

## CAN WE, AND IF SO, HOW CAN WE LEARN SOMETHING FROM HISTORY

I am quite skeptical about the possibility to learn something from history. I am especially so for the people of our modern time, who are so convinced that real history beings with them and that it is not important enough to know anything of history at all. People generally are not interested in history. They don't have a real relationship with it. They are eventually interested still in incidents, in big feats, in aspects of history that please them, but not in history as such.

Another difficulty to learn from history is that because of the weakening and fading of structure, we are all very egocentric. We all are, more or less, as the soldier on the front who, during an attack, is quite sure that eventually all his comrades will fall, but not he. And we are in the same time the reverse: We all are constantly afraid that just we and only we will fall, that we will be the scapegoat, that in our constant seeking to find scapegoats in the end the result will be that we ourselves came into this pit.

If two things are like that, are there responsibilities at all? I see two:

1. History is always, in some manner, the history of culture. The history of tradition, a tradition. The history of what happened with the human beings, living in that culture. What went well, what wrong, and eventually, are possibly, the reasons why it went well, went wrong.

To learn from history it is necessary to have a living relationship with tradition, with this tradition. And when this relationship, this feeling of belonging has disappeared, the only possibility to learn from history goes via the, in fact existential, way back to that tradition, in whichever manner. If tradition, this tradition is still part of life or if this tradition can become again part of life, then learning from history might be possible.

2. The other possibility is, that we recognise in history the scapegoats, so finding, in recognizing them, a way to our own humanity. Ingoing this way, recognizing the scapegoats and so our human predicament, it becomes possible to learn from history. This of course, must clearly be distinguished from the emotional "lacrimonouous" identification with scapegoats, from in fact, self-pity, which stops every learning process altogether.

It seems clear to me that for both ways there is only one possibility to come forward: by narrative. This is especially true for the second possibility, but I suppose that it is in fact as true for the first one. Both ways are about human beings and finding the possibility to recognise them as belonging to us. Only when this has happened is it possible to become more general, to deepen insights about the processes.

Learning processes, anyway, only happen when people meet. Direct or via the narrator who tells, being, in telling, the person, the persons, he tells about.

The "subjective" aspects of the question if we can learn something from history are, of course, only one side of the problem. The other side certainly in our circumstances is the objective one. We can, no doubt about that, learn much from history. In the same time, times are changing so tremendously, that it might be a big question in which times, out of which times we can learn most and how what we learned, or are learning, can shape, amidst

of so many other factors and influences, our life and our doing. It could be very important to think about this more systematically.

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