RESEARCH ARTICLE

"AM I MY BROTHER'S KEEPER?" EDUCATION AND THE WOUNDS OF CIVILIZATION.

Kaustuv Roy.
Azim Premji University.

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Manuscript Info	Abstract
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Manuscript History	This paper argues that the collective suffering of humankind, especially man-made suffering inflicted on the human species and on the natural world in general, must find a place for serious consideration ineducational discourse. Specific and dramatic instances of suffering such as wars or famine find mention in history but the contemplation of man-made misery as a large-scale, banal, and universal phenomenon is avoided in the curriculum.The conventional arrangement of subjects along disciplinary lines contributes in producing this silence. The obvious danger of such avoidance is the possibility of naturalizing suffering and seeing it, as Hegel did, as the unavoidable accompaniment of history. What is eroded in the process is accountability, which the critical discourses within education ought torecognize, for nothing serves more to corrode education from within thanits lack of participation in social accountability. Besides, it is also the stance of this paper that an emancipatory moment does not occur until we walk through collective suffering to the other side.

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In the Book of Genesis, on being asked about his brother Abel, whom he had murdered out of jealousy, Cain retorts in these ill-famed words: "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?"[1] If we put this question seriously to ourselves, almost all the major ethical systems such as the Judeo-Christian, the Islamic, the Confucian, the Buddhist, and the Vedantic,would answer quite clearly in the affirmative. A trusteeship is assumed as part of being human although differentially interpreted. Nevertheless, human attitude in general towards the world at large has reflected the brazenness of Cain. Political systems to which humans have surrendered their common will-to-power,and technological systems to which they have surrendered their will-to-think, are typically devoid ofethics. The wounds of civilizations are deepened by the metaphysical and ethical vacuum in which politics has located itself and from which it operates in the name of *realpolitik*.But why must this question come up at all in the realm of education?

Modern suffering is mostly man-made and modernist education is necessarily and unavoidably implicated in it; both come out of the same set of assumptions and affective determinations about the world, about ourselves, and the relations between the two. The most fundamental condition of the human being and of human societies in general is suffering, and yet this fact has not led to serious discussion in the general curriculum.[2]The 'business-as-usual' attitude adopted by mainstream education thus leaves out of the reckoning vital questions of phenomenological

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[1] Genesis 4: 1-9, *The Bible*, King James Version.
[2] Etymologically, suffering comes from the Latin *ferre*'to carry.' At the minimum, human beings have been carrying the burden of their civilizing efforts, and at the maximum, tearing down the results of those very same efforts (through war and aggression).

Corresponding Author:-Kaustuv Roy.
Address:-Azim Premji University.

significance. Specific instances of suffering such as wars or famine find mention in history but the contemplation of man-made misery as a large-scale and universal phenomenon is avoided in general. For instance, Adorno "speaks of the wounds societies inflict upon the subjects, of the wounds their exploitative systems inflict upon nature, of the wounds subjects inflict upon each other, of the wounds humans inflict upon their own bodies and minds [in the effort] to become modern, functional, enlightened beings in control of themselves, of the wounds any kind of philosophical system inflicts upon its own topics and objects by the very language and terminology…" (Martin Hielscher, "Adorno and Aesthetic Theory" in: *European Graduate School Lecture,* 2009). Whether the individual is consciously aware or not, the path to civilization has been paved with suffering and this suffering, its phenomenological content, cannot be simply wished away. And if the goal of education is individual and collective emancipation, then this suffering has to be confronted in some deliberate manner. In other words, the accumulated and self-inflicted wounds of humankind must be faced at some level and curriculum must play a part in it. It is the thesis of this paper that one must walk through collective suffering to reach the other side. Inhuman social arrangements demandserious reflection on pain and misery.

Further, knowledge being part of the civilizational process must logically be imbued with suffering in subtle and gross ways. However, just as the phenomenological aspect of reason is left out of curriculum discussions, so is any deep consideration of cathexis. The word suffering comes from Latin '*ferre',* to carry. To suffer then means to carry, to endure, or undergo. Modernity, suffering from its own excesses, rejects suffering as accidental and avoidable affliction, or needless *ascesis*. On the contrary, it seems almost banal to claim that humanity must examine the accumulated burden of suffering in order to work towards freedom. The task of curriculum is to acknowledge and understand suffering at all levels and not run away from it. In other words, education is accountable and this accountability requires that we develop a way of approaching and becoming critically reflexive about the multiple ways in which human societies generate suffering and misery. This paper will focus on some signal moments in the history of modernity as well as on the self-understanding of modernity to do a brief archaeology of civilizational misery. We will examine the nature of man-made suffering under the following four categories discussed by Adorno. Each is highly significant from the point of view of education andfor producing a living curriculum that can respond to the phenomenology of suffering in a context of social accountability.
1.   "The wounds humans inflict upon nature."
2.   "The wounds societies inflict upon the subject."
3.   "The wounds subjects inflict upon each other."
4.   "The wounds humans inflict upon themselves."

Let us begin with the first of these categories, namely, the wounds human beings and their systems inflict upon nature. Of course, right away we need to clarify what we mean by "nature," otherwise we face the risk of prevarication and objectification. The word "nature" comes from Latin *nasci* "to be born," which in turn derives from PIE root *gene* "to give birth" with the Sanskrit cognate *janati* "begets." In other words, etymologically, nature is what gives birth (to phenomena). By "nature," what is meant here is all that continuallymarks or impinges itself on the senses, plus the *unmarked* toward which these markings point. The first part is well understood and accepted. But markings, or sensory impressions, must of necessity point also to that which is unmarked, just as surely as light points towards the dark, or good marks out evil. This latter part is not well receivedin modernity or acknowledged. For our purposes, it will not be necessary to explicate the nature of the unmarked. It is sufficient to acknowledge it as an ontological inevitability.

Historically, the attitude of humans towards the phenomenal matrix—nature—has undergone profound changes. The crisis that human beings and all life on the planet face today is largely due to these attitudinal changes and the multi-dimensional violence towards nature that has been unleashed as its consequence. Our task here will be to briefly trace those changes through history, which will lead us to comprehend our present situation. And since technological modernity is largely a phenomenon whose birthplace is the West, the discussion will focus mainly on developments within Latin Christendom. "To save the souls of men in the particular atmosphere in which it found itself, Christianity had to forget and neglect, or at least belittle, the theological and spiritual significance of nature. Henceforth, the study of nature from a theological point of view did not occupy a central place in Western Christianity."[3]First, the decadence of the Graeco-Roman civilization towards the beginning of the Christian era allowed a nascent Christianity to fill a growing spiritual vacuum. What had started as the faith of a small group began to become religiously responsible for a large swathe of humanity. In order to be equal to this task, theological

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[3]SeyyedHosseinNasr, *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis in Modern Man* (London: Unwin, 1990), p.55-56.

doctrine took it upon itself to eradicate existing pagan beliefs and its cosmology. "To preserve a correct theology Christianity became opposed to the 'cosmic religion' of the Greeks, and some theologians called nature *massaperditionis.*In the dialogue between the Christian and the Greek, in which both sides were expressing an aspect of the truth but each a half truth, the Christian emphasized the nature of God, the human soul and salvation while the Greek emphasized the 'divine' quality of the cosmos and the 'supernatural' status of intelligence itself which enables man to know the universe. Against this cosmology Christianity opposed its theology and against this emphasis upon knowledge, accented the path of love."[4]Cosmogony was opposed by theology. To many of the theologians, nature was unredeemed and attention to the knowledge hidden in nature amounted to witch-craft. The possibility ofsupernatural intelligence endowed in nature itself was opposed by the prominence of *agape* or divine Love.

A binary opposition was thus created which did not see the possibility of these two being two halves of a single truth. "To overcome the danger of rationalism divorced from gnosis it made knowledge the handmaid of faith and ignored the supernatural essence of natural intelligence within men. Only in this way was it able to "save" a civilization and to instill into a decadent world a new spiritual life; but in the process an alienationtook place towards nature which has left its mark upon the subsequent history of Christianity. This is one of the deep-lying roots of the present crisis of modern man in his encounter with nature.Illuminative knowledge or gnosis has existed in Christianity but mostly onthe periphery, especially as far as Western Christianity is concerned.Knowledge derived from intelligence without the aid of faith came to be considered as 'knowledge according to the flesh', in conformity with the Christian conception of man as an essentially warped will whose wound must be healed throughthe rite of Baptism…In any case, because of its character as a way of love, and the excessively naturalistic background in which it was called upon to fill the spiritual vacuum caused by the decadence of Graeco-Romanreligions, Christianity drew a sharp line between the supernatural and the natural, or grace and nature."[5]The hostility to nature came from the intuition that the understanding of nature could release powers that de-emphasized the importance of divine Grace for salvation. To keep paganism in check therefore all reference to naturalistic knowledge that did not directly serve faith had to be suppressed as Mephistophelean. Ironically, as we know, Galilean science realized exactly these fears centuries down the road on the way to the breakdown of faith itself.

The other-worldly loyalty demanded by the Church was distinctly aliento the erstwhile religion of the ancient city-states which was "civic" in the sense that it did not require mediation by a church, nor were the divinities located in a supernatural space. There was intermingling: "the gods of the Greeks were not transcendent but directly involved in natural and social processes."[6] Besides, polytheism ensured that people could choose their own particular form of proximity to the supra-sensible, and find meaning in experiences that were not confined to the secular. But all that changed with the posing of a profound antithesis between the sacred and the profane. At one level, through the invention of the Holy Trinity the formal religion theologically removed the Pure Spirit from the plane of man's being. This would prevent the possibility of any claim to a direct and unmediated connection with the Divine, an attitude that could potentially have diluted the importance and centrality of the Church. And at another level, it insisted on a complete monotheistic allegiance to the "Son of Man" that would delegitimize the heterogeneity of alternative religious experiences. Also, with the removal of the Holy Spirit from the world of beings, that is, from nature, the conception of nature itself was transformed: "Such a [supernatural] space allows "nature" to be reconceived as manipulatable material, determinate, homogeneous, and subject to mechanical laws."[7] The supernatural space was invented to contain the Divine and removed from nature. Divested of its mystique, nature now became a mere resource to be exploited. The importance of this divestment cannot be overstated for the systematic denaturing of nature that was progressively received as advancement, and it marked the beginnings of the ecological ruination to come that was erroneously seen as the ascent of man.

Thus we see the beginnings of a peculiar humanism whose origin lies atthe confluence of several historical forces including the rise of theodicy or the attempt to rationally explain the existence of God. In the works of Thomas Aquinas and other theologians of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, for example, we find this remarkable intellectualization of religion.By the time we reach the late Middle Ages, the mystical and sensual element that we

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[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

[6]Jan Bremmer, *Greek Religion*, cited in, TalatAsad, *Formations of the Secular* (California: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 27.

[7]TalatAsad, *Formations of the Secular* (California: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 27.

encounter in St. Francis of Assissi, who belonged to the same historical period as Aquinas, is largely eroded. Machiavelli, for instance, dismisses any thought of redemption or grace of God. Rather, he focuses on the wicked side of human nature and takes that as the base-line on which to found worldly governance.

The Protestant Reformation will take this line of thinking forward and make the *homo economicus* or the economic man the new deity. "Two different but complementary movements can be seen at thistime. The first is the destruction of the esoteric organizations within Christendom such as the Order of the Temple. The result was that the gnostic and metaphysical element which had until that time been continuously present began to disperse and gradually disappear, at least as an active living force in the intellectual framework of the Christian West." And second, "in emphasizing particular universal causes and criticizing Peripatetic philosophy and science, Ockham and his followers like Oresme and Nicolas of Autrecourt made important discoveries in mechanics and dynamics, discoveries that form the basis of the seventeenth centuryrevolution in physics."[8]In other words, we see the rise of a science, and with it an anthropomorphic anti-humanism that sounds like an oxymoron.Let me explain that construct. After nature was displaced as the *mysterium magnum* and man was made in the image of God, the rise of a secular rationality in the guise of science in turn displaced man from the centre of the cosmos. To paraphrase Nietzsche, man tried to be God, but a monkey stood in the doorway.[9] But this decentering or take-down itself occurred within an anthropomorphic framework of empirical science.The reconstruction of the human took place from within the parameters of rationality itself. Man became the measure of himself.

The seventeenth century brought with it a line of influence that emerged out of the developments in natural science hastening the process of disenchantment. It is an easy assertion that the rapid advance of instrumental reason from the seventeenth century onwards contributed significantly to the humanist project by separating spirit frommatter and giving universal laws that all things obeyed without exception. But it is not a simple matter of religion retreating before reason, rather it was the arising of a complex set of *epistemes* and practices that changed the way people related to the world and to each other. "The Copernican revolution brought about all the spiritual and religious upheavals that its opponents forecasted would happen precisely because it came at a time when philosophical doubt reigned everywhere, and a humanism, already over a century old, had taken away from man his position as the 'divine image' on earth. The proposal that the sun is at the centre of the solar system was not in itself new; for it was known by certain Greek, Islamic and Indian philosophers and astronomers. But its proposal during the Renaissance without an accompanying new spiritual vision of things could only mean a dislocation of man in the cosmos."[10] This dislocation was accompanied by an alienation and a compensatory desire for domination over external nature as seen in the writings of Francis Bacon and others. The missionary attitude that was derived from Christian thought was substantially and pragmatically boosted by the growing reach of scientific reason and technology. The claim that humans could go it alone and achieve God's plans on earth was now backed by the workings of *techne* in the form of a wide range of material transformations and accumulated knowledge of the external world as well as new regimes of quantification.

The conviction that thought could think its way to material salvation and create the city of God on earthobviously had tremendous consequences for the earth. "Incited by the elusive dream of economic progress, considered as an end in itself, a sense of the unlimited power of man and his possibilities is developed, together with the belief, particularly well developed in America, of boundless and illimitable possibilities within things, as if the world of forms were not finite and bound by the very limits of those forms."[11] But a couple of centuries down the line, its own agencies now report to the contrary. According to a scientific study funded by NASA,"Modern civilisation is heading for collapse within a matter of decades because of growing economic instability and pressure on the planet's resources. Using theoretical models to predict what will happen to the industrialised world over the course of the next century or so, mathematicians found that even with conservative estimates things started to go very badly, very quickly. Referring to the past collapses of often very sophisticated civilisations - the Roman, Han and Gupta Empires for example - the study noted that the elite of society have often pushed for a "business as usual" approach to warnings of disaster until it is too late. In the report based on his "Human And Nature Dynamical" (Handy) model, the applied mathematician SafaMotesharri wrote: "the process of rise-and-collapse is actually a recurrent cycle found throughout history". His research, carried out with the help of a team of natural and social scientists and

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[8]SeyyedHosseinNasr, Op. cit., p.63.

[9]A sarcastic reference to Darwinian theory of evolution.

[10]SeyyedHossein Nasr, Op. cit., p.66.

[11] Ibid., p.18-19.

with funding from Nasa's Goddard Space Flight Center, has been accepted for publication in the Ecological Economics journal, the Guardian reported. Motesharri explored the factors which could lead to the collapse of civilisation, from population growth to climate change, and found that when these converge they can cause society to break down because of the "stretching of resources" and "the economic stratification of society into 'Elites' and 'Masses'". Using his Handy model to assess a scenario closely resembling the current state of the world, Motesharri found that civilisation "appears to be on a sustainable path for quite a long time, but even using an optimal depletion rate and starting with a very small number of Elites, the Elites eventually consume too much, resulting in a famine among the Masses that eventually causes the collapse of society."[12]Science and technology are the discursive and operational handmaidens of elites who historically use it first to reduce a complex reality to a reality that is graspable only within the limits and methods of science.[13] Next, humans and nature are envisioned and reconstructed from within that reduced medium that now claims to be the whole of reality. In other words, the symbols and equations of science begin to represent the totality of life itself in the hands of scientific elites. The dangers of such a maneuver are obvious—a part-reality masquerades as the whole without a critical perspective on itself. This part-reality, dominated by the quantitative character of modern science, reduces all quality to quantity, i.e. to measurement. Without a metaphysic within which these quantities find temperance and meaning, these fragments float about at the disposal of vandals of power. The wounds of civilization far from being healed grow skyward and the attenuation of suffering promised by the Enlightenment never arrives.

The task of education under these circumstances is clear enough. It is, first, to develop a robust critical perspective on the modern discourses of power, namely, science and technology, since these seem to have lost all critical perspective on themselves. Second, the reductionist trick by which science reduces life to its own symbols and categories needs to be fully understood and pedagogically reversed. And third, a conscious effort has to be made by appeal to other faculties of the human in order to be able to transcend the categories and symbols of the dominant discourses.

Next let us take up the second point in the essay for discussion, namely, the wounds societies inflict upon their subjects. In order to approach this complex theme I have first to lay down some assumptions and conclusions drawn here about the relations that appear before us as subject and society. In other words, it requires the most elementary articulation of the human condition, and I know of no better intellectual than Hannah Arendt to open this discussion. In a remarkable insight, arrived at probably around mid-twentieth century, Arendt observes that modern society is marked by a separation of thought and knowledge. For about a century now, human thought has been increasingly unable to comprehend what its knowledge (symbolic structures) has been able to do, nor has it been able to comprehend (hold together) where its know-how has been leading. Arendt writes: "the "truths" of the modern scientific worldview, though they can be demonstrated in mathematical formulas and proved technologically, no longer lend themselves to normal expression in speech and thought. The moment these "truths" are spoken of conceptually" they begin to sound as incoherent as a "winged lion."[14] The equations of quantum mechanics or the famed uncertainty principle, and many of the recent "truths" of physics do not have corresponding mental representations. That is to say, they cannot be understood in natural language, and any attempt to do so seem to end up in paradoxical propositions. Yet they seem to "work" meaning provide consistent results. This has led to a profound, even if largely unconscious, schism between natural language (what we can speak about) and knowledge (mastery of cause-effect). In turn, this schism has led, again largely unconsciously, to a devaluing of language itself since our capacity to create effects in reality far outstrips our ability to comprehend these effects: "For the sciences today have been forced to adopt a "language" of mathematical symbols which, though it was originally meant only as an abbreviation for spoken statements, now contains statements that in no way can be translated back into speech."[15]This means, for one thing, that from the perspective of the extremum of human do-ability the average person who is not an expert and who principally lives within the bounds of natural language is reduced to "bare-life" without any social-political value (other than as a consumer of the end-products).[16] But "wherever the relevance of speech is at stake, matters become political by definition, for speech is what makes man a political being. If we would follow the advice, so frequently urged upon us, to adjust our cultural attitudes to the present status of

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[12]Adam Withnall,"Nasa-funded study warns of 'collapse of civilisation' in coming decades," *The Independent*, Mar 17, 2014.

[13] See AshisNandy, *Traditions, Tyranny, and Utopias* (New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1992).

[14] Hannah Arendt,*The Human Condition*, 2nd edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p.3.

[15] Ibid.

[16] See Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (California: Stanford University Press, 1998)).

scientific achievement, we would in all earnest adopt a way of life in which speech is no longer meaningful."[17] This means that we are at the mercy of the experts, their technical gadgets and measurements that are imposed on us in the name of advancement without a framework for evaluating the same socially, ethically, or politically. For such an assessment is tied up with conceptualizing in natural language, which, as we have just seen, has been technically superseded.

But can we trust the judgment of the experts? To that Arendt says: "The reason why it may be wise to distrust the political judgement of scientists*qua* scientists…is precisely because they move in a world where speech has lost its power. And whatever men do or know or experience can make sense only to the extent that it can be spoken about. There may be truths beyond speech, and they may be of great relevance to man in the singular, that is to man in so far he is not a political being, whatever else he may be. [But] men in the plural, that is men in so far as they live and move and act in this world, can experience meaningfulness only because they can talk with and make sense to each other and to themselves."[18] The political is always plural; it is a domain where individual subjectivities have to establish connections through and by means of patterns that connect. We cannot do this by waving equations at one another, nor through mute logical deductions. The logic that builds nuclear or chemical weaponry cannot tell us what to do with them. Nevertheless, the drive to supersede and silence natural speech and thus to disperse the political, noted by other philosophers such as Giorgio Agamben, is a chief characteristic of modern societies.[19] The digitalization of thought becomes a new weapon in the unconscious totalization of cultures. Education must therefore inquire whether there is a moment of resistance left within this progressive totalization and digital anaesthetization of the mind, the recovery of which becomes not only a paramount task but even an obligation.

A closely related phenomenon of relevance that marks out modern societies is "the advent of automation." The desire to be free from labour and toil is not new, and it appears now as though by means of increased mechanization, science and technology has achieved this "dream." But this, as Arendt notes, is an illusion: "The modern age has carried with it a theoretical glorification of labor and has resulted in a factual transformation of the whole of society into a laboring society. The fulfilment of the wish, therefore, like the fulfilment of wishes in fairy tales, comes at a moment when it can be self-defeating. It is a society of laborers which is about to be liberated from the fetters of labor, and this society does no longer know of those other higher and more meaningful activities for the sake of which this freedom would deserve to be won…What we are confronted with is the prospect of a society of laborers without labor…Surely nothing could be worse."[20]Protestantism followed by the industrial revolution glorified human labour, so did Marx who made pronouncements like 'labour is the essence of life.' But in the meantime societies and peoples have been stripped of other meaningful activities, especially communal and religious ones, that could absorb released libidinal energies. So the fulfilment of the old dream of release from toil comes ironically at a moment when society has forgotten how it could meaningfully use leisure. Even Marx is silent on this. He seems to assume that leisure is good in and of itself and no *anamnesis* or cultural preparation is necessary. Nevertheless, this is a dangerous assumption, and the creative possibility of leisure must be sought anew.Pedagogically, our task is to discover how to confront the phenomenon of a society of labourers without labour, in other words, to deal with the problem of leisure, rediscovering fragments of other ways of conceiving and relating to the world than endless action upon it.

So far we have seen negation of speech as well as negation of labourto constitute two of the signal attributes of the modern world and its break with the old world.A third point comes out of the analysis which concerns the private/public distinction in modernity. For the Greeks, the private life (life in the household) could have real significance only against the background of the *polis* or the public life of the city-state. The *idion* (one's own) did not stand on its own but in relation to the *res publica*(commons). But, Arendt observes: "Not only would we not agree with the Greeks that a life spent in the privacy of "one's own" (*idion*), outside the world of the common, is "idiotic" by definition, or with the Romans to whom privacy offered but a temporary refuge from the business of the

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[17] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p.3-4.

[18]Ibid., p.4.

[19] This does not mean however that everyday speech is impaired. It means that expert discourses that govern the ends and means of society are powered by abstract symbols and their internal relations that have no parallel in speech. They do not seek meaning, which is political, but organizational efficiency. Weber thought of this as the "Iron Cage" and wondered who would want to live in it. Nevertheless, there are many moderns who believe that if only we allowed ourselves to be fully modern, meaning fully technologized, our problems would be over.

[20]Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p.5.

res publica; we call private today a sphere of intimacy whose peculiar manifoldness and variety were unknown to any period prior to the modern age…This is not merely a matter of shifted emphasis. In ancient feeling, the privative trait of privacy meant literally a state of being deprived of something, and even of the highest and most human of man's capacities. A man who lived only a private life, who, like the slave was not permitted to enter the public realm, or like the barbarian, had chosen not to establish such a realm, was not fully human."[21]Being an organic part of the *polis* was the very condition of possibility of being counted as a free human being. The true enrichment lay in public intercourse for which the private was only a prop. However, all this changes over time, and with the advent of modernity, it is the private realm that becomes the true space for social becoming as well as the becoming of the social.

Thus we come to the third of the negations, the negation of the commons, and its replacement by the idea of the private. It is this holy trinity of disavowals that constitute some of the principal modes through which modern societies inscribe themselves on the subject and through which a certain kind of subject is constituted. But what is it that makes the last of these, namely the negation of *res publica*, a wound? The construction of the private sphere through accumulation, consumerism, tourism, and the naked celebration of individuality is not mere happenstance. It came out of the confluence of several historical forces including large-scale expropriation of lands, and whose immediate consequence has been the rejection of the idea of the common good.The 'private' by definition means deprivation; its hypostasis can only be an expression of a neurotic state. The retreat of the common good and the attempt to privatize everything, which is the basis of liberal politics,has hurt the world tremendously, raising selfishness and greed to astronomic levels, and shrinking livability for all.

Let us now moveto the third point in the essay, namely, the wounds humans inflict on each other. Let us go back to the story of Cain and Abel one more time.

> Adammade love to his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain.She said, "With the help of the LORD I have brought fortha man." Later she gave birth to his brother Abel. Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. And Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast. Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it." Now Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field." While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him. Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" "I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?" The LORD said, "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground. Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth." Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is more than I can bear.Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence; I will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me." But the LORD said to him, "Not so; anyone who kills Cain will suffer vengeance seven times over." Then the LORD put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him. So Cain went out from the LORD's presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden.[22]

Cain murders Abel out of a sense of rivalry and frustration. The Lord had accepted Abel's offering and rejected that of Cain. The latter does not reflect on why such afate befell him, instead he turns on Abel to destroy him. The self-hatred is deflected onto a perceived rival. In this displaced antagonism is the birth of competition, the antagonism that will in time become the hallmark of modern economic relations. It would be a folly to thinkthat there was no competition in earlier ages, but in modernity, competition is the means as well as the end; it iselevated to an art form.[23] Ironically, the word competition, derived from Latin, means "to strive together."But usage has pushed it in the opposite direction to mean rivalry. Competition, or the acute sense of 'I' versus 'thou,' is sometimes unabashedly justified by a kindergarten version of evolutionary theory. Phrases like 'survival of the fittest' are

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[21]Ibid., p.38.Arendt notes that modern privacy isto be contrasted not so much with the political but with the social realm.

[22] Genesis 4: 1-9, *The Bible*, King James Version.

[23] One even hears of absurdities like "healthy competition" uttered with a straight face.

bandied about as though humans were arthropods or arachnids trying to reach breeding age. This social Darwinist model ignores alternative logic of social relations that were always available within traditional cultures.

Competition is underwritten by a model of atomic or monadic individualism. Individuation, not always a stable process, indicates a contingent breaking out of tribal or other amorphous consciousness to a delimited 'I' physically bounded by the skin, and psychologically marked by a distinct sense of separation from others. It is a complex process which we will not go into here. Suffice it to say that more than at any other period of known history, modernity takes this empirical self as its basic social unit and creates the model of social life on the basis of its appetites and assumptions. All of social choice theory and utilitarian principles, the basis of liberal political economies, base themselves on the "truths" of the empirical individual. And yet, by those very empirical standards, if we cut open the human brain we do not find the individual anywhere, only some tissue and fluid etc. One can only surmise that a powerful three-dimensional synthetic process is at work that creates the illusion of an integral, sustained, and stable psychological self. The question, of course, is, to what extent is it reasonable to base all of social relations on a figment of contingency?

Most traditional cultures were aware of this difficulty and had devised alternative models and pedagogical processes for dealing with this conundrum. The *Gita*, for example, which is one of the greatest philosophical treaties ever written on the nature and meaning of human action, proposes that the empirical self act without setting its heart on the "fruits of action."The 'end' or teleological purpose of action is not its fruits but self-knowledge. Instead,the constant hankering after outcomes (fruits of action) merely crystallizes the contingent 'I' and leads it into making errors. The structure of the empirical self on the other hand can be discovered through mindful action. One can see how this model might appraise the idea of competition: To compete with another means that we are focused on the fruits and our eyes are off the main purpose of action which is self-understanding. This leads us into endless cycles of action and reaction without any possibility of redemption.[24] More dangerously, in this process of ignorant action we damage others' lives besides our own.

I took the above only as an illustrative example, and most certainly there are other traditions and other approaches to the question of structuring subject relations within a political economy. For example, there is the "gift economy" of which Marcel Mauss writes. There is the notion of "hospitality" spoken of by Emmanuel Levinas. There is Gandhi's idea of collective actionbased on the notion of *Swaraj* (self-rule). Then there is the Buddhist notion of "right livelihood" for attaining mindfulness. What each of these have in common is that they have a different notion of individuality and the corresponding meaning of action-in-the-world than the modernist one. They would all reject competition as a viable way of organizing socio-economic life. A serious consideration of each would help us to stop damaging lives and allow people creative freedom to organize their lives differently. But that is the topic for another paper.

I now move to the fourth and final point in this essay which concerns the wounds humans inflict upon themselves. There are innumerable ways of violating oneself. The most obvious way is by neglecting basic nutrition, sleep, and hygiene, which is widespread, but easily identifiable (and reversible). A second obvious way of acting against oneself is excessive indulgence and abuse, untold instances of which are present across class and culture. Yet another way of wounding oneself is by living in perpetual conflict, within oneself and without. Unresolved conflicts can obviously lead to pathologies. But this is also fairly easily identifiable. I am not concerned here about any of this. Instead, what we are going to discuss in this section is a condition far more insidious than any of the above. It is the institutionalization of the human being. It occurs when the human being looks for institutionalized answers for all his genuine and imagined needs— physical, moral, emotional or intellectual. The result is a uniform world without the element of surprise. For, the moment I institutionalize my needs, I become open to "power, organization, management and manipulation." In other words, I cease to be a free being and become thoroughly bureaucratized within a system. I become the system. Ivan Illich writes: "The vocation, the ability, the empowerment, the invitation to choose freelyoutside and beyond the horizon of my *ethnos*…is understandable only to one who is willing to be

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[24] Take, for example, the case of a student who decides to compete for a seat in a professional program. S/he may use the situation blindly to acquire the end goal of getting a seat. Alternatively, s/he may use the situation principally to study her urges, assumptions, fears, reactions, and justifications in order to become transparent to herself. The transparency is needed because we do not know what this empirical self is or why it does what it does. Besides, this transparency releases creative energies that the mere end goal would not afford.It is reasonable to claim that this is a less damaging way of acting in the world.

surprised, [and] one who lives [on an] unimaginable and unpredictable horizon."[25] When I institutionalize myself, my perceptions can no longer hold the possibility or responsibility of seeing everything in a new light. And this is nothing short of a tragedy. In the following lines I shall discuss why that is the case.

In order to adequately grasp the consequences of institutionalization we shall take recourse to two mutually opposed concepts—certainty and contingency. Citing Professor Hans Blumenberg, Illich writes, "contingency expresses the state of being of a world which has been created from nothing, and is destined to disappear [into nothing]…The idea that the world is contingent at every instant on divine Will begins to be evident only in the eleventh century and is not fully fleshed out until towards the end of the thirteenth century…The world comes to be considered as something contingent,something indifferent to its own existence, something which does not bear within itself a reason or right to exist. This is something extraordinary. Other more competent persons may wish to try to compare this idea with Buddhist or Zen or Indian philosophical systems."[26]Illich is examining an idea that developed within Christendom which has echoes of earlier philosophical systems such as the *Upanishads* and the Buddhist teachings. He also mentions that Thomas Aquinas, who develops this idea of contingency even further, may have been influenced by Islamic scholars.

In contrast, for example, in Plato or Aristotle, the coming into being of the world was "an expression of its fitness for existence." Contingency played no part in it."This sense of things began to change with Augustine…the world's very existence takes on the character of something gratuitous.The world which is around me, the cat over there and the four red roses which bloomed during the nightare [seen as] a gift, something which is a grace."It must be noted that 'contingency', at this point does not mean 'arbitrary', a sense that appears later in history. Instead, the word is linked to a sense of deep mystery that has the aura of antiquity.Since the word arose in a dense and specific context, the meaning of it cannot be fully appreciated without referring to the whole of the Gospels.

All this changes with the advent of early modernity. "Blumenberg argues that the beginning of modernity coincides with an attempt to break out of aworld-view defined overwhelmingly by contingency."[27]By the time we are into the sixteenth century, in Descartes for example, each being contains and possesses its own reasons for and claims to existence. The conceptual and linguistic shaping of the word contingency now points more towards arbitrariness and hence discarded in the movement towards a man-made world. The older meaning, imbued with an impenetrable truth, a love that needed no further explanation beyond the sense of grace, is lost. In a beautiful passage, Illich writes, "A contingent nature at its noon is gloriously alive, but it is also uniquely vulnerable to being purifiedand cleaned of its aliveness in the sunset of contingency."[28] As the word comes to maturity and passes away it opens the door to a mechanical interpretation of the reality of the world.

Now, with the decline of the idea of gratuitous presence of the world, increasing attention is paid to the notion of 'cause'.Humans want to know what causes phenomena, without reference to any arbitrary Will. "At the beginning of the thirteenth century, the *causa efficiens*, the only one of Aristotle's four causes that we still call a cause, developed a new sub-category called the *causainstrumentalis*, which was cause without intention."[29]Earlier, cause was linked to divine will, but now it was possible to conceive of a causal force that had no intention behind it. A tool, for instance, was "without intention" till someone put it to some arbitrary use. The medieval Church used the idea of the *instrumentum* to name the sacraments or the holy rites of the Church (*instrumentadivina*). The twelfth and the thirteenth centuries were also a time of intense development of tools of production. It would make historical sense to think that these were not mere coincidences. Great winds of change were blowing, and a world that gradually emerged from these fairly radical developments was a world not defined by contingency but by the search for certainty.

One of the ways in which humans attempt to operationalize the idea of certainty, at least at the social level, is through institutions. Schools, hospitals, law courts etc. all attempt to project the idea of certainty, of predictable outcomes once authorized procedures are followed. Each tries to offer a service to the human that was once governed by chance. But what happens when humans use these systems is that they inevitably become part of those

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[25]Ivan Illich, *Rivers North of the Future: The Testament of Ivan Illich*(Toronto: Anansi Press, 2005), p.32.
[26]Ibid., p.35.
[27] Ibid., p.42
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid., p.51

very systems. In other words, our "instruments", since they are systemic, make us part of their structure and we cease to be independent beings. The very thought processes that guide our actions are filtered strictly through the options that the system offers. For example, it is easy to see how dramatically social behaviour has changed since the advent of the internet. But more importantly, the social subjects themselves have changed profoundly. The changes are linear and irreversible since other ways of looking are constantly sacrificed. It would be foolish to think that we are not the victims of our own systems. But why do I say victims?

We are the victims of our own systems and certainties because the more efficient a system or more elaborate a certainty, the more it turns away our possibilities of surprise and the unexpected, and the less we are able to go beyond the schooled imagination. For example, a social imaginary stuck on the path of technicism may go to unimaginable lengths on that particular trajectory and be very "successful," but is unable to think in a new direction that is not technological (it would be puerile to claim that there are no other directions). An institutionalized subject within an institutionalized worldmay lead a life that is more convenient but does it lead to a life that is more true? A world of symbolic order without ontological surprise is the most abysmal thing both philosophically and phenomenologically. It is the wound of all wounds because it is invisible, non-local, and a seeming positivity. And for the same reason, pedagogically it becomes a great challenge since schooling is already part of a system that does not recognize suffering. It advances the agenda of modernity uncritically, complicating lives without helping to understand the wounds civilizations inflicts on themselves.

Therefore the question "Am I my brother's keeper?" becomes more poignant than ever. For,considered seriously, it challenges the root metaphors of modern societies. From the fate of Cain we learn that the attempt to grow more sophisticated by burying our social ills never succeeds. The soil in which we attempt to bury our collective wounds becomes alienated from us thus cutting us off from our own nature. Even language, that fundamental attribute of the human, begins to be evacuated of meaning. Education cannot afford to ignore this warning as it must strive to serve truth and society at the same time.