

## ANALOGIES IN HISTORY

The mass of history has swollen enormously. It is not only that, since we were children, years densely packed with events have been added to it, it is also because, on the far side of time, it has been lengthened with stretches of incomparable length, with Egyptian and Near Eastern history and with the endless sea of prehistory. In between we are asked to pay attention to social and economic history, to African, Islamic etc., history, to the history of science and technique, you may go on indefinitely. This has created a major problem for history teaching on all levels, university included. If it has ever been possible to teach 'the whole of history' - even if we confine ourselves to (Western-)European history, Ranke's history of the Germanic and Romanic peoples, and condemn all the others implicitly as 'not worthy of history', Kipling's 'lesser breeds without the law' -, it is becoming every day more impossible. Nevertheless there are still appearing a great number of historical monographs and text books for schools which carry in their titles the words 'the history of ....'.

Apart from going on as if there were no problem at all, the historian or didactician may try to tackle it in various ways. He can make more or less arbitrary cuts in the subject matter and rearrange the remainder under a heading like 'thematic history'. But one may also ask whether it might not be possible to leave out certain traditional themes because they are adequately represented by another, according to the old rule : "ex uno disce omnes". In Germany and in the Netherlands this possibility has been characterised by the words 'representative' and 'exemplary' ('exemplarisch') and in the Anglosaxon world by the term 'transfer of learning'. In the Federal Republic of Germany we have lived through the great discussion on 'the exemplary principle' ('das exemplarische Prinzip'), but to cut a very long story short, the exemplary movement ('die exemplarische Bewegung') has exercised little or no influence on practical history teaching.

Against the exemplarist historians brought up that history is what is only individual; and does one want more then he must realize that that 'more' is not history, but 'sociological constructions' 1). And the famous German didactician Joachim Rohlfes solemnly declared that there exist no historical paradigms, because history knows no systematization and no 'representation' 2), and therefore, Rohlfes concluded once and for all, the principle

of exemplary teaching ('des exemplarischen Lehrens') is 'basically not applicable' in history. The opponents could quote no one less than Jacob Burckhardt who said that he rejected 'everything systematic' ('alles Systematische') in history, and especially philosophy of history 3). But he also wrote the following sentence : "For a person who wants to learn really, who wants to grow rich spiritually, a single well chosen source can represent in a certain way the infinitely many, because he finds and experiences ('empfindet') what is general in a single event ('das Allgemeine im Einzelnen')" 4). Unwittingly Burckhardt seems to have anticipated the exemplary principle of the 'mundus in gutta', of the whole world in a single drop, and that is, of course, 'representation' and nothing else.

The exemplary movement foundered - and one does not hear much of 'transfer' either nowadays - in the fleeting sands of an old philosophical problem, the relationship of the one and the many, a question which since the days of the first Presocratics till our own days never has been solved. That historians do not want to be philosophers does come home to roost of course, because they show themselves unable to solve their own theoretical questions. During the great debate in Germany they could have profited by the catalogue compiled by Hans Scheuerl 5). He put the question in which ways one thing can be representative for another (not necessarily in history, he was no historian), and he summed his answer up in the following headwords : paradigm - specimen - example - type - case - model - parable - pars pro toto - analogy. In historical thinking we may cut out at once 'specimen' (for in history we find no specimens of different species). Of very little use are 'paradigm', a very vague and general word, although we all use paradigms very frequently in education, - 'example' (with the meaning of something to be imitated), because the concept is by definition not devoid of value judgments, - and 'parable' ( a short story wherein the abstract and the concrete go hand in hand), because it tells us something imaginary, and the imaginary is spurned by the historian. We cannot do much with 'pars pro toto' either, for this concept begs the question how part and whole are related. Limitedly useful could be : 'case' ( a concrete instance of something general or abstract, while leaving out the irrelevant details) and 'type' (reduction of similar things to one con-

struction). Perhaps there is something more in 'model' (creative and free construction erected in order to represent the general, the abstract, the relationships or the method of working, without insisting on the model being true to nature). I suppose that the historian will cut out model too, because he cannot detect models in history, in economic history perhaps, but not elsewhere. The historian must remain 'true to nature', that is to say faithful to the events, he can and will not chop the details, the living thing, in order to get a clearcut (but dead) model. Yes, but nevertheless I am not quite sure that we do not use models. It could for example be defended very well that our chronology - a very important thing for us - as a systematic arithmetic construction is a model of time. But for the moment we had better not press on in this direction (although I intend to this later), and that leaves us with 'analogy' only. Things are coming to a head now, for if the concept of analogy is not valid or serviceable in history, there is simply no representation in history. But when things are not interrelated in one way or other, we have no 'historia' but only 'historiae', which means that it is not possible to write history scientifically.

We start with a severe handicap. The concept of analogy does not enjoy a very good reputation in modern philosophy (although there are exceptions), because it offers only resemblances or similarities, but does not prove anything. Philosophy does not ask for similarities, it needs identities. But there have been times in the history of philosophy in which the principle of analogy has been valued far more than nowadays, especially in the scholastic philosophy of the later Middle Ages. It was then that the magnificent concept of the 'analogia entis', the analogy of being between Creator and creation, played a decisive role. A man like St. Thomas however was too clever a philosopher to use analogies as arguments; he used them as a heuristic means, to get on the track of truth. Now history is not philosophy and not logics, and history teaching still less so, and therefore we are in the lucky position that we have not to deliver rigorous proofs, in any case not in the sense of the strictest logic, we may be content with analogies and similarities. We can put it like this : history is showing a certain coherence, is in a certain sense a unity, because its parts are analogous with each other. Now if it is

true that connections exist between the different and not identical parts of history, connections or relationships which may be called similarities or analogies, these parts would - to a certain extent - be interchangeable, but only insofar as they are analogous and not further. History is a whole because it is a total of reciprocal relationships, a sum of analogies. But then we must raise the question how these analogies are shaped, which are the similarities. If we want to make progress - and that is absolutely necessary for the future development of history didactics and of history teaching -, then our everyday language will not be sufficient. On the contrary, we must then describe the analogies as scientifically, as historico-theoretically as possible.

1. The first characteristic the parts of history have in common with each other and with the whole is chronology. Without exact chronology there cannot exist today scientific historiography, not without fixation, as rigorously as possible, on the time line, not without precise division of time in centuries, decades and years, even in months, days, hours, not without determination of the place of events in time with the help of dates. Simmel has put it severely : "A reality is only then historical, if we are able to fix it to a well defined spot in our system of time" 6). For our modern consciousness nothing is historical which cannot be 'localised' in time; myths, legends and sagas therefore are not included in our historical conceptions, at least not factually. Our completely furnished chronology permeates the totality of history, every era, every age, every historical life and every unhistorical life how unimportant it may look to the man or woman who lives it; in its system it spans all times, all events, all men, the whole of history and all the different parts of it, and embraces them with the same bond.

2. The second characteristic is the passage of time. Through all occurrences time is running, or perhaps better, history is identical with the passage of time. And time is always running in the same direction, from the past to our own days; time is not reversible, cannot be 'lived backwards'. History is not living backwards either, is not going back along the line of time : with a mental artifice we jump over a shorter or longer space of time, and then, from the point we have chosen, we drift back along the stream of time, away from the past and steering to the future.

3. The third feature of analogy, the third similarity, is that every phenomenon as such may be known by change. If we had only three words at our disposition to define the concept of history, they would be, I believe, 'history is change'. Unceasing transformation, that is for modern man the real thing is history, not the identical, not what remains unchanged, but what is new, creative, unexpected. Of course everybody knows that in history, even in our own time, much is traditional, much 'of olden times', but we do not consider that as the proper thing, it is viewed with a mixture of nostalgic emotion and a certain depreciation. The core of all that happens is in our opinion transformation, innovation, amelioration. We pronounce like a shibboleth of progress, resignedly or not : "... in this time of rapid changes...". When there is no transformation, so it seems, there is also no history. Already Ranke has presented this leading idea. For him the idea of a general progress to a positive end was philosophically untenable, but nevertheless he declared : "There is in all history undeniably a certain historical power .... a drive coming out of primeval times and going on more or less steadily"; he distinguished peoples which did not take part in this movement 7), one might say : unhistorical peoples. This fundamental idea that it is change which makes history 'historical', that (to paraphrase Orwell), all peoples are historical, but some more 'historical' than others (some even provided with a 'historical calling'), this idea, notwithstanding all modern openness of the world, is still omnipresent to us : one finds it operating in history text books where it constitutes an unconscious principle of the choice of subject matter.

Most historians shrink back from identities, from what remains unchanged, between them and the philosophers there exists a permanent misunderstanding, and since the end of the christian concept of history, in the eighteenth century, the christian historian does not know either what relation there may be between his belief in an unchanged God or an eternal revelation and the ever changing history.

Change is a category, a scientific category, which embraces history in its totality and in every single part of it.

4. The fourth distinguishing mark of analogy is that the subject matter of history is of a cultural nature. Now culture is a very badly defined concept. Therefore I feel myself entitled to try my hand at a definition of my own making, a very simple one : culture

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is every human act that can imitated consciously. 'Act' does not only signify (technological) civilization, but also language, thoughts, ideas (insofar as they become expressed, in a 'behavioristic' sense therefore, although I myself am no behaviorist). 'Consciously imitable' excludes for instance the talking parrot, but means meaningful, even potentially creative, repetition. Of course the repetition is in itself a conscious thing, but the act may not always stand out as such to the mind; for although language is very much 'culture', we construct our sentences 'unconsciously', automatically.

The consequence is that history occupies itself with culture, with human beings under their cultural aspect, and not with 'nature'. 'Nature' is of course an equally undefined subject. Perhaps it is advisable to stick to the definition of James Redfield that the sphere of nature is also the sphere of superior forces, of things that man cannot change 8). The sun is as 'natural' as natural can be, because we possess no possibility at all to change our orb of day. And man too has 'nature', he is and remains mortal, he is man or woman, he cannot fly, cannot live underwater and so on. Culture exists within these limits, it can only respect them 9). But the sphere of culture is that of things that can be altered, be operated upon, by (free) choice, human exertion or application of knowledge, says Redfield 10). Paradoxically, nature itself is a changing subject, for every culture has its own nature, its own way to have nature. A lot of things which have always been completely unchangeable - illnesses for instance - we have now got under control, they have become 'culture'. In this restriction of history to what is human and 'cultural' part and whole in history agree with each other.

5. The fifth analogy between part and whole is that they both contain the same historical factors. History as such is constituted by persons-groups-events-processes-structures-ideas-ideologies, that is, all things 'historical' can be brought back to these factors, can be catalogued in this way historically and scientifically. Examples : Disraeli is a person, the Wisigoths are a group, the battle of Cannae is an event, the Federal Republic of Germany is structure, the Industrial Revolution is a process, the Copernican system is an idea, marxism is an ideology.. For the time being this list seems exhaustive. I allow that many a category needs a more precise definition, for instance, ideology, but, again for the present and waiting for discussion, I

content myself with the meanings of everyday language.

In history there never operates one factor only, for instance never a person 'in itself'. Disraeli without more is nothing, anyhow not 'history', he is meaningful as an Englishman, he belongs to the group 'English nation' or to that other group 'British establishment', he is meaningful as an important member of the structures 'British state' and 'British Commonwealth', and because of his relation with the ideology 'British imperialism'. What exactly makes something historically significant, that, why it gets its own place in history, in historiography, cannot not be enlarged upon here, but it is quite clear that it is a combination of several factors. Therefore a biography is never only the description of a certain life, it is the fixation of that life in history with the help of an number of historical factors, it is the result of the determination of the relations between this life and its factors. A history of marxism never deals with that ideology alone, but also with marxists and marxist parties, with their ideas, with events in connection with marxist persons and groups.

Perhaps one would now draw the conclusion that 'pars' and 'totum' are nearby identical, in view of the great number of analogies. The only difference seems to be that the part is shorter than the whole. But any number of analogies does not make an identity.

If the parts were really completely identical with each other and with the whole, they would also be endlessly interchangeable. Then it would really be 'mundus in gutta', you could then find the sum total of all history even in a small part of it. Historiography would become superfluous to a large extent, we would not stand in need of history programs and of history curricula. In history teaching things could be restricted to a single item, your own town for instance however small. Perhaps 25 hours of history teaching in all or at the uttermost one scholastic year would prove sufficient.

But the fact that we always treat history extensively, in historiography and teaching, shows that we do not consider the parts as identical. To start with my last remark, the mere thing that the part is shorter than the whole is already a very important difference. Secondly, the whole has an open end, but not the part: this day is the last day of universal history, we know what has happened, we do not know what is going to happen. The Greek polis does not exist any more, we can study it in its begin-

ning, its progress and its end, as a so to say 'closed' phenomenon. And so it is with all historical life and with all events. Even our own life, or the town we live in, although their ends are still open, consist of 'closed' parts. My own city, Amsterdam, lives on, but medieval Amsterdam, as an independent historical phenomenon, has ended for ever.

A third and considerable difference between part and whole is that, although the same factors appear in both (groups, persons, etc.), it is not necessary that all of them feature in a part. It is very probable that in a part one of them dominates. The big history is an amalgam, a mixture of all the factors, everyone of them has its own place in it, and one cannot say which of them is more important, the groups or the persons or the events and so on. In a part however one factor dominates, it subjects the others to itself. In an historical biography a person gets pride of place, in a history of marxism a certain ideology, in the history of medieval Rouen a structure (the town), in the history of weaving a process, in the history of dualism an idea, in battle history an event. This dominance distinguishes the part from the whole, gives it its own seal, its own colour, makes it a very worthy object of history. It grants the part 'historicity'.

The dominance of one factor over the others connects the part with other parts in which the same factor dominates. But here we hit upon the weak spot. As didactical factors our factors are much too broad and therefore not yet very well usable in the choice of subject matter. Of course, if we study Napoleon as a 'person', this may lead to certain valuable conclusions which are applicable to other historical persons. But the difference between two historical persons may be so great that a comparison will not get us very far. We need more refinement, we shall have to introduce subcategories, which means a lot of analytical work. We should gain a lot already if, in the main category 'persons', we could separate the 'great rulers' from the rest : probably there are more real historical analogies between Caesar and Napoleon than between Cicero and Napoleon or even between Caesar and Cicero. By introducing another subcategory by qualifying Cicero as a 'literary statesman' you would probably detect analogies with Chateaubriand. Now one could easily go further and refine our analysis still more. I am thinking of categories of human action, take for example the



historically important one of 'responsibility'.

If, within the main category 'persons', we combine the subcategory 'great rulers' with another subcategory 'responsibility', then we discover a moment in the life of Napoleon which makes this very clear. When Napoleon left the battle field of Waterloo on the evening of June 18, 1815, he was still Emperor of the French and therefore responsible for France. In the perspective of world history however he had reached his end, his case was definitely lost. It took him several days, till the evening of June 22, before he clearly saw that he had to abdicate, in the interest of France and of European peace. He believed that from now on he could live as a private ('unhistorical') person, only responsible to himself, and could settle in England or even in the U.S. But soon it was made clear to him that others would take over the responsibility for himself and his future (=still saw him as 'historical' or at least as 'potentially historical'); only after a fierce inward struggle he delivered himself finally into the hands of the British authorities and was brought to St.-Helena. Now, for this short period of history, only a few weeks, I have compiled a series of 120 authentic sources (without connecting texts of my own hand, each text being directly joined by the next), with questions and tasks for the pupils. This piece of work shows vividly and dramatically what 'responsibility' means for a great ruler and his partners 11).

Piet Fontaine  
Utrecht/Amsterdam

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#### NOTES

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- 4) O.c., p. 64.

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- 9) L.c.
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