

Lecturer: R.D. Laing

Date: 15. 7. 67.

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material on  
THIS MINI-TRANSCRIPT

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Now I feel that we are meeting here at a moment in history where things are so precarious and dangerous and confusing that I'm not going to try to state more than what I think is obvious. This exercise in stating the obvious can be a sharing with you of what my misconceptions in your view might be. There is nothing more dangerous than the obvious. We know that Hitler regarded it as perfectly obvious that the Jews were a poison on the Aryan race, requiring to be exterminated; and that what is obvious to Lyndon Johnson is not at all obvious to Che Guevara. And what is obvious to me might not be obvious to anyone else. But the obvious is what stands in one's way, what stands in front of or over against one's self. And if one doesn't see the obvious, then one is liable to trip over it. And if one attempts to deny it, then one is involved in endless complexities of self mystification and denial. If the obvious is something that one can't accept, then one attempts to remove it. But at any rate, one has to begin by recognising that it exists for one's self. Rjw

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We have a theoretical and practical problem of finding the mediation between the different levels of contexts; between the different systems and metasystems; extending all the way from the smallest micro- to the largest macro- social systems. The intermediate systems that lie on this range have to be studied not only in themselves, but as conditioning and conditioned media between the individual and the collective. And it may be - as David Cooper was proposing specifically - that in our society and in certain times, under certain properties of this interlaced Rjw

set of systems, that revolutionary change may be more feasible, not at the extreme ends of the micro- and macro- set of systems, not between the individual pirouette of solitary, individual repentance on the one hand, or by a seizure of the machinery of the state on the other; but by a sudden, structural, radical change in the control system within the different elements that comprise the intermediate network of this total web.

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I started trying to see through all this from the study of, in the first place, certain people who were labelled psychotic or neurotic, as seen in psychiatric units and in out-patient clinics. And I began to see that the study of this was the study of a situation and not simply of individuals. And the study of this situation was pinned down in 3 principal ways, which can be taken as a paradigm of the way the study of all our social fabric is arrested and congealed by our failure to apply a proper type of rationality to the scene that demands it: In the first place the behaviour of such people was regarded as signs of a process that was going on in them, and fundamentally nothing else; that is, the whole subject was enclosed in a metaphor. This metaphor, the medical metaphor, in the second place, governed conditioned the conduct of all those who were in it. And thirdly, through this metaphor, the person within the system was isolated from the system, and no longer therefore seen as a person who was by definition an element in a social system, but his behaviour was the outcome or the product of a socially unintelligible psychological process for which he, this person, required to be

diagnosed and treated. This metaphor, and this way of thinking sanctioned ignoring and relegating to a secondary place of any understanding, the social context of the behaviour of the person. It also rendered any reciprocal interplay between the process of labelling and being labelled quite inconceivable - not only unobservable but unthinkable. Because how could diagnosing someone as ill who was ill make him ill? Or make him better, for that matter? In other words, I, along with my colleagues, eventually realised that the whole theory and practise of psychiatry, in this regard anyway, was an essay in what I would now call non-dialectical thinking and practise; but that once one had got oneself out of this straight-jacket of this metaphor, it was possible to see the dialectical intelligibility or function of this anti-dialectical exercise. The apparent unintelligibility of the experience and behaviour of the diagnosed person was a creation of the person diagnosing him. And this stratagem served quite specific functions within the structure of this system. For it to work, however, it was necessary that the persons utilising this stratagem should not themselves be aware that it was a stratagem. In other words, they should not be cynical or ruthless, they should be sincere and concerned. Indeed, the more treatment was to be escalated through negotiation in the form of psychotherapy, pacification through tranquillisation, physical struggle by means of cold-packs and straightjackets, and on to more humane forms of destruction through electroshocks and insulin comas, to the final solution of literally cutting a person's brain in two or more slices

through psycho-surgery • the human agents doing these things to other human beings had a tendency to feel more and more concerned, more and more sincere, more and more indignant, sorrowful, horrified and scandalised at the small minority of their colleagues who are horrified and scandalised by their actions. As for the patients, the more they protested, the less insight they displayed; the more they fought back, clearly the more they needed to be pacified; the more persecuted they felt at being destroyed, the more it was necessary to destroy them. And when even, at the end of it all, they seldom expressed gratitude - if they had no longer the brains left to express, at least with any vigour, a sense of being destroyed - this simply showed, as one leading psychiatrist said to me: "It's the white man's burden, Ronald. We can't expect any thanks, but we must go on".

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We don't have to ask why an increasing number of the world's inhabitants hate us Europeans and the U.S. We don't have to go into extraordinary psychological explanations of why I would hate someone who had napalmed my children. I don't see it in any more complicated than in black and white terms, that on one side people are fighting to preserve their humanity in all levels of their humanity - first it comes down to physical survival; and on the other side, people are fighting to destroy humanity, specifically human beings who are not specified, however, in the technology of mass killing - modern war is well past, on the one side, any sort of personal enemy. The people who are being fought are people whom the paid mercenaries of our country and the U.S. have never seen, know nothing about, have no personal quarrel with, and have never any chance of in any way meeting. And this war, I think, has already begun and it is a war to exterminate man.

R.W.

So that in this sense, we might say that, although within this social system as we are by accident born into, in that respect we must find some way of subverting this system, or we must find some way of liberating ourselves from it, if only to preserve ourselves. Because, if we have just got the slightest imagination, we are not doing anyone else a favour.

pg 16 I don't know why this is going on. No adequate economic fully accounts for it. U Thant has proposed that it's a sort of Holy War, an ideological war. There's a great deal to be said about the economics of it. The theoreticians in the Pentagon say that it's a global operation in order to contain the advance of Communist imperialism. It may be much more primitive than that, when President Johnson says to combat commanders in the Officers' Mess at Qumran Bay "Come hom with that coonskin on the wall". And when you listen to some of the other statements, such as "Bringing Red China to her knees",; One is involved in the most primitive sort of thinking, well beyond any evolved digital reasoning, the most primitive analogical thinking.

pg 16T.....That a great number of people feel ashamed and guilty if they don't ~~drop napalm~~ ~~and~~ manufacture it, and the whole thing that goes into the delivery of it. The thing has gone almost beyond being able to reach it if one is not a part of it, because once you have got into that you don't know that you are in it. There are several layers of multiple ignorance that cut off, it seems, people who are already in that run-away from their own source, so that one has come to be ashamed of one's own original nature, and terrified of it, and ready to destroy it if one sees any evidence of it in anyone else. This has been achieved - one can see it being achieved - not only by a family but by all the the institutions that are brought to bear on the child, first of all in terms of the kinesics of handling and the suppression of the immediate intelligence of smell and touch and taste in babies; and right through from that, very largely kinesically before any words have ever been put to it. So that the child, by the time he grows up, is ripe to volunteer or at any rate to acquiesce in



is expected to be proud of being called up to be a hired killer, and to be deeply ashamed of himself if he is frightened, even in his guts, or if he feels for some reason or other that she should not do this.

Congress - 22nd July 1967

R.D. Laing

Here's a quotation. It's Simone Weil talking about the Romans.

"The Romans conquered the world by seriousness, discipline, organisation, continuity of outlook and method, by the conviction that they were a superior race born to command, by the calculated, methodical use of pitiless cruelty, of cold perfidy, of hypocritical propaganda, employed simultaneously or alternately, by an unshakeable resolve always to sacrifice everything to prestige without ever being sensitive to pity, to peril, nor to any human respect; by the art of decomposing under terror the very soul of their adversaries, or of lulling them by hope before enslaving them by arms; lastly by so skillful a manipulation of the crudest lies that they deceived even posterity and deceive us still. No-one has ever equalled the Romans in the skillful use of cruelty. When cruelty is the effect of a caprice, of a diseased sensibility, of rage, of hatred, it often has fatal consequences to its employer. The cold calculated cruelty which constitutes a method, the cruelty which no instability of mood, no consideration of prudence, respect or pity can temper, which one can hope to escape neither by courage, dignity and energy, nor by submission, supplications and tears, such cruelty is an incomparable instrument of domination."

Well, it's maybe taken some of us this length of time to see through the Romans, but we I think are all of us becoming aware that we're living in a civilisation and a culture and a society comprising the northern Europe and America - the western world - which has rendered that statement out of date. As far as I can see, looking at what is being done by the agents of the society of which I am a member, we have arrived at a cruelty and violence which far exceeds, far exceeds anything that the Nazis ever did, or any other group of people have ever perpetuated on other human beings.

Now the demystification of violence that is one of the essential

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understand, not the violence, not the counter-violence of the Latin Americans, the Vietnams and the black people in the U.S. - that sort of response to being, to hundreds of years of utter humiliation and extreme forms of violence of all kinds - when people eventually say, and it's not just now, ~~xxxxxxx~~ there have been rebellions and revolts all over the world for all the time which is remembered. / But there's no problem about that. There's no intellectual or human difficulty, when someone says "If you do that just once more you're going to get it back just as you gave it." What however we do have to spend some time on because it is by no means obvious - by no means - why and how this inhuman violence is perpetrated at the periphery of the empire or the interface with sub-groups within it. You can do a number of things about that. Without knowing why, you can fight back - if someone draws a gun on you you can draw a gun on them; as John Gerassi was saying earlier, you can plan that you're going to hit first next time. You can line up with flowers and use flower power against police power. But some of the most significant contributions this week were some of the ones were felt by a number of people to be the most boring.

They were attempts to find out what - where the money is, where is the tie up between industry, the military, racist ideologies, the economic policies: the link-up between economics, the industrial-military complex, and the link-up between these massive bodies of corporate interests and of vested-interest groups, and how this is mediated through to smaller groups and so on. And this is very difficult to do. As far as I know there's no economist or intellectual in the whole of this country, of the U.K., who has come out with a systematic detailed analysis of that sector of human affairs. There's not a single person at the London School of Economics, as far as I know, seriously engaged in that. Now this is extremely serious and perhaps not by any means accidental. But we have to find these things out; these things however are difficult to find out, because we don't know whether the books are cooked ~~at~~ not, and we're talking about things that no-one can actually see, touch, taste



directorships, investments here and there and so on, that you can't actually see any more. And there's a strong presupposition that the type of organisation that the predominantly white imperialist society has managed to develop is this this invisible web where everyone feels trapped in it - not everyone, some people are happy perhaps to be trapped. But there's an increasing realisation, and this is the last point that I want to make, that there is in the classical sense of Marx and Hegel a dialectic of liberation.

If you remember - it would take a long story to say all the different meanings of dialectic, but Hegel had one famous example: the dialectic in the relationship between the master and the slave. He pointed out that the more the master enslaves his slaves, in other words the more he gets the slaves to do everything for him, the more he becomes himself helpless until the slave wakes up one day and realises that he is the master because the master has put himself in his power. And Marx's thesis, stating it in its simplest form, was something of the same order: that there is going to be an inevitable historical reversal - and it won't be inevitable because everyone sits back but because the people who have been put down for so long will inevitably realise that in many key respects they have been handed the power willy-nilly and all they need ~~ix~~ to do is to find the organisational means by which to take it over. I don't know whether <sup>it's</sup> ~~ix~~ happened more or less optimistically than in 1844, but we are clearly in a period now where for over a hundred years the main movement of humanity is that the people who have been exploited and oppressed and put down and robbed of cultural or psychological existence, and sometimes even been threatened and very nearly been subject to physical genocide, are in a world revolt. But the dialectics of this is that the white man, or the European or white N. American, is aware, becoming aware of the price that is paid by what has got to be done - has been done first of all to ourselves, and has to be done to our own children so that by the age of 17 or 18 practically all white Americans will apathetically accept their draft cards, and in docile obedience go

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it's just where they're sent - and within about 6 months of training they will be skilled technologists of mass murder. And any child is expected, by the training that they've had in the family and the schools and all the sort of propaganda these involve whereby they've become so brainwashed that anyone, everyone, is ripe to do this. Now that is an extraordinary achievement and I don't know any other group of people who have managed it that way. This isn't to take up arms out of self defence. This is utterly impersonal - if it's Vietnam today it might be the Middle East tomorrow, it might be all over the world. There are places on the face of the earth that practically every one who is fighting there have never ever heard of even - they've got no personal quarrel, they've got nothing against anyone.

Alright, we, as Jules Henry was saying, have now got a tendency to grow fat on fear. But we may grow fat on fear and it goes into our hearts, and the chlorestorol in our hearts is producing the death rate among the white middle-class American male at a higher rate and at a younger age than, as far as we know, any people who have eaten so much have ever died so quickly, of heart-failure. And it's a failure of the heart, and it's biochemical, cultural, socio-economic and everything else.

I think that more of us now are realising that until all men are free, none of us can be.

Lecturer: R.D. Laing

Date: 26. 7. 67.

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There's another possibility, which is the sort of thing David Cooper was alluding to a couple of days ago when he talked about turning into a dog, or turning into a plant or turning into an animal, or something like this - which could be said to be the turning into and actualising in one's own life certain concealed and forbidden possibilities of being human that in our society are absolutely tabu, but in other times and places and other societies are often even sought - after experiences or very highly rewarded: and a person who does do this and comes through it - goes into it and comes out of it - has a very high status of shamanistic priest, because they have been through one of those journeys - turning into an animal, total fragmentation of ego - and body into the dust of the cosmic prima materia, and so on, I'll go back to that in a minute - and coming through that again, emerges into society as someone who has been through this and is therefore able to act as a guide to others who may require a helping hand or some orientation in that particular voyage.

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we know where we are in space, we can move a bit, people feel themselves to be behind their eyes, but most people are completely unaware of all the events of the body that are going on. And they're unaware is that is the endemic, quote "normal" splitting off, cut off, repression, denial and so on of our awareness. And it is not natural state of affairs, it's a state of profound alienation to one's self and thence to other people. [And a certain sexual experience - a certain sort of tickle in the sort of genitals spreads a little way, and an orgasm happens, but most people have no experience at all of that, of sexual turning starting from the sexual Chakra, which can spread right back up the back, through the solar plexus, through the heart, through the throat - as in a sexual yoga, a state of profound illuminative awakenedness can occur through turning on sexually. So the normal state of affairs

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realises this is at any rate one step further on than most people who are under the delusion that they're alive. Dead men are very dangerous because all they can do is to kill other people, because they immediately think that nay form of life is a disaster - you might say that they unconsciously envy, but I don't know, they want to treat peole who are more alive than them, more aware than them. Because if you're unconscious that you're unconscious, you think you're conscious. Sin has always been defined as a state of ignorance. The greatest form of sin is to be unaware that you're unaware • not to know that you don't know. If you don't know that you don't know, you think you know. If you're unconscious that you're unconscious, you think you're conscious. If you're ignorant of being ignorant, you don't realise you're ignorant and therefore have to sure other people who are aware at any rat~~h~~that they're ignorant who are at any rate aware that they don't know, who are aware - the paradigm of that is that in the country of the blind the one eyed man ~~ix~~ will have his eye excised, because he's suffering from hallucinations.

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