Reflections on Mechanisms Influencing Human Behavior

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Abstract

Human behavior is strongly influenced by a series of both internal and external factors. These do not have an irresistible character; the individual begins given the possibility to choose between the varied paths to take action, just like he has the capacity to restrain certain impulses and to resist certain stimuli from the environment. The individual cannot leave the influence of these factors aside and give his outer manifestation another content than the one influenced by some of the aforementioned factors, although it has the possibility to choose from a multitude of types of reaction that type that be considers more suited and more according to the social patterns.

Human behavior is only to a certain extent hereditary predetermined because, at his birth, the child has some “natural predispositions” which subsequently, influenced by environment (including by education) change in psychic features of personality which shall direct the behavior. Furthermore, recent genetic researches suggest that the “hereditary legacy” does not strictly limit the individual and there are a series of flexible genetic features. Therefore, human behavior can be modeled by exogenous factors. This explains the role played by education in modeling human personality. Scientific researches confirmed the existence of hereditary predetermined behaviors. Heredity, though it exists, is only a trend, a “possibility” subjected to transformations influenced by the individual’s life conditions.

The behavior of an individual is also determined by his personality features, resulted from the interaction between environments (including education) and “natural predispositions”, and the “situation” can only be considered as an opportunity in the manifestation of the individual’s personality. It can influence situations, may choose certain ones and may avoid others. Actually, each individual builds up basic strategies on the objective reality which shall subsequently influence his reaction to fight back and thus shall guide his behavior.

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Introduction

Scientists have always asked themselves if man can be educated, if the influences exercised upon him by the social environment can change him. The correct answer to this question assumed the study of the factors influencing the development of human personality, of its limits and the correlation between these factors.

Based on different multidisciplinary researches, scientists have identified the following main factors of human personality: heredity, as an internal factor, having a phylogenetic feature, interfering in the process of human personality’s development with the psychosocial, educational and personal experiences processes of human evolution; environment, as external factor and education, as mixt, internal and external factor (Bontaș, 2001, p.35; Tîrcovnicu and Popeangă, 1972, p.33; Joița, 1999, p.41 [the author notes that the educated is the fourth factor of personality, with heredity, environment and education]).

Also, there are different opinions about the share of each of these factors in the educational process. Thus, hereditarianism or inest theories state that a decisive role in human evolution is played by heredity (Plato, Confucius, Schopenhauer, Lombroso, Spencer etc.); the ambient theories state that the decisive role is played by the environment, especially the socio-cultural one, which also includes education (Locke, Rousseau, Helvetius, Watson etc.) and the triple determination theories state that the main role is played by heredity, social environment and education, the latter one being preponderant (Democrat, Diderot, Herzen, Roșca etc.) (Bontaș, 2001, p.35).

The latter theory states that human personality is a bio-psycho-social unity, as a result of the interaction between three factors – heredity, environment and education, concept which would represent the only modern theory on human personality development contributing for the development and perfect of education and training (Bontaș, 2001, p.36).

Following the dominant opinion, the educational factor has the leading role due to its specificity, manifested both directly and indirectly through the other factors (Tîrcovnicu and Popeangă, 1972, p.39; Nicola, 2003, p.103-104). Without denying the important role played by education in human development, we must not consider it absolute against the other factors, even as their share cannot be considered absolute. The idea according to which the hereditary factor would have a decisive influence on human behavior is as prejudicial as the one of admitting the excessive influence of the environment; in fact, human behavior is conditioned both by heredity and the environment (Deleanu, 1983, p.53).

Content

Factors influencing human behavior are classified in two main categories: genetic factors and acquired factors.

a) Genetic factors

- Physical heredity includes a series of physical or psychical features transmitted from parents to their children through germ plasma. Genetics have clarified the sub-layer of the heredity material, establishing that the transmission of the parents’ characteristics is made through chromosomes, genes and nucleic acids. The latter ones (DNA - Deoxyribo nucleic acid and RNA – Ribonucleic Acid) have in their molecules in a codified shape the whole genetic information (Ivan, 2007, p.9).

  Each individual’s genetic information in based on the genotype, and the ensemble of psychical features developed in the interaction between heredity (genotype) and the socio-cultural environment, also education, is the phenotype (Bontaș, 2001, p.36).

  Each individual’s heredity patrimony is the result of the combination between genetic maternal and paternal units. Because there are unlimited combinations of the two categories of genetic units within a germ cell, the birth of identical individual is practically impossible. Except are the monozygotic twins who, coming from the same ovule, are hereditary identical, their genetic maternal and paternal units having the same share (Todoran, 1974, p.136-159).
But even for monozygotic twins the influence of the environment cannot be denied because it is possible that some twins, rose in different environments end up committing illicit actions and the other do not, even if they share the same “hereditary patrimony”. Theodosius Dobzhansky stated that “give one hundred children and based on the environment I shall make them geniuses or criminals”; other geneticists stated that “heredity offers us only the roadmap, the environment deciding to get to destination” (Scirpecaru and Astărescoae, 2003, p.36).

Against the idea of the almighty influence of environment, in literature was supported a more realistic thesis, namely that in every human being there are innate behavior units on which the environment has no influence, these being fixed action patterns or hereditary coordinates.

This conclusion is confirmed by the finding that usually the child adjust all by himself to environmental requirements, as well as adjusting to the massive acquisition of natural conditioned reflexes, formed spontaneously and unconscious even for adult persons (Tucicov Bogdan et al., 1972, p.27; Cesa-Bianchi, 1987, p.42-43 [the author note that natural or unconditioned reflex is present since birth and is based on the structure – reflex arc or diastasis – existing in the nervous system of each individual. Therefore, behavior must be considered as the expression of a chain of innate and achieved reflexes]). It was established that based on biological measurements, that until the age of 4, 50% of the brain capacity is available for action, ensuring the individual’s survival, further additions and increases only influencing the IQ. If the odds for this progressive availability are not ensured by the age of 4, the brain mechanisms can be frustrated, can close and have a subsequent difficult recondition (Tucicov-Bogdan, 1972, p.27). Are known accidental cases in which different children have managed to survive for a period of time outside the human social environment based on their genetic availabilities, surpassing the school age, but they no longer have the psychical features of their own specie due to the lack of socio-emotional environment, thus proving they were irretrievable. This aspect proves us that the need of a socio-emotional environment is specific to human beings (Cociu, 1982, p.183 [the authors state that it is about an innate feature of human beings, aspect that we do not share because the environment is one of the factors for developing the personality and not an innate feature]).

- **Psychical heredity** also has a certain weight in the genesis of human behavior. The data offered by psychology shows that the psychical factors are: *motivational* (needs, goals, trends, emotions, desire etc.), *cognitive*, knowledge (perceptive, representative, imaginary, intellectual) and *conative* or movement, for applying the desire and the idea of manifesting. A special place is reserved for the *character* (aggressive, acquisitive etc.), *temperament* (impulsivity, insensitivity etc.) and *human nature* (sociable, solitary etc.).

- **The character** gathers the ensemble of attitudes of him, of the others and of society, formed by education, but sometimes based on the innate temperamental features. It especially aims the socio-moral superstructure of the personality, the role as social being of humans (Dafinoiu, 2005, p.61). When we talk about character, we include a moral standard and issue a value judgment. The character sends us to the profound structure of personality, expressed by behaviors that, within a series of situations, are easily to be foreseen (Dafinoiu, 2005, p.61).

- **The temperament** expresses the energetic-dynamic dimension of human personality and contributes in determining the type of temperament of an individual. It is considered to comprise the complex of innate and acquired particularities of an individual and would represent the core of the character, altering and modeling it to a certain extent.

One cannot talk about a pure psychical heredity, because some psychical phenomena are formed during life and individual activity, being part of the phenotype. While the genotype is always hereditary, the phenotype is non-transferable and individual, because the phenotype is the result of the interference between the genotype and environmental influences, hereditary factors not having an important share. Psychical phenomena, simple or elementary, complex or superior are the result of the interference of hereditary factors with environmental influences, the share of these factors having a variable dynamic for each phenomenon and depending on the moment (Nicola, 2003, p.96). These hereditary factors are natural predispositions (anatomic-physiological particularities, the type of superior nervous activity) having a multipurpose feature, offering a pattern of
possibilities for psychical development, without fatally predetermining certain qualities or features of human personality (Nicola, 2003, p.97). The psychological structure of human personality is the result of the biological transformation under the influence of social life and education, every psychological feature being a unit of the interaction between the genetic factor and the environmental one (including education).

Behavior or attitude do not appear and manifest by itself without a certain motivation, namely without a certain incitement, a certain direction and energetic support. Therefore, motivation is a fundamental dimension of personality, an internal variable starting and sustaining different processes and psychical capacity, of the individual’s external reactions (Albu, 2002, p.44). The Italian doctrine emphasized that reason is an indicator for the individual’s personality, a fragment of his way of being; from a psychological perspective, reasons can be accepted as an organized system determining the individual to achieve certain goals, by organizing and sustaining behavior (De Cataldo Neuburger, 1987, p.249-250). In its wide sense, the concept of motivation gathers the ensemble of dynamic factors determining the individual’s behavior (Sillamy, 1996). In a more restrictive sense, motivation refers to the ensemble of stimuli or goals – needs, reasons, attractions, interests, beliefs, wishes, intentions, dreams, ideals, projects – supporting from the inside the achievement of certain actions, deeds, attitudes (Popescu Neveanu, 1978, p.458).

An important role in determining the behavior is the conscience. When simultaneous actions are unfolded they can be mentally evaluated and compared, without the risk and waste of time assumed by the attempt for each of them (Malim et al., 1999, p.99-101). Hence the conclusion that human beings do not immediately and automatically fight back to external stimuli, but has the possibility to choose his type of reaction, subjecting it to the control of his conscience. On the other hand, behavior sometimes seems to influence the conscience; for instance, human beings who tend to smile consider themselves happier than those who tend to frown (Malim et al., 1999, p.98).

b) Acquired factors

Beside the endogenous factors determining the behavior, there are also exogenous factors influencing human behavior. Among them an important role is played by environmental factors, namely:

- **Natural environment** (physical, geographical) represents the environment in which the individual reacts to stimuli coming from nature: earth, water, air, plants, animals, seasons etc.; this environment includes the ensemble of physical conditions in which humans live.

- Another environmental factor is the family. In family the child learns not only his first notions on right and wrong, but also his first notions on the rules existing in society and which he must respect. In deed was rightly said that parents are the first ones who enforce a certain behavior for their children. In the child’s conscience there will also be found some negative behaviors of his parents (alcoholism, a dissipated life etc.), influences that later shall repeat in his own behavior (Bontaș, 2001, p.294).

  Family education starts at an early age, when the child is “flexible” and can be shaped, but does not stop even after the child has grown up (when he is in kindergarten or in school) (Vlachos, 2001, p.168; Stânciulescu, 2002, p.33).

  One might even state that the socio-educational function of the family is always present in the child’ life (Bontaș, 2001, p.294), because even if the child is an adult with his own family, the influence of his parents has a wicker presence.

- **Reference groups**, namely the group of friends and acquaintances also have an influence on the child’s behavior starting from an early age. From the pattern of behavior of these groups, the child borrows values and rules, attitudes, models, opinions and conducts. But also the adults relate one to another or to different reference groups and often change their behavior according to the models they have accepted. No person can live without these groups, because the need of a group is determined by the very social essence of the human beings: membership in a group, the need to be recognized, to integrate and to cooperate with other members (Neculau et al., 1987, p.170).
School represents an important factor in systematic and continuing education. In this institution, education and training have the maximum degree of development by its programed, planned and methodic features of the educational activities (Cucoș, 2002, p.43). School education contributes in the creation and modeling of human personality, in the context of his life conditions (Cucoș, 2002, p.50-51).

The educational process has beside its informational-modeling and knowledge feature, basically instructive, an emotional-educational feature, in order to model certain qualities of the student and to create a dignified and civilized behavior (Todoran, 1982, p.59).

The church represents another factor modeling human behavior through the priest, providing the generous ideas of Christian morality. The educational influence of the church is systematic both with the opportunity of religious ceremonies, as well as with the occasion of specific activities, unfolded by the priest in and out of the church (confession, individual or group catechisms, explicitly educational activities). Religion also shares a certain ethics by specific moral rules (commands) such as: not to steal, not to kill, not to live in debauchery, not to argue, to help the one(s) in need, to love your brother, tolerance, forgiveness, devoutness and piety. Religion values certain noble feelings of humans, modeling his moral behavior. Jesus Christ is the excellent moral behavior model. “Follow God’s example, therefore, as dearly loved children” (Ephesians 5, 1) – is the advice of Paul. And this is the road that must be taken: “Until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4, 13).

Mass-media is another group of factors which can influence human behavior. Media institutions spread the information for the mass, also filing a modeling (educational) role especially on general public having different beliefs. This spiritual modeling, varied and complex has the force to energize human behaviors; the educational feature of the media is not substituted to school and education but joins them, thus contributing in the achievement of educational and training objectives (Bontaș, 2001, p.302).

Organizations, beside their specific, productive, creative, commercial (etc.) functions, have an objective function for educating human beings. Organizations are groups of individuals connected in different relations and having common goals (such as: economic, cultural, sportive, instructive purposes etc.). The structural-functional features of the organizations contribute to the model of human psychic and personality; individuals are also the product, the mirror of the organization or organizations they change throughout their lives (W.H. Whyte Jr.) (Zlate, 2004, p.35).

The way in which the influences of genetic factors interfere with those of social environment in human behavior has been the subject of wide argues during time. Scientists have wondered if genetic factors and those of environment have an automatic action on human behavior determining it absolutely or the human being has the possibility of choosing its behavior (free will).

Determinist philosophers (Locke, Berkeley and Hume) considered human behavior as the result of forces against which the individual has no power regarding both internal and external factors.

On such position is placed also the biological and environmental determinism, supporting the predominant feature of either the biological processes or of external environment influences. So, for example the classic psychoanalysis representatives considered the internal processes of the individual as causing his behavior. The behavior would be determined by powerful instinctive forces, by which the individual in unaware. These forces are mostly sexual and aggressive ones. The resulted behavior can be constructive and self-preservative or destructive or self-destructive (S. Freud) (Malim et al., 1999, p.67-68).

On the contrary, according to some authors who admit the existence of free will (Plato, Kant, Descartes) individuals are the only beings with soul, which gives them the freedom to make plans and to choose. Modern theories admitting the existing of free will are modernism and humanist psychology. Essentially these theories state that as long as a person may choose between different variables on the course of an action, in the absence of any coercion, we are dealing with free will. According to this vision, the individual is able to actively answer to
forces influencing him using psychic processes such as knowledge, reasoning and judgment to decide on a certain behavior (Malim et al., 1999, p.70-71).

Between these conceptions, determinism or free will it was also expressed an intermediate position, the so-called moderate determinism (William James) which is distant from radical determinism and pure free will. In a society promoting personal responsibility, radical determinism is unacceptable, and free will is hard to define in a satisfactory way.

Modern psychology favors a position between determinism and free will, stating that “the scientific perspective on man should at least admit that in a certain manner human behavior is subjected to certain laws and is predictable” (Max Wertheimer). Also the Italian doctrine states that, sometimes, behavior can be predetermined (De Cataldo Neuburger, 1987, p.252-253).

Thus, human behavior is influenced by a series of internal or external factors. They do not have an irresistible feature, the individual having the possibility to choose between different means of action, as he has the ability to inhibit certain impulses and to resist to certain environmental stimuli (Antoniu and Daneș, 1983, p.39). The individual cannot ignore the influence of these factors and give his external manifestation a different content than the one to which he would be influenced by different of the factors already mentioned, but has the possibility to choose from a series of reactions the most appropriate and consistent with social models.

Human behavior is only to a certain extent hereditary predetermined because, at his birth, the child has some “natural predispositions” which subsequently, influenced by environment (including by education) change in psychic features of personality which shall direct the behavior. Furthermore, recent genetic researches suggest that the “hereditary legacy” does not strictly limit the individual and there are a series of flexible genetic features. Therefore, human behavior can be modeled by exogenous factors. This explains the role played by education in modeling human personality. According to the Romanian doctrine, because of the fact that individuals’ behavior is achieved, its genetic components may be altered by cultural, controlling means, replacing the innate features with cultural ones, more advantageous in adjusting to the actual rhythm of civilization Scientific researches affirmed the existence of hereditary predetermined behaviors. Heredity, though it exists, is only a trend, a “possibility” subjected to transformations influenced by the individual’s life conditions (Antoniu and Daneș, 1983, p.38 [the authors note that heredity has a dominant influence in the first period of life, especially during childhood and teens]).

The behavior of an individual is also determined by his personality features, resulted from the interaction between environments (including education) and “natural predispositions”, and the “situation” can only be considered as an opportunity in the manifestation of the individual’s personality. It can influence situations, may choose certain ones and may avoid others. Actually, each individual builds up basic strategies on the objective reality which shall subsequently influence his reaction to fight back and thus shall guide his behavior (De Cataldo Neuburger, 1987, p.248 [the author shows that each individual “builds up” his own system of concepts based on a theory on self, a theory on the exterior world and of the relations between these two]).

Adverse consequences of the radical transformations in the economic, political, ideological, axiological areas combined and amplified by the informational explosion, the promotion of subcultural products, weakening the social control and the power of intervention of the social authorities, all this can damage the social balance, to create a moral and axiological crisis, to determine the corrosion of all moral beliefs contributing to the apparition of a large number of individuals and small groups abusing the constitutional freedoms and choosing a life incompatible with the social rules.

Conclusions

In Romania, social factors of criminality represent a consequence of the impact of the serious socio-economic problems specific for the transition period as well for the authority crisis crossed by all authorities of
the state of law. The defective legislation and the overloading of the criminal justice system, correlated with the lack of personnel and logistics made the effect of the preventive and repressive measures to be limited.

Considering the high rate of profit and the low degree of the risks, elements regarding organized crime have appeared and developed quicker in the economic-financial area. Corruption threatens not only citizens’ rights and fundamental freedoms, but also the good function of the state institutions, the entire democratic society.

A series of transnational organizations have created connections among inland groups of offenders and in cooperation with them they act for combating drugs, munitions or stolen vehicles trafficking, modern forms of slavery, the placement of false currency, illicit transportation of toxic wastes, armed attacks etc. Valuable objects from the national patrimony have been smuggled outside the country.

Special amplitude was gained by fraud and forging in their most diverse forms, customs and exchange frauds and breaching the legislation regarding import-export operations etc. Also the number of offences regarding tax evasion has grown, the phenomenon for claiming “tax protection” and kidnapping has amplified, numerous acts of violence between rival groups of offenders take place etc.

As a social phenomenon, corruption is the manifestation of the moral and spiritual decay of the public servant, involving certain material advantages for ordinary service obligations, for closing businesses and transactions by the circumvention of moral rules and laws.

Lately, the offences committed by violence have amplified (murders, rapes, hitting or other injury causing death, robberies and serious bodily harm – as forms of private violence, group conflicts or any other forms of terrorism).

We appreciate that by education, for preventing such actions, we must implement in the conscience of individuals at least three fundamental principles of law: *suum cuique tribuere* (to each his own or to each what he deserves), *alterum non injuriere* (not to injure other) and *honeste vivere* (an honest life).

References: