Philosophical Theory and Social Reality

Editor

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Preface

THESE ESSAYS on the social sciences and their conceptual framework were presented at a symposium entitled "Philosophical Theory and Social Reality" which was held under the auspices of the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library in January 1982.

The symposium was inaugurated by Smt. Sheila Kaul, Union Minister of State for Education and Culture, whose address on this occasion is included in this volume. The symposium generated considerable interest among scholars, and it gives me great pleasure to present the papers to the wider academic community.

I am much beholden to my colleagues in the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library who assisted me in preparing this volume for the press. I would, in this connection, specially like to thank Dr. Hari Dev Sharma, Shri J.S. Nahal, Shri S.R. Mahajan, Dr. S.R. Bakshi, Dr. Sheila Sen, Miss Deepa Bhatnagar, Shri T.K. Venkateswaran, and Shri Vijay Kumar.

RAVINDER KUMAR

New Delhi

Inaugural Address

by *Sheila Kaul*

I AM HAPPY for having been given this opportunity to be with you this morning and for reflecting along with you on such an important theme as that of the relationship between philosophical theory and social reality. That the Museum and Library, associated with the name of Jawaharlal Nehru, has thought of mooting this subject for discussion is both significant and appropriate. For Jawaharlal Nehru, who was by training a scientist and by predilection a humanist, devoted the major part of his life to grappling with the realities of the Indian social and political life, as also with the global problems of peace and international harmony. There was in him a dominant passion to cleave through theories of thought and to seize the substance of the reality and to act at the right and opportune moment to effectuate changes in the social, political and cultural situations. His historical writings are a testimony to this drive of his soul, and whether in his *Discovery of India,* or in *Glimpses of World History* we witness a searching enquiry into the meaning of events and into the means by which events can be fashioned in terms of the great ideals of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity. And I believe that it is this spirit of enquiry which should guide us in our deliberations at this extremely important symposium.

There is, I think, an intimate connection between the events in the world and the concepts through which these events are understood and interpreted. According to some, it is the concepts which are fundamental, while to others it is the events which are fundamental. Both seem to be extreme views, and the truth must lie somewhere in the middle. Events are meaningless

without concepts and concepts are empty without events. Or else, events and concepts are at bottom one, concepts being the subjective aspect and events the objective aspect. It may therefore be said that so long as there is a lack of correspondence between concepts and events, there is room either to reflect further to make concepts square with reality or to act further so as to make reality square with concepts. It is unfortunate that the history of social and political philosophy had demonstrated a deplorable gulf between concepts and events, and so there is an urgent need for continuing the study as to how this gulf can be narrowed and bridged. It is in this context that, I think, your symposium has relevance and meaning.

One of the important tools that philosophers have provided to understand the enigmatic flux of events is that of the "dialectic". That ideas progress in a dialectical manner was known to the ancients and we have in Plato a competent exposition of the dialectical theory. But it is only in comparatively recent times that this idea has gained a wider support and a larger substantiation. Hegel attempted to explain the entire movement of history in terms of the dialectical movement of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. Marx also, following Hegel, saw in history a pattern of progress through expanding and developing relationships of conflict and harmony breaking into a continuous series of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. But Hegel and Marx differed on the first premise as to the nature of the basic reality. According to Hegel, the basic nature of reality is that of the Absolute Idea, while to Marx it is that of Matter.

Metaphysicians have debated at length whether Reality is idea or consciousness or whether it is material. This debate is still inconclusive. But what is important is to note that there appears to be a fairly general consensus that there is some discernible pattern in the way in which events occur, and that this pattern does seem to indicate that conflicts and reconciliations play a major role.

At the same time we have to reckon with the fact that there are so many trivial events which seem to determine decisive developments. Indeed, some thinkers are so impressed by this curious logic of the "trifle" producing the "mass-events" that they have come to doubt if there is any "logic" at all in history. They try to convince us that every event in this world is a

"chance-event" and that the quest of man to seek any meaning or design in history may have some emotional significance but no significance in terms of objective truth. But this view leaves us with some paradoxes. If everything were a chance, we may ask, how did the sense of meaning and design arise at all? It may, of course, be answered that this also was a matter of chance. But this precisely is the paradox, namely, chance generating meaning and design. Again, if chance rules the world, then it is only a chance, and not a certainty, that the chance theory may be valid. In other words, the chance theory has no obligatory force.

I think that we are really called upon to leave the game of chance and to take a deliberate and serious view of history and events. The rise of civilizations is a fascinating fact of history, and equally fascinating are the phenomena of decline and fall of civilizations. We must find out if there are certain laws governing the rise and fall of civilizations and if there is a secret of continuing civilizations such as that of India. We must ask as to why man has survived and why he continues to build and re-build in spite of numerous catastrophes. And, most importantly, we must ask if the lessons of the past can give us wisdom and power by means of which we can fashion our future more securely and more fruitfully.

In recent times the question of social reconstruction has become preponderant. We have come to realize that our present social order does not meet our demands of justice and equity, and that there are conceivable ways and means by which this social order can be changed. It is being increasingly realized that we could develop a sound knowledge and a science of what may properly be called "social engineering", which can guide sociologists, scientists, and politicians in the task of building a new world order.

But it must be noted that it is comparatively easier to deal with political events than with social and cultural events. It is easier to explain the growth of the state than the growth of social institutions. It is easier to determine the relationship between the state and the individual than the relationship between society and the individual. Is it, we may ask, a mere "social contract" that brings individuals together or is there some intrinsic interdependence between the individual and

society that gives rise to the social organism? And even if we grant mutual interdependence between the individual and society, what explanation can we offer for the fact that some remarkable individuals overreach the boundaries of their social milieu? Is there something in the individual which is greater than social reality? These questions are important because some historians believe that human history is nothing but the story of a few great *individuals*.

And we have still more important questions as to how the individual is related not only to his own social group but also to larger groups such as the nation and humanity as a whole. Do we have an adequate philosophical theory to account for the multidimensional relationship of individuals, groups, and societies? These are in themselves extremely difficult questions, but there are still more formidable questions which we are called upon to answer. These questions relate to the way in which psychological forces determine the growth of traditions and conventions, and how these traditions and conventions become rigid and obstruct the free growth of the individual. And, it is still enigmatic as to how precisely great periods of crisis are developed in which traditions and conventions built over centuries are suddenly passed over within a short period of a decade or two, liberating not only a few individuals but even masses from the fetters of the past.

According to some thinkers, mankind is passing today through a peculiar crisis, which is neither economic, nor social, nor political, but which is *evolutionary* in character. In fact the idea of evolution is increasingly gaining ground, and this idea has led to a review of the entire gamut of philosophical theory. It has been suggested that social reality itself is a product of evolution and that it is only when the psychological processes of evolution are uncovered that an adequate conceptual framework of the emerging social reality can be formulated.

It is thus clear that there are before sociologists, historians, and philosophers certain extremely important questions which require urgent attention. The urgency is reinforced by the fact that while, on the one hand, humanity is threatened with the possibility of an unprecedented catastrophe on account of arms race and North-South conflicts, there are, on the other, great possibilities for humanity to choose the path of wisdom

and to usher in a new age. Somehow there is an increasing feeling—rational or irrational—as though humanity has to make a decisive choice within a very short time. We seem to hear clear warnings that it is on the leaders of today, and at the most tomorrow, that the responsibility is fixed to make the decisive choice, and that an error might prove fatal. It is for this reason that social and political philosophers have to be seriously concerned so that, if they have a chance, they may provide wise guidance which is crucially needed.

It is gratifying to note that social scientists, thinkers, and philosophers are gathered here to deliberate on this important subject which has a direct bearing on the contemporary situation. I am extremely happy to be with you this morning and hope your deliberations will be fruitful.

With these words I have great pleasure in inaugurating this symposium.

On the Appraisal of Social Reality

Ramkrishna Mukherjee

I HAVE NO KNOWLEDGE of 'philosophical theory'. As a social scientist, I try to find ways and means to understand social reality. My focus of attention is therefore on the perception-action-behaviour-relationship syndromes with respect to the objects of information and with reference to the role of human beings in the perspective of individuals to collectivities. The perspective subsumes the world society of humankind to represent a universe of variation which contains systemtic interactions among the phenomena to hold society as a product at a time-point and change society as a process over a time-period. The course of analysis and comprehension of social reality is therefore facilitated by characterizing the world society under three dimensions of variation in the place (*sthāna*), the time (*kāla*) and the people (*pātra*), as suggested by the *Sāmkhya* school of Indian philosophy.

With reference to virtually any place-time-people-bound configuration of world society, scholars are now worried about the consequence of social science knowledge because it seems to become more and more the handmaiden of politics: it is not employed as a power in itself. The concern for a meta-theory to understand the social reality testifies to this anxiety of a body of scholars, and so does the search for 'alternatives' by many others. The formulation of a meta-theory, however, is still in the realm of another 'theory' or a proposal, because the conceptual and methodological prerogatives of such an attempt are not clearly demonstrated yet. The 'alternatives' are posed disparately and therefore they prompt polemical discussions which generate a good deal of heat among the scholars but

shed little (or fragmented) light on the substantive reality. It appears therefore that the category of 'scientific' labour has hardly any value in itself: the social reality is appraised and moulded by other kinds of labour—be these of the fundamentalists, of the pragmatists, and so on.

At this crossroads of a purposeful and effective use of social science knowledge, Marx and Weber seem to communicate to the world on the same wavelength. Marx[1] noted in his Thesis XI on Feuerbach that "the philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point, however, is to *change* it". Weber (1970: 152) stressed "the one fundamental fact, that so long as life remains immanent and is interpreted in its own terms, . . . the ultimate possible attitudes towards life are irreconcilable, and . . . thus it is necessary to make a decisive choice". Marx and Weber, however, assume polar opposite positions in appraising the social reality.

One should not ignore the preceding ten theses of Marx on Feuerbach, which the young enthusiasts tend to do. For these theses do not deride the importance of scientific labour in the context of praxis; nor do they stand for any kind of 'economic determinism' of the social reality. At the same time, one must note Marx's basic postulates on the appraisal of social reality, as placed in the preface to his *Critique of Political Economy*: "In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will; these relations of production correspond to a definite stage of development of their material forces of production. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society—the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness."

One cannot also fail to note Weber's unequivocal statements in the context of appraising the social reality: "The so-called 'materialistic conception of history' as a *Weltanschauung* or as a formula for the causal explanation of historical reality is to be rejected most emphatically" (1949: 68). "No shadow of probability speaks for the fact that economic 'socialization' as such must harbour in its lap either the development of inwardly 'free' personalities or 'altruistic' ideals (1970: 72).

We thus find that social reality is evaluated in a sharply

different manner, and the polar opposite or the intermediate
valuations are stressed unilaterally by the scholars. The attempt
to arrive at a consensus on the most efficient valuation ends in
generalities, as we notice from the deliberations in the inter-
national conferences convened under the umbrella of the United
Nations or in the World Congresses of the social science sub-
jects. Alternatively, the specific academic efforts in this direc-
tion end in polemics, as Sutcliffe (1972) noted, for instance, in
his conclusion to a seminar discussion on the theory of im-
perialism. Clearly, the antagonistic value preferences of the
scholars prevent them from reaching an effective agreement
instead of either remaining diplomatically conciliatory or pit-
ting one valuation against another of the social reality *en bloc*
or one of its manifestations through a particular phenomenon.

Usually, therefore, the decision on the *relative efficiency* of
different valuations of social reality (and/or of the respective
social phenomena) is left to the time-dimension of variation and
beyond the intervention of scientific labour. The expectation is
that the immanent reality will reveal the most efficient valua-
tion: an expectation which is not invariably realized and fails
particularly with reference to the vital issues in the appraisal of
social reality. As noted, the scholars therefore search for a
meta-theory, posit alternative explanations of the social pheno-
mena, or merely indulge in polemics, with successively dimin-
ishing returns to the input of scientific labour.

It would be appropriate therefore to find ways and means to
systemize the valuation contexts to appraise the social reality
instead of regarding these contexts as forming a series of dis-
crete formulations. For, in the light of a part or wholesale
acceptance or rejection of one or another valuation context
under specific objective circumstances and with reference to a
particular social milieu, we may evaluate the relative relevance,
necessity, and efficiency of different valuations to appraise the
social reality. We are not unfamiliar with the second task (*vide*
Mukherjee, 1975: 46-65; 1979: 131-39); the problem rests
mainly with the first, namely, how to systemize the valuation
contexts.

In his letter to Starkenburg (25 January 1894), Engels eluci-
dates Marx's valuation of the material basis of society as the
prime concern in the appraisal of social reality and provides

us, in that connection, with an important clue to systemize the valuation contexts to that appraisal—be they of the material, of ideational, of existential, or of other kinds. He wrote: "It is not that the economic position is the *cause and alone active*, while everything else only has a passive effect. . . . Men make their history themselves, only they do so in a given environment which conditions it and on the basis of actual relations already existing." We are thus concerned with the continual interplay of the *items of objective information* and their *subjective valuation* on the perception-action-behaviour-relationship axis of the individuals forming collectivities—which ultimately cover mankind as a whole. The systemization of the valuation contexts to appraise the social reality may accept this manner of objective and subjective interactions as the basic point of reference.

Systemization, however, is concerned with "an organized body of material or immaterial things" (*The Concise Oxford Dictionary*). In order to form the 'organized body', one is therefore involved with measurement because the role of measurement is to "ascertain extent or quantity of (thing) by comparison with fixed unit or with object of known size" (*ibid.*) Hence, a number of scholars would outright reject any possibility of systemization of the valuation contexts because, according to them, the social and human phenomena are incommensurable. None the less, whether with respect to an objective information on society and the humanity or its subjective valuation, these scholars are seen to adopt the first two stages of measurement while the next two stages follow logically.

Measurement begins with the 'extent' of difference drawn, at first, *nominally* between 'this' and 'that', proceeds to a qualitatively distinguished *ordinal* series of 'identity differences', enters into the area of quantification when the identity differences are rated in a *numeral* series of higher/lower orders as 1, 2, 3, . . ., and ends in an *interval scale* series when the distances between the successive pairs of numbers as 1 and 2, 2 and 3, etc. can be calibrated in an *equispaced* manner. The measurement by 'extent' is thus inevitable to any course of description or explanation with reference to a set of objective information; its extension to quantification is also becoming the usual practice in all social science subjects.

Correspondingly, the valuation of an item of information can follow these sequential stages of measurement. We evaluate whether 'large is beautiful' with respect to 'this' thing (a woman) or 'that' thing (a man), an ordinal series of dogs categorized from pointers to pug, a numeral series of sea-shells of various sizes, or an interval-scale series of earrings of successively larger/smaller diameters. The course of valuation can also be regarded to be *positive* (v) as agreeable, good, desirable, etc., or *negative* (v') as disagreeable, bad, detestable, etc., or *neutral* ($\bar{v}$) with respect to an item of information. Moreover, we can place the value parameters v, $\bar{v}$, and v' in a numeral series of n-point minimax scale, from the maximum positive to the maximum negative, by passing through the *null* point of neutral or zero valuation. We shall see furthermore that value as a measure variable can also be considered in an interval-scale of unit distances.

The course of valuation would thus be precise, unequivocal, and comprehensive with respect to each item of information. Can it, however, attain the same standard of efficiency with regard to a social phenomenon and, sequentially, a constellation of phenomena regarded to depict the social reality? This is the question we must explore further in this essay.

A phenomenon is defined as an entity which is perceived but the constitution and the cause of which are not known precisely or comprehensively. A phenomenon is therefore conceived to be constituted of a set of things: a thing is defined as whatever is or may be the subject of perception; and, correspondingly, perception is defined as the act by which the mind refers its sensations to the external objects as they exist and in their cause-effect syndrome. Which means that a phenomenon is composed of a set of things, a thing is endowed with a set of properties, and a property is ascertained through a set of information items.

The issue is therefore the extent and the manner in which the *differentially valued* items of information can be so collated that the course of collation produces unambiguous *structures of values* with reference to the information items (i) on the properties (p) of things (t) composing a phenomenon (ϕ) and ultimately a constellation of phenomena (C) in order to depict the social reality (R). For the base to structure values will be

common as the respective items of information which, in their totality, would represent the universe of variation in objective reality. The items of information will denote, at the same time, the *minimal unities* to structure the subjective valuation of the objective reality. The different structures of values will not therefore be disparate. Instead, by being mutually distinct but homologous, these structures can be laid on a scale of measurement—nominal, ordinal, numeral, or intervals of unit distances —for purposes of systemization of the valuation contexts to appraise the social reality.

Many scholars, however, would consider this to be an impossible proposition on three main grounds:

1. Value is *ingrained* to all perceptions, actions, behaviour, and relationships of human beings.
2. The role of value in the social and human life is *synoptic* and *diachronic* with reference to the points of observation, enumeration, or probing of social and human thought and expression; it is not segmental and synchronic.
3. The trajectory of value from any point of reference is *multilinear* and *multi-dimensional*.

They hold the view therefore that the valuation of the respective items of information is disparate *vis-à-vis* the total reality. Hence for the appraisal of social reality the valuation must be limited to the nominal or the qualitatively ordinal distinctions drawn among the ensemble of values. Which means that a scholar should declare his/her value-load, and the same of those under investigation. To proceed beyond this limit and attempt any systemization of the valuation contexts to appraise the social reality would be unreal and would generate false knowledge through the media of social sciences by imitating what are called the 'exact' sciences.

This viewpoint is so prevalent that we must take note of it. It should be pointed out therefore that the validity of the first point raised by these scholars is accepted by all, including the physicists who are more and more inclined to underscore the value perspective in accumulating knowledge in the physical sciences (e.g., Einstein, 1916: 101; Born, 1956: vi-vii). The relevance of the second point is also not doubted: the physical

scientists included (e.g., Einstein, 1951: 4-7). And the necessity to consider the third point is noted by the scholars interested in the problems of measurement in social sciences. The substantive objection raised by the scholars against the attempts to systemize the valuation contexts to appraise the social reality would therefore be nullified or hold ground according as the riders posed by whether or not the above three points are efficieutly resolved.

As to the first, the fact that value is ingrained to 'sciencing' means that things in their existence are inseparable from their valuation. Primarily, it directs one to perceive a *selection* of things out of their theoretically infinite but enumerable numbers constituting a phenomenon. Subsequently, it directs one to *appreciate*, *deprecate*, or remain *neutral* to a specific information on a particular property of each of the things perceived. Regarding the primary consideration therefore we should bear in mind that while *objectivism* asserts that things exist by themselves, knowledge of these things refers to *objectivity* which denotes the identical perception by individuals of a thing at an extremely high density of probability. Probably one in a million (or tens of million) would perceive the colour green which others perceive as red; and therefore red is red: it is not green.

However, while red is thus *objectively* established as red in our perception at the primary level of comprehension of reality, its valuation would vary according to our perception of red at successively higher/deeper analytical levels. This brings us to the subsequent consideration and poses such questions as: How red (nominally) is the red thing that we see respectively? Which particular shades of red (ordinally) are agreeable or disagreeable to us, respectively, or is none of them of any consequence? Which points in a numeral series of 'more' or 'less' red in the vibgyor spectrum are the most and the least agreeable and disagreeable to us, respectively, or is none of them of any consequence? What are the fully quantified measures of our respective preference and abhorrence of red in the interval scale variations in red in unit distance from the *null* (zero) point, for which we may use a spectrophotometer?

The example is not hypothetical. The business enterprises in paints, textiles of different shades, etc. depend on such valu-

ations to produce goods in particular shades and in varying volumes for different shades according to empirically ascertained probability estimates of their respective demands. The example thus substantiates, furthermore, that the valuation of an information on a property of a thing does not form a *random space* of individual variations: it forms patterns in the space and thus denotes the *group character* of valuation in society and humanity.

Valuation no doubt varies from person to person, but so does our perception with respect to any information on a property of a thing. The length of a thing is not measured at *exactly* the same point of measurement of a measuring scale by a set of trained investigators or the replicas of a precision instrument. Extraneous variations of this nature, so long as these are regarded to occur within permissible limits, are considered to present the inevitable margin of error in the appraisal of the objective reality by means of any scientific venture. In spite of such *subjective* variations therefore the length of a set of things (e.g., the spokes for wheels of different radii) is regarded to represent an *objectively* variable property. The social reality is thus understood as a mosaic of objective information on the property of things constituting a phenomenon and forming a constellation of phenomena.

Correspondingly, by its incidence in a non-random manner—which forms patterns and attributes group-character to the respective probability densities, a set of subjective valuations of an item of information turns into a *social variable* which can be examined as objectively as the item of information itself. The *contextual validity* of measuring the valuation of an item of information for purposes of structuring values with reference to the characteristics we have represented by the symbols $i, p, t,$ $\phi, C,$ and R may not be doubted therefore as in the case of measuring the item of information.

We should, however, examine the manner in which this validity can be established. In that respect, the example cited on the colour of commodities points to two mutually distinct but analogous aspects of valuation as an *empirical concern*, provided we bear in mind that an empirical concern is as distinct from *empiricism* as objectivity is from objectivism.

1. Value cannot be measured distinctively unless we recognize that it denotes three separate but *systemically related* characteristics as v, $\bar{v}$ and v'.
2. Value can be measured in a more and more precise, unequivocal, and comprehensive manner only when the three probable characteristics of valuation are *integrated* to *each* item of information.

The first aspect denotes the spectrum of value as a variable. It is, however, usually considered in an isolated manner in terms of the respective parameters v, $\bar{v}$ and v', and not in reference to the continuous range of variation which the parameters can depict. This is how it has entered into the sphere of the physical and allied sciences. For example, should those scientific and technological innovations which employ the nuclear energy for war purposes be encouraged? Are the investigations into the structure of genes helpful or harmful to the humanity?

The systemic relationship among the three characteristics of valuation is not always taken into account even by those who evaluate the social reality, although it is of crucial importance for an objective (and not politically or emotionally motivated) evaluation. This has been illustrated with reference to the emergence of Bangladesh by examining those characteristics introduced in Pakistan during 1951-61 which were regarded by the government and the 'modernization' school in contemporary social science as 'developmental' measures. It was found that the acknowledged 'developmental' attributes ($= v$) for Pakistan were distributed as v for the west wing and v' for the east wing of the nation-state (Mukherjee, 1975: 58-60; 1979: 199-201).

One may also suggest that the apposite valuations of social reality would be more distinctive than they are found to be if the systemic relationship among v, $\bar{v}$, and v' is taken into account in place of any dichotomous distinction drawn, implicitly or explicitly, between v and v'. For instance, Frank's formulation (1970, 1972, 1975) of the 'development of underdevelopment' would possibly acquire a less polemical and more effective meaning if the valuation context of the reality of the Third World *vis-à-vis* the First and the Second is examined systemically with reference to the noted spectrum of value as a vari-

able. Similarly, the 'Modern World System' analysts, pioneered by Wallerstein (1974) and Hopkins (1978), may find it useful to take note of this value-spectrum while evaluating the systemic operation of the core, the periphery, and the critical entity of the semi-periphery (Mukherjee, 1980a: 314-16).

We should, however, bear in mind that the measurement of value in a systemic series of the three parameters v, $\bar{v}$, and v' is sometimes forced and therefore becomes false or fallacious. A nominal distinction is implicitly drawn among the three parameters with respect to the evaluation of the properties of a thing (e.g., urbanization) or a set of things (e.g., rural-rurban-urban with reference to the concepts of rural-urban dichotomy or continuum). An extension of this distinction to the formulation of a qualitative ordinal series of valuation is also now openly accepted (e.g., with respect to the nation-states labelled theocratic, monarchic, bourgeois-democratic, socialist, communist, and so on). The sequential formulation of a numeral series in a n-point minimax scale of 'more' or 'less' v and v', with the scale passing through the *null* point of v, is now less disputable than previously because of the contemporaneous developments in the techniques of scaling with particular reference to the opinion and attitude studies. There are cogent arguments, however, against any implicit assumption of a numeral series to represent an interval scale of unit distances: an assumption which is not infrequently found to provide the base for the studies of opinions, attitudes, and values to denote the quality of life which is an important indicator to appraise the social reality.

The arguments reflect one of the points of the controversy regarding the systemization of the valuation contexts to appraise the social reality; namely, the respective points in a n-point scale may not be equispaced and therefore the assumption that it represents an interval scale of unit distances is unwarranted. The controversy raises the further point that the perception of the respondents may not be *unilinear* and *unidimensional* with respect to the properties of a thing or the set of things evaluated. Finally, the point is emphasized that all such valuations of a phenomenon are segmental and synchronic while the phenomenon, by definition, is synoptic and diachronic.

For example, if one is asked about the goal in life (which is

an important indicator of the respondent's appraisal of social reality) by posing this question only, one's valuation of the life-goal is likely to be spontaneously superficial. In case a battery of discrete (and/or amorphous) questions, assumed to denote the nodal points in the goal of life, are posed, the valuation is likely to be distorted by the segmental choices offered and/or ambiguous because the questions may evoke multi-linear, multi-dimensional, and unequally spaced responses in a n-point scale. If, on the other hand, the items of information are so calibrated on the basis of *a priori* knowledge that these are equispaced, respectively, and they are so designed as to be sequentially related to form a comprehensive whole, then the responses on the goal of life will be precise, unequivocal, and comprehensive. Furthermore, in case the circuit of the items of information is so constructed as to refer to the respective properties of those things in a homologous series which, at the present state of our knowledge of the phenomenon, are related *intimately, successively,* and *systematically* to one's course of living, expectations, and aspirations, then the corresponding course of evaluation of the life-goal will be synoptic and diachronic. These possibilities have been demonstrated, however rudimentarily (Mukherjee, 1980b).

The example suggests that the items of information related to any social and human phenomenon can be so designed that their variable measures of valuation are equispaced, as illustrated with reference to the valuation of the red colour. At the same time these items can be so enumerated that they would depict, respectively, unilinear and unidimensional valuations. Correspondingly, the series of items can be systemized to denote in their totality the multi-linear and multi-dimensional valuation of the phenomenon according as the respective items of information on the respective properties of the respective thing referring to the phenomenon are systematically collated from the *bottom,* as it were, of the given universe of variation. The process yielded an objective valuation of the relative distances among the major political parties in India with reference to their allocation of the three parameters v, $\bar{v}$, and v' to the items of information regarded as representing the major ingredients of the Indian social reality (Mukherjee, 1975: 66-87).

Evidently, the points raised by those scholars who are against

systemization of the valuation contexts to appraise the social reality crystalize in the question: How can the synoptic, multi-linear, and multi-dimensional expressions of valuation of a phenomenon be measured with the same standard of efficiency as is now acknowledged to be possible with regard to the *information context* of the phenomenon? Our attention is thus drawn to the second aspect of valuation as an empirical concern because the riders posed in the way of systemizing the valuation contexts of the social and human phenomena are no less applicable to the information context of all phenomena, i.e., including the physical and biological ones and all others.

All phenomena are synoptic in concept, diachronic in comprehension, multi-linear in operation, and multi-dimensional in expression. The most precise, unequivocal, and comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon therefore presupposes a systematic *reduction* of the phenomenon to a set of things, each thing to a set of properties, and each property to a set of information. Also, in order that the systematic division and collation of these reducible traits of a phenomenon may continually enhance our knowledge on the phenomenon, the things it is constituted of, the properties the things are endowed with, and the information that can be perceived on the properties, are all, respectively, conceived to form an infinite but enumerable field of divisible elements.

At the bottom of the universe of variation, therefore, are the items of information which are so conceived, explored, and characterized that their variability can ultimately be equispaced as we proceed with our continual accumulation of knowledge of the phenomenon: beginning with the nominal distinctions drawn, next the qualitative ordinal series of variation formed, afterwards the numeral series formulated, and, finally, the numerals turned into an interval scale of unit distances. The items of information would, at the same time, represent the unilinear and unidimensional segments of the phenomenon because their linearity of variation can be tested (or engineered, if required), and for multi-variate analysis these are reduced to represent one or another dimension from a p-dimensional manifold. Also, eventually, the course of analysis, deduction, and inference would turn from division to collation whereby these items of information would be systematically collated to

reproduce the phenomenon in its multi-linear, multi-dimensional, synoptic, and diachronic form and content, structure and function, causality and process.

The systemization of the information context of any phenomenon has this objective in view irrespective of the aspect of reality with which it is concerned. However, the valuation context to the appraisal of the physical, biological, and such other aspects of reality need not undergo a course of systemization, for it can be directly standardized. Thus, for example, a drug prepared to cure an ailment would have the information context of what are its ingredients and how minute can be their divisible properties. This is similar to the information context of any social and human phenomenon. But the selection of particular ingredients for the preparation of a drug, and their collation in respective proportions, would have only one valuation: how efficient can be the selection and collation to prepare a drug to cure the disease? The issue is settled through experimentation, which is the convention in the physical and the allied sciences so long as it does not involve human beings as specimens for experimentation.

In the social and human sciences also the valuation is seemingly one and the same; namely, how efficiently we may appraise the social reality in order that the ways are paved and the means provided for an unconstrained expression of potentialities of individual beings in a secure and sustained course of living of the humankind. That valuation, however, cannot be standardized directly because, on 'moral' ground, it is not possible to experiment with human beings. To be sure, in practice or in the name of praxis, such experiments are built into the exercise of any authoritative formulation; but the deterrence of universally professed morality forbids any authoritative power from designing a course of experiment as in the case of preparing a drug to cure an ailment. The resistance of human beings to be thus experimented with is also well known in history; lately, in the context of assuming the innate superiority of a 'race', an ethnic group, a religious faith.

The upshot is that the standards to appraise the social reality are conceived differently according to the philosophical outlook of the social scientists and, as imputed, their material anchors in society. At the first glance, the contemporarily pre-

dominant concept to standardize the professedly agreed valuation of the present and the future of mankind appears to be singularly expressed by the UN declaration. Insidiously, however, two uniquely distinct concepts are in operation in the world society: (1) establish consensus among all individuals and their collectivities on the basis of mutual aid and interest; or (2) remove the basic contradiction confronting the present course of human history, which is not a matter of amicable agreement among all the interest groups formed by the individuals. Crudely but perhaps aptly the first standard refers to the assumption that the spirit of capitalism springs eternal in the human breast; the second to the declaration: proletarians of the world unite to usher in a new era in human history.

There are, however, well defined variations within and between these two central concepts. These variations have emerged around the nodal points to denote the prime movers of social change, namely, (1) the material basis of society, (2) the 'fact' of social existence, (3) the inexorable drive of social consciousness, and (4) the ideological basis of society. Also, in diverse manner, these variations draw cause-effect relationships among the nodal points in the total field of variation in the social processes (Mukherjee, 1979: 104-31).

Any attempt to ascertain, in a *deterministic* manner, the relative efficiency of all these valuations to appraise the social reality is ruled out. As illustrated, that would be applicable in the physical and allied sciences, but up to a point and not absolutely. Whereas, from the outset, the mere declaration of the acceptance of a value-load or the assumption of a value-free stance (but with an implicit value-load) does not further the attempt towards a precise, unequivocal, and comprehensive appraisal of social reality. Instead, either value-acceptance or value-neutrality nurtures and propagates disparate dogmas which obscure the course of appraisal.

Weber, for instance, is seen to adopt a value-neutral position when he states (1970: 152) that "if we are competent in our pursuit . . . we can force the individual or at least we can help him, to give himself an *account of the ultimate meaning of his own conduct*". He had, however, stipulated earlier (*ibid.*: 71-72) the negative injunction that "the opportunities for democracy and individualism would look very bad today were we to rely

upon the lawful effects of material interests for their develop-
ment", and the positive injunction that "freedom and democ-
racy are only possible when the resolute will of a nation not
to allow itself to be ruled like sheep is permanently alive". The
value-free stance and the abstract formulations of freedom and
democracy are congenial to certain interest groups holding
power, or striving for power, over the place-time-people-bound
configurations of the world society or the world society as a
whole. Hence, whether or not Weber and the like-minded
academic authorities intended it, they are seen to have nurtur-
ed the anti-Marxist dogmas we encounter today as standards to
appraise the social reality.

A substantial number of Marxists, on the other hand, pay
only lip service to the clarification of the Marxist viewpoint
which we have quoted from Engels and which he elaborated in
Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy
by stating that "men make their own history, whatever its out-
come may be, in that each person follows his own consciously
desired end, and it is precisely the resultant of these many wills
operating in different directions and of their manifold effects
upon the outer world that constitutes history". He also point-
ed out that while "the course of history is governed by inner
general laws", the fact that "nothing happens without a con-
scious purpose [is] important . . . for historical investigation,
particularly of single epochs and events".

Moreover, with reference to the "single epochs and events",
with which we are concerned while appraising the social reality
as an empirical concern, Lenin had clearly stated in *The Material-
ist Conception of History* that as distinct from "pre-Marxian
'sociology' and historiography", the contemporary task was to
ascertain "what determines the motives of people, . . . what gives
rise to the clash of conflicting ideas and strivings; what is the
sum-total of all these clashes of the whole mass of human socie-
ties; . . .". And Mao pointed out in his terse comment *On
Contradiction* that "we recognize that in the development of
history as a whole it is material things that determine spiritual
things, it is social existence that determines social conscious-
ness; but at the same time we also recognize and must recognize
the reaction of spiritual things, the reaction of social conscious-
ness on social existence, and the reaction of the superstructure

on the economic base".

Yet we find that many dedicated Marxists take one or another dogmatic stand, on the basis of their varying interpretation of the *general laws* of social development, and employ it as the standard to appraise the social reality. They tend to or decisively overrule the necessity of examining the continual interplay of the objective conditions and their subjective valuations by the individuals located in complementary and contradictory alignments of the social structure.

With reference to the Marxists, the non-Marxists, and the anti-Marxists, therefore, we commonly find that in a circular frame various trends of 'economic' determinism chase diverse tenets of 'spiritual' determinism, or the other way round, through a plethora of dogmas emerging from the aforementioned two central concepts to appraise the social reality. As mentioned in the beginning, it is an endless and unprofitable exercise.

This is why we are required to employ scientific labour to systemize the seemingly disparate valuation contexts to appraise the social reality. For against a systemic ordering of these contexts we may examine the what, how, and why questions of motivation of the complementary and contradictory social groups—in the sequence from individuals to collectivities to achieve the unanimously professed objective of humanity, and, on that basis, evaluate the relative efficiency of these valuations to appraise the social reality. The standardization of the valuation context may thus be obtained precisely, unequivocally, and comprehensively; but indirectly.

We have noted that methods are available to undertake the subsequent task. As regards the primary task of systemizing the valuation contexts, we can undertake it provided the following two *relevant* conditions are satisfied in the sequence of having proved earlier the validity of the task:

1. Value is regarded as a *measure variable* (and not a matter of judgement) which holds the potentiality to be evermore precise, unequivocal, and comprehensive by the sequential and systematic treatment of the parameters v, $\bar{v}$, and v' along the stages of measurement.
2. Value is integrated at the information level of a phenomenon, and *not* at the levels of a property the set of

information   would depict, the thing the properties would
characterize, the phenomenon *per se* as constituted of the
things, or any constellation of phenomena to depict the social
reality.

Which means that the appraisal of social reality should not
refer exclusively to the information variable *ij*, with valuation
(*v*) treated as constant at this level of accumulation of knowl-
edge, which is feasible when dealing with the physical and
allied aspects of reality. On the other hand, valuation in this
field of knowledge should not be regarded as *confounded* with
information in the manner Fisher (1949: 109) used the artifice
of 'confounding' for operational convenience. It is this notion,
however, which prevails—but conceptually—in the minds of
those scholars who are against systemization of the valuation
contexts to appraise the social reality. For according to them,
value is inseparable from the perception of a phenomenon.

We may pose an analogy in this context. When blood is
taken out from a person for clinical examination, it does no
more belong to that organism. Yet the chemistry of that sample
of blood provides knowledge to appraise the reality of that
organism. Knowledge thus forms an asymptotic relationship
with reality while science perseveres to reduce the asymptotic
gap by coordinating the levels of analysis and comprehension
through the media of observation, deduction, and inference.

For the appraisal of social reality, therefore, it would be as
much incorrect to ignore or bypass the valuation context of
measurement of the relevant phenomena as to confound valu-
ation with information and thus accept one or another value-
constellation as a matter of judgement *imposed* on the imma-
nent reality. It is *necessary*, instead,—after confirming the
validity and the relevance of the effort,—to conceive of 'informa-
tion' and 'value' as forming a *compound* variable *ij*, v_k. As
explained, the components of this variable have their respective
spheres of variation: it is, however, their *fusion* (and not mere
cross-classification at the property (*p*), thing (*t*), phenomenon
ϕ, or the constellation of phenomena (*C*) levels) which pro-
vides the necessary foundation to systemize the valuation con-
texts to appraise the social reality.

Which means that for the appraisal of social reality the

variate *ij* v_k is to be regarded as varying within its structure as $(i_1 v_1, i_1 v_2, \ldots, i_2 v_1, i_2 v_2, \ldots)$ and along the hierarchical ordering of the successively derived variables (p, t, ϕ C, and R)—through which it presents the immanent reality ($\hat{R}$).

The integration of value as a measure variable with the respective items of information, and the systematic collation of the items into properties, things, phenomenon, and the constellation of phenomena ultimately—but consistently recording the variability in valuation of the items themselves—will present different valuations of a phenomenon and the constellation of phenomena in a precise, unequivocal, and comprehensive manner. The valuation contexts to appraise the social reality will thus vary *objectively* and *systemically* instead of resting upon the subjective value judgements of one scholar and another, and thus yielding segmental or false knowledge on the immanent reality.

We have mentioned that this is the central point of those scholars who are against systemization of the valuation contexts to appraise the social reality. We should therefore point out that their criticism is actually levelled against themselves. The evaluation of a phenomenon, or a constellation of phenomena, from the *top*, as it were, because of the deductive-positivistic orientation of these scholars, cannot but provide a fragmented (and thus distorted) perspective to the appraisal of reality, as illustrated in the Indian fable of seven blind men who, respectively, described an elephant as the trunk of a tree by touching its feet, as a rope by touching its tail, and so on. This is why polemics prevail in the appraisal of social reality in terms of dogmas, vulgarization of a set of efficient principles (e.g., of Marxism), or the objective turns into a metaphysical concern.

Thus while there are no valid, relevant, or necessary reasons against the systemization of the valuation contexts to appraise the social reality, there are constraints which forbid the exercise to be *efficient*. The constraints are imposed by the respective value preferences of scholars guided by the deductive-positivistic orientation to appraise the reality—be it of the classical formulation of Comte (1848), of Weber (1930, 1958) who drew a dichotomy between the Protestant ethic for the West and the "other worldly outlook" for the East, of the doctrinaire Marxists despite the caution sounded by the

authorities on Marxism, or any other.

The constraints can be removed by the adoption of the *inductie-inferential* approach based on the *null* probability of statistiavl concept (Mukherjee, 1979: 131-39) which is contemporarily advocated by the physicists also for the 'exact' sciences (e.g., Born, 1956). The removal of the constraints in this manner will provide an unambiguous base for the systemization of the valuation contexts and thus pave the way for an evermore precise, unequivocal, and comprehensive appraisal of social reality. For we may, then, proceed to the next step to infer on the relative efficiency of all available and possible explanations (e_m) of the social reality on the scale of probability e_o . . . e_5. . . . e_1 (*vide* Mukherjee, 1979: 222-29).

Conceived in this manner, knowledge becomes power i itl-t self to interpret the world objectively and change it accordingy. Correspondingly, therefore, scientific labour would receive its apposite return instead of being utilized by dubious interest groups in society in the name of praxis. For there will be no room for conjectures and speculations such as "if this happens, then that will follow". Instead, the formulation will be that 'if x_j happens, then y_j is very likely to occur, and the probability of occurrence of x_j y_j is given by p_j where $0 < p_j < p_j < P_k \geqslant \ldots 1$".

Obviously, as knowledge accumulates from this rigorous exercise, our comprehension of x_j and y_j becomes successively more precise and unequivocal while p_j with reference to pi and p_k is more and more accurately determined to enrich the order of probability. The appraisal of social reality will thus increasingly narrow down the gulf between theory and research with reference to the possible outcome of the social processes. This is how knowledge becomes power in itself, and scientific labour is fused with social action in order to appraise and change the reality.

iBut this means that the social reality cannot be appraised wkth the so-called 'open mind' approach of an observer or the 'know-all' attitude of a seer; nor can it be revealed from the 'inown-unknown-*unknowable*' objectification of a transcendentalst. The universe of variation in this case is of known and *knowable* items of information and their valuations, which are compounded with reference to the properties of things constitut-

ing the phenomena and forming the constellations of phenomena. The universe therefore is to be explored inductively and inferentially, by constantly taking note of the dialectical nuances of *iti* (is) and *neti* (is not), in order to answer the four fundamental questions one asks to understand reality, namely: what is it, how is it, why is it, and what will it be?

Yājñavalkya in *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad* (2.3.6, 3.9.2 7,4. 2.4, 4.4.22, 4.5.15, etc.) frequently used the phrase *neti neti*, that is 'neither thus (*neti*) nor thus (*neti*)', in order to establish the reality of the supreme being (*iti*). However, in the secular perspective also and whether or not a scientist is a theist, an agnostic, or an atheist, such as, Max Born *vis-à-vis* Einstein (Born, 1956: vi-vii, 90), the dialectical principle thus involved in drawing an efficient inference from a *null* consideration is indispensable for the appraisal of social reality in a precise, unequivocal, and comprehensive manner.

Which means that scientific labour cannot just support or oppose an 'alternative' or roam in the wilderness of a metatheory. Instead, the appropriate attitude to employ this kind of labour should follow the lines of Article 10 of *Kenopaniṣad,* provided one accepts its translation by the probabilist P.C. Mahalanobis, which is without a theistic slant:[2]

> I do not think I Know very well
> Nor that I do not Know.
> He Knows who Knows this
> I do not Know and I Know.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. The extracts quoted in this paper from Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Mao are not cited under references because they can be found in any edition of their selected or collected works under the titles mentioned.
2. The references to *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad* and *Kenopaniṣad* have also not been cited, but their original Article numbers are mentioned, for one may consult the original Sanskrit version or its translation in any language.

   The translation of Article 10 of *Kenopaniṣad* was found among the personal unpublished papers of Mahalanobis after his death in 1972. It may be of interest to compare this translation with that by the social reformer Rammohun Roy (Nag and Burman, 1945-58: II, 18) which is as follows:

"Not that I suppose that I know God thoroughly, nor do I suppose that I do not know him at all; as, among us, he who knows the meaning of the above-stated assertion, is possessed of the knowledge respecting God, viz. 'that I neither know him thoroughly, nor am entirely ignorant of him.'"

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Philosophical Theory and Social Reality

Daya Krishna

IT IS A COMMON PRESUPPOSITION of cognitive enterprise that what is real and is sought to be known is independent of the beliefs of men. Yet social reality is the sort of reality where "beliefs" in varying degrees are an integral part of the reality itself. They may constitute it wholly or partially, but there can hardly be any social reality in the making of which beliefs do not play any role at all. But if this be the case, we are led to ask what happens to the question of the determination of "truth" and "falsehood" which is so central to the cognitive enterprise and without which it can hardly be regarded as making any sense at all.

There is, of course, a type of reality which is totally created by man and which, at the same time, is sought to be understood by man also. We are obviously referring to works of art which may be taken as paradigmatic examples of such a reality. They *are* sought to be understood, and judgements about them are contested and disputed as if they were "true" or "false". It may be observed that disputes about a work of art are of two kinds—those that ultimately reduce themselves to matters of fact related to it, surrounding it, and concerning it, and those that relate to what may be called its evaluation. It may also be observed that it is the former alone that can be settled in principle; as for the latter, they *are ultimately* a matter of personal preference and taste. But personal preference and taste are not separate or independent of the understanding of a work of art and the disputes usually concern the understanding itself. As for the "factual" questions surrounding a work of art, they are either completely irrelevant to its understanding or only

remotely and indirectly related to it.

Nevertheless, it may be argued that what is relevant is the other person's (or persons') beliefs who individually (or jointly) created the work and not the beliefs of the person who tries to understand them. Or, to be perhaps more accurate still, it is the beliefs of the person who tries to understand them. Or, to go a stage even further, it is the beliefs of the person about the belief, or beliefs, of the person, or persons, who created the work that is the most relevant thing in understanding and evaluating the work one is trying to understand. And it is by affecting these beliefs in some way or other, that the disputant tries to change the understanding and consequently the judgement of the person regarding the work of the art concerned.

All this may be dismissed as the "intentionalist" fallacy and we may be reminded of the structuralist and the neo-structuralist critique which is supposed to have conclusively refuted such an approach towards the understanding of any work of art. Not only this. We may be told of the intrinsic impossibility of knowing what the creator's intentions were or even that the understanding and appreciation of a work that is anonymous suffers in any essential way from such a situation. The debate may be widened still further and we may be accused of ignoring the recent work in the philosophy of action where it has been argued as cogently as it can ever be done in these domains that even for understanding human actions we need not postulate any such entities as "ends" or "purposes".

We are not interested in entering the debate here on one side or the other. The issue as we see it is not how this "understanding" is itself to be understood, but whether it is *different* from the type of understanding we usually seek with respect to natural phenomena in science these days. It is possible that nature may be approached in the way we try to understand a work of art, but then it would be dubbed as "superstition". The converse process where we approach a work of art as we approach nature in science these days is, on the other hand, dubbed "scientific", which is indeed the most honorific term in the cognitive culture today. The search for a monistic understanding of one type or the other is laudable, but whether it equally succeeds in all realms is questionable. And even if

one were to doubt this in the face of almost unquestionable evidence, one would have to concede that there *are* alternative ways of understanding unless one were to restrict the term and confine its use to one's own way of understanding alone.

The problem of beliefs in constituting reality is not so far-fetched as it may seem at first sight. Nor is it confined to art or its understanding alone which, for most people, is far removed from what they consider "real",—the shadow of a shadow, the world of make-believe wherein we enter only to seek entertainment or *rasa* or delight. But unfortunately for those who think like this, *this is the* central problem of the social sciences also, since a large part of the socio-cultural reality which they deal with is equally the result of what men believed and the action they undertook consequent upon those beliefs. The situation in which we are born and in which we have to live and grow is something that seems to be as much given as anything in nature and yet it is mostly the creation of men and would not have been what it is but for their beliefs and actions. Had they been different, the situation would have been different, and in a most profound sense we would have been different too. How well we know this in the fields of language and religion where what we are born to, or born into, seems alone the most natural and real to us. But this is true in other fields as well. There is no area of economy or polity or society which does not share this characteristic and hence is *not given* and *created* at the same time.

What is given in these realms is, to a very large extent, what one believes to be given; and what one creates through one's action is again the result, to a very large extent, of what one believes to be the case. What is given is not there apart from the beliefs entertained about it by men, just as what one believes to be the case determines one's action irrespective of the fact whether or not the belief is true. In the realm of the mind, what is *believed to be true* functions almost in the same way as what is true, and thus the radical difference between truth and falsehood is replaced by the dynamic difference be-tween what is believed to be true and what is not so believed. In fact, the latter category may itself be divided into two parts, the one relating to that which one considers to be positively false and the other concerning that about which one is totally

ignorant. The latter is, in a sense, a strange category; for as Hegel has pointed out, if we were completely ignorant of something, we would not even be aware whether or not we were ignorant. But in spite of what Hegel has said, we all are aware of what may be called the generalized fact of our ignorance, the fact that we do not know about many things and that, at a certain point in time, no one else may know about them either.

The beliefs that we hold to be true or false, combined with the awareness that there is a large area about which we are ignorant, give to our actions always the character of a gamble, a wager, through which we bet on a possible outcome that might or might not occur. This character of all action is further strengthened by the fact that we are not only aware of our ignorance regarding large areas which are relevant to our action but are also aware, on the basis of our past experience, that many of the beliefs that we hold to be true may turn out to be false, and those we consider false may turn out to be true. Further, even the beliefs that we hold to be true or false, we do not hold them with the same degree of certitude. Not only this, the certitude itself fluctuates not merely with the variation in relevant evidence, which it should, but also with the variation in our psycho-physical, or rather psycho-physiological, conditions which are epistemically irrelevant to it. But whether, or not those conditions are epistemically relevant, they do determine action which brings about a sort of situation into being which the other actors in the situation cannot but react to as real.

The role of beliefs, whether true or false, or whether held on grounds which are epistemically relevant or irrelevant, in constituting social reality can hardly be disputed. The difference in this regard between knowledge and belief as sought to be made out by certain philosophers is mostly, if not totally, irrelevant. One would of course act on knowledge if one claims to have it, but one would act even if one knows that one does not have knowledge, for action cannot wait. Thus, a man of action or, for that matter, anyone involved in action at any level whatsoever, has to take the help of whatever he can get hold of in the situation, however ill-founded or mistaken it may be from the cognitive point of view. And as life is a business

of acting, whether one likes it or not, we may hazard the view that from its viewpoint the distinction between knowledge and belief or between true and false belief is of secondary importance. What matters, on the other hand, is the success or the failure of action or, at a deeper level, of moral satisfaction or dissatisfaction, or perhaps of spiritual peace or joy or the opposite of these sentiments.

In a profound sense therefore knowledge has been irrelevant to man except of the moral or the spiritual kind, or when it occurs in a causal context promising control and power over phenomena. The religions of the world have therefore been primarily concerned with moral or spiritual issues and very seldom, except in esoteric contexts, with causality for control over external processes. The secular knowledge about these was taken for granted and given a secondary status with the clearest indication that, by itself alone, it was incapable of providing that which makes man distinctively human.

As philosophy, at least in its early stages, was closely related to religion and arose in fact as a ratiocinative counterpart to it, the predominant concerns of religion were also the concerns of philosophy. There was of course the added and the most pertinent difference that while religion was mostly revelatory or intuitive in character, philosophy had to give reasons for whatever it held to be true. This was as much true when it supported the claims of revelation as when it denied them. The gradual emergence of the autonomy of reason simultaneously ensured the autonomy of philosophy. The critical and cognitive functions of reason were reflected most clearly in the philosophical enterprise, which is perhaps the purest self-reflective activity of reason itself.

This, however, is not the place to go into the history of philosophy, or even to raise the question of the possibility of different philosophical traditions, in the face of the claim of reason to be essentially universal in nature. Rather the role of reason itself, both in its pure and in its practical aspects, in the shaping and constitution of human reality shall be our chief concern. "Man is a rational animal" is a saying too old at least in the western tradition of thought about man and if to be rational at least in its purer reaches is to be philosophical, then it would not be doing any serious injustice to the statement

if we were to read it as "man is a philosophical animal".
Philosophy at the deepest level, we have said, is the self-articu-
lation of reason and perhaps the best way of such an articulation
is the engagement of reason in a dialogue with itself. The
dialogue may ostensibly be with one's own self, or with that of
another, but it is always the dialogue of reason with itself. The
intra-individual or the inter-individual nature of the dialogue is
always there and thus reason has a social dimension inbuilt in
its very nature. This dimension, it should be noted, is primarily
critical in nature in that the first response, whether of oneself
or of the other, to what has been stated is almost always to find
faults with it. The second impulse of course is to defend what
was stated against the objection and thus continue the cycle
indefinitely till either one gets tired or the attention shifts to
something else. The re-stated position after one has tried to
meet the objection, however, is not the same as it was before
the objection was made. It is different in the sense that one is
aware of the possibility of an alternative even though it has
been rejected, at least for the time being; and this awareness
affects radically the original position in that it makes it at least
slightly tentative in character.

The dialectic that this inherent self-articulation of reason
gives rise to, however, is neither Hegelian nor Marxian or
Platonic though it may sometimes display the characteristics
of either of them. This is so for the simple reason that there is
no predetermined form which the objection has necessarily to
take or the way that the reply has to take. True logicians have
tried to frame the rules of the game, but as the history of
philosophy has shown, they have been proved wrong. The
history of the self-articulation of reason has proved larger than
the history of logic though, at least in recent times, the latter
has tried hard to catch up with the former.

Yet even though there is an essential unpredictability in the
dialectical interplay of reason, in its life of objection and
counter-objection, and even though it has in substance refused
to be bound by the so-called rules of logic (while paying formal
obeisance to them), it has always claimed universal validity for
itself. And this has been as much true of those who have
gleefully cut at the very root of the autonomy of reason as of
those who have been struck by its transcendent majesty as at

its Bar everything is finally judged. Whether it be Marxists, or
the Freudians, or their innumerable epigoni who call them-
selves sociologists of knowledge, each and all of them regard
what they say as universally valid. The story is the same with
all those who argue for universal determinism; they *alone* are an
exception to it. And as each one is an exception in his own eyes,
and not an exception in the eyes of others, we have the amus-
ing spectacle of everyone regarding himself as free, and what he
says as universally valid, while all the rest think otherwise.
The social reality that the comedy of presuppositions generates
is not our immediate concern, though we cannot let the
opportunity pass without pointing it out as another example
of how beliefs, whether true or false, generate their own
reality.

The articulation of reason therefore has always a double
aspect. On the one side it is always contested, while on the
other, if the objection is treated as a relevant objection, some-
thing is shared between the contestants and treated as beyond
dispute and perhaps as beyond even possible dispute. To put
the same point in another way, nothing can be beyond possible
dispute but something has to be so, if the dispute is to be
carried on in rational terms and not to degenerate into mutual
abuse or sullen silence. Perhaps the universality is evidenced
by the often unacknowledged mutual modification of the views
of the concerned disputants, and their return to the dispute
again and again after having discovered new points for or
against the position in the interval. The disputes within a
shared culture display this characteristic in a pre-eminent sense.
But what about the disputes between cultures? To the extent
they confine themselves only to abuse or to fighting or to
separate, segregated living in geographical regions culturally
closed to one another, they have alternative frameworks with
little in common with each other. But the moment they enter
into a dialogue, the situation changes; the objection necessitates
the need for a reply and the reply provides the stimulus for a
new counter-objection.

The life of philosophy, then, is the life of reason and the life
of reason is the life of objection and counter-objection, and
though this may degenerate into a game where display of skill
alone matters, at a deeper and more serious level it is always in

the service of a restless search for the truth which can never rest at any particular place for long. What has this play of reason, both in its play aspect and in its serious aspect, to do with the social reality? Very little, if the latter is conceived of as being static and seen at a fixed moment in time only. But let it be seen as changing and fluid and in the perspective of time and history, and the situation would appear to be substantially different. The surface ripple of today's interplay of reason may become tomorrow's determinative structure and thus give form and substance to social reality and shape its texture.

The trouble with the term "social reality" is that it not only means so many things, but also has so many levels, each substantially and even radically different from the other. Yet whatever the level, there is always a creative, and a collectively creative, element in it which gives it that characteristic freedom which "nature", at least when it is cognitively apprehended, seems to lack entirely. Embedded within the constraints provided by "nature" itself, yet never knowing how far they can be stretched, avoided, or even overcome, man, both individually and collectively, tries to build another order (or rather orders) of reality, each of which creates not only new levels of freedom, but also new levels of constraint which non-human "nature" has never known.

In this continuous interplay of freedom and constraint, what perhaps has mattered most is the conceptual imagination whose paradigmatic example is the philosopher who combines in himself not only the functions of the scientist and the artist, but also, perhaps at the deepest level, the functions of language itself, which makes man essentially man. To give shape to thought, to provide it with the terms of its own articulation, to lay down the norms of meaningful discourse, and, at a larger remove, of meaningful living itself, are some of the things that philosophy does and, in doing so, shapes social reality both in its actual and in its ideal aspects. The categories of thought, the meaningfulness of questions, the relevance of answers, the perennialness of problems, the tentativeness of solutions—all these are as much the life-blood of philosophy as of social reality. Yet philosophy seems to be the most abstract and useless of activities, little related to either the individual or the social reality where, so to say, the action is. In this it is close to art, which

also shapes our imagination, or ways or looking at things and feeling about them, and yet appears as the most superfluous and dispensable activity (apart from sport) in which man engages. The hard core of social reality seems to lie in economy and polity which deals with issues of wealth and power in whose context everything else appears either as a superfluity or as a luxury. Those are the games in which adult children engage in the name of art and philosophy, sports, and religion.

Yet it is equally true that, in retrospect, we judge societies, cultures, and civilizations by what they have created in these domains. And even when we take political and economic structures seriously into account, as has been urged once again by some scholars recently, it is primarily as an indirect evidence of what was achieved in the realm of knowledge, or the achievement of the good, or even in the creation of efficient organizational structures through which one could achieve anything whatsoever.

The radical difference between these two modes of evaluation, the one predominantly prevalent in the context of the present and the other in that of the past, may be understood in terms of the differing primacy of the causal and the meaningful dimensions in human life. The former is important in the context of the present, as it is there alone that the lever of action can be pressed and thus the wielders of power, whether they be political or economic, bureaucratic or military, get their overwhelming influence and importance in history. Yet the moment they are no more, or they get out of the positions of power, they become irrelevant and those who tried in any way to give meaning and significance to human lives come to the fore. And this position they occupy for all times, their influence depending upon the greatness and the depth of the vision they opened to man. Also much of this influence becomes a part of the culture and is acquired unconsciously through the tradition into which an individual is born.

Culture in fact is the name we give to what gives meaning to our lives and provides us with a map to find our way therein. And philosophy is culture become self-conscious of itself; and self-consciousness, as always, is not only critical of what *is*, but reaches out to what *can* be or even what *ought* to be. Art in a sense, as we have already said, does the same. But for all

its expressiveness, it is dumb in a profound sense—in the sense in which someone who cannot express himself through language regards himself and is regarded by others as dumb. The literary arts of course have the advantage of language and, in a sense, the philosopher does with the concept what the literary artist does with the image or the metaphor. But even with all the advantages of language, the literary arts are in the same position as the other arts. This may seem strange but if one reflects on the fact that any work of art, including those that are literary in character, can speak only for itself and by itself, what we are trying to say would perhaps become more clear. A work of art is, so to say, untranslatable and essentially so. The problem is usually posed in terms of translation from one language to another, but that is to misconceive the problem. Can a work of art be made more intelligible by saying what it says through another work in the same medium or even in another medium? Can what a painting or a poem or a statue "say" be said with any greater clarity by trying to convey it through another painting or poem or statue? To pose the question is to see its absurdity. A work of art says what it says and none else can say it better or perhaps even worse. One has therefore to return again and again to the work itself for apprehending what it says and all the attempt to elucidate it any further or through some other means appears intrinsically doomed to failure.

Philosophy, on the other hand, is articulateness itself. It, in a sense, is the dialogue of reason with itself. And this dialogue is as unending as the life of the Mind or even, to a certain extent, the life of the Spirit. Social reality includes, besides these, the life of the Body also—its needs and its dreams. The realms interpenetrate and create a field where articulate dialogue is the necessity, both within the realm and between the realms. Reason is the great mediator between the realms, and philosophy, being the self-articulation reason, envelops, penetrates, and interrelates all the realms. There is therefore, as everybody knows, a philosophy of everything—the most abstract and irrelevant, and yet the most essential essence of every discipline and of the reality it deals with.

Philosophy thus is interwoven in the fabric of social reality in many ways. It provides those basic categories in terms of

which a people try to make sense of their experience, the basic questions which are accepted as meaningful and worth asking in any particular culture. It also determines in a subtle way the directions in which the answers may be meaningfully sought. Besides these, at a still deeper level, it provides for that perennial openness of all human enterprises by subjecting them to a healthy sceptical scrutiny and bringing to bear considerations from other realms on the one that is usually the subject of closed dogmatic considerations of its own.

This intermeshing of philosophy, culture, and social reality, however, raises fundamental problems for philosophy itself. The philosophical enterprise is essentially universal in character; at least, it always aspires to be such. On the other hand, both culture and social reality are essentially diverse and pluralistic in character. They have such a character not merely as a matter of historical fact, but also as a matter of aspiration. And this is because they cherish the unique differences which set them apart from others, and provide them those points of individuality and identity without which no member of a society feels himself or herself. This deep difference in aspiration creates that basic tension in every culture between the drive to universality and the assertion of separateness, difference, and individuality. The resolution of the tension lies in understanding the relationships between history and philosophy, between time and eternity, between the particular and the universal—relationships which themselves can be formulated in various ways and which have been the subject of perennial dispute in philosophy. Perhaps the diversity in social reality may be traced to these alternatives themselves, some of which have been accepted and lived through by certain cultures, and others, by other cultures. Social reality may thus be seen as the concretization of philosophy in a medium determined by the underlying biological structure of man, and as philosophy itself is diverse, so is the social reality of man.

Reflections on the Nature of
Historical Reality

Ravinder Kumar

I PROPOSE to raise in this essay a few issues about the nature of historical reality and its relationship with the wider domain of philosophical speculation about social reality. The discipline of history is, in the main, a discipline which addresses itself to empirical reality. It seeks to reconstruct the past, as a totality, from the fragmentary evidence which the actors of the past have bequeathed to the posterity; or from the partial record they have left of their activities, in the form of the written word, or through other manifestations of their material and intellectual culture. For this reason the energies of professional historians have been largely directed towards the aggregation and analysis of empirical data. Also for this reason professional historians have left to others—scholars in the realm of social theory and philosophical speculation—the vital task of theorizing about the nature of historical reality, and in the process providing them with a sensitive understanding of the central place occupied by historical activity and historical understanding in the overall scheme of our intellectual endeavour.

The reluctance of the professional historian to speculate about the nature of his discipline is the most unfortunate phenomenon. It is unfortunate for a number of reasons, some of which are obvious and others not so obvious. Even a cursory examination of the nature of the discipline will reveal that any understanding of historical activity—its raw materials as well as its logical structure, its place on the map of knowledge, as well as its perception of the human condition—requires as much of

a theoretical underpinning as of an empirical underpinning.
No scholar can really acquire credibility as an historian who
does not understand the nature of what the practitioners of
the craft refer to as "source materials". These source materials,
as I shall explain later, are the very raw stuff of history; the
basic building blocks out of which the historical past is re-
constructed. A thorough understanding of source materials, of
their range as well as of their limitations, provides the historian
with vital clues about the nature of his discipline. Source
materials tell him what he can do. They also tell him what he
cannot do. Moreover they enable the historian to select and
locate those realms of social theory which are most relevant to
historical activity, and can be drawn upon with great profit
into the reconstruction of the past. Most important of all, a
scholarly understanding of source materials enables the his-
torian to provide a rigorous basis for the development and
refinement of social theory, to embrace the expanding vistas of
social reality.

To emphasize the empirical basis of historical scholarship is
to focus attention on the obvious. For, as we have suggested
above, the empirical underpinning of the discipline of history
is something which is understood fully well by the practitioners
of the craft. What is less well understood, if it is understood
at all, is the relationship of creative tension between theory
and practice in historical scholarship. We have already spoken
of the central position occupied by the aggregation of empiri-
cal data, and their structuring into a logically consistent and
stylistically elegant narrative, in works of history. We would
now like to approach the problem from the other end, in a
manner of speaking, and look at the role of theory in the recon-
struction of the past by the historians. The moment we raise this
issue, we find ourselves trespassing on the territory, properly
speaking, of social philosophy and related areas of intellectual
enquiry. Speculative disciplines by their very nature abstract
from social reality and conjure into existence theoretical
formulations which enable us to capture this reality in readily
comprehensible and easily communicable codes, although all this
is achieved at the cost of distorting what is being observed and
analysed. Yet the seamless web of the past, and the relation-
ship of cause and effect between what happened yesterday and

the living present, imposes upon the historian the logical necessity of drawing upon social theory, despite its distorting character, when he seeks to recapture a particular facet of what happened in the past. Without some conceptual under-pinning, the professional historian's task would become a mind-less activity, indistinguishable from naive antiquarianism. However, the fact that all historical activity rests upon assump-tions and social theories, explicit or implicit, should not blind us to the distorting character of theory itself. It is this distort-ing character which imparts to works of historical scholarship a significance over and above the specific insights which they offer regarding specific themes and particular subjects.

In the discussion that follows I propose to reflect upon the nature and the quality of historical activity, its weaknesses as well as its strengths, its range as well as its limitations, with some of the aforementioned considerations in view. I shall, in the first instance, critically examine the intellectual climate in which the discipline of history crystallized in the nineteenth century. Next I shall look at problems such as the objectivity and the growth of our understanding about the past in historical literature. Finally I shall speculate briefly on the central theme of this essay, namely, what do we understand by histori-cal reality?

I

While the discipline of history is, at one level, a discipline of considerable antiquity, it owes most of its contemporary structure and content to the intellectual climate of the western world in the nineteenth century. This was a century when the Industrial Revolution had transformed the material basis of social life in Great Britain and in western Europe. Along with this transformation came a great expansion of knowledge in the realm of the natural sciences. The growth of knowledge put at our disposal instruments for the generation of material wealth, and for exercising control over nature, the like of which were unknown to mankind in the preceding centuries. The achievements of the natural sciences, achievements which were closely related to the Industrial Revolution, and resulted in the expansion of our intellectual horizons in various direc-

tions, came about through a mode of acquiring knowledge—
the so-called scientific method—which sought to understand
the nature, the structure, and the behaviour of the material
world through laws and generalizations which, on the one
hand, rested upon logical induction and, on the other, were
susceptible to empirical verification and capable of predictive
explanation. The triumphs of the natural sciences inevitably
influenced the minds of scholars who were concerned with man
and society rather than with matter and nature. There gradually
grew among such scholars—it would be legitimate to call them
social scientists, and it would be proper to include historians
among them—the belief that the methodology of the natural
sciences, a methodology which they described as positivism,
would yield rich dividends if utilized for an understanding of
the human condition and the social destiny of man.[1]

The technique of scholarly research and historical writing,
as we know it today, dates back to the nineteenth century
when the discipline of history assumed its present form in the
hands of some distinguished European scholars. The most
pervasive influence upon these scholars was the influence of
positivism. Under this influence, men like Ranke and
others who accepted his intellectual leadership took upon
themselves the task of studying the past as it 'actually existed'.[2]
The principal means to such an objective recreation of the
past was the documentation which the political actors of
antiquity had left behind in the public and private archival
repositories of the countries of Europe. Painstakingly, docu-
ment by document, through a critical examination of the re-
cords left for the posterity, Ranke and the scholars of his
persuasion sought to reconstruct the fabric of political society
in the past centuries through a combination of accuracy, trained
imagination, and rigour. The spirit of inquiry which informed
their labour was no different from the spirit of inquiry which
informed the labour of the natural scientists. Over and above
this, they acted in the belief that their efforts would yield
intellectual dividends, in our understanding of historical reality,
no less significant than the dividends earned by the natural
scientists in our understanding of material reality.

From the very outset the positivism, which inspired the
historians of the nineteenth century, was flawed in at least two

important respects. While it is true that Ranke and his disciples, apart from stressing the fundamental importance of archival materials, subjected such materials to critical scrutiny, the like of which was conspicuous by its absence in the earlier phases of historical inquiry, it is also true that their use of the inductive method as the only valid basis of knowledge was innocent of the realization that the inductive method was not an end in itself. If the analogy of the natural sciences was to hold true for the discipline of history, then the application of the scientific method to the study of history would yield generalizations that could be expected to throw a flood of illuminating light upon the nature of man and the evolution of human society. The positivists, or at any rate those among them who devoted themselves to the study of history, never really went beyond the first stage of the positivist programme, the stage of aggregating empirical data. The crucial task of drawing up explanatory models or generalizations rich in their predictive potential was something which wholly eluded them. Indeed this crucial constituent of the positivist programme eluded the historians to an extent where the aggregation of empirical data became the *summum bonum* of their intellectual endeavour.[3] The imposing volumes of the *Cambridge Modern History* inspired by Lord Acton stand as a monumental example of this style of intellectual and historical activity.[4]

If the historians, committed to a positivist worldview, had merely shirked the task of constructing a "grand theory" out of the data which they had aggregated, the harm which they could possibly have inflicted upon the discipline of history would have been of little consequence. However, a more serious result of their activity was that more often than not assumptions, hypotheses, and social theories picked up at random coloured their approach to the examination of social reality in the past. Such assumptions, hypotheses, and social theories also distorted the contents of the voluminous writings which they offered to the community of scholarship with such mindless eloquence. A notorious instance of how unconscious commitment to values shaped the creative activity of the positivist historians can be seen in the case of no less a scholar than the great Ranke himself.[5] On the surface, Ranke wrote his monumental works without the mediation of ideology between

the scholar and his materials. In reality, Ranke's deep commitment to Protestant values, and his equally deep commitment to the romantic nationalism that was activising the German people contemporaneously, deeply coloured his historical writings, unconsciously rather than consciously. The mediaeval belief that nature abhors a vacuum is particularly true of the human mind. If a scholar does not equip his intellect with sense, it is likely that it may get infected with nonsense. It is not only the great historians of the nineteenth century, such as Ranke, who offered us a version of positivism, dwarfed and distorted in equal proportions, in their historical writings. Contemporary historians are no less susceptible to these failings. The positivist influence on historical writing therefore has been an influence which leaves much to be desired. Even if we do not raise at this stage the philosophical question whether man can actively shape his destiny—of course in the context of his material circumstances—a question which positivism brushes aside in a most cavalier fashion, it is nevertheless true that the positivist theory has been applied in a very unhappy manner by the historians. The results of their intellectual endeavour are therefore the reverse of satisfactory, and it would only be proper for the historians to abandon the positivist worldview as an unrewarding means of understanding the past of human society.

We are advocating the rejection of positivism, as a tool for conceptual analysis in history and in the social sciences, only partly because scholars have in the past taken a very limited view of its scope and its potential. We are advocating the rejection of the positivist worldview also because even in its most comprehensive version it remains a very limited if not ill-conceived method of acquiring knowledge in the realm of the social sciences, or in the domain of the natural sciences. The fact of the matter is that today even the natural scientists in all probability look askance at the simplistic outlook of positivist ideology. They are further inclined to reject, as a result of the growth of theoretical as well as empirical knowledge in the natural sciences, the positivist understanding of laws, generalizations, and explanations as far too rigid and schematic an understanding of the complex material reality which they are engaged in exploring. The natural scientists would

argue, for instance, that their perception of material phenomena is a statistical and aggregate perception of such phenomena. The sort of certainties their peers in the nineteenth century assumed to exist belong to the realm of fantasy rather than to the domain of reality. Material objects and material phenomena in other words are much more elusive of precise formulation than was assumed by the natural scientists in the nineteenth century, in the first flush of the victories which they won over matter and nature.

Whatever be the relevance of positivism for the acquisition of knowledge in the natural sciences, we are dealing with a qualitatively different universe of discourse when we consider philosophical theory and its relationship with man and society. Unlike inanimate matter, man is a sentient being, with a capacity to comprehend and to conceptualize; a capacity, over and above this, to translate his understanding of himself, and his material no less than his cultural environment, into social action directed towards the achievement of specific goals. We are not suggesting here that man is free to shape his world in accordance with ideas, or notions, or Utopian dreams which he finds attractive and desirable. We are merely suggesting that man has the opportunity, and the capacity, to shape his future within the objective constraints of the material and cultural reality which surrounds him. In other words, when it comes to purposive social action, man is not a completely free agent. His conceptualization as well as his activism has to take account of the material environment in which he is placed. At the same time, man is not a wholly passive being either, drifting in time and space at the mercy of forces, or elements, which constitute his material and cultural environment.

Because the social sciences as well as history are concerned with man, severally and collectively, any social theory which seeks to provide us with insights into the human condition has to take into account the potentialities of the human-intellect. As we have suggested earlier, this intellect enables man to become an active participant in (though not the sole determinant of) the historical process. For this reason, conceptualization in the social sciences, not excluding history, where the subjects of study are themselves the instruments of intellectual

comprehension and social action, is qualitatively different from conceptualization in the natural sciences. Even if positivism as a mode of intellectual enquiry were to be valid for the natural sciences, which it is not, it is clear that it could contribute very little to our understanding of human society, contemporaneously or historically. The positivist legacy which we have outlined in this essay is a legacy which we would do well to exercise from our intellectual consciousness. Only after such a consummation can we proceed towards a rational understanding of our past, and apply this understanding to the creation of an equitable society in our midst.

II

The rejection of the conceptual framework devised by Ranke for the discipline of history can, in some respects, be a traumatic experience for the scholar. For whatever be its shortcomings, and we have dwelt upon them at considerable length in this essay, Ranke's method had about it an air of certainty, a quality of self-confidence, which sustained the historical profession, at least in the English world, for virtually a century. This certainty and self-confidence rested on the belief that it was possible to use archival sources for re-creating the past of human society with a degree of objectivity that was comparable to the degree of objectivity which scholars attain in the natural sciences. Once we reject this belief, once we assume that even the aggregation of empirical data, and their analysis to re-construct the past, rests upon implicit, if not explicit, presuppositions, then the whole edifice of historical writing, as conceived by scholars in the nineteenth century, crashes to the ground. For the certainties of historical knowledge, the certainties of which Ranke and his disciples were so proud, are then seen to rest on the most tenuous of grounds. Indeed the very reconstruction of the past, as something objectively real, is now open to question, since this reconstruction appears to be a product of the historical imagination, inspired by social theories to which a scholar stands committed.

All this is not to suggest that Ranke's contribution to historiography deserves to be rejected in its entirety. Indeed in two specific areas the innovations introduced by Ranke have become

a part and parcel of the intellectual armoury of the historian and influence his work today no less than they did during the nineteenth century. The first seminal change which Ranke introduced in historical scholarship was the technique of drawing upon archival materials for the reconstruction of the past. These archival materials were bodies of documentation created by the actors of the past; and the innovation lay in rejecting second-hand and "after-the-event" appreciations of situations, for materials generated in the actual process of social formation or political decision-making. The rigorous use of archival materials is a principle to which historical scholarship has remained faithful since the time of Ranke. It is also a principle which distinguishes historical scholarship from scholarship in other social sciences, since the crystallization of the discipline in its present form. To an extent this dependence upon archival sources gives to the discipline of history a very conservative and, in some respects, a very limited, character. Indeed let me confess that historians, precisely for this reason, appear to scholars based in the more speculative disciplines to be somewhat lacking in the faculty of imagination. However, if historians as a class seem a little timid in their creative work, by that very measure their writings have a quality of rigour, a capacity for endurance, which we rarely encounter in other social science disciplines. Historians, at their worst, often descend into the examination of trivia. Yet they can rarely be accused of losing contact with reality. Perhaps some of the more speculative disciplines in the social sciences concerned with man, society, and the human condition could well take a lesson or two from history in this regard.

In focusing on the seminal importance of archival materials for the reconstruction of the past, Ranke also introduced another crucial element in historical writing, though it would be only fair to point out that he was not a pioneer in this respect. This was the convention of subjecting the document, or the record, to be used in historical writing to critical scrutiny before it was accepted as a legitimate instrument for the reconstruction of the past. As every scholar knows, a document (or a fragment of evidence) surviving from the past provides one with a partial glimpse of reality, as seen through the eyes of an individual who has his own biases and preconceptions.

Those biases and preconceptions find reflection in what the individual writes, about whom he chooses to write, and how he perceives things. In other words, historians are fully conscious of the highly subjective character of the materials which they use in reconstructing the past. Two devices are employed by the historian to remedy the flawed quality of the materials which he utilizes for his research. First, the historian attempts to reduce the quantum of bias and distortion in his evidence through the application of suitable correctives. Secondly, the historian draws upon a multiplicity of perceptions—admittedly all of them subjective—in the belief that through such a process he may be able to reconstruct an authentic and objective past, qualitatively superior to the subjective evidence which constitutes the basis of his writings.

From what we have observed above it should be clear that our repudiation of Rank'e legacy is by no stretch of imagination a complete repudiation of the contributions of this distinguished scholar. Indeed while rejecting Ranke's view of the scientific character of his work, we are at the same time accepting, as the very basis of the discipline of history, some of his fundamental contributions to the historian's craft. If this be so, then we are faced with a number of important questions: What is the quality of objective truth which the historian is able to capture in his writings? Does historical writing rest entirely upon the shifting sands of social theory? Is our perception of the past transformed with every change in the climate of philosophical thought in human society? Is there, or is there not, something like a real growth in our understanding of the past? Do we move from one fashion in historiography to another, like blind men blundering in the dark?

The answers to some of the questions which we have posed above lie at the very core of the historian's craft, and the character of his discipline. It would be appropriate for us to first outline briefly our response to these questions, and then illustrate our stance by drawing upon specific examples of historical scholarship. We believe that the empirical data which form the basis of historical writing have an autonomous existence, quite distinct from the philosophical preconceptions which inform scholars in their intellectual activity. We further believe that over a period of time there is an increase in the

range as well as in the depth of our reconstruction of the past. There is a corresponding increase, with the passage of time, in the complexity of the detail, as well as in the sophistication of the overview, which the historian is able to communicate to his scholarly audience. The induction of a novel social theory for the purposes of historical writing does not necessarily lead to the repudiation, or the rejection, of earlier perceptions. Quite the contrary. A new theory often leads the scholar to explore fresh facets of social reality, thereby providing evidence about the past that is complementary to existing knowledge, and making our understanding of this past more comprehensive and all-embracing. Over and above this, one cannot but be struck by the fact that scholars whose intellectual vision is shaped by different social theories often find themselves in agreement about the events of the past. The crucial differences between such scholars lie not in their assessment of political reality and social transformation in centuries past. They often lie in their assessment of the quality of such transformations.

Our argument would perhaps be easy to follow if we examined the findings of historical scholarship in relation to specific facets of the past. To take one outstanding example: No historian today would deny the fact that in the year 1789 a very complex, and a very fundamental, transformation took place in French society; and there is also a consensus among scholars in describing this transformation as a revolution which marked a turning-point in the history of France, and indeed of mankind as a whole. Where scholars differ is not in their acceptance of a revolutionary transformation in France in 1789. The differences between scholars lie in their assessment of the material as well as the moral character of this transformation, and its repercussions on French society and indeed on the rest of the human race.[6]

Briefly put, three perceptions of the French Revolution can be discerned in the historical literature which is available on the subject. It is possible to locate conservative historians, scholars with a negative stance towards phenomena such as industrialization and democratization, who look upon the French Revolution as the source of a vast majority of the problems which beset human society in our own times. Such historians feel that the changes brought about by the cataclysmic events

of 1789 in France and in Europe have created more problems
than they have resolved; further, they also believe that the
devolution of political power in the hands of the masses has
been one of the most retrogressive developments in the modern
world. All the ills of contemporary society, whether it be the
rise of authoritarian political systems in some parts of the
globe, or the less-than-rational impulses which often sway
polities governed by the principles of popular democracy, are
attributed by conservative historians to the changes which the
French Revolution introduced, first in the politics of Europe
in the nineteenth century, and next in the politics of Asia
and Africa in the twentieth century.

Although conservative historians subscribing to the views
we have briefly outlined above, have become an increasingly
rare species over period of time, the liberal critique of the
French Revolution is very much of a living reality in the realm
of contemporary historical scholarship. Scholars subscribing to
this viewpoint readily accept the demise of the feudal order in
France, and in the rest of Europe. They also look upon the
emergence of bourgeois society, in the sphere of material
culture no less than in the sphere of intellectual culture, as a
phenomenon which marks a substantial step forward for human
society. However, liberal historians are fully aware of the
fact that the French Revolution was more than just a bourgeois
transformation of the social order. The Revolution also inducted
into the realm of active politics social classes whose material
interests and cultural values were by no means identical to the
interests and values of the middle classes which came into
their own in Europe in the nineteenth century. Even the
populist politics of 1789 in France, and the years which followed
immediately thereafter, reflected the aspiration of these social
classes to conjure into existence a polity which would transcend
the liberal era, and usher in a phase in human history when
the wretched of the earth would come into their own. The
radicalism of such classes during the decade of revolution in
France, or later in the nineteenth century, is anathema to
liberal historians, and earns their thorough condemnation.

Finally, we have a radical historiography of the French
Revolution, which focuses with great precision on the aspira-
tions of the impoverished classes in the cities as well as in the

villages, and demonstrates the extent to which the achievements of the Revolution, although they drew upon the restlessness of such classes, had very little to do with their economic interests or their social needs.

Perhaps the illustration, all too brief, which we have given of different historical perceptions of the French Revolution, substantiates the observation that social theory often provides complementary, instead of conflicting, perceptions of the past in the shape of historical scholarship. The three schools of historiography to which we have referred above are in agreement about the fundamental importance of the Revolution of 1789 in France to the history of mankind. These schools are also in agreement about the core factual content of this Revolution, though some of the scholars, and here their ideological commitments play a crucial role, stress the role and participation of particular social classes more than they stress the role and participation of others. Where they really differ is in their assessment of the positive achievements, or the negative repercussions, flowing out of the French Revolution. Conservative scholars who are wedded to the feudal order as the basis of good society, regard the French Revolution as the source of all our present problems. Liberal historians, on the other hand, are happy to accept the transfer of power from the feudal classes to the bourgeoisie; they are also happy to accept the emergence of an industrial society, of the market order, and of middle-class politics. However, what appals them is the attempt of the impoverished classes to carry the revolution to a further stage, and introduce radical notions of popular democracy and social equity in the countries of Europe.

III

If we briefly recapitulate our delineation of the nature of historical reality, then a number of observations spring into focus which could bear reiteration before we conclude this essay. We would first like to emphasize that the classical historiography which crystallized around the creative work of Ranke and his disciples is now largely discredited in scholarly circles, although Ranke's emphasis on the central role of archival documentation in the reconstruction of the past

remains one of the core elements of historical research. Archival sources apart, the positivist assumptions on which Ranke's historiography rested has now been rejected in favour of the view that historical understanding and historical reconstruction rest, in the ultimate analysis, upon social theories and upon assumptions about the nature of man and society, which theories and assumptions play a crucial role in giving content and form to the historian's work. However, it is important to strike a note of warning if the rejection of the positivist worldview lends credence to the belief that empirical data and empirical reality play a wholly subordinate and passive role in works of historical scholarship. Indeed we would suggest that if the social reality which the historian explores is to be regarded entirely as a handmaid of speculative theories about man and society, then historians might just as well commit collective suicide. They have no *real* role to play in the intellectual odyssey of mankind. We believe that the discipline of history and the reconstruction of the past, with which history is crucially concerned, retain an autonomy over and above the social theories which assist the scholar in his creative work. Indeed this autonomy of empirical reality is not only crucial to the vitality of the discipline of history. It is also crucial to the development and refinement of social theory. For this reason, as indeed because of the central position which the discipline of history occupies in man's creative endeavour, the historian's task remains as crucial to the cognitive enterprise as a whole as that of the social philosopher and other scholars in the social sciences.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. See the chapter on Comte in Raymond Aron, *Main Comments in Sociological Thought*, Vol. I (London, 1963).
2. For a rigorous appreciation of Ranke see G.P. Gooch, *History and Historians in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1967), pp. 72-122.
3. The distinguished Dutch historian, Peter Geyl, has provided us with an incisive perception of the influence of positivism on Ranke in his essay on Ranke in *Debates with Historians* (London, 1970).
4. For a sensitive portrait of Lord Acton, see "Introduction" in W.H. McWeill, *Lord Acton: Essays in the Liberal Interpretation of History* (Chicago, 1967). Also see Acton's "Letter to Contributors to the Cambridge Modern History" which is reproduced in this volume.

5. See Geyl on Ranke as in note 3 above.
6. See F. Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution* (Trans. by E. Forster) (Cambridge, 1981). Also see H. Ben-Israel, *English Historians on the French Revolution* (Cambridge, 1968).

R.G. Collingwood's View of History

J.S. Grewal

THIS BRIEF ACCOUNT of R.G. Collingwood's view of history has another limitation: it is elementary. It is necessary, first, to be clear about Collingwood's position. And for this, *The Idea of History* is not enough. We must go not only to his *Autobiography* but also to the earliest exposition of his views on history in the *Speculum Mentis*. Once we know his position, the limitation as well as the strength of his theory of history should become evident. That is why this 'critique' of Collingwood's view of history is largely an exposition of his theory. A certain measure of repetition, though avoidable, has been retained in the interest of clarity and consistency.

I

In his *Autobiography*, which was meant to be 'the story of his thought', R.G. Collingwood tells us that as a student at Oxford he was "thoroughly indoctrinated" with the principles and methods of 'realism' as expounded by Cook Wilson. For the Oxford 'realists', according to Collingwood, knowing was 'intuiting' or 'apprehending' some 'reality'. But his own interest in archaeology, which began before World War I, taught him that what one learned depended not merely on what turned up in the trenches but also on what questions one asked:

Here I was only rediscovering for myself, in the practice of historical research, principles which Bacon and Descartes had stated, three hundred years earlier, in connexion with the natural sciences. Each of them had said very plainly

that knowledge comes only by answering questions, and that these questions must be the right questions and asked in the right order.[1]

The 'intuitionist' theory of knowledge appeared to be unsatisfactory in the face of Collingwood's pursuit of historical knowledge based on archaeological evidence. The logic of 'question-and-answer' appeared to apply equally well to other kinds of evidence:

You cannot find out what a man means by simply studying his spoken or written statements, even though he has spoken or written with perfect command of language and perfectly truthful intention. In order to find out his meaning you must also know what the question was (a question in his own mind, and presumed by him to be in yours) to which the thing he has said or written was meant as an answer.[2]

Question and answer, thus, were correlative.

'Realism' was equally unsatisfactory on another score: its irrelevance to moral philosophy. The 'realists' appeared to be telling their pupils that they could study philosophy to know but not to act. Indeed, the great principle of realism was that nothing was affected by being known, and this was true of human action as of anything else. Moral philosophy was only the theory of moral action: it could not therefore make any difference to the practice of moral action. People could act just as morally without it as with it. In short, the 'realist' appeared to say:

I stand here as a moral philosopher; I will try to tell you what acting morally is, but don't expect me to tell you how to do it.[3]

In his *Speculum Mentis*, or 'the map of knowledge', published in 1924, Collingwood declares that "all thought exists for the sake of action. We try to understand ourselves and our world only in order that we may learn how to live."[4]

II

It may be useful to dwell a little more on the earliest express-
ion of Collingwood's views on history in the *Speculum Mentis*
which covers history as well as art, religion, science, and
philosophy, "the chief forms of human experience".[5] He under-
lines the importance of historical writing and historical think-
ing in modern times. Through a long process, history in this
special sense of the word came into being in the eighteenth
century and shot up to a gigantic stature in the nineteenth.

> It is an absolutely new movement in the life of mankind. In
> the sense in which Gibbon and Mommsen were historians,
> there was no such thing as an historian before the eighteenth
> century. There were *rerum questarum scriptores*, annalists
> and compilers of memoirs; but the gulf between a Thucydides
> and a Gibbon is not a mere difference of degree between the
> historian of a short period and the historian of a long. It is
> the difference between the recorder of those facts which
> happen to be directly visible from his own empirical situa-
> tion in history, and the thinker who, defying the empirical
> limitations of time and place, claims for himself, in principle,
> the power to recount the whole infinite history of the
> universe; restricting himself to this part of it or that not
> because he happens to be planted there, but because it is his
> own good pleasure so to restrict himself.

Historical consciousness added a new dimension to this develop-
ment: "the kind of intellectual feats that can be performed by
a Grote or a Gibbon, though they are an essential part of the
historical life, are actually acquired by this life only when it
recognizes itself as historical".[6]

According to Collingwood, the unique feature of this his-
torical consciousness is the recognition of concrete fact. The
scientific consciousness denies the concreteness of this fact, and
therefore in its hands the fact becomes the mere abstract in-
stance of an abstract principle. This in history is called 'elevat-
ing' history to the rank of a science. Fact, in this type of his-
torical error, is supposed to be 'mere' fact and to require supple-

ment from outside in the form of the so-called laws of history.

> The discovery of these is the work of sociology, economics, and kindred sciences. These sciences, so long as they are incorporated within the body of history itself, are useful to it and aid its progress, as do archaeology, numismatics, and other historical sciences; but if they are conceived as ends to which history is the means—engines to which historical fact is so much fuel—they represent a downward movement in the path of thought, an attempt, which may easily be successful, to put back the clock of progress, and a recommendation by the tailless fox for a general decaudation of his brethren.[7]

Logically, Collingwood rejects the notion of laws governing the historical process. If the historian thinks he can lay down *a priori* laws that govern the course of history in the past, present, or future, "if he thinks that there is any way of determining a fact except by straightforward historical inquiry, or that history truly repeats itself in any way whatever, large or small, he is merely a fool". However, generalization or hypothesis is possible, but not unless the historian is prepared to spend years "in the inductive study of coins and title-deeds, peculiarities of grammar and idiom, fragments of architecture and pottery, all the pedantic detail of scholarship and antiquarianism".[8]

The recognition of concrete fact had implications also for prophecy and the historical method. The historian's business is with the fact; and there are no future facts. The whole past and present universe is the field of history, to its remotest parts and in its most distant beginning. Over this field the historian is absolutely free to range in whatever direction he will, limited not by his 'authorities' but by his own pleasure:

> The maturity of historical thought is the explicit consciousness of the truth that what matters is not an historian's sources but the use he makes of them. If they mislead him, the responsibility for being misled is his. It is his business not to lie down under his authorities, but to criticize them: if they intend to deceive him, to outwit

them: if they are silent, to invent means of making them speak. These devices of self-reliant and self-conscious historical thought form what is called historical method.[9]

Collingwood's commitment to the view that history is the affirmation of concrete facts conditions his view of causation. The true historian is never content with stating the facts; he tries to understand them. He has to consider not only what happened but also why it happened. The historical fact of Collingwood already contains all those things within itself:

> To understand the facts is to affirm them not in arbitrary isolation but in their actual relation to their context. The reason why an event happened is sought by the historian not in an abstract scientific law but in facts, and facts alone. The cause of an event in history is its intrinsic relation to other events in history, and the causal nexus is not external to them but lies in their very nature. The motives of historical personages are not psychical forces brooding above the flow of historical events: they are elements in these events, or rather, they are simply these events themselves as proposed and planned by the agents.[10]

In history thus we come upon the idea of an object beyond which there is nothing and within which every part truly represents the whole. This absolute whole is the concrete universal.

> Everything in it is determined by its place in the whole, but this is not determinism because every part determines the whole and therefore by implication every other part: so that each part taken separately may be regarded as the crucial determinant of everything else, just as every separate link bears the whole responsibility for keeping the chain together. Everything in it is as unique as the whole, and the uniqueness of every part is based upon the uniqueness of every other.

The concept of the concrete universal tends to make history an autonomous and a peculiar discipline. The principle of the

structure of the concrete universal is not classification, the abstract concept, but the concrete concept, which is relevance, or implication:

> The only reason why this notion of a concrete universal is thought puzzling or paradoxical is that our attempts at philosophical theory suffer from the obsession of regarding science as the only possible kind of knowledge. For the concrete universal is the daily bread of every historian, and the logic of history is the logic of the concrete universal.[11]

As yet history for Collingwood is not the history of thought. History is the crown and the *reductio ad absurdum* of all knowledge of an objective reality independent of the knowing mind:

> Here for the first time we place before ourselves an object which satisfied the mind; an object individual, concrete, infinite, no arbitrary abstraction or unreal fiction, but reality itself in its completeness. This object is what we have tried and failed to find in art, in religion, and in science. In history we have found it; and we have found it to be an illusion. In its perfect reality it is perfectly unknowable, and our efforts to achieve it can do nothing but frustrate themselves.[12]

This is because the progressive alienation of the mind from its object is complete in history. The world is triumphantly unified as object, only to find itself separated from the mind by a gulf which no thought can traverse.

Collingwood suggests a transition from history to philosophy as self-consciousness. The world of fact which is explicitly studied in history is implicitly nothing but the knowing mind. In this transition history is destroyed, but much belonging to the historical frame of mind is taken over almost unchanged by the philosophical.

> Philosophy, like history, is essentially the assertion of concrete reality, the denial of all abstraction, all generality,

everything in the nature of a law or formula. For this and similar reasons the identification of philosophy with history is far less violent and misleading than its identification with science, religion or art.[13]

III

"My life's work hitherto", said Collingwood over a decade later, "has been in the main an attempt to bring about a *rapprochement* between philosophy and history."[14] One aspect of this *rapprochement* was the realization that philosophy had a history. The problems with which philosophy was concerned were not unchanging. Different philosophies were different attempts not to answer the same but different questions. In Plato's *Republic* the ideal o human society was an ideal conceived by the Greeks of his own time. By the time of Hobbes, people had changed their minds not only about what was desirable. The two ideals were different. Ideals of personal conduct were just as impermanent. The meaning of ideal itself was subject to change.

Metaphysics was now seen by Collingwood as the beliefs of a people at a given time about the general nature of the world and therefore as the presuppositions of their physics. By degrees he found that there was no recognized branch of philosophy to which the principle did not apply. The problems and the solutions proposed had their own history. There were no longer two sets of questions to be asked, one historical and one philosophical, about a given passage in a given philosophical author. "There was one set only, historical."[15]

The other aspect of *rapprochement* between history and philosophy was a philosophy of history. The chief business of twentieth-century philosophy was to reckon with twentieth-century history.[16] First came the realization that scissors-and-paste was not the true foundation of historical method.

> The historian has to decide exactly what it is that he wants to know; and therefore there is no authority to tell him, as in fact (one learns in time) there never is, he has to find a piece of land or something that has got the answer hidden in it, and get the answer out by fair means or foul.

This was akin to Bacon's notion of science. To answer questions about the past, the historian needed something here and now in his present world as his evidence. Thus the past which a historian studies is not a dead past, but a past which in some sense is still living in the present.[17]

A new kind of history as well as a new awareness was needed also to deal with our moral and political difficulties. If action was to be raised to a higher potential, the agent had to open his eyes wider to see more clearly the situation in which he was acting:

> If the function of history was to inform people about the past, where the past was understood as a dead past, it could do very little towards helping them to act; but if its function was to inform them about the present, in so far as the past, its ostensible subject-matter, was incapsulated in the present and constituted a part of it not at once obvious to the untrained eye, then history stood in the closest possible relation to practical life. Scissors-and-paste history, with its ideal of obtaining from authorities ready-made information about a dead past, obviously could not teach man to control human situations as natural science had taught him to control the forces of Nature; nor could any such distilled essence of scissors-and-paste history as had been proposed by Auguste Comte under the name of sociology; but there seemed to be some change that the new kind of history might prove able to do so.[18]

Collingwood expressed his new conception of history in the phrase: "All history is the history of thought." To think historically one had to ask what that person was thinking who made this, wrote this, used this, or designed this. Nothing else could be the object of historical knowledge. In order to know the thought it was necessary that it should have been expressed either in language or in one of the many other forms of expressive activity. The important thing for the historian was to think over again for himself the thought whose expression he was trying to interpret. Historical knowledge thus was the re-enactment in the historian's mind of the thought whose history he was studying.[19]

This new conception of history, more or less fully evolved by about 1930, appeared to give a satisfactory answer to a crucial question forced upon Collingwood's attention by World War I.[20] An unprecedented triumph for natural science, the war was an unprecedented disgrace to the human intellect. It was patently clear that the gigantic increase since about 1600 in man's power to control nature "had not been accompanied by a corresponding increase, or anything like it, in his power to control human situations".[21] What was needed, was not more "good will and human affection" but more "understanding of human affairs and more knowledge of how to handle them".[22] Was it possible to construct a science of human affairs to deal with human situations as skilfully as natural science could deal with situations in the world of nature? "The answer was now clear and certain. The science of human affairs was history."[23]

IV

In *The Idea of History*, Collingwood lays great stress on the importance of historical knowledge in the twentieth century. This had implications for philosophy. The dominant form of knowledge in Classical Greece was mathematics, and Greek philosophy placed mathematics in the centre of its picture. This was the position of theology in the Middle Ages, and of science from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century. Theories of knowledge designed to account for mathematical and theological and scientific knowledge did not touch upon the problem of historical knowledge:

> This did not matter so long as historical knowledge had not yet obtruded itself on the consciousness of philosophers by encountering special difficulties and devising a special technique to meet them. But when that happened, as it did, roughly speaking, in the nineteenth century, the situation was that current theories of knowledge were directed towards the special problems of science, and inherited a tradition based on the study of mathematics and theology, whereas this new historical technique, growing up on all sides, was unaccounted for. A special inquiry was therefore needed whose task should be the study of

this new problem or group of problems, the philosophical problems created by the existence of organized and systematized historical research.[24]

The Idea of History is thus Collingwood's attempt to reckon with 'twentieth-century history'.

In the twentieth century we have a clear idea of the nature, the object, the method, and the value of history. It is a science, or an answering of questions, concerned with human actions in the past, pursued by interpretation of evidence for the sake of human self-knowledge.[25] But people had not always thought of history in this way. The larger part of *The Idea of History* is devoted to historiography from the days of Herodotus to Collingwood's own to mark the stages by which the new conception of history has come into existence.[26]

In the Epilegomena of *The Idea of History* there are seven sections, each with a self-contained argument. This accounts for repetition and overlapping. The Epilegomena also gives the impression of being disjointed. It is necessary to isolate the distinctive point made in each and to see if they are interlinked.

The first section relates to the principle that all history is the history of thought. Axiomatically for Collingwood, without self-knowledge no other knowledge can be critically justified and securely based. Self-knowledge is defined as knowledge not of "man's bodily nature, his anatomy and physiology; nor even a knowledge of his mind, so far as that consists of feeling, sensation, and emotion; but a knowledge of his knowing faculties, his thought or understanding or reason".[27] The methods of natural science were irrelevant for such a study. Scientific method is the right way of investigating nature; the right way of investigating the mind is by the methods of history.[28]

The study of history, consequently, presents peculiar problems. The historian, investigating any event in the past, makes a distinction between what may be called the outside and the inside of an event. By the outside of the event is meant everything belonging to it which can be described in terms of bodies and their movements. By the inside of the event is meant that in it which can only be described in terms of thought. The historian is never concerned with either of these to the exclusion

of the other. He is investigating not mere 'events' but 'actions'. An action is the unity of the outside and the inside of an event. His work may begin by discovering the outside of an event, but it can never end there; he must always remember that the event was an action, and that his main task is to think himself into this action, to discern the thought of its agent.[29]

It is important to see the implication of this realization for Collingwood. "After the historian has ascertained the facts, there is no further process of inquiring into their causes. When he knows what happened, he already knows why it happened."[30] He cannot emulate the scientist in searching for the causes or laws of events. This is implied in the conception of history as the history of thought. In the re enactment of past thought in the historian's own mind is implied not only critical thinking on the part of the historian but also conscious thinking on the part of the human agents of history. Not all human actions therefore are the subject-matter of history:

> So far as man's conduct is determined by what may be called his animal nature, his impulses and appetites, it is non-historical; the process of those activities is a natural process. Thus, the historian is not interested in the fact that men eat and sleep and make love and thus satisfy their natural appetites; but he is interested in the social customs which they create by their thought as a framework within which these appetites find satisfaction in ways sanctioned by convention and morality.[31]

By confining the scope of historical investigation to purposive action Collingwood is able to put forth the view that history is essentially 'knowledge of mind'.

> Unlike the natural scientist, the historian is not concerned with events as such at all. He is only concerned with those events which are the outward expression of thoughts, and is only concerned with these in so far as they express thoughts. At bottom, he is concerned with thoughts alone; with their outward expression in events he is concerned only by the way, in so far as these reveal to him the thoughts of which he is in search.[32]

Past human activities are not a spectacle to be watched, but experiences to be lived through: "they are objective, or known to him, only because they are also subjective, or activities of his own".[33]

This view of the historian's position has an implication for generalization in history. If by historical thinking we already understand how and why Napoleon established his ascendancy in revolutionary France, nothing is added to our understanding of that process by the statement that similar things have happened elsewhere. "It is only when the particular fact cannot be understood by itself that such statements are of value."[34] Furthermore, types of behaviour do recur so long as minds of the same kind are placed in the same kind of situations.

> The behaviour-patterns characteristic of a feudal baron were no doubt fairly constant so long as there were feudal barons living in a feudal society. But they will be sought in vain (except by an inquirer content with the loosest and most fanciful analogies) in a world whose social structure is of another kind. In order that behaviour-patterns may be constant, there must be in existence a social order which recurrently produces situations of a certain kind. But social orders are historical facts, and subject to inevitable changes, fast or slow. A positive science of mind will, no doubt, be able to establish uniformities and recurrences, but it can have no guarantee that the laws it establishes will hold good beyond the historical period from which its facts are drawn. Such a science (as we have lately been taught with regard to what is called classical economics) can do no more than describe in a general way certain characteristics of the historical age in which it is constructed. If it tries to overcome this limitation by drawing on a wider field, relying on ancient history, modern anthropology, and so on, for a larger basis of facts, it will still never be more than a generalized description of certain phases in human history.[35]

Thus generalization in history is possible but not very important, and there is no possibility of formulating immutable universal laws.

Another implication of the conception of historical knowledge as knowledge of mind is the differences of degree in the historicity of different ages.

> The historicity of very primitive societies is not easily distinguishable from the merely instinctive life of societies in which rationality is at vanishing-point. When the occasions on which thinking is done, and the kinds of things about which it is done, become more frequent and more essential to the life of society, the historic inheritance of thought, preserved by historical knowledge of what has been thought before, becomes more considerable, and with its development the development of a specifically rational life begins.[36]

Conversely, the irrational element in human life, though a part of human existence, is outside the domain of historical knowledge. In realizing its own rationality, mind also realizes the presence in itself of elements that are not rational. They are not body; they are mind, but not rational mind or thought. These irrational elements are the subject-matter of psychology. They are the blind forces and activities in us which are part of human life as it consciously experiences itself, but are not parts of the historical process: sensation as distinct from thought, feelings as distinct from conceptions, appetite as distinct from will. They are the basis of our rational life, though no part of it. Our reason discovers them, but in studying them it is not studying itself.[37]

V

The scope of history is discussed more explicitly by Collingwood as "the subject-matter of history". Nature, immediate experience, and thought in its immediacy fall outside the scope of history. Of everything other than thought there can be no history. A biography, a diary, or a memoir is not history. The peculiarity of thought is reflection: thought is not mere consciousness but self-consciousness. From this point of view certain forms of activity are, and others are not, matter of historical knowledge. Politics, for instance, can be historically

studied. There can be a history of warfare too. Economic activity can have a history. There can be a history of morals. "Today it is no longer necessary to argue that art, science, religion, philosophy and so forth are proper subjects of historical study."[38] In his *Roman Britain*, Collingwood himself discusses politics, the machinery of government, the people, the towns, the countryside, industry and commerce, art and religion, which is in conformity with the scope of history in his philosophy.[39]

Collingwood's concern with the bearing of historical knowledge on moral action is reflected in the section on 'history and freedom'. Our knowledge that human activity is free has been attained through our discovery of history. The disappearance of historical naturalism entails that the activity by which man builds his constantly changing world is a free activity. This does not mean, however, that man is free to do what he chooses. The rational activity which historians have to study is never free from compulsion. But this compulsion is imposed upon the human reason by reason itself in recognition of the situation. For a historian to say that a man is in a certain situation is the same thing as to say that he thinks he is in this situation. The hardness of the fact consists in man's inability to think of his situation otherwise. Just as historical thought is free from the domination of natural science, rational activity is free from the domination of nature.[40]

VI

Progress in history must be distinguished from what is called progress in nature. A natural process is progressive only in the sense of being evolutionary. The idea of progress involves the idea of change for the better:

> The conception of a 'law of progress', by which the course of history is so governed that successive forms of human activity exhibit each an improvement on the last, is thus a mere confusion of thought, bred of an unnatural union between man's belief in his own superiority to nature and his belief that he is nothing more than a part of nature.[41]

The question whether any particular historical change has

been an improvement must be answered on its merit in each
particular case. The historian must judge the relative value of
two different ways of life, taken as two wholes. He must
re-experience them both in his own mind as objects of historical
knowledge. But a way of life in its entirety cannot be a possible
object of historical knowledge. It would be idle to ask whether
any one period in history taken as a whole showed a progress
over its predecessor. In any period as a whole there may be
large tracts of life for which the historian has either no data,
or no data that he is in a position to interpret. He cannot
speak of progress in happiness, comfort, or satisfaction. He
can talk of development in art but not of progress. He can talk
of progress in morality not in relation to individual problems
of conduct but in relation to social institutions as expressions
of moral ideals. This double aspect appears in economic life,
politics, and law. In science, philosophy, and religion, however,
there is only one aspect, the rational.[42]

The case of science is the simplest and the most obvious in
which progress exists and is verifiable. Progress in science
would consist in the supersession of one theory by another
which served both to explain all that the first theory explained,
and also to explain types, or classes of events, or 'phenomena',
which the first ought to have explained but could not. Science,
however, is mistress only in her own house. There can be no
progress in art, for example, even if it could be subjected to
the rule of science. Philosophy progresses insofar as one
stage of its development solves the problems which defeated it
in the last, without losing its hold on the solutions already
achieved. In religion, progress is possible on the same terms
as in Christianity over Judaism.[43]

In theory, thus, progress is possible in a certain sense in
certain cases. Whether it has actually occurred, and where and
when and in what ways, are questions for historical thought to
answer. Progress, moreover, is not a mere fact to be discovered;
it is only through historical thinking that it comes about at all:

> If we want to abolish capitalism or war, and in doing so
> not only to destroy them but to bring into existence
> something better, we must begin by understanding them:
> seeing what the problems are which our economic or

international system succeeds in solving, and how the solution of these is related to the other problems which it fails to solve. This understanding of the system we set out to supersede is a thing which we must retain throughout the work of superseding it, as a knowledge of the past conditioning our creation of the future. It may be impossible to do this; our hatred of the thing we are destroying may prevent us from understanding it, and we may love it so much that we cannot destroy it unless we are blinded by such hatred. But if that is so, there will once more, as so often in the past, be change but no progress; we shall have lost our hold on one group of problems in our anxiety to solve the next. And we ought by now to realize that no kindly law of nature will save us from the fruits of our ignorance.[44]

VII

Two sections of the Epilegomena have a direct bearing on Collingwood's conception of the historical method: on imagination and evidence. Historical knowledge is wholly a reasoned knowledge of what is transient and concrete. It is neither a question of memory, nor can it be based on authority. The autonomy of historical thought is seen at its simplest in the work of selection, and more convincingly in historical construction and criticism. Historical imagination plays a crucial role in historical criticism and historical construction. The historian's web of imaginative construction does not derive its validity from being pegged down to certain given facts:

All that the historian means, when he describes certain historical facts as his data, is that for the purposes of a particular piece of work there are certain historical problems relevant to that work which for the present he proposes to treat as settled; though, if they are settled, it is only because historical thinking has settled them in the past, and they remain settled only until he or someone else decides to reopen them.[45]

Obedience to three rules of method distinguishes the historian

from the historical novelist: his picture must be localized in space and time; it must be consistent with itself; and it must stand in a peculiar relationship to something called evidence.[46]

Collingwood underlines the importance of evidence as something indispensable:

> The historian is not allowed to claim any single piece of knowledge, except where he can justify his claim by exhibiting to himself in the first place, and secondly to any one else who is both able and willing to follow his demonstration, the grounds upon which it is based.[47]

Collingwood goes on to argue that 'testimony' is not evidence and that the method of scissors-and-paste produces only pseudo-history. The notion of 'source' is only a modified form of the notion of testimony. The important question about any statement in a source is not whether it is true or false, but what it means.

> And to ask what it means is to step right outside the world of scissors-and-paste history into a world where history is not written by copying out the testimony of the best sources, but by coming to your own conclusions.[48]

Every step in the argument about a historical construction depends on asking a question. In this logic of questioning,

> questions are not put by one man to another man, in the hope that the second man will enlighten the first man's ignorance by answering them. They are put, like all scientific questions, to the scientist by himself. There is the Socratic idea which Plato was to express by defining thought as 'the dialogue of the soul with itself', where Plato's own literary practice makes it clear that by dialogue he meant a process of question and answer.[49]

Furthermore, these questions can be put to mute objects as much as to literary statements. The difference between literary and archaeological evidence is annihilated.[50]

In Collingwood's 'scientific' history, the word 'source' is

replaced by 'evidence' where anything is evidence *if it* is used as evidence for any subject whatever. In practice, however, the historian has in mind a preliminary and tentative idea of the evidence he will be able to use. The more historical knowledge we have, the more we can learn from any given piece of evidence; if we had none, we could learn nothing. Our knowledge of the past goes on increasing with more and more evidence but, paradoxically, progress in historical knowledge only underlines its relativity. In history, no achievement is final:

> The evidence available for solving any given problem changes with every change of historical method and with every variation in the competence of historians. The principles by which this evidence is interpreted change too; since the interpreting of evidence is a task to which a man must bring everything he knows; historical knowledge, knowledge of nature and man, mathematical knowledge, philosophical knowledge; and not knowledge only, but mental habits and possessions of every kind; and none of these is unchanging. Because of these changes, which never cease, however slow they may appear to observers who take a short view, every new generation must rewrite history in its own way; every new historian, not content with giving new answers to old questions, must revise the questions themselves; and—since historical thought is a river into which none can step twice—even a single historian, working at a single subject for a certain length of time, finds when he tries to reopen an old question that the question has changed.[51]

VIII

T.M. Knox, the editor of *The Idea of History*, observed in 1945 that exclusive philosophical importance given by Collingwood to history was a reflection of his scepticism about philosophy as well as natural science:

> It surely must be a radical scepticism about both philosophy and natural science which leads a thinker to hold that

knowledge is to be gained only by historians and only
from interpreting historical evidence. From *The Idea of
History* onwards, Collingwood's writings contain an impres-
sive argument for the recognition of history as productive
of results no less entitled to be called knowledge than
those of natural science. But he was not content merely
to argue, as he did so vigorously and convincingly, against
positivistic attempts to absorb philosophy into natural
science as the sole form of knowledge; he went farther
and took up a position equally intransigent, and at bottom
for the same sceptical reasons, claiming for history
precisely what his opponents claimed for science. A
mere *rapprochement* between philosophy and history had
ceased to content him.[52]

T.M. Knox asserted, nevertheless, that after Collingwood
"English philosophers will be able to continue ignoring history
only by burying their heads in the sand".[53]

Indeed philosophers have taken notice of Collingwood's
philosophy of history, like Christopher Blake, Alan Dongan,
Ernest Gellner, and Patrick Gardiner in the 1950s.[54] Early
in 1961, E.H. Carr summarized Collingwood's views to show
that his "searching critique" had brought to light "certain
neglected truths". In the first place, Collingwood showed that
the facts of the past would never come to us 'pure', since they
did not and could not exist in a pure form: they were always
refracted through the mind of the recorder. Secondly, Colling-
wood emphasized the historian's need for an imaginative
understanding of the minds of the people with whom he was
dealing. Thirdly, Collingwood underlined that we could view
the past, and achieve our understanding of the past, only
through the eyes of the present. According to Carr, there are
some dangers also in 'the Collingwood view of history': the
historian tends to become more important than his facts, and
the present more important than the past.[55]

G.J. Renier has reacted sharply to 'the Collingwood view
of history'. According to him, Collingwood could not make
a really valuable contribution to 'the history of the methodology
of history' because of his one-sided conception of history, his
pan-idealism, mysticism, and confusion between history as

knowledge and process. In fact Renier regarded Collingwood's conception of history as "dangerous" for the discipline of history. Nevertheless, "bad theory" did not stand in Collingwood's way to "good history".[56] More recently, G.R. Elton has expressed the view that Collingwood's anti-positivistic relativism has no bearing on the character of his historical writing. It is not possible to analyse the *Roman Britain* in terms of Collingwood's philosophy: "It is just ordinary sound history".[57]

Arthur Marwick's criticism of Collingwood is a little more comprehensive. For him, *The Idea of History* is "beautifully writtern and poetic in its sensibility", but it is "a puzzling and unsatisfactory book".[58] Many of his ideas are reflective of the twentieth-century reaction to the nineteenth-century 'revolution in historical studies'. Collingwood played an important part in restoring to the twentieth-century historian a confidence that "what he was doing was not quite as daft as it sometimes seemed". Everybody interested in history should know something of Collingwood's ideas. "But it must be stressed again that he does not stand in the mainstream of the development of historical studies: full of deep insights, he is no sure guide to what historians actually do or how they think."[59]

According to Marwick, Collingwood's denunciation of the scissors-and-paste method was justified but the statement was accurate for the English universities rather than for historical studies as a whole. Similarly, in broadening historical thinking on the basis of non-literary evidence he was not alone: he was "at one with Bloch, Febvre and the *Annales* school".[60] His insistence that historical thinking was not only different from scientific thinking but also supreme was based on the "rather silly argument" that when a scientist framed a theory he used "certain historical knowledge in his possession as to what experiments had been tried and what their results had been".[61] Collingwood's emphasis on the study of purposive action was an illuminating commentary on one part of the historian's method. But his contention that there is nothing except thought that can be the object of historical knowledge is "absolute rubbish". Collingwood was convinced of the importance of history and underlined the dignity of the subject through his writings. But his "odd mystical outbursts" provided material for the enemies

of the subject. He prepared the ground for the violent reaction against the glorification of intuition which came after World War II.[62]

Collingwood himself was convinced that his conception of history enabled him to acquire better historical understanding. As an archaeologist he started interpreting all objects in terms of purposes, with some interesting results. The archaeologists before him, who had worked at the Roman Wall between Tyne and Solway, had never seriously asked themselves what it was for. He was able to point this out and to suggest that the wall was meant for an 'elevated sentry-walk'. Similarly, putting right questions in the right order to evidence from archaeology he was able to estimate the total population of Roman Britain more accurately than the historians working from literary sources. His explanation of a 'Celtic Revival' is yet another example of the bearing of Collingwood's theory as a philosopher on his practice as a historian. These examples could serve as an illustration of "the *rapprochement* between philosophy and history, as seen from the view of history".[63] Indeed it would be difficult to maintain that Collingwood's philosophy of history had no bearing on his historical writing. The bearing of his philosophy on second-order history, that is the history of historical writing, is also well illustrated by his treatment of historiography from ancient to modern times in western Europe.[64]

Some of the charges brought against Collingwood appear to be based on a partial view of his position. E.H. Carr's charge, for instance, that in Collingwood's view of history the historian tends to be more important than the past facts totally ignores what Collingwood says about the historian's necessary dependence on evidence and his concern with the concrete fact. Similarly, the view that Collingwood appears to make problems of the present more important than the past ignores his great veneration, almost a longing, for the past modes of life.

On the basis of the *Speculum Mentis, An Autobiography*, and *The Idea of History* it has been possible to form a more or less coherent idea of Collingwood's position. To upset the order in which he presents his ideas, we may think of evidence in the present as the starting point. The questions put to

traces from the past relate to actions of individuals and their conscious purposes. Thus much of what springs from unconscious motivation falls outside the scope of historical inquiry, ruling out also the idea of 'social forces'. In the imaginative construction of the past, historical facts are established and presented in their inter relationships in a specific field of human activity such as politics, economics religion, art, science, or philosophy, but no interrelationships between any of these segments of life are entertained.

Collingwood concedes the possibility of generalization in history and his work is full of generalizations. But he attaches no importance to generalization in his historical methodology. Theory as a tool of advancing historical research is deliberately ruled out. The essential clue to Collingwood's philosophy of history does not lie so much in his idealism, or in his relativism, as in his conservative attitude towards life. Notwithstanding his apparent concern for a gloves-off philosophy, true knowledge of the past in 'the Collingwood view of history' is the source not of social action but of social preservation.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. R.G. Collingwood, *An Autobiography*, Oxford University Press, 1959 (first published 1939), pp. 22, 24-25.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 31.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 48.

4. R.G. Collingwood, *Speculum Mentis or the Map of Knowledge*, The Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1963 (first published 1924), p. 15.

5. *Speculum Mentis*, p. 9: "This book is the outcome of a long-growing conviction that the only philosophy that can be of real use to anybody at the present time is a critical review of the chief forms of human experience, a new Treatise of Human Nature philosophically conceived."

   It may be added that Collingwood did not wish to be treated as 'the vendor of new-fangled paradoxes' and given some silly name like that of 'New Idealist': *ibid.*, p. 13. Nevertheless, the *Speculum Mentis* was dismissed by a 'realist' reviewer precisely as "the usual idealistic non-sense". In Collingwood's considered view it was neither usual nor idealistic: *An Autobiography*, pp. 56-57.

6. *Speculum Mentis*, pp. 203-4.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 208.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 211.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 217.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 218.

   That Collingwood did not change this view of causation is evident from his discussion of 'causation in history' in the late 1930s. 'Cause' is defined as "the free and deliberate act of a conscious and responsible agent". For causing we may substitute making, inducing, persuading, urging, forcing, compelling, according to differences in the kind of motive in question: *An Essay on Metaphysics*. The Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1962 (first published 1940), p. 290.

11. *Speculum Mentis*, p. 221.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 238.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 246

14. *An Autobiography*, p. 77.

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 59-68.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 79.

17. *Ibid.*, pp. 81, 97.

18. *Ibid.*, pp. 99-106.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 110-12.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 115.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 90.

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 91-92.

   Collingwood's concern for the practical implications of his philosophical thinking comes out clearly also in his study of aesthetics. "Everything written in this book has been written in the belief that it has a practical bearing, direct or indirect, upon the condition of art in England in 1937, and in the hope that artists primarily, and secondarily persons whose interest in art is lively and sympathetic, will find it of some use to them:". *The Principles of Art*, Oxford Paperback, 1963 (first published 1938), p. vi.

23. *An Autobiography*, p. 115.

24. R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, The Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1951 (first published 1946), pp. 5-6.

   Collingwood had worked on 'the idea of nature' in 1933-34 before finally turning to 'the idea of history'. His argument is worth noting. "A scientific fact is an event in the world of nature. A scientific theory is an hypothesis about the event, which further events verify or disprove." Thus a 'scientific fact' is a class of historical facts, and "no one can understand what a scientific fact is unless he understands enough about the theory of history to understand what an historical fact is". The same is true of past theories: they can be understood only through historical research. Natural science can thus be understood only in the context of history. "We go from the idea of nature to the idea of history." *The Idea of Nature*, The Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1957 (first published 1945), pp. 176-77.

25. *The Idea of History*, pp. 7-11.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 205.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 209.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 213.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 214.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 216.
32. *Ibid.*, p 217.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 218.
34. *Ibid.*, pp. 222-23.
35. *Ibid.*, pp. 223-24.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 227.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 231.
38. *Ibid.*, pp. 302-11.
39. R.G. Collingwood and J.N.L. Myres, *Roman Britain and the English Settlements*, The Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1968 (first published 1936, 7th reprint of 2nd edn. of 1937).
40. *The Idea of History*, pp. 315-18.
41. *Ibid.*, pp. 321-23.
42. *Ibid.*, pp. 326-33.
43. *Ibid.*, pp. 332-33.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 334.
45. *Ibid.*, pp. 234-48.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 246.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 252.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 260.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 274.
50. *Ibid.*, pp. 276-77.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 248.
52. *Ibid.*, p. xiii.
53. *Ibid.*, p. viii.
54. Patrick Gardiner (ed.), *Theories of History*. The Free Press, New York, 1959.

    According to Gardiner, Collingwood was one of those philosophers who vindicated the 'autonomy of history', raised a number of important points concerning the implications of the notions such as 'understanding' and 'explanation', and discussed the ways in which the practising historians interpret their subject-matter, revealing the presuppositions that underlie any piece of genuinely historical thinking: *ibid.*, p. 8.
55. E.H. Carr, *What is History?* Pelican Books, 1977 (reprint), pp. 20-27.
56. G.J. Renier, *History: Its Purpose and Method*, George Allen & Unwin, London, 1961, pp. 7n, 40-49, 75, 81, 82, 115, 121, 225n, 231, 245.

    See also   David Hackett Fischer, *Historians' Fallacies*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1971, pp. xii, 183-85, 196-98.
57. G.R. Elton, *The Practice of History*, Collins-Fontana, 1976 (7th impression), p. 79.
58. Arthur Marwick, *The Nature of History*. The MacMillan Press Ltd., London, 1976 (first published 1970), p. 80.
59. *Ibid.*, p. 81.
60. Arthur Marwick, *The Nature of History*, p. 82.
61. *Loc cit.*

62. *Ibid.*, p. 83.
63. R.G. Collingwood, *An Autobiography*, pp. 127-45.
64. R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, pp. 14-204.

History as a Social Process and as a Social Science

Dietmar Rothermund

1. HISTORY: ENQUIRY AND ITS RESULTS

HISTORY ORIGINALLY MEANT "enquiry" but it has acquired additional connotations; it refers to the result of this enquiry as well as to its subject-matter which is sometimes regarded as an animated entity. The "verdict of history" is conjured up as the judgement of a last court of appeal which will settle everything. This idea is derived from the experience of incomplete information in any given situation and an awareness of the benefit of hindsight which makes men of a later age better judges of that situation. But those who refer to this "verdict of history" also have something else in mind; they hope that the "forces of history" are on their side and that the result of their actions will stand the test of time whereas the designs of others will prove to be wrong. The benefit of hindsight is thus supposed to encompass not only more information but also a knowledge of what went right or wrong. Whoever appeals to the "verdict of history" cannot "pack the court", but he hopes, of course, that the sentence will be in his favour, because the result of the judicial enquiry will be determined by the course of history itself.

History as an enquiry and as a social process is perceived in terms of a "feedback" which influences the results of the enquiry as well as the continuation of the process. The "benefit of hindsight" thus implies a qualitative change, an awareness of the relative importance of past events. But this awareness may

be subject to further change. The "verdict of history" may be revised; it is not the "last judgement". History as enquiry does not stop, but the result of this enquiry will appear as a dated statement like a sentence pronounced by a judge. As such it can be attributed to the person who has made it: the historian who writes history and evaluates the actions and the situation of those who "made history". Others may in turn enquire into the conditions of his work in terms of a history of historiography in order to find out about the historicity of the historian.

2. THE HISTORICITY OF THE HISTORIAN

This historicity of the historian is nothing but a specific instance of the historicity of man which is of central importance to modern philosophy. But this specific instance is of particular interest because of what one may call its prismatic reflection. The historian should be most intensely aware of his own historicity. But if he is overcome by this awareness he would probably get scared by the uncharted sea of relativism and would stop writing history. Although the historian is usually sceptical about philosophies of history, he nevertheless relies on them implicitly or explicitly. Such philosophies of history try to establish a point of departure or arrival beyond history. The point of departure may be a golden age or a "paradise lost", a state of original revelation or perfect harmony which makes all subsequent history an experience of regression from this ideal state. The point of arrival may also be such a state of harmony, a situation of perfect rationality without conflict etc. Such points beyond history, like the point outside the universe which Archimedes asked for, provide a firm position from which one can survey the course of history. Since they are beyond history they are not subject to enquiry. They are based on metaphysical postulates even if they appear in a mundane disguise such as the idea of a "classless society".[1]

Modern philosophy has shied away from such metaphysical commitments and the philosophy of history has been replaced by what may be called a philosophy of historicity. There is no point of departure or arrival but only history as a continuous social process. Philosophical theory is nothing but a reflection of historical conditions and does not provide an independent

yardstick. History does not permit detachment, it encompasses everything. In this way history and society are identical; social existence is historical existence and vice versa.[2] But where is the lodestar which permits one to ascertain one's position in the midst of this stream? The answer of the philosophy of historicity sounds like the old story of the man who lifted himself up by his own bootstraps. Critical reflection on one's own historicity is the only way of achieving a "foothold" in this continuous stream.[3] There is some similarity between the Buddhist philosophy and this modern philosophy of historicity.

The method of critical reflection becomes of central importance to this philosophy and for this reason hermeneutics has played a key role in recent philosophical debates. This is attractive for the historian as his discipline is rooted in a tradition which also assigns great importance to hermeneutics. But hermeneutics has been put to many different uses and must be handled with care.

3. HERMENEUTICS: THE METHOD OF UNDERSTANDING INTERNAL EVIDENCE

Before it assumed its wider, secularized meaning hermeneutics referred to the method of interpreting biblical texts by paying close attention to every detail and to the relationship of the whole of the respective text to its parts. The assumption was of course that the text was revealed truth. It was therefore not necessary to go beyond the text in order to grasp the meaning of each word; a scrutiny of internal evidence would be sufficient to unravel the full meaning of the whole as well as of the parts of the text. The method was thus not aimed at explaining the text by referring to general laws or any other point of reference outside the text but on understanding the text on its own terms. This hint at the origin of hermeneutics and at the distinction between explanation and understanding is made here because it is of importance for the subsequent discussion.

As a method of analysing internal evidence hermeneutics was a technique which could easily be transferred and secularized so as to serve not only the theologian but also the philologist, the historian, and the modern philosopher, who expanded it so as to include not only texts but all other manifestations of

human thought.[4] The analogy of the critical reflection of one's own historicity and the understanding of internal evidence of the manifestation of human thought was a tempting proposition. The only problem was that the reliance on internal evidence implied a submission to the authority of thought as such.[5] If this authority is not accepted one must turn to external points of reference. This is why "inter-subjectivity"[6] has attained a crucial importance for the representatives of the philosophy of historicity. Inter-subjectivity is the social dimension of critical reflection and provides the framework for the understanding of internal evidence.

Historians who have not achieved this degree of sophistication of the philosophers still tend to think of hermeneutics in a more elementary way and use it for the defence of their approach to the understanding of internal evidence against those who challenge them to adopt the rules of scientific explanation.[7] The contrast between "understanding" and "explanation" has been emphasized again and again in order to distinguish the method of the historian from that of the scientist, but this argument was mostly based on misconceptions of what the historian and the scientist actually do.

4. UNDERSTANDING AND EXPLANATION

The juxtaposition of "understanding" and "explanation" is a product of a particular constellation in intellectual history. The great progress of the natural sciences and particularly of physics along the lines of classical mechanics generated "laws" which seemed to permit explanations in terms of absolute objective certainty. The state of science was accordingly assessed in these terms and the social sciences tried to achieve a similar precision. In their quest for the explanation of social phenomena in terms of general laws they parted company with history. The historians on the other hand emphasized "understanding" as a legitimate alternative to "explanation". The distinction between "idiographic" and "nomothetic" sciences helped to demarcate the disciplinary boundaries.[8] The historians settled down in their "idiographic" niche and when it became obvious that the social sciences were far from being successful in their "nomothetic" endeavours, the historians could safely criticize

them as they were not in the same boat. In the meantime, however, the natural sciences had progressed along lines which were different from the old ones of classical mechanics. New concepts had emerged which were not easily understood by historians and social scientists who continued their debates, if they talked to each other at all, in the terms of the nineteenth century.

5. STRUCTURE AND PROCESS

Phenomena which concern natural and social scientists may be designated in the most general terms as structure and process. "Structure" has already become a watchword among social scientists and "structuralism" is a school of thought which has attracted anthropologists and linguists.[9] There is also a growing awareness of structural history, but the historian's reference to "structure" is often rather vague.[10] Structure means a system of interdependent elements which changes whenever one element is removed or added. Historical research rarely yields enough information in order to identify a structure completely. The structures of which historians speak are usually only patterns which can be identified with the help of some parts, just like a jigsaw puzzle. Furthermore, historians who have claimed to write structural history have actually described the more static elements of such patterns instead of focusing their attention on features of dynamic change. The great interest which such structural historians have shown in geography is characteristic of this approach.[11] More or less perennial conditions of human life should of course receive adequate attention, but important developments are often influenced by ephemeral phenomena which also require careful analysis. The emphasis on the static aspect of structural history was due to an initial reaction to the "history of events". In turning towards periods of "long duration" it was durability which attracted more attention and structure was conceived of as the sum of the enduring features of the subject matter. In this way processes which necessarily imply structural change were not studied with the same interest. The study of processes involves the analysis of what one may call the scatter diagram of numerous traces of change and such traces are events. Therefore

this type of study looks too much like the old "history of events" which the structural historian wished to overcome. But a new approach to historical research must combine the study of both structures and processes. The significance and direction of processes can only be determined by reference to structures which change in the course of these processes. Structures on the other hand are of interest to the historian only to the extent that they are subject to change. If they are totally inert one may state that they have no historical significance as such but only to the extent that their existence impinges upon other structures and processes (e.g., natural barriers which may or may not constitute boundaries between social units etc.). Cross-references between structures and processes are needed for the study of history but it has been argued that in the social sciences it is impossible to study the structure and the process at the same time.[12] A structure can be identified only when it is held constant and is not in the process of change; the identification of a process, on the other hand, focuses on the elements of change. This methodological warning may be appropriate for other social scientists who are in a position to observe both structures and processes as contemporaries, but it does not apply to the work of the historian who has anyhow only an indirect access to processes which he must trace by identifying instances of structural change. The work of the historian thus consists of mental process simulation. The scatter diagram of numerous bits and pieces of information related to structural coordinates is in his mind, and he tries to fit lines into it which indicate a meaningful process. While doing this he is constantly testing the "goodness of fit" and finally arrives at a connected account: the historical narrative. This transformation of mental process simulation into the historical narrative has attracted the attention of the analytical philosophers of history, but so far they have not considered it in these terms and have followed the track of the philosophy of language in order to probe into the kind of statements which historians make. Nevertheless some light has been thrown on important aspects of this transformation.

6. NARRATIVE PROCESS SIMULATION: SYNTAX AS SYNTHESIS

The analytical philosophy of language and, even more so the linguistic studies of narrative operations have contributed significant insights into the complexity of the type of activity which seems to be so simple: "telling a story". The modern problem-oriented historian may think that he is not concerned with "narrative history" which he considers to be a preoccupation of earlier generations. But in terms of the analytical philosophy all connected statements made by the historians are "narrative". Even a brief statement may be defined as an "atomic narrative" whereas a longer one amounts to a "molecular narrative".[13] One could continue this line and speak of a narrative network which may encompass a whole monograph. Within such a context narrative strategies[14] can be studied which make full use of all possibilities of connections, conjectures, qualifications, suggestions, mental reservations, etc. which the syntax of the respective language offers to the speaker or writer.

Both history and language are social processes, but whereas history is not related to a definite system unless one accepts metaphysical postulates about the origin or aim of this process, a language is a system which can be defined in terms of a grammar. The transformation of history as a process into history as a narrative implies the production of a message which is structured according to grammatical rules. Syntax facilitates the synthesis of numerous pieces of information so as to re-create the historical process. This intimate relationship of the work of the historian with the use of language gives rise to two problems—one connected with the receptivity and the other with the activity of the historian. The first problem consists of the conviction carried by the narrative of the historian's sources and the second may be described as "the tyranny of persuasive rhetoric".[15] There may even be cases of straight-forward translation of the one into the other when the historian is so impressed by the arguments he finds in his sources that he adopts them and hands them on in his own persuasive narrative. But such instances can be subjected much more easily to a critical review than the more common and less

obvious cases of sketchy conjectures disguised in the garb of well-knit syntax. In spite of such potential pitfalls the historical narrative remains the only instrument of process simulation and there has been no substitute for it so far. It is therefore even more important to devote adequate attention to the critical analysis of this narrative.

The historical narrative as a process simulation is not merely descriptive; it is also explanatory, because such a simulation is impossible without reference to causation. However, whereas the human mind is generally geared to the consideration of linear causation, social processes are usually not explicable in such terms. Recent experiments with human judgement and decision-making in interaction with computer-simulators have actually shown that this linear tendency of the human mind constitutes an impediment to problem-solving which requires thought processes akin to systems analysis.[16] The historical narrative is an approximation to this style of thought because it uses the modes of syntax in order to evoke the perception of what may be called non-linear causation.

If someone answers a question about a puzzling situation by saying, "This can only be explained historically",[17] he indicates that the rules of linear causation are not applicable in this case but that several intervening causes must be taken into consideration in order to understand why a certain process which started at point A and was supposed to lead to point B actually ended up at point C. It would be possible to unravel the multiplicity of intervening causes by isolating them in terms of several broken lines of causation, but this is not what the one who asked the question would like to know. He wants to see the curve of causation, if it is not a straight line, after all, and he gets what he asked for: a narrative. This narrative will refer to the intervening causes only to the extent which is necessary for an understanding of the issue that has been raised. The economy of the narrative actually consists in excluding "narratively inert matter",[18] i.e., everything which does not directly contribute to the explanation which is expected. In other words, the narrative, while taking account of non-linear causation, tries to approximate as far as possible the type of linear causation to which the human mind is attuned. This of course implies that a narrative of this kind, even if it is a very

long and complex one, is conceived of as an answer to a question. But as it deals with non-linear causation it may in fact answer more questions than the one which was initially raised. It is this aspect of the historical narrative which makes it possible to link it with systems analysis and process analysis.

7. THE ANALYSIS OF NON-LINEAR CAUSATION

Systems analysis has emerged in recent years as a method of dealing with complex situations such as decision-making with limited information, the evaluation of unexpected side-effects of decisions, etc.[19] The basic approach is that of assuming an interdependence of the elements of a system. Changes in these elements can be simulated by computers and in this way one can arrive at process analysis. It is conceivable that with the progressive refinement of "hardware" and "software" the computer could help to test historical narratives with regard to their "goodness of fit". It is not suggested that the computer produces the narrative or replaces it by something else, but that it checks the process simulation provided by the narrative against historical data of which it can store as much as the historian can feed into it. Such data could be both qualitative and quantitative; events as well as structural factors could be taken into consideration. With adequate programming the computer not only could check the respective narrative and indicate facts which do not fit in with it, but could even retrieve additional information.

As an example of such a project we may outline the problem of the rise and fall of the Portuguese empire which may be defined as a sub-system of an expanding European system and as an intrusive element in a loosely interrelated Indian Ocean system.[20] The most important internal elements which gave rise to this empire were an accumulation of nautical experience and a royal monopoly of maritime trade with scarce commodities such as gold and pepper. The nature of this trade required armed protection, and such trade was lucrative enough to provide adequate means for such protection. When projecting their activities into the vast region of the Indian Ocean the Portuguese noticed that a great deal of unprotected free trade was conducted in this region from which protection rent could

be derived. This protection rent became in due course more important than the profits from trade, but it brought about a tendency towards sub-contracting which finally pervaded the entire Portuguese system. Offices were sold and pepper contracts under the royal monopoly were given to private merchants who also had to bear the risk of the long voyage. The collection of protection rent without the provision of adequate protection and the lack of development and diversification of maritime trade led to the demise of this sub-system. Its achievements such as the extension of nautical experience and the methods of armed trade and the collection of protection rent were copied and further developed by other sub-systems. A history of the Portuguese empire which would be written from the point of view outlined here would go beyond the mere narrative of a sequence of events and also beyond a structural account by emphasizing the dynamics of the process which led to the rise and fall of this empire. It would draw upon other social sciences such as sociology and economics in order to find models and concepts for the interpretation of this process.

This brief narrative outline of the process of the expansion and collapse of the Portuguese empire is based on several conjectures and on a limited range of qualitative and quantitative data; it could very well be inaccurate and it is certainly incomplete. A data bank which would include all available information on the sailing of Portuguese ships, all battles fought by the Portuguese, all sales of offices, the major political decisions of the Portuguese kings, the text of documents and writings produced by the contemporary Portuguese, the record of their contracts with the peoples of the Indian Ocean, etc. could help to check and improve the narrative. The historian would have to engage in a kind of dialogue with the computer in which these data are stored and revise his narrative in the light of several "trial runs". If the historian conceives of his narrative as process simulation he should have no difficulty in adopting this procedure. So far he has been doing the same thing by using the limited storage capacity of his brain and conducting "trial runs" by combining facts with each other and looking for more information so as to fill gaps until he finally translates the network of non-linear causation which he has identified into a coherent narrative.

The method suggested here may also help to trace instances of cumulative causation for which we may borrow the term "synergism" from the life sciences. Synergism is defined as "combined activity of agencies, e.g., drugs, hormones, which separately influence a certain process in the same direction". The effect can be either the sum of these separate effects but may also be greater than that sum. The opposite of synergism is antagonism.[21] The borrowing of these terms from the life sciences does not mean that we wish to introduce organic analogies into the social sciences; the analogy is limited to the process of non-linear causation which may also include instances of separate but combined effects which could be greater than the sum of the separate effects but may also cancel each other or prove to be antagonistic to such an extent that processes are inhibited or reversed. Referring to the above-mentioned example of the Portuguese empire once more we could identify several factors which contributed to the rapid expansion of that empire (nautical experience, royal monopoly, openness of the Indian Ocean system into which the Portuguese intruded) in terms of synergisms and others (sub-contracting) as antagonistic.

Taking systems analysis and the study of synergisms as points of departure we may arrive at a new use of hermeneutics which has been discussed above as a method of understanding internal evidence.

8. SYSTEMS ANALYSIS AND HERMENEUTICS: HISTORY AS A SOCIAL SCIENCE

The analogy between systems analysis and hermeneutics may not appear to be self-evident at first glance. The votaries of these two methods may even think that they have nothing in common or are mutually opposed to each other. But, in fact, the basic approach of the systems analyst may be described as the understanding of a system by means of internal evidence. He tries to identify connections of inter-dependence in order to trace the contours of the system whose complete outline is unknown to him when he starts his analysis. In this way his method is the same as that of the scholar who uses hermeneutics in the secular sense of the term. But even the theologian who used hermeneutics in the original sense of the term and

considered the text before him as revealed truth was a kind of "systems analyst", because he had to admit that he did not know the totality of the revealed truth in which he believed and his study of the scriptures was actually aimed at enlarging his knowledge by understanding the interdependence of the different elements of this truth. Accordingly we may also regard the historian as a "systems analyst" who tries to trace the interdependence of past events and processes. If the historian looks at hermeneutics in this way he will be able to interact much more readily with the representatives of other social sciences. He then could use their theories and models and test them; if they prove to be of little value in explaining the past they would probably also not have much predictive value either. By drawing the attention of other social scientists to complex instances of cumulative causation he could also enrich their knowledge. This is the way in which the "lessons of history" could be useful.

Just like the "verdict of history", the "lessons of history" are often mentioned by people who do not want to learn anything but only wish to emphasize their point of view. This is what may be called the homiletic use of history. Homiletics like hermeneutics was practised by the theologian. Whereas hermeneutics refers to the understanding of textual evidence, homiletics is the method of expounding a text. Expounding the "lessons of history" has always proved to be a futile exercise, because it focuses on the substance of particular historical experiences rather than on the understanding of non-linear causation. On the contrary, such "lessons of history" were usually presented in a streamlined form so as to drive home the point which the respective author had in mind, and of course in this way history can be made to teach anything one likes. There is a "useful past" for all purposes. Such interest in the "lessons of history" has done history as a social science more harm than good. The quest of the other social sciences for an emancipation from the dead weight of such "lessons" has contributed a great deal to the estrangement which still prevails between social scientists and historians. Some social scientists have rediscovered an interest in history in recent years, but they have often used historical examples only as illustrations for their models and theories and have

thus unwittingly fallen into the old habit of looking for the "lessons of history". Historians could easily criticize such attempts by pointing out that essential facts had been missed or misinterpreted, if they took note of such intrusions into their field at all. In reacting against the homiletic use of history as well as against rash generalizations based on limited historical evidence the professional historian has concentrated on detailed investigations which are of little interest to other social scientists. The common concern for the analysis of history as a social process has thus been forgotten.

The gulf between history and the other social sciences has also been widened by a misunderstanding of the historical narrative which tends to be underrated as well as overrated. It is underrated if it is thought to be nothing but a descriptive exercise without scientific discipline and it is overrated if it is taken as precluding further enquiry because it gives the impression of a definitive statement. As has been stressed earlier, the historian must show the results of his investigations in the form of a narrative, but this narrative is tentative; it can be replaced as the benefits from hindsight are exploited more fully and new questions lead to new answers.

The historical narrative is not a reproduction of history "as it happened" but a retrospective interpretation. Historical statements cannot be verified by reference to the "facts" which they report. With the exception of isolated events such "facts" could not have been witnessed on the terms in which the historian refers to them.[22] The meaning of these "facts" is derived from the consequences which they had as observed by the historian. The intensity and direction of this observation and the method of attributing consequences or tracing a course of events back to the original "fact" is of crucial importance. Social experience generates again and again new perspectives which require a re-writing of history. Social conditions which influence contemporary thought also give new directions to historiography. At a time when global processes such as industrialization, economic and strategic interdependence, etc. dominate human life, the historian tries to understand the past in terms of similar processes which encompassed whole societies, lasted for generations, and seemed to gain an autonomous momentum pressing human actions into their service regardless

of whatever may have been in the minds of those men who committed the respective actions.[23] The autonomy of such processes is a problem which deserves special attention, and history as a social science must perform the task of defining and explaining the conditions under which such processes arise and to what extent they are autonomous or dependent on other factors.

9. PROCESS AND FEEDBACK: TOWARDS A THEORY OF HISTORY AS A SOCIAL SCIENCE

Historians who look for theoretical orientation may feel attracted by genetics which is a highly sophisticated science and has left crude Darwinism far behind. The genetic code, the transfer of genetic information, the sequence of variation, selection, and retention which characterizes the process of evolution seem to provide analogies which could be useful to the historian.[24] But there is an essential difference between this process and a social process. The genetic code can be changed by mutation and the altered code can be reproduced; there is, so to speak, no limit to genetic imagination, and there is a guarantee of the retention of its result provided it passes the test of selection. This selection is an intervening independent variable. The mode of variation and retention are on the other hand independent of the environment and are based on the intrinsic qualities of the genetic code. Further analogies may be derived from synergetics, a new concept of theoretical dhysics related to the process of the formation of order parameters. The concept was suggested by a physicist working on laser theory who tried to explain the way in which laser waves suddenly moved "in phase" after a brief period of "critical fluctuation".[25] It emerged that such processes of self-organization in open systems could be witnessed in many other instances of transition. In such instances the final formation of a new order parameter is also preceded by periods of critical fluctuation. The climax of these fluctuations is termed "chaos" by physicists.[26] But to them such "chaos" is nothing but a competition of different order parameters, which will end when one of these parameters wins and becomes dominant.

The decisive event in such a critical fluctuation is a "breaking

of symmetry". In the course of such a critical fluctuation when instability prevails minute changes which would have remained marginal under different conditions may have great significance.[27] Such physical analogies are useful and synergetics may help to explain social phenomena as well, but in the sphere of social processes we must also take into account the potentialities of learning and adaptation which influence the course of events. Adaptation does not mean passive adjustment to given conditions. Furthermore, adaptation should not be conceived of only in terms of a stage within a process but as a continuous mode of interaction with the environment. In trying to identify the point of departure of social processes some social scientists have looked for "preadaptive advances". Such "advances" have been characterized as "solutions of problems which did not yet exist".[28] This terminology obviously does not make sense in the context which has been described above. Moreover, "preadaptive advances" can be defined only with reference to a "successful" adaptation. But while one may object to the terminology the phenomenon itself is certainly of great importance. It may be more useful to approach this phenomenon by thinking in terms of two opposite characteristics which could be called "enabling proficiencies" and "disabling propensities". In legal terminology an "enabling act" is an act which gives the executive an option which may be utilized if the need arises but may also remain on the statute book without ever giving rise to any action. Similarly an "enabling proficiency" may or may not initiate further social processes. It may sometimes arise in a totally different context from that in which it plays a decisive role at a later stage.

An interesting example is the pivotal position of the Oracle of Delphi in Greek culture and political development.[29] This oracle might have remained a purely local centre of a mysterious cult, but it became a veritable storehouse of information, and in the absence of a predominant political centre of the expanding Greek world it served as a focal point for the accumulation and dissemination of thought and thus contributed to the rise of Greek democracy as a decentralized form of political organization. Another instance of this kind is the origin of modern bureaucracy with the Roman Church of the Middle Ages. The church was the first "multi-national corporation".

Its growing influence in the early thirteenth century required administrative procedures of greater regularity and continuity and the availability of highly educated personnel accustomed to work within a well-defined hierarchy made it possible to base these procedures on standardized written communications. Bureaucracy later on was regarded as the hallmark of the rationality of the modern age but it obviously owes much to the "enabling proficiency" of the church.

The nautical experience and endeavour of the Portuguese is another case in point. The "enabling" features have been discussed in an earlier section of this paper. But the "disabling propensities" have also been mentioned; they consisted of the tendency to use the royal monopoly as a kind of money estate from which a rent could be derived without concern for the adequate maintenance of this estate. In this case the "enabling proficiency", the period of optimal conditions, and the effect of the "disabling propensities" can be identified as a sequence, and it is thus possible to trace the process from the beginning to the end. But this does not imply that "enabling proficiencies" and "disabling propensities" cannot co-exist in time. They may sometimes be the proverbial two sides of the same coin. Disabling propensities may smother enabling proficiencies, they may be checked by various factors, sometimes even by a clearly identifiable decision, but they may also derive added strength from the perversion of earlier proficiencies.

In an earlier section of this paper it was suggested that the terms "synergism" and "antagonism" may be used in order to refer to instances of cumulative non-linear causation. "Enabling proficiencies" and "disabling propensities" should be seen in such a context. Thus proficiencies of a very disparate kind could provide support for each other, and similarly different disabling propensities may combine so as to produce antagonism. What is "enabling" or "disabling" in such a context depends on the interaction itself. Thus a proficiency which may contribute to a certain process may appear to be antagonistic at a later stage. The rise and fall of the Moghul empire may serve as an illustration of this type of process. The rise of this empire was based on the use of modern firearms and on the design of a rational system of revenue administration which served as the base of a well-balanced imperial hierarchy.[30] When the

empire expanded and the hierarchy became top-heavy because an attempt was made to integrate the vanquished leaders into this hierarchy, the agrarian base broke down and armed resistance flared up everywhere which was quite effective due to the general availability of firearms. This is of course an extremely abbreviated account of a complex process but it indicates the relationship between the enabling and the disabling factors. It may also help to identify the crucial juncture at which the feedback within a process switches from the enabling to the disabling trend.

Feedback in its most elementary form refers to the type of electric device which, for instance, makes a lift stop according to the instructions given by pulling a switch or pushing a button. In a more general sense it refers to any kind of action taken after registering the relevant information. It also refers to the receiving of information about the effect of actions. In the present context it stands for the adaptive function of the social process. The utilization of enabling proficiencies would be accompanied by an acceleration of feedback; action and information would be in close correspondence. Disabling propensities would either impede this feedback in the beginning of a process or disturb or interrupt it in a more advanced stage. These impediments or interruptions may be of different types. The most obvious and dramatic disturbances would occur whenever actions are taken which are clearly at odds with the information received or when there is a breakdown of communications which cuts off the flow of information. But such extreme cases are rare; the more frequent type of disturbance would be due to the distortion or neglect of information or a growing time lag between action and information. There may also be a lack of perception of changing conditions which would require a revision of accepted views. Institutions which once reflected an adequate feedback may obstruct it at a later stage. A reliance on the enabling proficiencies of yesterday may actually prove to be a disabling propensity at present. In the case of the Moghul empire the adherence to Akbar's system which was then overloaded beyond its capacity was such an instance of institutional lag which impeded the necessary feedback. In fact the more perfect an institutional design is supposed to be, the greater are the chances of such an

institutional lag. If institutions not only provide channels of communication but embody a great deal of what may be termed "frozen information" they tend to obstruct further feedback. Sometimes the feedback may be restored by establishing other channels while the obstructive institution becomes fossilized, but whenever it remains of central importance it may effectively interrupt all feedback and enhance the disabling propensities.

Enabling proficiencies and disabling propensities are usually not perceived as such by those who display them in their actions, nor is "feedback" a conscious endeavour. It is the task of the historian as a social scientist to identify them and to recreate them in the narrative which he produces. In an earlier section of this paper the historical narrative has been characterized as process simulation. In this final section an attempt has been made to approach the social process in terms of the "feedback". Seen in this way the historical narrative is aimed at tracing this "feedback". In performing this task the historian not only illuminates the past but contributes to a "feedback" which concerns his own society. The historicity of the historian refers to this "feedback".

In presenting his findings the historian cannot claim that he has discovered some absolute truth. He cannot even conclusively disprove statements made by other historians which are at variance with his statements if the disagreement goes beyond "hard facts", and even such "facts" may be valid only in their respective context. If there is such a disagreement different statements must compete with each other. The competitive co-existence of ideas is acknowledged as a necessary condition even in the natural sciences.[31] Sometimes a consensus may emerge, but this again may be challenged by another statement. History as a social science is a reflection of history as a social process, but it is not a passive reflection which mirrors social reality. Indeed, history is itself part and parcel of the social process and enriches it by contributing to a social discourse which is a necessary ingredient of social life.

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10. K. Faber, *Theorie der Geschichtswissenschaft*, p. 103.

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27. Similar ideas are expressed by Daya Krishna in his contribution to this volume where he writes: " . . . The surface ripple of today's interplay of reason may become tomorrow's determinative structure and thus give form and substance to social reality and shape its texture."

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The Nature of Social Categories

G.C. Pande

IN DEALING WITH A GIVEN SOCIETY the historian cannot avoid
using the basic terms and concepts which are current in that
society and articulate its self-awareness. At the same time he is
also obliged to interpret these terms and concepts for his con-
temporaries, especially for those who are already used to
systematic conceptual schemes belonging to different social
sciences. Thus in dealing with ancient Indian society one must
speak of *varṇa* or *jāti* or *dharma* and at the same time seek to
interpret these in terms of class, caste or estate, law or ethos,
etc. The difficulty in such interpretation arises from the
fact that these terms, ancient or modern, do not refer to
objectively given and unequivocally determinate phenomena but
rather to concepts which reach back to some tradition of
thinking. Colours, plants, and artifacts are examples of objec-
tively given and relatively determinate phenomena where,
although different levels of construction are involved,
the constructed or demarcated objects are more or less
unequivocally identifiable and empirically accessible. Quite
distinct from such constructs of sense-perceptible phenomena
are the basic constructs such as the Vedic *varṇa* or the Marxian
'class' in terms of which popular or learned social apperception
articulates itself. Such basic concepts or social categories
cannot be ascertained or judged in the same manner as concepts
referring to merely external phenomena. I propose to
argue in this paper that social categories are essentially ideal
and that their ideality seeks to be expressive of the inner nature
of personal consciousness, though imperfectly. In this sense
they are rooted in subjectivity being determinations of ideal

self-consciousness. To the extent to which this is true, social reality will be a projection of the self and social theory of self-knowledge. The social historian, then, would be required to interpret the social categories of an age in terms of its cultural context rather than in terms of any timeless system of social science.

CATEGORIES AND THE DIALECTIC

It is well known that Aristotle's doctrine of categories was a classification of the meanings of terms capable of being used as predicates.[1] These types of predicative meanings are conceived by him as simply apprehended reals. In the *Vaiśeṣikā* similarly the categories or *padārthas* are conceived as ultimate demarcations in real objects of knowledge—*prameyah padārthah*.[2] On these realistic views words have meanings which constitute objects of knowledge and these in turn correspond to reality. Concepts, then, become essentially representations and error essentially a misconnection of concepts.

Against this, idealistic philosophers such as Kant and Dignaga have held that the most important aspects of knowledge are constituted by pure concepts which are not derived from experience. They are necessary forms of the mind rather than the forms of a reality independent of the mind. They are the necessary conditions of knowability, the standards to which actuality must attain in order to be real and knowable.[3]

If for the moment we leave aside that aspect of realism which treats the universals as objects of knowledge given independently of the mind, we have here a contrast between empiricism and rationalism, the former deriving all ideas from experience, the latter deriving fundamental ideas from reason conceived as an independent faculty of knowledge. It is the contrast of commonsense realism and empiricism on the one hand, and of idealistic rationalism on the other, which represents a perennial contrast of philosophical views in the history of thought especially in the West. This philosophical contrast becomes important as soon as we seek a theory of reality. So long as we do not seek a theory of reality in general, i.e., a philosophical theory of reality, and are satisfied by the commonsense criterion of perceiving and handling some part

of it, we do not need to examine the nature, source, and limits of our knowledge. We remain satisfied with images and suppositions.[4] For the natural scientist, thus, the perception of sensible effects is a sign of reality.[5] If he can correlate a perceptible occurrence with its conditions in a definite and measurable manner, he acquires a hypothetical knowledge which gives power to handle some bit of reality. The question, however, must be raised as to whether the power to produce or use something can be said to be the same as knowing it. A machine may produce music; can it be said to understand it? On the other hand, the pure mathematician understands abstract forms which do not have any necessary connections with either perception or use. What is the reality of these forms and, when they are exhibited by natural phenomena, what is their relationship with the reality which conforms to them? Is reality to be conceived in terms of sense-perceptible effects, or the power to produce such effects, or in terms of intelligibility, coherence, and rational necessity? Then, again, if we turn to the experience of values and human personality we seem to discover a wholly different criterion of reality. Neither perception nor motion nor necessity appears to be relevant here. An ideal is neither an actual thing nor a mere thought nor a logical form. And yet its reality is undeniable. The socio-historical world would be inconceivable without the moving force of ideals. If physical reality is what corresponds to sense-perception as a mode of knowledge and pure forms are the objects of logical ratiocination, perhaps we should posit a third kind of intuitive knowledge to account for the apprehension of ideals. In seeking to view reality as a whole the philosophical theory must face the puzzling diversity of aspects which the reality exhibits.

It would seem that the most efficacious method of dealing with puzzles and contradictions lies in the method of dialectic, so Plato found dialectic unavoidable when the foundational ideas of science had to be examined. In dealing with pure ideas not derived from and applying to experience, Kant saw the role of dialectic.[6] It was the signal achievement of Hegel, however, to show that all ideas are inherently dialectical[7] and that all general ideas are determinations of reality and capable of being graded in terms of their power. Unfortunately Hegel was guilty of an excess. He was not content with discovering a

difference of grades in ideas but sought to give their final and detailed order and even sought to unravel them in their necessary order in nature, society, history, and culture. One must grant, however, that whatever may be the practical difficulties in such a stupendous enterprise, if the basic assumption of Hegel be correct that pure reason underlies reality and that the categories are only the necessary steps in which it discovers and realizes itself, the only enterprise which would be worth while philosophically would be the one which Hegel undertook. One may, however, question whether the foundational reason of the universe can be identified with human reason and whether human reason as the faculty of comprehending essential reality can be identified merely with the faculty of logical reasoning. What is called *prajñā* or was intended by *nous* is intuitive and synoptic, not discursive and mediate like human intellectual reasoning. Hegel's distinction between *Vernunft* and *Verstand* does not really cover this gap. Although Spinoza's distinction between the second and the third kind of knowledge is not clear, he never makes the mistake of assuming that the human intellect, though a part of the infinite intellect of God, can ever realize it fully.[8] The fact is that at the human level the eternity of *prajñā* or *nous* is but partially reflected in the contingent temporality of the *psyche* with the result that human ideas are only constructs (*vikalpas*) woven with words and signs out of empirical material where the sense of reality belongs to an undefined but immediate 'that' but the sense of necessity belongs to an intelligible 'what' which remains corrigible.

In the Indian tradition generally the radical contrast of experience and reason is not accepted and at the same time pure consciousness is generally held to possess an intuitive power which is the source of moral and spiritual truths. Reason in conjunction with experience enables one to act more or less successfully but experience is not limited to sense-perception. The mind can experience without the senses and the soul without the mind. These are principles attested by extra-sensory and yogic perceptions. Doubtless there are schools of Indian philosophy which do not accept this position but an appeal to possible experience seems to me to be more acceptable than the dogmatism of common sense. In any case, the acceptance of a multi-level development of experience has a profound

effect on the nature and place of dialectic. Buddhist and Vedantic dialectic thus functions critically with reference to the contradictions of philosophical ideas but does not seek to give a blueprint of reality. Besides, Buddhist dialectic also devotes itself to the linguistic and psychological aspects of thought, which are excluded from Hegel's logic as irrelevant.

For this reason the idea that knowledge and reality belong to several corresponding levels and that the way to the highest is prepared by philosophy as a dialectical examination of ideas is common to western idealism, as exemplified in Plato and Hegel, and the Indian traditions of Buddhism and Vedanta. A great difference, however, divides them. In Plato and Hegel the highest rational knowledge is still intellectual and the reality corresponding to it includes a morally organized social reality. Plato's idea of good and Hegel's idea of self-consciousness thus remain essentially continuous with human social experience. The Indian philosophical attitude, on the other hand, interprets the absolute level of reality to correspond to non-discursive knowledge in which the sense of social difference is overcome by the sense of spiritual unity. Social reality thus corresponds to an intermediate level in the dialectic of consciousness, a level where the self is not seen as a mere object nor is the object seen as merely the self.

OBJECTS AS MEANING-CONSTRUCTS

Buddhist dialectic begins with the analysis of the formation of meanings and concepts, and I should like to introduce at this point the fundamental Buddhist theorem of *apoha* that the words used in discourse refer to phenomenal data only indirectly through thought-constructs.[9] It has been argued that the meaning of terms are neither things nor their representations nor simple reflexes in the mind. It will be seen on reflection that it is not merely judgements that presuppose analysis and synthesis, but the terms too, being more or less defined, presuppose such a process. It is a psychological fact that experience is given as a continuous flow of immediacy with reference to which the activity of thought constructs objects of knowledge.[10] These objects thus become, on the one hand, the meanings of words; on the other they are images superimposed on the

flow of immediate data. Words are not mirrors but analytical
tools used by thought. It follows that objects are not self-
identical, positive realities. They are abstractions which serve
as images of reality to the extent that they provide us with a
criterion of demarcating what is relevant from what is irrelevant
in practice. For example, the word 'water' signifies an idea
and an image which enable us to exclude sand as well as mirage
in a desert as irrelevant in the quest of water for quenching
our thirst. The psyche is immersed in a flow of words, ideas,
and images and the supposedly 'real' world which these pro-
ject is in its intelligible aspect a world significantly constructed
by the mind. This can be seen most strikingly if one contrasts
the representations of the world in common sense, poetry,
myth, magic, and science, or for the matter of that, if we look
at the history of science, philosophy, or social worldviews.

THE WORLD AND ITS TWO ORDERS

The subject-object distinction of consciousness converts itself
by the manifest force of instinct into the ego-world distinction.
To the extent to which the world is constructed out of phenom-
enal data it may be said to constitute the natural world. The
Buddhists have elaborately argued the theorem that the char-
acteristic which defines the reality of this world is its efficiency
in helping or hindering the satisfaction of human instincts, i.e.,
arthakriyākāritva.[11] The order of this natural world is thus
causal and the ideas which seek to represent it have the form of
conditional statements and hypothetical imperatives. In so far
as the phenomenal data are sense data, the natural world con-
structed out of these is the familiar physical world. While the
physical world is felt as wholly other than self and its order
conceived as wholly deterministic, the social world constructed
out of the phenomenal data of self-consciousness is by contrast
felt to be related to the self by an intimate belonging, and its
causal order is conceived as compatible with the facts of
volition and its dimensions of obligation and freedom. Both
the physical and the social worlds are constructed out of
phenomenal data, the former out of sense data, the latter out
of the data of self-consciousness. The distinction between the
two worlds is conceptual rather than existential. They represent

two ways of conceiving the reality which the ego faces, viz., in terms of purely external or largely internal laws of contingent happening. The Buddhist law of *Pratityasamutpāda* or *Dharmatā* abstracts the essence of physical as well as of psychoethical laws of becoming.[12]

It would follow that even in the case of sense-perception we do not have a pure encounter with reality, nor do we have a case of simple reflection in the mind. The objects of sense-perception are neither immediate presentations nor exact representations. They are images demarcated by the habitual or instinctive activity of thought and projected externally and superimposed on the immediate data. Even in such simple perceptions as of colour, the visual apparatus functions selectively and the full perception is bound up with complex apperceptive factors.[13] The finally determined image of the colour as given can hardly be described as a reproduction of what belongs to the sense-stimulating field. The stimulating factor and the sensory factor jointly produce an image which is defined and interpreted through the operation of complex psychic factors to yield a definite idea expressible in statements such as "this is blue". The very framework of spatial extension and temporal duration in which the image is placed is not given in the same sense in which the external cause of 'colour' may be said to be given. The essential function of thought and its process may be said to be that of relevantly demarcating or ordering the fluid impressions of the senses so that the 'self' instead of being carried away floating and confused in this flux finds itself secure within a stable world which is subject to orderly change.

SOCIAL CATEGORIES AND THEIR EVALUATIVE CHARACTER

If thought constructs a world of recognizable entities and patterns out of fugitive sensibilia, it does so for the ego which is at the same time constructed as a stable and self-identical entity recognizing itself as related to similar entities. The world, whether physical or social, and the ego are both mentally constructed out of phenomena and the principles of such construction are the categories. Social categories would thus be the constituent principles of the social world. They are not

representations of empirical social facts but the social facts themselves are constructed out of experience in accordance with these. Nor are they necessary expressions of pure reason since they obtain only in relation to practical experience. They as e principles of ordering the data of ego-centric experience to facilitate the practical seeking of man. In this sense they are essentially regulative or normative, functioning by providing ideal images for the ego, ego-relations, ends, and volitional dispositions. In Buddhist terminology, they are the *dharmas*, especially *mārga-dharmas*, into which *dharmatā* is differentiated in its temporal aspect.

Society may be defined as consisting of a set of persons pursuing various ends and interacting in accordance with a set of rules which assign relational identities to them and evaluate ends and modes of behaviour. Persons imaging themselves in terms of relational identities constitute the subjective support of the social order while the norms and values which they recognize as ideal images constitute its objective part. The order is relevant to the life of seeking and activity and its defining concepts or categories are essentially evaluative, not descriptive. Sonship, for example, does not connote a natural fact but an identity recognized in terms of conventions and acquiring meaning in terms of duties and rights, i.e., in terms of the value placed on specific ways of action. One may thus disown a natural son or adopt one who is not a son naturally. One may become a kin by a ceremony or a kin may be ostracized. Studentship, Brahmanahood, rulership, and ownership are similarly categories arising out of evaluation and one defined conventionally. The distinction of morality, law, and custom again is basically a distinction of values. The distinction between individual and society is similarly not a distinction between the separateness and collectivity of natural bodies but a distinction between two types of value, viz., the value of personal independence and the value of an order of interpersonal dependence and transcendence of personal particularity. Social categories are implicitly judgemental abstractions and they proceed primarily from values, not facts.

SOCIAL REALITY—PRAGMATIC, NOT ULTIMATE

It may be as well to recapitulate some of the points sought to be made so far. Reality is what is given in experience but what is immediately known of it is inexpressible. Now instinctive and practical seeking leads to the activity of thought enquiring into relevant ends and means and it fashions a world of objects including ego-subjects out of the immediacy of experience. The general concepts which underlie the construction of these objects have been called categories. The immediacy of experience and the creativity of thought, both involved in a process of practical seeking and enquiry, thus constitute the twin sources of the categories which are mental constructions with practical relevance. They may be called tools of thought in the service of instinctive life. At this point both Buddhism and Vedanta agree. The Madhyamikas declare that all categories or *dharma* are devoid of any absolute truth. They have merely pragmatic validity or *samvrti-satya*. For Vedanta the means and objects of cognition function only within the bounds of instinct. The point here is not whether the categories are purely rational or empirical, for they are held to be both, but that their validity consists only in their practical efficiency without their giving any clue to the absolute nature of reality. Philosophical theory assumes on this view an essentially dialectical character. By showing the relativity of all concepts it tends towards suicide but serves to turn the mind towards the inexpressibility of truth.

Reality as such is inexpressible and no categories apply to it. Where categories do apply we have a world of changing and relatively defined objects. The validity of its descriptions is pragmatic and relative, the test of truth being the apparent satisfaction of an anticipation in some action-situation.[14] Corresponding to the distinction between reality and the world or *paramārtha* and *vyāvahāra*, one may draw a distinction between two aspects of the world—natural and conventional. This distinction is not to be confused with that between nature and society. Nor is the natural order to be confused with the physical order. The natural order based on causality has a psychic as well as a physical component, a human as well as a non-human aspect. The human and the non-human worlds are

tied together. It is true that materialism would like to affirm
the primacy of the physical world in the causal sense but
traditional thought has always believed that the physical world
exists in order to serve the purpose of the spirit.[15] Spiritual
beings tied to physical identities, as men are, find themselves
at once subject to moral law as well as to causal law. Both
these types of law belong to the nature of human existence
which thus belongs to a physical as well as a moral world.
Both these orders of the human world are natural but to the
extent to which the moral law is held to be the result of the fiat
of actual men it appears to be conventional just as a similar
anthropomorphic reduction of natural causation transforms
the natural world into a world of magic.

It is the ethical and conventional order which constitutes
society. The social order thus has an inherently natural
aspect. Hence the distinction of nature and society is miscon-
ceived just as it is a misconception to think of the natural
basis of society to lie in the instinctive life of men. Instinctive
life belongs to the causal order which is presupposed by natural
existence as such, human as well as animal. The fact that men
are motivated by urgent needs does not in itself create the
social order. It is the human perception of law, moral and
conventional, which creates society. We may conclude this by
saying that the categories in terms of which the consciousness
of society is made possible are essentially normative. Social
reality itself belongs to the level of *vyavahāra* which has the
twin characteristics of *paratantra* and *parikalpita*, i.e., of being
determined regularly and of being constituted by mental ideas
and images of which the most important is that of substance
whether as person or as material thing.[16]

THE BASIC SOCIAL CATEGORIES—PERSON AND LAW

That the social order is based on the moral law, that the moral
law is relative to empirical self-consciousness, and that empiri-
cal self-consciousness projects a personal identity which is not
ultimately real are commonly accepted principles of the Indian
philosophical tradition. The notion of a self identifying itself
with body and mind and yet claiming to be simple and self-identi-
cally enduring contains many spiritual and logical difficulties.

Body and mind are constantly changing and causally determined. They are perishable aggregates, heteronomous and objective in nature. How can they be integrally related to a personal identity which claims to be simple and enduring? Hence this notion of a finite spiritual substance is rejected by Buddhism as well as by Vedanta. Buddhism goes farther in rejecting not merely the category of person or soul as spiritual substance but the very category of substance itself. It admits, however, that although the category of substance does not apply to reality, it nevertheless provides the basic mould of our instinctive conception of the world and ourselves. We people the world with material substances and imagine ourselves analogously as spiritual substances or persons. Instinctive self-consciousness expresses itself in the notion of 'I' and 'mine' on which are built the structures of personality as well as society. Personality has a definite structure of causally functioning and related components. Society, on the other hand, is only a conventional aggregate of persons, although the conventions ultimately appeal to moral principles. Moral principles are not derived from conventions or mere human appetency. They are not forms of willing as such but ideal forms of willing, i.e., the forms of willing characteristic of the enlightened will. Enlightenment is ultimately the knowledge of reality but its minimal component is true self-knowledge, or, what is the same thing, the knowledge of selflessness. It is only through insight into one's own reality, an insight which negates accidental and surrogate identities, that one can truly understand the reality of others. "He who sees himself sees others. He who sees others sees himself."[17] The inward truth of others is known on the analogy of oneself. What is unreal about oneself is known easily on the analogy of what we see in others. From enlightenment follows selflessness, i.e., the rejection of the instinctive and conventional notion of the self and the realization of the sameness of all beings. The distinction between the enlightened and the instinctive self-consciousness is the basis of the distinction between the ideal and the actual forms of self-consciousness. The principles of ideality constitute the moral law. The social order thus is apparently a conventional regulation of the pressures of instincts and particular interests resting on a belief in the reality of separate persons and their relationships but is essentially a

seeking to realize the ideal moral order, i.e., the law perceived by a person when enlightened.

THE NATURE OF PERSON OR SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS

Since the social order is constructed out of the data of self-consciousness, its categories are derived from that of person or individual self-conscious being. Whether they express relationships or functions or ends, social categories remain adjectives or modifiers of what a person is or has or seeks to be or to have. Self-consciousness thus may be said to be the matrix of social categories. It is an agreed principle of Indian philosophy that the instinctive self-consciousness of man is involved in a radical and transcendental error. As Sankara says,

> It is a matter not requiring any proof that the object and the subject whose respective spheres are the notion of the 'Thou' (the Non-Ego) and the 'Ego', and which are opposed to each other as much as darkness and light are, cannot be identified. Hence it follows that it is wrong to superimpose upon the subject whose self is intelligence, and which has for its sphere the notion of the Ego—the object whose sphere is the notion of the Non-Ego, and the attributes of the object and vice versa to superimpose the subject and the attributes of the subject on the object. In spite of this it is on the part of man a natural procedure—which has its cause in wrong knowledge—not to distinguish the two entities (object and subject) and their respective attributes, although they are absolutely distinct, but to superimpose upon each the characteristic nature and attributes of the other, and thus coupling the Real and the Unreal to make use of expressions such as 'That am I', 'That is mine'.[18]
>
> The mutual superimposition of the Self and the Non-Self, which is termed Nescience, is the presupposition on which there base all the practical distinctions—those made in ordinary life as well as those laid down by the Veda—between means of knowledge, objects of knowledge (knowing persons), and all scriptural texts, whether they are con-

cerned with injunctions and prohibitions (of meritorious and non-meritorious actions), or with final release.[19]

Empirical self-consciousness presupposes a mutual super-imposition of the subject and the object and such self-consciousness is presupposed by all social, moral, and religious activities. The categories constituting objectivity and subjectivity have been sought to be listed by several Indian and western thinkers. Aristotle and Prasastapada, Kant and Dharmakirti seek to list the basic concepts or categories presupposed in scientific knowledge which is the paradigmatic case of the knowledge of objects in their objectivity. Subjectivity expresses itself in the cognitive and affective dimensions of experience especially and its categories may be supposed to be capable of being gleaned from their philosophical critiques which, however, have not been so prolific or outstanding as the critiques of objective knowledge. There is also an inherent difficulty in the matter. The very attempt to discover the neotic categories of subjectivity tends to objectivize them and to substitute some kind of accidental objective content for the living inexpressibility of subjectivity. The analysis of desire and will, for example, tends to become the analysis of their ends or objects. Similarly, the analysis of feeling tends to move into the analysis of occasioning situations and associated objective content. We can doubtless discern and name such categories as intention and purpose, obligation and freedom, meaning and expression, depth and worth, etc., but whereas objective categories such as space, time, and causality enter into precise observation and measurement and hence into scientific knowledge, the categories of subjectivity necessarily elude entering into such development. Subjectivity being the immediacy of experience tends to become a matter of imaginative intuition and symbolic expression rather than of adequate rational cognition. Subjective time involved in memory and anxiety, for example, cannot be formulated mathematically like objective time.

Apart from being apprehended through its irrepressible immediacy within the Ego-consciousness, subjectivity is apprehended in the cognitive context as its deepest presupposition or 'transcendental' condition. Nothing is known of the subject except that it is and is necessary for knowledge. To reach the subject

all objectivity must be excluded. It is their intrinsic and mutual exclusion as of light and darkness to which Sankara refers. In all knowledge or consciousness the object is revealed as an actually or potentially defined other, while the subject is revealed only as the self-revealing immediacy of knowledge. In its essence thus knowledge is not an object but the subject. And yet we are apt to think of the subject as a peculiar object possessing many properties including that of knowledge. Common sense assimilates subjects and objects, reifying the former and anthropomorphizing the latter and conceiving both as substances of different sorts. Science excludes subjective categories from objects which are conceived as elements in a system of interacting forces and relationships. Though science excludes subjective categories from objects, it applies objective categories to subjects and regards these as basic. The subjective categories of immediacy, then, become merely relative and phenomenal appearances produced by objective being by its own laws. Space, time, and causality become the basic categories of the knowledge of all reality. The whole structure of modern social science is thus reared up on the epistemological reduction of the person to objective causes and conditions.

Now Buddhist thought, too, had reduced the person to objective causes and conditions but it did not reduce the mind to matter, i.e., to a phenomenon wholly dependent on sense-perceptible- causes and conditions. The Buddhist reduction of the person to causes and conditions was accompanied by a parallel reduction of matter as also the recognition that the categories of objectivity are mental constructs which do not represent reality in its absoluteness. What the Buddhist theory does is to help release self-consciousness from the delusion of an identity in terms of objective factors. Physical features, social relationships, instinctive passions, and objective cognitions are all external to enlightened consciousness. In the modern scientific approach exemplified in psychology, anthropology, and sociology the human person is deanimated and left with no inner reality except natural instincts working within a field of social relationships with the help of positive knowledge. Some modern interpreters have doubtless interpreted the Buddhist doctrine of the 'Personalist Fallacy' in a positivistic manner but they forget that while modern positivism is contented with

the derivation of values from natural instincts and perception seeking an increasing adjustment of man with his environment, Buddhism characterizes the life of seeking and satisfaction as one of intrinsic suffering and seeks a spiritual transfiguration of consciousness through enlightenment.

It will hardly be disputed that social categories are relative to social experience, not the mere perception of the physical world. Social experience is not the experience of bodies but of persons in which the experience of bodies is adjectival. It has been argued earlier that persons are constructs out of empirical self-consciousness. The category of the person is unique in being at once subjective and objective. Thus social behaviour cannot be understood merely in terms of bodily motion but must be looked upon as the expression of thought and will and is a means to the attainment of some purpose. Endowed with meaning and purpose behaviour immediately demands moral judgement because it proceeds from and towards a person who has to be credited not merely with desire and habit but with freedom and reason. Since the self-consciousness constitutive of a person distinguishes a transcendental subjectivity from a circumstantially constituted objectivity, it has an essential seeking for the liberation of the subject from the bondage of its accidental *persona*, a seeking which conflicts with the instinctive or derivatively calculated involvement of the person in seeking ends and means in terms of other persons and things. In so far as this latter seeking is merely for and through insentient things, it has only to follow the rules based on positive knowledge. It would be a search for interests, satisfactions, and utilities through power and calculating reason. Owing to its innate egoism, such a Hobbesian state of nature could never lead to a social condition which requires the true recognition of others as persons with similar rights. Such recognition presupposes a self-consciousness in which the self distinguishes itself ideally from its objective constitution and its urgencies and is capable of viewing itself as the universal subject, the spectator of all ideas standing apart from their mere temporal or historical flux. It is only a self which is conscious of its ideal universality that can distinguish value from appetites, pleasures, and selfish interests and can become the moral subject. It is the notion of

the ideal self which is the source of the moral law on which social unity and coherence depend.

To sum up, reality is given as experiential immediacy but is understood as a world of meanings constructed in the course of practice. In so far as the principal category of this world is the person, it becomes the social world. The order of the social world is that of value-based norms arising ultimately from the idea of the person as the supreme value. The being or reality of the person is in self-consciousness which contains within itself a tension between ideality and actuality. The ideal self is not an abstract model designed in the interest of social usefulness but the ultimately real transcendental subject in which immediacy and coherence or non-contradiction both coalesce.

SOCIAL CATEGORIES IN THE DIALECTIC OF CONSCIOUSNESS

It will be seen as mentioned earlier that social reality and its conceptual understanding both have a certain intermediate status in the dialectic of consciousness.[20] Mere immediacy and its categories do not provide social reality. Such categories are mere demarcations of appearances which are taken at face value and are for this reason said to refer to apparent being or *prātibhāsikasattā*. Bare sense-perception or merely sensuous imagination illustrates the consciousness corresponding to this level of being and cognition. When appearances are held to be part of a causal process we have a new level of reality and its knowledge. Here the criterion of immediacy is replaced by that of mediately known efficiency. Substance becomes the chief category and inference the chief mode of knowledge. This is the level of natural reality and its scientific knowledge. So far we have only an externally oriented consciousness. It is only with self-consciousness that the criterion of reality becomes the adequacy of an object to an immediately felt ideal which itself is known more fully in the course of the effort at realization. The contradiction between the felt ideality of the self and its actuality lies at the basis of a notion of reality which seeks to regulate the causal efficiency of actual objects in accordance with the forms posited by the self in its search for its real nature. This is the level of moral self-consciousness and social reality

corresponding to it. The only social theory, then, which can truly understand social reality is moral theory. Correspondingly the categories relevant to the comprehension of social reality can only be definitions of norms based on value which itself is truly apprehended in terms of self-enlightenment.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Cf. W.D. Ross, *Aristotle*, "*The ordinary meaning of kritigrapix is 'predicate'*, . . . ", p. 23.
2. *Praśastapādabhāṣyam.*
3. Hegel's *Wissenschaft der Logik* is the most strenuous attempt to give an exhaustive account of such standards.
4. Cf. Jowett, *Dialogues of Plato*, Vol. I, p. 771.
5. Cf. Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (Hamburg, 1956), p. 292, asterisked note on the definition of reality.
6. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 337. Kant's comments on Platonic ideas—*ibid.*, pp. 349ff. Kant's agreement with Plato relates only to moral ideas.
7. Cf. Hegel, *op. cit.* (Frankfurt am Main, 1969), Vol. I, p. 52: "Kant hat die dialektik hoher gestellt . . . die allgemeine Idee, die er zugrunde gelegt und geltend gemacht hat, ist die *Objectivitat des Scheins* und *Notwendigkeit des Widespruchs*, der zur *Natur* der Denkbestimmungen gehort: . . ."
8. Cf. Spinoza, *Ethics* (Eusyman's), Pt. II, Prop. XI (*Coroll*).
9. Cf. my tr. and comy. on Ratnakirti's *Apohasiddhi*.
10. Cf. my tr. and comy. on Dharmakirti's *Nyāyabindu*.
11. Cf. Stcherbatsky's *Buddhist Logic*, Vol. I, pp. 79ff, 191ff.
12. Cf. my *Studies in the Origins of Buddhism*.
13. For the Buddhist psychology of perception, see *Abhidharmakośa* and *Abhidhammattha-Saṅgaho*.
14. I.e. *Pravṛttisānarthya, Alvisatvāda.*
15. Cf. The Sāṁkhyan notion of *puruṣārtha* where Nature though insentient works *as if* for the Spirit, with which may be compared the Aristotelian and Kantian notions of teleology.
16. Cf. my *History of the Development of Buddhism* (in Hindi), Chapter on Mahāyana.
17. *Āyaraṁgasūtta* as quoted and interpreted in my *Aspects of Jaina Political Thought* (forthcoming).
18. Preface to his comy. on *Vedāntasūtras* (tr. Thibaut).
19. *Loc. cit.*
20. Cf. my *Meaning and Process of Culture*, pp. 140ff; also my *Mūlya-mimāṁsā* (conclusion).

Marxism and Popular Protest Historiography:
Notes and Questions

Majid Hayat Siddiqi

". . . always . . . selectivity is the point; the way in which, from a whole possible area of past and present, certain meanings and practices are chosen for emphasis. . . ."

—Raymond Williams,
Problems of Materialism and Culture,
London, 1980, p. 39.

OUR PRESENT is constituted of various elements from the past and the reconstruction of the past in the present involves many tendentious choices. Historians who write about the past in the hope of fashioning an idiom of scholarship often labour under an illusion that in doing so they are, in their own present, intervening in the political process. While it may be true in the largest sense that no historical writing is value-free, the distance between the desired ends of scholarship and the arguments that are sought to be welded into weapons is often great and untraversable. Nor is the self-consciousness of such a scholarship unique. Often it will be seen repeating what has already been said before, reinforcing tautologies with variations in detail and emphasis. Usually such writings are prefaced with strongly worded statements of intent or commitment and are to be found in the greatest number in popular protest historiography. In this essay we review such historical literature to argue, first, that historical writing derived from assumptions shared by a Marxist theory of politics and a liberal-evolutionist view of

social progress leads us to propositions that are based on teleological reasoning. Secondly, we argue that in keeping with the underlying teleological idea, the distinction between ideology as a system of beliefs and the historical process of the transmission of these beliefs in society is blurred through a subordination of the questions of 'probability' and 'choice' to the necessity of identifying the epochal movement of ideas. Thirdly, we examine how teleological predisposition may indeed be questioned within the analytical and narrative structures of popular protest historiography. Finally, we review the factors which make for contrariety within popular protest historiography by drawing attention to a contradiction between 'long-view' and 'short-term' considerations of Marxist theory and the need to develop mutually exclusive criteria for political and historical analysis.

I

In a roughly hewn form a people's historiography began to develop in India[1] in the nineteen-forties when R. Palme Dutt argued that

> Peasant unrest and peasant risings can be traced with increasing frequency during the period of British rule in India. In their first primitive and spontaneous forms the anger and unrest of the peasants found expression in isolated actions of revenge and violence against individual money-lenders and landlords.[2]

In this formulation note was first taken, following 'orthodox' Marxist condescension, of the primitiveness of peasant rebellion. At the same time the 'spontaneity' thesis was advanced suggesting the need for introducing from 'above' a superior form of organization. The peasantry was seen to have a revolutionary potential when it was noted that since the World War of 1914-18

> Peasant unrest in India has advanced at a speed without previous parallel and takes on a more and more clearly revolutionary character.[3]

The capacity of the peasantry to organize independently of the nationalist leadership—the 'autonomy' thesis—was also acknowledged:

> The peasants spontaneously formed village committees to resist evictions . . . and were drawn into the political struggle of the Indian National Congress on the basis of their own grievances but the political struggle was never directly linked up with the local kisan [peasant] committees. . . . The peasants came to feel the need to develop these and create their own mass organisation.[4]

Time and again, with an imperviousness to its own past, these ideas have been repeated in post-independence history writing in India as if new, ignoring the observations of Palme Dutt. At least three scholars have employed the metaphors of 'currents' and 'streams' to describe the chronologically continuous occurrence of protest. One, similarly, has spoken of mobilization from 'above' and 'below'. Still others have sought to resolve the question of how to treat a broad agglomerate of social classes in protest by enveloping all in a single category of 'subaltern classes'/'people' while emphasizing the distinctive characteristics of autonomous political action, spontaneity, violence and horizontal mobilization.[5] As is well known, for Marxist historical analysis (from which Palme Dutt derived his own framework) these ideas, originally spelt out by Engels,[6] are not new. Yet, should we wish to accommodate this Fanonist muscle-flexing on the peasantry's behalf,[7] developed as an idiom purportedly to trounce nationalistic hegemonic claims over peasant history, we would still come up against the fact that this very idiom, of popular protest, was already an integral feature of nationalist historiography itself. We find the 'autonomy' and 'spontaneity' theses preserved in Gandhi's remarks (1921), in Nehru's autobiography (1936), and in the account of a peasant movement (1918-19 and 1928) by a leader of the Congress Right.[8]

The point which we would like to emphasize is that historical categories that are in use at a given point in time are broadly shared, even by contending adversaries. Their application to a given historical problem is not limited to being constituted of

only the most immediate polemics that may arise from contemporary concern with the politics of any given society.[9] In fact these polemics and the accompanying histories on which they are based are themselves often entirely derivative even though in their movement they may be described as riding the broad back of an anarchist ideology. If, as Chomsky has argued, anarchism is not "a fixed, self-enclosed social system but rather a definite trend in the historic development of mankind . . . [which] strives for the free unhindered unfolding of all the individual and social forces in life",[10] then indeed the emphases on spontaneity and autonomy in this historiography are its very life-blood. Sanction for such a view may also be found in Marx to Freiligrath (1860), where it is stated that it is desirable to retain a distinction between party in the narrow sense and "party in the great historical sense of the word . . . which grows everywhere, spontaneously, from the soil of modern society."[11] Except that such a definition would encompass the politically diverse views even of the conservative. Gandhi, for example, expressed open disdain for a history other than a people's history.[12] Hu Shih, vanguard intellectual of the rightist schism in China's May Fourth movement, saw the common people as the motivating force behind innovations in even cultural and literary history.[13] Our description therefore does not lead us any closer to knowing more about why these emphases persist in such unbroken continuity. It could be argued that they had a political birth in the course of a national movement and given the structurally unchanged, though of course socially changing, nature of oppositions in the welter of ideologies, they cannot but have persisted. This would be a superficial functionalist explanation, for the problem as defined till now has a more universal ramification.

Even within a set of closely formulated propositions such as Marxism, it is difficult to discern how and why a historical study of popular protest reinforces and/or redefines a sense of the past, aside of course from providing an emotional satisfaction of belonging to 'an age-old tradition of rebellion':

> Is it analogous to the sense of continuity which . . . makes it apparently desirable for school children to learn of the

existence of . . . ['national' personalities] . . . they are
supposed to know about . . .?[14]

We should like to insist with Hobsbawm that

our instinctive sympathy with the sentiment should not
. . . lead us to overlook the difficulty of discovering why
this should be so.[15]

Perhaps it might be easier for us to approach this question
by looking at the written history of popular protest in Europe.
Here too we see that the rather one-dimensional teleological
idea that people determine social progress while ascending
higher levels of ideological development (towards democracy,
bourgeois and socialist) is retained by both Liberal and Marxist
practitioners of the craft. The English rising of 1381, for G.M.
Trevelyan, "sets it beyond doubt that the peasant had grasped
the conception of complete personal liberty" and that "he con-
sidered freedom to be his right".[16] In a considerably more
sophisticated form, a similar inflexion has been detected in
Hobsbawm's writings with the difference that Hobsbawm, unlike
Trevelyan, sees ideological and organizational forms of
primitive rebellion and social banditry as developing in
response to changes in the characteristics of prevalent modes of
production.[17]

Not only do changes in social organizations and politics seem
oı be based upon popular volition, or at least upon the con-
sequences of popular volition in history, even ideological
change across social formations is seen to occur in a similar
manner. George Rude has recently, after explicitly stating
his adherence to a Gramscian framework and his own pref-
erence for studying the "less structured forms of thought
that circulate among the common people",[18] argued that
ideological change across social formations results from the
synthesis of local traditions and experience with derived ideol-
ogy and this is effective only under certain conditions. What
these conditions are and whether the total social picture within
which these are located suggests an ongoing continuity upon
popular sentiment may best be judged after quoting Rude at
some length.

What I am arguing is that there are three factors . . . to be taken account of: the 'inherent' element which . . . was the common base; the 'derived' . . . element which could only be effectively absorbed if the ground was already prepared; and the circumstances and experience which, in the final analysis, determined the nature of the final mixture. In this way only can we understand why the *sans-culotte* of Paris remained revolutionary while many of their confreres at Lyon, Marseilles and other cities, whose 'inherent' beliefs were broadly the same as their own and who had experienced a similar baptism of revolution, later, under the impact of a new set of ('Girondin') ideas, changed their allegiance; and why the Vendee peasants, with similar 'inherent' beliefs and aspirations to peasants in the rest of France, in the conditions prevailing in the spring of 1793, allowed their former revolutionary ideas to be pushed aside by others.

However, it is not quite so simple; for in all such cases . . . the stubbornness of the original 'inherent' beliefs are [sic] such that the new 'derived' ideas, whether progressive or conservative, that come through the channels of transmission—and this is not peculiar to the 'pre-industrial' period—are not likely to be the same as those that went in. So the process of grafting was never a simple $A+B$ affair. Had the 'inherent' element been a purely passive recipient then perhaps it might. But, in fact, in the case of all classes, and not of the 'popular' classes alone, all 'derived' ideas in the course of transmission and adoption suffer a transformation or 'sea-change'; its nature will depend on the social needs or the political aims of the classes that are ready to absorb them.

He adds, significantly, that what is also true is that

the popular revolutionary tradition, having led an underground existence out of sight of the authorities, survived and re-emerged in new forms and under new historical conditions when the 'people'—the recipients of the previous set of derived ideas—had also suffered a 'sea-change'.[19]

Thus, for Rude, the ideas of John Ball and Wat Tyler, of Poor Conrad and Thomas Muenzer, of Levellers, Diggers, Ranters, and of the *sans-culotte*, seen as representing the people's movement from below, are also seen as having surfaced centuries later in other political forms and even other societies.[20] The past is seen as having tapered into each successive present in which, each time, the semblance of only a serial continuity was retained. It could not have been otherwise, given the widely disparate forms of belief, culture and social structure that finally emerged from the upheavals of the preceding six centuries (notwithstanding the fact that altogether it was essentially the emergence of the political and ideological forms of capitalism). Thus Rude's Gramscian promise remains unfulfilled. He offers us the specifics of popular protest so long as we are willing to accept his general point: that the historical study of ideology has meaning only when it is seen as if flowing through all varieties of channels of transmission—i.e. in and across time (or, "if the ground is already prepared"). And if the 'people' too are seen as having changed each time, the 'new-old' ideas, when they surfaced in the succeeding epochs, are seen as having been received by a 'new-old' people. Rude's dragging of popular protest across the threshold of time leads, therefore, only to what Geertz has called a "flattened view of other people's mentalities".[21]

II

The point that ideology is discontinuous is nevertheless an element of the Marxist historical method. In *The Peasant War in Germany*, for instance, the limits on Muenzer's thought (and action)—'objective' limits imposed by the conditions of the time—are emphatically described. This, despite the fact that *Peasant War* "was largely an expression of frustration at the failure of 1848 . . . a restatement of [Engels'] belief in the continuance of the revolutionary tradition in Germany".[22] In this classic, while an individual's capacity to transcend his historical context is explicitly denied, the teleological idea of the continuity of ideology across time (i.e. across modes of production) is retained. This, albeit, in a form in which the individual is

made to stand as surrogate for ideology. This is evident from Engels' remarks about Muenzer.

> The worst thing that can befall a leader of an extreme party is to be compelled to take over a government in an epoch when the movement is not yet ripe for the domination of the class which he represents and for the realization of the measures which that domination would imply. What he *can* do depends not upon his will but upon the sharpness of the clash of interests between the various classes and upon the degree of development of the material means of existence, the relations of production and means of communication upon which the clash of interests of the classes is based every time.

Hence class struggle is seen as dependent on the relations of production in a given mode at a point in time and 'will'—('ideology', 'autonomy', 'spontaneity', 'voluntarism')—is seen as incapable of transcending the limits of what is possible in a given age. Engels, in the same passage, continues:

> What he *ought* to do, what his party demands of him again depends not upon him, or upon the degree of development of the class struggle and its conditions. He is bound to his doctrine and the demands hitherto propounded which do not emanate from the interrelations of the social classes at a given moment, or from the more or less accidental level of relations of production and means of communication, but from his more or less penetrating insight into the general result of the social and political movement. Thus he necessarily finds himself in a dilemma. What he *can* do is in contrast to all his actions as hitherto practised, to all his principles and to the present interests of his party; what he *ought* to do cannot be achieved. In a word, he is compelled to represent not his party or his class, but the class for whom conditions are ripe for domination.

So it is also posited that ideas can appear well ahead of their time. Ideas such as those of Muenzer, it is thereby suggested,

provide the 'continuous' links between the past and the successive present. There is, however, nothing in the historical account of things as they were which warrants the conclusion that Muenzer represented ideas *ahead* of his time. By suggesting that Muenzer's ideas, though of his time, were truly speaking not of his time, i.e. they did not arise from the variety of the configurations of material forces (described by Engels) "but from his more or less penetrating insight", Engels forecloses two issues in favour of a teleological vision in history.[23]

First, that which in ideology is not explicable in terms of strictly 'material' forces is described as representing through the individual's aspirations a 'forward' movement. (One could just as easily argue that Muenzer's 'communist' ideas belonged to his past.) The second question foreclosed is that of 'choice'. That which Muenzer thought "he *ought* to do", and which could not then "be achieved", is depicted as a possibility of the future. In that respect, for the present in which Engels lived and wrote, the past was not seen as dead.

The past, however, is dead. History is about an absolute past in which there were no choices that were 'open', but for the (often regretted) intervention of this or that individual, party, or other historical agency. Of course, at each stage in history choices were open to individuals but these were only within the present to which that individual belonged. Marc Bloch, aware of the pitfalls of historical criticism, has drawn our attention to the past-bound nature of such 'choices' and the limits by which these, like the question of probability as a whole, are governed.

> When the historian asks himself about the probability of a past event, he actually attempts to transport himself, by a bold exercise of the mind, to the time before the event itself, in order to gauge its chances, as they appeared upon the eve of its realization. Hence probability remains properly in the future. But since the line of the present has somehow been moved back in the imagination, it is a future of bygone times built upon a fragment which, for us, is actually the past. If it is incontestable that the event has taken place, these speculations have little more value than that of a metaphysical game.

> ... We are not forbidden to amuse ourselves with these questions, providing we understand them for what they really are: simple rhetorical devices intended to illuminate the role of contingency and of the unforeseeable.... They have nothing to do with the criticism of evidence.[24]

We have felt it necessary to emphasize this subordination of 'choice' and 'probability' to 'individual' and 'ideology' because often hypotheses in popular protest history are wholly contemporaneously phrased alongside the assumption that the past *in fact* offered choices of which we might avail today.[25] Thus it is asked in Indian history, "Why did the Left fail to make a revolution?",[26] or, again, it is asserted by a historian, a major political figure, that poor Muslim peasantry in southern India were "very good material as peasant cadres if only there had been a good and efficient central leadership", and that "the greatest mass movement in British Malabar was diverted into the most tragic and futile mass action",[27] merely because it was not led under a political leadership that would be relevant to the author's present.

We would also like to point to one other element in the reasoning criticized above which is functionalist in orientation and from which the immediate 'causal' context is putatively derived. This is the unity, often seen to exist, between a set of stated religious precepts and their ultimate value in a social context. In a sense this tendency may be described as the radical obverse of the prejudice of 'Orientalism' criticized by Said.[28] It consists of spotting the potential for revolutionary action arising from a presumed—and to an extent justifiable—consonance in ideological, political, and ethical notions of preordained historicity between two distinct traditions and this then serves as grist for the protest historian's mill. The sympathy between Islam and Marxism is indicated by Thomas Hodgkin, for example, through Sultan Galiyev's and Jamal-al-din-al Afghani's humanist views[29] and then generalized as a universal possibility:

> Revolutionary Islam ... shares with marxism a concept

of history as involving a continuing conflict between
oppressors and oppressed, leading, by a process conceived
as historically necessary, to the ultimate victory of the
oppressed; and generating, in a profound crisis, a revol-
utionary movement which will bring about the overthrow
of the existing corrupt and oppressive social order and
the substitution of a just and classless society.[30]

One could cite, in response, not an historical example in which
the factually opposite were true,—that Islam and Marxism in
their political manifestations were not able even to work out a
modus vivendi, and such examples there are in plenty—but one
in which the paradigmatic opposite is found to be true. In the
process of the Chinese Revolution, the communists found it
advisable to forge a political unity with an Islamic peasant
community based primarily upon the mutual recognition *of
their differences*.[31] From Indian archival materials we know
that Pan-Islamist ideas, in their anti-imperialist unity with
Marxism, were not seen by political activists as preordained
in the direction of communism, but, given the emphasis on
equality in both traditions, towards the eventual adoption of
Islam by 'Bolshevism'.[32] Given the fact that Hodgkin's argu-
ment is based on an assessment of the complementarity of two
sets of normative belief, there seems to be little logical obstruc-
tion in the way of accepting the teleology of any one set.

To recapitulate our argument till this point: We have argued
that teleology is an element common to historical writing of
both liberal and Marxist ideological persuasion. This teleol-
ogical structure, is reinforced by two factors mainly. One is
the nominalist application of an underlying assumption of
progress. The second involves a reductionist reasoning which
has given rise to historically false questions about 'sponta-
neity', 'autonomy' and 'choice'. These questions, which have
featured widely in the historiography of popular protest, are in
fact located on a matrix of pseudo-probability. Along such a
matrix the unreal claim about the historicity of continuity is
made which is merely serial and the case for which could be
argued only from a vantage point of a present which is itself
defined, i.e. self-perceived, as identifiable within a historical-
teleological process.[33]

III

For all the teleology inherent in popular protest historiography, historians have nevertheless begun to argue, some explicitly, within this tradition itself, the case for delinking the autonomy of description from any sense of a forced pace of time. In Hobsbawm's writings on social banditry and peasant rebellion, to which we have earlier referred as situated on the straight and narrow path, there are 'heretic' elements. His observations on the emergence of the Sicilian Mafia tells us that

> *it grew out of the needs of all rural classes and served the purpose of all* in varying degrees. . . . For the feudal lords it was a means of safeguarding property and authority: for the rural middle class a means of gaining it . . . it was a complex movement including mutually contradictory elements . . . [emphasis added].

He adds, and this is significant,

> however tiresome to the historian he must resist the temptation to pigeon-hole Mafia more precisely at this stage of its development. . . .[34]

Here the character of the popular movement in Sicily from the middle to the late nineteenth century is not (pre) defined in terms of what followed later: i.e. the Mafia's reactionary nature in its backing of authority in the Sicilian peasant rising of 1894, its increasing distance from socialist and peasant league activity in the first two decades of the twentieth century and its support for the non-fascist Liberal Party. Nor is its own existence seen always to have been a function of any one or more classes, rising or falling. In Marxian phraseology, the necessity of recognizing the autonomy of the elements of a superstructure (and therefore also of social phenomena as a whole, in their own right) is underscored.

In history writing about China too popular protest is beginning to be considered differently. The problem of the characterization of the phenomena of social protest in the short run, outside any framework of 'the ultimate', is increasingly being rec-

ognized. Lucien Bianco acknowledges the double-edgedness in any assessment of the role of the Red Spears.[35] They provided the population protection against bandits while "at times the society rather resembled the Mafia and exacted a heavy toll from the rural population". "In the peasants' eyes, the society was alternatively the elite and the dregs . . . *or both at once.*"[36] Jean Chesneaux, while dismissing, we think a bit too tardily, those secret societies which depended on 'spiritual mumbo-jumbo' as 'artificial', recognizes, nevertheless, that when

> they served as *corporate embodiment* of individual desires for insurrection . . . [they] were capable of extraordinary offensive and defensive efforts . . . *finding in themselves all the answers they sought, they had no ultimate interest in the class struggle as such.*[37] [emphasis added].

The greater acceptance of the cultural and political autonomy of popular protest—an autonomy in spite of and along with, not merely as, class struggle—and of popular protest as cultural form, is also evident from a seminal article on political shoemakers in Europe. Its authors have demonstrated the long duration of this phenomenon, manifested in a heterodox and endemic protest, reflecting the material culture of a trade which met its demise in an era of large-scale industrial production. Yet the study is remarkably free of any hint of teleology, especially when we consider the fact that the ideologies espoused by shoemakers were always radical in a spectrum embracing anarchism, socialism, and even communism.[38]

The freeing of concepts hitherto embedded in the historian's habits of political analysis and the discovery of their greater flexibility and innovative potential, however, has also led at times to rather unhappy compromises between the movement towards a new history and a ubiquitous past. This we feel to be true for the application of the concept of 'moral economy' to peasant protest in Southeast Asia.[39] As developed originally by E.P. Thompson, 'moral economy' reflected the shared area of concern between a paternalistic eighteenth-century English society and its 'crowd', especially with regard to market practices.[40] The labouring classes and the poor could not see this moral economy violated by middle men and protested through popular demon-

strations, mainly food riots, to defend the assumptions on which they considered its legitimacy to have been based.[41] Its application to an explanation of the Nge-Tinh Soviets of Vietnam and the Saya San rebellion in Burma,[42] while innovative, includes simultaneously two different, even contradictory, methodological assumptions both of which Scott attempts to uphold. He argues that his own analysis is "essentially phenomenological",[43] i.e., it explores and defends the view that peasant values and experience defined their sense of equity which they did not allow to be violated. He, therefore, sees his own task as limited. A phenomenological approach to social history is primarily informed by a cultural relativism.[44] It presumably would not accept a holistic philosophy such as that of the early Lukacs.[45] But Scott insists:

> It is not necessary for my argument nor would I necessarily claim that the peasant's view of relative equity is to be preferred on normative grounds to any other standard of exploitation. In fact the argument is in no way inconsistent with a view that would label this peasant notion of exploitation a form of false-consciousness.[46]

The idea of false-consciousness and the penumbra of connotative implications for a Marxist theory of ideology which the term immediately brings to mind[47] are not acceptable however to the original author of the moral economy concept.[48] Nor are these consistent with the phenomenological approach purportedly deployed by Scott. In this approach symbols are acknowledged as real[49] and are not considered merely surface features of some more basic reality.[50] The erosion of the principles of reciprocity and subsistence in the Southeast Asian peasants' moral economy arises, we are told further, from the movement of structural historical features:

> The more precapitalist the context, the more likely the exchange will involve a great variety of reciprocal services beyond the arrangements for cultivation and the division of the crop.[51]

In such a movement, then, is implied a teleology in reverse. The

probability of the historical existence of a culturally specific moral economy is seen to be greater the further away (chronologically backwards in time) the society is seen to be from the onslaught of capitalism. Thus does the moral economy concept move from eighteenth-century English society to twentieth-century Southeast Asia, from a 'phenomenological' explanation to peaceful coexistence with the 'false-consciousness' assumptions, from a cultural present to a historical past and back again. It is thus a dual yet indirect reductionism both from political theory and historical generality, proxied by a cultural, phenomenological mediation.

That voluntarist and teleological implications of popular protest history are being questioned, however cautiously, is not in doubt. This is reflected in recent studies of Indian history though it must be added that it is yet the weaker emphasis. A study of agrarian crime in Bihar in the late nineteenth century reconstructs the domination of a rural hierarchy without referring to any 'anti-landlord' process prompted by the schema of an eventual rich peasant ascendancy.[52] Another work, on the formation of polarized religious identities as communalist antagonism, suggests the incorporation of unrest and mobilization themes within a framework of symbolic culture[53] ungoverned by the consideration that the story would have significance only if it tapered into an ultimate explanation for the 1947 partition of India along religious lines. Recent historical work has also shown that the old question of 'spontaneous' agrarian unrest versus 'bourgeois' Indian nationalism can have more than one implication. A study of peasant protest on a large north Indian estate[54] demonstrates how the 'autonomous' opposition of a 'spontaneous' peasant leader could also lead—as it indeed did—to the creation of a mass base for the politics of Council entry, politically a position to the 'right' of Gandhi's Congress. As for continuity, a definitive study of Malabar Muslim society establishes the real and historical (*not* historicist) continuity determined by long-run religious solidarity than have Malabar history interpreted in eventist terms of communalist politics and peasant uprising.[55]

IV

Both Marxist and non-Marxist liberal historical studies, in the explication of popular protest, reinforce a teleology which is based on political considerations of the present. There is an ever-present temptation for historians of popular protest to lend their account significance in the terms of their own political belief. This results, more often than not, in a narrow utilitarian conception of the historian's value to society however readily it be conceded that as the movement of knowledge is asymptotic to its object,[56] any correlation of political positions and a historian's quest would not stand scrutiny.

We have observed in the preceding section a glimmer of developing differences of approach that are evident within the widening orbit of popular protest historiography. Such differences seem to be based at first sight either only on the particular choice of the object of study or on a growing methodological pluralism, both within and around the Marxist historical method. What is not squarely confronted is a contradiction of Marxist theory, between its view of history and the necessity of political action. From a top-flight perspective this distinction has been observed when the difference between Marxism as a science and the ideological underpinnings of historical materialism has been emphasized.[57] The distance between a formulation of ideas at that level and the nitty-gritty of a historian's plane, however, is so great that one might well 'operate' one kind of theoretical emphasis and 'subscribe' formally to another.[58]

The dual divide, between politics and history on the one hand and the theory and practice of history-writing on the other, is not manifest in the methodological pluralism of popular protest history alone. It is fundamental to a Marxist concern about the choice of criteria for historical study as a whole. These criteria may either be defined as of simultaneous relevance to a Marxist theory of politics and a Marxist concern with history or one should take cognizance of a divergence of assumptions about politics and history within Marxism, especially when these are seen to overlap in contemporaneous situations.

In order that our discussion not become too abstruse, we

would like to show, through an illustration drawn from Marxist Indian history, how an historical assessment within one time-frame clashes with another historical assessment in another time-frame. Each of these two assessments differ, however, only in the object and period chosen for study and not because any one of these examples is in any way deficient in the existing criteria for Marxist historical analysis. The first of these examples we may describe as (a) *The Peasantry and Class Struggles in Indian History: A Long View*, and the second as (b) *The Peasantry and Nationalism in Modern India*.

(a) According to a recent estimate of Indian history over two thousand years,

> The specific features of Indian peasant uprisings . . . deserve careful consideration. The basic one. . . is their comparatively backward level of class-consciousness. In China peasant revolts with specific demands for tax-reductions have caused dynastic changes. In the English rising of 1381 and the Peasant Wars in Germany in the 16th century, the peasants came forward with the objective of securing specific changes in their legal and economic status. In other words, the peasantry, in its own consciousness, stood forth as a class. It is here pre-eminently that the Indian peasant revolts exhibit a remarkable deficiency. . . .
>
> The peasantry's first steps towards the attainment of its self-awareness was an achievement of the National Movement, for whose success the peasants were so largely responsible.[59]

(b) A common underlying emphasis in a burgeoning literature on peasant uprisings in British India has been that the peasantry organized and carried out its movements largely independently of the nationalist leadership. In fact, the ideology of Indian nationalism is seen to have acted as a barrier to the initial organization and the further development of the revolutionary potential of the peasantry.[60]

While the protagonists of 'nationalist' historiography will no doubt see a vindication of their own stand in (a) just as their adversaries will return to the archives for some more

evidence for (b), clearly the varying assessments do not signify only a difference between the levels of generalization, (a) being higher, by virtue of its longer time-span, than (b). The long-view of (a) leads us to consider the self-awareness of the peasantry as a class to have been an achievement of the National Movement. Studies which have focused, narrowly, through monographs, on the autonomous origins of peasant activism lead us to the conclusion that the role played by the National Movement was not so important after all. Each assessment would find an integral place in the premises of any hypothesis which seeks to explore the nature of the ideology of contemporary India vis-à-vis class-awarenesss of the peasantry for a political understanding. Which view, the long or the short (from the standpoint that a historical view is indeed useful for the formulation of contemporary political positions), is then to be of greater 'Marxist' value? Why?

A concern within the Marxist tradition with 'where to pitch?' an historical argument and 'why?', has of course a longer history than what our illustration suggests in its emphasis on a limited political conundrum. Marxist theory as a whole has always been a 'total' theory within which differences of logical space, of economics, politics and ideology, have been delineated by its interpreters. This has been the moving spirit behind Lukacs' suggestion that in social science the "monographic method is the best way to obscure the horizon of a problem".[61] When, however, such a totalizing scheme was redeveloped towards a synthesis that would incorporate the value (long asserted by Marx and Engels anyway) of the empirically specific,[62] a conclusion, diametrically the opposite of Lukacs', was reached by Gramsci. For him, successful subaltern history for example, could "only be dealt with monographically".[63] It could

> only be demonstrated when an historical cycle is completed and this cycle culminates in a success. Subaltern groups are always subject to the activity of ruling groups even when they rebel and rise up: only "permanent victory" breaks their subordination and that not immediately. In reality, even when they appear triumphant, the subaltern

> groups are merely anxious to defend themselves. . . .[64]
> [emphasis added].

Thus, we suggest, Gramsci was not unaware of the potential of myth-making in a subaltern history attempting a wider canvas than what mere monographs would allow. If the monographic condition were to be transgressed by a practitioner of *praxis*, given the diversified and fragmentary nature of the evidence for subaltern history, he would be left with little control over his material.[65] The empirical was the historian's only terrain. The 'people' were not amenable to theory.

The meaning and implications of 'an historical cycle', however, like so much else in Gramsci's writings, are left unelaborated. We may take it then that a completed 'historical cycle' is a reference in figurative language to a successful proletarian revolution ("permanent victory"). Therefore, while the distance between ideologically conditioned political activism and the scientific status of historical analysis is indeed acknowledged, for Gramsci too the latter continues to be contingent on the former.

We should like to conclude therefore that to acknowledge explicitly the distinction within Marxism between approaches to history and roads to politics is for Marxists no battle lost to ideological pluralism.[66] On the contrary, any recognition of this distinction and of the further need for evolving criteria that are mutually exclusive for political and historical analysis would only strengthen the status of Marxism as a science.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. This essay begins with an illustration drawn from history writing about India merely as a convenient point of departure for the author. No original significance is implied.
2. R. Palme Dutt, *India Today*, London, 1940 (reprint 1970), p. 275.
3. *Ibid.*, 276.
4. *Ibid.*
5. See, respectively, L. Natarajan, *Peasant Uprisings in India, 1850-1900*, Bombay, 1953, 'Conclusion'; G. Pandey, *The Ascendancy of the Congress in Uttar Pradesh, 1926-34*, Delhi, 1978, p. 216; R. Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies I*, Delhi, 1982, p. 5; M.H. Siddiqi, *Agrarian Unrest in North India, 1918-22*, Delhi, 1978, p. 111; R. Guha *et al.*

in R. Guha (ed.), *loc. cit.*; D. Hardiman, *Peasant Nationalists of Gujarat, 1917-34*, Delhi, 1981, p. 14.

6. F. Engels, *The Peasant War in Germany*, London, 1927, *passim.*

7. As inspiration derived from Frantz Fanon's warning against 'The Pitfalls of National Consciousness' in *The Wretched of the Earth*, London, 1969, pp. 119-65, or from Alavi's seminal article 'Peasants and Revolution' urging a revaluation of the role of the peasantry in a schema of revolution. H. Alavi in *The Socialist Register*, 1965.

8. For Gandhi's recognition that the peasant movement was anterior to Congress involvement, see *Young India, 1919-22*, Madras, 1924, p. 742; for Nehru's candid admission of this fact, *An Autobiography*, London, 1936, pp. 51-53. Rajendra Prasad, *Satyagraha in Champaran*, second revised edn., Ahmedabad, 1949, pp. III-IV (Hindi, 1918-19, English, 1928) devotes an entire chapter to autonomous antecedents of peasant protest in 1907-09.

9. We might recall here Marc Bloch's salient suggestion that "to be excited by the same dispute even on opposing sides, is still to be alike". *The Historian's Craft*, New York, 1973, p. 185.

10. Noam Chomsky, quoting Rudolph Rocker (*Anarchosyndicalism*), in 'Notes on Anarchism', *For Reasons of State*, Fontana, 1973, p. 151.

11. N. Geras, 'Classical Marxism and Proletarian Representation', *New Left Review*, 125, p. 86.

12. B.G. Gokhale, 'Gandhi and History', *History and Theory*, XI, 2, 1972, p. 217.

13. Hu Shih, *The Chinese Renaissance*, New York, 1963, quoted in F. Schurmann and O. Schell (eds.), *Republican China*, Penguin, 1968, p. 59.

14. E.J. Hobsbawm, 'The Social Function of the Past: Some Questions', *Past and Present*, No: 55, 1972, pp. 13-14.

15. *Ibid.*

16. Writing, thus, without the politics left out, Trevelyan's remark antedates the introduction of 'people's history' and 'crowd history' in British and European historiography. G.M. Trevelyan, *England in the Age of Wycliffe*, p. 185 cited in G. Rude, *Ideology and Popular Protest*, London, 1980, p. 43.

17. Pat O'Malley, 'Social Bandits, Modern Capitalism and the Traditional Peasantry. A Critique of Hobsbawm', *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, Vol. 6, No: 4, 1979, pp. 489-94.

18. G. Rude, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 35-37.

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 92, 112.

21. Clifford Geertz, 'Ideology as a Cultural System', in *The Interpretation of Cultures*, London, 1975, p. 210. For a convincingly worded warning against stretching the idea of continuity in people's responses motivations across long periods, see Stuart Hall, 'Notes on Deconstructing "The Popular" in R. Samuel (ed.), *People's History and Socialist Theory*, London, 1981, pp. 227-40. Cf. also R. Holton,

'The Crowd in History: Some Problems of Theory and Method', *Social History*, 3, 1978, pp. 219-33.

22. Bob Scribner's brief yet comprehensive historiographical piece on the 1525 revolution, (pp. 242-55), in R. Samuel (ed.), *People's History*, *op. cit*.

23. All preceding quotes are from Engels, *op. cit.*, p. 135. Emphasis in the original.

24. Marc Bloch, *op. cit.*, pp. 124-25; for clues to Bloch's theory of the growth of knowledge on which is predicated his view of historical criticism, pp. 55, 62, 75. Cf., also, inherent logical problems in such glib back-projections, brilliantly illustrated in Max Black, 'Possibility', *Models and Metaphors*, Ithaca, 1962, pp. 140-52.

25. Aware of the absurd lengths to which such 'commitment' might be made to stretch, it has been forcefully rebutted by E.P. Thompson who feels it necessary to clarify, from his own empirical study, that 'plebian culture' is to be seen within "a structured set of relations, in which the State, the law, the libertarian ideology, the ebullitions and direct actions of the crowd, all perform roles intrinsic to that system, and within limits assigned by that system, which limits are at the same time the limits of what is politically and culturally "possible" also". E.P. Thompson, 'Eighteenth Century English, Society: class struggle without a class?', *Social History*, III(2), 1978, pp. 161-62.

26. The central theme of a special issue on the Left in Indian History, *Studies in History*, Vol. III, Nos.: 1 and 2, 1981, Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. We have argued elsewhere that a concern with fictitious possibilities too easily slips into judgements about moral 'right' and 'wrong' in history. Review, 'Nationalism and Colonialism', *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, Vol. 12, No: 2, 1982, pp. 236-38. "Why did the left fail?" is only the obverse of the other question, "Why did Gandhi betray?" the people's aspirations. The asking of this latter question as a historical question has been properly criticized by Sumit Sarkar in his *Popular Movements and Middle Class Leadership in Late Colonial India*, Calcutta, 1983, p. 50. Yet, Sarkar falls into that very error himself when he begins his essay by talking of the "ultimate relative *failure* of mass initiative" (emphasis in the original), p. 3, and closes with "ultimate failure", p. 61. To refer to the masses in an anthropomorphic vein is no different from asking the same question of individuals.

27. E.M.S. Namboodiripad, *A Short History of the Peasant Movement in Kerala*, Bombay, 1943, pp. 10-11, quoted in R. Hardgrave, 'The Mappilla Rebellion, 1921', *Modern Asian Studies*, II, i, 1977, pp. 96-97.

28. Edward Said, *Orientalism*, London, 1978.

29. Thomas Hodgkin, 'The Revolutionary Tradition in Islam', *History Workshop Journal*, 10, 1980, pp. 138-50; for an earlier, similar, strain, W.C. Smith, *Islam in Modern History*, London, 1957.

30. Hodgkin, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

31. See the chapter, "Moslem and Marxist" in Edgar Snow, *Red Star over China*, Pelican, 1972 edn., esp. p. 358.

32. Special Bureau of Information Weekly Reports No: 2 (19 February 1920), p. 6 and No: 13 (15 May 1920), p. 6 in Political Secret File No: 1229, 1920, 4 and 20, India Office Library, London. [Xerox at Archives of Contemporary History, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.]

33. Hobsbawm, questioning the subjective and emotive element in the choice of a historian's subjects for research, has decried social class and popular protest studies as so much 'vulgar Marxism' when these have emerged from only an incidental identification with the Marxist method in history. 'Karl Marx's Contribution to Historiography' in R. Blackburn (ed.), *Ideology in Social Science*, Fontana, London, 1972, pp. 270-71, esp. point 6: "Specific subjects of investigation derived not so much from Marx, as from the interest of the movements associated with his theory, e.g. in the agitations of the oppressed classes (peasants, workers), or in revolutions". Writing in sympathy with Althusser, Hobsbawm also stressed the belief that in Marx's model of social change, 'class struggle' represented only one set of a given society's internl contradictions, "merely a special case", that could also be playing a "subordinate part". *Ibid.*, pp. 279-81. Such a view of social scientific enquiry, we feel, has been repeated in Hobsbawm's approval of Clifford Geertz's 'method' of 'thick description' and the latter's interpretative essay on the Balinese cockfight. E. Hobsbawm, 'The Revival of Narrative: Some Comments", *Past and Present*, No: 86, 1980, pp. 3-8. Lately, though, he seems to have gravitated to a position we would describe as broadly sympathetic to the very traits he has on numerous occasions earlier criticized. Compare Hobsbawm's developmentalist emphases on 'forecast' and 'prediction' in 'the structuring of the subject of historical and social science inquiry', in 'The Contribution of History to Social Science', *International Social Science Journal*, Vol. XXXIII, No: 4, 1981, pp. 624-40.

34. *Primitive Rebels* (1959), Manchester, 1971, p. 41.

35. Lucien Bianco, 'Secret Societies and Peasant Self-Defense, 1921-1933', p. 215, in J. Chesneaux (ed.), *Popular Movements and Secret Societies in China, 1840-1950*, Stanford, 1972, pp. 213-24.

36. L. Bianco, *loc. cit.*, p. 220, emphasis added.

37. J. Chesneaux, 'Secret Societies in China's Historical Evolution' in J. Chesneaux, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-21, esp. p. 20. Not all among those who see the changes in the way the inherent, putative or real (or both) characteristics of social groups and classes are described, necessarily acknowledge these as arising from a growing pluralistic tendency within popular protest analysis. Mao's more sympathetic account of the lumpen proletariat for example in the contrast it represents with Lenin's and Marx's severe debunk of this 'social

scum' is seen by one writer as a reflection merely of "the advance of the world revolution". George Thomson, *From Marx to Mao Tse-Tung*, London (3rd edn.), 1975, pp. 47-48. Cf. Edward Friedman's note on *elements declasses* in Janos Bak (ed.), *The German Peasant War of 1525*, London, 1976, pp. 117-23.

38. E. Hobsbawm and Joan W. Scott, 'Political Shoemakers', *Past and Present*, No: 89, 1981, pp. 86-114.

39. James C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia*, Yale University Press, 1976.

40. E.P. Thomson, 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in Eighteenth Century', *Past and Present*, No: 50, 1971, pp. 78-136.

41. Cf. A.W. Coats, 'Contrary Moralities: Plebs, Paternalists and Political Economists', *Past and Present*, No: 54, 1972, pp. 130-33 and E.F. Genovese, 'The Many Faces of Moral Economy', *Past and Present*, No: 58, 1973, pp. 161-68 for criticisms of Thompson's essay.

42. For historical criticisms of Scott's thesis, S. Popkin, *The Rational: The Political Economy of Rural Society in Viet Nam*, London, 1979; Ngo Vinh Long, 'Rewriting Vietnamese History', *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, Vol. 10, No: 3, 1980; Michael Adas (review article), 'Moral Economy or Contest State?', *Journal of Social History*, Summer, 1980, pp. 521-46.

43. Scott, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

44. Clifford Geertz, *op. cit.*, especially Chapters 1, 4, 8, and 15 and *passim*.

45. See below, p. 20.

46. Scott, *op. cit.*, pp. 31-32.

47. For a critical study of the Marxist theory of ideology, Martin Seliger, *The Marxist Conception of Ideology*, Cambridge, 1977. For an historian's rejection of Lukacs, Rude, *op. cit.*, p. 21; for Scott's approving and qualified references to Lukacs, Scott, *op. cit.*, p. 32 and p. 160 respectively.

48. Cf. E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, Pelican, 1979 (reprint), pp. 9-13 and *passim*.

49. Clifford Geertz, 'Thick Description', *op. cit.*, pp. 3-32.

50. *Idem*, 'Ideology as a Cultural System', *op. cit.*, pp. 193-223.

51. Scott, *op. cit.*, pp. 172-73; that popular response can be shown to have 'meaning' only when it is viewed against a generalized conception of time is also evident from constant references in Scott's book to Barrington Moore, Eric Wolf, Richard Cobb, George Rude, and others.

52. A. Yang, 'The Agrarian Origins of Crime: Saran District, 1886-1920', *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 13, No: 2, 1979, pp. 289-306.

53. Sandria Freitag, 'Sacred Symbol as Mobilizing Ideology: The North Indian Search for a "Hindu' Community", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 22, No: 4, 1980, pp. 597-625.

54. Stephen Henningham, 'Agrarian Relations in North Bihar: Peasant Protest and the Darbhanga Raj, 1919-20', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol. XVI, No: 1, 1979, pp. 53-75.

55. Stephen Dale, *Islamic Society of the South Asian Frontier*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1980. Much is made of a series of so-called peasant rebellions in Malabar in the latter half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The actual situation is better reflected in the fact that in a total of 28 'outbreaks' between 1836 and 1919 there were only 349 peasant rebels, i.e., an average of twelve individuals per 'rebellion', while in 25 of these cases the number of participants ranged between one and nineteen. While these incidents must indeed be recognized as symptomatic of agrarian unrest, they hardly merit the description of peasant revolt and rebellion. Cf. Conrad Wood, 'Peasant Revolt: An Interpretation of Moplah Violence in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries', in C. Dewey and A.G. Hopkins (eds.), *The Imperial Impact: Studies in the Economic History of Africa and India*, London, 1978 p. 133.

56. Perry Anderson, *Arguments within British Marxism*, London, 1980, p. 13.

57. Louis Althusser has alluded to this gulf when stressing his differences with the Gramscian conception of Marxism but the point has not been developed. L. Althusser and E. Balibar, 'Marxism is not a Historicism', *Reading Capital*, London, 1970, p. 128.

58. E.P. Thompson's definition of the confines of culture (see f.n. 25 above) is an illustrative case in point. The definition could not have been more Althusserian in spirit in its emphasis on the importance of the structural limits of possibility. And yet, such a formulation appeared in the very year of the publication of *The Poverty of Theory*.

59. Irfan Habib, *The Peasant in Indian History*, Presidential Address to the Forty-third session of the Indian History Congress, 1982, pp. 46-47.

60. Further references to this literature may be found in the book referred to in f.n. 5 above, in Jacques Pouchepadass, 'Peasant Classes in Twentieth Century Agrarian Movements in India', in E. Hobsbawm *et al.* (eds.), *Peasants in History: Essays in honour of Daniel Thorner*, Calcutta, 1980, pp. 136-55 and in D.N. Dhanagare, *Peasant Movements in India, 1920-50*, Delhi, 1983.

61. Quoted in Lucien Goldmann, *The Human Sciences and Philosophy*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1967, p. 78.

62. Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, London, 1968, p. 36.

63. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, London, 1971, p. 55.

64. *Ibid.*

65. Those who see a unity therefore between Gramsci's views on subaltern history and his 'voluntarist' commitment within politics reduce the former to the latter. See, for example, R. Guha, *op. cit.*, for a sonorous but misguided reception accorded Gramsci. A more judicious examination of the same theme may be found in Renato Constantino, 'Notes on Historical Writing for the Third World', *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, Vol. 10, No: 3, 1980, pp. 233-40

though we retain important reservations about his use of the infelicitous phrase 'wisdom of the masses' (p. 238).

66. For an interesting comment proferred in this context, see Martin Stuart-Fox, 'Notes on Historical Writing for all Three Worlds', *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, Vol. 12, No: 2, 1982, pp. 225-29.

From Grammar to Social Reality:
A Journey with Pāṇini

Devendra Nath Sharma

THE SANSKRIT LANGUAGE, whatever be its antiquity, is
of a wonderful structure; more perfect than Greek, more
copious than Latin, and more exquisitely refined than
either; yet bearing to both of them stronger affinity both
in the root of verbs and in the forms of grammar, than
could possibly have been produced by accident; so strong,
indeed, that no philologer could examine them all without
believing them to have sprung from some common source,
which, perhaps, no longer exists.

This pronouncement by Sir William Jones in his inaugural
address at the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal in A.D. 1786 was
historic in the truest sense of the term. As Otto Jespersen
has rightly observed:

It was the discovery of Sanskrit that was the real turning
point in the history of linguistics. It must be said that the
first acquaintance with this language gave a mighty impulse
to linguistic studies and exerted a lasting influence on the
way in which most European languages were viewed by
scholars.[1]

Proceeding further he says,

"Sanskrit certainly forms the only sound foundation of
comparative philology and it will always remain the only

safe guide through all its intricacies. The comparative
philologist without a knowledge of Sanskrit is like an
astronomer without a knowledge of mathematics.[2]

Leonard Bloomfield, the father of American linguistics,
acknowledges the debt of Sanskrit in the following words:

> It was in India that there arose a body of knowledge
> which was destined to revolutionise European ideas about
> language. The Indian grammar presented to European
> eyes, for the first time, a complete and accurate descrip-
> tion of a language, based not upon theory, but upon
> observation. The Hindu grammar taught Europeans to
> analyse speech forms.[3]

A Soviet publication brought out by V.V. Ivanov and V.N.
Toporov elaborates the point thus:

> The features of Sanskrit single it out from all other great
> languages of the world. Sanskrit has a unique value for
> the theoretical study of such problems as language and
> time, language and culture, language and society, the
> interpretation of the literary language and spoken dialects,
> the intermixture of languages, the problem of the artifi-
> cial language and the possibility of the co-existence of
> cognate languages at different stages of development. All
> this makes the study of Sanskrit very important for gen-
> eral linguistics.[4]

One could go on quoting endlessly from linguists all over
the world about the importance of Sanskrit in linguistic studies.
The anchor-sheet of this discipline is furnished by the grammar
of Pāṇini (circa fifth century B.C.) which according to Bloom-
field "is one of the greatest monuments of human intelligence".
Pāṇini's work, regarded as "the most complete grammar of any
language dead or living", is a marvel of ingenuity. Every
linguist has paid the highest tribute to Pāṇini for the superb
skill he has shown in the structural analysis of Sanskrit. His
method is so scientific, systematic, and comprehensive that it
at once becomes a model *par excellence* for the description of

any language.

Pāṇini views language as part of man's total behaviour. His analysis therefore, is based as much on its use as on its structure. Not only theory but also extensive field-work and minute observation must have gone into his analysis. The famous Chinese traveller, Hiuen Tsang, has noted that with a view to collecting material for his grammar Pāṇini undertook extensive journeys, met people and noted the linguistic peculiarities and variations.

> He (Ṛṣi Pāṇini) was from his birth extensively informed about men and things. . . . He wished to reform the vague and false rules of writing and speaking, to fix the rules and correct improprieties. He wandered about asking for right words. . . . He then laboured incessantly and put forth all his power of mind. He collected a multitude of words and made a book on letters. . . . It contained everything known from the first till then, without exception, respecting letters and words. . . . The king issued an edict that throughout the kingdom it should be used and taught to others; and he added that whosoever should learn it, from beginning to end, should receive as his reward a thousand pieces of gold. And so from that time masters have received it and handed it down in its completeness for the good of the world.[5]

The following facts emerge from Hiuen Tsang's remark: (i) Pāṇini enjoyed a reputation for his knowledge of men and things from his early days; (ii) the extant grammars lacked in clarity, propriety, and comprehensiveness; (iii) in order to remove these shortcomings Pāṇini undertook to write a grammar and for this he collected enough material by visiting places, meeting people, and noting peculiarities, all being first-hand methods; (iv) he fulfilled the task with unflinching devotion and meticulous care; (v) besides the intrinsic merit of the work, royal patronage, coupled with handsome reward, paved the way for its popularity; (vi) the entire work has ever since been handed down in unbroken oral tradition.

Pāṇini's *Aṣṭādhyāyī* (so called because of its division into eight chapters) is not only a codification of rules pertaining to

the Sanskrit language but also a veritable mine of information on the social, political, cultural, educational, geographical, religious, and economic conditions of his time. It is unique as much for its linguistic theory as for its social reality.

The *Aṣṭādhyāyī* consists of about 4,000 sūtras (aphorisms). The sūtra style, known for its brevity, was very popular in ancient Sanskrit literature for the writing of books in various disciplines such as grammar, philosophy, law, and literary criticism. The greatest advantage of the sūtra style is its conciseness, and perhaps no one used it to a better purpose than Pāṇini. The device has its plus as well as minus points. On the plus side it makes the memorizing of a text exceedingly easy; there is also a lot of saving of time. On the minus side, comprehension becomes difficult; at times even impossible, without proper initiation. That is why Hartmut Scharfe, a German scholar, has referred to the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* as "organized chaos". To the uninitiated it is 'organized chaos' no doubt but out of this 'chaos' has grown a vast mass of literature in the form of commentaries, explanations, annotations, and annotations on annotations with the result that it is a life-time job to master all this. And in this process grammar has become philosophy, as subtle and abstruse as any philosophy could be. It has in fact been designated as philosophy and placed alongside other metaphysical systems of Indian philosophy. To claim the position of a scholar in the traditional Sanskrit lore, one has to be an adept in grammar, and grammar means Pāṇinian grammar. We can, however, be sure that Pāṇini himself never wanted his grammar to develop into philosophy. He was a down-to earth pragmatist and was writing the grammar of a living language spoken over the tract of land extending from Gāndhāra to Assam and from the Himalayan range to the Godāvarī basin. Besides being in actual use, the language had also a long and rich literary and cultural tradition. Adequate and full grammatical analysis of a language with such historical, geographical, and cultural perspectives was no easy task, but Pāṇini accomplished it with a success which has no parallel in history.

Scores of distinguished grammarians and etymologists had preceded Pāṇini and their works were available to him as is evident from his frequent references to some of them. Unfortunately all those works are lost to us and we know nothing of

them except some of the names. It is therefore not possible for us to form a comparative estimate of their worth *vis-à-vis* that of Pāṇini. But it will not be uncharitable to infer that Pāṇini's immeasurable superiority had its share in their eclipse.

One may ask as to what is so unique about Pāṇini which has evoked universal admiration. The answer in one word is his 'methodology'. Even an adverse critic like William Dwight Whitney (1827-97) has been obliged to admit that "the grammar (*Aṣṭādhyāyī*) remains nearly, if not altogether, the most admirable product of the scientific spirit in India, ranking with the best products of that spirit that the world has seen".

Pāṇini's technical terminology is a vital part of his methodology. How much of the terminology is his own creation and how much borrowed from his predecessors is a matter we have no basis to determine. Some borrowings may not be ruled out but the bulk of it must necessarily be his own because it is the very foundation of his whole grammatical structure besides being a wonderful aid to conciseness and accuracy.

Pāṇini's *tour de force* is brevity. In order to achieve this he employed a number of devices, first and foremost among them being the Pratyāhāras. Pāṇini grouped the sounds or phonemes of Sanskrit into 14 sections called the Pratyāhāra sūtras:
1. a i u (ṇ)   2. ṛ ḷ (k)   3. e o (ṅ)   4. ai au (c)   5. ha ya va ra (ṭ)   6. la (ṇ)   7. ña ma ṅa ṇa na (m)   8. jha bha (ñ)   9. gha ḍha dha (ṣ) 10. ja ba ga ḍa da (ś) 11. kha pha cha ṭha tha ca ṭa ta (v) 12. Ka pa (y) 13. śa ṣa sa (r) 14. ha (l)

These sūtras are said to have been given to Pāṇini by Lord Śiva as a reward for his penance. They are, therefore, also called Māheśvara sūtras. This is in keeping with the Indian tradition of relating anything of importance to some divine power or deity. I would personally like to keep the deity apart, and give full credit to the great grammarian's transcendental vision. These 14 Pratyāhāra sūtras are the crux of his whole phonology. The grouping of the phonemes is done with an eye on all referential points likely to occur throughout the grammar. A Pratyāhāra is formed by combining the first letter of a sūtra with the final indicatory letter of any sūtra. The limit of the brevity achieved by this device can be easily gauged from the following Pratyāhāras:

'al' (a of the first sūtra combined with l of the fourteenth

sūtra) denotes all the sounds (vowels as well as consonants) of .
the Sanskrit language; similarly 'ac' denotes all the vowels and
'hal' all the consonants. The word 'halanta', used in modern
Indian languages for words ending in consonants, is from
Pāṇini. Another noteworthy feature of this grouping is the
placement of the phonemes on strictly phonetic principles; for
example, all the vowels are placed together with a dividing line
between the simple vowels, the long vowels, and the diphthongs.
A similar ingenuity is shown in the placement of the conson-
ants according to their point of articulation and phonetic features
such as aspiration, voicing, nasalization, etc. The alphabet of
no other language has such a scientific basis of the classification
and placement of its phonemes. Macdonell's remark on Sanskrit
literature is noteworthy on this point:

> This complete alphabet . . . which was evidently worked
> out on phonetic principles . . . is the alphabet which is
> recognised in Pāṇini's great Sanskrit grammar, and has
> remained uncodified ever since. It not only represents all
> the sounds of Sanskrit language but is arranged on a
> thoroughly scientific method. . . . We Europeans, on the
> other hand, 2500 years later and in a scientific age, still
> employ an alphabet which is not only inadequate to rep-
> resent all the sounds of our language, but even preserves
> the random order in which vowels and consonants are
> jumbled up as they were in the Greek adaptation of the
> primitive Semitic arrangement of 3000 years ago.[6]

Pāṇini used more than half a dozen abbreviatory devices to
ensure brevity such as anuvṛtti, anubandhas, technical symbols
such as ṭi, ghu, luk, lyut, lup, the gaṇapāṭhas, omission of aux-
iliary verbs, elliptical sentences. I would like to explain them
as briefly as possible. In the framing of the sūtras Pāṇini meti-
culously omitted such words as could be supplied or understood
from the preceding sūtras. Anuvṛtti (indication or suggestion
from what has been stated previously) is the name of this
method. Needless to say that considerable economy in the use
of words could be achieved with the help of this method.
Anubandhas have a multi-functional purpose. A suffix like ghañ
has two anubandhas: gha and ñ; gha is for effecting a phonol-

ogical change in the root and ñ for vṛddhi (the lengthening of the first vowel in the root). In another suffix, lyut, 'l' enjoins acute accent and ṭ the feminine suffix 'nip' in the words formed by adding this suffix. Technical symbols such as ṭi and ghu also have such functions. The gaṇapāṭha are listed words which undergo similar grammatical changes. Pāṇini would use only the first word of a gaṇapaṭha in a sūtra but the sūtra would apply to all the words enumerated in that gaṇa (group). Thus instead of mentioning, say, thirty or forty or two hundred words (some of the gaṇas consist of more than two hundred words) the mention of a single word will suffice for a structural change in all of them. These gaṇapāṭhas yield ample material of historical, geographical, and cultural value.

Another remarkable contribution of Pāṇini is his concept of Sandhi. Vowels and consonants in close (uninterrupted) proximity affect and modify one another during the process of articulation. The rules of Sandhi are relevant not only for Sanskrit but also, by and large, for all the languages, because they are based on the processes involved in the production of human voice. Hence they are valid for and applicable to all the languages. For instance, according to one of the rules of Sandhi an unvoiced consonant preceding a voiced consonant becomes voiced. Now this rule applies as much to English or Russian as to Sanskrit. In a sentence such as "look back", k in 'look' is unvoiced and just after that there is a voiced consonant—b in 'back'. The result is that in quick articulation k sounds like g and the sentence is heard as 'loog back'. Not only the concept of Sandhi but also the term itself has been borrowed by modern linguistics. This demonstrates its intrinsic worth and practical utility.

Pāṇini showed the way as to how to analyse words into their constituent units. The principle of dividing words into different units was already in existence and etymologists such as Yāska (circa seventh century B.C.) had freely employed it but Pāṇini gave it a new orientation and a sound footing. The free and bound morphemes, as we call them in structural linguistics, are nothing else but roots (Prakṛtis) and suffixes (Pratyayas) of Pāṇini with different names. Many subtler problems raised by and on the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* have not even been taken up, much less tackled, by modern linguistics. For example, modern linguistics

is yet to explain the function of prefixes in words, that is to say, why the meaning of a word undergoes complete change with the addition of prefixes. Reception, deception, conception, perception, etc. give entirely different meanings because of the prefixes, the root remaining the same. What is then the basis of the meaning: the root or the prefix? Another set of examples from Sanskrit in which the root and the suffix being the same words assume entirely different meanings: āhāra, vihāra, prahāra, upahāra, apahāra, uddhāra, saṁhāra, etc.

Pāṇini's division of the parts of speech into two (Subanta and Tiṅanta) is perhaps the simplest and the most logical one. Like Sandhi the concept of Zero inflection also has been found to be of such significance that it has been adopted by the western linguistics.

Martmut Scharfe is quite near the mark in his appraisal, when he says:

> Pāṇini and with him the grammarians that contributed to the science of grammar before him, owe their greatness to a combination of fundamental discoveries: (1) the insight that the proper object of grammar is the spoken language, not its written presentation; (2) the theory of substitution; (3) the analysis in root and suffix; (4) the recognition of ablaut correspondences; (5) the formal description of language as against a 'logical' characterization; and (6) the concise formulation through the use of a meta-language. It is often said that the transparent nature of Sanskrit made the analysis possible. But we can argue as well that it was first Pāṇini's analysis which made the structure so transparent.

Pāṇini's treatment of phonetics, phonology, and morphology is so complete and exhaustive that it leaves nothing to be desired. It is sometimes pointed out that his treatment of syntax is rather sketchy. In this connection, it has to be borne in mind that in an inflectional language such as Sanskrit syntax almost always goes with the inflection of words and therefore a separate treatment of syntax is not essential. Further, the rules governing the cases (kārakas) and the compounds (samāsas) are parts of

syntax and hardly leave any scope for pitfalls. Pāṇini's division of the word into śabda and pada is also an aid to syntax. A śabda is a meaningful unit no doubt but it cannot be used in a sentence unless it acquires the status of a pada by the addition of nominal and verbal suffixes to it and with the addition of nominal and verbal suffixes its function in a sentence becomes fixed and precise.

Pāṇini does not believe in abstract conceptualization. He has presented the descriptive analysis of the living language of his day in as faithful a manner as possible. He is a thorough-going empiricist whose approach to language is absolutely practical. The philosophical enquiry is a later development which started with Patañjali (circa second century B.C.) and through Bhartṛhari (A.D. sixth century) continued right up to the seventeenth century and found in Koṇḍa Bhaṭṭa and Nāgeśa Bhaṭṭa very able exponents of the philosophical aspect of linguistic analysis. It is not my purpose to give an account of the grammatical literature in Sanskrit or to evaluate the contribution of individual scholars. I only wish to show that Indian intellectual tradition is essentially and intrinsically synthetic in its approach. There is no conflict between the conceptual and the empirical; in fact they are mutually complementary. The empirical without the conceptual lacks depth and the conceptual without the empirical is infructuous. The problem of morality in art has been feverishly debated in the West by the aestheticians and philosophers right from Plato's time to this day, and even after 2,500 years a meeting point is nowhere in sight. On the other hand the Indian aestheticians, some of whom were outstanding philosophers, never bothered about the question of morality in art. Erotic carvings decorated the walls of the temples and amorous sports of the gods and goddesses were freely described not only in poetry but also in the hymns, the underlying principle being that what is socially real or relevant should not be discarded or rejected.

The following excerpt from a recent publication on the sociology of language presents a sharp contrast to the all-inclusive Pāṇinian system of linguistic analysis:

> Linguistics, particularly American linguistics, during at least the first half of this century has been primarily a

formal discipline, almost along the lines of abstract mathematics. It has concentrated on the analysis of language structure. Thus, language *per se*, in the form of a corpus of sounds and smaller or larger units of meaning, has been examined for its patterns, as if it were something that existed above and beyond its users and uses. Psychologizing and sociologizing have not only been ignored but have been attacked in former years by the most distinguished American linguists as dangerous and misleading pursuits.[7]

This closed-door attitude of the mainstream of American linguistics has given rise to a parallel discipline under the rubric of 'anthropological linguistics.' Such an extreme academic stance is difficult to come across in the Indian tradition. Till recently a subject such as semantics had no place in American linguistics. It is needless to say that language, devoid of meaning, serves no purpose because primarily it is meaning that differentiates human speech from animal speech. That is why semantics occupies a very prominent position in Indian linguistics.

Patañjali, the author of the great commentary (Mahābhāṣya) on Pāṇini's *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, maintains in unequivocal terms:

> A man who wants to use a jar goes to a potter and says, "Make a pot, I want to use it." But a man who wants to use words does not go to a grammarian and say, "Make words, I want to use them." He picks up words from the social milieu and uses them freely as and when he wants to.

Both Pāṇini and Patañjali put great premium on usage. They regard usage as the highest authority in solving linguistic doubts. In fact Pāṇini has only described the language he has found in everyday use around him, for he regards language as a part of human behaviour and environment. And what is this use or usage except the social acceptability or reality?

There is a general impression that Indian thinking is predominantly otherworldly and has very little to do with practical and concrete facts of life. I would like to submit that this im-

pression is basically erroneous and unfounded. It is unfortunate that many people tend to base their conclusions on insufficient or even wrong data and without seeing things in their proper perspective. It is indeed with a view to controverting this impression that I chose to highlight the social aspect of Indian linguistics with special reference to Pāṇini who is universally acclaimed as the greatest grammarian ever born.

It can be safely asserted that no single book, specially of the size of the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* and on a subject like grammar, is as much concerned with social reality as the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* is. There is hardly any aspect of life which does not find a place in Pāṇini. Even a listing of the items will occupy considerable space. I shall give a very brief account of the salient points that are relevant for our present purpose. For convenience we can divide the material into six broad categories (which are by no means exhaustive), namely, social, economic, political, religious, educational, and geographical. The *Aṣṭādhyāyī* gives a very vivid picture of contemporary social conditions. There are hundreds of words that throw light on the Varṇāśrama system, the social units, marriage, food and drink, dress and ornaments, entertainments and sports, music and musical instruments, health and disease, living apartments, means of transport, etc.

On economic condition the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* is full of useful data. Agriculture, animal husbandry, trade, and commerce formed the backbone of economy. Naturally words dealing with the land, the farm, the farmer, the implements of farming, the different kinds of crop, irrigation, ploughing, sowing, harvesting, winnowing, storing, etc. abound in the *Aṣṭādhyāyī*. Similarly terms related with trade and commerce, for instance capital, manufacture, marketing, profit, tax, duty are available in any number. Pāṇini does not forget to mention even the chief trade routes. He also notes the highways and the various types of roads passing through the plains, the mountains, the deserts and the marshy lands. The names of dozens of commodities along with their manufacturers, such as the goldsmith, the blacksmith, the potter, the weaver, and the carpenter, occur throughout the book. The measurements, the weights, and the coins of gold, silver, and copper are all there. References to many types of loans, debts, and wages and the

methods of their repayment are equally interesting. Even a mere enumeration of the material on the polity, administration, education, geography, and religious rites will run into pages.

I would like to illustrate some of the points with the help of a few sūtras of Pāṇini. As I have already stressed, Pāṇini's primary concern is a grammatical principle or the formation of words but an exploration of the sūtras at different levels gives a feel of the social reality which it indirectly hints at. There is a sūtra: Pānam deśe (8.4.9) which enjoins that the na of Pāna is changed into nā when it occurs as the second member of a compound and the compound denotes a country or a people. The Kāśikā explaining this rule gives four examples: Kṣīrapāṇah uśinarāh, surāpānah prāeyāh, sauvīrapānah bāhlīkāh, and kaṣāyapāṇah gāndhārah. Pāna means drink. In these compounds, according to the above-quoted sūtra, pāna is changed into pāṇa. This is the grammatical function of the sūtra—to prescribe phonetic change of na into ṇa in such compounds but if we look a little deeper at the examples we come across a very interesting reality which is socially significant. Milk as a drink was popular in Punjab (which is so even now); the easterners were fond of alcohol; the inhabitants of Balkh preferred jujube-juice, and an astringent decocted drink was liked in Gāndhāra.

Another example is perhaps of greater social relevance. According to the sūtra śūdrāṇāmanirvāsitānām (2.4.10), a dvandva compound of words, denoting such of the śūdras as are not excluded from the communion of the higher castes, is used in singular. Determining the number of a compound is the sole purpose of this sūtra. But it sheds considerable light on the social condition obtaining in Pāṇini's days. The social connotation of Anirvāsitānām is highly significant. Anirvāsitānām means "of those who are not excluded", that is to say not excluded from interdining, in other words who can take their meals in the same utensils in which the people of the higher castes take their meals. This envisages a position in which two categories of śūdras emerge; one, those who are not excluded, i.e. who can interdine with the higher castes; the other, those who are excluded and who cannot interdine. These two categories of śūdras are parts of the Aryan caste system. Patañjali commenting on this sūtra refers to a third category of śūdras,

i.e. those who were foreigners and did not belong to the Aryan fold but contact had already been established between the two. The marauding Śaka and Yavana hordes had not yet been assimilated in the Aryan society and the Aryans, conscious of their cultural superiority, looked down upon the invaders and ranked them with the śūdras. The appellation therefore of the śūdra has at least three references: in the first category come those who, though called śūdras, enjoyed a happy social status with the upper castes; in the second category are those who had a lower position and could not mix freely with the upper castes; and the third category comprised those foreigners who because of their aggression and hostility could not claim acceptability in the Aryan society. Now, this sūtra, primarily concerned with the number in a compound, is pregnant with social realities of enormous cultural and historical significance.

In this context I am tempted to refer to the following hemistich of Tulsidas:

Dhol ganvar sudra pasu nari/ye sab tadan keadhikari.

I am of the definitive view that the word 'śūdra' has been used here in the sense of the third category mentioned above, i.e. it denotes the foreign invaders such as the Afghans, the Turks, the Mughals, and others. Tulsidas was well versed in the traditional lore; he must have taken the clue from Patañjali and used it accordingly. This is corroborated by the fact that not only in the Rāmacaritamānasa but in all his writings Tulsidas does not use the word Muslim or Mohammedan even once. His śūdras, therefore, like the Śakas and the Yavanas of Patañjali are the foreign invaders and not the followers of any religion. This is a good example of how unfamiliarity with the cultural or linguistic background leads to misinterpretations.

The *Aṣṭādhyāyī* consists of a large number of sūtras for forming names of places and persons. Places were named generally on four grounds: the names of their founders, their economic products, their association with historical personages, and their proximity to known objects or monuments (4.2.67-70). Ample material of historical importance can be culled from the examples of those sūtras. The naming of students (Brahmacārin) depended on (1) the period of their stay with the teacher

or at the centre of learning; (2) the subject or treatise of study; or (3) the name of the teacher. While there were students who spent as long as forty-eight years (Aṣṭacatvāriṁśaka) at the gurukul, there were others who attended some courses for half a month, one month, and one year only and were called ardhamāsika, māsika, and sāṁvatsarika respectively (*Aṣṭādhyāyī*, 5.1.94). These examples point to the existence of short-term courses as of now.

There is a constant interaction between language and society. Not only the social attitudes, norms, and values are reflected in language, they also influence its structure and vocabulary. Since languages function in a social matrix and since societies depend on language as a means of intercourse, language behaviour and social behaviour are interrelated. One cannot be properly understood without the other. It is therefore not only desirable but also necessary that linguistic studies be pursued not in abstraction but as a part of social reality. Pāṇini, by his profound investigation and marvellous presentation, has shown the way which modern linguists can emulate with great profit and greater promise.

To this outstanding achievement of the Indian intellect, Barend Faddegon (1874-1955), Professor of Sanskrit at the University of Amsterdam, pays his tribute—apt and true—as follows:

> I adore Pāṇini because he reveals to us the Spirit of India, I adore India because it reveals to us the Spirit, the Spirit.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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3. *Ibid.*, pp. 10-12.
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5. *Si-yu-ki* by Hiuen Tsang, quoted from J.F. Stall (ed.), *A Reader on the Sanskrit Grammarians*, The MIT Press, Massachusetts, p. 6.
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Some Subjective Orientations in Understanding Indian Social Reality

M.S.A. Rao

AT NO TIME in the history of sociology and anthropology has
there been a closer linkage between philosophical and sociol-
ogical theories than exists today. In scholarly circles all over
the world it has become increasingly fashionable to look at
social reality from the viewpoint of such philosophical pers-
pectives as phenomenology (Husserl), ethnomethodology
(Garfinkel), structuralism (Ferdinand De Saussure, Roland
Barthes, Levi-Strauss, Leach, and Piaget), existentialism (Sartre),
logology (Kenneth Burke), hermeneutics (Paul Ricoeur and
others), and Wittgenstein's philosophy of language and mean-
ing. All these theories which came to be developed in the
West, particularly in Europe, have revolutionized sociology
and anthropology. And over a period of nearly fifty years
there has been not only a proliferation in the variations of their
application to sociology and anthropology but also a dialogue
and polemics. The upshot of this is now we have a plethora of
such concepts and theories as phenomenological sociology,
ethnomethodology, componential analysis, cognitive anthropol-
ogy and sociology, structuralism, semiology (theory of signs),
symbolism, symbolic interactionism, ethnology, ethnoscience,
ethnolinguistics, ethno-agriculture, sociology and anthropology
of metaphors and meanings, and hermeneutics (science of
interpretation of texts and scriptures).

In all these diverse developments, one can discern a common
concern for a subjective orientation of understanding and inter-
pretation of reality rather than its explanations, measurement,

prediction and formulation of general laws as in the case of physical sciences. It may be further noted that Marx and Durkheim are also drawn into the vortex of phenomenological and structural interpretations, and Weber's notion of interpretative understanding with its emphasis on meaningful relationship and motivation behind social action, has acquired a central place in subjective orientations of sociological theories.

'It is not my aim in this paper to present all these developments in the interaction between philosophical and sociological (including anthropological) theories since I have already indicated some of these trends elsewhere (Rao, 1979b). Here I shall only confine my attention to the problem of understanding certain types of social and cultural movements with special reference to ideology. I will also show that the choice of one ideology to the exclusion of another leads to a distorted view of Indian social reality as in the case of Professor Dumont's *Homohierarchicus*.

EMIC VIEW OF SOCIAL AND CULTURAL MOVEMENTS

Social and cultural movements are a part of the history of Indian society and culture. In understanding these movements it is necessary to adopt an *emic* point of view. The terms *emic* and *etic* were coined by Kenneth Pike (1954) on the analogy of phon*emic* and phon*etic*. While phonemic refers to the minimal sound in a language recognized by the native speakers themselves, phonetic refers to the mininal sounds in a language recognized by trained linguistic anthropologists. The *emic* and *etic* distinction is now applied to the analysis of social and cultural phenomena. Although Pike formulated this distinction, it was anticipated by Sapir (1927) who said that a skilful reporter may give a picturesque account of what he sees and hears, or thinks he sees and hears (an *etic* one) without providing the cultural key to understand the phenomenon (an *emic* one). Thus *emic* view requires one to enter the world of meanings, purposes, interests, and motives behind the actions of the actors. It presents the native's point of view which is significant, real, and meaningful. The *emic* view is as empirical as the *etic* view. It provides the insider's point of view which yields a correct

understanding of the phenomenon in question. The distinction between the *emic* and the *etic* is not just the location of the observer, namely, the insider and the outsider, or one who belongs to the native culture and one who is outside of it. The crucial point is whether the observer understands the phenomenon from the point of view of the native categories of thought and values, i.e. native ideology. Thus an observer might belong to the native culture and yet may not be able to identify the native ideology. Conversely an observer who is external to the culture may correctly identify the native ideology and interpret the phenomenon in question in its light.

The *emic* view, which is subjective, of the social and cultural movements is contained in the ideologies of these movements. An ideology may be defined as a cultural or symbolic system after Clifford Geertz (1964), with two clarifications. First, ideology is a dynamic symbolic system being sensitive to feedback processes and secondly, ideology is double-edged. On the one hand, it offers a more satisfactory system of ideas and values, providing a source of identity, a principle for organizing life-styles and experiences, and for incorporating new interests and aspirations of its members. On the other, it provides the basis for opposition and conflict, sometimes implicit and sometimes explicit, *vis-à vis* other groups. Thus an apparently quiet organizational face is not without elements emphasizing differences, opposition, and conflicting relationships with others. Ideology is an expression of clash of interests and it has an organizational role for the concerned group.

Ideology is central to the communication or understanding of codes and messages. Communication is the process by which messages consisting of expressive actions are transmitted from the sender to the receiver (Leach, 1976: 9-16). In the context of social movements the receiver may be an audience or an individual. Similarly the sender may be an individual or a committee or an association. Expressive actions include verbal as well as non-verbal modes of communication. A communicative event is the unit of communication consisting of various components as Hymes (1964, 1972) has shown. It consists of participants as senders and receivers, channels, codes, forms of messages, topics, events, discourse setting, and the activity of the system. In the context of a social movement, however,

there are many interrelated communication events with different types of settings and ideology at the level of deep structure. The communication process tends to be further complicated as the participants in a social movement speak different dialects and languages.

A social movement is an organized effort on the part of a section of society based on an ideology, which is either present initially or will develop later, to bring about either partial or total change in the system of values and relationships of society. It involves collective mobilization, ideology and an orientation towards change. Indian society abounds with many cultural, social, and political movements right from the Buddhist to the neo-Buddhist movements. The ideologies of most of these movements are based on protest against the conditions of relative deprivation in the religious, economic, social, and political conditions and so as to change these conditions in order to incorporate the interests and aspirations of the participants of the movement. For instance, the two backward classes movements—the Sri Narayana Dharma Paripalana movement and the Yadava movement—which I have studied (1979) show that being based on ideologies of protest they have brought about transformative changes.

The point that I want to illustrate here is the difference between the *etic* and the *emic* views of studying social movements and to show that the latter provides a correct and more adequate understanding of social reality. Let me take the Yadava movement as an example.

The Yadava movement, which took shape around the turn of the present century, involved about ten per cent of India's population, ten different castes, and people speaking most of the languages in India. The castes of cowherds are spread all over India. They are called by different names: Ahirs, Rawats, Gopas, Sadgopas, Gwalas, Gaulis, Gopalas, Gollas, Konars, and Idiyans. In some places they are small peasants and agricultural labourers. Their place in the caste hierarchy was above the pollution line but in the category of low-caste Hindus. Above them were the landowning castes such as Rajputs, Thakurs, Marathas, Reddis, and Vellalars, and Vokkaligas and Lingayats, merchant castes, and Brahmins. Although they were not considered untouchables, they suffered from many kinds of

relative deprivations. They were exploited by the landowning castes and were under their political dominance. They were required to render free labour, to bear palanquins, and were forced to give customary gifts to the landlords.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the Ahirs in the erstwhile Punjab, United Provinces, and Bihar claimed themselves to be Yadavas. Literally 'Yadavas' means descendants of the Yadu dynasty, a famous Kshatriya dynasty, to which God Krishna belonged. There are three related arguments for this claim. First, Krishna was a Yadava as he belonged to the Yadu dynasty, and he was raised as a cowherd having associations with cows, cowherds, and milk-maids. Ahirs, Gopas, Gollas, and other cognate castes were and are cowherds. Hence all these castes are Yadavas. Further, in Mahabharata all these castes are used as synonyms of Yadavas. Secondly, there is historic evidence to show that the Abhiras, who were Kshatriyas, had established powerful kingdoms in different parts of India. The Ahirs and the Gopas are synonyms of the Abhiras. Thirdly, the present Yadavas, as Kshatriyas, are entitled to wear the sacred thread which is symbolic of twice-born status. The Yadava mythology is the main source of reasoning, and the other two are supportive.

The Yadava mythology argument is based on an analogy with two pairs of metonyms and metaphor:

| Yadava/Krishna | = | Ahir/Cowherd |
| Ahir | = | Yadava/Kshatriya |

The metaphorical equation is also transformative as Turner (1974: 25, 290) argues, fusing separated realms of experience into one image.

1. That Krishna was a Yadava is a metonymic relation in the mythological realm.
2. That Krishna was a cowherd is a part metonymic relation in the mythological realm, as he was raised as a cowherd, but he was not born as one, nor was he a cowherd when he grew up.
3. That the Ahirs, Gopas, Gollas, and other cognate castes were cowherd castes is a metonymic relation in the empirical

realm.

4. That the Ahirs are Yadavas is a metaphor transforming the mythological realm into empirical realm through cow symbolism, which is common to the Ahirs and Krishna

However, the metaphor Ahir-Yadava undergoes a further transformation in the situational context of opposition and conflict between the Ahirs and the twice-born castes, especially the Kshatriyas. Hence in the ideology of the Yadava movement the metaphor Ahir=Yadava becomes a metonym: Ahir/Yadava. The force of the argument here is that the Ahirs are not *like* the Yadavas but they *are* Yadavas, the relationship being intrinsic. This is a code of protest and challenge against the ritual superiority of the Rajputs, Thakurs, Bhumihar Brahmins, and Brahmins. Thus when a Brahmin Sanskrit scholar in Banaras challenged the Yadava status of the Ahirs and other castes, there was a widespread strong reaction against him. Abhimanyu, a Yadava Sanskrit scholar, produced copious evidence from the scriptures to prove the metonymic relationship. His book *Speechless Reply* ran into several editions and became the charter of the Yadavas.

Early in the century, the Yadavas realized that, as Kshatriyas, they ought to have the sacred thread, the visible symbol of the twice-born status. They started wearing the sacred thread in public in Bihar and U.P., and this resulted in violent conflicts between the Yadavas and the upper castes. The Yadavas also came under the influence of Arya Samaj in Punjab and U.P., and as Aryas they could wear the sacred thread, without coming into direct conflict with the upper castes, as Arya Samaj was an established widespread movement. Hence the first set of issues around which collective mobilization took place around 1910 in Punjab, U.P., and Bihar was the sacred thread movement, popularizing the Yadava terminology and protesting against forced labour. Thus both the caste and the class situations reinforced one another.

How does one read the message of claiming Kshatriya status and donning the sacred thread by the Ahirs and other cognate castes? An *etic* view considers it as a case of Sanskritization (Srinivas, 1969: 98). The lower castes adopt the customs and manners of the upper castes, and move up in the caste

hierarchy through the process of imitation. This is incorrect. A real understanding of the social reality comes from the *emic* approach. We should turn to the Yadava ideology to get the clues for decoding the message. The ideology developed in the context of conflicting relationships between the Ahirs and the cognate castes and the upper castes and classes. Claiming Kshatriya status and donning the sacred thread were symbolic of protest against the monopolies of the twice-born castes, and not acts of imitation. The Yadavas wanted to establish their claims to positions and goods which were the preserve of the twice-born.

The Yadavas not only claim Kshatriya status but also backward class status. The Kaka Kalelkar Commission in its 1955 report had recommended the adoption of caste criterion. But the Government of India overruled the recommendation and issued a directive to the States to adopt the economic criterion. All the other backward classes strongly reacted to this decision and the All-India Backward Classes Federation took up this issue on a national scale. The Yadavas are in the forefront of the leadership of the federation and they have made the adoption of the caste criterion as an important programme of action of the All-India Yadav Mahasabha and of the regional associations. The second Backward Classes Commission was headed by Mr. Mandal (a Yadava). The Mandal Committee report is yet to be tabled in Parliament.

From the *etic* point of view there exists an element of contradiction in the divergent claims of the Yadavas: On the one hand they claim themselves to be Kshatriyas, twice-born upper castes, and don the sacred thread, and on the other they want themselves to be listed under the category of Other Backward Classes. Kshatriya claim and Backward Class claim are contradictory. However, to treat the two claims as a case of contradiction or paradox from an *etic* point of view presupposes a dualistic situation of ritual scale and secular scale of social mobility. Secondly, it presupposes that the Kshatriya claim is an expression of upward mobility aspiration and the Backward Classes claim is an expression of downward mobility. On the contrary the *emic* point of view which is presented in the Yadava ideology shows the conflicting relationships beween the Yadavas and the upper castes/classes in all walks of life, and

both the claims are seen as expressions of attack on the mono-
polies of the upper castes. By claiming Kshatriya status the
Yadavas are attacking the ritual superiority of the twice-born
castes and by claiming backward class reservations they are
restricting the entry of the upper castes and dislodging them
from the monopolistic positions in the fields of technical and
professional education and government jobs. Thus the message
in both the cases is the same, though the codes are different.
There is no dichotomy between the ritual and the secular
spheres. The Yadavas are attempting to break monopolies all
round. At the deeper level there is neither duality nor contra-
diction. The Yadava ideology provides the logic for connecting
symbols and decoding messages. It looks at both the claims as
two logically related parts of the same message, rendering the
incomprehensible meaningful.

Thus ideology as a symbolic system provides the basis for
establishing identity and working out hard and soft social
boundaries. It organizes the experiences of the concerned
category of people by incorporating their aspirations. It moti-
vates as well as legitimizes a programme of action. It provides
the yardstick for assessing the nature and the degree of com-
mitment of both leaders and followers, and for evaluating the
results of events. In all these it is necessary to note that ideol-
ogy is a dynamic symbolic system. It is subject to the effects
of feedback processes at every step. Thus the event structure
of a movement represents the unfolding of the ideology in its
varied and modified forms, each event having a feedback
effect.

Schisms and splits that occur in a movement due to different
and divergent ideologies create enclaves in the pre-existing
communication system. New symbols and codes come into
being. Also the same symbols and codes will be subject to
different interpretations and they become more restricted in the
range of communicability. Social boundaries and audience
change, and with the change in the social context the mean-
ings of symbols and their interconnections undergo changes, as
all meanings are socially determined (Douglas, 1975). The rela-
tionship between ideology and communication in the context
of social movements thus is a dynamic one. An understanding
of this comes from studying the deeper and often hidden

motives and meanings rather than the overt actions. It may be pointed out that ideologies of most social and cultural movements are only variations of the theme of ethnic and class conflict and protest. For instance, the Vīra-Śaiva movement which emerged in the twelfth-century Karnataka had an ideology which was similar to that of the SNDP movement in Kerala (Rao, 1979). Ambedkar's movement adopted the principle of rejection of Hinduism by embracing Buddhism. Similarly many tribal movements with millenarian and messianic ideologies provide another variation of the same theme of conflict and protest, from the *emic* point of view (Rao, 1981).

After having argued that an *emic* view which takes into account subjective considerations of meanings of action as expressed in the ideology of people provides a more adequate understanding of the relevant social reality, I must hasten to add that the choice of one ideology to the exclusion of another leads to an incorrect understanding of Indian social reality. The case in point is the ideology of the *homo-hierarchicus*.

THE PROBLEM WITH THE IDEOLOGY OF HOMO-HIERARCHICUS

Professor Dumont's *Homo Hierarchicus* (1970) is no doubt a classic study of Indian society and culture from the positive-cum-subjective viewpoint. Dumont uses the concept of ideology to identify the central pivoting principle of Indian society or, to be more specific, Hindu society. He considers ideology as a system of ideas and values which are representations in general of the whole society. It gives a faithful picture of the system. The ideology of the caste system is hierarchy which is the principle by which the elements of a whole are ranked in relation to the whole. This is the conscious form of reference of the parts to the whole in the system. What underlies hierarchy is the principle of opposition of pure and impure. Hierarchy is the superiority of the pure over the impure. It is purely a matter of religious values. It is the relationship between that which encompasses and that which is encompassed.

Besides the absolute dichotomy between pure and impure, Dumont posits the absolute dichotomy of status and power (Brahmans and Kshatriyas) in the politico-economic aspects.

The latter which is the basis of varna theory is considered secondary in relation to the ideology of caste, namely, hierarchy; power being subordinate to hierarchy. While Dumont rightly identifies hierarchy as the basic ideology of the caste system, he overplays the dualism of religious and politico-economic and of status and power. This dichotomy is rightly challenged by Marriott and Inden (1977), Berreman (1971) and others which I will not take up here. Instead I shall consider Dumont's ideas of renunciation and sect which he considers as contradicting the collective man of the caste system.

It is unfortunate that Dumont does not examine the ideology behind sect in the same fashion as he does with regard to caste. For him, Indian religious groupings which are readily characterized in terms of renunciation are called sects. The Indian sect is defined as a religious grouping constituted primarily by renouncers, initiates of the same discipline of salvation, and secondarily by their lay sympathizers, any of whom may have one of the renouncers as a spiritual master or guru. Dumont treats sect in the context of renunciation and the opposition between the man-in-the-world and the individual-outside-the-world. Although the institution of renunciation contradicts the caste system, it is thought of as complementing the caste system by *revitalizing* the fundamental caste value. Another relationship between caste and sect according to Dumont is that the latter degenerates into the former or sectarian adherences serve to differentiate particular castes.

Thus in his treatment of sect and caste Dumont sees only complementarity and the supremacy of caste values or the ideology of hierarchy and collective man. In my view the fundamental ideology underlying sect is egalitarianism which is in conflict with the ideology of caste, namely, hierarchy. Renunciation is only one aspect of sect ideology emphasizing individualism. Further, the two ideologies of caste and sect have always been in a dialectical relationship, and it is this dialectical relationship in the context of politico-economic system that provides a more realistic and adequate understanding of Indian society and culture in its historical development. Let me elaborate my argument.

Sociological and anthropological studies have analysed Indian society and culture more from the standpoint of caste

than from that of sect. However, a few available studies (Bhattacharya, 1866; Bhandarkar, 1913; Farquhar, 1915; Pai, 1928; Thoothi, 1935; Ghurye, 1953 and 1962; Fuchs, 1965) have examined the origin, development, organization, and social role of different sects. For instance, Ghurye not only traces the ascetic origin and development of diverse sects but analyses the social role of sectarian aggrandizement of certain sects such as the ganapatyas. Elsewhere I (1974, 1977) have shown that the ideology of sect has been one of protest against the established order (which need not always be the centralized institution) emphasizing the egalitarian values in different degrees. The sect counters the caste system freeing it from the bonds of hierarchy and collectivity towards egalitarianism and individualism. It cuts at the root of hierarchy of caste by abrogating the principle of birth and heredity the cornerstone of pure-impure dichotomy.

Sects, in Indian history, have appeared as movements expressing social values of contradiction, conflict, dissent, protest, reform, and transformation. Buddhism which was one of the first sectarian movements against Brahmanical Hinduism developed into a world religion with its appeal for egalitarian values transcending hierarchy in terms of Brahmanical supremacy. Even today this appeal is a real force enabling the Harijans to reject Hinduism and embrace Buddhism. While Buddhism became a world religion, Jainism mainly remained an Indian religion offering an alternative to Brahmanical Hinduism. Similarly Veerasaivism revolted against the Brahmanical supremacy, and made available salvation and other ritual goods and services to the common man across caste and even sex. There have been a number of devotional (*bhakti*) movements since the days of Nayanars and Alwars which emphasized egalitarian values of man before God in that grace can be won by anyone irrespective of caste and creed through the path of devotion. Similarly there was the development of Tantrism against the vegetarian, teetotal path of knowledge. Later Sikhism emphasizing egalitarian values developed into a separate religion. During the British Raj and after many sectarian movements of different kinds emerged incorporating ideas of equality and individualism.

An analysis of all the sects and sectarian movements in Indian

society and culture is a life-time job for any historian or socioiogist. Suffice it to point out here in the context of *homohierarchicus* that the ideology of hierarchy which Dumont considers central is only *partial*. In other words it is a one-sided and subjective orientation which is misleading. And any fuller and valid understanding and interpretation of Indian social reality will have to take into account the two ideologies of castes and sect—hierarchy and egalitarianism—and their dialectical relationship. The sect ideology releases forces of contradictions and conflict with a view to countering the caste ideology. It may be that after a period of time the sects get routinized and become part of the establishment. But the protest ideology of sect continues to operate and finds expression in different ways.

Thus a more adequate understanding of Indian society and culture is gained through an analysis of the dialectical process of two opposed ideologies of caste and sect—hierarchy and egalitarianism, holism, and individualism. It is wrong to conceive of Indian society, and for that matter any society, as either *hierarchicus* or *equalis* ignoring historical developments and dialectical processes of the two opposed organizational principles within the same society and culture.

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Prospects of an Integrated Approach to Social Reality

D.N. Dhanagare

I. SCOPE OF THE DISCUSSION

THE FORMULATION 'social reality' involves intriguing questions in the sociology of knowledge—such as "What is real?"," How is one to know it?", and 'How best the gap between 'reality' and its conceptual reconstruction in the process of knowing can be narrowed down?" Although the general tendency in the social sciences is to accept the concept of 'social reality' as a term whose meaning is deemed to be known to its users, Berger and Luckmann (1971) have made us aware of the deep philosophical and epistemological connotations of the words 'reality' and 'social reality'. Apart from these basic questions pertaining to 'reality' and 'knowledge' in which a sociologist should be no less interested than his colleagues in social philosophy, the problem of social relativity of 'reality' and the ultimate validity or invalidity of knowledge are equally vexing.

This paper,[1] however, is not an attempt at discussing the meaning of 'social reality' in the framework of the sociology of knowledge. We shall therefore bypass the deep philosophical questions without underrating their importance. Here we shall take 'social reality' as given—implying that society is an objective reality, although it may be differently perceived, conceived, and interpreted. We assume that it is possible to understand society—its basic structures and dynamics—through procedures of empirical observation and verification as well

as through intuitive philosophical reflection. We treat these two methods of understanding as mutually complementary rather than contradictory. The ways of understanding society are manifold and those who seek to know it may not necessarily agree on the adequacy and the utility of a particular mode of understanding. It is with this broad positivist yet liberal conviction that this paper seeks to explore the possibilities of integrating alternative approaches to the understanding of social reality. Particularly our focus will be on the nature, the scope, and the limitations of what we call an 'integrated approach'. We shall also discuss later the status of theory and the role of social values in the context of our advocacy in favour of an integrated approach to the understanding of social reality.

II. TWO CONCEPTIONS OF SOCIETY

There are two broad conceptions of society—or of the relationship between man and society. One of these may broadly be called the 'emergent' conception which views society or social order as *sui generis*. Man's interrelationships with his environment, human or otherwise, produce institutions, norms of conduct, and all forms of typifications which imply historicity and control. This conception therefore treats 'social order' as prior, as something that transcends the individuals who constitute it. Society is viewed as a natural boundary-maintaining system of all human action. The lack of the transcendent nature of society is treated as equivalent of lack of social control— which means *'anomie'* (Horton, 1966: 705). The sociological tradition that subscribes to this emergent notion of society is often traced to Emile Durkheim (1964). The other may be termed as the "immanent" conception which views 'social order' as basically a human product. It implies that society exists only as a product of human activity. Externalization is a fundamental biological need; and human beings have the necessary biological equipment to realize it. The so-called *sui generis* social order is thus reduced to the human individuals who constitute it. Thus society or social world is conceived as nothing more than a summation of its constituents. The conflict theorists, for example, subscribed to the immanent conception

and viewed society not as a transcendent social order but as a continually "contested struggle between groups and classes with opposing goals, perspectives and world-views" (Horton, 1966: 705-6). Karl Marx, for example, considered the transcendence of society as tantamount to alienation of man from his own social nature (Bottomore and Rubel, 1971: 102-14; 175-85). Both these conceptions are somewhat 'ideal type' polarities that miss the fundamental dialectical nature of the relationship between human activity and experience on the one hand and the institutional order—that is, not only the product of human activity but also an objective reality in its own right, on the other. For our purpose, then, we may proceed with the following basic premises: (a) that society as a social reality is a human product; (b) that it is an objective reality that is independent of its components and one which is amenable to empirical verification and understanding; and (c) that man is a social product at the same time as society is viewed as a human product.[2]

The purpose of restating these familiar premises is to highlight the integral nature of man-society relationship, or of the relationship between man, nature, and society. The three are only abstractions and conceptualizations drawn from what is an extremely complex, and yet indivisible, set of interconnections. This is not to suggest that the founding-fathers of modern social sciences in the late eighteenth and in the nineteenth centuries were grossly unaware of this basically indivisible interrelationship between man, nature and society. Despite the fact that this awareness was often reflected in the writings of social philosophers of the pre-industrial era, attempts at studying man, in relation to nature and society, got compartmentalized into a host of specialized disciplines. These attempts eventually got institutionalized into independent scientific domains. Even a cursory look at the schemes of classification of 'sciences' in the writings of August Comte, Herbert Spencer down to Wilhelm Dilthey and Max Weber would reveal the underlying intellectual justifications for creating separate sciences—with peculiar sets of concepts and methodologies which were meticulously sustained and preserved, though seldom advanced, by their disciples in the present-day social sciences.

III. UNITY AND DUALITY OF SCIENCES

The intention here is not to deny the fundamental duality of sciences—a notion to which we subscribe. At the level of the spirit and ethic of scientific enquiry one could find a basic identity between the 'natural' and the 'humanistic or social' sciences. Philosophical evidence suggests that the method in the natural sciences is based on the same kind of cycles of interpretation as are commonly associated with social sciences (Kuhn, 1970). Empirical observations suggest that "natural science investigation is grounded in the same kind of situational logic and marked by the same kind of indexical reasoning which we are used to associate with the symbolic and interactional character of social systems/or social world" (Knorr, 1977: 689-96). However, more recently methodological discussions have pointed out the essential inadequacies of the positivistic model for social science methodologies and have highlighted the significant differences between concrete method, analysis, and research procedures of the social sciences and those of the natural sciences (Knorr-Cetina, 1981: 335-36). Therefore the two realms of sciences had to follow entirely different sets of logic of proof, of verification, and bases of generalizations in their development throughout the nineteenth century and thereafter. What is interesting is the fact that the compartmentalization did not stop at the simple binary division between 'natural' and 'social' sciences; the process of specialization by disciplines got proliferated not altogether without any purpose or justification.

Growth of sociology, psychology, anthropology, comparative religion and politics, and economics was mainly in the form of branching off from social philosophy which in its classical formulations had viewed the integral nature of social reality. The development of various specialized social science disciplines was in a large measure a response to the nature of transformation wrought about by the industrial capitalism throughout the nineteenth century. Elaborate division of labour based on high degree of specialization characterized the work organization in modern industrial societies. Advances in science and technology and their application to productive processes led to atomization and gradual fragmentation of the integral units of

man-society relationship. Specialization in social sciences, emergence of a number of sub-disciplines, and a somewhat pathological keenness to demarcate boundaries of one science from the other were only manifestations of that fragmentation. The branching off of various specialized social science disciplines and sub-disciplines may be viewed as the need of the time and yet it reflects the segmental view of man which this process encouraged. Specialization in modern society thus acts as a double-edged weapon. It ensures a high degree of expertise in a sector of learning, but at the same time it creates conditions of self-imposed isolation from other pursuits of learning. The latter typifies the present-day social science scene in our academies.

IV. INTERDISCIPLINARY EXCHANGE

The Natural v. *Social Science Experience:* Before examining the scope and the potential for an integrated approach in the social sciences, it would be quite instructive to acquaint ourselves with the experience of the natural sciences. In this area there has been a more meaningful interaction among different disciplines over several centuries and their progress has been more orderly and better regulated. This is not to suggest that the natural sciences have reached the pinnacle of perfection and have solved all problems and riddles. But among the natural sciences there is a common trunk, going from mathematics to quantum mechanics, then to physics, from there to chemistry, biology, and from there even to physiological psychology. In other words, we can discern in the natural sciences a series of 'decreasing generality' and 'increasing complexity'. Using these classificatory criteria, which we have borrowed from Comte, we can certainly place various natural sciences in a hierarchical order where specialists in one would need collaboration of research workers belonging to the preceding sciences in a given order (Piaget, 1973: 9-10).

Thus we find that physics finds mathematics indispensable, and theoretical physics, while lending itself to experimentation, is essentially mathematical in its form as well as in technique and application. Similarly, mathematicians are concerned with physics in that they, by deduction, solve certain problems posed

by physics. A chemist cannot go very far without physics, and a biologist needs chemistry, physics, and mathematics. In all these fields, therefore, interdisciplinary research is becoming imperative for attempting the integration of perspectives and for enriching our understanding of the material world. It must, however, be stressed that such integration is facilitated by the nature of the subject-matter, and by a clearly defined order of disciplines, determined by the principles of decreasing generality and increasing complexity that find wider acceptance in the natural sciences. Consequently, a whole range of new sciences such as biophysics, biochemistry, biometry, etc. are emerging with their increasing complexity.[3]

In the field of human sciences, interdisciplinary research can result from two separate but interrelated needs. First is the 'need for information' and more data, and the second is the need for more common structures or for analytical integration. At the first level an interdisciplinary collaboration poses little or no problems. It involves exchange of information among related disciplines in the belief that such exchange enriches a discipline's understanding of the phenomena under study. A discipline's boundaries and autonomy in explanatory terms are not eroded by interdisciplinary contacts at the level of information or data. It may sometimes lead to adoption of common methods by related disciplines, which in turn may pave the way for a possible integration at the level of analysis or perspectives or interpretative scheme. The fulfilment of this second need for common structures, or what we have termed as analytical integration, is beset with several difficulties. Unlike in the natural sciences, in the social sciences there is no linear order of sciences ranged between 'decreasing generality and increasing complexity'. On the contrary, in some of the social sciences there is a marked tendency to reduce explanations of diverse social phenomena to a single perspective peculiar to that science. Sociologists are often accused of reducing everything to sociology and their reductionism is often pejoratively dubbed as 'sociological imperialism'. Similar tendencies are noticeable, with differences in degree, among some economists, political scientists, linguists, psychologists, and so on. In our opinion, the challenges posed by reduction, particularly in the social sciences, to some extent explain the growing interdisciplinary

trend that is receiving a continual impetus today. Consequently, like in the natural sciences, even in the field of social sciences a whole range of 'new specializations' are emerging and we have 'sociolinguistics', 'political sociology', and 'economic anthropology' (Godelier, 1976), and the like. These are in turn paving the way for an integrated approach in the field of social sciences.

Implicit in our argument is integration of perspectives, i.e. analytical integration, which is possible by synthesizing theoretical formulations and empirical findings produced across social science disciplines. This is possible by what Piaget (1973: 11) has called 'reciprocal assimilation', by partial reduction of the 'higher', but also by enrichment of the 'lower' by the 'higher'. Going over the bounds of one's own discipline at the analytical level implies a synthesis of perspectives, and an assimilation of scientific explanations. Such convergence is warranted more by the nature of social facts or social phenomena that social scientists deal with. For such a convergence, social scientists must begin by comparing their problems first; if there is convergence of certain general problems, then they must see whether the two sets of problems and social realities they deal with have connections with other areas that are dealt with by other disciplines; and finally, to solve those problems, they must examine whether it is necessary to take recourse to any seminal ideas which actually rest on common mechanisms, or on integrated, synthesized analytical scheme.

V. STATUS OF THEORY IN INTEGRATED APPROACH

Fortunately, the logic and the structure of certain social theories and perspectives are conducive to such an integration. But neither have their explanatory powers been fully tapped nor are their adaptive and innovative potentialities sufficiently revealed so far. Reference may be made here to the Marxian general theory of history, particularly 'dialectical materialism', Talcott Parsons' theory of social systems (1970: 3-23) and action frame of reference (1977: 43-51, 731-57), and also to more recent advances made in structuralism. This is only by way of illustration and not an exhaustive list of perspectives which we consider as inherently facilitating synthesis.[4] Func-

tionalism and structural-functionalism in anthropology too had this potential for synthesis. However, in the hey-day of functionalism 'structure' was used more as a static concept. Consequently, complex social processes tended to be redulced to simple mechanistic formulae—mostly derived from anaogies and isomorphism with biological systems. Later, and at a higher level of abstraction, in the systemic analytical framework this narrowness was overcome as 'structure' came to be viewed as having an inherently dynamic character and 'change' was seen as the result of 'structural differentiation'. This is not to suggest that systems theorists of analysis became less interested in the problems of systems maintenance and the *status quo*. Nevertheless, these developments paved the way for some dialogue between the adherents of the dialectical theoretical tradition and those of the systemic theoretical tradition. Such attempts to synthesize these two or more approaches for theoretic assimilation could be mentioned as one of the striking features of the European intellectual tradition today. Qualitative differences in their emphases still persist. For example, the systems approach continues to focus on functional equilibrium as 'homeostasis' whereas the dialecticians treat it as 'homeorhesis' or dialectical equilibrium as the essence of the process of structural transformation (Ball, 1979: 785-96). Althusserian attempts to combine the structuralist and Marxist perspectives are points in this direction of synthesis and assimilation at the theoretic level (Althusser and Balibar, 1970; Rex, 1974). Alan Tournaine's (1977) work may also be cited as an important landmark in this context.

In India so far such an integration or theoretical synthesis is not in sight. Few social scientists demonstrate even the awareness of theory and those who recognize the relevance of theory for any systematic understanding of social phenomena are still fewer. Even where theory is taken seriously, as is the case of sociology in India, to confine to my own discipline, the systemic theoretical exercises have been made by Yogendra Singh (1973), Y.B. Damle (1965: 32-52; 1967: 250-81) and others, whereas the Marxian dialectical analyses have grown somewhat independently of the former (e.g. A.R. Desai, 1948; 1969). Even rudimentary efforts in the direction of synthesis or integration are lacking in India.

Basically all the theories only represent different alternatives of appraising social reality. But Ramkrishna Mukherjee notes some striking features of theoretical orientations in sociology. First, that these theoretical alternatives have a deductive-positivist base and that "there is no objective basis from which to infer their relative powers of explanation and prediction *vis-à-vis* the contextual reality". Instead it is left to the subjective judgements of the proponents of the various theoretical alternatives. Therefore although theories are mutually distinct, they in effect express both 'fact' and 'values'. Secondly, this undoubtedly influences the cause-and-effect ordering of facts in various theoretical alternatives. The ideological loads and differences among sociologists thus lead them to promote one or another alternative appraisal of social reality (Mukherjee, 1977: 33-34). As a reaction to this situation, Mukherjee prefers to come out of a vicious circle of an ideologically loaded deductive positivism and advocates what he calls an inductive-inferential approach to social reality. Two points could be raised on Mukherjee's proposed approach. First, he presumes that inductive sociological exercises will *not* demonstrate oppositional value preferences as deductive positivist alternatives do. Secondly, what kind of theoretical breakthrough will induction achieve? Mukherjee confesses that in the immediate future inductive-inferential approach will not achieve such a breakthrough (*ibid*.: 135). But, the contribution such an approach is likely to make either to the development of a new theory or integration of existing theories is not precisely spelled out by Mukherjee. In the absence of these, his views practically border on nihilism or an anti-theoretical position or both.[5]

At the level of theory,[6] to what model of theory should the protagonists of integrated approach subscribe? Here, monistic and pluralistic theoretical models provide us with two clear alternatives. Seen in the true spirit of integration the monistic theory model looks incompatible with the tasks of synthesis and assimilation which face the social scientists today. Such theories are possible only where scientists have succeeded in establishing causal explanations that facilitate predictions and control. The credit for having achieved these is often given to natural sciences but even there scepticism over the tenability of 'causal' (i.e. predictive) explanation is growing. In our opinion

the nature as well as the objectives of 'social causation' is basically different from causation in the natural sciences. The goal of social science inquiry could at best be 'understanding' (implying Max Weber's exegesis—interpretation) or 'trend analysis' and not 'prediction' (Kaplan, 1964: 346-56). The nature of scientific explanation, and therefore of theory in humanistic sciences, is 'stochastic' or 'probabilistic'. Today even the natural scientists have a secular position. Various alternative explanations of social phenomena are possible. This leads us to a pluralist theoretical position. However, the tasks involved in integrated approach must not remain confined only to rocognizing the plurality of the social forces that operate; they must also include evaluation of the relative importance of those social forces. An attempt must necessarily be made to indicate which of the interpretations is more tenable and which social forces prove to be more decisive in time and space. Social scientists have to tackle the problems of analysis at the 'synchronic' and the 'diachronic' levels. The real success of an integrated approach lies in explaining social reality at both the levels. Moreover, theoretical pluralism implies relativism which means that there need not be *the* theory, or *the* explanation for all time to come. What is relatively a more important and determining force at a particular phase in societal development may not always remain so in time and space. Hence theoretical or analytical integration is not a one-time feat but an endless process that has to be kept up relentlessly.

VI. THREE ORIENTATIONS IN INTEGRATED APPROACH

All those social scientists interested in studying social reality in an integrated and interdisciplinary perspective may have three possible alternative types of orientation, viz. cognitive, affective, and conative. Conventionally, cognitive orientation has been considered not only necessary but also desirable as an integral part of any scientific pursuit. The cognitive orientation itself operate at two levels. At one level it manifests itself through a description of the phenomenon which is being observed in terms of the concepts commonly used by diverse social science disciplines. Here similarities and differences in the conceptual connotations familiar in respective

social science fields must first be carefully sorted out. This will ensure multifaceted descriptions that are mutually complementary and reinforcing. At the other level the cognitive orientation manifests in explanatory exercises. Scientific explanation is an attempt to answer 'why' and under 'what conditions' the phenomenon occurs and with 'what consequences' (Gore, 1976: 9-10). Most of the social sciences in the Anglo-American intellectual tradition have laid emphasis on these aspects of the cognitive orientation.

The other two orientations—affective and conative—have so far been considered as inappropriate for 'pure' scientists. The canons of positivism, of objectivity, and, more particularly, of ethical neutrality and value-free knowledge discouraged social scientists from adopting affective or even conative orientation towards social realities. These orientations denote psychological and affective involvement of a scientist and his will or desire that would ultimately reflect in social action. The controversy over 'value-free' and 'value-based' social science is an age-old and yet an unresolved one. But there has been a marked shift in favour of the latter in more recent years (e.g , see Mullick, 1979). The role of value judgements in (a) the selection of problems, (b) the determination of the contents of conclusion, (c) the identification of facts, and (d) the interpretation and assessment of evidence is most vital. As Ernest Nagel has put it: "[the] social scientist selects what . . . [are] the socially important values; and he attributes 'cultural significance' so that value-orientation is inherent in his choice of material for investigation" (1961: 1-14). Thus although Max Weber was a vigorous proponent of "value-free social science", his contention nevertheless was that the concept of culture itself has a value-concept and an empirical reality became "culture" to us as we related it to value-ideas. Thus we cannot, and must not, discover what is meaningful to us by means of a "presuppositionless" excursion into empirical data. Orthodox social scientists, however, continue to cling to "value-neutrality' as the essence of science in methodological sense. To them affective orientation is by its very nature non-objective, and conative orientation presupposes certain prescriptive, normative concerns or 'end-states' in terms of which existing reality is sought to be evaluated, modified, and changed if necessary.

Unfortunately, most social scientists today choose to accept the role of self-appointed guardians of objectivity and prefer to talk of 'social change' as if it were value-free.

Social scientists operating within an integrated frame have then two options. They may choose to refrain from prescriptive and 'end-state directed activities' and thus confine themselves to purely cognitive-type of scientific studies, whether descriptive or explanatory or both. Implicit in this position is an assumption that complete objectivity and value-free knowledge are possible. In such an ideally detached frame of analysis researchers function purely as technocrats and do not wish to, or pretend not to, be committed to any set of value preferences. Alternatively, social scientists can opt for a committed science in which research pursuits have social relevance and are anchored in certain end-states—whether directly or indirectly. Social reality would not only be understood but sought to be modified or changed in relation to value preferences. An interdisciplinary research team must be homogeneous in terms of its orientation. A team with some members trying to remain 'aloof and detached' and others with avowed commitment will not be a viable one because its members are likely to engage themselves in activities that pull them apart and can function at cross purposes.[7]

Our own preference is for a social science that is committed and is socially relevant.[8] This choice is dictated by two considerations. First, that absolute 'value-neutrality' is not possible except in the form of pure and simple abstraction or mental construct. Thus 'value-freeness' borders on 'valuelessness'. Often value-choices tacitly influence scientific endeavours and still claims to 'scientific objectivity' are voiced most vociferously. This is far more dangerously misleading because in that case value-loads operate at the unconscious level under the facade of scientific objectivity. Therefore the best course for social scientists is to make their value-preferences explicit, whatever they may be, and then try to conform to the rigours of scientific objectivity. In fact, "to be aware of one's own value-preferences itself is a step towards scientific objectivity" (Srinivas, 1970: 4-5). Secondly, in the methodology of social sciences, which is styled mostly on the model of natural sciences, unfortunately 'value-preference' and 'scientific objectivity' are pitted against

each other as mutually incompatible polarities. At least in Weber's writings value-free social science did not imply 'pre-suppositionless' investigation of social reality (1949: 1-47) as it tends to be accepted in the present-day empirical sociology. Within the framework of accepted values and desired end-states it should still be possible for a social scientist to maintain the standards of objectivity, avoid distortion, and examine and present facts in a manner that is replicable, so that inter-subjective verifiability could be possible. Our position is that it is possible to distinguish between 'fact' and 'value' and to identify value-bias whenever it occurs in social inquiry. When we take this position we are aware of the tension inherent between the positivist and the intuitionist camps. This tension is apparent even in Weber's famous notion of 'understanding' or *verstehen* itself. It raises some far-reaching philosophical issues into which we need not go. According to Weber, 'action' covers all behaviour to which a subjective meaning is attached by the agents, and social action covers all action that takes account of the behaviour of others by virtue of the subjective meaning attached to it by the agents. Some interpreters of Weber have taken this sense of *verstehen* to entail an intuitionist position. But this is not so. Weber is emphatic that even the most self-evident interpretation requires to be validated by reference to concrete empirical evidence. In the choice of this evidence value-preferences may operate but verification of subjective meaning or interpretation, as in the case of all hypotheses, is indispensable. To that extent Weber never compromised with the basic tenets of positivism, although he always believed that some form of 'internal' comprehension and 'external' confirmation necessary to justify any sociological explanation (Runciman, 1974: 11-13). Likewise, when we argue in favour of a value-based understanding of social reality, we believe that the test of empirical demonstration and verification (within the methodological canon of objectivity) is inescapable for committed social science inquiry.

In our view, suppression and distortion of basic facts are most injurious to one's own values, and they weaken the cause or the efforts in the direction of the desired end-states. Within the matrix of value-commitments, a certain objective methodology could be followed without any wavering on one's ultimate

value-choices. For social scientists, therefore, the question of 'ends and means' is of vital importance. Neither is to be subordinated to the other. So far efforts were aimed at pursuing one at the expense of the other. Our submission is that it is possible to blend these two together. This will also end the 'ivory-tower' isolation of which social sciences are often held guilty, and will render them as socially relevant and serviceable. One of the reasons why the contribution of social scientists to social change in India is dismally poor is that they are preoccupied with spinning 'theories of action' rather than 'for action'. Consequently, a philosophical theory of social reality seldom gets translated into an instrumentality of social transformation despite the rhetoric of demagogues and academicians who profess a deep concern for the wretched of the earth.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. This is a revised version of a working paper prepared for a seminar on 'Interdisciplinary Approach to Social Reality—Its Methodology and Organization' held at the Tilak Maharashtra Vidyapeeth, Pune, in February 1981. Later it was delivered as a lecture at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology, New Delhi, on 19 March 1981. These exposures have helped me a great deal in recasting the paper. I am particularly indebted to my colleague Dr. U.B. Bhoite who read the paper and made several comments.

2. These premises have been drawn from Berger and Luckmann, 1971: pp. 78-79.

3. It must be stressed that mathematics need not be treated exclusively as a natural science. In their styles of reasoning as well as of abstraction mathematical and philosophical discourses have been quite akin to each other. This was as much true of the classical Greek philosophy as it is in the case of modern symbolic logic which draws heavily on Boolean Algebra. However, contemporary social sciences in general, and sociology in particular, gradually got dislocated from philosophical and also mathematical reasoning when methodological sophistication became euphemism for increased quantification and application of statistical techniques.

4. One could add to this list 'symbolic interactionism', 'ethnomethodology', 'phenomenology' and other perspectives too.

5. I must confess that before preparing this paper I had not carefully looked into Professor Ramkrishna Mukherjee's *What Will It be?* (Bombay: Allied, 1976). I hope to go through this work carefully, and shall revise my views on his 'inductive sociology' in case I find

that my apparently harsh judgement was unwarranted.

6. The term 'theory' has been used here to imply 'scientific explanation'—the sense in which it is commonly used in some of the standard works in the philosophy of science. For example see Nagle (1961) and Kaplan (1964).

7. I hope this should suffice to clarify that I am not arguing in favour of theoretical eclecticism or *laissez-faire*

8. I have stated my position on this question elaborately elsewhere. See Dhanagare, 1980: pp. 25-26.

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On Understanding Human Action*

Satya P. Gautam

A CONSIDERATION of the techniques, the methodology, and the concepts being used by the majority of social scientists suggests that in most of the social science theories there is a considerable emphasis on sophistication and continuous improvement of the techniques of statistical analysis of observed behaviour. There is a general tendency to establish a 'natural science' of society and of human behaviour which would match the precision and the explanatory scope of physical sciences and possess the same type of logical structure.

The roots of this tendency, which has been more dominant in the Anglo-Saxon world, can be traced back to a particular view of mind and the nature of language in the philosophical ideas that have informed the theorizing about the nature of the relationship between the science of man and the science of nature. The puzzles, the paradoxes, and the confusions that are pointed out by rival theorists in the philosophy of social sciences cannot be adequately dealt with unless one recognizes that the dualist metaphysics (having its origins in Descartes, in modern philosophy) and a particular view of science (going back to Galileo, Kepler, Newton, and other founders of modern science) are the underlying sources for most of the controversies.

A dualistic metaphysical position, according to which there were only two basic categories of existence, namely mental and physical, and which further postulated a contingent

*For a detailed discussion of the issues raised in this paper, see my *Reasons for Action*, Ajanta Publications, New Delhi, 198 .;

relationship between the two, was put forward by Descartes. He maintained that it was logically possible to think of something mental (e.g. the mind) without implying that this mental entity had anything to do with something physical (e.g. the living human body). This view gave rise to a host of questions regarding the criteria by which the 'mental' could be distinguished from the 'physical', on the one hand, and the nature of the relationship between the two, on the other. The criteria that were proposed for drawing a distinction between the mental and the physical, from time to time, generated several dichotomies, viz., conscious *v.* non-conscious, inner *v.* outer, subjective *v.* objective, private *v.* public, unextended *v.* extended, and qualitative *v.* quantitative, which create intractable problems in action theory.

It would be relevant to mention here that in speaking of the separateness of mind and body, Descartes was not speaking of an *actual* separation, but of a *possible* separation, i.e. of the possibility of a disembodied mind. The Cartesian doctrine of the possibility of a disembodied mind gives rise to several difficult problems of epistemology which the scientific tradition tried to avoid by rejecting the dualistic thesis and by applying the methods and principles of the physical sciences to the study of man. But this evasion of dualism was achieved only through a demolition of the conceptual framework used in daily life for describing and understanding human actions. This was necessitated by a particular view of language which was put forward by St. Augustine and has been accepted in its different formulations by most of the philosophers in the western tradition till recently. According to this view there is an isomorphism between the constellation of words in our language and the constellation of objects in the world. Words are names of objects and acquire meaning by virtue of their reference to the objects they name. The meaning of a word, according to this view of language, is a kind of object, and depending upon the presence or the lack of an object of this kind a word is either meaningful or meaningless. Combined with the Cartesian dualism, and the belief that mental events are inner, subjective, and private, this theory of language implies that concepts such as sorrow, pain, anger and the like are meaningful by virtue of their reference to something inner and private which is not

accessible to direct observation by a person other than the one who is experiencing sorrow, pain, anger, etc. Thus another person cannot know for certain what I think, feel, or sense. No one can ever verify one's inferences regarding my mental states conclusively, i.e. directly. Others can observe only my physical behaviour which is external, objective, and public. Such a conclusion (which rests upon the fallacious theories of meaning and mind) led most of the behavioural scientists to accept a positivistic view of enquiry according to which the distinction between essence and appearance should be dropped as scientists are entitled to record only that which can be directly observed by them and that any formulation involving the use of general terms cannot have any real referent other than individual concrete objects. The acceptance of these assumptions insinuates that concepts and categories which enable us to describe and explain the physical world will also enable us to describe and explain what human beings are and what they do·

The impact of the Cartesian view of mind, on the one hand, and Positivism, on the other, has been so strong in the behavioural sciences that either the experiential realm has been denied existence altogether or it is declared as totally subjective and private so that it is not directly accessible to anyone other than the person concerned and that there is no way to verify such experience claims. Consequently, the experiential aspects of human beings have been ignored altogether. But to ignore the experiential capacities of human beings is to see them as less than capable of meaningful actions (or projects) and to depersonalize or dehumanize them, and to arbitrarily reduce praxis to process. Most of the studies in human sciences present human beings as less than what they really are (or could be) to the extent that they assimilate human choices and decisions to a special realm of material or natural processes specifically via the reduction of human qualities on the order of things or animals.

Much of the behaviourist's antagonism to mind could be explained as the result of a misunderstanding of the nature of the concepts that are employed in discourse about the mental realm. The main argument of behaviourism is that we can never make reliable and repeatable observations of another person's (a behaviourist would prefer to use the term 'organism')

experiences and since science can deal only with what is observable, experience can have no place in a science of human behaviour.[1] The behaviourist may be right in rejecting introspection as a method of understanding human actions but is wrong in denying experiences any place whatever in scientific discourse.

As against the behaviourist approach in psychology, the concept of action that has prevailed in sociological literature, following Weber, holds that action is to be distinguished from 'mere' behaviour by the presence of a 'mental' element. According to this view, the definitive feature of action, and the locus of its meaning, is consciousness of some sort of subjective experience in the mind of the actor.[2] The task of sociologists is to interpret action with reference to the subjective meaning that the agent attaches to it. Through the use of the term 'attach', Weber makes it appear as if we are dealing with two discrete kind of 'things'—'behaviour' and 'subjective meaning'. The use of the term 'attach' already presupposes the break between behaviour and meaning of behaviour. It may be pointed out that there is an important ambiguity in Weber's position for he did not discuss in detail what he meant by 'subjective meaning'. But it is not difficult to see that the description of action in terms of behaviour plus a mental component is a consequence of Cartesian dualism and a fallacious theory of language. Though Weber did say that understanding of the meaning of an action was essential for sociological theorising, he insisted that interpretation at the level of meaning must be supplemented by a causally adequate explanation. In order to provide a causal theory of social action, sociological theory usually takes recourse to the reduction of human agency to internalization of values and fails to treat social life as *actively constituted* through the doings of its members.

It is quite ironical that despite their diverse disagreements on the methodology of social sciences, both behaviourists and their opponents share the view that action derives its meaning in terms of the subjective experience of the agent. The behaviourists, believing that these inner experiences cannot be scientifically observed, decided to do away with the inner states and confined themselves to the observable behaviour, whereas the phenomenologists, for obvious reasons, have argued that

this approach precludes a proper understanding of human behaviour. But both sides of the dispute tacitly agree that these problems are rooted in the subjective character of human consciousness. The only way to clarify the issues involved in the debate between the behaviourists and the phenomenologists lies in the rejection of their shared premise which is a hangover of the Cartesian heritage. The first step in this direction is to recognize that meaning is not the property of a private subjective experience, and that actions can be properly understood only in terms of the actor's relationship with the social context in which they are performed. It is a truism that meaning requires a subject in so far as it is an individual who acts in accordance with his own perceptions, intentions, and goal-orientations. But meaning is not subjective in so far as it transcends individual behaviour as inter-subjectively accepted and conventional meaning. Social reality is constituted by the fact that people not only act but also inter-subjectively understand each other's actions. Someone who signals his hand out of the car window to indicate his intention to turn in a particular direction does so on the assumption that other drivers understand the meaning of the gesture and will act on that understanding. The fact that the arm-signal means what it does exists as a social fact independent of any specific individual's understanding of it. The possibility of understanding presupposes the fact that the actor and the spectator have a common frame of reference and meaning without which communication is not possible. This common frame of meaning cannot be shown either as a physical or as a mental object. The meaning cannot be a private reserve since communicability is a prerequisite for meaning. Communication is impossible unless meaning is available to the speaker and the hearer, the writer and the reader, and the actor and the spectator.

In case it is possible to understand what the other means when one is sharing one's thoughts and feelings implies that statements about experiences are as significant, if not more as statements that can be made about overt behaviour. It is taken for granted that we know a good deal in *practice*, if not in theory, about ourselves as persons. We do not, for instance, continuously mistake things for people, and do not expect objects to possess the abilities that belong to people. On the

other hand, we do expect people to respond to us, to try to communicate, to perceive, to understand, and so on. Normally our attitudes towards machines, organisms, and people are quite different, and for all practical purposes we face few difficulties in discriminating which is what. In our everyday relationships we do not continually confuse and baffle each other; it is only *in theory* that we find it difficult to spell out the differences clearly.

In view of the above one has to guard against those tendencies in social science which reduce or abbreviate human beings to objects or organisms in order to accommodate the observational or reductionist methods of natural science in the study of man. It has to be understood that sociology, history, psychology, socio-biology, law, and linguistics deal with different aspects of human activities and that each of these disciplines formulates its problems in terms of its specific interests and in view of the methodological tools that are available to it. Therefore the problems, the methods, and the eventual answers are related to and determined by the purposes of the enquiry within that specific field. It is not to be ignored that various 'scientific' approaches to the study of man and his life have fragmented the 'total human being' of everyday experience into as many pieces as there are disciplines. It is a homo-sociologious, or a homo-psychologious, or a homo-economious that we encounter in behavioural sciences rather than the man that we come across in everyday life.

II

In the analysis of actions the central problem is whether or not it is possible to state the criteria by which a line could be drawn between actions and non-actions. Wittgenstein's question, "What is left over if I subtract the fact that my arm goes up from the fact that I raise my arm?", has been answered in various ways by different philosophers. But the underlying assumption in most of these answers has been that the question demanded an explication of the relationship between bodily movements and actions. Though there is a wide disagreement on the question of assimilation of the concept of action under the concept of movement (a sequence of events) or behaviour,

a major theme of recent writing in analytical philosophy is that
'movements' can, under specific circumstances—usually where
they can be linked with conventions or intentions, rules or
motives, etc.—be counted or be redescribed as actions, and
that any action can be redescribed as a movement or as a
sequence of movements (except perhaps those actions which
have the character of refraining). The implication of this is
that there are two alternative ways of describing the same
conduct—one in which an action is described as a mere *happen-
ing* and another in which it is seen as a *doing*.

It may be argued that these two alternative modes of describ-
ing actions cannot be equally appropriate for the understand-
ing of actions, as the proper unit of reference for analysis of
action has to be the person, the human agent, who is lost sight
of in the mode of description in which action is seen as move-
ment. The view which regards actions to be a subset of events,
or holds that there is no difference between action and behav-
iour, cannot be very illuminating, for any characterization of
action merely in terms of changes in the physical realm fails to
draw a distinction between what human beings do, what hap-
pens to them, and what they undergo. It may be pointed out
that even if doing and undergoing were exhaustive categories,
they are not mutually exclusive; the person committing theft
may also be feeling nervous or guilty; and the man being
robbed may be simultaneously acting, i.e. resisting his assailant.
Those who argue for the assimilation of the concept of action
within the concept of event or the concept of behaviour do not
fully appreciate the reflective character of the awareness that
human beings have of their capacity to intervene (or not to) in
the world with a view to bringing about certain consequences.
Actions are unlike events in the sense that they are not lan-
guage and therefore independent. As language-users, human
beings are capable of self-reference; a capacity lacking in objects
and organisms.

Language plays a very crucial role with respect to human
actions. Animal behaviour and physical events can be discussed,
described, and explained in language (though these phenomena
by themselves are non-linguistic in character, i.e. language is
not involved in their occurring etc.) but it is only human actions
in which language is used by the agents involved in actions.

Language is used not only in talking about actions (as in the case of physical events and animal behaviour) but also for engaging in action itself—i.e. in planning an action, in carrying it on, or in assessing and evaluating it.

In order to show that actions are different from events, it shall be argued that action is not identical with its corresponding event (or sequence of events) for the same action may involve different events and the same events may be involved in the performance of different actions. The thought of every action being identical with some event is counter-intuitive for it is a category-mistake to think of events as being intentional or unintentional. It does not make sense to speak of an event as intentional or unintentional for unless X was already characterized as an action it would be irrelevant to ask whether X is intentional or unintentional. It is wrong to think that events are characterized as actions by virtue of their possession of an extra property of being intentional or unintentional. Consider the following cases:

(a) A gives O to B
(b) A returns O to B
(c) A lends O to B
(d) A donates O to B
(e) A deposits O with B

Now, though the meaning of giving, returning, lending, donating, and depositing are different from one another, all these actions seem to involve the same (observable) event, i.e. the object O passes from A to B. Nevertheless, whether passing of O from A to B is a case of giving or depositing (or any of the others mentioned above) is determined by the context of the situation. As far as *physical facts* are concerned, passing of O from A to B will be sufficient to make any of the above statements [(a) to (e)] true. But these physical facts are only a necessary and *not* a sufficient condition for the truth of any of these statements. The difference between *depositing* and simply *handing over* some money has in part to do with what one means or intends to be doing—and what one *can* mean or intend (by doing which one does in the way one does it) is rel-

lated to the particular socio-cultural context in which the action
is performed.[3]

A failure to take into account the context of action (con-
stituted by institutions, rules, beliefs, and intentions) is likely to
result in a misinterpretation or misunderstanding of the action.
Lloyd has provided a rather amusing account of what a tribal
anthropologist might see if he visited the Brighton beach in the
middle of the summer. The anthropologist's account may read
somewhat like the following:

> The people of England are religious and devout worship-
> pers of the sun. Each year they leave their homes and
> travel to the coast for the purpose of worship and often
> take up small accommodation in tents or in what they
> call caravans, or live with other people during their short
> stay. Each day they begin worship by prostrating them-
> selves on the shingle in the heat of the sun, which is
> often so hot that they wear shields over their eyes. Their
> bodies become burnt and some become ill, but few are
> deterred by this, such is their devotion. At various times
> people will baptise themselves in the waters, calling to
> each other and waving their arms in ecstasy. At midday,
> families group together when a symbolic ceremony takes
> place. Three-cornered pieces of bread, known to the
> natives as 'sandwiches', are passed around and eaten.
> During the afternoon they throw symbolic, large, inflated,
> multi-coloured orbs to one another, illustrating the
> dominance of the sun in their lives. Throughout all this,
> the elders lie motionless in their canvas seats with their
> faces covered, in deep and prolonged meditation. These
> observances may continue for a family for up to fourteen
> days, when they return to their work until the following
> year.[4]

Lloyd says that such an interpretation of what the people
on the Brighton beach were doing seems quite consistent with
their physical movements. That is to say that if these people
really were sun-worshipping instead of sun-bathing and enjoy-
ing themselves, their bodily movements might be no different.
The difference lies in how they saw their movements. What the

anthropologist did not do was to see things the way the natives did, to entertain the ideas they had, and to understand the significance that these things had for them. If we wish to understand what a person is doing we have to understand not only his beliefs and intentions but also the socio-cultural context (constituted by institutions, norms, and rules) which provide the framework within which he forms his purposes in terms of appraisal of his situation.

It is a truism that we usually do not deliberate about most of our actions in advance. But the fact remains that there are occasions when the question "What should I do?" presents itself as a significant one in our lives. The question presupposes an awareness of availability of alternative courses of action for in the absence of such an awareness there would be no sense in considering such a question. The question can also be formulated as: "What is the best thing for one to do in this situation?" A consideration of the question involves an appraisal of the relevant facts of the situation and the appropriateness of the alternatives available to the person in the given situation. It is relevant here to point out that when one is considering the question "What should I do?", one is not attempting a prediction about oneself but is trying to come to terms with one's situation and reaching a decision regarding what to do.

As we are not born rational but come to acquire skills of reasoning in the process of growing up in society, we come to learn about the relevant factors which count as reasons for (or against) actions in learning about ourselves, society, and the world. In our deliberations about actions, as in our communications to others regarding the reasons on which we acted, we assume shareability of our experiences in the sense that we expect others to understand us. We assume that due to a similarity of experiences they would make sense of our remarks, and the very same assumptions provide for the possibility of social life. While growing up in society, each one of us learns that our emotions, reflections, dreams, and phantasies are known by others only indirectly, through various manifestations, each of which is open to diverse interpretations. We also learn that others too have emotions, reflections, dreams, and phantasies which become known to us through their manifestations; we also learn that social life depends upon the possibility

of some sort of rapport between our experiences and those
of other people. This rapport is possible for we share the
criterion of identity of an experience by learning the conventions
that establish its sameness. The capacity to identify and
describe our feelings presupposes the use of concepts which we
share with other members of society. Every human society has

(i) concepts which serve to identify certain basic human
needs;

(ii) concepts which are needed in order to determine how
much importance is to be attached to these needs in
relation to other human satisfactions;

(iii) concepts which are needed in order to determine how
much importance is to be attached to human needs
and satisfactions in general, in relation to the non-human

(iv) world;

concepts which offer ways of seeing one's relation to
other human beings.

The concepts will differ from one culture to another but since
the categories will remain the same, it will always be possible
to arrive at some degree of understanding of the concepts and
norms of an alien culture.[5]

Human beings take note of the facts of the situation, frame
alternative plans of actions, work out the probable consequences
of adopting these plans, and decide upon some of them within
the framework of the concepts mentioned above. Ordinarily
we are guided by the prevalent practices and values of our
culture. This is why we are asked to account for our actions
only when the action is regarded as wrong, untoward, inept,
odd, etc. We understand such requests as a demand for justi-
fication or defence of the action. In responding to the questions
of the sort "Why did you do?", we take recourse either to
justifications or to excuses. Depending upon the context, these
justifications or excuses may be of several different kinds.
Before giving our reasons for an action in response to a ques-
tion, we do try to take into account the moral, social, legal,
or other imports of the question. In offering justifications, we
accept the responsibility for the act but deny the pejorative
quality associated with it. On the other hand, in offering

excuses we usually admit that the act is wrong or inappropriate but disown full responsibility for the act. Whether the excuse offered by a person is accepted or rejected usually depends upon his status in the context in which the account was demanded and offered. However, it is important to recognize that we do not succeed in providing reasons for all our actions because we do not keep on deliberating indefinitely but terminate our reasoning at some stage—a stage beyond which we do not provide or look for further reasons. We do not look for further reasons because they are taken for granted and are indicated in the very language of discourse. It is for this reason that the question of relationship between reasons and actions or the question of what kind of considerations have a bearing on which kind of actions cannot be adequately answered without taking into account the concrete cultural practices in which individuals participate.

Reasons for actions are linked with recognition of purposes and adherence to general principles of action which may constrain people from acting in certain ways. These principles, whether they are rooted in social, moral, or legal conventions, function as normative pressures on the people who are committed to these principles. In offering explanations for actions in terms of reasons, we are not only offering a reason for the performance of a particular act (in the sense of actions being means to the goals of agents) but also providing information about the beliefs of the person and the social, moral, and legal context which he takes into account while formulating his projects. It can be appreciated that most of our actions such as joining a protest march, attending seminars, entering into a contract, voting in an election, etc. presuppose a setting of certain institutions, norms, conventions, and practices. It would be inappropriate therefore to expect that an understanding of such actions should be provided purely in neuro-physiological or behavioral terms.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. "Behaviorism begins with the assumption that the world is made of only one kind of stuff—dealt with most successfully by physics. Organisms are parts of that world and their processes are, therefore, physical processes. . . . Behaviorism assumes that ideas, motives and

feelings have no part in determining conduct, and, therefore, no part in explaining it. As a behaviorist I question the nature of such events and their role in prediction and control of behaviour." B.F. Skinner, 'Consciousness: A Debate', in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 1966-67, p. 325.

2. "In action is included all human behaviour in so far as the acting individual attaches a subjective meaning to it." Max Weber, *Theory of Economic and Social Organisations*, edited by Talcott Parsons, New York, The Free Press, 1966, p. 88.

   Weber also refers to "complex of subjective meaning" and "meaning in the minds of individual persons" as definitive features of human action. (See pp. 98-102.)

3. "One very fundamental action is that of giving. To give is not just to hand over, but to authorize the recipient to retain and use, and if he so chooses to dispose of what is given, and to extinguish one's own rights to do likewise. Giving cannot be understood except with regard to these rights and powers—else how should we distinguish giving from lending?—and these rights and powers only make sense in a social setting and cannot be explicated in purely physical terms." J.R., Lucas: "The Phenomenon of Law' in Hecker and Raz (eds.), *Law, Morality and Society*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977, p. 87.

4. D.I., Lloyd, 'Nature of Man', in *Philosophy and the Teacher*, edited by D.I. Lloyd, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978, p. 36.

5. Richard, Norman: *Reasons for Action* of, Oxford: Blackwell, 1971, pp. 139-40. In this book Norman has provided a critique of utilitarian rationality by pointing out that *all* reasons for acting do not necessarily rest upon utilitarian foundations. He also challenges the empiricist distinction between man as a spectator or as a thinking being and man as an agent. Norman contends that "freedom of the abstract individual, divorced from a culture and therefore from a concrete rationality, is a totally empty freedom . . . the nature of human action and human reason cannot be properly understood unless it is seen primarily in social terms." (*Ibid.*, p. 83). Norman's analysis provides a way out of extreme subjectivism and arbitrary conventionalism by placing practical rationality in its socio-historical contexts while denying a deterministic relationship between rationality and social forces.