CHAPTER II

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 apriori. 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.