

HEALING AND CREATING IN HISTORY

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The topic assigned me reads: healing and creating in history.

What precisely it means or even what it might mean, does not seem to be obvious at first glance. An initial clarification appears to be in order.

We have to do with healing and creating in history. But no particular kind of history is specified, and so we are not confined to religious or cultural or social or political or economic or technological history. Again no people or country is mentioned, neither Babylonians nor Egyptians, Greeks nor Romans, Asians nor Africans, Europeans nor Americans. It would seem, then, that we have to do with healing and creating in human affairs. For human affairs are the stuff of history, and they merit the attention of the historian when they are taken in a relatively large context and prove their significance by their relatively durable effects.

Now if 'history' may be taken broadly to mean human affairs, it is not too difficult to obtain at least a preliminary notion of what is meant by the other two terms in our title, 'healing' and 'creating'. For there comes to hand a paper by Sir Karl Popper entitled "The History of our Time: An Optimist's View".¹ In it he opposes two different accounts of what is wrong with the world. On the one hand, there is the view he attributes to many quite sincere churchmen and, along with them, to the rationalist

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philosopher, Bertrand Russell. It is to the effect that our intellectual development has outrun our moral development. He writes:

"We have become very clever, according to Russell, indeed too clever. We can make lots of wonderful gadgets, including television, high-speed rockets, and an atom bomb, or a thermonuclear bomb, if you prefer. But we have not been able to achieve the moral and political growth and maturity which alone could safely direct and control the uses to which we put our tremendous intellectual powers. This is why we now find ourselves in mortal danger. Our evil national pride has prevented us from achieving the world-state in time.

To put this view in a nutshell: we are clever, perhaps too clever; but we also are wicked; and this mixture of cleverness and wickedness lies at the root of our troubles."²

In contrast, Sir Karl Popper would argue that we are good, perhaps a little too good, but we are also a little stupid; and it is this mixture of goodness and stupidity that lies at the root of our troubles. After avowing that he included himself among those he considered a little stupid, Sir Karl put his point in the following terms:

"The main trouble of our time — and I do not deny that we live in troubled times — is not due to our moral wickedness, but, on the contrary, to our often misguided moral enthusiasm; to our anxiety to better the world we live in. Our wars are fundamentally religious wars; they are wars between competing theories of how to establish a better world.

And our moral enthusiasm is often misguided, because we fail to realize that our moral principles, which are sure to be over-simple, are often difficult to apply to the complex human and political situations in which we feel bound to apply them."³

In upholding this contention Sir Karl was quite ready to descend to particular instances. He granted the wickedness of Hitler and Stalin. He acknowledged that they appealed to all sorts of hopes and fears, to prejudices and envy, and even to hatred. But he insisted that their main appeal was an appeal to a kind of morality. They had a message; and they demanded sacrifices. He regretted that an appeal to morality could be misused. But he saw it as a fact that the great dictators were always trying to convince their people that they knew a way to a higher morality.

Now one may agree with Lord Russell. One may agree with Sir Karl. Indeed, there is no difficulty in agreeing with both, for the Christian tradition lists among the effects of original sin both a darkening of intellect and a weakening of will. But whatever one's opinion, it remains that there is a profound difference between diagnosing a malady and proposing a cure. Whether one stresses with Lord Russell the conjunction of clever but wicked or with Sir Karl the conjunction of good but stupid, one gets no further than diagnosis. On the other hand, when one speaks of healing and creating, one refers to positive courses of action. To this positive aspect of the issue, we now must turn.

The creating in question is not creating out of nothing. Such creating is the divine prerogative. Man's creating is of a different order. Actually, it does not bring something out of nothing, but it may seem to do so. William James, the American psychologist and philosopher,

has described three stages in the career of a theory. First, ". . . it is attacked as absurd; then it is admitted to be true, but obvious and insignificant; finally it is seen to be so important that its adversaries claim that they themselves discovered it."⁴ Such a theory is creative.

Let me illustrate this need for human creating from the contemporary economic situation. Last year there was published a thick volume by Richard Barnett and Ronald Müller with the title, Global Reach, and the subtitle, The Power of the Multinational Corporations. Its thirteen chapters fell into three parts. The first set forth the aims of the multinational corporations: they propose to run the world, for they can do the job and our little national governments are not equipped to do so. The second set of chapters delineated what the multinational corporations were doing to the under-developed countries: they have been making them more hopelessly worse off than otherwise they would be. The third set finally asked what these corporations, which in the main are American, have been doing to the United States; the answer is that they are treating the States in the same way they are treating the under-developed countries and, in the long run, the effects there will be same as in the rest of the world.

Now if the multinational corporations are generating worldwide disaster, why are they permitted to do so? The trouble is that there is nothing really new about multinational corporations. They aim at maximizing profit, and that has been the aim of economic enterprise since the mercantile, the industrial, the financial revolutions ever more fully and thoroughly took charge of our affairs. The alternative to making a profit is bankruptcy. The alternative to maximizing profit is inefficiency.⁵ All that the multinational corporation does is maximize profit not in some town or city, not in some region or

country, but on the global scale. It buys labor and materials in the countries where they are cheapest. Its credit is unimpeachable and so it can secure all the money it wants from whatever banks or money markets are in a position to create it. Its marketing facilities are a global network and to compete one would have first to build up a global network of one's own. The multinational corporation is a going concern. It is ever growing and expanding. It is built on the very principles that slowly but surely have been moulding our technology and our economics, our society and our culture, our ideals and our practice for centuries. It remains that the long accepted principles are inadequate. They suffer from radical oversights. Their rigorous application on a global scale, according to Barnett and Müller, heads us for disaster. But as the authors also confess: "The new system needed for our collective survival does not exist."⁶ When survival requires a system that does not exist, then the need for creating is manifest.

While it can take a series of disasters to convince people of the need for creating, still the long, hard, uphill climb is the creative process itself. In retrospect this process may appear as a grand strategy that unfolds in an orderly and cumulative series of steps. But any retrospect has the advantage of knowing the answers. The creative task is to find the answers. It is a matter of insight, not of one insight but of many, not of isolated insights but of insights that coalesce, that complement and correct one another, that influence policies and programs, that reveal their short-comings in their concrete results, that give rise to further correcting insights, corrected policies, corrected programs, that gradually accumulate into the all-round, balanced, smoothly functioning system that from the start was needed but at the start was not yet known.

This creative process is nothing mysterious. It

has been described by Jane Jacobs in her The Economy of Cities,⁷ as repeatedly finding new uses for existing resources. It has been set forth in the grand style by Arnold Toynbee under the rubric of "Challenge and Response" in his A Study of History, where the flow of fresh insights takes its rise from a creative minority, and the success of their implementation wins the devoted allegiance of the rank and file.⁸

I have spoken of insights, and I had best add what I do not mean. An insight is not just a slogan, and an ongoing accumulation of insights is not just an advertising campaign. A creative process is a learning process. It is learning what hitherto was not known. It is just the opposite of the mental coma induced by the fables and jingles that unceasingly interrupt television programs in our native land and even in the great republic to the south of us.

Again, insights are one thing, and concepts are quite another. Concepts are ambiguous. They may be heuristic, but then they merely point to unspecified possibilities, as highly desirable as justice, liberty, equality, peace — but still just empty gestures that fail to reveal how the possibilities might be realized and what the realization concretely would entail. Again, concepts may be specific, but then they are definite, rounded off, finished, abstract. Like textbooks on moral theology they can name all the evils to be avoided but get no further than unhelpful platitudes on the good to be achieved. For the good is never an abstraction. Always it is concrete.⁹ The whole point to the process of cumulative insight is that each insight regards the concrete while the cumulative process heads towards an ever fuller and more adequate view. Add abstraction to abstraction and one never reaches more than a heap of abstractions. But add insight to insight and one moves to mastery of all the eventualities and complications of a concrete

situation.

The creative process culminates in system, but the system is only system on the move. It never reaches static system that comes into existence and remains forever after. So it is that, when the flow of fresh insights dries up, when challenges continue and responses fail to emerge, then the creative minority becomes the merely dominant minority and the eagerness of the rank and file, that exulted in success, turns into the sullenness of an internal proletariat frustrated and disgusted by the discovery that a country in which, more and more, everything had worked has become a country in which, more and more, nothing works. Such is the disenchantment that, to use Toynbee's terms, brings to an end the genesis of a civilization and introduces first its breakdowns and eventually its disintegration.

But, one may ask, why does the flow of fresh insights dry up? Why, if challenges continue, do responses fail? Why does a minority that was creative cease to be creative and become merely dominant?

There are many intermediate answers that correspond to the many and varied circumstances under which civilizations break down. But there is one ultimate answer that rests on the intrinsic limitations of insight itself. For insights can be implemented only if people have open minds. Problems can be manifest. Insights that solve them may be available. But the insights will not be grasped and implemented by biased minds. There is the bias of the neurotic fertile in evasions of the insight his analyst sees he needs. There is the bias of the individual egoist whose interest is confined to the insights that would enable him to exploit each new situation to his own personal advantage. There is the bias of group egoism blind to the fact that the group no longer fulfills its once useful function and that it is merely clinging to

power by all the manoeuvres that in one way or another block development and impede progress. There is finally the general bias of all 'good' men of common sense, cherishing the illusion that their single talent, common sense, is omniscient, insisting on procedures that no longer work, convinced that the only way to do things is to muddle through, and spurning as idle theorizing and empty verbiage any rational account of what has to be done.

Not only is there this fourfold exclusion of fresh insights by the neurotic, by the bias of individual and, worse, of group egoism, and by the illusory omniscience of common sense. There also is the distorting effect of all such bias on the whole process of growth. Growth, progress, is a matter of situations yielding insights, insights yielding policies and projects, policies and projects transforming the initial situation, and the transformed situation giving rise to further insights that correct and complement the deficiencies of previous insights. So the wheel of progress moves forward through the successive transformations of an initial situation in which are gathered coherently and cumulatively all the insights that occurred along the way. But this wheel of progress becomes a wheel of decline when the process is distorted by bias. Increasingly the situation becomes, not the cumulative product of coherent and complementary insights, but the dump in which are heaped up the amorphous and incompatible products of all the biases of self-centered and short-sighted individuals and groups. Finally, the more the objective situation becomes a mere dump, the less is there any possibility of human intelligence gathering from the situation anything more than a lengthy catalogue of the aberrations and the follies of the past. As a diagnosis of terminal cancer denies any prospect of health restored, so a social dump is the end of fruitful insight and of the cumulative development it can generate.

I have spoken of creating in history and of its nemesis. But my topic also calls for a few words on healing. In fact, the genesis and breakdown of civilization occupy only the first six of the ten volumes Toynbee devoted to his *Study of History*. In the last four there emerges a new factor, for out of the frustration and disgust of the internal proletariat there come the world religions and a new style of human development.

For human development is of two quite different kinds. There is development from below upwards, from experience to growing understanding, from growing understanding to balanced judgement, from balanced judgement to fruitful courses of action, and from fruitful courses of action to the new situations that call forth further understanding, profounder judgement, richer courses of action.

But there also is development from above downwards. There is the transformation of falling in love: the domestic love of the family; the human love of one's tribe, one's city, one's country, mankind; the divine love that orients man in his cosmos and expresses itself in his worship. Where hatred only sees evil, love reveals values. At once it commands commitment and joyfully carries it out, no matter what the sacrifice involved. Where hatred reinforces bias, love dissolves it, whether it be the bias of unconscious motivation, the bias of individual or group egoism, or the bias of omniscient, short-sighted common sense. Where hatred plods around in ever narrower vicious circles, love breaks the bonds of psychological and social determinisms with the conviction of faith and the power of hope.

What I have attributed to love and denied to hatred, must also be denied to any ambiguous and so deceptive mixture of love and hatred. If in no other way at least from experience we have learnt that professions of zeal

for the eternal salvation of souls do not make the persecution of heretics a means for the reconciliation of heretics. On the contrary, persecution leads to ongoing enmity and in the limit to wars of religion. In like manner wars of religion have not vindicated religion; they have given color to a secularism that in the English-speaking world regards revealed religion as a merely private affair and in continental Europe thinks it an evil.

Again, while secularism has succeeded in making religion a marginal factor in human affairs, it has not succeeded in inventing a vaccine or providing some other antidote for hatred. For secularism is a philosophy and, no less than religion, it may lay claim to absolutes of its own. In their name hatred can shift from the religious group to the social class. So the professions of tolerance of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment did not save from the guillotine the feudal nobility of France, and the Marxist march of history in Russia has attended to the liquidation not merely of the bourgeoisie but also of the Romanovs, the landowners, and the kulaks.¹¹

As healing can have no truck with hatred, so too it can have no truck with materialism. For the healer is essentially a reformer; first and foremost he counts on what is best in man. But the materialist is condemned by his own principles to be no more than a manipulator. He will apply to human beings the stick-and-carrot treatment that the Harvard behaviorist, B. F. Skinner, advocates under the name of reinforcement. He will maintain with Marx that cultural attitudes are the by-product of material conditions and so he will bestow upon those subjected to communist power the salutary conditions of a closed frontier, clear and firm indoctrination, controlled media of information, a vigilant secret police, and the terrifying threat of the labor camps. Again, while Christians accord to God's grace the principal role in touching men's hearts and enlightening

their minds, it would seem that the true believer in the gospel according to Marx must be immersed in proletarian living conditions, on the ground that only such material conditions can confer upon him the right thinking and righteous feeling proper to proletarian class consciousness.¹²

Healing then is not to be confused with the dominating and manipulating to which the reforming materialist is confined by his own principles. It has to be kept apart from religious hatred of heretical sects and from philosophic hatred of social classes.¹³ But besides these requirements, intrinsic to the nature of healing, there is the extrinsic requirement of a concomitant creative process. For just as the creative process, when unaccompanied by healing, is distorted and corrupted by bias, so too the healing process, when unaccompanied by creating, is a soul without a body. Christianity developed and spread within the ancient empire of Rome. It possessed the spiritual power to heal what was unsound in that imperial domain. But it was unaccompanied by its natural complement of creating, for a single development has two vectors, one from below upwards, creating, the other from above downwards, healing. So when the Roman empire decayed and disintegrated, the church indeed lived on. But it lived on, not in a civilized world, but in a dark and barbarous age in which, as a contemporary reported, men devoured one another as fishes in the sea.

If we are to escape a similar fate, we must demand that two requirements are met. The first regards economic theorists; the second regards moral theorists. From economic theorists we have to demand, along with as many other types of analysis as they please, a new and specific type that reveals how moral precepts have both a basis in economic process and so an effective application to it. From moral theorists we have to demand,

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along with their other various forms of wisdom and prudence, specifically economic precepts that arise out of economic process itself and promote its proper functioning.

To put the same points in negative terms, when physicists can think on the basis of indeterminacy, economists can think on the basis of freedom and acknowledge the relevance of morality. Again, when the system that is needed for our collective survival does not exist, then it is futile to excoriate what does exist while blissfully ignoring the task of constructing a technically viable economic system that can be put in its place.¹⁴

Is my proposal utopian? It asks merely for creativity, for an interdisciplinary theory that at first will be denounced as absurd, then will be admitted to be true but obvious and insignificant, and perhaps finally be regarded as so important that its adversaries will claim that they themselves discovered it.

Notes

- 1) Karl Popper, Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge, New York: Harper Torch Books, 1968.
- 2) Ibid., p. 365.
- 3) Ibid., p. 366.
- 4) William James, Pragmatism, London: Longmans, 1912, p. 198. Quoted by Louis Mink, Mind, History, and Dialectic: The Philosophy of R. G.

Collingwood, Bloomington/London: Indiana University Press, 1969, p. 255.

- 5) Where, of course, inefficiency means by definition the failure to maximize profit.
- 6) Richard Barnett and Ronald Miller, Global Reach: The Power of the Multinational Corporations, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1974, p. 385.
- 7) Jane Jacobs, The Economy of Cities, New York: Random House (Vintage Books), 1970.
- 8) For an incomplete list of the critiques of Toynbee's A Study of History, see that work, vol. XII: Reconsiderations, London/New York: Oxford University Press, 1961, pp. 680 - 690. With Reconsiderations available, the critics are far less impressive.
- 9) As the Scholastics put it: Bonum ex integra causa: malum ex quocumque defectu.
- 10) I have written at greater length on bias in Insight pp. 191 - 206; 218 - 242; 627 - 633; 688 - 693. In the Hegelian-Marxist tradition 'bias' is treated obliquely under the name of alienation.
- 11) For background see the penetrating analysis by Christopher Dawson, "Karl Marx and the Dialectic of History," The Dynamics of World History, edited by John J. Mulloy, London: Sheed and Ward, 1957, pp. 354 - 365. The chapter appeared originally in Dawson's Religion and the Modern State, 1935.
- 12) For Marx, morality is relative to social class. As Dawson trenchantly put it: "Hence it would seem that the only real immorality is to betray the interests of one's own class, and that a man like Karl

Marx himself, or F. Engels, who serves the interests of another class even if it be the class of the future, is no social hero, but an apostate and a traitor. He has become a bad bourgeois but he can never become a good proletarian unless he is economically and sociologically absorbed into the proletariat." Ibid., p. 362 f.

- 13) Of course, though racism and nationalism are pre-philosophic, they can be imagined as absolutes and generate abundant hatred.
- 14) Moral precepts that are not technically specific turn out to be quite ineffectual, as Christian Duquoc has pointed out in his Ambiguité des théologies de la sécularisation: essai critique, Gembloux: Duculot, 1972. See his remark on The Secular City by Harvey Cox on p. 67; also pp. 103 ff. and 113 ff. on the Pastoral Constitution, Gaudium et spes.