

THE IMPORTANCE OF WORLDVIEW FOR WELLBEING

Alex Reichel

"...may He give you the power through His Spirit for your hidden self to grow strong..." St. Paul to the Ephesians 3:16

This paper is headed by a short phrase from St. Paul. Not only has Rene Girard's theory of mimetic desire reinstated the traditional canon of Western literature but he has shown that the JUDEO-CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURES have uncovered the hidden mechanisms of human culture "hidden from the foundations of the world". Hence their capital importance in the psychological and anthropological wellbeing of the human prospect, not only for the West but the entire world. In seeing this I have no hesitation in quoting St. Paul's rather convoluted sentence in full. He is kneeling before the Father praying that "Out of his infinite glory, may he give you the power through his Spirit for your hidden self to grow strong, so that Christ may live in your hearts through faith, and then, planted in love and built on love, you will with all the saints have the strength to grasp the breadth and the length, the height and the depth; until knowing the love of Christ, which is beyond all knowledge, you are filled with the utter fullness of God" (Eph:3:16-19). Now this sentence contains many mystery words but I will draw attention to just a few.

The expression "the breadth and the length, the height and the depth" is an expression from Stoic philosophy which means the totality of the cosmos. The

verb "to grasp" is also a technical word from Greek philosophy. Thus to grasp this totality requires strength and empowerment from a reality known as the anointed one of God. This implies that this hidden self, the heart, has the capacity to receive certain live-in realities, not only from society but also from the transcendent. Girard insists that we are interdividual persons, being incapable of integration of ourselves. Incidentally the Judeo-Christian scriptures use the word "power" rather than "energy". This latter term only occurs once or twice in those scriptures where a Greek influence is discerned; viz. the Septuagint.

The hidden self has then the capacity to take on board entities which can make it co-terminous with the cosmos and beyond. But it can be otherwise: there can be education and its opposite, ignorance. We can thus picture the human self waxing from hiddenness to manifestation in the world, from subjectivity to objectivity. We can thus talk of the subjective self, the objective self and the process of development from the one to the other. St. Paul's text also opens up for the self a mystical awareness beyond knowledge and attained through love. But let us concentrate on knowledge, that

essential human good which is the object of education. I will have recourse first to a simple metaphor.

In the Foreword to a recent book,¹ Jean Houston tells the remarkable story of an encounter which she and her father had with the famous ventriloquist, Edgar Bergin. Jack Houston was a comedy writer and a friend of Bergin's. When he and Jean arrived at Bergin's hotel suite they found the door open. They entered quietly and then could hear an animated conversation taking place in part of the room between Edgar Bergin and his ventriloquist's dummy, Charlie McCarthy. They were amazed to find that Edgar Bergin was asking Charlie McCarthy deep and ultimate questions like "What is the meaning of life?", "What is the nature of love?", "Is there any truth to be found?" and similar questions. Charlie was answering with a stream of timeless wisdom, pouring out of his endlessly clacking wooden lips. The dummy was expounding knowledge that could only have come from a lifetime of deep involvement with these eternal mysteries. After a considerable time Jack Houston coughed to gain attention and a red-faced Edgar Bergin turned around to greet his visitors.

"Hello, Jack, Hi, Jean. I see you caught us."

"Yeah, Ed", said Jack, "What in the world were you rehearsing?"

¹ Abraham, R; McKenna, T; Sheldrake, R; "Dialogues at the Edge of the West", Bear & Co., Santa Fe, 1992.

"No rehearsal, Jack", Bergin replied, "I was talking to Charlie. He's the wisest person I know."

"But, Ed, that's your voice and your mind coming out of that cockeyed block of wood."

"Yes, Jack, I suppose it is," Bergin answered quietly, "and yet, when he answers me, I have no idea where it's coming from or what he's going to say next. It is so much more than I know."

This story illustrates an important distinction to be made between subject and object in any discussion of the self. Self-consciousness is an understanding of oneself as both subject and object. The self sees itself as subject and objectifies itself as part of the whole, the totality of 'the world'. Thus a formal identity between the self and the world exists as flowing from reflection on the structure of the self. If this self reflection and recognition does not occur we have pathology. Charlie McCarthy is thus a metaphor for Edgar Bergin's objectified self but significantly under Bergin's complete control. Pathology can enter the process of integration of the self in a thousand ways, across a spectrum from false objectivity (as with Klaus Mann's Mephisto², an actor who was a non person when not performing) to the unreachable subjectivity of extreme psychosis. We leave aside questions of pathology, to look at the phenomenon

² Mann, Klaus; "Mephisto; Roman Einer Karriere", Rowohlt, Hamburg, 1981.

of self integration in terms of the worldview context from which it emerges.

We need at first to consider a given worldview and for this purpose I have chosen the Christian worldview with which I am more familiar. The thesis of this paper is that there are some widespread worldviews which are inimical to the proper development of the self. There is a charming practise among Irish mothers and fathers to refer to one another as "himself" and "herself" respectively. This is, in part, a recognition of the god-like or goddess-like character of one's partner. It is the objectivised self which has the potential to be "lived in" by other vibrant entities, in whatever terms, Jungian or otherwise, such entities are conceived. Edgar Bergin's art was called ventriloquism since the voice sounds were thought to originate in the belly. Ventriloquism is probably a trick performed with the voice box and vocal chords, but the story of Edgar Bergin and Charley McCarthy reminded me of Jesus' cry to those attending the Feast of Tabernacles:

"If any man is thirsty let him come to me: Let the man drink who believes in me, for as scripture says, from his belly shall flow rivers of living water".

He was speaking of the Spirit which those who believe in him were to receive for there was no Spirit as yet since Jesus had not been glorified.³

The belly, the heart, one's innermost parts, have traditionally been regarded as the seat of spiritual experience, although

³ John 7:37-39

the word or the voice has a similar role in several traditions. Thus in the experience of "ecstasis", which has very little to do with "ecstasy" as it is currently understood, one may stand apart, so to speak, from oneself and hear oneself speaking in strange languages for example, or otherwise observe oneself exercising a gift of healing for another person or hear oneself uttering gifts of wisdom. Word or Logos has a central role in some mystical regimes.

The extreme delicacy and indeed the paradoxical nature of the self as objectivised subject is captured by St. Paul, when he says: "I live, not I, but Christ lives in me", ⁴ or again, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me". ⁵

As someone has said, we are called upon in this age to live our lives "mythically and in depth". Since discovering the work of Rene Girard who knows that the Passion of Christ brought an end to the power of myth, I prefer to say now "spiritually and in depth" (where depth here refers to "fleshing out in the body"). We can no longer understand or control our worlds in the terms of our education and training. Indeed we now see that the very notion of CONTROL has emerged from the scientific and technological world view based on a kind of idealism which called for a

⁴ Galatians 2:20

⁵ Philippians 4:13

strict separation of subject from object; the I versus the IT; the mind versus the mechanical world. To live spiritually and in depth is to have the self embedded in the objective world; the I together with the objectivised THOU.

It would be hard to find anyone today who did not know that the whole world is ailing; but many still in CONTROL mode try to bootstrap themselves back to health or wellbeing. There is a remarkably prophetic poem published by T.S. Eliot in 1944, the "Four Quartets". The following passage is from the quartet called "Dry Salvages".⁶ To understand some obscure words we need to know that 'to haruspicate' is to divine the will of the gods by inspecting the entrails of animals, 'sortilege' is divination by drawing lots and 'to scry' is to resort to crystal gazing. The following is the extract from "Dry Salvages":

*"To communicate with Mars, converse with spirits,
To report the behaviour of the sea monster,
Describe the horoscope, haruspicate or scry,
Observe disease in signatures, evoke
Biography from the wrinkles of the palm
And tragedy from fingers; release omens
By sortilege, or tea leaves, riddle the inevitable
With playing cards, fiddle with pentagrams
Or barbituric acids, or dissect
The recurrent image into pre-conscious terrors –
To explore the womb, or tomb, or dreams; all
these are usual
Pastimes and drugs, and features of the press:
And always will be, some of them especially
When there is distress of nations and perplexity
Whether on the shores of Asia, or in the Edgware
Road.
Men's curiosity searches past and future*

⁶ Eliot, T.S. "Four Quartets", Faber, London, 1979.

*And clings to that dimension. But to
apprehend
The point of intersection of the timeless
With time, is an occupation for the saint –
No occupation either, but something given
And taken, in a lifetime's death in love,
Ardour and selflessness and self-surrender.*

The poem points up the importance of "keeping our heads" in this time of global perplexity rather than to grasp at chimeras. Perhaps rather, our heads need to be surrendered to a higher power in order that we might think more clearly.

Selflessness and self surrender refer to the "caving in" of the "I", (I becomes C, the cave of the heart) in order to be receptive to the OTHER or the THOU. According to St. John: "He must increase, I must decrease".⁷

⁷ John 3:30

WORLDVIEWS

From the point of view of an external observer a *worldview* is a view of the world held by a subject. For the subject, of course it may be part of the objective self. Subjectivity is thus the principal keynote of its scientific description. To gain access to it any human scientist or professional therapist is in much the same position as the medical symptomologist, illustrated in the following Burmese proverb:

*"Despite the strides that science makes,
None can tell my belly aches
Unless I tell the doctor so
Even he would never know" 8.*

Recognising that there is a lowest common denominator in the multiplicity of human experience, this little aphorism, nevertheless, throws into sharp relief the basic problem of religiology, which has worldview as its formal object. Note that religiology is quite distinct from sociology which has human society as its formal object and also from anthropology which studies human culture. By any method laying claim to the title scientific, how does one come to grips with the subjective realm of inner experience? What is it like to be a Sufi? or a Hindu? or a Zen Buddhist? Is there a difference, discernible by some scientific method, between a Christian who exercises the charisms of the Holy Spirit and one who doesn't? Is there a religiology of grace?; of peak experiences?; of altered states of consciousness? How does the worldview

arise within the consciousness of a mentally disturbed person whereby he believes himself to be Napoleon or the Cosmic Wizard of the Universe?

We can describe *worldview* then as a conceptual model of reality to which a certain assent has been given; that is, a belief structure. Every person approaches the world with a worldview. This worldview may be consciously expressed or inchoate, perhaps even coded in primary process. Worldview underlies every person's receptivity to or construction of knowledge of the world. There is no such thing as a non-believing person. The critically important question is then "Is there a basis in reality for the worldview in which one believes?" and "What are the criteria for establishing this basis in reality?" My position in regard to these questions is essentially an ethical position, viz. inasmuch as one's worldview is a matter of choice, one ought to be chosen which fosters the full flowering of the human person, enabling him or her to actualise all his or her human potential. For many today, mental disturbance and many other problems of human failure can be sheeted home to an inadequate worldview, a foreshortening of vision which actually inhibits this flowering of the human person.

There is another tenet of my worldview which also has an ethical basis; the human mind has a natural aptitude to know what is true and it can never be totally devoid of truth. Thus, even in the most bizarre expressions of mental contents there

⁸ Maung Myint Thein: "Burmese Proverbs Explained in Verse", Hu Loong Lithographer Pty. Ltd. Singapore.

can be discerned elements of reality which can be built on as a basis for communication. This is nowhere more striking than in the work of John Weir Perry⁹, who is able to discern patterns of meaning leading to healing within the chaotic utterances of severely psychotic persons. As L. Mehl has written: "Insanity is anxiety produced deconstruction through which an organised worldview is separated into its various constituents. It can serve as an unexpected opportunity for the deconstruction-reconstruction process".¹⁰

Without access to worldview as such, any attempt by the human sciences to come to grips with the existential realities of human behaviour will be futile. Inasmuch as the human sciences employ models, paradigms, assumptions, presuppositions, and ideologies in their descriptions of human behaviour their products will be essentially reductionistic and therefore false since the descriptions will be given in terms of something the phenomenon is not, i.e. in terms of difference. For example, a Durkheimian social analysis of the religious practices of Irish peasants is just a game; a Freudian analysis of the practice in some Moslem countries of clitoridectomy is just a game. Without sympathetic access to the respective worldviews of such groups there will be no real understanding of the

social expression. The "game" process is endemic in the history, philosophy and social studies of science; but then science itself may be just a game. I am reminded of Chesterton's bon mot: "*The only way to be an entomologist is to be an insect*".

There are, of course, observable characteristics of coherent worldviews when such worldviews are coherently expressed. The religious studies scholar, Ninian Smart,¹¹ proposes a seven dimensional scheme whereby worldviews can be characterised. These are:

1. *The Practical and Ritual Dimension* – the public observance, the colourful, the photographable;
2. *The Experiential and Emotional Dimension* – the seminal events of consciousness, eg. the visions of Muhammad, the enlightenment of the Buddha etc., the experience of the numinous etc.
3. *The Narrative or Mythic Dimension* – the story side of the worldview, some prehistorical, eg. creation myths, myths about death and suffering – and others historical, eg. the crucifixion of Jesus, the recognised scriptures etc. There is usually a cosmology.
4. *The Doctrinal and Philosophical Dimension* – which engages the teachers of the worldview. Indeed

⁹ John Weir Perry; "The Far Side of Madness", Spring Publications, Dallas, Texas, 1989.

¹⁰ Mehl, L; "Mind and Matter", Mindbody Press, Berkeley, 1986, p.150.

¹¹ Smart, Ninian; "World Religions", Cambridge U.P. 1989.

some worldviews take their entire thrust from philosophical myths and cosmologies, eg. the Schools of Athens, the scientific and technological worldview, the worldview of the Marxist state, and so on.

5. *The Ethical and Legal Dimension* – the law which a tradition or subtradition incorporates into its fabric, eg. the Torah in Judaism, the Shari'a in Islam etc. which prescribe conduct for the whole society.

6. *The Social and Institutional Dimension* – organisations, congregations, academies of science, politburos, hierarchies etc.

7. *The Material Dimension* – buildings, works of art, icons, temples, sacred places etc.

As examples of coherent worldviews we might mention Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Marxist State, Nationalism, Scientism, Eclecticism, "Occerism" (this one endemic to Australia), Secularism, Animism, Spiritism, etc. Some of these have proved to be inadequate in the objective sense and some are proving to be inadequate for the full flourishing of the human person. In a time of rapid change and perplexity, of course, any worldview may be sorely tested in the subjective sense, but some actually prevent the proper development of the objective self even in full coherence. One of these is the scientific and technological worldview which I perceive as rapidly degenerating and not only because notions of subjective reality are foreign to it. Based as it is on Democritean atomism,

mechanicism, and empiricism, it can produce no insights into the experienced realities of soul and spirit and their objective manifestations.

The degenerate and fragmented worldviews we encounter amongst marginalised people in Western industrial society are genuine worldviews nevertheless and they can often be discerned and understood by referring to the characteristics described by Ninian Smart. These same characteristics can be deployed in reconstruction of an inadequate worldview in the direction of wholeness. They can be employed as fore-projects in the hermeneutic approach to understanding which involves genuine dialogue. The therapist is merely a catalyst for the removal of obstacles to healing which is accomplished through the healing propensities inherent in the whole person; a unity of body-soul-spirit. An adequate worldview can be developed if one has access to the person's history, life experiences, education and so on. The development can be accomplished through shared experience, rituals, laughter and the winning of trust. When trust has been gained the deployment of Era III medicine ¹² in the context of love can be most beneficial.

The critically important insight concerns the vision of the self within

¹² Dossey, Larry; "Era III Medicine: The Next Frontier", ReVision, Vol 14, No.3 , 1992.

the experienced worldview. Self evaluation may vary across a wide spectrum from extreme self abasement to extreme delusions of grandeur. With growth of an integrating worldview the vision of the self also develops. However there is no objective science which can grasp the quality of reality which worldview presents to those that hold it in the world. Real and humanly liberating knowledge of the self will occur when subject and object are seen to constitute the same reality. There is both continuity and contiguity of "outside" and "inside". By looking "objectively" without, the self discerns a quality of being similar to what it discerns when looking "subjectively" within, ie. the activity of knowing must share common structures with the source of the activity, viz. the object known. The "outside" world of things consisting of "matter" and "form" (i.e. "knowability") correspond to the intuition that there is psychic matter "inside" capable of being informed by the same principle of knowability. For example, the perception of harmony and discord, order and chaos outside is similarly characterised in the inner psychic substance and vice-versa. Inasmuch as external or internal reality is configured as a unity of parts and wholes, the wholes being greater than the sum of the parts, the reality inside or outside consists of parts configuring into the whole, also greater than the sum of the parts; the activities and passivities of the human person inside are mirrored in the activities and passivities of external nature; the propensities and potentialities inside are realised outside, and so on. A vast number of properties and qualities

of the real may be similarly discerned and ramified.

There already exist epistemologies and posited ontologies stemming from worldviews in which the programme outlined above is at least partially realised, eg. the essential interconnectedness of all things, the cosmos "outside" and enlightenment "inside" is effected by certain Eastern or Middle Eastern worldviews in practise, eg. Zen Buddhism, the "Lila" of Hinduism and "Wisdom", the everlasting feminine in Judaism, and so on. Their programmes are no less disciplined than other sciences, perhaps even more so. In the Christian worldview, of course, nature is caught up into the transcendent and reconfigured in a mode involving new elements entirely. As Raissa Maritain has remarked: "Man is an animal who feeds on transcendentals".

Although there is a qualitative sameness of inside and outside realities in the purely natural order, the reality inside is clearly supraphysical, immaterial and incompositive. This opens up the realm of symbolic presentation, particularly metaphoric processes, given that knowability in things is never comprehensive, even when (or particularly when) mathematical structures are placed on them from "inside". The ramifications of such symbols are enormous, eg. intelligence is like sunlight, willing and bidding like an army commander, peace like the tranquility of ordered nature and so on.

It is by such qualitative continuity that worldviews, even faulty ones, arise in subjects, and without access to this qualitative unity, no worldview can be understood by an objective observer. Objective reality must include the subjective domain or we are stuck with social scientific relativism, ie. to interpret reality from the point of view of what it is not.

**© 1999 Prof. Alex Reichel
The Academy of the Word**