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Narahari Rao Culture as Learnables

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Abstract: I want to argue that there is a task of ‘culture research’ other than what is practised in the empirical disciplines such as Social Anthropology or historical disciplines such as Literary Studies. Suppose ‘Cultures’ are looked upon as different legacies of ways of going about in the world resulting from the different pasts of different groups of people. Such ways can be either approached as a phenomena to be explained or as an embodiment of knowledge dispositions to be learnt. However, the predominant tool for approaching knowledge dispositions is to look at them as explicitly or implicitly held propositions. One consequence of this propensity is to construe understanding a culture as arriving at the beliefs held by the community characterised by that culture. I will show that there is a way of extending the Fregean distinction between ‘object’ and ‘concept?’ in such a ‘way as to make it serviceable to conceptualise non-propositional forms of knowledge, and consequently, a more re tool for identifying the objects of culture research.

Keywords: cultural, difference, knowledge, learning, attitudes.

1. TRADITIONS AS HERITAGE SENTIMENT

This paper is an attempt to think through two sentiments, one philosophical, and another more generally shared by the intelligentsia across the borders of many countries:

- (1) There is neither a unique right manner of behaving nor a unique right way of conceiving the world of objects, even though not every manner is right and not every conception of the world, appropriate.
- (2) Many different traditions or ‘cultures’ existing in the world are a heritage not to be lost

(here onwards this will be referred to as ‘traditions as heritage sentiment’).

The targets of the second sentiment are predominantly the Non-European cultures and more often than not it is a mere expression of courtesy to people of Non-European origin. In contrast, I want to suggest that it involves a genuine issue that demands theoretical attention: there are some specific research tasks flowing from this sentiment.

My suggestion turns on two obvious but nevertheless significant assumptions: (1) any knowledge is worth preserving and we have an obligation to see to it that knowledge once produced is not lost. (This is a ruling assumption of the ‘Modern’ set up). (2) Groups with different pasts are likely to have inherited different dispositions to behave, and these different dispositions, since they are the ways and means of mastering the problems of life for the respective groups, can be considered as *knowledge dispositions*. From these assumptions a not yet well realised conclusion can be drawn as to an important research task: (3) since the consequences to group behaviour arising from their different pasts are often referred to as their ‘culture’, we may say that we have an obligation to enquire into the *knowledge embodied* in different cultures. For our purpose, the problem of the range of extension of the term ‘group’ can be left open. Perhaps in any decision to extend the range or narrow it down, a certain level of validity has to be conferred to the broad distinctions prevalent such as the ‘Western culture’, ‘Indian culture’, ‘Chinese culture’ and ‘African Culture’ etc., which pick out significant traditions, the knowledge dispositions of which may be presumed to differ. As far as the ‘Western’ or European Tradition is concerned one can presume that there is no further need to conceptualise that inheritance as ‘knowledge’, both because European tradition has been the source of most of what we take to be knowledge, and further because its contribution and singularity has been the theme of so many scholarly attempts at conceptualisation. Things are different when it comes to Non-European traditions: the task of enquiring into the *knowledge dispositions* embodied in them is still to be begun.

There are two paradigms of investigating culture in the academic disciplines, one traceable to Sociological studies, and another to Literary studies. Broadly speaking, in the first case *culture* is used as an ‘explanatory’ concept and in the second as a ‘hermeneutic’ concept. In fact, one can identify both these paradigms within the ambit of the discipline of anthropology in the course of its historical development. The argument of this paper is that both these concepts of culture do not supply the necessary means for the task arising from the *traditions as heritage sentiment*. In their place I want to suggest identifying culture as *teachables* or *learnables* in contrast to that of identifying it as *Explanans* of behaviour, on the one hand, and beliefs to be made *understandable*, on the other.

2. CULTURES: ‘WHEN?’ VERSUS ‘WHY?’

First, let me identify the point of contact between the common sense intuitions and the concepts derived from the philosophical tradition to articulate them. Mainly we can find two uses of ‘culture’ in the common parlance. The first use, which in fact is the one we are concerned with, becomes operative on occasions such as the felt differences between the familiar and the alien ways of going about in the world. In this use, the *differences*, and therefore the assumption that many cultures exist, are constitutive of the very concept of ‘culture’. But there is another use where such plurality is not necessarily implied: ‘culture’ meant to single out the cultivated tastes or manners from that of the not cultivated. This

conception has a long intellectual history and the *feuilleton* use meant to refer the offerings like theatre, music, paintings etc., is only one of its conspicuous derivatives.

The German *Geschichtsphilosophie*, to which we owe to a large extent the concepts of 'culture' prevalent in academic disciplines, combines these two uses by bringing in a theory of the historical evolution of human *ethos*. Thus the sociological conception of culture as the ways of doing things prevalent in a social group and the idea of culture as singling out the civilised ways from those not civilised gets combined by the assumption that certain groups are more cultivated in the historical scale of human development than others.

But even if we distance ourselves from such attempts to put cultures in a hierarchical scale, there is a point of contact between the two uses. It is the propensity to apply standards to judge the ways of doing things. This is as much part of any common sense orientation as that of noticing the differences between familiar and alien ways of doing things. Therefore, a theory of culture that proposes to conceptualise ways of doing things inherited from the past is required to satisfy the following two demands: (1) to provide the conceptual means to make sense of the felt differences between the familiar and the alien ways, and (2) to make room for the application of standards of right and wrong. The latter demand does not necessarily mean that the standards one is accustomed to should be applicable, but that some standard or the other, probably a standard that itself gets formed in the process of reflection, is applicable. How this second demand can be met without falling into the trap of thinking *that there is*, or *there should be*, one world of *right* customs is a crucial question for cultural theory.

Since this paper is meant as delineating the tasks and not as accomplishing them I will not be addressing the issue of standards. But I want to identify one of the paths that begins with a consideration of standards but leads onto a morass.

We can reasonably ask what other, to us non-familiar, way of doing is exhibited by a group, and raise a question why they prefer *that* way and not *another* way. This 'why?' is a question regarding the objective followed by them. In its turn, the objective itself can become the target of the question 'why?'. Why do they have *that* objective and not *another* that is familiar to us? A question about objectives, and rightness or wrongness of them, is a question about the consequences of following a particular mode of action, and how far those consequences are desired and desirable. The discussion about the *desirability* of the consequences is also not a question of formulating a maxim to decide which consequences ought to be considered as desirable and which not. There are various considerations that one puts forward one's preferences, but these in turn depend upon the whole lot of other inherited modes of values and ways of doing things. Entering into a discussion of the desirability when two or more different *ethos* are involved, is a process of acquainting with another mode of life than the one we are familiar with.¹

The 'why?' in this context can be rephrased into a 'when?' question: *when*, i.e. under what conditions can we still say that it is *this* particular *sort* of action and not *that*? *when* is it *this* particular *way* of leading the life and not *that*? Such *when*-questions are part of learning process of identifying an unfamiliar mode of action, or way of life.

1 Here I am taking a consequentialist as against the Kantian type of ethical position. But my consequentialist position is not, and need not be, one that identifies itself with an utilitarian position. My point is merely that the question of desirability of something cannot be decided by way of deducing the desirable from one or a set of maxims.

But one may easily slip from such questions about actions into questions of the sort, why he or she or a particular group has the *nature* he, or she, or it, has. Whereas the former question is of the sort that helps us to learn another way of doing things than our own, the latter sort is not part of such learning. It is part of seeking explanation for something which is identified as an interesting phenomenon. Assuming that in the original Chinese no straight forward lexical items exist to make a distinction between cheese and butter, we may ask the question *why* this is the case. An explanation such as the following may be offered in answer to such a *why*-question: unlike in many other areas of the world, in mainland China until recently milk was not part of the staple food; consequently the lexical items concerning milk and milk products are not differentiated to the extent as found in those languages that are spoken in areas where milk is a staple food. For learning Chinese I don't require this explanation, and what I require is what devices to use in what succession in order to distinguish butter and cheese when I find them: for example, *when* is a particular expression a device for distinguishing and *when* for identifying something as similar to something else. Thus in the context of learning an action, the *why*-question is in fact a *when*-question in contrast to the question 'why?' asked to seek an explanation to a phenomenon.

While reflecting on knowledge, the confusion between a 'why?', in the sense of a *when*-question, with that of 'why?', in the sense of asking for an explanation, is a real danger. For example, one of the concerns underlying the question of method in the epistemological tradition from Bacon to Descartes and Locke is that of finding the ways and means of increasing human knowledge. But this concern was mixed up with two others: (1) the relative merits and demerits of perception and 'reason' as modes of justifying knowledge, (2) to give an account of the powers of *human understanding* or human reason, which was bound up with the assumption that providing a theory of how to increase knowledge is a task of providing a theory of the nature of human reason conceived as a special faculty or object.

In fact, this latter assumption amounts to conceiving the task of theory of knowledge as a task of explaining the *specialness* of human being. This side-tracks the issue of *how* best we can increase and make different sorts of knowledge available, to an issue of *why* human beings have knowledge that they do. This latter question handles the *question of knowledge* as if it were a question *about a sort of objects*, and it commits the fallacy of identifying a *when*-question, one regarding a criterion of distinguishing different types of cognitive actions, with the 'why?' of seeking explanations of something that is identified as a phenomenon.

Translated into a theory of culture, this confusion would mean confusing the task of identifying the *differences* of culture in order to make different ways of doing things available, with the task of explaining *why human beings have culture*. The philosophy of culture of Cassirer, for example, is part of this tendency of the epistemological tradition. In him, what starts as an effort to delineate the differences between the different modes of thinking ends up as a theory that professes to explain why different cultural forms are exhibited by different human departments of action and different groups of people. The explanation is that human beings, in contrast to animals, have symbolic forms as the instrument of mediation between sense-experience and action.²

2 See, 'A clue to the nature of man: the symbol', chapter 2 in Cassirer (1992).

Such explanations, even if they are true by themselves, are not relevant for a programme of cultural research that takes *the traditions-as-heritage-sentiment* seriously. The theory that is both relevant and needed is not the one that answers the question, 'why human beings have cultures?' but rather 'what constitutes a cultural difference?' The felt differences between familiar and alien ways of going about in the world in themselves are not sufficient in order to identify the domain of cultural research: logically speaking, anything is different from anything else in innumerable ways. What kind of difference should count as a *cultural difference* and not, say, a biological or social or an individual difference? For an answer looking into a long standing distinction in the philosophical tradition between knowledge and phenomena could prove to be useful.

3. REASONS VERSUS CAUSES

One of the founding slogans of analytical philosophy is that to reflect on knowledge is not the same as conducting a psychological enquiry. Frege suggested that not distinguishing object and concept is the source of *psychologism* in logic. Ryle and the later Wittgenstein have drawn the fuller implication of this by saying that enquiry into concepts is not the same variety of enquiry as enquiry into objects.³ In the further course of the history of analytical philosophy, however, the strict distinction between object-questions and conceptual questions has not only been watered down, but questioned outright. Instead of going into the influence of these developments on the field of investigation of culture, I will proceed by stating why it is necessary to retain the distinction between conceptual enquiry and object-enquiry, and even to enlarge the scope of that distinction.

Briefly stated, the justification for retaining that distinction is the following. The pairs of concepts such as 'reasons' vs. 'causes', 'understanding' vs. 'explanation', etc., available in the European philosophical tradition mark out an important difference. Suppose I am invited to a party tonight by my Korean friends who have bought the choicest wines for it. I may tell my neighbour that I am going to get drunk tonight. This statement may be understood in two ways: (1) as a prediction of the outcome of my going to the party tonight, (2) as a declaration of my decision to get drunk tonight. Suppose I am asked for reasons for my saying so, in case my statement is of the first sort, the reasons I give would be saying things such as the following: my previous experience of such circumstances tells me that one ends up drinking a lot of wine, and in addition also takes some blue-label whisky at the end, and one inevitably gets drunk. Though these are also called in the common sense usage as 'giving reasons', they are in fact, in the terminology of the philosophical tradition, 'explaining' the outcome in terms of some 'causes' i.e. in terms of causal conditions operating in a party of the sort I have been invited.

In contrast to it, suppose my original statement is a declaration of my decision to get drunk; in that case, the reasons I give to justify my decision are of a different nature than the above. It could run something like the following. The party I have been invited is of my close friends, it is a nice company, choicest wines are going to be offered, and I have been immersed too long in work, today I have a right to complete relaxation. These are 'reasons' I give to justify the decision I make to act in some particular way, and not the 'causes' in terms of which a predicted event can be explained.

3 The whole of Rao (1994) is concerned with the nature of conceptual enquiry as contrasted to object-enquiry.

The elucidation above is given in terms of the distinction between the reasons for a decision and causes in terms of which something is predicted. But the distinction is much more general. It can equally be between justifying a claim and explaining a phenomenon. The enquiry into the nature of valid and invalid justifications of an action or a claim is not the same as an enquiry into the nature of causes operating in a situation. Thus the pairs of concepts such as reasons versus causes, and understanding versus explaining are meant to mark out the difference between approaching something as concerned with *knowledge* and its variants (such as fallacies, ignorance etc.) as against approaching something as a *phenomenon*. One and the same statement can be approached as a knowledge claim or as a phenomenon. In the latter case, for example, one can investigate the statement in terms of the psychological or sociological causes that make the person put forward such a claim. But then we are no longer approaching the statement as a knowledge claim; rather we approach it as a phenomenon. To do the former is, for instance, to enquire into the exact sense of the statement, its validity, and the nature of grounds that are relevant to decide its validity, and such things.

4. KNOWLEDGE VERSUS PHENOMENA

The next step that I want to take is to suggest that the investigation of cultural difference as conceived in Anthropology is mainly that of approaching it as phenomenon. Instead, our task is to initiate a project of approaching cultures as embodying different *knowledge systems*, inherited and exhibited by different societies.

To specify what constitutes a 'knowledge system', however, the contrasts such as 'reason' vs. 'causes' are inadequate. The model of knowledge within the context of which the distinction between knowledge and phenomenon is made by Frege is that of the *propositional model*, a model where to know is to know that something is the case, or to know that a certain rule has to be applied. If this model is taken as the basis for investigation of the knowledge systems, then it would be conceived as a task of identifying *beliefs* (the stated or implied 'reasons') behind the encountered actions. Investigating 'cultural difference' would thus become a task of documenting the differences in beliefs prevailing amongst different groups that presumably result in their different ways of going about in the world. This approach which can be designated as the 'beliefs approach' was fairly widespread, and still has its adherents in anthropological research. So, a detour may be in order to indicate the drawbacks of such an approach for our purpose.

Though the objective of the discipline of anthropology was never explicitly conceived that way, still, one often encounters the assumption that anthropology delivers the knowledge possessed by those groups which the anthropologists study. Does it?

We can examine this possibility by focusing on one specific theme. It is often said that the main danger an anthropologist must guard against is 'ethnocentrism', the problem arising from a projection of one's own ethnic group's habits and values onto another. On the face of it, this appears to be a concern to profit from the experience of groups foreign to the researcher (or to his tradition). That is, overcoming ethnocentrism appears as part of a project of overcoming the confinement of one's own habits and methods of going about in the world in order to discover the available alternatives to them. Is that the case? In what connection is 'ethnocentrism' considered as a defect to be overcome in anthropology?

4.1. Represented versus Representer's Context

Anthropologists are exhorted to pay attention to 'context'. But this term is ambiguous; at least it has been used in two different senses: in the sense of a situation describable and in the sense of something presupposed in any successful description. For example, when it is enjoined that behaviours, activities, institutions and texts have to be understood in terms of the *context* in which they are embedded, the directive is meant to say that we should not take these items in isolation but consider them as parts of a larger whole, and look for the role of respective items in that larger whole. But this latter is as much the object of empirical enquiry as the items embedded in it. That is, the 'context' is open to description just as other items of investigation. I will call this '*represented context*' and it can be contrasted with '*representer's context*'.

The latter is something that is the focus in some recent theories where anthropology is conceived as a genre of writing. The writer has some definite audience in mind and he knows and makes use of the shared conventions and expectations. When one speaks of context in this connection, it is in a sense something already known by the writer and the reader. Enquiry into it is in the form of reflection and elucidation of it rather than in the form of investigating it as an empirical object. If indeed one wants to do the latter, then the writer, the reader, and the practice, of which the writer and reader along with their contexts are parts, become 'objects' within a meta-representation, i.e. the investigated context is no longer the *representer's* but a *represented context*. But this does not eliminate the representer's context. Like all descriptions meta-representations too proceed from some specific purpose and are tied to some specific (meta-)representer's context.

If representation is context bound then knowledge is too, since it necessarily depends on representation. This is what underlies the issue of 'ethnocentrism' which arises because of the recognition of the following two facts: (1) the phenomena of which anthropology seeks knowledge - beliefs and practices - are, partly at least, constituted by the representation of the bearers of those practices and beliefs; (2) members belonging to different 'societies' or 'cultures' have different background histories and traditions and therefore they do not share the same conventions and expectations; i.e. they do not share the same *representer's contexts*. This gives rise to the question as to the status of knowledge acquired through representing the representation.⁴ This question is not something specific to the predicament of anthropology; one can even claim that the present discussion in anthropology is just taking over the discussion carried out under the rubric of 'hermeneutics' to the question of ethnographic representation.

4.2. Ethnographic Representation and Philosophical Hermeneutics

But there is an important difference. Philosophical hermeneutics arose in the context of classical studies of well acclaimed texts (and art works or semiotic artefacts) of the past. Its focus was the question of the status of 'humanistic studies': in contrast to sciences of the past that do get antiquated, something from the past masters needs to be presented as of contemporary relevance. Instead of postulating some a-historical content made available in each of the texts of the past, philosophical hermeneutics sought to specify a

⁴ See Berg, E. & Fuchs, M. (1993) for a documentation of the various issues discussed in recent anthropology arising out of the problem of representing representation.

different kind of cognitive gain than that of receiving the sciences of the past. For this the inevitability of the admixture of *representer's* and *represented contexts* was seen as an opportunity rather than as a problem: it provides for the extension of one's thinking horizon through the 'fusion of horizons', i.e. it extends the scope of the domain of meaningful talk. It was asserted that encounter with the past masters though begins with *our* questions and prejudices (*Vorurteile*), yet occasions a transcendence of them by confronting us with unfamiliar lines of thinking.

But unlike in the case of the acclaimed texts (and artworks) of classicists, the anthropologist does not have anything specific to go by. Texts passed on by the intellectual tradition, along with one or many traditions of understanding them, are made familiar by the very process of one's socialisation. Thus interpretation is an effort at understanding what has already been identified as something communicated, i.e. as *signs*. Such a starting point does not exist in the case of study of aliens. Anthropology began in the wake of the demarcation of modern society from that of 'pre-modern', the 'primitive', the 'traditional' etc. Seeking, collecting and interpreting the practices and beliefs all over the globe was *in order* to enquire into the 'predecessor' of the thought forms as well as the social forms of 'modernity'. The fact that what was found elsewhere belongs to the pre-history of 'modern' (meaning, European) forms was taken for granted. As a result, the interest in them was as *phenomena* and not as *signs*: even when texts and artefacts of aliens were collected the impulse came from a curiosity about the phenomena represented by them rather than on something *said* through them.

These are not mere historical legacies which could be given up at will. Unlike the texts of the classicist, what an Anthropologist encounters is an array of unfamiliar behaviour and practices out of which he has to select something as important and collate them into his data. He does not simply discover religion, ritual, or magic, but rather identifies some practices in terms of such categories as 'religion', 'ritual' and 'magic', thereby introducing a way of grouping the practices which may or may not correspond to the groupings and distinctions shared by the group he is studying. It is from *his* background tradition that the researcher brings to his observation such categories, and also some criterion of what is important and what is not.

4.3. What is not my Question

Before going further it is perhaps useful to demarcate the question this paper is concerned with from those questions and answers in the academic market place. For it is normal that when one encounters something new, one attempts to understand it with the help of the familiar models. An explicit indication of what my concern is not meant to be, may therefore help the reader to dissociate his reading of this paper from some familiar models of culture discourse which otherwise he or she may associate with my question:

(1) The question asked and the answer pursued in this paper should not be construed as a variety of *critique of colonial discourse*. I do talk about Non-European cultures or traditions, and demarcate the culture research I am concerned with from that which is the focus of the discipline of cultural anthropology. But that diction and demarcation is not meant to criticise the discipline of cultural anthropology for what it does, but rather to sketch and bring out the contours of a different kind of cultural research than that envisaged by the discipline of cultural anthropology.

(2) This paper should not be situated within the ‘culture discourse’ that is familiar under the rubric of the debate ‘Liberalism versus Communitarianism’. That debate centres around the question: whether, and in what sense, one can speak of the *rights* of a group in addition to that of individuals? In contrast, my concern is with the question: Whether it makes sense to speak of one group of people possessing one variety of knowledge in contrast to another group that possesses another variety? I don’t see why this question should not be answered positively. After all the very existence of the predominant institutional set up for research in the contemporary world is based upon such a possibility: the concept of a university is based on the premise that there are different expertise possessed by people practising different disciplines. The argument of this paper is that if one can speak sensibly of different groups of people possessing different knowledge dispositions, then one can conceive of certain research tasks with regard to the knowledge inheritance of people who have grown up in different cultural traditions.

(3) My concern is also not that of defending this or that custom prevailing amongst this or that group of people. Of course, I do talk about the ‘traditions’ and this word is often associated with a contrast inherited from a theory tradition of sociology: the contrast between the ‘traditional’ and the ‘modern’ societies, and the ‘traditional societies’ as the reservoir of all different evils that evoke horrific images such as burning of the women, mutilation of the sexual organs of the girls etc. In my opinion the adoption and monopolisation of the word ‘tradition’ by the sociological theory tradition that is concerned with demarcating the ‘modern societies’ from the so called ‘pre-modern societies’ is a big loss to conceptual clarity as to the nature of human societies and cultures. However, here I do not want to go into that question. For my purpose it is enough if you grant me the following two assumptions:

(1) Ways of life elsewhere than in one’s own milieu can be considered as normal though they are different from the ways one is accustomed to.

(2) These differences result from different groups having different pasts.

The claim of this paper is that there emerges a different domain of cultural research than hitherto conceived when dispositions formed by those different pasts are approached with the aim of conceptualising and investigating them as knowledge dispositions.

4.4 Representer’s Purpose and the Constitution of Domains: The Pragmatic Turn

One central idea of the twentieth century epistemology is that the distinctions we make are literally that: they are *made*, and not the *given* fact of nature. This assertion does not deny that there were stars long before man started worrying about his stars. It only insists on one implication of the logical distinction needed to be made while talking about descriptions, that between the ‘object’ and ‘signs’ or ‘representations’. To identify something as an ‘object’ is to imply that it cannot be exhausted by description, which is another way of saying that any ‘description’, or more generally, ‘representation’, is necessarily selective. Consequently, the criterion of relevance is an important aspect of our identifying something as a representation of something else. If so, the ‘representation’ is bound to the context of purpose for which that representation is made. That is, the distinctions we make are tied to the purposes we have. This is not the same doctrine as

saying that we can get away with any distinctions we like. Of course, there exists an objective pull, but it makes itself felt only in the fact whether the distinctions we make are serviceable enough for our purposes or not; there is no way of justifying for a set of distinctions the claim of a unique effectiveness and superiority over all other sets, unless of course a Godly purpose is postulated in which all of us partake.

The assumption underlying this pragmatic turn in the conception of knowledge can be rephrased in the idiom of 'concepts' instead of the idiom of 'distinctions': the concepts we use are not *given* but *made*, not individually but through the joint efforts of groups and generations of human beings. Further, to enquire into those concepts is to identify the corresponding action consequences rather than identifying the supposed beliefs held by the agents.

4.5. 'Making Sense of a Situation': Beliefs Inadequate and Unnecessary

One question the beliefs approach is intended to answer is: why some agent acts in a particular way? Postulation of beliefs, it is hoped, would answer this question. Thus, for instance, many anthropologists use the concept of 'meaning-aspect of an action' (akin to Max Weber's conception of '*Sinnzusammenhänge*' or '*Sinnhaftigkeit der Handlung*') in giving an account of what they are doing. The basic idea is the following: since communities differ in the way they deal with their environment (both social and physical) they must structure their environment differently. Such structuring embodied in actions can be termed as 'meaning-aspect' and enquiry into it is a legitimate interest.

However, such structuring necessary for actions is not necessarily explicable as beliefs held by agents. Further, what is considered as appropriate elaboration of 'meaning aspect' of an action depends on, what for, i.e. in what context, and for what purpose, it is offered.

I venture to say that very few people have neatly expressible beliefs (in fact, even less so in so called 'traditional' societies), and in general, hardly anyone conducts his or her life by looking for directives derivable from this or that belief.⁵ At any rate, there is no conceptual need to postulate beliefs in order to account for the human ability to orient in different situations. A precondition of orienting oneself is only that one has to differentiate the environment in some way. Suppose we call this aspect of an action that of 'making sense of a situation', it is important to note that it is not the same as having a belief and applying it. In fact, beliefs are neither adequate, nor necessary, for that purpose. A belief, even if it exists, needs to be interpreted anew in every context if it is to be useful to guide one's actions. This implies that the usefulness of beliefs for a person possessing them depend on his having already some capacity to interpret them and apply them to different contexts. This latter is part of a more general capacity to use words or concepts (or more generally, signs) as instruments of differentiating the environment and thereby orienting oneself in the world. Thus a capacity to differentiate the environment i.e. *to make sense of a situation*, is a different, and a logically prior, capacity to that of having beliefs and applying them to master a situation.

A second problem with the beliefs approach can be formulated in parallel to the logical maxim that an object cannot be exhausted by description: an action cannot be exhausted

5 Such a picture of human conduct is perhaps derived from a wishful idea of an ideal Christian conduct - the conduct derivable from, and justifiable by, recurring to Biblical or Moral commands.

by any set of beliefs that may be given as reasons for it. Just as for the purpose of evaluating descriptions, one has to have some criterion whether a description is relevant or not, similarly, to judge the rightness or wrongness of the belief-system offered as an explication of an action, one needs to have some criterion of relevance of the offered beliefs for the concerned actions. This implies that to judge what beliefs account for which set of actions one needs to recur to the context and purpose of the explication. In other words, constructing a belief-system is itself a context-oriented action. If we assume the contrary, we will land in a hopeless position, because we will have no conceivable procedure available to construct the beliefs: the elementary basis for understanding a divergence of opinion is a (real or imagined) situation of acting together in the context of which a divergence from a familiar way of doing things becomes apparent. To make sense of an opinion one has to form an idea of alternative courses of action ensuing from assenting or dissenting to it. That is, at least as an epistemological procedure, an action has to be taken as prior to belief, and as that in terms of which a belief can be made sense of. In that case, any explanation of action in terms of belief begs the question.

4.6. Learnable versus Manipulable

The beliefs-approach is a legacy of the propositional model and the context-invariant conception of knowledge. In its place the pragmatic turn presumes knowledge to be of the nature of skills and sensitive to contexts. Within this perspective approaching something as knowledge can be demarcated from approaching it as phenomenon by using a distinction between two classes of pragmatic orientations. We can look at the observed patterns of behaviour of a community either as something *manipulable* or as something *learnable*. In the first case the observed something can be confronted in our practical dealings either with an adjustment to it or with a manipulation of it; since both these types of dealings involve manipulation - either of oneself or the objective situation - they can be considered as issuing from the *manipulative stance*. Alternatively we can look at the observed patterns as instances of *ways of doing things*: the presented way of doing can be considered as an efficient or a deficient way and accordingly we can take a learning or a teaching attitude, both of which I want to subsume under the term '*learning stance*', because both involve looking at the observed as a *learnable* something. Thus, the criterion for distinguishing knowledge from phenomenon is to see whether something is the result of conceptualising by taking a *learning* or a *manipulative* stance.

When something is approached as a phenomenon the appropriate question would be one of asking what causes or sustains that particular state of affairs, irrespective whether these states are of institutions or of beliefs. That is, 'causing', 'sustaining' and 'state of affairs' as used here are conceptualisable in very many different levels and ways: we may speak of physical states and mechanical causation or psychical and social states and functional causation. Saying that traditions are knowledge dispositions, on the other hand, implies that they can be conceptualised in such a way as to make them available for teaching or learning.

Two things need to be said about the use of the 'learnability' above. First, to say something is 'learnable' is also to say that it can be looked at as a possible way of doing things which is further improvable. This implies further that as *way of doing things*, it can be investigated as a domain in its own right with a view to improving and perfecting it. Second, as used here, 'learnable' is a contrast notion to that of 'causal' and correlative to

the notion of knowledge. There are, of course, important differences in kind to be thematised amongst learnables: *learning ways of living* or 'attitudes' is a different form of learning than learning an academic discipline, and this again differs from learning of skills such as cycling. But in order to demarcate a stance to something as *knowledge* from a stance to it as *phenomenon* a generic notion of learnability is sufficient.

To summarise, actions are not necessarily consequences of 'reasons' in the sense of beliefs. But they can be looked upon as exhibiting learnable skills. Therefore the term 'knowledge system' we spoke of earlier has to pick out *knowing how* exhibited in actions rather than the beliefs supposedly underlying them. Accordingly, the criterion of picking out 'knowledge' against 'phenomenon' is not that of identifying occasions of providing 'reasons' as against that of providing 'causes'; it is rather that of identifying something as *learnable* as against *manipulable*.

Further, the dispositions to action that are learnable can be termed as *knowledge dispositions*. The two constituents of this term are chosen with the following considerations. (1) The expression 'knowledge' is used in order to emphasise the contrast with behaviour. By 'looking at something in terms of behaviour' are meant the situations where we may consider an expression of a habit as either a result of a fortunate or an unfortunate formation in an individual, but we do not bring upon it the bearing of judgement in terms of a standard of perfection. In contrast, an action which is an expression of a learnt skill or a learnt ethos will be looked upon as either more or less perfect, adequate or still more perfectible in terms of some standard of perfection. (2) The expression 'disposition' is used to emphasise two contrasts. First, what we are concerned with are conceptualising actions in contrast to the *results* or *resources* used in an action, such as sentences and texts. Second, the action we are concerned with is in the sense of the *type* or *schematic* aspect in contrast to the *token* or *actualisation* aspect - the latter is meant in an inclusive sense to refer to both individual acts and assertions.

5. VARIETIES OF KNOWLEDGE AND 'CONFIGURATION OF LEARNING'

The strict distinction between approaching something as *learnable* and approaching it as *phenomenon* not only does not preclude a recognition that there are different kinds of learnables, but it even enables us to identify and conceptualise those differences. There are different skills and different grades of skills requiring certain other skills as pre-conditions of their learning. And learning strategy, used and discovered while learning one kind of skill, can be generalised to learn other skills. In this process of wider and deeper generalisation of the strategies of learning more complex forms of *learning how to learn* emerge.

Broadly, the knowledge dispositions prevailing in community or society can be distinguished into (1) *technical skills*, both useful and artistic ones, (2) *disciplines* that involve methods, information and standards of evaluation, (3) *attitudes* within the ambit of which both skills and disciplines are practised.

With regard to the items of this classification, skills and disciplines are well recognised as forms of knowledge. In the case of *attitudes*, however, the situation is different. Many factors are responsible for why this is the case. One of them is certainly, that, unlike skills, attitudes can not be easily or perhaps not at all conceptualised into learnable procedures.

Nor can they be equated with the information that a person possesses. But *attitudes*, in the sense of possible *types* of stances towards life, do express themselves in many complex ways of dealing with the world, and therefore they do have a claim to be considered as a form of knowledge. In fact, what is often identified as 'world views' are attitudes, even though, in such identifications, already a theoretical approach how they are to be conceptualised is embodied, i.e. it is assumed that attitudes are a system of beliefs. However, to say the least, one has to distinguish 'world view' in the sense of a belief-system from the attitudes exhibited in the way one acts and leads one's life. This latter need not be expressed and most of the time are not expressible as beliefs.

Whereas skills and disciplines are comparatively easy to transfer from one culture to another, it is the attitudes, which are neither easily conceptualisable nor easily transferable, that gives a culture its characteristic specificity. It is this that can give substance to the notion of 'cultural difference'.

As part of his or her socialisation, an individual learns not only technical skills but also, along with them, certain ways of learning: one not merely learns but also learns to learn. A way of learning when it is present in an individual or a milieu does influence other ways of learning prevailing along with it. That is, ways of learning necessarily form a configuration and do not remain separate and discrete. Thus one can speak of a *configuration of learning* getting formed in a society over the generations, and it is this that gives a holistic rounding off to the way of going about in the world of a community - that is both conspicuous to a visitor and also has an air of high intangibility.

To sum up, the concept of 'configuration of learning' is one of the means we can fruitfully use in order to identify cultural difference and forging this concept can open up a new kind of investigation of cultures.

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