

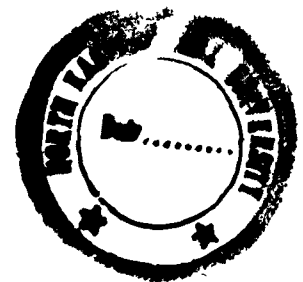
THE IDEA OF A WORLD VIEW AND UNDERSTANDING PEOPLE

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CERTIFICATE

*Certified that the subject matter of this thesis is the record of work done by **Early Richard Tongper**, that the contents of this thesis did not form a basis of the award of any previous degree to him, or, to the best of my knowledge, to anybody else, and that the thesis had not been submitted by him for any research degree in any other University.*

*In habit and character, **Early Richard Tongper** is a fit and proper person for the **Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**.*

SHILLONG

THE 18th DECEMBER 1991


(MRINAL MIRI)
Supervisor

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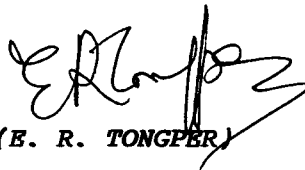
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(E. R. TONGPER)

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

In this work I undertake a philosophical exploration of the concept of a world view. My primary inspiration for the work has come from the fact that there are many diverse ways of organising, and thus making sense of man's experience of himself, of fellow human beings, of the world of nature around them and of what might be called the world of the spirit: and these diverse ways have never received the kind of philosophical attention in most traditions of philosophy that they should have. Philosophical traditions, in the East as well as in the West, have concentrated on building systems of 'logically fool proof' abstract conceptual structures sometimes in conscious opposition to what I call traditional world views and sometimes in conscious disregard of such world views.

I begin by a more or less descriptive account of the scope and what may be called the depth of a world view. Next I draw a contrast between a metaphysical system and a world view. The main point here is perhaps, a metaphysical system is a self-conscious, deliberate, discursive construction whereas there is a profound element

of givenness in all world views.

I discuss next the particular mode of articulation, or rather modes of articulation of world views where it is not the ratiocinative sequencing of ideas or concepts that is important, but symbolic formulations which spring as it were not from the intellectual surface of the mind but rather from the spiritual depth of a people.

Lastly, and perhaps inevitably I confront the problem of the divergence of world views, and the problems that it creates or seems to create for intelligibility and communication across divergent world views. This is the problem which seems suddenly to have gripped the Western mind in recent years and although there doesn't seem to be any accepted solution, I take the views of the European philosopher Gadamar to be the most insightful and promising in this connection. I, therefore, conclude by an exploration of some of the central Gadamarian ideas.

CHAPTER I

WHAT IS A WORLD VIEW

WHAT IS A WORLD VIEW

I

The total constellation of assumptions, concepts, theories and opinions derived from tradition and experience by which a community understands and interprets life and destiny is called its 'world view'. Sometimes we can speak of the world view of a particular period, as the sum of the knowledge and assumptions of that period or age combined in a particular way of looking at the human situation. We affirm that there is such a thing as a world view of the people referring to the general content and range of their ideas. Every tribe has a world view that functions to permit and shape thinking, consciousness and memory. In this, one tribe is not different from another. But the content and range of assumptions, concepts, theories and opinions upon which one's mind goes to work, constitutes a specific world view, and produces in the individual or in the community a characteristic mentality. The world view as it were forms the backdrop against which the tribes or communities intellectual, moral and emotional life take shape and proceed.

A world view is also the way in which a people cha-

racteristically look outward upon the universe. It suggests how everything looks to them. A world view certainly starts with a man who is a viewer, thus includes some idea of the self. It includes also a recognition of other people, of the qualitative differences between them (e.g., as between older and younger people, males and females, between friends and strangers etc.). It also defines all things and creatures that are not human. Every world view includes ideas of space, time, extension and periodicity. It explains how one should respond to birth, puberty, maturity, old age and death. It also confronts that which is not seen and defines the invisible.

A world view is not just a matter of beliefs. It forms each society's basic model of reality from which the conceptual and behavioural forms such as linguistic, social, religious and technical structure find their unified meaning. A world view explains how and why things exist, continue or change. It evaluates which forms are proper or improper. It systematizes and orders the varied conceptions of reality in the society into an overall integrated perspective. Thus a world view is not just a matter of doctrines, beliefs of systems, it is the whole model of reality which is held and practised by a society. So if we merely try to discredit certain world views we will neither understand them, nor

the role they play in the society.

A world view is thus the collective consciousness of the people. Its expression is hardly ever in a straightforwardly cognitive mode. It makes use of symbolic forms whose meanings are naturally open to a variety of interpretations, myths, legend, tales of various kinds, poetic devices and so on. A community's understanding of its own world view is never wholly explicit. There is a powerful element of givenness about it and a mature intelligent adult of the community is able to move about in it with ease and without having to question the givenness of it. The contrast between a world view and a purely intellectual system such as a metaphysical system or a scientific system is therefore very clear.

The world view is the central systematisation of conceptions of reality to which the members of the culture assent and from which their value system originates. The world view lies at the very heart of the culture, touching interacting with, and strongly influencing every other aspect of the culture. The world view of any given culture presumably originates in the series of agreement by the members of the community concerning their perception of reality and how they should regard and react towards that reality. The world view like all other aspects of cultures, would

undergo constant change so that it would be possible to see the difference to a greater or lesser extent from the original world view and from other extant world views that have developed from that common ancestor world view: A world view is imposed upon the young of a society by means of familiar processes of teaching and learning. In this way, youngsters reared in a given culture are conditioned to interpret reality in terms of the conceptual system of that culture.

If a person's culture conceives of a relationship between the universe and humanity as a dominance-submission relationship in which persons simply submit uncomplainingly to circumstances without seeking to gain dominance over them, those persons will ordinarily learn to perceive their relationship to the universe in these terms. If a person's culture conceives of disease as the result of activities of personal malevolent spirits, that person will ordinarily learn to perceive any disease in his or her experience to be so caused.

The model given above explains the world view of a culture as a kind of central control box of that culture. With respect to the organisation or patterning of the culture, the world view may be seen as the organiser of the conceptual system taught to be employed by the member of that culture.

With respect to the behaviour or performance of the participants in the culture, the world view may be thought of as that which governs the application of the culture's conceptualisations of their relationships to reality. Almost everything in the patterning and the performance of culture lies in this central conceptualisation. The centrality and the consequent importance of the world view become very clear when one considers the centrality to life of the functions served by the world view of the culture. Therefore, a people's world view is their basic model of reality.

Some of the important functions of any given world view:

Explanatory Function – One of the most specific functions of the world view is the explanation of how and why things got to be as they are and how and why they continue or change. The world view embodies for a people, whether explicitly or implicitly, the basic assumptions concerning ultimate things on which they base their lives. If the world view of a people conditions them to believe that the universe is operated by a number of invisible personal forces largely beyond their control, this will affect both their understanding of and their response to reality. If, however, a people's world view explains that the universe operates by means of a large number of impersonal, cause and effect operations

which if learned by the people, can be employed by them to control the universe, the attitude of these people towards reality will be much different.

These ideas are customarily articulated in the mythology of the people. The term 'myth' is here used in its technical sense to denote any story that is employed to unfold support, or explain a part of the world view of the people. Mythology takes a variety of forms from culture to culture. In the large number of cultures one would look to fables, proverbs, riddles, songs and other forms of folklore for indications of world view. In more complex societies one finds in addition to the folklore, printed literature which often philosophizes the mythology of, for example, science, religion, politics, etc.

Evaluative Function – The other important function of a world view is evaluational in character-judging and validating function. The basic institutions, values and good of a society are evaluated ethnocentrically, and therefore, sanctioned by the world view of their culture. Very often one finds that in most of the cultures of the world the ultimate ground for these sanctions is supernatural. It is by the God or gods that most people understand their world view and their culture as a whole to be validated. As with its explanatory function, the evaluational function

of people's world view is integral to every aspect of the life of the society. All important and valued behaviour, whether classified as economic, political, social, educational, is judged in terms of a culture's world view assumptions, beliefs, values, meaning and sanctions.

Psychological Function – The world view of the people also provides psychological reinforcement for that given society. At points of anxiety or crisis in life it is to one's conceptual system that one turns to for the encouragement to continue or the stimulus to take further action. Crisis times such as death, birth and illness and transition times such as adolescence, marriage, etc. – all tend to heighten anxiety or in some other way requires adjustment between behaviour and beliefs. And each tends to be dealt with in a reinforcing way by the world view of a society. Often this reinforcement takes the form of rituals or ceremony in which many people participate, for example, funeral, marriage ceremony. In such ways the world view of a group provides security and support the behaviour of the group in the world that appears to be filled with uncontrollable forces.

Integrating Function – The world view of the culture systematizes and orders the perceptions of reality into an overall design. In terms of this integrated and integra-

ting perspective, the people of any culture conceptualise what reality should be like and understand as well as interpret the events to which they are exposed. A people's world view establishes and validates basic premises about the world and man's place in it, and it relates the strivings and emotions of man to them. Thus, in its explanatory, evaluational, reinforcing, and integrating functions, world view lies at the heart of a culture, providing the basic model for bridging the gap between the objective reality and the culturally agreed upon perception of that reality. The world view formulates for the members of the social groups the conceptualisations in terms of which they perceive reality.

Adaptational Function – A group's world view does not completely determine the perception of all its members at all times. Though there is characteristically a very high degree of conservatism to such conceptualisation, there is change in this as well as in all other areas of culture. People do on occasions, shift in their perceptions of reality. They come to see things in ways slightly or drastically different from the ways that their world view has conditioned them to perceive of them. They change one or more of their conceptual models and reinterpret their conceptions. And such shift in perception, especially if engaged in and repor-

ted by socially influential persons, may be accepted by other members of the social group. This results in the group's altering their conceptual structuring of the modes of reality.

Thus over a period of time groups such as the ancient Hebrews moved from belief in many gods to a strong concept of monotheism. Likewise large segments of western culture have moved through renaissance, industrial revolution, and American frontierism from a belief in the supremacy of the Judeo-Christian God to a belief in the actual or potential all sufficiency of the technological human.

Ordinarily, such conceptual transformation takes place slowly. Sometimes though, the pressure for rapid change is great. Particularly in the face of such pressure we observe another function of a people's world view which relates directly to the more disintegrative aspects of culture change. That function may be labeled 'adaptational'. Inherent in world view is the ability to reduce internal structural contradictions that occur in the process of culture change. People, by adjusting their world view, devise means for resolving conflict and reducing cultural dissonance. That is, in circumstances of cultural distortion or disequilibrium there is a resilient quality to world views by means of which people reconcile hitherto apparently irre-

concilable differences between old understandings and new ones. If a society gets into ideological difficulty it may be far easier to reinterpret values than to reorganise society. In extreme cases this adaptation to changing perception calls for major replacement and revitalisation. But short of such drastic cultural surgery the adaptational quality of world views is constantly in evidence in all sorts of culture-change situations, whether these be mild or intensive.

Different world view assumptions lead to different conclusions

There is a good bit of similarity to human behaviour in spite of cultural differences. There is even a considerable body of evidence to suggest that human reasoning processes are essentially the same no matter what one's culture is. For this reason it has been stated that humans differ not so much in the processes by means of which they reach their conclusions as in their starting points. The fundamental processes of reasoning of all peoples are essentially the same, but the premises on which such reasoning rests and basic categories that influence the judgement of different people are somewhat different. That is, members of different culture arrived at different conclusions concerning reality because they have started from different assumptions.

If a particular world view assumes that the natural universe is predictable, understandable, and scientifically describable, it will also attempt to understand and describe 'causes' or at least the factors involved in such phenomena as natural calamities (e.g., storms, earthquakes etc.) or sickness and health, misfortune and success. If something happens the people of this given world view are determined to at least find out how it happened, whether or not one could explain why. This determination to probe, to analyse, to explain comes naturally to them because their world view assumes that it can and should be done so. But people of another different world view would start from other assumptions concerning the universe and of course, came out with very different conclusions. Their logic may be just as good as that of the other one and the way they reason from assumptions to conclusion may be similar to the way the other would do it, but their basic world view or assumptions may be very different. Their assumptions, too, may be just as valid as ours, but focussed on a part of the data that the other would ignore. For example, there is a great deal about the universe that defies neat description even when the most precise western scientific techniques are applied. Sometimes a world view which believes in the ability of human science to master any and every problem, ordinarily chooses to ignore the capricious, unpredictable aspects

of the natural universe. In fact, such a world view is often so focussed on the 'immediate why' of the happening (e.g. earthquakes and other natural disasters) that it seldom concerns itself with the 'ultimate why' of such happenings.

Most cultures, however, teach those immersed in them to show much concern for the ultimate causes of things and no less concern for the details of how they come about. To these societies the universe seems to be a good bit less predictable and understandable. They cannot be content simply to describe why a person contracted a certain disease, they want to know 'how' it was that that person got ill and not another. And their concern leads them to regard the universe as basically capricious and unpredictable. In the case of such cultures, tragedy is taken to be done to the whim of displeasure of a personal spirit. New inventions such as airplanes, rockets etc., likewise may be understood to have come about due primarily to the whim of a supernatural being who chose to give to certain people the knowledge and skill to produce them. For they must assume, only God will give the people the ability to produce such wonders. The fact that the members of such cultures start with a different set of assumptions determines that they will arrive at conclusions different from others.

Another interesting story of world views could be taken from the different assumptions of the role or status of women in the society. There are cultures who are increasingly concerned that women have not been regarded as equal to men. They could define equality in terms of the right of a person to move freely both geographically and socially, to compete freely for employment or leaderships to speak out freely, to be free from tasks that we regard as drudgery. That is, they link equality with freedom, they judge that men have been allowed greater freedom than women, and they conclude, therefore, that the position of women is unequal to that of men, since it is not the same with respect to the possession of individual freedom.

On the other hand, there are other cultures who assume the most valuable thing a culture can give to its women is not freedom but 'security'. Whereas the cultures mentioned earlier might say that a woman is so valuable as an individual that she could be just as free as possible, the other cultures would reason that a woman is such a valuable member of the society that she should be made just as secure as possible. Starting from this latter assumption, these cultures frequently conclude that woman must be provided with secure marriage and home, and a relatively routine and restricted set of expected achievements in order that

she may in turn provide a maximum of security for the newest and most vulnerable members of the society, the children. In such societies equality between the sexes means the provisions of different things for men and women – security for women, freedom for men. There seems to be no feeling of compulsion on the part of these societies to give both men and women the same kind of thing, since they regard male and female roles as complementary that is non-overlapping. They, therefore, seek as much as possible to do away with all competition between the sexes. Furthermore, ideally the cultural assignment of greater freedom to men is to enable them to use that freedom to assure greater security for the women. Thus, in terms of their assumptions high security for women is just as valuable as greater freedom for men. Therefore, the status of men and women in such a society may be equal, though their roles are utterly different from the role that other societies may feel to be token equality. For equality to them can mean 'equal but thoroughly different' whereas for others it is coming more and more to mean 'sameness'.

II

For an insider of any given community, a world view is something which he received from the past and has to



be learned afresh by each generation. This could take place broadly by a process of absorption from social environment, particularly, in the family circle or a home. In many communities certain elements of the world view are communicated directly in rites of initiation and by any other forms of deliberate instruction. Most of the action in accordance with a given world view is generally at the subconscious level. This means that for an insider an accepted world view covers almost everything in his life. But sometimes when the unit is larger, a world view will include within itself a number of sub-world views within a wide variety and diversity is also possible. At times when the variations go beyond a certain limit, a counter world view will have come into being. This could also result in the existence of a new world view.

In the broadest sense, when an insider speaks of his world view it means simply the pattern in which he along with his fellow-community members do, think and feel about things together. If there is to be common life and corporate action, there must be agreement, spoken or unspoken, on a great many things. It is from this basic world view of the insider that flow standards of judgement or value, of what is good for him and his immediate perceptions of what is acceptable as in accordance with the general will of

the community. Also the standard of conduct concerning relation between individuals, between sexes and the generations, within the community and those outside the community.

An insider of any given culture understands – even if unconsciously – that his world view is closely bound-up with his language and is expressed in proverbs, myths, folk-tale, and various art forms which become part of the mental furniture of all the members of the community. It governs actions undertaken in the community – acts of worship or of general welfare, of laws and the administration of law, social activities such as dances and games, and smaller units of action such as clubs, societies, associations, for an immense variety of common purposes.

A need of a unified existence is always felt in any given community. And people find that participation and persistence in a world view is one of the factors which provides them (as insider of that particular world view) a sense of belonging. It gives them a sense of security, of identity, of dignity, of being part of a large whole and of sharing both in the life of the past generations and in the expectancy of the community for its own future.

For an insider of any culture, his world view is an integrated system of beliefs about God, reality or the

ultimate meaning; of value – about what is true, good, beautiful and normative; of custom – how to behave, relate to others, talk, play, dress, work, pray, trade; etc. and of institutions which express these beliefs – values and customs – e.g., government law courts, temples, churches, family, schools, hospitals, factories, shops, unions, clubs, etc. which bind him with the community together and give him a sense of identity, dignity, security and continuity.

Although an insider of any world view finds it difficult to accept change, yet his world view is never static. There is a continuous process of change. But this usually happens so gradually as to take place within the accepted norms, otherwise the world view of a culture is disrupted. Therefore, there is always a felt need for a persistence of a world view. There is always a fear of disruption and even of the system collapsing whenever a world view is being challenged. Any insider of any world view will not allow as far as possible any kind of disruption of a world view, because it means the disruption of his peace, and the interference of the well being of the community. And once the peace, the sense of security, of dignity and identity of the people is taken away, then everything is taken away. Thus, we see throughout the human history that a world view has served to bind the people of a community together, and

its importance has made the people to make a kind of persistence on maintaining a world view from one generation to the other.

Throughout the centuries man has witnessed the confrontations of different world views. It is very important to note that the role of the outsider of any particular world view is always very significant and crucial. A proper understanding of any world view demands so much of openness, patience and involvement of the outsider, where in most cases the unavailability of these qualities on the part of the outsider, makes him (an outsider) to come to all sorts of incorrect and blunderous conclusions.

But again there is another picture of the outsider's attitude towards a particular world view which has to be taken for discussion. It had happened in the history that whenever the power, the forces of the outsider is greater (greater in the sense of administrative or military power) there was always a tendency to ignore, look down on, underestimate and even to crush down the existing world view and to impose a new one.

It is a known fact in the history of this country, that the people who came to rule us were the bearers of good and bad qualities of their nations. They could not

strip themselves of the cultural characteristics and the world views of their countries and their people. With the absolutisation of western world view they could not see anything good in other world views, more especially in that of tribal culture. With their strong sense of superiority, we have seen that they had the tendency to believe that no other culture except that of their own was sensible. So in most of the confrontations without any proper understanding of the tribal world view, they had in one way or the other destroyed most of the important characteristics of the tribal world view.

For example, nature for them is for observation and experiment, but for a tribesman nature is where he could feel at home with, it is sacred for him. There are unlimited ways in which a tribesman could show his gratefulness to nature. There are ceremonies throughout the year in every season to mark his being involved in the processes of nature. These ceremonies may look barbarous to an outsider's, but for a tribesman it is done in the spirit of worship. As against the outsider world view of a specific place of worship, a tribesman is not restricted by it, his home, his paddy field, rivers and mountains are all places of worship for him because his world view considers them as equally sacred.

III

It is very important in any study of a world view to distinguish between the component entities of a world view and the purposes they serve. The component entities or forms of a world view are the observable parts of which it is made up. These are the customs arranged in patterns or the products of those customs. Many components of a world view are conceptualisations of material items as well as non-material items. Axes, hoes, houses, clothing, automobiles, animals, people etc. are concepts represented by material forms. The marriage customs, family structures, words, grammatical patterns, singing, dancing, sleeping, speaking etc. are concepts of non-material forms. Most anthropologists in the past were much concerned with the components of a world view they sought to observe and describe. They often went into greater detail in describing the items of a world view and the way these items were arranged than in dealing with any other part of a world view. Many such descriptions tended to dissect and classify kinship system, religious rituals, grammatical system, economic pattern and the like much as a medical student dissects a dead body. We learn much about the inventory of a culture from such descriptions but not much about its dynamics.

Each of the component entities of a world view is

used by the people of that given culture to serve particular purposes or functions. Some of these purposes or functions are general or universal, relating to basic human needs that every culture must meet. Others are more specifically related to individual, non-universal, and group concerns. At the general level it can be said that the purpose or function of marriage is to legitimize procreation but at a more specific level, marriage may function to enable young people to escape from their parents. Thus, the component entities or forms of a world view frequently served several purposes at once – some general, some specific.

The contributions that the component entities or forms of a world view make to the overall structuring of any given culture are their functions. As each form is used to play its part in relation to the other and it is always seen as serving its function. The participants in a culture may or may not be aware of the functions served by any given form of a world view, or they may be aware of certain functions and unaware of others. Some people may be aware of the fact that they eat to keep alive, but not that they eat also to reduce their fear of unknown situations.

We have just discussed the distinction between the component entities of a world view and the purposes they served. We have used the term 'forms' of a world view in

this context to refer to the component entities of a world view. Apart from the discussion on the relationship between the forms of a world view and the functions they play, it is also important for us to analyse the meanings and the usage of any given form of a world view.

One of the most important functions served by every form of a world view is to convey meaning to the participant of a community, and the meaning consists of the totality of subjective associations attached to the form of a world view. In many ways world view is communication, where each form of a world view is the bearer of impressions, values, attitudes and connotations from person to person and group to group. The meanings that these forms of a world view conjure up in the minds of those who employ them are a crucial aspects of the way these forms function in a society. The use that the participants in a culture make of their customs is also critically related to the meanings attached to these forms of a world view within the society. Indeed, what a given custom means is determinable only from an observation of its functions and uses within its specific cultural context. There are apparently no forms of world view that convey exactly the same meaning in any two different cultures.

In the same way as the forms of a world view may

serve several functions at once, so also they typically convey more than one meaning at the same time. Some of the meanings conveyed are at the conscious level for most participants, but many are below the threshold of consciousness for a majority of those who use these forms of a world view. Furthermore, many if not all of the forms of a world view will signify or mean at least some different things to different individuals and groups within the community.

A Wedding ceremony within a given culture may signify the legitimization of the right of the couple to live together and to produce and raise children together. There will however, be certain additional different meanings symbolized by that same ceremony in the minds of the couple, the parents of the bride, the parents of the groom, the guests etc. What for nearly everyone may symbolize total happiness may also symbolize apprehension to the couple, extra work and expense to the parents.

Closely interrelated to function and meaning is the matter of how a form of a world view is used. In other words, it is important for us to understand the distinction between world views' forms and their functions, meanings and uses. These considerations, more than others, make explicit the active part that human beings take in the operation of the culture. The forms of a world view are relatively

passive in and of themselves. How they function and what they mean are dependent upon the way active human agents employ them. Most of the ways in which the forms of a world view are used are routinized through the processes of culture. Thus, most of that world view is within a relatively fixed range of variation allowed by the tradition of their culture. Within this range there is room for individual and sub-group variations in most customs. It is possible, therefore, to speak of both culturally patterned usage and individual variation usage.

CHAPTER II

METAPHYSICAL SYSTEMS AND WORLD VIEW

METAPHYSICAL SYSTEMS AND WORLD VIEW

A metaphysical system is the result of a deliberate, systematic intellectual exercise, inspired presumably by the desire to understand what in truth is the real and what in truth is merely apparent. A philosopher might embark upon this intellectual exercise because (1) of a deep dissatisfaction with the existing—what we have called world view, (2) of a desire to articulate in abstract theoretical terms the foundations of an already existing theoretical tradition, (3) of a deep conviction that our ordinary ways of thinking and talking about things are based on foundations, which, once they are adequately spelt out, will be seen to be in the very strong sense, unshakable. This classification of the motivations behind the construction of the metaphysical system is of course not exhaustive. It does not, for instance, include the primary motivation underlying changes within an on-going tradition of metaphysical thinking. And this is that every living tradition of intellectual theoretical thinking includes an argument about itself, i.e., includes the possibility of its own criticism sometimes marginal, sometimes radical. It is only in this way that we can under-

stand saying, the development of the empiricist metaphysics in Britain, the development of what is called 'rationalist thinking' in Europe from Descartes to may be Husserl or the tradition of Buddhist and Nyaya logical thinking in India. We are however here not concerned with the history of metaphysical thinking as such whether in the West or in the East; but the more basic question of the problem or set of problems which inspires a particular philosopher to construct the metaphysical system that he does give it its specific shape. It seems to me that as far as the latter question goes our initial classification if not exhaustive, is at least adequate enough to go on with.

I would like to consider as examples (no doubt much qualification will need to be added) the three kinds of metaphysical construction of the following: (1) Descartes, (2) Kant, (3) Strawson.

(1) Descartes, as we all know begins with a total rejection of all beliefs which are historically, culturally and in any way spatio-temporally specifically given to us. He believes in the possibility of knowledge which is 'pure' – pure in the sense that it is uncorrupted by elements which come down to us historically or culturally or which are specific to our times and place. Pure knowledge in this sense is possible because we have the, what

Descartes calls, "natural light of reason". Truth can only be discovered by a stringent application of this natural light of reason and by following a method which will keep out all the corrupting influence of spatio-temporal specificities.

We all know that Descartes believes that the entire foundation of knowledge proper or knowledge pure in the above sense can be built on the totally indubitable universal certainty of the Cogito. I do not here wish to go into the details and particular difficulties of Descartes metaphysics. I merely wish to make the following, 'what I take to be important points about the aftermath of the Cartesian programme of pure knowledge: (i) It is clear that modern science, beginning from the 17th Century onwards, has been inspired by this Cartesian programme. The scientists' claim to objectivity, ahistoricity, universality, non-culture specificity are of a piece with the Cartesian ideal of purity of knowledge. (ii) In recent times very serious doubts have been raised in philosophy as well as in the practice of science about the very coherence of the ideal of Cartesian pure knowledge. One has only to think of Wittgenstein and his intellectual legacy and Kuhn and the on going debate around him in the philosophy of science. (iii) Even if, for argument sake, it is

allowed that for the natural sciences Cartesian purity is conceivably an achievable goal, there would, I think, be a wide acceptance if the idea in this last part of our century that for the social sciences to set themselves a goal of this kind is to be embarked on a totally intellectually misdirected programme. Thus take for example, a thinker like Habermass who says that his intellectual orbit is necessarily Euro-centric, or even Levy Strauss who makes the claim that anthropology is necessarily the Western man's way of understanding 'native' cultures.

(iv) There is also now the powerful Nietzschean idea, most creatively reconstructed by Foucault, that all knowledge is a function not of the Cartesian natural light of reason but of power. Thus there can be no truth in the Cartesian sense; truth, like knowledge must also be a function of power. One lesson for our purpose to be learned from all this is that the idea of a world view in the sense that we have been considering it is not as easily dethronable as Descartes and his modern day followers might have thought.

(2) I have taken, as indicated above, Kant's metaphysics as an attempt to articulate the theoretical foundations of the natural sciences of his time. This interpretation of Kant, advanced among others, by Callingwood is

obviously not the only possible interpretation of Kant's great work, the Critique of Pure Reason. The other, perhaps the more popular interpretation, is that, Kant was concerned not just to spell out the epistemic foundations of the natural sciences of his time but that he saw his primary concern as that of philosophical articulation of the foundational concepts of our awareness of a world itself. But whatever interpretations of Kant that we accept, what is relevant for my purpose here is to show how the intellectual activity involved in the articulation of his system like that of Kant's is radically different from the energy underlying the construction of a world view. Although unlike Descartes, Kant does begin with the assumption that elements of what we are aware of in this world must be given and are beyond any sensible doubt, what we ultimately have as object of certain knowledge is a skeletal world of the categories and the principles of understanding. The flesh and blood of this skeletal world are open to empirical investigation and can never be the objects of certain knowledge. As to the ultimate questions of human life such as what is my destiny; what is my place in the ultimate order of things; is death the end of everything; what is it to be truly happy or fulfilled in life; although Kant is painfully aware that there must be answers to them, he also must at the same

time, admit that his metaphysical system is either incapable of answering these questions or at best can provide only apologies of answers.

The limits to the Kantian variety of investigation are already laid down at the very beginning of the programme by Kant's distinction between analytic and synthetic judgement and his stipulation that the sphere of human knowledge must be strictly confined to the domain of the synthetic a priori. That judgement or propositions are the only expressions of human cognition, that imagination can have only a subordinate role in man's epistemic adventure and that Aristotelian logic sets, once and for all, the limits or the criteria of rational thinking – these are the assumptions, if you like, prejudices, which deprive a metaphysical system like that of Kant's of the richness, density, flexibility, and the variegated nature of a world view.

(3) Strawson, as we know, made the, by now, familiar distinction between descriptive metaphysics and revisionary metaphysics. Revisionary metaphysics, according to him always begins with a 'logical' dissatisfaction with our ordinary ways of thinking and talking about reality, and therefore, with a rejection, in principle if not in practice, of these ways of dealing with realities,

and then builds on the basis of this rejection a conceptual system which is supposedly logically flawless and therefore the proper framework in terms of which to understand reality. His examples of such revisionary metaphysics are those of Bradley and also presumably that of Descartes. Strawson believes that every system of revisionary metaphysics can be shown in detail to be mistaken in radical ways. In his book Individuals we have such demonstrations of the detailed mistakenness of revisionary metaphysics such as that of Descartes, Hume, Leibnitz and presumably the early Wittgenstein. Descriptive metaphysics on the other hand rests on the assumption that it is not possible that our ordinary ways of thinking and talking about reality have radical logical flaws in them, (perhaps a justification of this assumption would be that if it weren't so, the basic elements of the intellectual equipment in term of which we have an organised experience of reality would not have withstood the test of time which as a matter of fact they have). The Descriptive metaphysician takes his task to be one of laying bare, in Strawson's own words, the conceptual framework of ordinary human thought rather than construct a conceptual system which is opposed to it. Thus for instance, if we take our ways of talking about the physical world around us to be generally logically unchallengable, the question that the metaphysician can

usefully ask is what is it that makes it possible for us to talk and think in these ways at all? – perhaps a Kantian question. The answer that Strawson comes up with to this question is that our ways of thinking and talking about the world are what they are because of certain concepts which are fundamentally basic to human thinking. This result is useful in that it also provides an explanation of why it is that our ways of thinking have withstood the test of time i.e., have not undergone radical or revolutionary changes. For Strawson the concept of an identifiable and re-identifiable particular is such a basic unchangable, eternal concept. Similarly, the concept of a person as it is ordinarily employed by us is also such an eternal concept. For concepts like these to disappear or to even undergo radical changes is for human thinking about the world itself to dissolve or to become totally incoherent and chaotic.

Once again I do not wish to enter into a critical appraisal of Strawson's idea of descriptive metaphysics. I wish merely to point out the difference between the Strawsonian 'description' of a conceptual framework and the articulation of a world view but one point of criticism must perhaps be made and this is that the idea that certain of our concepts must enjoy the status of complete immutabi-

lity if intelligible human experience in any form at all is to be possible is highly questionable. It may be that our ways of thinking about things may have been so radically conditioned by Strawson's 'basic' concepts, it may be difficult or even impossible for us to imagine ways of thinking which may be quite fundamentally different from ours. But from this difficulty or even impossibility of imagination it doesn't at all follow that it is also logically impossible for there to be such different ways of thinking about things. In fact, it is not even clear that some of the concepts that Strawson calls basic are indeed basic in his sense. For instance, it is highly questionable if the concept of a person as spelt out by him is really basic in his sense of the term.

But my interest is not in any detailed criticism of Strawsonian theory. I talk about Strawson at all only as yet another example of metaphysical thinking as opposed to the articulation of a world view. Strawson, like Kant, leaves us with the skeletal world of space and time, particular physical things in this space, and time, and persons. But a world view's concern is not just in the scaffolding (another of Strawson's words) of his world, but in the great variety of its building blocks and the different kinds of cementing materials that bind them together.

Thus a world view is concerned with the point of my being here at all with the point of my relationship with other human beings, with animals, with trees, with rivers and with the other world; and not just with the fact, if it is a fact, that there are particulars in this world like physical things and persons in mutual spatio-temporal relationship with one another. A world view articulates in a great variety of ways – and not just in a logical sequence of ideas – the very depth of my being and not just the fact of my being.

CHAPTER III

A WORLD VIEW AND ITS ARTICULATION

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So far we have talked generally about the nature and function of a world view, and how it is that world view is different from and in some respect similar to metaphysical system which have been constructed in different intellectual tradition. A metaphysical system such as, e.g., that of Descartes or Kant or Strawson consists normally of a logical sequence of ideas generated primarily by philosophical reflection on problems, or supposed problems inherent in normal ways of thinking or talking about reality – human or other. It is normally assumed that these problems or alleged problems reflect logical inadequacies in a system of ideas self-reflectively related to one another in terms of strict logical principles that a true picture of reality can be constructed. It is primarily for this reason that Strawson, e.g. call a traditional metaphysical system 'revisionary' – revisionary because they consist primarily in logical revision of ideas implicit in our common thinking about reality. He, of course, believes that all revisionary metaphysics are in principles mistaken – their mistakes lies simply in the fact that they are revisionary in this sense. It is of course also possible naturally to show the mis-

takes of any particular revisionary metaphysics in detail – as he does for himself with the Leibnitzean metaphysics in the rather odd chapter entitled "Monad" in the book Individual; and also with the Cartesian and the early Wittgensteinian metaphysics of the self. Strawson believes only in the possibility of what he calls descriptive metaphysics.

Descriptive metaphysics simply consists in the logical exposition of the conceptual framework implicit in our ordinary thinking about physical objects and persons. This implies – that there is something basically unutterable, or in Strawson's own word, 'eternal' and universal in our ordinary thinking about things and all that is possible for a philosopher to do is to expose their unutterable and universal elements in our common thinking. In this, Strawson perhaps recognised Kant and to a certain extent Wittgenstein as his masters in the western tradition of philosophical thinking.

As we have already noted the world view of the people is different from a metaphysical system either of the revisionary kind or of the other Strawsonian-Kantian kind, in that, it is never articulated in a self-conscious sequence of logical interrelated ideas. In the articulation of a world view it is not logic as under-

stood in the traditional Aristotelian or modern formal logic sense of the term or the traditional Nyaya sense of the term, that is as it were that primary motive or the method of exposition. Here perhaps we ought to distinguish between cultures which are self-reflective in the theoretical sense of that term and cultures which are not self-reflective in quite that sense of the term. Of course, this is not a distinction which is clear or rigid - A culture which is not primarily theoretical will always have within it the potential or possibility of a natural theoretical development whereas a culture which is primarily theoretical has within it interconnected elements of great significance which are not integrated into the theoretical articulation of the culture.

Most tribal cultures may be atheoretical in this sense. Perhaps the culture or civilization that emerges from the great Homeric poems Iliad and Odyssey is also atheoretical in this sense, although of course, they lend themselves to masterful theoretical use in later Greek civilization. Since in a primarily atheoretical culture, the world and man's predicaments in it are not sought to be "explained" in terms of deliberately constructed sequence of interconnected or supposedly interconnected abstract ideas, man's understanding of his

place and predicament in the world is expressed in terms of a great variety of symbolic formulations which arise as it were out of the very depth of a people's existential spatio-temporal specificity. These symbolic formulations include what is generally called 'myths', legends, stories of various kinds, songs, designs and stylised form used in different kinds of folk-crafts and what has now come to be known as folk-art. Of course, in the last two or three centuries in the West, different theoretical approaches have been evolved in an attempt at "unravelling" the meanings of these symbolic forms. The so called evolutionary approach, the structural-functionalist approach, the psycho-analytic approach and so on. All these approaches, while they undoubtedly throw some light on the meanings of these symbolic forms, are opened to the radical objection that they are essentially reductive, i.e., that according to all of them the only understanding possible of these symbolic forms is the one that emerges from reducing them to something other than what they are.

One thing of course which has made the flourishing of such reductive analyses possible in our times is the general loss of meaning that ideas earlier thought to be central and crucial to an understanding of man's predi-

cament have suffered during our time. Take for example, the concept of taboo fashioned by the anthropologists. In the Journal of his Third Voyage, Captain Cook records the first discovery by English speakers of the word 'taboo' (in a variety of forms). The English sea-men had been astonished at what they took to be the lax sexual habits of Polynesians and were even more astonished to discover the sharp contrast with vigorous prohibition placed on such conduct as men and women eating together. When they enquired why men and women were prohibited from eating together, they were told that the practice was taboo. But when they enquired further what taboo meant they could get little further information. Clearly taboo did not simply mean 'prohibited'. For to say that something – person or practice or even theory is taboo is to give some particular sort of reason for its prohibition. But what sort of a reason? It has not only been Cook's sea-men who had been troubled by this question: from Frazer and Tyler to Franzsteiner and Mary Douglas the anthropologists have had to struggle with it. From that struggle, two keys to the problems emerge. The first is the significance of the fact that Cook's sea-men were unable to get any intelligible reply to their queries from their native informants. And what this suggests is – that every hypothesis is to some degree speculative

– that the native informants themselves did not any longer understand the word they were using and this suggestion is reinforced by the ease with which the Polynesian king of the time abolished the word 'taboo' forty years later and the lack of any significant social consequence when he did so.

But could the Polynesians come to be using a word which they themselves do not understand? It is here that, for instance, Steiner and Douglas are illuminating. For what they both suggest is that taboo rules often and perhaps characteristically have a history which falls into two stages. In the first stage they are embodied in the context which confers intelligibility upon them so it is argued that a taboo rule of a certain class presupposes a cosmology and taxonomy of a certain kind. Deprive the taboo rules of the original context, and they are apt to appear at once as a set of arbitrary prohibition, as indeed they characteristically do appear when the original context is lost. When those background beliefs expressed in symbolic formulations (of the kind we have mentioned above) in the light of which the taboo rules had originally been understood have not only been abandoned but also forgotten.

But while many atheoretical cultures and the

symbolic formulations built into them might, as it were, have died leaving the latter, so to say, orphaned of any meaning; there are others which have survived and there are still others which live in a sort of suspended animation. But this is not true just of atheoretical cultures; it can happen and has happened in the case of theoretical cultures as well. Theoretical cultures have died leaving behind a set of ideas which seem to be empty of content and there are theoretical cultures whose theoretical existence can be best described as one of suspended animation.

But of course as we have said most civilizations are a mix of the theoretical and the atheoretical, the abstract and the concrete, the ideational and the symbolic, the 'logical' and the revelational. The relationship between the two is difficult to explore. While the atheoretical, the concrete, the symbolic, the revelational is in some sense primordial and has a kind of spontaneity and freedom built into it, the theoretical, the abstract, the ideational and the logical is not so. Also the latter occasionally acquires a life of its own independently of the atheoretical etc., and goes as it were, its own way. This is quite easy to see if we look for instance, at the history of Western civilization; its theoretical

life, which has been painfully sorted to be related to the atheoretical, the revelational by, for instance, Plato, has progressively broken away from it and is now the only predominant mode of articulating the meaning of things. The Indian civilization compares interestingly with the Western. While in it the theoretical and the atheoretical always remain closely connected (think for instance of Sankara) in the past several hundred years its theoretical life seems to have died a slow death or if it is claimed that it has not died, the most one can say of it is that it shows occasional signs of life in heavy gasps of breath that emanates from it from time to time. But its atheoretical life seems to be as vibrant as ever, and, in the hands of a clairvoyant intellect like Ananda Coomara Swamy or in recent times Rama Chandra Gandhi it suddenly acquires an unimaginable palpability.

Take Rama Chandra Gandhi's (I am thou: Meditations on the Truth of India) understanding of the profound symbolic significance of the great "elephant god" Ganesa.

"... to begin with reflections on the humorousness of the form of Ganesa. Elephant paunchy body of a god whose vahana is a mouse, the very pointed definition of funniness, i.e., incongruity. But funniness shot through with charming winning innocence, witness the broken tusk and scattered laddus inviting unafraid unembarrassed child-like partaking

of the sweetness and bounty of creation by all, especially the child-like of all ages...."1

But reflect a little on the very funniness and charm and innocent in the image of substantial Ganesa riding a tiny mouse.

"... there is here in the image of Lord Vinayaka the full truth of Sri Aurobindo's supramental yoga, the powerfulest possible imaging of the idea of an alchemical revolutionary emergence or unveiling in evolution of a perfected body harbouring a perfected mind and a self-realised soul. For such a body, such an integral being not in heaven but revealed on earth in conditions of materiality, would be not merely a being and meaning, the meaning of a gravity-defying substantially, a symbol come to life, a breathing living godhead on earth, an area of utter transformation of entropy into substantial light, a Krishna or Rama or a resurrected Christ, meaning-laden ideographic prototype image of Ganesa proclaiming unmistakable their common status of divine corporeality...." 2

"in his massiveness and lightness is the truth that time and eternity harbour the vision and realisation of eternal perfection of being, a total victory over gravity and mortality and decay, and all this miracle not unmixed with the suggestion of humour without which the light of the divine life would be a conceit, a disfiguring solemnity in the gay sun of truth...."3

"the power of Vinayaka springs more fundamentally from his being, as in Sri Aurobindo's general conception and naturally

omnipotent corporeal God of light; and yet so utterly unoppressive and unexploitative that all that mass of corporeal divinity sits lightly on a tiny mouse, not hurting it at all. God on earth is no burden and bully The power of God and the lightness of God are one, they are one also with the wisdom of God...."4

Now take the traditional religion of the Khasi. A modern day theoretical exposition of it might go as follows: Man has a covenant relationship with God. They believe that there is only one God and he's the one who created the universe and all that is in it. The various names ascribed to God indicates that the Khasis' concept of God is that he is the source the 'mother' of all aspects of life. We also find that their understanding of the human soul is unlike the Epicurean concept but on a strong belief that the soul returns to its creator even as the body turns to dust. Life then is understood to be a preparation for that after-life and the various rites and rituals are ways and means through which man can qualify for a happy after-life.

The Khasis also believe in the presence of evil - 'ka tyrut' the queen of evil spirits. So they found themselves in a great dilemma perplexed and ignorant of the ways to communicate with God their Creator who had said that he would guide them through signs and omens.

So one day, a meeting of all humans and animals was convened, to try and resolve man's predicament. The human explained to the animals, their great dilemma and the causes which brought them to such a state. Then they requested the animals, being creatures who did not descend from the Seven Huts, to appoint someone who would be willing to approach God and to beg him to have mercy and to forgive the humans and also give them instruction as to how humans can communicate with God. The animals were sympathetic but not a single one dared to offer himself. When all hope was lost, the Cock crept up and offered himself. He was then a naked bird and so man offered to clothe him before he approached God. The legend goes on to say that the cock went and met God the Creator, narrated to him man's sufferings and predicament because he cannot meet God. Then on behalf of man he begged for mercy and forgiveness and also requested God to instruct him as to how man can gain fellowship with God on earth.

God the Creator was well pleased with the cock's role of mediation, so he said,

"if you a creature who is not under the curse of God nor under the power of 'ka tyrut', the Evil spirit, promise to bear man's sin and be sacrificed for him, then I too will forgive him and be merciful to him, when ever he comes to me in prayer and supplication, and

I will explain to him how he can read my message and commandments in the signs of the egg shells that he will break and my message in the signs of the intestines of the cock that he will sacrifice."5

The cock promised to be a ransom and a sacrifice for man. After that God covered the cock in rich and beautiful plumes and promised to reveal his commandments in the egg that man will break and in the soft portion of his body whenever man will sacrifice him. Then God explained to the cock what each sign means and also gave it the ability to crow, whereby man can read the passage of time from early morning to the evening. After all that, God sent him back to earth.

From then onwards the cock and the egg play the most vital role in the sacrificial rites of the Khasis. So the Khasis have u Iar Syngkhong or the cock that will extricate the soul of the dead from any shame or condemnation, so that it can easily pass on to God. They also have u Iar Padat or the cock that will guard the soul from any evil spirit of the air or fire, ensuring the soul to arrive in good health to its God. Then there is also u Iar Krad Lynti or the cock that will clear the path for the dead person's soul to reach its creator without any obstacle.

Thus every sacrifice opens with such words of the following strain:

Oh cock, oh child of God
 Oh one bestowed with commandment and promise
 From the beginning of time, from the earth's
 first light
 From the foot of God,
 To be the Ransom the sacrifice, just when rites
 and rituals were installed from the seven huts
 the seven nests. 6

Thus later generations follow the rites and rituals revealed by God the Creator in signs and omens of the cock.

But later on, man still could not meet the requirements of God through rites and rituals, even though the cock is his ransom and his sacrificial bird. So other efforts of appeasement and justification were sought for. Eventually, it appears that the Khasis are still looking for the perfect mediator, who will carry the sin of the world.

Also, take the following somewhat different, but related account of the significance of the cock for the Khasi world view:

"In every society certain things, objects, animals or natural forces acquire a complex set of meanings. The legends and stories of the Khasis give a prominence to certain mountains, rocks, rivers and

amongst birds, the cock. The cock has acquired a significance as being regarded the saviour of man. A legend records that when the Diengiei tree (responsible for darkness on earth) was cut down there was a great celebration on earth in which all animate and inanimate creatures took part. However, the sun and the moon came late to this celebration and man, not yet empty of evil and wrong doing, laughed at them. As a result, the sun and the moon fled away to the sacred grove called ka krem lamet ka krem datang to hide from man. Once again the earth plunged in darkness.

In panic, man prayed to U Blei to remove again the darkness. 'Till comes the one the most blessed who shall for man lay down his head', there was no remedy for the darkness that engulfed the world of man, God replies. The council of men looked in vain for a creature on earth who had done no wrong and, therefore, could bring back the sun and the moon from the sacred grove. At last one such creature was found, the U Malyboit malymbiang (a naked animal), which was promised an outfit of handsome colourful feathers if it was successful in its mission.

It was this naked animal which took the sins of man on its shoulders, brought the sun and the moon back to earth and came to be known as U Syiar khraw Jutang (the cock). Whenever the cock crows three times, the sun comes back to this world from his place of hiding. From those ancient times onwards man has been able to communicate with God through the signs and symbols (ki dak ki shin) which appear in the intestines of the cock. 'Among the Khasis the egg breaking and the killing of fowls and animals are not offerings. The rites are directly connected with augury and divination or with our covenant with God.'

Almost every auspicious occasion, be it a house-warming naming or marriage ceremony, involves the killing of the cock. Take for instance the ritual of house-warming. While the merry making and teasing is going on between the house-owners and the guests, the diviner severs the neck of a cock and throws the bird in the midst of the gathering. Of the guests, the one who stands near the cock, sprinkles pure water on it until it is still. The diviner then picks up the bird and takes out the entrails to read the good and the bad signs. 'After this comes the Ryngkang Syiar (literally, 'the leap of the cock'). Three men bend down along one side of the room and three other, from the other side run and try to leap over them, they in turn trying to catch them by their shoulders. This act is repeated thrice'.

God accepts the cock as it offered itself for man in ancient times and became the medium between man and God. This ritual of killing the cock and praying to U Blei is a symbolic act reminding Him of his covenant to man. The cock as messenger conveying the prayer of mankind to God became necessary since man lost direct contact with the sacred reality from the beginning due to his transgressions. There is no one single explanation as to why the Khasis chose the cock from amongst many possible symbols. All kinds of interpretations are possible when we attempt to understand the deeper meanings of any cultural symbol.

In line with the earlier account I would regard the role of the cock as symbolic of the Khasi's love of the living sacred reality (note the legend about the Diengiei tree). The sun's presence on earth is absolutely essential. Darkness is evil and the daily visit of darkness

ceases with the crows of the cock every dawn. To achieve the perfect unity of being and spirit we should enjoy the presence of the sacred in the immediately given existent world, for it is here that our spirit fulfills itself. That is why Khasi society took pains to expel radical mysticism aspiring to go beyond everything given, abolishing all law and all form within the conditioned order. The social law and everything else is not turned against but is directed towards U Blei which constitutes its permanent background. Even the departed dead souls do not shun the living world, they remain friends and well-wishers of the living."⁷

Let us now have a look at how symbolic formulation plays a crucial role in the articulation of the Christian world view. Being one of the important sacraments, the Lord's supper as it is commonly known and practised in the church, has been well described as an action in which Christians look back to the death of Christ on the cross for the recreation of the human race; in which they look upward to their Lord and Master and are renewed in their dependence on Him and their allegiance to him. But certainly no words can do justice to the richness of its meaning. The understanding of this sacrament begins with the recognition that here is an action instituted by Christ which His disciples are to repeat as a means whereby His presence with them is realized and the benefits of His Passion are appropriated. In His very own words He says, while breaking the bread, "this is my body,

which is for you; do this in remembrance of me". And while He took the cup He says, "This cup is a new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me".

The symbolic meaning of the bread and wine being used in the sacrament of the Lord's supper emphasise the memorial element, reminding the church of all that Christ has done, and continues to do for all his people. The term 'Holy Communion' which is also referring to this same sacrament points to the fellowship – the communion with the living Christ. Another term which is also equally used for this sacrament is the term 'Eucharist' which literally means 'thanksgiving'. Participation in the Eucharist therefore means the participation in the worship of thanksgiving for what Christ has done through his death on the cross for the salvation of the whole humanity. All these terms and meanings are good, provided we do not use one to the exclusion of the others. All these are needed if we are even to approach the meaning of this central act of Christian worship, which includes all that is true of prayer and praise, confession and aspiration, hope and gladness.

The sacrament of the Lord's supper is not a mere remembrance of the past event – it has also both the

present and future significance for the Christian church. The illuminating comment of C.H. Dodd is appropriate to mention here:

"In the Eucharist the church perpetually reconstitutes the crisis in which the Kingdom of God came in history. At each Eucharist we are there. We are in the night in which He was betrayed, at Golgotha, before the Empty Tomb on Easter Day, and in the upper room where he appeared; and we are at the moment of His coming, with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven, in the twinkling of an eye at the last trump."⁸

The importance of this comment is that it brings out the fact, too often overlooked, that the sacrament of the Lord's Supper – that the bread and wine have eschatological element, that is, in the Lord's Supper, the past, present and future are inseparably united. The death of Christ on the cross is no doubt once and for all in the past but the Bible makes clear the connection between the rite and the cross. The mark of the cross is as though impressed on the sacrament by the authority of Jesus himself. The Eucharist is a feast of joyful thanksgiving not in spite of the cross but because of it. It takes us back to those events which make so great a claim on our gratitude. It is, indeed, an act of remembering. Memory of the whole story of Jesus as we partake in the sacrament of bread and wine, of which crucifixion

and resurrection are the climax, is an important part of Christian life. As we partake the bread and wine we remember not only the upper room and Calvary but all that led up to it; how he went about doing good, giving himself to men, willingly accepting in obedience to the Father and for the sake of humanity the way of the Cross.

The elements of bread and wine are no doubt symbols in Christianity, but this does not mean a mere representation of the formulated dogmas of Christianity. It actually bears witness to the truth that Christ gave himself to die on the cross for the sake of the whole world. In the language of the Bible 'remember' never concerns the dead past but always the past as breaking into the living present, powerful and effective now. This should prevent our making obedience to the command "Do this in remembrance of me" a mere memorial of what happened in the past. We look back to, and depend on, what happened in the past that becomes here and now, the means by which we appropriate the innumerable blessings. The unity of this action is indeed indissoluble and cannot be broken even by an attempt to be logical. It is in penitence and gratitude that, here and now, the Christians are enabled to make their offering of praise and thanksgiving, uniting their self-sacrifice

to Christ perfect sacrifice. Only if Christians are united with that perfect offering, can they offer themselves. The church is nourished by the perfect sacrifice of Christ. It can do its work for him in the world only as it is ready to sacrifice itself for him. It follows that the Church's central act of corporate worship should be the continual setting forth of the perfect sacrifice before itself and the world.

"The bread is broken and the wine is poured. The tokens of His Body and Blood are eaten. The Christian family, alive through His death and nourished with the power of His risen life, is enabled to give the service which its worship demands."⁹

"The Holy Communion looks back to God's saving act in the past; it is the present means by which we partake of the benefits of what God has done for us, it also looks forward to the future, till he comes. The meaning of the future in the setting of the New Testament has been greatly helped by recent teaching concerning 'realized eschatology' i.e. that the Age to come is already present in history because Jesus has come as Lord and Christ. Here and now, men in Christ have passed from death into life and can enjoy a foretaste of the eternal joys.... The New Age has indeed come and the Christian has the first fruits, but there is still the final consummation to come. In fact ... the faith of the New Testament is a unique combination of the 'now' and the 'not yet'".¹⁰

Perhaps in concluding we can say the following about the specificity of symbolic articulation which is the hallmark of a world view as opposed, say, to a metaphysical system: (i) while there are symbolic formulations (such as used, say, in creative poetic imagination) which are constructed by a deliberate self-conscious exercise of a human imagination, the symbolic formulation which are the characteristic elements of a world view seen to have an autonomy of being which amounts almost to a sort of givenness. This is true whether we take the symbol of the elephant god Ganesh or of the Khasi-Pnar cock or the bread and wine in Christianity. (ii) This autonomy and givenness can also be very understandably taken to endow a revelatory character on these forms. The symbols might well have come as it were from God himself. (iii) It also explains the inexhaustibility of meanings that inform the symbolic formulations. There are always greater depths of meaning to be found in them at different times at different places and in different ages. (ii) For a world view to have died is for its symbolic elements to have lost their autonomy and givenness and therefore to have acquired an arbitrariness and unintelligibility.

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CHAPTER IV

WORLD VIEWS, COMMUNICATION AND UNDERSTANDING

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A world view, as we have discussed it, seems to be a comprehensive formulation etc. whose very givenness exercises an authority over the community and the individual in it whose world view it is. This authority is the authority of the criteria of right and wrong, of truth and falsehood which are as it were constitutive of the world view itself. This way of conceiving a world view seems to immediately create a problem – a problem which seems to be exercising the modern European mind a great deal. It comes about in the following way: Descartes, for example, taught us that truth must be independent of, and uncontaminated by any cultural, historical, individual psychological specificities; the criteria of truth therefore must be independent of all these and must be capable of being shown to be so. If truth were not pure and absolute in this sense, then there will be no such thing as knowledge as such or progress of human knowledge. The Cartesian view of the purity of truth and knowledge is embodied in the practice and precepts of modern science, and it may be said that the great achievements of modern science themselves are living proofs of the correctness

of the Cartesian account. Unfortunately, however, the criterion account of truth as spelt out either by Descartes or in modern science cannot be justified except by dogmatically asserting that it is justified or by a procedure which is patently circular. Thus, think of the Cartesian circle out of which no satisfactory way has yet been found either in Cartesian scholarship or generally; or think of the intellectual fumbblings of Sir Karl Popper in his debates with Kuhn. This situation then heads to the question: is truth then not relative to a system, a culture or a world view as we have conceived it? Many modern thinkers are inclined towards a positive answer to this question. But there is also a painful awareness of the consequence of accepting a full-blooded relativism. Such an acceptance of relativism would seem to negate the possibility of any meaningful communication between systems, cultures and world views – it would also undermine the very notion of the universality and the uniqueness of knowledge and therefore of its progress. With this notion of universality of knowledge, also goes the idea of objectivity.

It seems to me that the solution to the relativist impasse must lie in somehow freeing the notion of knowledge and therefore of objectivity from both the Cartesian trap and the relativist anarchy.

But before I go on to explore this possibility, a word about values. An interesting and radical development in modern western thought has been the total separation of the cognitive (therefore of truth) from the evaluational. There is a curious convergence of views here between the Anglo-American analytic tradition and the European existentialist phenomenological tradition. The ideas of right and wrong can be allowed to be radically relative – relative to a culture, to a world view and even to an individual. Thus to many it appears that an epistemological absolutism can co-exist quite happily with a moral relativism or anarchism.

My own belief is that the separation of the sphere of the moral or the evaluational from the sphere of cognition or episteme is totally untenable and therefore the idea of the possibility of the peaceful co-existence between cognitive absolutism and moral relativism is also similarly untenable.

To return now to the absolutist-relativity dichotomy, one most insightful attempt at transcending the absolutist trap and relativist anarchy is that of Gadamar in his book Truth and Method. I would like, in this last part of my thesis to explore some of the ideas central to Gadamar's rediscovery of the notion of a prejudice.

"It is not", says Gadamar,

"So much our judgement as it is our prejudices that constitute our being. This is a provocative formulation for I am using it to restore to its rightful place a positive concept of prejudice that was driven out of our linguistic usage by the French and the English enlightenment."¹

It can be shown that the concept of prejudice did not originally have the meaning that we have attached to it. Prejudices are not necessarily unjustified and erroneous so that they inevitably distort the truth. In fact, the historicity of our existence entails that prejudices, in the literal sense of the word, constitute the initial directiveness of our whole ability to experience. (Gadamar's redefinition of prejudices come therefore very close to our conception of our world view). Prejudices are "biases" of our openness to the world. They are simply conditioned whereby we experience something – whereby what we encounter says something to us. This formulation certainly does not mean that we are enclosed within a wall of prejudices and only let through the narrow portals only those things that can produce a pass saying "nothing shall be said here". Instead we welcome just that guest who promises something new to our curiosity. One ought perhaps here make a distinction between what may be called

blind prejudices and enabling prejudices. The discrimination between the two cannot be achieved by a Descartes-like act of pure self reflection. It is only through the encounter with what is handed down to us through tradition that we discover which of our prejudices are blind and which are enabling. In opposition to Descartes monological notion purely rational reflection by which we can achieve transparent self knowledge Gadamar tells us that it is only through the dialogical encounter with what is at once alien to us, makes a claim upon us, and has an affinity with what we are that we can open ourselves to risking and testing our prejudices. This does not mean that we can ever achieve complete self transparency. To think so is to fail to do justice to the realization that "prejudices constitute our being".

Another of Gadamar's central ideas is that of the notion of the authority of a tradition or a world view. It is of course the case that it is persons that have authority, but the authority of persons is based ultimately not on the subjection and abdication of reason implicit in a tradition or world view but on recognition and knowledge – knowledge, namely, that the other is superior to one self in judgement and insight and that for this reason his judgement takes precedence i.e., it has prio-

rity over one's own. Authority in this sense, properly understood, has nothing to do with blind obedience to a command. Indeed authority has nothing to do with obedience but with knowledge. Thus, the recognition of authority is always connected with the idea that what authority states is not irrational and arbitrary but could be seen in principle to be true. This is the essence of the authority claimed by the teacher, the true elder of the community, the superior, the expert. The "prejudices" they implant are legitimized by the person himself.

We have spoken earlier of the seeming givenness of a world view or in the Gadamarian sense of tradition this givenness has obviously to be understood not in any absolute sense but only as something into which we are as it were born. There is no unconditional antithesis between tradition and reason. The fact is that tradition is constantly an element of history and of freedom. Even the most genuine and solid tradition does not persist by nature because of the inertia of what once existed. It needs to be affirmed, embraced, cultivated. It is essentially preservation such as is active in all historical change. But preservation is an act of reason though perhaps an inconspicuous one. For conspicuous reason only what is new or what is planned appears as the result

of reason. But this is an illusion even where life changes violently, as in ages of revolution, far more of the old is preserved in the supposed transformation of everything that any one knows, and combines with the new to create a new value. At any rate preservation is as much a freely chosen action as revolution and renewal.

A third and perhaps the most crucial Gadamarian concept for our purpose is that of a horizon. Related to this concept is also the idea of a 'situation'. A situation like a world view represents a standpoint that limits the possibility of vision. Hence, the idea of a situation can be understood only by reference to that of a horizon. The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point. A horizon is limited and finite but essentially open. The close horizon that is supposed to enclose a culture is an abstraction. The historical movement of human life consists in the fact that it is never utterly bound to any standpoint, and hence can never have a truly close horizon. The horizon is rather something into which we move and that moves with us. Horizons change for a person who is moving. Thus, the horizon of the past out of which all human life lives and which exists in the form of tradition is always in motion. It is not

historical consciousness that first sets this surrounding horizon in motion. But in it this motion becomes aware of itself.

Horizons are limited, finite, changing and fluid. The question then arises what are we doing (or rather what is happening to us) when we try to understand a horizon (world view) other than our own? What we seek to achieve or rather ought to seek to achieve is what Gadamar calls 'a fusion of horizon', a fusion whereby our own horizon is enlarged and enriched. Gadamar's main point becomes even sharper when we realize that for him the medium of all human horizon is primarily linguistic and that the language we speak (or that rather speaks to us) is essentially opened to understanding alien horizons. It is through fusion of horizon that we risk and test our prejudices. In this sense learning from other forms of life and horizon is at the same time coming to an understanding of ourselves. Only through others do we gain true knowledge of ourselves.

This can be put also in the language of incommensurability made popular by the philosopher of science Thomas Kuhn. We can say that incommensurability of different forms of life, of different world views or different historical epochs always present us with a challenge

– a challenge that requires learning to ask the right question and drawing on the resources of our own linguistic horizon in order to understand that which is alien. For Gadamar it is not a dead metaphor to liken the fusion of horizon that is the constant task of effective historical consciousness to an open and on-going dialogue or even conversation.

The temporal or the spatio distance between say the Khasi world view and the Christian or the Hindu world view must not be regarded as a negative barrier but is rather positive and productive of understanding. By opening ourselves to the symbol of the Cross or to the symbol of the elephant headed god Ganesa, we open ourselves to the claim to truth that the latter makes upon us. And of course it must be so the other way round as well. We bring to life new meanings of the symbolic texts. And this understanding is also a form of what Aristotle might have called phronesis, a form of practical moral knowledge which becomes constitutive of what we are in the process of becoming. Gadamar seeks to show to us that an authentic understanding of an alien text or world view becomes integral to our very being and transforms what we are in the process of becoming.

The foregoing also gives us an inkling of a theory of inter-cultural understanding. The authentic intention of understanding is as follows: In approaching an alien world view, in wishing to understand it, what we always expect is that it will inform us of something. A consciousness formed by the authentic attitude of understanding will be receptive to the origin and entirely foreign features which comes to it from outside its own horizon. Yet this receptivity is not acquired with an objectivist 'neutrality': it is neither possible, necessary nor desirable that we put ourselves in brackets, that is, outside our own horizon. The correct attitude of understanding supposes only that we self consciously designate our opinions and prejudices and qualify them as such, and in so doing stripped them of their extreme character. In keeping with this attitude we grant the other (culture, world view or whatever) the opportunity to appear as an authentically different being and to manifest its own truth, over and against our own pre-judgement and prejudices.

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CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION

The thesis, as will be easily seen is incomplete in many ways. My only consolation is that a thesis for a Ph.D. degree cannot hope for a definiteness or completeness which is usually the result of work that has much greater maturity than an ordinary research student is expected to have achieved. But in all humility I would wish, in conclusion, to mention the following points about the thesis which in my opinion, deserve some attention: (i) A philosophical exploration of an idea of a world view has not, in my knowledge been undertaken in quite the way that I have tried to do in my thesis. (ii) I believe that the distinction that I make and try to explicate in some detail between the idea of a metaphysical system and that a world view is an important distinction and that there are many more things to be learned from further exploration of this distinction than I have been able to make. (iii) While purely discursive ratiocinative articulation is certainly a legitimate mode of human articulation, it is certainly not the only mode nor the only legitimate mode of human articulation. The mode of articulation primarily involved in the construc-

tion of a world view is as legitimate and is as capable of producing authentic insight into the truth about man as any other. I hope that this point is also adequately made good in my thesis. (iv) The problem of relativism which seems to haunt the Western mind of today is to my mind somewhat a pseudo problem. While in a way it is perhaps an expression of the guilt of the Western mind for the intellectual and cultural imperialism apart of course from the political and economical imperialism that it has exercised over the rest of the world for the past two or three centuries or so, relativism which is belied both by fact and logic, cannot obviously wash off this guilt. Relativism has no room either for self criticism or for criticism or even appraisal of the other. What we need is self respect as well as respect for the other and such respect can come only from accepting the potential universality of the other as well as of one's own. Such an approach, in my reading, I find in Gadamar's work. Hence, I conclude the thesis with a look at some of Gadamar's central ideas.

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