CHAPTER III

A WORLD VIEW AND ITS ARTICULATION
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 Odysseus 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 if 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. Ele-
phant 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 un-
afraid 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 ascribes 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."

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 latang 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 Malymboit 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.  

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.
REFERENCES


