

644B0DTE070

Second part of fifth lecture, August 6, 1971

I would like to add a further remark to Albert Descamps' account of the way the exegete, the biblical exegete, should speak to theologians. It is all very well to give the impression of the foreign and the archaic, the distant past, and so on. But one wants something more. And it is that something more that people are trying to provide when they write about the Hebrew mind or Hellenism, or the spirit of Scholasticism. And the trouble with such works is that unless one is an expert in the field, one doesn't know just how much of it to take as accurate, just what it means and so on. It is apt to be full occult entities for a person who is not himself an expert in the field, and if he is, well, he doesn't need it. And there is a possible solution to that that I wish to point out, namely, when we were treating the stages of meaning in the third chapter on meaning, the last section was on the stages of meaning, we were doing reconstructions in terms of, well, not distinguishing between the functions of meaning, the constitutive mixing in with the cognitive so that man constitutes not only himself in the world, but the world he is in; and you get myth. or effective meaning mixed up with communicative meaning and you get magic. There is, on the basis of cognitional theory and its extensions into meaning and further determinations you can get from a person like Cassirer in the first volume of his *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* or from Bruno Snell, that if people doing work such as Cassirer and Snell did were to work from the basis of a transcendental method and its extensions, it would be possible to proceed systematically towards the reconstruction of mentalities; it wouldn't take you all the way, but it would enable you just to know how to go about the ways of meaning that exist under certain

circumstances by removing certain later developments; working backwards from where we are to the way things were at an earlier stage.

History

We will now go on to our next chapter, History. The word 'history' is employed in two senses. There is history (1) that is written about. The battle of Waterloo is history. And there is history (2) that is written, an account of the battle. History (2) aims at expressing knowledge of history (1).

The precise object of historical inquiry and the precise nature of historical investigation are matters of not a little obscurity. *Theories of History* by Patrick Gardiner has an immense bibliography of discussions on what is history. This obscurity is not because there are no good historians. It is not because good historians have not by and large learnt what to do. It is mainly because historical knowledge is an instance of knowledge, and few people are in possession of a satisfactory cognitional theory. A similar view has been expressed by Gerhard Ebeling in his *Word and Faith*, London: SCM, 1963, p. 49. An adequate account of history can be made only when certain philosophical problems have been eliminated. Again, in the *Epilegomena* to R.G. Collingwood's *The Idea of History* there are excellent chapters on Nature and History, The Historical Imagination, Historical Evidence. But the fourth on History as Reenactment seems to be involved a bit in problems of idealism. It doesn't mean that the earlier chapters aren't right on.

We will discuss, first of all, nature and history; secondly, historical experience and historical knowledge; and, thirdly, critical history. The third we will leave till Monday.

[Nature and History]

A first step will be to set forth the basic differences between history and natural science, and we shall begin from a few reflections on time.

One can think of time in connection with such questions as what is the time, what is the date, how soon, how long ago. On that basis one arrives at the Aristotelian definition that time is the number or measure determined by the successive equal stages of a local movement. It is a number when one answers three o'clock or January 26, 1969. It is a measure when one answers three hours or 1969 years. One can push this line of thought further by asking whether there is just one time for the universe or, on the other hand, there are as many distinct times as there are distinct local movements. And, on the Ptolemaic universe, Thomas held that there was only one time for the universe because all other motions derived from the *primum mobile*, and that set the standard time. When Copernicus came in, of course, the *primum mobile* vanished, but there was just one time still nonetheless. And Newton explained it by having absolute time and absolute space, as well as relative time and relative space. Kant changed them into the a priori forms of the sensibility. And Einstein eliminated them; there are as many times as there are inertial frames in relative motion.

The foregoing notion of time – how soon, when – is of great importance to the historian, for he has to date his events. It is not, however, an adequate account of what time is, for it is limited to counting, measuring, and relating to one another in a comprehensive view all possible instances of such counting and measuring. Moreover, it is this aspect of time that suggests the image of time as a raceway of indivisible instants, an image that little accords with our experience of time.

Fortunately, besides questions about time there are also questions about 'now.' Aristotle asked whether there was a succession of 'nows' or just a single 'now.' He answered with a comparison. Just as 'time' is the measure of the movement, so the 'now' corresponds to the body that is moving. Insofar as there is succession, there is difference in the 'now.' But underpinning such differences is the identity of the substratum.

Now this advertence to the identity of the substratum, to the body that is moving, removes from one's notion of time the total extrinsicism of each moment from the next. No doubt, each successive moment is different, but in the difference there is also an identity. It is the same thing moving.

With this clue we may advance to our experience of time. There is succession in the flow of conscious and intentional acts; there is identity in the conscious subject of the acts; there may be either identity or succession in the object intended by the acts. Analysis may reveal that what actually is visible is a succession of different profiles; but experience reveals that what is perceived is the synthesis (*Gestalt*) of the profiles into a single object. Analysis may reveal that the sounds produced are a succession of notes and chords; but experience reveals that what is heard is their synthesis into a melody. There results what is called the psychological present, which is not an instant, a mathematical point, but a time span, so that our experience of time is, not of a raceway of instants, but a now leisurely, a now rapid succession of overlapping time spans. The time of experience is slow when the objects of experience change slowly and in expected ways. But time becomes a whirligig when the objects of experience change rapidly and in novel and unexpected ways.

So we have considered time, first of all, as number and measure of motion; then, the 'now' that corresponds to the substratum of what is

moving; and, finally, we move from the moving body to the subject, the identical subject, the succession of acts and the succession of objects with regard to which the acts occur. And the fact of the time span, the psychological present it's called.

Whether slow and broad or rapid and short, the psychological present reaches into its past by memories and into its future by anticipations. Anticipations are not merely of the prospective objects of our fears and desires but also the shrewd estimate of the man of experience or the rigorously calculated forecast of applied science. Again, besides the memories of each individual, there are the pooled memories of the group, their celebration in song and story, their preservation in written narratives, in coins and monuments and in every other trace of the group's words and deeds left to posterity. Such is the field of historical investigation.

Now the peculiarity of this field resides in the nature of individual and group action. It has both a conscious and an unconscious side. Apart from neurosis and psychosis the conscious side is in control. But the conscious side consists in the flow of conscious and intentional acts that we have been speaking about all week. What differentiates each of these acts from the others lies in the manifold meanings of meaning set forth in the third chapter. Meaning, then, is a constitutive element in the conscious flow that is the normally controlling side of human action. It is this constitutive role of meaning in the controlling side of human action that grounds the peculiarity of the historical field of investigation.

Meaning may regard the general or the universal, but most human thought and speech and action are concerned with particulars and the concrete. Again, there are structural and material invariants to meaning, but there also are changes that affect the manner in which the carriers of

meaning are employed, the elements of meaning are combined, the functions of meaning are distinguished and developed, the realms of meaning are extended, the stages of meaning blossom forth, meet resistance, compromise, collapse. Finally, there are the further vicissitudes of meaning as common meaning. Meaning is common in the measure that community exists and functions, in the measure that there is a common field of experience, common and complementary understanding, common judgments and at least an agreement to disagree, common and complementary commitments. But people can get out of touch, misunderstand one another, hold radically opposed views, commit themselves to conflicting goals. Then common meaning contracts, becomes confined to banalities, moves towards ideological warfare.

It is in this field of meaningful speech and action that the historian is engaged. It is not, of course, the historian's but the exegete's task to determine what was meant. The historian envisages a quite different object. He is not content to understand what people meant. He wants to grasp what was going forward in particular groups at particular places and times. By 'going forward' I mean to exclude the mere repetition of a routine. I mean the change that originated the routine and its dissemination. I mean process and development but, no less, decline and collapse. When things turn out unexpectedly, pious people say, 'Man proposes but God disposes.' The historian is concerned to see how God disposed the matter, not by theological speculation, not by some world-historical dialectic, but through particular human agents. In literary terms history is concerned with the drama of life, with what results through the characters, their decisions, their actions, and not only because of them but also because of their defects, their oversights, their failures to act. In military terms history is concerned, not

just with the opposing commanders' plans of the battle, not just with the experiences of the battle had by each soldier and officer, but with the actual course of the battle as the resultant of conflicting plans now successfully and now unsuccessfully executed. In brief, where exegesis is concerned to determine what a particular person meant, history is concerned to determine what, in most cases, contemporaries do not know. For, in most cases, contemporaries do not know what is going forward, first, because experience is individual while the data for history lie in the experiences of many; secondly, because the actual course of events results not only from what people intend but also from their oversights, mistakes, failures to act; thirdly, because history does not predict what will happen but reaches its conclusions from what has happened; and fourthly, because history is not merely a matter of gathering and testing all available evidence but also involves a number of interlocking discoveries that bring to light the significant issues and operative factors.

So there are four factors there. Individuals do not know what is going forward because (a) experience is individual, but the data for history are had from the experiences of many people. Secondly, because the actual course of events results not from what people know and intend but also what they overlook, their oversights, their mistakes; and they don't know their mistakes. Thirdly, because history is not a matter of predicting anything. It has to assemble the data; and to assemble the data you have to be at a later time be able to get the experiences of many. And fourthly, because merely assembling the data is not yet history; you have to proceed from the data to an understanding, a gradual development of understanding, so that you know what was going forward.

The study of history, then, differs from the study of physical, chemical, biological nature. There is a difference in their objects, for the objects of physics, chemistry, biology are not in part constituted by acts of meaning. There is similarity inasmuch as both types of study consist in an ongoing process of cumulative discoveries, that is, of original insights, of original acts of understanding. But there is a difference in the expression of the respective sets of discoveries. The discoveries of physics, chemistry, biology are expressed in universal systems and are refuted if they are found to be incompatible with a relevant particular instance. But the discoveries of the historian are expressed in narratives and descriptions that regard particular persons, places, and times. They have no claim to universality: they could, of course, be relevant to the understanding of other persons, places, and times; but whether in fact they are relevant, and just how relevant they are, can be settled only by a historical investigation of the other persons, places, and times. Finally, because they have no claim to universality, the discoveries of the historians are not verifiable in the fashion proper to the natural sciences; in history verification is parallel to the procedures by which an interpretation is judged correct.

If we want to compare history with such human sciences as psychology and sociology, we have to distinguish the kind of psychology, the kind of sociology; if it is the behaviorist type, the relation of history to them is the same as to the natural sciences. On the other hand, if the psychologist or sociologist is attending to meaning, then we have a possibility of fruitful interaction; the historians providing the psychologists and sociologists with a richness of material that cannot be had simply out of the present, and, on the other hand, the historian deriving from sociologists

and psychologists general principles of interpretation as a basis from which he can proceed to his study of the past.

Now so much for a contrast between nature and history, namely, saying that man is a historical being insofar as meaning is constitutive of his living; and there is the field of meaningful speech and action that is set up, and that provides the object of history.

[Historical Experience and Historical Knowledge]

Knowledge is not just experiencing. It is experiencing, understanding, and judging; it is three things. We all have historical experience, but that doesn't mean that we have historical knowledge. To move from historical experience to historical knowledge, you have to get the experiences of many people and put them together and so move from experiences to understanding, and from understanding to judging.

Our present aim will be to say something about historical experience and then something about the thought process from historical experience to written history. But there is a further, third section where we deal with what is called critical history, and that's history that is done at the present time.

Already there has been described the subject in time. He is identical, ever himself. But his conscious and intentional acts keep shifting in one way or another, to make his 'now' slip out of the past and into the future, while the field of objects that engage his attention may change greatly or slightly, rapidly or slowly. Not only is the subject's psychological present not an instant but a time span, but in it the subject may be reaching into the past by memories, stories, history, and into the future by anticipations, estimates, forecasts.

It is sometimes said that man is a historical being, and the meaning of the statement may be grasped most vividly by a thought experiment. And it's just a thought experiment. I'm not giving you a medical account of amnesia. Suppose a man suffers total amnesia. He no longer knows who he is, fails to recognize relatives and friends, does not recall his commitments or his lawful expectations, does not know where he works or how he makes his living, and has lost even the information needed to perform his once customary tasks. Obviously, if he is to live, either the amnesia has to be cured, or else he must start all over. For our pasts have made us whatever we are, and on that capital we have to live or else we must begin afresh. Not only is the individual an historical entity, living off his past, but the same holds for the group. If we suppose that all members in the group suffer total amnesia, there will be as total a collapse of all group functioning as there is in each individual in the group. Groups too live on their past, and their past, so to speak, lives on in them. The present functioning of the good of order is what it is mostly because of past functioning and only slightly because of the minor efforts now needed to keep things going and, when possible, to improve them. To start completely afresh would be to revert to a very distant age.

Conrad Lorentz is going around universities in the United States and telling the students that they are not barbarians, that they are pre-Aurignacian. You have to be living on the past; you can't start out with some absolute novelty; you go back to infancy. And they like it, incidentally.

Now I have not been offering a medical account of amnesia. I am simply attempting to portray the significance of the past in the present, and thereby to communicate what is meant by saying that man is a historical being. But being historical is the history that is written about, the living

tradition which formed us and thereby brought us to the point where we began forming ourselves. This tradition includes at least individual and group memories of the past, stories of exploits and legends about heroes, in brief, enough of history for the group to have an identity as a group and for individuals to make their several contributions towards maintaining and promoting the common good of order. But from this rudimentary history, contained in any existential history, any living tradition, we must now attempt to indicate the series of steps by which one may, in thought, move towards the notion of scientific history.

In general it is a process of objectification, and we shall begin from the simpler instances of autobiography and biography before going on to the more complex matter of history which regards groups.

Towards an autobiography, a first step is a diary. Day by day one records not every event that occurred – one has other things to do – but what seems important, significant, exceptional, new. So one selects, abbreviates, sketches, alludes. One omits most of what is too familiar to be noticed, too obvious to be mentioned, too recurrent to be thought worth recording.

As the years pass and the diary swells, retrospect lengthens. What once were merely remote possibilities, now have been realized. Earlier events, thought insignificant, prove to have been quite important, while others, thought important, turn out to have been quite minor. Omitted earlier events have to be recalled and inserted both to supply the omitted context of the earlier period and to make later events more intelligible. Earlier judgments, finally, have to be complemented, qualified, corrected. But if all this is attempted, one has shifted from keeping a diary to writing one's memoirs. One enlarges one's sources from the diary to add to the diary all the letters and other material one can acquire. One ransacks one's memory. One asks

questions, and to meet them one starts reconstructing one's past in one's imagination, depicting to oneself now this now that former *Sitz im Leben*, to find answers and then ask the further questions that arise from those answers. As in interpretation, so here too there gradually are built up contexts, limited nests of questions and answers, each bearing on some multi-faceted but determinate topic. In this fashion the old, day-by-day, organization of the diary becomes quite irrelevant. Much that had been overlooked now has been restored. What had merely been juxtaposed now is connected. What had been dimly felt and remembered now stands in sharp relief within perhaps hitherto unsuspected perspectives. There has emerged a new organization that distinguishes periods by broad differences in one's mode of living, in one's dominant concern, in one's tasks and problems, and in each period distinguishes contexts, that is, nests of questions and answers bearing on distinct but related topics. The periods determine the sections, the topics determine the chapters, of one's autobiography.

Biography aims at much the same goal but has to follow a different route. The autobiographer recounts what 'I saw, heard, remembered, anticipated, imagined, felt, gathered, judged, decided, did ...' In the biography, statements shift to the third person. Instead of stating what is remembered or has been recalled, the biographer has to do research, gather evidence, reconstruct in imagination each successive *Sitz im Leben*, ask determinate concrete questions, and so build up his set of periods each containing a larger or smaller set of related contexts. In the main there are three main differences between autobiography and biography. The biographer is free from the embarrassment that may trouble an autobiographer in his self-revelation. The biographer may appeal to later events that put in a new light the judgments, decisions, deeds of his subject,

to reveal him to be more or less profound, more or less wise, more or less far-sighted, more or less astute than one otherwise would have thought. Finally, since the biographer has to make his subject intelligible to a later generation, he has to write not just a 'life' but rather a 'life and times.'

While in biography the 'times' are a subordinate clarification of the 'life,' in history this perspective is reversed. Attention is centered on the common field that, in part, is explored in each of the biographies that are or might be written. Still this common field is not just an area in which biographies might overlap. There is social and cultural process. It is not just a sum of individual words and deeds. There exists a developing and/or deteriorating unity constituted by cooperations, by institutions, by personal relations, by a functioning or malfunctioning good of order, by a communal realization of originating and terminal values and disvalues. Within such processes we live out our lives. About them each of us ordinarily is content to learn enough to attend to his own affairs and perform his public duties. To seek a view of the actual functioning of the whole or of a notable part over a significant period of time is the task of the historian.

As the biographer, so too the historian proceeds (1) from the data made available by research, (2) through imaginative reconstruction and cumulative questioning and answering, (3) towards related sets of limited contexts. But now the material basis is far larger in extent, far more complex, far more roundabout in relevance. The center of interest has shifted from the individual to the group, from private to public life, from the course of a single life to the course of the affairs of a community. The range of relevant topics has increased enormously, and, on many, specialized knowledge may be a necessary prerequisite to undertaking historical investigation. Finally, history itself becomes a specialty; historians become a

professional class; the field of historical investigation is divided and subdivided; and the results of investigations are communicated in congresses and accumulated in periodicals and books.

So much, then, for the distinction between historical experience and historical knowledge, and a brief indication of the process from historical experience to historical knowledge as illustrated by an autobiography.

Now the real core of the whole question is, of course, the next section on critical history; it is quite complicated, and I think we had better save it for early Monday morning.