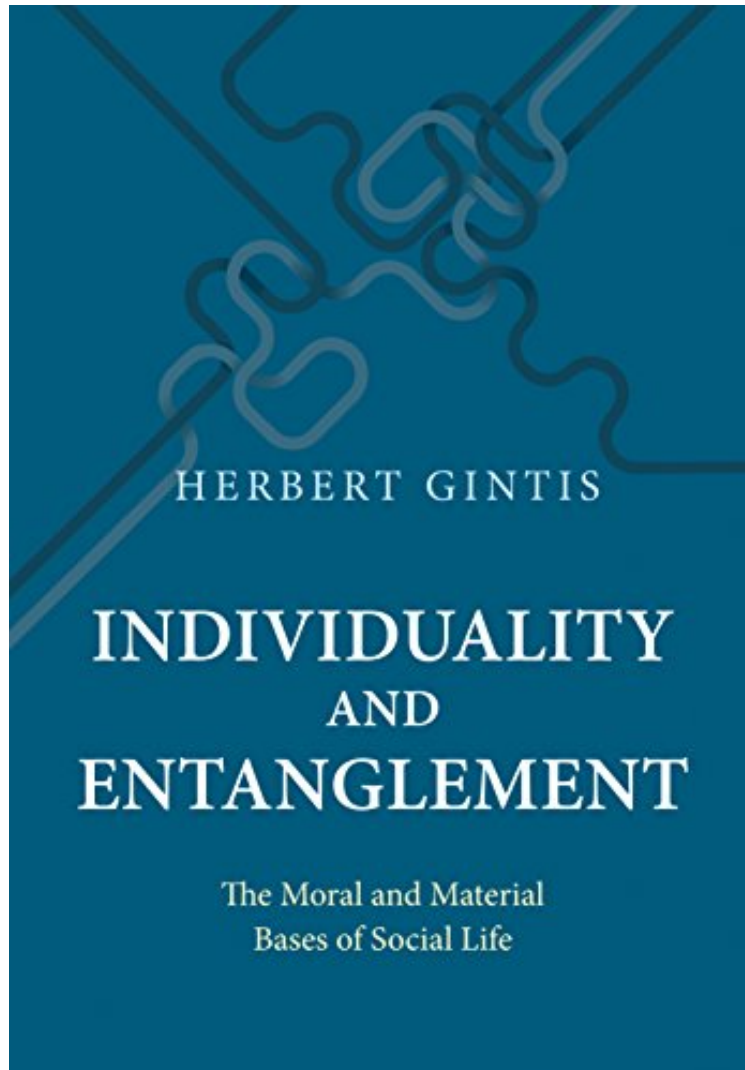


(Ebook pdf) Individuality and Entanglement: The Moral and Material Bases of Social Life

Individuality and Entanglement: The Moral and Material Bases of Social Life

Herbert Gintis

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Herbert Gintis : Individuality and Entanglement: The Moral and Material Bases of Social Life before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Individuality and Entanglement: The Moral and Material Bases of Social Life:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Must-read for every student of social sciences. Gintis blends ...By Ioannis Kospentaris Must-read for every student of social sciences. Gintis blends evolutionary anthropology, biology, brain sciences, game theory and sociology to offer a state-of-the-art review of the foundations of human action and sociality A tour de force!5 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Unification of social sciencesBy Janos Varga Herbert Gintis is an economist who has contributed to numerous other fields of the social/behavioral science. His

recent book can be viewed as the synthesis of his work done during last two decades (or so). As such, a reader following Gintis's earlier works will find much of the material discussed here familiar. He has long been a proponent of the unification of social sciences based on game theory and rational choice, tries to provide the foundation of this process, thus in this book covers a broad range of themes connected, in general, to the human behavior and society. The chapters in the book are loosely related to each other, almost every one of them is based on one or more of Gintis's earlier books/journal articles, and the author gives a nice and informative overview of them in the first chapter. Even if one has read those articles/books, the way he presents "the big picture"; here makes the book a worthwhile investment since (usually) Gintis is able to convey relatively complicated models and ideas in a clear manner, while absorbing the theoretical articles published in specialized journals takes much more time (which is completely understandable since journal articles are for the specialists of the given field). The math used in the book is not demanding so that should not be a problem for the interested reader. As Peter Richerson notes on the back cover, Gintis is one of the deepest thinker about the fragmentation of social sciences, and this is expressed in the amount and range of literature that he processed, covered and presented here. The book is not flawless though. Sometimes I had the feeling that the chapters consist of unrelated themes and models (especially ch 6) and they were just bunched together without further refinements. The section titles and their content are not always in concordance (e.g. 2.5. "Evolutionary history of primate societies"; but the actual content is five paragraphs about the bipedalism). Moreover, he usually gives a balanced treatment of the literature, but, for example in case of Douglas Fry, where Gintis implies that Fry pictures the hunter gatherers as "noble savages" (p.30), is just unfair. Fry only states that war (not aggression or homicide) was largely absent before agriculture, simply because simple HG societies lack the strong leadership required for warfare. The way he handles money is at odd with the book's interdisciplinary approach: the existence and emergence of money are explained here solely by the money's medium of exchange function. And this is exactly how economics textbooks explain them, despite the fact that anthropologist and sociologists using ethnographic and historic data rejected this claim. He does not mention Mauss, Polanyi, Ingham etc. All in all this is a very deep, well-written book, highly recommended to every serious social scientist. One final note on the physical appearance of the book: the hardcover version, which is an especially nice work, is only 35 dollars. Usually for this price one can only get a paperback (considering only academic books). So kudos to Princeton University Press and Gintis.

3 of 21 people found the following review helpful. The Dead Hands of Group Selection and Phenomenology Destroy Another Book and Another Career By Featherless Biped Since Gintis is a senior economist and I have read some of his previous books with interest, I was expecting some more insights into behavior. Sadly he makes the dead hands of group selection and phenomenology into the centerpieces of his theories of behavior, and this largely invalidates the work. Worse, since he shows such bad judgement here, it calls into question all his previous work. The attempt to resurrect group selection by his friends at Harvard, Nowak and Wilson, a few years ago was one of the major scandals in biology in the last decade, and I have recounted the sad story in my article "Altruism, Jesus and the End of the World"; how the Templeton Foundation bought a Harvard Professorship and attacked Evolution, Rationality and Civilization -- A review of E.O. Wilson 'The Social Conquest of Earth' (2012) and Nowak and Highfield "SuperCooperators" (2012). Unlike Nowak, Gintis does not seem to be motivated by religious fanaticism, but by the strong desire to generate an alternative to the grim realities of human nature, made easy by the (near universal) lack of understanding of basic human biology and blank slateism of behavioral scientists, other academics, and the general public. Gintis rightly attacks (as he has many times before) economists, sociologists and other behavioral scientists for not having a coherent framework to describe behavior. Of course the framework needed to understand behavior is an evolutionary one. Unfortunately he fails to provide one himself (according to his many critics and I concur), and the attempt to graft the rotten corpse of group selection onto whatever economic and psychological theories he has generated in his decades of work, merely invalidates his entire project. Although Gintis makes a valiant effort to understand and explain the genetics, like Wilson and Nowak, he is far from an expert, and like them, the math just blinds him to the biological impossibilities and of course this is the norm in science. As Wittgenstein famously noted on the first page of Culture and Value "There is no religious denomination in which the misuse of metaphysical expressions has been responsible for so much sin as it has in mathematics." It has always been crystal clear that a gene that causes behavior which decreases its own frequency cannot persist, but this is the core of the notion of group selection. Furthermore, it has been well known and often demonstrated that group selection just reduces to inclusive fitness (kin selection), which, as Dawkins has noted, is just another name for evolution by natural selection. Like Wilson, Gintis has worked in this arena for about 50 years and still has not grasped it, but after the scandal broke, it took me only 3 days to find, read and understand the most relevant professional work, as detailed in my article. It is mind boggling to realize that Gintis and Wilson were unable to accomplish this in nearly half a century. I discuss the errors of group selection and phenomenology that are the norm in academia as special cases of the near universal failure to understand human nature that are destroying America and the world. Those who wish to read all my articles please consult the ebook here Philosophy, Human Nature and the Collapse of Civilization -- Articles and Reviews 2006-2016 by Michael Starks 662p (2016) In the years after the Nowak, Wilson, Tarnita paper was published in Nature, several population geneticists recounted chapter and verse on

the subject, again showing conclusively that it is all a storm in a teacup. It is most unfortunate that Gintis, like his friends, failed to ask a competent biologist about this and regards as misguided the 140 some well known biologists who signed a letter protesting the publication of this nonsense in Nature. I refer those who want the gory details to my paper, as it's the best account of the melee that I am aware of. For a summary of the tech details see Dawkins Article The Descent of Edward Wilson <http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/edward-wilson-social-conquest-earth-evolutionary-errors-origin-species>. As Dawkins wrote 'For Wilson not to acknowledge that he speaks for himself against the great majority of his professional colleagues is an act of wanton arrogance'. Sadly Gintis has assimilated himself to such inglorious company. There are also some nice Dawkins youtubes such as <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IBweDk4ZzZ4>. Gintis has also failed to provide the behavioral framework lacking in all the social sciences. One needs to have a logical structure for rationality, an understanding of the two systems of thought (dual process theory), of the division between scientific issues of fact and philosophical issues of how language works in the context at issue, and of how to avoid reductionism and scientism, but he, like nearly all students of behavior, is largely clueless. He, like them, is enchanted by models, theories, and concepts, and the urge to explain, while Wittgenstein showed us that we only need to describe, and that theories, concepts etc., are just ways of using language (language games) which have value only insofar as they have a clear test (clear truthmakers, or as eminent philosopher John Searle likes to say, clear Conditions of Satisfaction (COS)). I have attempted to provide a start on this in my recent writings, such as The Logical Structure of Consciousness (behavior, personality, rationality, higher order thought, intentionality) (2016) and The Logical Structure of Philosophy, Psychology, Mind and Language as Revealed in the Writings of Ludwig Wittgenstein and John Searle (2016). Those interested in all my writings in their most recent versions may consult my e-book Philosophy, Human Nature and the Collapse of Civilization - Articles and Reviews 2006-2016 662p (2016). I will now give a brief presentation of this framework. Since I have explained this table and its use in describing behavior in great detail in many recent papers and several books, available on this site and others, I will not repeat it here. Gintis starts making dubious, vague or downright bizarre claims early in the book. It begins on the first page of the overview with meaningless quotes from Einstein and Ryle. On p xii the paragraph beginning 'Third Theme' about entangled minds needs rewriting to specify that language games are functions of System 2 and that's how thinking, believing etc. work (what they are), while the Fourth Theme which tries to explain behavior as due to what people 'consciously believe' is right. That is, with 'nonconsequentialism' hers trying to 'explain' behavior as 'altruistic' group selection mediated by conscious linguistic System 2. But if we take an evolutionary long term view, it's clearly due to reciprocal altruism, attempting to serve inclusive fitness, which is mediated by the unconscious operation of System 1. Likewise for the Fifth Theme and the rest of the Overview. He favors Rational Choice but has no idea this is a language game for which the exact context must be specified, nor that both System 1 and System 2 are 'rational' but in quite different ways. This is the classic error of most descriptions of behavior, which Searle has called The Phenomenological Illusion, Pinker the Blank Slate and Tooby and Cosmides 'The Standard Social Science Model' and I have discussed it extensively in my other reviews and articles. As long as one does not grasp that most of our behavior is automated by nonlinguistic System 1, and that our conscious linguistic System 2 is mostly for rationalization of our compulsive and unconscious choices, it is not possible to have more than a very superficial view of behavior, i.e., the one that is nearly universal not only among academics but politicians, billionaire owners of high tech companies, movie stars and the general public. Consequently, the consequences reach far beyond academia, producing delusional social policies that are bringing about the inexorable collapse of industrial civilization. See my 'Suicide by Democracy-an Obituary for America and the World'. It is breathtaking to see America and the European democracies helping citizens of the third world destroy everyone's future. On p xiii one can describe the 'nonconsequentialist' (i.e., apparently 'true' altruistic or self-destructive behavior) as actually performing reciprocal altruism, serving inclusive fitness due to genes evolved in the EEA (Environment of Evolutionary Adaptation; i.e., that of our very distant ancestors), which stimulates the dopaminergic circuits in the ventral tegmentum and the nucleus accumbens, with the resulting release of dopamine which makes us feel good; the same mechanism that appears to be involved in all addictive behavior from drug abuse to soccer moms. And more incoherent babble such as 'In the context of such environments, there is a fitness benefit to the 'epigenetic transmission' of such 'information' concerning the 'current state' of the 'environment', i.e., transmission through non genetic 'channels'. This is called 'cultural transmission'; [scare quotes mine]. Also that 'culture' is 'directly encoded' in the brain (p7), which he says is the main tenet of gene-culture coevolution, and that democratic institutions and voting are altruistic and cannot be explained in terms of self-interest (p17-18). The major reason for these peculiar views does not really come out until p186 when he finally makes it clear that he is a group selectionist. Since there is no such thing as group selection apart from inclusive fitness, it's no surprise that this is just another incoherent account of behavior; i.e., more or less what Tooby and Cosmides famously termed The Standard Social Science Model. What he calls 'altruistic genes' on p188 should be called 'inclusive fitness genes' or 'kin selection genes'. Gintis is also much impressed

with the idea of gene-culture coevolution, which only means that culture may itself be an agent of natural selection but he fails to grasp that this can only happen within the context of natural selection (inclusive fitness). Like nearly all social scientists (and scientists, philosophers etc.), it never crosses his mind that 'culturers', 'coevolutioners', 'symbolisers', 'epigeneticisers', 'informationisers', 'representationisers', etc., are all families of complex language games, whose COS (Conditions Of Satisfaction, tests for truth) are exquisitely sensitive to context. Without a specific context they don't mean anything. So in this book, as in most of the literature on behavior, there is much talk that has the appearance of sense without sense (meaning or clear COS). His claim on p xv, that most of our genes are the result of culture, is clearly preposterous as e.g., it is well known that we are about 98% chimpanzee. Only if he means those relating to language can we accept the possibility that some of our genes have been subject to cultural selection and even these merely modified ones that already existed—i.e., a few base pairs were changed out of hundreds of thousands or millions in each gene. He is much taken with the 'rational actor' model of economic behavior. but again is unaware that the automaticities of S1 underlie all 'rational' behavior and the conscious linguistic deliberations of S2 cannot take place without them. Like many, perhaps the vast majority of current younger students of behavior, I see all human activities as easily comprehensible results of the working of selfish genetics in a contemporary context in which police surveillance and a temporary abundance of resources gotten by raping the earth and robbing our own descendants leads to relative temporary tranquility. In this connection I suggest my review of Pinker's recent book—The Transient Suppression of the Worst Devils of Our Nature—A Review of The Better Angels of Our Nature. Many behaviors look like true altruism, and some are (i.e., they will decrease the frequency of the genes that bring them about—i.e, lead to the extinction of their own descendants), but the point which Gintis misses is that these are due to a psychology which evolved long ago in small groups on the African plains in the EEA and made sense then (i.e., it was inclusive fitness, when everyone in our group of a few dozen to a few hundred were our close relatives), and so we often continue with these behaviors even though they no longer make sense (i.e., they serve the interests of unrelated or distantly related persons which decreases our genetic fitness by decreasing the frequency of the genes that made it possible). This accounts for his promoting the notion that many behaviors are 'truly altruistic', rather than selfish in origin (such as in sect. 3.2). He even notes this and calls it 'distributed effectivity' (p60-63) in which people behave in big elections as though they were small ones, but he fails to see this is not due to any genes for 'true altruism' but to genes for reciprocal altruism (inclusive fitness), which is of course selfish. Thus people behave as though their actions (e.g., their votes) were consequential, even though it is clear that they are not. E.g., one can find on the net that the chances of any one person's vote deciding the outcome of an American presidential election is in the range of millions to tens of millions to one. And of course the same is true of our chances of winning a lottery, yet our malfunctioning EEA psychology makes lotteries and voting hugely popular activities. He also seems unaware of the standard terminology and ways of describing behavior used in evolutionary psychology (EP). E.g., on pg. 75 Arrow's description of norms of social behavior are described in economic terms rather than as EP from the EEA trying to operate in current environments, and at the bottom of the page, people act not as 'altruistic' punishers (i.e., as 'group selectionists') but as inclusive fitness punishers. On p 78, to say that subjects act 'morally' or in accord with a norm 'for its own sakers', is again to embrace the group selectionist/phenomenological illusion, and clearly it is groups of genes that are trying to increase their inclusive fitness via well-known EP mechanisms like cheater detection and punishment. Again on p88, what he describes as other-regarding unselfish actions can just as easily be described as self-regarding attempts at reciprocal altruism which go astray in a large society. Naturally, he often uses standard economics jargon such as 'the subjective prior must be interpreted as a conditional probability', which just means a belief in the likelihood of a particular outcome (p90-91), and 'common subjective priors' (shared beliefs) p122. Much of the book and of behavior concerns what is often called 'we intentionality' or the construction of social reality, but the most eminent theorist in this arena, John Searle, is not discussed, his now standard terminology such as COS and DIRA (desire independent reasons for action) does not appear, he is not in the index, and only one of his many works, and that over 20 years old, is found in the bibliography. On p97 he comments favorably on Bayesian updating without mentioning that it is notorious for lacking any meaningful test for success (i.e., clear COS), and commonly fails to make any clear predictions, so that no matter what people do, it can describe their behavior after the fact. However, the main problem with chapter 5 is that 'rational' and other terms are complex language games that have no meaning apart from very specific contexts, which are typically lacking here. Of course, as Wittgenstein showed us, this is the core problem of all discussion of behavior and Gintis has most of the behavioral science community (or at least most of those over 40) as coconspirators. Likewise throughout the book, such as chapter 6, where he discusses 'complexity theory', 'emergent properties', 'macro and micro levels', and 'nonlinear dynamical systems' and the generation of 'models' (which can mean almost anything and 'describes' almost anything), but its only prediction that counts (i.e., clear COS). In spite of his phenomenological illusion (i.e., the near universal assumption that our conscious deliberations describe and control behavior—at odds with almost all the research in social psychology for the last 40 years), he also shares the

reductionist delusion, wondering why the social sciences have not got a core analytical theory and have not coalesced. This of course is a frequent subject in the social sciences and philosophy and the reason is that psychology of higher order thought is not describable by causes, but by reasons, and one cannot make psychology disappear into physiology nor physiology into biochemistry nor it into physics etc. They are just different and indispensable levels of description. Wittgenstein famously described it 80 years ago in the Blue Book. "Our craving for generality has [as one] source; our preoccupation with the method of science. I mean the method of reducing the explanation of natural phenomena to the smallest possible number of primitive natural laws; and, in mathematics, of unifying the treatment of different topics by using a generalization. Philosophers constantly see the method of science before their eyes, and are irresistibly tempted to ask and answer in the way science does. This tendency is the real source of metaphysics, and leads the philosopher into complete darkness. I want to say here that it can never be our job to reduce anything to anything, or to explain anything. Philosophy really is 'purely descriptive'." He is also quite out of touch with the contemporary world, thinking that people are going to be nice because they have internalized altruism (i.e., group selection), and with demographic realities, when he opines that population growth is under control, when in fact predictions are for another 4 billion by 2100 (p133). He sees a need to "carve an academic niche for sociology" (p148), but the whole discussion is typical gibberish (no clear COS), and all one really needs (or can give) is a clear description of the language games (the mind at work) we play in social situations, and how they show how our attempts at inclusive fitness work or go astray in contemporary contexts. Over and over he pushes his fantasy that "inherently ethical behavior" (i.e., group selectionist altruism) explains our social behavior, ignoring the obvious facts that it's due to temporary abundance of resources, police and surveillance, and that always when you take these away savagery quickly emerges (e.g., p151). It's easy to maintain such delusions when one lives in the ivory tower world of abstruse theories, inattentive to the millions of scams, robberies, rapes, assaults, thefts and murders taking place every day. Again and again (e.g., top p170) he ignores the obvious explanations for our "rationality", which is natural selection—i.e., inclusive fitness in the EEA leading to ESS (Evolutionarily Stable Strategies), or at least they were more or less stable in small groups 100,000 to 3 million years ago. Chapter 9 on the Sociology of the Genome is inevitably full of mistakes and incoherence—e.g., there are not special "altruistic genes"; rather, all genes serve inclusive fitness or they disappear (p188). The problem is that the only way to really get selfish genetics and inclusive fitness across is to have Gintis in a room for a day with Dawkins, Franks, Coyne etc., explaining why it is wrong. But as always, one has to have a certain level of education, intelligence, rationality and honesty for this to work, and if one is just a little bit short in several categories, it will not succeed. The same of course is true for much of human understanding, and so the vast majority will never get anything that is at all subtle. As with the Nowak, Wilson, Tarnita paper, I am sure that Dawkins, Franks and others would have been willing to go over this chapter and explain where it goes astray, but wanton arrogance is an absolute barrier to truth. The major problem is that people just do not grasp the concept of natural selection by inclusive fitness nor of subconscious motivations, and that many have "religious" motivations for rejecting them. This includes not just the general public and non-science academics, but a large percentage of biologists and behavioral scientists. I recently came across a lovely review by Dawkins of a discussion of the selfish gene idea by top level professional biologists, in which he had to go over their work line by line to explain that they just did not grasp how it all works. But only a small number of people like him could do this, and the sea of confusion is vast, and so these delusions about human nature that destroy this book, and are destroying America and the world will, as the Queen said to Alice in a slightly different context, go on until they come to the end and then stop.

In this book, acclaimed economist Herbert Gintis ranges widely across many fields—including economics, psychology, anthropology, sociology, moral philosophy, and biology—to provide a rigorous transdisciplinary explanation of some fundamental characteristics of human societies and social behavior. Because such behavior can be understood only through transdisciplinary research, Gintis argues, *Individuality and Entanglement* advances the effort to unify the behavioral sciences by developing a shared analytical framework—one that bridges research on gene-culture coevolution, the rational-actor model, game theory, and complexity theory. At the same time, the book persuasively demonstrates the rich possibilities of such transdisciplinary work. Everything distinctive about human social life, Gintis argues, flows from the fact that we construct and then play social games. Indeed, society itself is a game with rules, and politics is the arena in which we affirm and change these rules. Individuality is central to our species because the rules do not change through inexorable macrosocial forces. Rather, individuals band together to change the rules. Our minds are also socially entangled, producing behavior that is socially rational, although it violates the standard rules of individually rational choice. Finally, a moral sense is essential for playing games with socially constructed rules. People generally play by the rules, are ashamed when they break the rules, and are offended when others break the rules, even in societies that lack laws, government, and jails. Throughout the book, Gintis shows that it is only by bringing together the behavioral sciences that such basic aspects of human behavior can be understood.

From the Back Cover"Herbert Gintis is our deepest thinker about the scandalous state of fragmentation of the human sciences. In this book, he distills a synthetic foundation for the sciences of human behavior from the mutually necessary but fatally flawed models offered by psychology, sociology, biology, and economics. Everyone who cares about these sciences needs to come to terms with his analysis."--Peter J. Richerson, coauthor of *Not by Genes Alone: How Culture Transformed Human Evolution*"In *Individuality and Entanglement*, Herbert Gintis develops an original and distinctive theory of human sociality, drawing on ideas from economics, sociology, and evolutionary biology. The book combines breadth of focus with analytical penetration, and is written in an engaging, accessible style. Highly recommended."--Samir Okasha, University of Bristol"Herbert Gintis is a scholar with sufficient depth in philosophy and science to develop a balanced treatment of one of the most important remaining problems in evolutionary biology: the units and forces of natural selection that yield advanced social behavior. He has done so admirably in *Individuality and Entanglement*."--Edward O. Wilson, Research Professor Emeritus, Harvard University"Herbert Gintis's new book is a major contribution to the study and unity of the social sciences. Its breadth and depth in examining the meaning and unifying power of the rational-actor model is outstanding in perceiving the fundamental issues--biological, sociological, and economic--involved in understanding the special role of human social behavior. It forces economists to analyze what rationality means and, in particular, the role of social and other-regarding forces in the development of the economy. The command of social science literature displayed is matched by the power of the formal analysis."--Kenneth J. Arrow, Nobel Laureate in Economics

About the Author Herbert Gintis is an external professor at the Santa Fe Institute. He is the author, coauthor, or coeditor of a number of books, including *Game Theory Evolving*, *The Bounds of Reason*, *Unequal Chances*, *A Cooperative Species*, and *Game Theory in Action* (all Princeton).