results be determined that are not of their choosing? Just strike a man in the face. Will he be knocked out? Will he run? Or will he strike back? Each stage of each development brings on a new series of endless possibilities, situations and choices, any one of which may upset the most calculated of predictions.

Has Mr. Kass all the available facts and data for what is to happen from now until 1956? How can he be sure that he has? Isn't it possible that he will throw more weight and importance on some of the facts than will others, thereby causing them to arrive at different conclusions? Karl Marx, one of the foremost exponents of economic determinism, has missed badly.

No doubt, whatever is going to happen, is going to happen. But it is like figuring how to pick winners in a horse race. Perhaps some of the factors calculated may have nothing to do with the result, and some of the factors not calculated may have *all* to do with the result, which may cause a prediction to come true, yet not to the actual credit of the predictor. And remember, one is open to ridicule indefinitely when constantly reminded of an absurd prediction made in the past.

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