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Dear Collegian,

Why are we the kind of people that we are?

Surely no thinking person has been able to avoid pursuing the answer to that question. Especially is this true when we have goofed something up, when we have done something stupid.

In fact, that's what "behavioral science" is all about. A high degree of our education is centered about that problem. Out of the discussions of our time have come many suggestions in answer to that question. John Staddon, professor of psychology at Duke University, was quoted as saying, "Social science assumes that behavior is determined, but determinism does not imply lack of personal responsibility. Responsibility just means normal sensitivity to the sticks and carrots of life." This certainly indicates that the questions of "Who am I?" and "Who are you?" are relevant subjects for animated discussion in our present culture. From academia to the business community, the influences that "determine" our destiny are the object of many an inquiry in these days. Some answers to the inquiry include...

We are determined by the degree of our intelligence. The thought is that there is within us an innate intellectual capability, which is not the same as knowledge. It has to do with our capacity to apprehend, understand, memorize, compare and express facts which may come to us. It is generally agreed that intelligence, as in IQ, cannot be changed. We can deal with people in terms of intelligence--as we must, but we cannot hope to change their predetermined intelligence capability.

Another suggestion is that **we are determined by our family background.** The essence of our ultimate nature is genetic. This view is advanced by the high degree of genetic studies and "genetic manipulation" that we see going today. The genetic determinists make remarkable promises as to the developments they will produce in the days to come, like cloning.

There are other views. Many suggest that **we are determined by the culture.** It is our circle of friends and worldly involvements that produce the "final you." Certainly, the very word, "culture," implies interaction between people and the conditioning factors thereof.

Thinking further, we note that others insist that **it is our studies that determine the nature of our personalities** and our possibilities for the future. Within this source of determination we should include the components of impressive teachers, helpful books, student interaction, collegiate sources of fellowship and perhaps others. Surely every student believes that there is at least a degree of determination in his studies. If not true, why go to school? (Some ask that question very seriously.)

Others insist that the **determining factors of life are so varied that they can only be called "accidental."** For them, life is a serendipity thing determined by unpredictable, fortuitous accidents or incidents that come upon us. One might call them "accidental determinists," which is about all that can be said.

In addition, there are those of an existential nature who deny the existence of valid causes, "This moment has no causes and it also has no consequences" insist the more vocal existentialists. Therefore, outcomes can be predicted from no cause whatsoever and what happens happens. There is a kind of "cosmic loneliness" which sets in with people of this all-too-common state of mind.

We can instantly see that the variant points of view as to why life is what it is are many. The multiple causes that are suggested certainly make valid what we again would need to call "behavioral studies." Actually, while we don't often notice it, every conversation and every interaction between any two people is a behavioral study. The flight instructor has studied the behavior of the student and believes in a certain predictability of that behavior, or else he would not license him to fly an airplane. The employer speaks with supposed casualness to an employee, but actually he is studying him very intently. Just so does a congregation listen to a preacher or the reader evaluate the writer of the text. In like fashion are judgments made about everyone and decisions transpire, based on that most universal of all activities, behavioral evaluation.

Who Am I?

We ask the question about others, "What can this person be expected to do?" Of interest also, is the fact that we ask these questions of ourselves. "Why am I like I am?" we ask ourselves. The want of an answer to that question, or an inappropriate answer, can lead to depression, and even despair. This is doubtless why Shakespeare wrote, "Know thyself and so sure as the night follows the day, thou canst not be false to any man." But alas, when we succeed even partially in knowing ourselves, we may discover evil thoughts and pernicious ideas that hide behind the emotional fig leaves that we are wearing. But let us agree that one does not know himself or herself until he or she knows how life is determined.

How really is life determined? Of course, the fact is that we are what we are to some degree by the influence of each one of the determinisms which we have mentioned. There is no doubt that we are influenced by our friends, our parents, our intelligence, our genetic makeup, our diligent studies and happy accidents of life that come upon us.

Because we are thoughtful, however, we reject the totality of influence that others suggest from these sources of our "beingness." In our heart of hearts, we know that influences have come upon us, but we also know that we have a choice, we choose as to whether "to be or not to be" influenced by these variant pressures to conform. We stand as thinking, choosing, volitional beings in the midst of a circle of potential determinisms. All of

these, as we have seen, must be respected, but none of them are to be revered. In life, obedience is one thing and obeisance is another.

Why then are we what we are? To answer this question correctly is to take a giant step in understanding it all.

To discover that answer, let us remember first of all that there is a just God who presides above the world and above our personal lives. Speaking about Him, the Bible says, "*In Him we live, and move, and have our being*" (Acts 17:28). God is our Maker and the source of life for us all.

Let us remember then that the will of God, which is pervasive in the world, is the direction and influence which we cannot do without. God has made known to us His plan for our lives and He offers us a **choice**. We must, therefore, insist that we are what we are and become what we become because of our willingness to conform to the will of God or to reject His will. **The determinant of human life is the will of the individual person responding affirmatively to the will of God.** To believe that, in the last analysis, life is determined by any other force is to pursue a delusion. So, once again, we must face the fact that Jesus Christ stands in the middle of all of our affairs and He alone makes life what it is. Other determinisms notwithstanding, the ultimate influence in life can only be Jesus Christ. Decision--the decision for Christ--determines destiny.

Your Choice

I cannot overemphasize this important point! It is one of the paramount facts of life that we are offered a number of pathways to follow. We are not coerced in one direction or another by some kind of fatalism of which people speak. Rather, we are given that all important thing--**choice** about what we shall be. Therefore, the greatest ability which we may possess in life is the wisdom to choose the correct direction. Yes, the great determinism in life is the free will, the power of choice that God gives to man. We are not automatons! We are not marionettes! We are not mindless robots! We are not even mere creatures of instinct like the animals of the field. No indeed, we are discerning, thinking, choosing human beings who are then given the opportunity and the responsibility to live in the midst of the outcomes that our choices bring to pass. This is why Joshua, the leader of the nation of Israel, spoke to his nation and to the whole world as he did. He said, "*Choose you this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the river, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord*" (Josh. 24:15).

It is clear then that the necessity of choosing is pressed upon every man and every nation. It is also clear that the choice in life is, in the final analysis, between the only God and all of the pagan gods. It is the choice between good and evil.

In the same sense, reality presses this same choice upon you and upon me. We discover in the New Testament that the choice between good and evil is really the choice between something and nothing. Choosing between something and nothing, that is the ultimate thing in life.

It is certainly about this that Paul wrote when he said, "*Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ*" (I Cor. 3:11). Referring to the facts of life about

God, the Apostle Paul says, "We can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth" (II Cor. 13:8). Recognizing the nature of his own life, the Apostle Paul said, "By the grace of God I am what I am" (I Cor. 15:10).

We therefore have an earnest recommendation to make. The problems of life are resolved when we come to the place to which the Apostle Paul came on the Damascus Road. After he met Jesus Christ face to face, he said, "Lord, what will You have me to do?" Christ gave him the answer to that question and that moment became the launching pad of destiny for Saul of Tarsus. He was more greatly used of God than any other human being and electrified the world with the Gospel of the Grace of God.

I recognize the fact that teachers, scholars, people of influence may disagree. They may all attempt to write the books, deliver the lectures and teach the lessons that will produce conformity to an alternative, secular view. So, while treating the ideas of our world with respect, we should also have a touch of detachment, cynicism even, about every so called "fact" of life. In more elaborate fashion, Paul puts it to us, saying. "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ" (Col. 2:8). This means, of course, that there are those who will attempt to spoil us, to confuse us about life. They will use bad philosophy and deliberate deceit to bring this to pass. So we must learn that human tradition--that which comes from this world--is not to be confused with the truth of Christ. To know and to appreciate the truth of the Word of God will produce the personality and outlook with us that will carry us all the way to heaven.

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