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The United States and Communism

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I. Torn-to-pieces-hood and Class War

Professors of English have a right to frown on the word "torn-to-pieces-hood". It is not English. The term is not found in the dictionary. But despite these two blemishes, it was coined as an indispensable term by William James fifty years ago.

Although political scientists never have explored the term offered them by "The Prophet of the Nation that is to be", William James, in the term "torn-to-pieces-hood", has hit the center of America's political soul.

Of course it is quite well known that James' philosophy proclaimed pluralism. Few people will get excited by this mental concept of "pluralism". But behind all valid or great philosophies a personal experience may be found. Behind William James' rational discussion of the pluralistic universe was the emotional experience of the torn-to-pieces-hood in his own soul. Mind and heart must be reconciled before we can respect a man's philosophy. By speaking of his own torn-to-pieces-hood, and by basing his pluralistic philosophy on his experience of reality, James was honest enough to establish peace between his soul and his mind.

For this reason, the experience is profound. William James is the finest representative of America's crucial character. This essay is written in recognition of William James' discovery. His theory of pluralism leaves us cold, but his experience of torn-to-pieces-hood is prophetic.

For we who live in the United States daily experience the difficulties of uniting, be it inside or outside ourselves. We experience our dividedness and divisions. Yet our experiences of them are not well expressed by an abstraction like pluralism, or by a static noun like division. We experience them as processes and conflicts. Conflicts can hardly be articulated by nouns; "torn-to-pieces-hood" suggests that we act and are acted upon at the same time. And such a verbal phrase, albeit far from the genius of the English language, must be coined because it is at the center of the American soul. "Torn-to-pieces-hood" renders this service. It is so genuinely American that its formation is decidedly un-English. No English stock phrase would be able to signify the specific depth of the American experience.

Why does "torn-to-pieces-hood" reach so deeply into an American speaker's own mind? In the United States all frontiers have been taken by storm. The pioneer scoured the new regions swiftly. Besides the frontiers of geography, frontiers of class, of religion, of race, have been overrun. Every one of us has gone beyond his limits far into some foreign territory. This territory may be of space or of time: for instance, boys are wizards in their precious shrewdness; old men are boys and behave like boys. In this way the frontiers of the ages are overrun. Men take care of children with a motherly finesse, women stand up with a virile aggressiveness. And thus the frontiers of the sexes are overrun. I know of a bank president who built a hotel and loves to play the clerk in it with great seriousness. A social welfare worker may be cross examined about her own married life by

the woman she is investigating. Frontiers of class are overrun. All men are equal ~~xxx~~ we declare in a final sweep, embracing all the inequalities of men. For although the frontiers are overrun, they continue to exist. All frontiers being overrun, all frontiers continuing to exist--this blend produces the American torntopieceshood. We have the frontiers within ourselves. We have enlarged our estate by holding part of ~~another~~ souls' territory. Accordingly we partake of opposite ways of life. Our soul, open to all, is not classless or sexless or ageless; it preferably is multiclass, plurigaged, bisexual, wide-travelled. For this reason, we all are torn to pieces by a perpetual uncertainty between feminine and masculine, rich and poor, city and farm, sophisticated and low-brow reactions. In the same sense as the Soviets represent class war and the perpetual revolution, America represents for the world at large torntopieceshood and the perpetual victories over it. Torntopieceshood is America's revealing contribution to man's nature. Behind both Marxism and James, the truth of the life living and life destroying enmities, the great Christian Cross, becomes visible. ~~But~~ both are nearer to the Cross than any of the European nations. ~~But~~ that which is collectivized as "class war" by the economic terminology of the party line, appears in individualistic America as the torntopieceshood of the individual. We should not reject this genuinely un-European term. We need it for establishing peace at all. We need it for determining the relation of the United States to Russia, and to steer clear of ~~the~~ the cliffs on which European nationalism perished.

## II. The United States and Russia

Russia holds the very opposite position from America.

The proletarian revolution has simplified all divisions by denying their right to exist. In the United States frontiers are not recognized; they are swiftly traversed but they remain. Russia halts in front of them and deliberately sets out to destroy them.

On class war, which in the United States is one of a hundred internal conflicts, the Russians focus in tremendous concentration. We try to bring all conflicts out of focus so that they seem to remain on the sidelines. The Russians wish to focus attention on them and smash them with hammer and sickle. We call the Russian ideology Communism. We may call our ideology the pluralism of torntopicceshood.

Russian and American eyes focus differently. Communism really is un-American. Let nobody believe that it is un-American because it is immoral. It simply does not fit the mores of the people. We hold an opposite view of the world from the Russians. Class wars to us are one conflict among a thousand to be overlooked and minimized. To the Russians class war takes on gigantic proportions and has to be maximized by mental effort.

These two ways of focussing, the Russian and the American, are in themselves profoundly complementary. In the mental realm, they keep alive the two genders of grammar as expressed by son and daughter. Russia is the rebel son of Europe, the revolté of his mother civilization. America is the heiress daughter of the Old World. Russia destroys, America comprehends Europe. Both are the heirs of the European conflicts, and each resolves them in a peculiar manner. By communism, the Russian oversimplify. By torntopicceshood,

the Americans overcomplicate. In Russian eyes, the frontiers must be annihilated. In American eyes they must be patiently ignored. The impatient son and the patient daughter look at their mother continent which has destroyed itself.

The end of the second world war leaves these two aspects of human conflict: the United States and Russia are the victors. Obviously both are right. Both have something valid as son and daughter, as smasher and as preserver of the ruined Europe's gifts, as Orestes and Iphigenia who had to cleanse the soil from the rivers of blood shed by Clytemnestra-Europe. We have labelled this sketch "The United States and Communism". We now have reached the point at which the lopsidedness of this title becomes clear. We should grant the Soviets reciprocity. Then the reciprocal headline would have to read: the Russian Soviets and torntopieceshood. Russia and the United States play indeed a representative role in this profound crisis of mankind. One focusses on the abolition of conflicts, the other on being inclusive of conflicts. Both, in isolation, would perish. Torntopieceshood may be our genuine starting point. Communism may be a genuine goal. But both lack some important element. For the torntopieceshood may bog down in mere pluralism. And if we should give in to mere pluralism, disintegration would set in. A philosophy of conflict must not rob us of our hope of overcoming this or that conflict at one time or another. Torntopieceshood without an ultimate hope leads to despair. An eternal hope, and partial success in settling conflicts in reality, are the indispensable corollaries of torntopieceshood. This hope may take the place of definite

goals. But the future must be represented at least by hope or we get stuck in the conflicts of the past. With the Russians, the smashing of the conflict itself may be the one definite and naive goal. But they are threatened with the opposite kind of despair from the United States. The eternal hope of the American people is undefined and it takes many shapes. The goal of the Russians is overdefined and ultra-uniform. They are imperilled by brutality. Kuleks, priests, intellectuals, nationalities, are eliminated by acts of violence. All pre-revolutionary individual starting points are dishonored and overridden for the sake of the one definite goal. The charity which respects a given conflict and shows forbearance to the diversity of our starting points must be imparted to Russia by the United States. The clarity which foresees ultimate goals must be imparted to the United States by Russia.

Both charity and clarity are indispensable. For both protect the dynamic character of life from stagnation or nihilism. And both accept society as the unity beyond conflicts. In their interaction, they determine the pace at which the ghosts of this war may be pacified.

Tormentlessness mitigated by boundless charity, Communism mitigated by boundless charity, are not irreconcilable. In contrast, hopeless tormentlessness and brutal communism are irreconcilable. By these two sentences, then, the faith or unfaith of the living Americans and Russians of this generation will be judged.