PROBLEMS OF MEANING IN DISCOURSE
WITH REFERENCE TO RELIGION

JESSE NDWIGA KANYUA MUGAMBI

A thesis submitted in fulfilment for the Degree
of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of
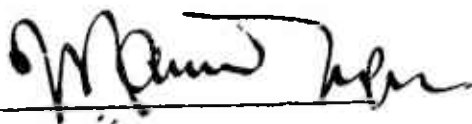Nairobi.

1983

Bd-113

Ag

B

804

·A2M8

DECLARATION

This thesis is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any other University.
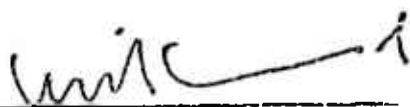
_____

J.N.K. MUGAMBI

6th April 1984

DATE

This thesis has been submitted for examination with my approval as University Supervisor.

_____

PROF. J.G. DONDERS

6-2-1984

DATE

CONTENTS

PAGE

ABSTRACT

The introduction of this work provides the background for the whole study, including literature review.

The first chapter deals with factors which influence discernment of meaning in discourse, such as language, culture, nurture, education and personal experience.

The second chapter proposes a theory on modes of thought and expression. It discusses the empirical, stipulative and assessive modes and shows how the theory might be applied.

The third chapter explores the problem of description, especially with regard to religion. Of particular interest in this chapter is the difficulty of describing God.

The fourth chapter deals with the problem of morality. In the fifth chapter the problem of destiny is dealth with. These five chapters are followed by the conclusion and select bibliography.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my great appreciation of the constructive criticisms which several scholars have rendered to my thinking during various stages in the preparation of this work.

Among these, the following have been especially helpful: Prof. J.G. Donders, Dr. Aziz Esmail, Prof. Richard Bell, Dr. Eugene Hillman, Prof. Kwasi Wiredu, Prof. P. Bodunrin, Prof. Mazisi Kunene, Prof. G.S. Were, Prof. R. Murungi, Dr. J. Nyasani and Prof. L. von Wright.

I am also greatly indebted to all those people who have contributed in other ways, consciously or otherwise towards my completion of this work.

INTRODUCTION

THE MEANING OF MEANING

Someone makes a statement and another responds by asking: "What do you mean? This question indicates that the respondent has not understood the message which the statement was intended to convey. There are many circumstances which might evoke such a response. For example, if the speaker and the respondent speak different languages, the former may be unable to communicate to the latter. If both the speaker and the respondent use the same language, the latter may be unable to understand the statement because it contains a word whose meaning he does not know. He may also ask for the intended meaning of the statement, if one or several words could be understood in more than one sense.

Discourse involves the effective communication between persons using verbal expression. The use of verbal language is such that communication can break down without the speaker and the respondent realizing it. This happens especially when the speaker assumes that the meaning he attaches to the words he uses, is the same meaning that those

words are accorded by the hearer. For effective
discourse to take place, it is necessary that the
speaker and the hearer use words in a consistent
way, so that the hearer hears what the speaker
intends to be heard.

For effective communication to occur in
writing, it is necessary that the reader reads
what the writer intends to be read. In both the
oral and written forms of verbal language, effect-
ive communication is difficult to achieve, because
words are used in a wide variety of ways. Moreover,
the meaning someone attaches to a word or expression
is influenced by a combination of factors which are
unique to his personality. Some of these factors
are discussed in chapter one.

Even the word 'meaning' can be understood
in several ways. Frederick Vivian in his book
<u>Thinking Philosophically</u>[1] has identified six
different uses of the word 'mean'.[2]

1.   Clouds mean (are a sign of) rain.

2.   When he says that, he means (is thinking of)
      me.

3.   He says he will do it, but he doesn't mean
      (intend) to.

4.   If you do that, it will mean (cause) trouble.

5.   What does life mean (its purpose).

6.   'Clouds' mean 'visible masses of condensed watery vapour'.

Since the work 'mean' is used in so many ways, one would have to discern the intended meaning in a particular statement by discovering the message that the word is intended to convey.

The present work has been motivated by the puzzling observation that people often engage in discussion without communicating, because the key words are not used with consistent meaning by the participants. It hopes to explore some of the problems that arise in discourse - especially when religious concepts are introduced.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The quest for meaning has preoccupied thinkers throughout history. Human intellect is not settled until this quest is satisfied. In the western intellectual tradition the quest for meaning can be traced to the earliest Greek philosophers. The dialogical approach in works such as Plato's Republic[3] was used to ensure that ideas were conveyed in discourse as clearly as possible. Socrates used the question – and – answer method to advance his arguments towards consistent conclusions. David Hume used this approach in the eighteenth century to criticize natural theology in his Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion.[4]

Meaning as a subject of philosophical enquiry has probably attracted more attention in the twentieth century than at any other time previously. Logical Positivism[5] in its early stages tended to restrict meaning within the confines of empiricism. The 'Vienna Circle', which brought the Logical Positivists together in the period between the two world wars, was interested in the 'promotion of the scientific view of the world'. Logical Positivists tended to be intolerant towards metaphysics, theology,

and ethics. They were much more interested in empirical statements, because in their view only empirically verifiable propositions were meaningful.

In 1921 Ludwig Wittgenstein published a small book which stirred much interest among both the logical positivists and their critics. The book, <u>Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus</u>[6] was considered by the Vienna Circle to be supportive of logical positivism, although Wittgenstein did not identify himself with that group. The philosophy of Wittgenstein is of considerable interest to the present study; he was greatly concerned with language, meaning and understanding.

In his <u>Tractatus</u>, Wittgenstein suggested that names correspond to things as pictures correspond to things as pictures correspond to objects. A sentence would be true if its words configurated the things to which those words were supposed to refer. If there was no such configuration, the sentence was false. Wittgenstein recognized, however, that there were some things about which we could not speak. About such things he suggested, we should remain silent,[7] or 'show' in some other way.

Despite the popularity of this view of language among logical positivists, Wittgenstein abandoned it in favour of another view, which was also very striking. According to his later view, he suggested that the meaning of words in a sentence depends on the function which the words are intended to accomplish by the speaker. In order to discern meaning, in an expression, therefore, it would be necessary to understand the form of life which formed the context of the speaker.[8] The present study proposes that this approach, though challenging, would be more effective than any other in dealing with problems of meaning in discourse. Wittgenstein published only the _Tractatus_ while he was alive, but many of his ideas have been published posthumously, since he died in 1951.[9] In addition, there are many commentaries and expositions about various aspects of his philosophy.[10]

Today, most courses in philosophy included 'language use' as a topic, because of the importance which meaning has acquired in contemporary philosophy. Frederick Vivian's book _Thinking Philosophically_,[11] for example, was published as a textbook for philosophy students. A whole chapter is devoted to Philosophy and Language. Two chapters deal with ethics and moral theories, and

one chapter is reserved for a dicsussion of
metaphysics. This book has been found useful in
the preparation of the present study.

Bertrand Russell in his Problems of Philosophy[12]
discusses in a definitive way some themes which
are directly relevant to the present study, such as
appearance and reality; knowledge by acquaintance
and knowledge by description, truth and falsehood;
and so on.

Another work that has been found relevant
for the present study is Robert G. Olson's
Meaning and Argument,[13] especially the first part
which deals with meaning. The eight chapter of that
book is in agreement with the conclusions drawn
from the present study. That chapter discusses
rules for the informative use of language.

Some studies in Philosophy of Religion have
also been found useful for the present study.
These include Colin Brown's Philosophy and the
Christian Faith,[14] H.D. Lewis' Philosophy of
Religion[15] and James I. Campbell's The Language of
Religion.[16]

Many of the illustrations to support arguments
in this study are drawn from the Christian tradition.
The Revised Standard Version of the Bible has been
used, including the works of Christian Theologians
such as J.S. Mbiti,[17] John Macquarrie,[18] Paul Tillich,[19]

Rudolf Bultmann,[20] Dietrich Bonhoeffer[21] and John Hick.[22]

The foregoing literature review is not exhaustive, it serves only as a guide to show the scope of bibliographical references which has shaped the direction of thinking in the present work.

REFERENCE NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. Frederick Vivian, <u>Thinking Philosophically</u>, London: Chattos and Windus, 1969.

2. <u>op.cit</u>., pp. 7-8.

3. There are many editions of this famous work. For example, see <u>The Republic of Plato</u>, Trans. F.M. Conford, London: Oxford University Press, 1941.

4. There are many editions of this work. See for example <u>Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion</u>, ed. Henry D. Aiken, New York: Hafner Press, 1948.

5. Logical Positivism is presented in many works. See, for example, J.B. Hartman, ed., <u>Philosophy of Recent Times</u>, Vol. 2, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967; John Macquarrie, <u>Twentieth Century Religious Thought</u>, London: SCM Press, 1963, ch. VI.

6. L. Wittgenstein, <u>Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus</u>, First English edition, 1922. New edition - London: Routledge, 1961.

7. <u>op.cit</u>. Proposition 7. Several scholars have discussed this proposition to explore its implications for Religious Discourse. See for example, W.D. Hudson, <u>Ludwig Wittgenstein</u>, Richmond: John Knox Press, 1968; <u>Wittgenstein and Religious Belief</u>, London: Macmillan, 1975. I am grateful to Ludwig

Von Wright for his stimulating lecture on Wittgenstein at the University of Nairobi on Thursday 26th January 1984. He taught and was acquainted with Wittgenstein at Cambridge.

8. I am indebted to L. Von Wright for confirming Wittgenstein's emphasis on this point. See Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations, paragraphs, 2,8,19,21 and 23.

9. Some of Wittgenstein's posthumously published works included: Philosophical Investigations, Oxford: Blackwell, 1953; Philosophical Remarks, Oxford: Blackwell, 1975; Letters to Russell, Keynes and Moore, Oxford: Blackwell, 1974, On Certainty, Oxford: Blackwell, 1969.

10. Examples of commentaries on Wittgenstein's thought are the following: H. Hartnack, Wittgenstein and Modern Philosophy, London: Methuen, 1962 Eng. Trans. 1965; G.C. Luckhardt, ed., Wittgenstein: Sources and Perspectives, Hassocks, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1979; F. Waismann, Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle, Oxford: Blackwell, 1979, C. Van Peuersen, Ludwig Wittgenstein: An Introduction to his Philosophy, London: Faber, 1969; David Pears, Wittgenstein, London: Fontana Collins, 1971; T. Morawetz, Wittgenstein and

Knowledge, London: Harvester Press, 1980;

A. Maslow, _A Study in Wittgenstein's Tractatus_,

University of California Press, 1961; Warren Shibles,

Wittgenstein, Language and Philosophy, Dubuque:

Brown Book Company, 1969.

11.   Frederick Vivian, _op.cit._

12.   Bertrand Russell, _Problems of Philosophy_,

London: Allen and Unwin, 1912.

13.   Robert G. Olson, _Meaning and Argument_, New York:

Harcourt Brace and World, 1969.

14.   Colin Brown, _Philosophy and the Christian Faith_,

London: Tyndale Press, 1968.

15.   H.D. Lewis, _Philosophy of Religion_, London:

English Universities Press, 1965.

16.   James I. Campbell, _The Language of Religion_,

New York: Bruce, 1971.

17.   J.S. Mbiti, _African Religions and Philosophy_,

London: Heinemann, 1969; _New Testament Eschatology

in an African Background_, London: Oxford University

Press, 1971.

18.   John Macquarrie, _Twentieth Century Religious

Thought_, London: SCM, 1963.

19.   Paul Tillich, <u>The Courage to Be</u>, Digswell Place, Welwyn: James Nisbet, 1952; <u>Morality and Beyond</u>, London: Collins Fontana, 1963; <u>Systematic Theology</u>, 3 vols., University of Chicago Press, 1953-1957 and 1963; <u>A History of Christian Thought</u>, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967, 1968.

20.   Rudolf Bultmann, <u>Primitive Christianity in its Contemporary Setting</u>, London: Collins, 1960; <u>Faith and Understanding</u>, Vol. 1, London: SCM, 1966.

21.   Dietrich Bonhoeffer, <u>Letters and Papers from Prison</u>, London: SCM, 1953.

22.   John Hick, ed., <u>The Myth of God Incarnate</u>, London: SCM, 1977; <u>God and the Universe of Faiths</u>, London: Macmillan, 1973.

CHAPTER ONE

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE DISCERNMENT OF MEANING
IN DISCOURSE

THE ROLE OF ASSUMPTIONS

Whenever a person attaches meaning to an expression, there are certain assumptions which he takes for granted. Those assumptions are the criteria on the basis of which he discerns meaning. Sometimes we are aware of our assumptions, and we deliberately attach particular meanings to certain expressions on the basis of this awareness. At other times, however, we are not conscious of the assumptions forming the basis of our discernment of meaning.

Formal philosophical training helps to inculcate in the student, the habit of identifying assumptions and clarifying their implications in discourse. This chapter will outline some major factors which constitute the background of assumptions. The factors outlined below will help to illustrate the complexity of the endeavour to discern meanings of words and expressions in discourse.

Too often, people engaged in discourse tend to overlook the significance of their assumptions.

If in a discussion the participants ignore or overlook each other's assumptions, it is difficult for them to reach mutually agreeable conclusions. Conversely, if the participants appreciate the assumptions on which each person bases his argument, it is easier to carry the discourse to its logical conclusion, even though the participants may mutually agree to disagree. Tolerance and compromise are indispensable in effective dialogue. Appreciation of the assumptions of other people generates tolerance and encourages compromise.

Some assumptions are so deeply entrenched in an individual's personality, that he finds it impossible to reject or 'compromise' them in favour of new assumptions which are introduced in the process of dialogue. The effectiveness of formal schooling and other aspects of socialization can be assessed in direct proportion to the extent to which such schooling succeeds in inculcating in the learners, the attitudes intended by the educators. If schooling and socialization are effective, the predetermined attitudes become an integral part of the learners' personality.[1]

The assumptions which we hold, consciously or otherwise, greatly affect our understanding. When we change our assumptions, our attitudes change accordingly. The change of assumptions through the process of education, is one of the most effective

ways to change people's attitudes. Training people
to identify and critically review their assumptions,
is one of the most valuable assets of the educational
process. Without such critical self-evaluation, it
is difficult to sustain an innovative society. When
self-evaluation is stifled, creativity is suppressed
and this is detrimental to both the individual and the
society of which he is a member. Traditional African
society tended to discourage its members from re-
assessing the assumptions on which the African
approach to knowledge was based. This inhibition
had the effect of curbing innovative ventures.
Colonization introduced a new educational system
which indoctrinated Africans to believe they were
incapable of inventing.[2]

LANGUAGE

Language in general extends far beyond the use
of words, although the medium of verbal communication
is perhaps the most important aspect of human inter-
action.

The oral use of verbal language is a universal
phenomenon, found in all cultures. However, the
written form of verbal language is developed only
in some cultures. The written form of any language
is a reduction of its oral form. Marshall McLuhan

has argued that the use of the written form of English, especially since the invention and promotion of printing, has had a negative effect on verbal communication in particular, and on human communication in the Anglo-Saxon culture in general. This study will not digress into a critique of McLuhan's theory of communication. However, it is worthwhile to appreciate his observation that the conversion of verbal language from the oral to the written form, is a reduction in which some of the linguistic aspects expressible orally are omitted or very poorly transcribed when language is reduced to the written form. For example, intonation, tempo and mood are difficult to express in writing. The gestures of a speaker add to the impact of his message on the listener, and these gestures are not part of the transcribed form of the message. This problem has been appreciated in a new way by experts who are endeavouring to reduce African languages into the written form, as a pioneering exercise.[3]

It is worthwhile to make a few comments concerning the oral form of verbal language. As pointed out earlier, the written form is derived from the oral. At the present time, specialized African scholars throughout this continent are endeavouring to promote African 'oral literature' or 'orature', because they have appreciated its value as the medium of preserving, conserving and transmitting cultural values among African peoples. The majority of the African

population neither reads nor writes, and this situation is likely to prevail for many decades to come. Therefore, the oral channel of communication will need to be extensively utilized for the general education of African peoples.

The reduction of the oral form of verbal language into the written form, demands full competence in the language being so reduced. Christian missionaries and Bible societies contributed greatly in the reduction of many African languages into writing. However, some of them had only very limited knowledge of the languages they were so reducing. Consequently, the versions of the Bible which they produced were difficult to read - partly because of the ideas expressed, and partly because of the orthography adopted. African writers are beginning to take seriously the task of creating works of art in their own tongues, rather than in foreign languages like English, French, German, Portuguese, and so on.[4]

The oral form comes into use very early in the life of an individual. Learning to speak is one of the skills which a normal child acquires within the first few years of life. The mastery of this skill enables the child to absorb cultural values from the social environment in which he grows up. In a school-oriented society, children learn many

values out of the class-room, even before they are
ready for admission into the formal educational
institutions. This observation is especially
significant in the African context. When it happens
that the values inculcated in the formal educational
institutions do not coincide and are not identical
with those values acquired in the extra-curricular
setting, the child develops a double-standard
value system. This is one convincing explanation
as to why many Africans, even after accepting
Christianity through the school and the Church,
continue to retain the core of their Africal cultural,
and religious and intellectual assumptions. In
school they are taught in a linguistic medium
which is foreign, and at home they communicate in
an indigenous medium which is authentic to their
own culture. Language is a cultural product, and
it carries cultural and intellectual ideas in its
vocabulary and grammatical structure. Teaching a
foreign language and using it, will inevitably
involve learning (often indirectly and unwittingly)
the culture of that foreign language. In most
African countries primary school children are
educated with the use of foreign languages as the
basic mediums of instruction.

The use of the 'mother-tongue' as the basic medium of instruction, is very valuable in any society, because the patriot learners are given the opportunity and reinforcements to internalize the values, attitudes and assumptions which are an integral part of that language. Foreign languages are useful for wider communication and for enriching the values and assumptions already acquired through the patriate language. However, a child who is unable to speak his mother tongue in a social environment where most of his relations and peers speak it, grows up with great cultural and intellectual disadvantages.[5]

It is important to emphasise that those people who can neither read nor write are, nevertheless, able to express their ideas and transmit their cultural values. One of the greatest social problems in contemporary Africa, concerns the 'generation-gap' created by the introduction of formal literate schooling. Non-literate parents find it difficult to communicate effectively with their own children who have become literate through formal schooling. Owing to the prejudiced attitudes they acquire in school against their cultural and religious heritage, the children have little or no regard for the advice they get from their non-literate parents. Instead, . they tend to follow ideas learned in school and from books — even books which in the west are considered

to be of poor quality.

The 'generation-gap' as a social problem cannot be explained merely in terms of literacy and illiteracy. In schools, children in Africa are taught to speak, read and write foreign languages, mainly those of former colonial masters. Those foreign languages are conveyors of foreign cultures. Thus the children acquire certain aspects of foreign cultures in the process of learning the foreign languages associated with those cultures. Hence the 'generation-gap' becomes at the same time a semi-cultural gap. Communication then breaks down, at least partially. Parents complain that they are no longer able to control their children, and the children complain that their parents do not understand them.

Thus the oral form of a language is important as a factor influencing the discernment of meaning in discourse, especially because of the role which this form occupies in the early development of an individual's personality. In contemporary Africa, this form is even more significant as a factor, because it is used for upbringing of children as well as for general communication and education by the majority of Africa's population. This situation tends to introduce an artificial division of the society between the 'literate' and the 'illiterate'.

Since languages are carriers of cultures,
the more languages a person speaks the more
culturally exposed he will be.[6] If for example
someone lives among a people in a foreign country
and does not take the trouble to learn the languages
of the people, he remains cut off to the core of
that people's culture. He may observe the customs
of the people, but he remains culturally detached
from the inner dynamics of the culture. The oral
form of language is the key towards cross-cultural
interaction.[7] It should be noted, however, that
learning the language of foreign peoples does not
automatically yield an appreciative attitude
towards them. Other factors, as will be discussed
in later sections, may prevent a multi-linguist
from adopting an appreciative attitude towards
cultures other than his own. Learning many languages
increases the chances for developing cultural open-
mindedness.

A person with an appreciative orientation
may greatly enrich his understanding of foreign
cultures through learning foreign languages, even
without living in the countries to which those
languages are indigenous. Most schooled Africans
are in this situation. In their school education
they have been given opportunities to learn foreign
languages and cultures, at the expense of their own.

Consequently, many young Africans are more competent in foreign languages and cultures (like English, French, Portuguese) than in their own. This point became clear during the revision of the education curriculum in Kenya, when the teaching of the African heritage and African languages was introduced. Inevitably, many trained teachers felt incompetent to teach their own cultural and religious heritage, and their own mother tongues, because in their school education they did not have the opportunity to study and reflect on them except in derogatory terms. Yet they felt more conversant with the English language and with western culture in general.

The written form of verbal language influences the discernment of meaning in a more complicated way. When a person acquires the skill of literacy, he is able to obtain ideas from even those people whom he has never met. Utilization of the oral form of language is limited to physical interaction between persons, although the telephone, tape-recorder, gramophone, radio and television have greatly extended the scope of oral communication. The printed media, including books, newspapers, magazines, journals and so on, have greatly contributed to both individual and social education. Today the attitudes and assumptions of literate people are increasingly being shaped by the printed and

electronic media. It follows, therefore, that verbal language, both in its oral and written forms, is one of the most important factors which influence the discernment of meaning in discourse.

CULTURE

The human being is a social animal, which grows up within the context of human culture. In this study the term 'culture' is understood to mean the totality of a people's way of life, including all the artifactual manifestations, which are a visible expression of that people's understanding of human nature and the world. Thus 'culture' includes all the expressions which arise from the social institutions and technological involvements of a people. Bringing up children includes not only feeding them and looking after their physical health - it also includes teaching them the cultural values which are maintained by the parents or guardians. The child spontaneously absorbs and internalizes the culture around him, and this cultural education forms the central part of the child's social awareness.

Language as a cultural product is one of the most effective and vital instruments for the socialization of the child. Since verbal language

is not culturally neutral, the achievement of competence in a particular language necessarily implies the acquisition of a large amount of knowledge regarding the culture in which that language has developed.

The influence of culture on the discernment of meaning in discourse can be illustrated with the following examples. A child understands the meaning of the term 'family' in the context of his early social environment. In the African cultural setting, the family includes not only the parents and their children, but also the entire household, clan, and even the whole ethnic community. The word 'family' has a much more restricted meaning in the western cultural setting, referring to the father, mother and their children. The implication of this difference is interesting to consider. When the word 'family' enters into a discussion in which there are African and western participants, it will often be understood differently by the two groups. For the African participants the word will be assumed to refer to a whole community, whereas the western participants will assume the narrow meaning indicated above.

In such a discussion, it is necessary to agree on the definition which will be operative, if misunderstandings are to be avoided. Very often such common words are not defined in cross-cultural

discussion, and this leads to misunderstandings, owing to different cultural assumptions.

Another example is the word 'home'. In the African cultural setting, 'home' refers to the place where one's family lives. Since in African understanding the family includes both the present generation and the ancestors, 'home' is the place where one's ancestors lived and died. Thus there is in African cultural assumptions an attachment to the ancestral land, which is incorporated in the African understanding of 'home'. Considering that in Africa the majority of people are rural dwellers, 'home' for most Africans refers to some rural village where most relatives live. Thus a schooled African who lives and works in an urban centre for many years together with his wife and children, continues to consider his 'home' to be the place where his extended family has traditionally lived, even though he may own a house and other property in the town or city where he spends most of his life.

This African understanding of 'home' has serious implications for national development planning and also for the problem of refugees in contemporary Africa. When people have to leave their ancestral homes involuntarily owing to political unrest, new development projects or other reasons, this migration causes much social and phychological disturbance to those involved.

In contrast, home for most people in the western world means the place where a person happens to be dwelling at a particular period. Owing to high geographical mobility and extensive appropriation of land for urbanization and industry in the west, 'home' has ceased to be understood as the traditional dwelling place of a person's lineage. Thus an expatriate from the west working in Africa tends to regard his present place of work as his 'home' as long as he stays there. He may not be able to predict where his next 'home' will be, unless he knows where he will take up his next job.[8]

It is interesting that many Africans today, under the influence of Christianity, have enthusiastically adopted the idea that 'this world is not my home, I am just passing through'. However, this idea seems to have been adopted owing to the apparent transitoriness and insecurity of present existence. Thus the traditional understanding of home is not abandoned, but rather, the new religious notions are superimposed upon traditional African assumptions. In discussing this example, here, it is being suggested that when in a piece of discourse the word 'home' occurs, it will be accorded different denotations depending on the cultural background of those involved in the discussion. Assumptions as

to its meaning should therefore be clarified to avoid misunderstandings, especially if the discussion includes people of different cultural backgrounds.

Consider the word 'ancestor' as yet another example. In some Christian denominations the 'Early Church Fathers' are venerated as 'Saints'. African Christian theologians have raised the question as to whether African Christians ought to continue venerating their ancestors, or they should substitute the veneration of Christian saints for their traditional veneration of ancestors. There seems as yet to be no consensus among African Christian theologians with regard to this question. The raising of this question in African Christian theological discourse is indicative of conceptual confusions concerning the relationship between the African cultural heritage and 'Christian' customs which have been exported into Africa during the modern missionary enterprise from the west.

It is not clear why the veneration of ancestors by African concerts is seen as a negation of the Christian faith, and the veneration of the 'Early Church Fathers' is not so regarded. Nevertheless, the discussion of this question by African theologians is an integral part of the quest for an authentically African Christian theology - a Christian theology which accepts a serious and positive

recognition of the African cultural tradition.

All the examples cited above indicate that the cultural assumptions which a person internalizes and takes for granted in the process of his socialization, greatly affect the way he derives meaning from words in discourse. This remains the case whether a person uses his mother tongue or a foreign language. One of the problems of the teachers of English as a foreign language, is to help the learners to understand the usage of English from the cultural perspective of the native speakers of this language. Thus the meanings attached to words are related to the cultural backgrounds of those who speak or hear the words. There is no way in which a human individual can isolate his understanding of words from his cultural limitations.[9]

One of the most effective ways of dealing with such limitations in discourse, is for a person to develop sensitivity towards his cultural conditioning, and endeavour to transcend cultural parochialism. Transcending one's cultural conditioning in a piece of discourse involves the appreciation of the cultural backgrounds of others, and allowing them to influence one's own ideas within the rational framework which is assumed in the trend of argument.

NURTURE

In this study 'nurture' will be used to mean the particular way in which a child is brought up. Within a particular family, a child may be brought up to assume that he is better and more loved by his parents, than other children. This attitude will greatly affect the way he relates himself to the other children both in his family and in the community. Although those children may share a common culture with this child, his particular attitudes derived from his nurture will lead this child to develop interpretations of some concepts with a slant particular to that child.

For example, if the child is encouraged to grow up with the attitude that his parents hate him, this attitude may have a great effect on the way that child will view parents in general, throughout his life. Thus the word 'parent' will be understood by that child to mean someone who does not love his children. A contrary view will be developed and assumed by a child who grows up with the attitude that his parents love him. Considering that discourse is a voluntary activity in which those who participate choose the appropriate words to convey their arguments, it is inevitable

that nurture will have some influence on the discern-
ment of meaning. Some words may have negative denota-
tions in the understanding of one person, and positive
ones in that of another.

Therefore, it would be a mistake for someone
to assume that within a piece of discourse the
participants share consensus on the meaning of the
key concepts under discussion, unless those
participants have stated explicitly that this is
the case. [10]

One implication of this observation for the
discernment of meaning in discourse, is that
human beings are inevitably influenced by their
psychological attitudes whenever they attach meanings
to words and expressions. Many of those attitudes
are acquired during the period of nurture, although
personal experiences in later life also contribute
to an individual's psychological development.

It is not the task of this section to prescribe
the attitudes which ought to be encouraged or
indoctrinated on children. Rather, its main
concern is to posit nurture as one of the factors
which influence discernment of meaning in discourse.
It is likely, for instance, that the views maintained
by most people towards religion are based on their
experience of religious life during the early
stages of their nurture. A child who grows up in
a parental environment that despises religion will
inevitably be influenced by that attitude in his

development towards maturity. If religion is
presented to a child as a set of dogmatic assertions
about which they can find no intelligible explana-
tions, the child is likely to grow up with the view
that religion is an irrational enterprise which can
be accepted only at the expense of critical reflection.
Indeed, many people view religion in this way,
owing to the frustration of their critical quest
concerning religion during their childhood and
earlier stages of their academic education.

In spite of growing up in christian families
and receiving primary and secondary education in
schools with christian sponsorship, many young
people in contemporary Africa tend to view religion
in general and Christianity in particular, as
dogmatic enterprise without much intellectual
satisfaction. This is partly because their nurture
at home and religious instruction in school, do
not facilitate free discussion of religious issues
between parents and teachers on the one hand, and
the children on the other. When the children grow
up and achieve their intellectual freedom in
early adulthood, many tend to revolt against the
dogmatism imposed on them during their nurture and
early education. The prejudices they develop in
reaction against that dogmatism, is reflected when

they later participate in discourse concerning religion.

EDUCATION

The term 'education' is difficult to define. In its ordinary usage today it tends to refer to the formal instruction which is acquired in institutions such as schools, colleges and universities. In the context of this study, however, the term will be used with a wider connotation, to include the whole process through which a person in any culture is socialized to become hopefully a responsible member of his community. It is true that in the modern world education has become increasingly institutionalized, with the result that the educational process has tended to be a form of 'mass-production'. This tendency is illustrated by such devices as standardized tests, wearing of uniforms, standard campuses for educational activity, standard textbooks, and so on.

In traditional African society there is less formalization and standardization, although certain basic tests of endurance may be normative for all children in a particular community. For instance, initiation into adulthood is a rite of passage which all children would be expected to undergo successfully,

and this would involve a difficult ordeal such as circumcision. One of the points of cultural conflict between Africans and western Christian missionaries especially during the colonial period, arose from the fact that most missionaries were ignorant about the educational value which Africans attached to the rite of initiation into adulthood. Under this ignorance they condemned the initiation rites, misjudging them to be 'barbaric' and 'heathen'. To replace these rites, they introduced their own dogmatic instruction, which was literary and institutionalized. In their reaction, Africans considered this to be a cultural imposition of invaders, without any rational justification from the African point of view.[11]

Although in the contemporary world literacy is a valuable skill to acquire, it is a mistake to equate education with the acquisition of this skill. A literate person is not necessarily educated, although those people who are literate may utilize the skill to enhance their educational process. How then, does education influence discernment of meaning in discourse?

In every culture, a person's education systematizes his thought. It equips him with basic arguments which he can use to justify his opinions and beliefs. Through his education, a person is equipped to reinforce the cultural, religious and

intellectual presuppositions of the society in which he grows up. At the same time, 'good' education equips the student with tools for the critical evaluation of the ideas he has received through the educational process. There is often a dialectical tension between the ideals of an educational system, and the actual achievements of that system at any given period. Those who formulate educational policies and control the educational system in a society intend to promote the values to be internalized by those who will be considered 'educated' in that society. However, the declared general aims of an educational system may not be realized in the implementation. Hence the need for continuous evaluation of the educational process, to test the actual achievements in relation to long term general aims.

The educational process in every culture facilitates the acquisition of new ideas and skills that are considered valuable by those who determine educational policy. In contemporary Africa, modern education has become the process through which African children and adults are exposed to new ideas and skills, especially those derived from western culture and technology. For many people, education is viewed as an instrument for the acculturation of African individuals into the western way of

life. In schools, colleges and universities,
African youth learn about the new 'scientific world-
view', about western history and culture, and also
about Christianity. They are exposed to the ideas
of great thinkers of other cultures, especially
those of the western world. They devote propor-
tionately less attention to the African cultural,
religious and intellectual heritage.

Thus to be 'educated' in contemporary Africa
tends to mean being literate and familiar with
the developments in western thought, history,
science and technology. It is inevitable that a
person's education will greatly influence his
discernment of meaning in discourse. For instance,
a person who in his education has specialized in
a branch of empirical science, such as physics
and chemistry, will tend to recall his scientific
training while participating in a piece of
discourse, irrespective of the topic that may be
under discussion. Likewise, an ordained priest
will tend to drag his doctrinal interests into a
piece of discourse, irrespective of the topic being
considered. Modern education has tended to over-
emphasise the value of specialization, to the extent
that many students of science know little about
philosophy and theology, while students of theology
and philosophy know little about empirical science.

This situation makes it difficult for effective discourse to be conducted between students and scholars who have specialized in various disciplines.

It is a matter of great concern to the present author, that compartmentalization of knowledge still thrives today even though there is increasing demand for interdisciplinary interaction among scholarly specialists. If it is true that education greatly influences the discernment of meaning in discourse, it is necessary for the participants in a piece of discourse to ascertain and appreciate the educational backgrounds of those with whom they engage in argument. It is unlikely, for example, that a person who through his education has become convinced that religion is 'opium of the people' or 'an illusion', will engage in an effective discourse with a priest who, through his theological training has come to believe that religion is the 'cement of society' or 'the antidote against despair'. Thus the criticism of defence of religion can best be conducted with clear qualifications regarding the context and the educational background of those who propound respective arguments for and against religion.

It is worthwhile to add that even within the same academic discipline specialists may differ and disagree because of misunderstandings arising from divergence in orientation during their education. For example, Protestant and Catholic theologians may differ over an issue not because they deny the basic doctrines of the Christian faith, but because their theological training has prepared them to argue on differing premises. Open philosophical training helps people to transcend their educational backgrounds and appreciate arguments which are presented on the basis of differing educational presuppositions.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Human individuals evaluate and respond to common experiences differently. For example, an event experienced by a group of people, such as an accident or a riot, will have different impacts on each of those who are involved... as participants, spectators, rescuers, security officers, and so on. Moreover, no two individuals, not even identical twins, can have an identical set of experiences in the world. We perceive the world around us relatively, depending on our existential location, the physical

condition of our sense-apparatus, our psychological

condition, and so on. An event may be of great

significance to one person, while to another person

the same event passes with little or no attention.

Take the second world war for instance.

There are some people in the western world to whom

this war had a shocking impact. The theologians

Paul Tillich and Jurgen Moltmann are examples.[12]

Before the outbreak of that war it seemed to many

people in Europe and North America, as if the world

could rely on advanced empirical science and techno-

logy for the realization of peace, justice and

material prosperity. Furthermore, the first world

war had been such a horror that it seemed as if no

one would dare to declare another military confronta-

tion on a global scale. Yet another world war

broke out within two decades after the first. This

experience shattered the hopes of those who had

believed in a 'secular salvation' for the world.

It is in the context of this shock, that Paul Tillich

wrote The Shaking of the Foundations,[13] and Jurgen

Moltmann wrote his Theology of Hope.[14] The term

'second world war' refers to a particular set of

historical events. Although it might appear as if

there is no vagueness or ambiguity with regard to

its meaning, the foregoing remarks show that this

term conveys a variety of connotations for different

people. It cannot mean the same thing for the

scientists who developed the atom bomb, as it does for those who survived the explosions of that bomb in Japan during World War II. Nor can it mean the same thing for those who were prisoners of war in Germany, as it does for Kenyans who accompanied the British forces as conscripts in the Middle East and in Asia. The term 'second world war' refers to a set of events which signify different things to different people, depending on the various ways in which they experienced the war.

Consider another simple example. The term 'water' to a person who has been saved from drowning, will have a different significance from that accorded to it by a person who has been saved from death, being thirsty, by drinking a glass of this substance. To the person saved from drowning, water may mean something to be dreaded, whereas to the one saved from death by drinking a glass of water, it may have the significance of a life-giving substance. When the word is used in discourse, it follows that it will be accorded different 'meaning', depending on the experience of different people, as regards this substance.

The word God may also mean different things to different people. Consider, for instance, the beliefs of Martin Luther the reformer,[15] Friedrich Nietzsche the nihilist[16] and Sigmund Freud the

psycho-analyst. [17] For Luther, God was the source
of ultimate and absolute authority. He believed
that God's authority was infinitely above that of
the Pope, and on the basis of this belief he
defied the latter. Nietzsche, on the other hand,
thought of God as a tyrant. If God was the being
whom all people must obey without question, then
God must be more despotic than the worst autocrat
on earth. On the basis of this argument, Nietzsche
postulated his nihilist philosophy. For Freud,
God was a glorified father, worshipped as a relic
of a ritual murder that was allegedly committed early
in the history of the human race. In Freud's
view, God was worshipped by people who were psycholo-
gically sick and in need of treatment. God was a
projection of the human mind, an illusion of sick
people. Once the mind was cured through psycho-
analysis, the patients would stop believing in
that illusion.

The foregoing examples illustrate that the
personal experience of a person, together with the
other factors discussed in the preceding sections,
form the background in which individuals discern
meaning in discourse. Often, the exact impact of
particular experiences on a person is not clear
when the person engages in a discussion involving

words associated with those experiences. However, biographical works and autobiographical publications of renowned thinkers show that personal experiences and the other factors, combined, lead to the personality of an individual.

It can be concluded, therefore, that the task of discerning meaning in discourse is not merely a matter of establishing absolute meanings of words. The most effective way of discerning the meaning of words in discourse, is by probing the whole context in which those words are used.

IMPLICIT AND EXPLICIT FACTORS

There may be other factors that influence discernment of meaning in discourse - this chapter does not claim to be exhaustive. However, the factors outlined above suffice to show that the derivation of meaning from words in a piece of discourse within a particular language, is greatly influenced by many assumptions which the discussants covertly and overtly hold. The factors that influence discernment of meaning may be implicit or explicit. This section will elaborate this point.

Implicit factors are those which arise from the cultural and existential background of the individual, and are internalized in the spontaneous

process of nurture and socialization. Such factors lead to assumptions which are inherent in the language, culture and personal experience of the individual.

Explicit factors, on the other hand, are those which arise from the formal education of the individual. They lead to assumptions of which the individual is often aware, because they are consciously inculcated during instruction and training.

The response of an indidivual to religion is influenced not only by his implicit religious experience within his society, but also by his explicit formal education. It can be concluded, therefore, that both the implicit (or covert) factors and the explicit (or overt) ones reinforce each other to determine the perspective which a person adopts in his discernment of meaning. Since the combinations of these factors vary from person to person, the problem of achieving consensus among a large group of participants in a piece of discourse is immense. Today this fact is appreciated by most international organizations which value consensus, like the United Nations Organization and the World Council of Churches. In order to facilitate deliberation at their international forums, such organizations encourage the discussion of their agenda at local, national and regional levels before they are tabled in world plenary

sessions.   Through this procedure divergencies of opinion are minimized, though not eliminated.

REFERENCE NOTES

CHAPTER ONE

1. Thus schooling may encourage open mindedness, but it may also entrench prejudice, depending on the policy and objectives of the educations system, and also on the educators.

2. Neither traditional African education, nor colonial schooling helped Africans to cope advanta- geously with the new situation under imperial rule. African nationalist leaders endeavoured to transcend the limitations of both pre-colonial and colonial structures in order to forge new progressive nations.

3. For a critique of Marshall McLuhan's ideas see R. Rosenthal, ed., McLuhan Pro and Con, Penguin Books, 1969. While developing reading materials in African languages for adult literacy classes, the Department of Adult Education in Kenya is taking into serious consideration the need to improve the orthographies that were introduced by missionaries and Bible translators during the colonial period.

4. For exampke, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Okot p'Bitek and Mazisi Kunene. Each of these writers has written some works in his own mother tongue, in addition to

their publications in English. Prof. Kwasi Wiredu
has urged for African philosphers to articulate
their reflection in their own African languages,
as an important step in the development of African
philosophy. See his book <u>Philosophy and an African</u>
<u>Culture</u>, Cambridge University Press, 1980.

5. It is true that in some countries where there
are immigrant workers, especially in Europe, the
same situation prevails - if the children of those
workers go to school in those countries, they have
to be taught in foreign languages. However, the
situation in Africa seems much worse: people in
their own country are taught in foreign languages
(English, French, Portuguese, etc.) even in those
places where a local lingua franca is established -
like Kiswahili in eastern Africa. Interestingly, it
appears difficult for a country to develop its national
culture without at the same time promoting its own
national language.

6. In order for a person to become competent in a
foreign language it is necessary for the learner to
understand how that language functions within the
culture to which the language is the 'natural'
medium of expression and communication.

It is possible, of course, for modified versions
of a language to evolve under special historical

circumstances, like Creole and Pidgin English in the Carribean and West Africa. However, such versions are normally not accepted for wider and international usage; they are limited to the communities that evolve them.

7. It is true that a person can acquire many ideas by reading translated works. However, it is also true that some shades of meaning are lost and new ones added when a work is translated, especially when the languages involved are not culturally and historically related. Note, for example, the problem of translating the New Testament into African languages. This point has been raised by Okot p'Bitek in Religion of the Central Luo, Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1971, ch. 3. I agree with Noam Chomsky and John Lyons that there are no superior and inferior languages. Each language is developed to meet the needs of the people who develop it. See J. Lyons, ed., New Horizons in Linguistics, Penguin, 1970.

8. This observation is based on the author's conversations with many expatriates working in Africa, including missionaries. It is true, thought, that those who feel psychologically attached to their "motherland" will continue to regard it as 'home' and return there when political instability or other factors compel them to leave Africa.

9. Some writers from Africa and the Carribean have
suggested that local variations of English should
be developed and popularized, especially in those
areas where English has become the language of home,
Church, school, office and politics. However, such
popularization of localized variations of English
will not, in the near future, elevate the new forms
to the same status as the standard form established
in the mother country of English, and in British
dominions like Australia, New Zealand and Canada.
In those countries English is an integral part of
the Anglo-Saxon culture, which is dominant there.
In Africa, on the other hand, foreign languages
like English, French and Portuguese are used owing
to recent colonial history. They have not evolved
together with the culture of African peoples.

10. It might appear rather tedious for participants
in a piece of discourse to first clarify how each
person understands the meaning of key concepts
before they engage in arguments about the subject
under discussion, but this initial step is indispen-
sable if misunderstandings are to be avoided.

11. For a creative presentation of the conflict
between western and traditional African cultural
values see Chinua Achebe, Things Fall Apart; No
Longer at Ease, London: Heinemann, African Writers
Series; Ngugi wa Thiong'o, The River Between,

48

Heinemann, African Writers Series;   Okot p'Bitek,

Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol, Nairobi: East African

Publishing House, 1967.

12.   See Paul Tillich, The Shaking of the Foundations,

Penguin Books, 1959;   Jurgen Moltmann, Theology of

Hope, London: SCM Press, 1973.

13.   P. Tillich, op.cit.

14.   J. moltmann, op.cit.

15.   On Martin Luther see Colin Brown, op.cit.,

pp. 37-48.

16.   On Nietzsche see J.P. Stern, Nietzsche,

London: Fontana/Collins, 1978.

17.   On Freud see David Stafford-Clark, What Freud

Really Said, Penguin, 1967

CHAPTER TWO

MODES OF THOUGHT AND EXPRESSION

MODES AND MODELS

This chapter will concentrate on explaining the sense in which the term 'modes of thought and expression' is applied in the present study. After providing an operational definition of this term, the chapter will outline a theory of modes of thought and expression, which will be the basis of analysis when dealing with specific problems of meaning in discourse in the remaining chapters.

Every academic discipline has its models and symbols which are used for the purpose of analysing and clarifying its subject-matter. It sometimes happens that one word or sign is applied to convey different meanings in different disciplines. For example, the word 'symbol' in chemistry conveys a different applied meaning from its usage in religion and anthropology. Chemical symbols such as those which indicate the chemical structure of material substances, would make no sense to a person who is not trained to interpret them. Take water and common salt for instance. These are common culinary substances in every culture. Housewives

do not normally think of the chemical composition of water and salt when they form part of a recipe.

In ordinary conversation we do not normally talk of H^2O and Sodium Chloride (N Cl). Yet these chemical symbols have great significance for chemists. In view of their chemical composition, these two substances have particular uses in various branches of empirical science. At the same time, the same substances have significant symbolic meaning in religion. Jesus referred to his followers as 'the salt of the earth'. He also talked of the need for a person to be 'born anew...of water and the Spirit'. Such religious expressions have no significant meaning in such branches of empirical science as chemistry and biology.

Similarly, the sign of a cross has much religious significance in the Christian religion, whereas in arithmetic and algebra the same sign carries a totally different meaning. To a fashion designer, the same sign may not be anything more than an artistic design of a piece of cloth. This observation is in agreement with Wittgenstein's later view of language, proposing that the meaning of a word can best be discerned in the context of its usage. Failure to do this can lead to serious misunderstandings.[1a]

Consider again the following exmaple, which has been cited above: Nicodemus misunderstood and was greatly puzzled when Jesus told him that he must be born a second time. 'How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?' In the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus it is clear that Jesus was using the verb 'to be born' in a sense different from its normal biological usage. Hence the misunderstanding between him and Nicodemus, which led the latter to seek for further clarification of what Jesus meant.

In the present study, the term 'Mode' technically refers to the disciplinary context in which words and symbols are used, both in thought and expression. Thus a mode of thought and expression is the general disciplinary context in which a piece of discourse is conducted.

A 'Model' is a miniature representation of a large object, or an enlarged representation of a minute object. It may also be a simplified representation of a complex of objects. In general, models are designed to convey, in simplified form, the complicated structure of objects and complexes of objects. Thus an architect designs a model of a proposed building, and a chemical scientist designs models to explain the molecular and atomic

structure of substances. A chemist's model of
a hydro-carbon is not the real thing - not the
real hydro-carbon, and the architect's model of
a building is not the real building.

In this study, the term 'model' will be
used to refer to representations of both objects
and relations. To understand the meaning of a
model, it is necessary first to understand the mode
of thought and expression, in which that particular
model is applied. For example, to understand a
chemical model, it is necessary to understand the
function of such models in chemistry. An artist's
impression of a proposed building helps people to
form an idea of what to anticipate when the building
is completed, although the artist may not draw his
impression according to scale. A poet uses analogies
to express his responses to objects, but it would
be a mistake to take poetic analogies and metaphors
literally. According to the working definition of
'model' discussed above, it can be said that the
artist's impression of a proposed building, and a
poet's analogies concerning a certain object, are
both 'models' in this technical sense.

The preceding remarks about modes and models
lead to the observation that in discourse, problems
of meaning arise when one person assumes and for
lates his arguments within one particular mode and

model, while other participants in the same
discourse apply different sets of modes and models.
For a consensus in meaning to be achieved, it is
of primary modes and models which are applied in
each argument. This study proposes that many of
the conceptual tensions and conflicts which have
arisen have been rooted in misunderstandings and
lack of consensus with regard to the modes and
models applied in the arguments within each of these
disciplines, that is, empirical science, philosophy
and theology, respectively.

In this study it is proposed that human
discourse can be considered to fall under three
main modes of thought and expression. It is true
that this remark is reductionist, in the sense that
it places all human discourse within three modes.
However, a criticism against such reductionism
may be answered with the comment that one way of
understanding a problem is to formulate a compre-
hensive theory which accounts for all aspects of
that problem. The modal theory proposed in this
chapter provides a framework for dealing with
the problems of meaning in discourse. It may
remain controversial, whether the three modes
discussed below can accommodate all aspects of human
discourse. Nevertheless, in the view of the present
author this modal theory is generally enough to
accommodate all aspects.

THE EMPIRICAL MODE

The term 'empirical science' in this section and in other parts of this study, refers to that branch of human knowledge which seeks to understand the quantifiable structure of physical reality. The technical usage of this term in contemporary scholarship restricts empirical science to the systematic, experimental research which is conducted by scientists to investigate by quantitative methods, selected aspects of material reality under controlled experimental conditions. Since the rise of modern empirical science, specialisation has been increasing greatly. Technology based on such scientific research has facilitated the invention of contrivances which, in turn, have made more precise empirical research possible. The invention of the computer is one of the most significant technological inventions in the twentieth century. It has helped scientists to collect, analyse and store empirical data in proportions that were not possible in the past, for instance in the sixteenth century.

Before the rise of modern empirical science, the word 'science' was used much more widely, to include all human quests for knowledge. In its ordinary usage today, the word 'science' refers to the discipline which has been qualified above as

'empirical science'. Thus in its ordinary usage today, the word 'science' has acquired a narrower meaning than it had in the past.

While recognizing the restricted technical usage of the term 'empirical science', it is proposed here that the empirical mode of thought and expression is part of human discourse in all individuals and cultures. Empirical science as described above belongs to the empirical mode of thought and expression, but even people who are not empirical scientists by profession also participate in discussions in which empirical propositions are made.

One of the significant implications of this remark, is that all people make empirical propositions in their thought and expression, even though only a few people in the world are professional scientists. A similar observation can be made with regard to philosophy: All people philosophise to some extent, even though only a few individuals in the world can be regarded as philosophers. The place of philosophy in this modal theory will be considered in the next section.

Anything can be discussed within the framework of empirically oriented discourse. However, it should be noted that a subject which is discussed from the empirical perspective can also be discussed

from other perspectives. The following is an illustration of this point.

It is possible to discuss Mount Kenya in exclusively empirical terms. Within the empirical mode of thought and expression, discussion about this prominent geographical feature in Kenya will concentrate on empirical details such as its height above sea level, the temperature and pressure at various contours on its slopes, the structure of its rocks and vegetation, the amount of rainfall on each side of the slopes, the size of the rivers flowing from the mountain, and so on. One of the facts which fascinated European explorers in the nineteenth century, was that this mountain had snow on its peak, despite its location on the Equator. They found it interesting that some spots on the tropics, such as Mount Kenya and Mount Kilimanjaro, were colder throughout the year than some temperate lands in winter. The interest which European explorers developed regarding this mountain, was generated by empirical considerations, and their expeditions to do more research in the tropics were conducted within what has been called the empirical mode of thought and expression.

The peoples who have traditionally lived around Mount Kenya were obviously aware of the great altitude of this mountain, but their view

of this prominent feature in their environment was
not dominated by empirical considerations. They
took it for granted that it was a very high mountain,
that it was cold at the top, that many rivers flowed
from it, and so on. However, what struck them most
was the religious significance of this mountain.
For them, its magnificence symbolized the greatness
of God and his providence as originator and sustainer
of the world. Thus the people of Gikuyu worshipped
God facing Mount Kenya, although they were not wor-
shipping this mountain as some early missionaries
and anthropologists thought.[1b] Thus also, the
people of Gikuyu thought of Mount Kenya in terms
of the religious sentiment it evoked in them,
whereas the early explorers thought of it in
terms of its empirical details which were of great
interest to empirical scientists in Europe. Within
the framework of the modal theory proposed here,
the religious approach to reality belongs to the
'Assessive' or 'Valuative' mode of thought and
expression. This mode will be considered in a
later section of this chapter.

It is worthwhile to provide another example
to illustrate the assertion that anything can become
a subject of empirically oriented discourse. In
a symposium published in New Essays in Philosophical
Theology, empiricist philosophers engaged in

discussion with theologians, concerning God.   Antony

Flew, an empiricist philosopher, argued that the

theist's belief in God is like a belief in an

invisible gardener, who, in practice, is not a

gardener at all.[2]   The empiricist parable of the

'Invisible Gardener' has been cited in many published

discussions on the philosophy of religion.   H.D. Lewis

summarises the parable as follows:

> The parable tells of a clearning in a
> jungle which looks like a garden which someone
> must be tending.   But no such gardener is ever
> seen or heard.   The disputants set up a fence
> and electrify it, they patrol with bloodhounds.
> But there are no shrieks or other signs of an
> invisible climber, the hounds never give cry
> Yet one explorer insists that there must be a
> gardener.   In Flew's words, 'Yet still the
> Believer is not convinced.   "But there is a
> gardener, invisible, intangible, insensible
> to electric shocks, a gardener who has no scent
> and makes no sound, a gardener who comes secretly
> to look after the garden he loves."   At last
> the Sceptic despairs, "But what remains of your
> original assertion?   Just how does what you
> call invisible, intangible, eternally elusive
> gardener differ from an imaginary gardener or
> even from no gardener at all?"
>
> The suggestion here is that religious
> assertions are qualified to the point where
> they have no significance, in Professor Flew's
> pointed phrase they 'die the death of a thousand

qualifications', they are 'eroded' until
they are not assertions at all; and it must
be admitted that this is very like what
happens.[3]

This example leads us to another observation,
that some subjects are more amenable to empirically
oriented discourse than others. For example,
nuclear fision and genetic engineering are topics
which scientific specialists can explain and discuss
much more competently than theologians, unless of
course those involved in the discussion are trained
in both disciplines and are acquainted with the
particular topics in question. Similarly, discourse
concerning God is more appropriate for theological
discourse than for empirical scientific research.
Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to add that theologians
can offer useful critiques of the ethical and
religious presuppositions of physical scientists,
while the latter can challenge theologians to be
more precise in their definitions of theological
terms.

In ordinary non-professional discussion
people frequently make empirical propositions, but
they do not have to be scientifically precise.
Technical scientific discourse demands precision
when dealing with empirical data, but non-specialists
are not as interested in precision as in communica-
ting their general empirical impressions about the

subject they may be discussing.

This section can be concluded with the remark
that all branches of empirical science fit within
what we have called the empirical mode of thought
and expression. Their research concentrates on the
material aspects of reality, observing and analysing
such empirical details as length, breadth, depth,
height, weight, colour, shape, size, density,
quantity, smell, taste, sound, temperature, pressure,
and so on. In other words, the empirical mode of
thought and expression utilizes sense-data and
its propositions are expressions of sense-experience.
Scientific equipment is designed and improved to
enable scientists to measure these details more
accurately and to facilitate more detailed analysis.
However, even without scientific training and
equipment people frequently make empirical proposi-
tions -- all people engage in the empirical mode
of thought and expression.

THE STIPULATIVE MODE

Any discourse demands that the conditions
of validity and invalidity of argument be stipulated.
Very often, the rules operative in a piece of
discourse are presupposed without discussion. In
ordinary conversation for instance, people do not

normally state their assumptions, and the rules of debate are taken for granted.

Learning a language includes the skill of recognizing the various ways in which words are used. It also includes the skill of recognizing figures of speech and applying them in expression. Thus a person who is competent in a language will spontaneously recognize a factual statement, a metaphor, a joke, a proverb, a command, a question, and so on. Ludwig Wittgenstein in his later writings realized that the discernment of meaning in verbal language cannot correctly be based on his earlier view of language, in which he had restricted meaningfulness only to those words which named objects. He rightly recognized that the meaning of words and expressions could best be discerned from the context in which they were used.[4] Sometimes a grammatical sentence may not convey the full meaning of the key words used in it, and it is necessary to consider the whole passage in which the sentence appears.[5]

In the stipulative mode of thought and expression, people establish and criticize the assumptions on which principles of validity (deductive or inductive) in argument are based. Socrates is reputed for using leading questions

and answers to establish clarity and consistency in discourse. The dialogues of Socrates, as well as those of Plato, are stipulative in character. Philosophy primarily serves a stipulative role in human discourse. It is true that philosophy as an academic discipline includes description and history. Nevertheless, philosophy as a creative activity is largely a stipulative involvement.

All people occasionally ask stipulative questions.. If in the middle of a conversation someone asks: 'What do you mean?' he is aking a stipulative question. Only a few people in the world are philosophers, if 'a philosopher' is defined as a person who spends most of his thinking time asking philosophical questions and providing philosophical answers to them in a systematic scheme. However, just as all people make empirical propositions without necessarily being professional scientists, it can be said also that all people irrespective of their culture and philosophical training, engage in stipulative thought and expression, without necessarily being philosophers in the technical sense of the word 'philosopher'.

Before concluding this section it is worth-while to consider the place of Logic and Mathematics in this modal theory. There is no consensus among scholars as to whether Logic and Mathematics belong

to the Arts or to the Sciences. In the modal
framework proposed in this chapter, these two
disciplines are considered as belonging to the
stipulative mode of thought and expression, because
logic and mathematics are developed as special ,
theoretical tools for conceptual analysis. They
help in the process of stipulation, whether such
stipulation concerns the Arts or the Sciences.
Just as philosophy is not restricted to either the
Arts or the Sciences, so are Logic and Mathematics
not restricted. It is interesting to note that
in some universities, philosophy, logic and
mathematics are studied both within the Arts and
the Science faculties.[6]

Logic and Mathematics have contributed in
challenging presupposed concepts in all disciplines.
The following is an illustration of this point:
When Isaac Newton formulated his laws of motion,
he posed a serious question to Christian theology
with regard to the concept of God. If the world
functioned in a determined way according to fixed
natural laws, where did God fit in the Newtonian
scheme? Some Christians chose to believe that this
'determined' or fixed system was the work of God.
Christian theism seemed to be contradicted by the
Newtonian system, because the world, according to
the system, was functioning automatically without
external interference. Deism was a response to

Newton's deterministic physics. The deists maintained
that if God exists, he must have created the world
and then left it to function according to the
natural laws which Newton had formulated. Laplace
did not find any use of 'the God hypothesis'.[7]
Charles Darwin and his friend Thomas Huxley, on the
other hand, maintained an agnostic view with regard
to the existence of God, on the ground that they
had no empirical evidence to conform or refute
the Christian doctrine of God's existence.[8]
Although some people chose to reject theism during
the heyday of determinism and empiricism, others
believed that empirical science confirmed rather
than refuted Christian theism. For example, the
Anglican archbishop Frederick Temple took this
view in the middle of the controversy between
Christian theists and the advocates of Darwin's
theory of evolution.[9]

Albert Einstein's theory of relativity has
posed a new challenge to classical Christian
theism. If nothing is fixed as Newton had thought,
how can the doctrine of God as creator and sustainer
of the world continue to be maintained? If things
in the world happen by chance, how can Christian
theists continue to maintain that God is eternally
in control of the universe? Again, most Christian
theists have remained faithful to the affirmations
of classical Christian doctrine, although many of

them have adopted a revised world-view on the basis
of new empirical scientific discoveries.[10]

It can be concluded, therefore, that logic
and mathematics help in the clarifying and questin-
ing of old concepts, and also in the formulation
of new ones. Interestingly, many logicians and
mathematicians have taken keen interest in philo-
sophy, and some of them made great contributions
in both philosophy and empirical science.[11]

The stipulative mode of thought and expression,
including philosophy, logic and mathematics,
serves both the Arts and the Sciences. They
criticize concepts which are presupposed and promoted
by all disciplines. By so doing, they contribute
to the discovery of new perspectives and also in
the invention of new concepts which become useful
in the development of human thought.[12] Thus this
mode of thought and expression is indispensable
in all discourse. Without agreed procedures of
argumentation it would be impossible to arrive at
consistent conclusions.

THE ASSESSIVE MODE

The term 'Assessive' has been used in this study for lack of a more definitive one. In ordinary talk we do not only refer to things in terms of our empirical perception of them, but also in terms of the 'values' which we attach to those things. Competence in a language includes the skill to appreciate expressions which articulate values rather than empirical descriptions. The stipulative mode of thought and expression as discussed in the preceding section, provides conceptual schemes in which meaningful discussion can be conducted while discussants frequently shift their frames of reference from one mode to another. It is difficult to conduct a conversation of any length, which is restricted to only one mode of thought and expression. Thus all discourse includes value judgements.

A piece of discourse is 'empirical' if empirical propositions are dominant, and it is 'stipulative' if stipulative considerations are its main concern. If a piece of discourse is dominated by value judgements,[13] then it can be categorized as 'assessive'. The term 'Assessive' has been preferred to 'Valuative' because of the loaded connotations which 'Valuation' carries — in both ethics, physics as well as in economics. Thus

in the theory proposed here, the assessive mode of thought and expression is that in which we articulate our own subjective assessment of phenomena.[14]

When an artist creates a work of art (as a creative writer, a poet, a sculptor, a painter, a musician, and so on), he takes for granted his empirical perception of the subject of his work, but he transcends this perception in order to articulate his own subjective _impression_ of the object. This impression may not reproduce all the empirical details of the object according to scale, because the main interest of the artist is to highlight those aspects which strike him as most significant. The artist also allows his _emotional response_ to the object of his work, to enter into his artistic presentation. This does not mean that the artist's work is always sentimental - artists are often very serious in their work. Artistic works have standard criteria of judgement. We may agree about good poetry, but may be unable to say with precision why it is good poetry.

Whereas the empirical mode demands an accurate, proportional and objective presentation of empirical details, the artist is not restricted by such a rule.[15] Thus an architect has to draw the plans of a proposed building according to scale, but the artist's impression of the same building

does not have to be in scale, for he draws his impression according to the perspective, distance and direction from which he views the proposed building. The artist expresses an aesthetic appreciation of the object of his artistic work, and hopes to evoke the same aesthetic appreciation on those who come into contact with his work.

Both religion and the creative arts (such as poetry, music, painting, sculpture, and so on) are involvements which require the subjective participation of those who make their assessive responses. In religion, the believer compounds his total evaluation of phenomena, and expresses his subjective inference arising from this compounded evaluation.

Religious dogma and aesthetic judgements are not open to critical debate in the same way that philosophical theories are. They may be reinterpreted, but not debated. For example, an artist's belief that the world is ultimately good, is as dogmatic as a religious believer's doctrine that the world originated from God. Both religion and the creative arts employ figurative, rather than direct language. A poet, for example, uses words to convey his message in an indirect way, and linguistic convention allows for this kind of expression. Consider the following poem by Chinua Achebe, for instance:

A son's arrival
is the crescent moon
too new too soon to lodge
the man's returning. His
feast of re-incarnation
must await the moon's
ripening at the naming
ceremony of his
grandson.[16]

In this poem the identification of the birth
of a male baby with the arrival of the new moon,
evokes several emotions which prepare the reader
so that he appreciates the impact of the 'generation-
gap' between the young and the old in African
society. The sentiments expressed in the poem are
culturally conditioned, in the sense that the full
impact of the poem is much more appreciable to those
who understand and participate in the naming of new-
born babies after their relatives of an older
generation. Viewing the poem from the perspective
of the ordinary use of verbal language, it would be
a misunderstanding to identify a new-born baby with
the new moon.

Similar figurative use of verbal language
can be observed in religion. Consider, for
example, the opening few sentenses of the account
of creation in the book of Genesis:

In the beginning God created the heavens
and the earth.
The earth was without form and void, and
darkness was upon the face of the deep;
and the spirit of God was moving over the face
of the waters.
And God said, "Let there be light";
and there was light.
And God saw that the light was good;
and God separated the light from the darkness.
God called the light Day,
and the darkness he called Night.
And there was evening and there was morning,
one day.[17]

Though this quotation might appear like a
historical (or scientific) account of how the
universe originated, it is an 'assessive' expression
of its writer's affirmation, that the universe owes
its origin to a source (or power) beyond itself.
The word 'God' stands for this extra-mundane power.[18]
It would be erroneous to dismiss Achebe's poem as
meaningless, merely because literally, a new-born
baby is not a new moon. Likewise, it would be a
misunderstanding to treat the account of creation
as an alternative scientific hypothesis to the
theory of evolution.

Thus the assessive mode of thought and expres-
sion is that mode which allows for our subjective and
emotional response to phenomena. At the same time,
the empirical mode allows us to use language in a

more direct and objective way, expressing the
empirical details received through our sense-
experience as accurately as possible. The stipula-
tive mode regulates the use of language in general,
and fixes the limits of meaningful expression.

It can be concluded, therefore, that each of
the three modes of thought and expression as
discussed above, has a significant contribution to
make in human discourse. Meaning in any piece of
discourse must be discerned with full consideration
of the modes that are in operation, as well as the
assumptions underlying the argument. The previous
chapter discussed assumptions and also the factors
that influence the discernment of meaning in
discourse. However, before bringing this chapter
to a close it is worthwhile to show how the theory
postulated in the preceding section might be applied,
and some philosophical implications of such an
application.

It is possible to conduct discourse pre-
supposing any of the three modes, but it is
impossible to conduct such discourse without
reference to the other two modes. In general,
empirical science presupposes the 'empirical' mode.
Most philosophical reflection is 'stipulative'.
The 'assessive' mode is predominant in religion,
morality and aesthetics.

AN APPLICATION OF THE MODAL THEORY

While accepting the risk of over-generali-
zation, it can be argued that one mode of thought
and expression may be more common in one
cultural situation than in others.[19] It appears,
for instance, that in the western intellectual tradi-
tion the three modes discussed in this chapter have
claimed dominance in historical succession,
especially since the beginning of modern western
philosophy. Until the end of the Middle Ages, the
'Assessive Mode' was prevalent. All discourse was
censured by authorities of the Catholic Church, and
thinkers were expected to express ideas which
conformed to established doctrines of the Church.
Any thinkers who did not conform to those doctrines
were persecuted on the ground that they were antago-
nistic to the Church which claimed to have the
divine right to set the pace for all epistemological
enquiry. Thinkers like Abelard, Anselm and Thomas
Quinas articulated their ideas within this intel-
lectual climate.[20]

The Renaissance challenged the Church's
monopoly of knowledge. Francis Bacon, for example,
maintained that rational reflection must be set
free from the censorship of ecclesiastical
authority. Natural theology, in his view, was not

rational enough because it was restricted by doctrinal presuppositions which scholastic thought was not allowed to question.[21] Thus the arguments of Thomas Aquinas for the existence of God were considered inconsistent by the rationalist philosophers of the Renaissance. David Hume was particularly critical of natural theology, and built his sceptical philosophy of religion on the challenges of earlier rationalists such as Francis Bacon.[22] By the middle of the seventeenth century, rationalism had replaced natural theology as the dominant intellectual approach among leading thinkers in Europe.

The liberation of intellectual enquiry from the dogma of the Catholic Church facilitated the rise of modern empirical science. Pioneers of modern scientific research, such as Galileo, Kepler, Copernicus and Isaac Newton, were regarded by Church authorities as a threat to Christian doctrine, because their investigations seemed to dislodge the dogma which were believed to be revealed truths. Galileo was imprisoned for his scientific research, and forbidden to teach his discoveries. Martin Luther, the reformer, considered Copernicus to be a fool because of publishing his discovery that the earth revolved round the sun. Luther believed that the geocentric world-view was a revealed

truth.[23]

As the discoveries of modern empirical science
became more widely accepted even within the Church,
rationalism was gradually replaced by empiricism
as the respectable approach to human knowledge.
John Locke was a pioneer of the empiricist trend
in modern western philosophy.[24] However, it was
Isaac Newton who made empirical science, especially
physics, a respectable discipline among the intelli-
gentsia. This was especially so in England. He
published his _Principia_ in 1687, was a member of
Parliament for Cambridge in 1688, and president of
the Royal Society from 1705 until his death in 1727.
He was honoured with knighthood in 1705 for his
scientific work. Newtonian physics dominated modern
scientific research until it was recently challenged
by the scientific relativism of the twentieth
century.[25]

One of the significant consequences of this
historical sequence, has been that theology,
philosophy and empirical science evolved as
separate disciplines, each claiming its own indepe-
ndent authority and its own procedures of establi-
shing epistemological validity. Towards the end
of the nineteenth century and at the beginning of
the twentieth, secularism was widely publicized,

with the result that many people felt confident
that empirical science and technology could ensure
the future 'progress' of humankind. The two world
wars in the twentieth century have shattered this
dream in the minds of many people. Paul Tillich
made this point emphatically in his book The Shaking
of the Foundations.[26] This change of attitude
arose particularly because of the realization that
scientific research and the technology related to
it, can be utilized for both destructive and
constructive purposes. The decision as to how
empirical science and modern technology should be
used, is primarily an ethical matter. Yet, ironi-
cally, empirical science has tended to exclude
ethical considerations from its declared presupposi-
tions. The Massachusettes Conference on 'Faith,
Science and the Future', held in July 1979, was
convened in an endeavour to bring theologians,
empirical scientists and philosophers into consulta-
tion, in order to discuss and recommend common
strategies for the constructive future of humankind.[27]
Since the second world war the need for such consulta-
tion has been felt in the west. Nevertheless, the
isolation between these three major disciplines
(theology, philosophy and empirical science) remains
unbroken. It is doubtful that a common approach

to human problems can be agreed upon, as long as experts continue to regard each of these disciplines as epistemologically self-sufficient.

The African intellectual tradition has approached the concern for knowledge comprehensively, not in a compartmentalized way as observed in the western tradition.[28] The three modes of thought and expression have been maintained in integration, not in isolation. Thus epistemic enquiry has not diverged into distinct disciplines, although in every traditional African community there have been specialists in various skills such as iron-mongery, pottery, healing and so on. This inte-grated approach has in practice meant that religion, philosophical reflection, empirical observation and traditional technology have been utilized in an inter-related and inter-active way. [Religious beliefs and moral values have influenced]Religious beliefs and moral values have influenced philoso-phical ideas as well as the designing and utilization of technology. Thus traditional African society has not experienced an ethical crisis such as that faced in the west as a result of conflicts between religion, philosophy, empirical science and western modern technology.[29]

It can be convincingly argued that this integrated approach has had both disadvantages and advantages. Negatively, the approach has been

detrimental to technological and philosophical
innovation. Empirical research, which is the founda-
tion of modern advanced technology. was not given
the chance to develop freely without the censorship
of religious beliefs. Philosophical innovativeness
has also been traditionally curbed by taboos on
various subjects which were considered closed to
free discussion. It is interesting to note, for
example, that the existence or non-existence of God
has not been a live issue in traditional African
thought. God's existence has traditionally been
taken for granted. Inventive thinkers in tradi-
tional African society have not found it necessary
or desirable to assert independence from religious
and moral censorship. Generally, innovation in
any of the three main aspects of knowledge has been
greatly handicapped by the censure which each mode
of thought and expression has imposed on the other
two. Hence the relative lack of innovativeness in
traditional African society may be attributed to
the self-censorship which is inherent in the tradi-
tional African approach to human knowledge, with
its integrated emphasis.[30]

Nevertheless, it can be argued also that this
integrated approach to knowledge has the positive
value of checking against irrelevance in epistemic
enquiry. Any involvement of the intellect in

matters which did not have direct and practical
usefulness in the life of the traditional African
community would be condemned. Thus the apparent
weakness of the traditional African approach, as
discussed above, has a positive aspect to it.
Although innovation was severely restricted, this
restriction ensured that only 'appropriate knowledge'
and 'appropriate technology' were permitted.[31]
Creative people were not allowed to venture into
technological and speculative projects which were
considered potentially dangerous to the welfare of
the community.

The integrated approach to knowledge, which
has been presupposed in traditional African society,
can contribute positively towards correction of
the epistemic compartmentalization which has been
exported to contemporary African from the west.
No mode of thought and expression, and no compart-
mentalized academic discipline can yield comprehen-
sive knowledge about phenomena in which we experience
our complicated existence. Therefore, an integrated
epistemic approach is desirable, whereby each of
the three modes will be appreciated as contributing
partly, towards greater human understanding. Such
an approach is more likely to overcome problems of
meaning in discourse.

REFERENCE NOTES

CHAPTER TWO

1a. See Wittgenstein, <u>Philosophical Investigations</u>, Oxford: Blackwell, 1968, para, 2,8,19,21 and 23.

1b. Concerning the traditional Gikuyu attitudes towards Mt. Kenya, see J. Kenyatta, <u>Facing Mount Kenya</u>, London: Secker and Warburg, 1938.

2. Antony Flew and Alisdair MacIntyre, eds., <u>New Essays in Philosophical Theology</u>, London: SCM Press, 1955. The story of the 'Invisible Gardener' was first articulated by John Wisdom in his eassay entitled 'Gods', in 1944, which was reprinted in his book <u>Philosophy and Psychoanalysis</u>, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1953. That essay stimulated much philosophical discussion in Britain. Originally, it was published in <u>Proceedings of the Aristotelean Society</u>, 1944-5, then reprinted as Ch. X of <u>Logic and Language</u>, Vol. I, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1951.

3. H.D. Lewis, <u>op.cit</u>., p. 81.

4. See note 1a above.

5. A story that was recently told to me may illustrate this point: A Christian evangelist met a policeman at a street junction. He asked the policeman: 'Have

you found Jesus?' The policeman replied: 'I did not know he was lost! The evangelist and the policeman were not thinking of a common issue, even though 'finding Jesus' was a common expression in their short conversation.

6. On this point see W.W. Sawyer, Prelude to Mathematics, Penguin Books, 1955.

7. I.T. Ramsay, Religion and Science: Conflict and Synthesis, London: SPCK, 1964, pp. 2-3.

8. Concerning the views of Charles Darwin and Thomas Huxley see William Irvin, Apes, Angels and Victorians: A Joint Biography of Darwin and Huxley, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1956.

9. W. Irvin, op.cit. See also E.O. James, Christianity and Other Religions, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1968, pp. 15-23; Colin Brown, Philosophy and the Christian Faith, London: Tyndale Press, 1968, 3rd American Printing by Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1978, pp. 147-50; B. Russell, History of Western Philosphy, London: Allen and Unwin, 1946, 2nd ed. 1961, pp. 520-21.

10. For a lucid presentation of Einstein's thought see B. Russell, ABC of Relativity, London: Allen and Unwin, 3rd ed. 1969.

11. For example, B. Russell, A.N. Whitehead,
G.E. Moore, G. Frege, L. Wittgenstein, K. Wiredu.

12. W.W. Sawyer, Prelude to Mathematics, op.cit.
I have found this book interesting and helpful on
this point.

13. The term 'value judgement' in this context
and elsewhere in the present study is used for lack
of a better term. It is not intended to suggest
sentimentality.

14. I am aware that some contemporary philosophers
have adopted the fourfold categorization of proposi-
tions - 'empirical', 'analytical', 'value', and
'metaphysical' (see F. Vivian, op.cit., pp. 19-30)
However, this categorization can be misleading,
because it tends to place limitations on the subjects
about which the four types of statements can be made.
In the present study it is argued that empirical,
stipulative and assessive prepositions can be made
on any subject, depending on the mode of thought
and expression which the speaker presupposes.

15. This explanation may appear to be an over-
simplification of creativity in art. However, it
seems to me that a work of art is very much a personal
response to reality as the artist experiences it.

I use the terms 'subjective assessment' and 'emotional response' positively, not in a derogatory sense. Some readers may disagree with my summary or artistic creativity. I admit that this issue is open to a variety of explanations. What I have presente in this section is my view of how artistic works are produced.

16. In Chinua Achebe, <u>Beware Soul Brother</u>, London: Heinemann African Writers Series No. 120, 1972, p. 32. It is clear that this poem is not mere expression of emotion. However, it is significant that the poet found the birth of a male child a subject worth writing about, linking it with the arrival of a new moon. Another poet might write about the same subject, and associate the birth of a child with some other phenomenon in nature.

17. Genesis 1:1-5 (RSV).

18. Although 'God' stands for the 'Creator', the writer of this account does not stop to stipulate how we should understand the message contained in the story of creation. It is the theologian who has to deal with the task of interpretation - heremeneutics. Thus theology may be stipulative in as far as it outlines how religious expressions should be interpreted. Inevitably there may be many 'theologies', just as there are many 'philosophies', depending on the interests and presuppositions of the respective

theologians and philosophers.

19. Auguste Comte held a similar view, but I do
not share with him the view that there are phases
in the development of human thought – the theological,
the metaphysical and the positive. In my view,
metaphysics and theology are not mutually exclusive,
and positivism itself is not free from metaphysical
presuppositions. For a discussion of Comte's view
see Wilhelm Windelband, A History of Philosophy,
Vol. II, New York: Harper and Row, 1958, pp. 650-53.

20. It is true that the question of authority in
the Church and the predominance of the 'assessive
mode' in the Middle Ages are two separate issues. ,
However, these issues are related, because the Church
endeavoured to impose its authority over the believers,
on matters which it would have been wiser for the
Church to allow free individual response.

21. For a discussion of Francis Bacon as a critic
of Scholastic thought see W. Windelband, op.cit.,
pp. 383-88.

22. See, for example, David Hume, Dialogues Concerning
Natural Religion, New York: Hafner Press, 17th
printing, 1975.

23. Bertrand Russell, _History of Western Philosophy_, London: Allen and Unwin, 1946, pp. 520-21. Also Arthur Koestler, _The Sleepwalkers: A History of Man's Changing View of the Universe_, Pelican Books, 1968, pp. 361-63.

24. B. Russell, _op.cit._

25. B. Russell, _op.cit._

26. Paul Tillich, _op.cit._

27. _Faith and Science in an Unjust World_ (2 volumes) Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1980.

28. It is interesting to note that in traditional Africa (south of the Sahara) there is no mysticism and no 'schools of thought' in the western sense of these terms. Epistemology as a discipline is unknown there, because the approach to the quest for knowledge is totally different from the approach in the west. It could be that the invention and use of writing in the western intellectual tradition contributed to the isolation of epistemological pursuits from the practical concerns of the societies of which the philosophers were an integral part. In traditional African society the sages would not see themselves in isolation from the aspirations of their communities. Rather, they had the responsibility to advise the

community on matters directly related to communal
needs and interests. For an introductory discussion
of traditional African life see J. Mugambi and
N. Kirima, The African Religious Heritage, Nairobi;
Oxford University Press, 1976, reprinted 1982.
For some insights into traditional African thought
see K. Wiredu, Philosophy and an African Culture,
Cambridge University Press, 1980.

29. In traditional African society, environmental
pollution was taken care of: ironmongers, potters,
and other specialists worked relatively far away
from the inhabited settlements. Though the societies
were small, this principle could be followed today.

30. From the perspective of traditional African
thought, this self-censorship may positively be
regarded as intellectual responsibility. However,
censorship seems to have been excessive, thereby
hampering innovative thought.

Contemporary western society seems to have adopted
the opposite extreme, where there seems to be too
much innovation, with the consequence that it is
difficult to know the best option while the Mass
Media advertise every innovation as though it were
the best.

31.　I use the term 'appropriate technology' to mean that technology which is designed and approved by the people themselves, in response to their own needs and interests. Inappropriate technology, in contrast, would be that which is imported, or designed by local people without relevance to the people's needs and interests. In this sense 'appropriate' implies relevance, determined by the people themselves and not by imported 'experts'.

CHAPTER THREE

THE PROBLEM OF DESCRIPTION

RUSSELL'S THEORY OF DESCRIPTION

In his *Problems of Philosophy*[1] Bertrand
Russell distinguished two types of knowledge -
knowledge by Acquaintance and knowledge by
Description. He writes:

> Knowledge of things, when it is of the
> kind we call knowledge by acquaintance, is
> essentially simpler than any knowledge of
> truths, and logically independent of knowledge
> of truths, though it would be rash to assume
> that human beings ever, in fact, have
> acquaintance with things without at the same
> time knowing some truth about them. Knowledge
> of things by description, on the contrary,
> always involves...some knowledge of truths
> as its source and ground.[2]

It would be worthwhile to quote Russell to
show what he means by acquaintance and description.
On the former he explains as follows:

> We shall say that we have acquaintance
> with anything of which we are directly aware,
> without the intermediary process of inference
> or any knowledge of truths. Thus in the
> presence of my table I am acquainted with the

sense-data that make up the appearance
of my table - its colour, shape, hardness,
smoothness, etc.;   all these are things of
which I am immediately conscious when I am
seeing and touching my table. The particular
shade of colour that I am seeing may have many
things said about it - I may say that it is
brown, that it is dark, and so on. But such
statements, though they make me know truths
about the colour, do not make me know the
colour itself any better than I did before:
so far as concerns knowledge of the colour
itself, as opposed to knowledge of truths
about it, I know the colour perfectly and
completely when I see it, and no further
knowledge of it itself is even theoretically
possible. Thus the sense-data which make up
the appearance of my table are things with
which I have acquaintance, things immediately
known to me just as they are.[3]

Russell goes on to explain that knowledge of
the table as a physical object, on the contrary is
not directly knowledge "...it is obtained through
acquaintance with the sense-data that make up the
appearance of the table". It is possible, without
absurdity, to doubt whether there is a table at all,
whereas it is not possible to doubt the sense-data.
Knowledge of the table as a physical object is what
Russell calls knowledge by description. The table
is "the physical object which causes such-and-such
sense-data". The table is described by means of

sense-data.

Memory and introspection, Russell adds, are extensions beyond sense-data and enable us to recall past experiences as well as the experiences of other people. The knowledge we have through memory and introspection is knowledge by acquaintance.

Knowledge by acquaintance also includes our awareness of universals - general ideas such as whiteness, diversity, brotherhood and general principles such as induction, contradiction, identity and so on. Such knowledge cannot be described - it can only be 'shown'. In contrast, however, knowledge by description is based on truths which we discern about our sense-data from that which we intend to describe.

According to Russell, the fundamental principle in the analysis of prepositions containing descriptions is: "Every proposition which we can understand must be composed wholly of constituents with which we are acquainted."[4]

Russell concludes his discussion of description and acquaintance as follows:

> The chief importance of knowledge by
> description is that it enables us to pass
> beyond the limits of our private experience.
> In spite of the fact that we can only know
> truths which are wholly composed of terms which
> we have experienced in acquaintance, we can
> yet have knowledge by description of things

which we have never experienced. In view of
the very narrow range of our immediate experience,
this result is vital, and until it is under-
stood, much of our knowledge must remain
mysterious and therefore doubtful.[5]

This observation by Russell leads to the
concern of this chapter: Is it possible to express
descriptive knowledge about religious concepts
clearly, in such a way that there is neither vague-
ness nor ambiguity? It will be shown that this is
very difficult, because key religious terms, such as
God, are used in diverse ways. Before discussing
the problem of describing 'God' (as an illustrative
example), it is worthwhile to examine the meaning
of 'vagueness' and 'ambiguity'.

AMBIGUITY AND VAGUENESS

Robert G. Olsen in his book Meaning and
Argument[6] has presented a useful summary of the
difference between ambiguity and vagueness. The
present section will be based on Olsen's work.

A term is ambiguous if it has more than one
meaning. In one of the dialogues between Socrates
and Meno as reported by Plato, Meno argues that a
man cannot inquire either about that which he knows,
or about that which he does not know. If he knows,

he has no need to inquire. If he does not know he
cannot inquire because he does not know the very
subject about which he is to inquire.' This argument,
known as Meno's dilemma, seems unconvincing, because
if accepted it would imply that there is no point
in inquiring about anything. The difficulty in the
argument is that the verb 'to know" is used in two
different ways. In one sense, 'to know' means to
recognize or identify. This is the common, ordinary
usage of the verb. In another sense, to know
something means "to give a formal definition of the
word used to refer to it, enumerating explicitly
a set of properties that belongs to all objects of
this kind and that distinguishes them from others".
The verb 'to know' may be used in other senses also.
In the Old Testament, for example, the verb is used
to mean sexual intercourse for the purposes of
procreation - "Adam knew Eve his wife, and she
conceived and bore Cain..." (Genesis 4:1 RSV).

A statement which contains an ambiguous term
will often be entirely true if one of the meanings
of that term is intended, but entirely false if a
second meaning is contrued. To avoid misunderstand-
ings in discourse, therefore, it is necessary to
specify what someone intends to mean, so as to give
guidance to those whom he addresses.

Ambiguity and vagueness are related concepts, but they are distinct from each other. A _vague_ term refers to a range of phenomena without exact boundaries. Consider for example, the expressions 'bald man' and 'tall man'. If a man has no hair on his head, he is clearly bald. If he is more than six foot in height, he is clearly tall. What if he has a hairless patch and hary fringes on his head? What if he is five foot and ten inches? Some people would say that in the latter case such a man is not fully bald, and not very tall.

A statement containing a vague term is often difficult to categorize as completely true or completely false. In many instances it will be partly true and partly false, because of the lack of limits to determine the exact meaning of the vague term.

Many words are both _ambiguous_ and _vague_, even though ambiguity and vagueness are independent properties of words.

The word 'democracy' is an example. This term is ambiguous because many different systems of government are designated by it. The term is also vague, because given one form of government which is designated as democratic, there is a wide range of guarantees which the system presupposes, but there are no exact rules to determine which, or how many which, or how many, of those guarantees must be present for the system to be called democratic.

In religious discourse meaning is often obscured because of using vague and ambiguous terms. The endeavour to describe key religious terms with clarity is challenging not only because of the observations made by Russell concerning description and acquaintance, but also because of the difficulty of avoiding ambiguity and vagueness. This will be illustrated by examining the concept of 'God' in the following section.

DESCRIBING GOD

Consensus regarding the precise meaning of the English word 'God' is difficult to attain. It is even more difficult to identify the meaning of translations of this word into other languages, as will be shown in this section. Often in theological discourse there is a tendency to take the meaning of this word for granted, only to discover later that those involved have assumed a wide variety of divergent views with regard to what 'God' signifies. Such divergence leads to the failure to attain conceptual consensus.

The writer of the first chapter of the gospel according to St. John in the New Testament recognized the problem of describing 'God' especially in the context of a wide variety of philosophical and theological traditions. He therefore introduced his presentation of the life of Jesus with an endeavour to bridge the conceptual gap between Judaic theology, Christian faith and the Hellenistic philosophy which explained ultimate reality in terms of Logos. It is worthwhile to ask the question.

whether he succeeded in this task. He identified Logos with YHWH and by doing so, gave Logos a theomorphic designation which was alien to the Greek meaning of Logos. Moreover, he further identified YHWH with Jesus, whom the Christian faith was presenting as the incarnation of YHWH.[8]

When this text was translated into English, the philosophical and theological background of its writer's concern was lost:

> In the beginning was the Word, the the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it...The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world knew him not. He came to his own home, and his own people received him not. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave the power to become children of God; who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father... (John 1:1-14, RSV).[9]

Analysed philosophically, this text is riddled
with problems if we try to discern meaning from it.
Yet its writer thought he was clarifying the concept
of God through it. However, as Okot p'Bitek has
observed, the English translation makes it concep-
tually unintelligible, and the Acoli translation is
even worse. Here it is unnecessary to embark on
an exhaustive philosophical analysis of that text,
or even an extended commentary of Okot p'Bitek's
presentation of Acoli religious beliefs.[10] Let it
suffice to point out that the text quoted above
does not make sense when it is considered out of
the context in which it was originally written - its
writer suggests that: (a) Logos was the principle
that explained ultimate reality, (b) Judaic theism
challenged that principle (as well as the numerous
mystic beliefs prevalent in the Mediterranean region
at that time) and proposed, instead, the doctrine
that YHWH was the creator and sustainer of the
universe and of history, and (c) Christians were
convinced that they had received from Jesus new
enlightenment which superseded the Hellenistic
philosophies, Judaic theism and the mystery religions
followed by many people in the Roman empire of that
time. It was this conviction which gave Christian
apostles (like Paul and the writer of the text
quoted above) the audacity to preach their new

doctrine calling it the 'Good News'.[11]

It is impossible to translate that particular text into any language without losing the original impact of the message that the writer intended to convey. Indeed, even its English translation is meaningless to someone unacquainted with the Hellenistic philosophies of the first century. The identification of YHWH with _Logos_ may have served a useful evangelical purpose, but it is doubtful that those hellenized Jews who engaged in this exercise offered a more lucid philosophical definition of God. Paul, for example, claimed that the Greeks in Athens worshipped the 'Unknown God' whom the Christians claimed to know. We may cite Paul's address to the Athenians and assess whether his presentation of God was clearer than that of the learned and religious Greeks whom he challenged:

> 'Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along, and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, "To an unknown god." What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.
> 'The God who made the world and every-thing in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by man, nor is

he served by human hands, as though he needed
anything, since he himself gives to all men
life and breadth and everything. And he made
from one every nation of men to live on all
the face of the earth, having determined
alloted periods and the boundaries of their
habitation, that they should seek God, in
the hope that they might feel after him and
find him. Yet he is not far from each one
of us, for "In him we live and move and have
our being"; as even some of your poets have
said, "For we are indeed his offspring."

    'Being then God's offspring, we ought
not to think that the Deity is like gold,
or silver, or stone, a representation by the
art and imagination of man. The times of
ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands
all men everywhere to repent, because he has
fixed a day on which he will judge the world
in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed,
and of this he has given assurance to all
men by raising him from the dead.'[12]

    Paul's address did not advance beyond the
claim that Jesus was appointed by God. The apostle
did not 'prove' that Christians like himself knew
God better than those Greeks who worshipped the
'Unknown god'. Even if Paul's hearers had accepted
that Jesus was God's special envoy, this acceptance
would not necessarily imply better knowledge of God.
Moreover, Paul identified the 'Unknown god' of the
Athenians with the God of whom Jesus was the special

envoy. For Paul, the resurrection of Jesus was the assurance that indeed Jesus was appointed by God. This argument is not conclusive, as will be shown below.

Suppose a stranger visits a community and he claims to have been sent by God. Suppose, further, that in order to 'prove' his claim he conducts activities which the members of that community do not understand. Would those activities constitute a conclusive 'proof' that the stranger was God's messanger? When colonial authorities came to Africa, they claimed to have been sent by their emperor. Their Christian missionary counterparts claimed to have been sent by God. In practice, what was the difference between the two groups? The colonial authorities justified their claim more strongly than the missionaries, when they displayed spectacular military power especially with the use of guns which African peoples had not seen before. The African victims of colonial invasion were finally 'convinced' by the colonisers' claim, when the colonial authorities demonstrated the 'universal' presence of their emperor by forcing Africans to become subjects of the distant king or queen. Christian missionaries could not demonstrate the universal presence of their God in the same practical way, although some of them considered

colonial conquest of Africans by european powers to
be the work of God.[13] What, then, was the difference
between the invisible God who allegedly sent the
missionaries, and the distant emperor who set
the colonial authorities? Given the failure of
Christian missionaries to justify their claim to
have been sent by their God to Africa, and given
the cultural homogeneity displayed by missionaries,
colonial authorities, merchants and settlers, it
is understandable that many Africans considered
Christian missionaries from Europe to be agents of
the same distant emperor who had sent the colonial
authorities and the settlers. How could this African
interpretation of the missionary enterprise be
corrected? In practice, the missionaries largely
failed to show that they were different.

African peoples traditionally believed that
God (known by various African proper names) was
the originator and sustainer of the universe. They
believed that God was on their side. Who was this
other god who allegedly had sent the Christian
missionaries to preach against the cultural and
religious heritage of Africans, to undermine their
dignity and freedom? The conflict between traditional
African theology and the Christian missionary
enterprise led to the widely held view among
Africans, that there was no difference between a

European missionary and any other European invader on African soil. For if the missionaries had been sent by God, they would have championed the interests of Africans rather than those of the invading powers.

The foregoing illustration leads to a further philosophical question: Was the God whom the Christian missionaries worshipped and proclaimed the same as the one in whom African peoples believed? In the case of the apostolic period in the Graeco-Roman world, missionaries like Paul maintained that the 'Unknown god' of Greek worship was the same God who had sent Jesus. However, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries under the influence of social evolutionism, Christian missionaries to Africa believed that African peoples were so 'primitive' that they had not yet evolved from animism through polytheism to monotheism.[14] By the end of the first quarter of the twentieth century some missionaries like Edwin Smith were realising that this kind of interpretation of the African religious heritage could not help them to justify their missionary and colonial propaganda. So they conceded that indeed Africans believed in God, but this God was deistically conceived in traditional African thought. They thus projected deism into the traditional African understanding

of God.[15] The evangelical motive for depicting the African religious heritage deistically, was to show that the traditional African understanding of God was deficient in emphasising God's transcendence rather than immanence, and also to explain what they considered to be moral depravity in traditional African society. Christianity was therefore being introduced, so they argued, in order to teach Africans that God was immanent and expected moral righteousness as defined by missionary external piety.[16]

This warped rationalization of the modern missionary enterprise lasted throughout most of the colonial period in the twentieth century, and has been maintained by many western missionaries in post-colonial Africa. Several African scholars including J.S. Mbiti, E.B. Idowu, S.G. Kibicho and others have refuted the missionary view that the traditional African understanding of God is deistic.[17] On the basis of their own ethnographical research, they have shown that missionary anthropologists have been mistaken in their missionary interpretation of the African religious heritage.

In this section our main interest is not to echo the criticisms of African scholars against missionary anthropology, although those criticisms are valid. Rather, our main concern is to examine

the philosophical implications of this anthropology
for the notion of God in particular, and for
religious beliefs in general. If God is the creator
of the universe and the sustainer of history as is
claimed in Judaism, Christianity and Islam, then   ,
God must be the creator of Africa and sustainer of
African history — as well as the creator of the
rest of the universe and sustainer of other
histories. It follows, also, that the theological
theory of 'General' and 'Special' revelation is
inconsistent with this view of God. Yet many
theologians even today maintain the doctrine of
the universal providence of God and also, with
self-contridiction, subscribe to the theory of
'General' and 'Special' revelation.[18]

It is philosophically and theologically
inconsistent to maintain that God is the creator
and the director of all human history and also,
that some peoples are outside that history which
God directs. Ironically, both Christianity and
Islam accept ancient Hebrew history as the manife-
station of God's special revelation to humankind,
but at the same time these religions re-interpret
that history in ways that are unacceptable to
Judaism. If western culture and the western strands
of Christianity were judged from the perspectives
of other cultural and religious traditions, they

would certainly be found wanting. It would be interesting and worthwhile, for instance, to judge western Christendom from the perspective of African historical experience. Why should the western cultural, intellectual and religious tradition be the standard by which all other traditions are measured? There is no philosophical justification for the prevalent situation in the contemporary world, whereby the western tradition is the point of reference for discourse on any issue.

So far this chapter has endeavoured to show that it is difficult to attach straightforward meaning to the term 'God' and its translations in various languages. The problem arises partly because of the diversity of cultural, philosophical and religious traditions, and partly because religious discourse cannot be conducted effectively within the empirical mode of thought and expression in which meaning is discerned through the verification principle. To regard 'God' merely as a material entity expressible in direct empirical categories will inevitably lead to misunderstandings. This is the shortcoming of anthropomorphism in theology. But how else can the term 'God' be used in discourse? This question leads to another concern of this chapter: It is worthwhile to ask

what kind of entity 'God' stands for. If that term
does not stand for an entity, then what kind of a
word is it in grammar? Is it a proper noun, a
descriptive term, or something else?[19]

One of the most significant problems in
theology is that the term 'God' seems not to
represent a distinct concept.[20] Take Christian
theology for example. Christian doctrines about
God are obscure and often contradictory. 'God'
is affirmed to be 'Spirit' and also 'Person'.
What does this mean? It might appear, according
to these affirmations, that the essential nature
of human persons is 'spiritual' rather than
'material'. Yet modern empirical science cannot
confirm that this is so. Spiritualists and
materialists cannot agree over this point, since
their initial assumptions are diametrically opposed.
The Christian doctrine of the Trinity is a further
illustration. That doctrine affirms the unity as
well as the plurality of 'God'. Is God one or many?
Some Christian theologians evade this question by
suggesting that the Trinity is a mystery. Never-
theless, from a philosophical point of view it is
desirable for believers to be conceptually clear
about what they believe. One of the points of
disagreement between Christian and Islamic theologies,
concerns the doctrines of the Trinity and divine

incarnation. Among Christian theologians, the vagueness of these doctrines has never been conclusively clarified.

The doctrine of divine incarnation in Christianity affirms that 'God' who is eternal and supernatural has manifested himself fully in one historical person, Jesus. How can the supernatural become natural? Again, Christian theology demands that this doctrine be accepted dogmatically as an article of faith.[21] Another problematic doctrine is that which affirms both predestination and free-will. It seems impossible to accept this doctrine wholly without being involved in self-contradiction. Moreover, 'God' is not only accorded anthropomorphic attributes - Christian theology presents God as a male 'person'. What does it mean to say that 'we are the children of God'? The problem of describing God begins as soon as theologians attempt formulating a description.

Earlier in this chapter it has been shown that our description of the material aspect of reality relies upon our perception...if our senses deceive us, we err in the descriptions we offer. Description of the non-material aspects of reality is even more difficult, because these aspects are not open to objective empirical verification. Therefore, the human efforts to describe God are

doubly problematic - mysticism seems to be an easy
escape from this problem because mystics cannot be
objectively proved right or wrong in their alleged
experience of God. At the same time, when the
various religions in the world claim to proclaim
God's revelation to humankind and antagonise each
other, there is no standard criterion by which
their doctrines can be proved right or wrong.
The appeal of empiricism in the twentieth century
has depended upon its positivistic claim to provide
objective criteria for determining valid knowledge
and distinguishing it from 'pseudo-knowledge'.
However, as this chapter has shown, the problem
of description is not that simple. Another theory
must be sought which would accommodate the validity
of both the empiricist and the religious claims
in discourse. The theory proposed earlier in this
study can provide such accommodation.

REFERENCE NOTES

CHAPTER THREE

1. Bertrand Russell, The Problems of Philosophy, London: Allen and Unwin, 1912; Quotations from Oxford University Press, paperback edition, 1959, reprinted 1971, pp. 25-32.

2. op.cit., p. 25.

3. ibid., p. 25.

4. ibid., p. 32.

5. ibid., p. 32.

6. Robert G. Olsen, Meaning and Argument, New York: Harcourt Brace and World, 1969, Part I, pp. 5-15; 37-52.

7. Plato's Meno, New York: The Liberal Arts Press, 1949, p. 36.

8. On the Hellenistic sources of Christian doctrinal theology see Rudolf Bultmann, Primitive Christianity in its Contemporary Setting, London: Collins Fontana, 1960. Also Paul Tillich, A History of Christian Thought, New York: Simon Schuster, 1967, 1968, pp. 1-133.

9. John 1:1-14 (RSV). The translation cf the Greek term Logos as 'Word' in English raises the question whether the original meaning is retained in the English translation. What is 'the Word?' It seems to me that Logos and 'the Word' are not semantic equivalents.

10. For Okot p'Bitek's views on this point see his African Religions in Western Scholarship, op.cit.; Religion of the Central Luo, Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1971.

11. It is owrthwhile to note that official Judaism never accepted the basic claims on which Christianity was built - e.g. that Jesus was the Messiah, and that Jesus was God Incarnate. See for example, Judah Halevi, The Kuzari, a famous book written by a Jew living in Spain during the 15th century; Max I. Dimont, Jews, God and History, New York: New American Library, 1964, The Indestructible Jews, New York: New American Library, 1971.

12. Paul's speech in Athens, Acts 17:16-34 (RSV).

13. See, for example, Hal Olsen, African Myths about Christianity, Kijabe, Kenya: AIC Publications, 1972, Also B. Delfgaauw, Twentieth Century Philosophy, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1969, p. 10.

14. For a brief ciritcism of this evolutionist view see J.S. Mbiti, <u>African Religions and Philosophy</u>, London: Heinemann, 1969, Introductory chapter. Also B. Idowu, <u>African Traditional Religion: A Definition</u>, London: SCM Press, 1973.

15. See Edwin Smith, <u>African Ideas of God</u>, London: Edinburgh House Press, 3rd ed. 1951. For a critique of this interpretation of African religious thought see B. Idowu, <u>op.cit.</u>, pp. 51-69, 140-72.

16. This approach was recently endorsed by M.J. McVeight, in his book <u>God in Africa: Conceptions of God in African Traditional Religion and Christianity</u>. Cape Cod: Claude Stark, 1974.

17. J.S. Mbiti, <u>Concepts of God in Africa</u>, London: SPCK, 1970: B. Idowu, <u>Oludumare: God in Yoruba Belief</u>, London: Longmans, 1962, <u>African Traditional Religion</u>. <u>op.cit.</u>; S.G. Kibicho, '<u>The Interaction of the Kikuyu</u> Concept of God, its Continuity into the Christian Era, and the Question it Raises for Revelation', Ph.D. Dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1972; 'The Interaction of the Kikuyu Concept of God with the Biblical Concept', in <u>Cahiers Religions Africaine</u>, Vol. II No. 4, June-July 1973.

18. In my view, the doctrine of 'Election' is the most prolbematic of all the doctrines proclaimed by Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Each of these religions claims to be God's chosen channel for proclaiming God's will for humankind. Which of these holds the true revelation? Is it likely that none of them is the chosen vehicle for divine interaction with humankind?

19. This question has been dealt with by Michael Durrant in his book The Logical Status of 'God' and the Function of Theological Sentences, London: Macmillan, 1973. His answer is that it is not possible to formulate a consistent scheme for mapping out the logical status of God in theological expressions. Each theologian formulates his own scheme, but all theological schemes are not consistent if they are taken as a whole. I am in agreement with this view.

20. M. Durrant, The Logical Status of 'God', op.cit.

21. Judaism rejects this Christological claim. See Judah Halevi, op.cit., Max I Dimont, op.cit. For Debate on this print see J. Hick, ed. The Myth of God Incarnate, London:SCM, 1977; M. Goulder, ed., Incarnation and Myth: The Debate Continued, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1979: Michael Green, ed. The Truth of God Incarnate, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1977.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE PROBLEM OF MORALITY

PRELIMINARY REMARKS

Man relies upon his own perception and experience to guide his understanding, and he interprets reality according to assumptions which cannot be derived merely from logic or empirical knowledge. To facilitate effective discourse it is necessary for the discussants to mutually appreciate each other's assumptions, so that their verbal expression may be accorded meaning with the framework of that mutual understanding.

The present chapter will deal with another problem of meaning in disciourse - the problem of morality. In the context of this study, morality is understood to be the matrix of principles and actions which generally regulate acceptable conduct of human individuals and groups within a given society, for the purpose of maintaining healthy relations among that society's members.[1]

In discourse, morality precipitates a major problem of meaning because it is difficult for people to establish consensus with regard to acceptable moral conduct. Universally acceptable moral values with their corresponding conduct are only gradually realized - both within a local community and in the world as a whole. Within history, moral values change, to the extent that what is acceptable in one historical period may become anathema in a later period. Moreover, between various human cultures there are divergences with regard to what is considered morally acceptable. This relativity generates almost insurmountable misunderstandings in discourse. A few illustrations will help to clarify this point.

It took many centuries for the world to reach the consensus that slavery and slave-trading are morally wrong. The triangular trade between Europe, Africa and America across the Atlantic Ocean was conducted for several centuries without any objection being raised officially by governments and churches, although the mainstay of that lucrative trade was the traffic in African slaves that were forcefully uprooted from their homes, chained and shipped for sale as cheap labour in the Caribbean and in the Americas. Christian

theology at that time did not find anything morally
wrong in slavery or in this trade. Both Augustine
and Thomas Aquinas considered slavery to be consis-
tent with Christian doctrine, and they rationalized
the practice as Aristotle had done in pre-Christian
Greece.[2] James Cone, a contemporary descendant
of those unfortunate victims of the Atlantic slave
trade and an articulate Christian theologian, has
convincingly shown that the Christian reformers
including Martin Luther, John Calvin and John
Wesley accepted the then prevalent view that slavery
was morally justifiable, and in this respect they
were as conservative as their theological
predecessors.[3]

It was not until the nineteenth century that
the campaign for the abolition of the Atlantic
slave trade gained momentum. Eric Williams, another
contemporary descendant of the slaves, has convin-
cingly argued that the campaign for the abolition
of the slave trade was motivated more by economic
interests than by Christian theological enlighten-
ment.[4] The Industrial Revolution in Europe produced
efficient machines which could replace the cheap
slave labour without loss of profits in the planta-
tions. The introduction of those machines would
reduce the risk of slave riots, thereby ensuring
greater profits both for the planters and the
industrialists across both shores of the Atlantic.

Theological rationalizations of the campaign against the slave trade followed, rather than preceded the initiatives of interested industrialists who claimed humanist philanthropy to be the moral drive of their campaign.[5] In East Africa, the slave trade was considered 'illegitimate' by European explorer-missionaries like David Livingstone. In his public addresses at home, David Livingstone appealed to the British people to support the abolition of the trade, so that it might be replaced by what he called 'legitimate' commerce and Christianity. Legitimacy was defined in terms of British economic and political interests, not in terms of the concerns of the Arabs who conducted the trade, or the Africans who were its victims. Livingstone recommended British settlement in East Africa as the strategy which would undermine the slave trade effectively and replace it with agricultural commerce that would benefit Britain. From the perspective of Africans, this new commerce did not ensure their liberation, for they were enslaved on their own soil through settler-based colonialism. Ironically, the modern missionary enterprise supported colonialism in spite of its claim to proclaim liberation and salvation.[6]

Consider another example – Apartheid. At the time of writing (1981), the majority of the world's

governments have condemned Apartheid as an immoral system and a threat to world peace. Yet a few powerful nations have not been willing to support the effective peaceful measures which would bring an end to Apartheid; instead they have openly condemned armed nationalist struggles against the system. In this case, it can be argued that the basic issue is a moral one and that the economic and political relations ensuing from the continuation of Apartheid are manifestations of moral decadence among those people who, overtly or covertly, support this system.

Racism, the doctrine on which Apartheid is built, refuses to accept that all homo sapiens constitute one race.[7] Instead, it maintains that some people - those born with light complexion and silky hair - are superior to all others and have an absolute mandate from 'God' enabling them to dominate over the rest of the species. Theologically, this claim is blasphemous because it portrays 'God' as a racist who created and pre-destined some people as masters and others as their slaves. Why is it that an issue such as this one should take so long for the world to resolve?

A third illustration concerns the issue of international 'development'. The world is at

present vaguely divided economically into three
compartments - the so-called 'first-world',
'second-world' and 'third-world'. The so-called
'third-world' consists of the nations of Africa,
Asia and Latin America. This compartment which
comprises more than two-thirds of the world's
population does not consume a proportionate share
of the world's resources, even though most of those
resources are found in those continents. Instead,
the largest portion of the world's resources is
consumed luxuriously by the small fraction of the
world's population occupying the so-called 'first-
world'.[9]

International discussions concerning the
fair redistribution in the appropriation of the
world's resources have so far failed, because the
rich (so-called 'developed') countries have refused
to give up some of their luxuries for the welfare
of those who live below subsistence level. As in
the other examples discussed above, this issue can
be understood primarily as a moral problem. Why
is it that economic imbalance persists, in spite
of the fact that many of those who maintain it
claim to follow lofty moral ideals? Why is it
that influential universalist religious and secular
organizations (like the Christian Church and the
United Nations Organization) are unable to forge an

effective moral drive which would bring fairness in the world?

Apparently, such organizations may, after considerable debate amongst their members, publish declarations condemning one evil or another in the contemporary world, but they seem to be impotent when it comes to implementing those declarations. This observation indicates that there are two levels in the discourse over the problem of morality — the theoretical and the practical levels. In the following two sections these two levels will be discussed.

Before embarking on that discussion, it is worthwhile to recall the main thesis of this study. In a previous chapter it has been shown that human discourse fits into three basic modes of thought and expression — the empirical, the stipulative and the assessive modes. Following this modal theory, in what mode can morality be placed? If the definition of morality proposed in this section is valid, it follows that morality belongs to the assessive mode of thought and expression, because it is concerned with man's evaluation of himself in the context of human society (parochial or global) and in the context of natural environment. It is much more difficult to achieve conceptual consensus in the assessive mode than in the other two, partly

because this mode cannot be objectified (detached
from subjective interests) as much as the other two
modes.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that a
stipulative discussion such as that articulated in
this study, may help at least in pointing out some
difficulties and in showing how those difficulties
might be resolved. Philosophising about human
activity is a special kind of human involvement, an
involvement which is indispensable as a means to
rationalize the rest of human activity. In this
discussion of morality as a problem of meaning
in human discourse, morality is viewed not as an
abstract notion, but as an involvement which is
an integral part of all human thought and work. In
practice it is not possible for a normal human
individual to detach himself from his moral
commitment, even though in a theoretical discussion
he may choose to discuss a topic without explicit
references to his moral bias. Indeed, such conceal-
ment of moral interests is one of the greatest
obstacles to effective discussion.

FOUNDATIONS OF MORALITY

Throughout this study it has been argued that
one of the most effective ways of avoiding mis-
understandings in discourse is for the participants

in a discussion to appreciate each other's
assumptions. In any discussion involving morality,
this is an especially difficult challenge because
of theoretical and practical considerations. The
theoretical considerations have to do with whatever
different people consider to be the theoretical
foundations of morality. The practical considera-
tions are related to the ways in which individuals
and groups actually conduct themselves within
human society on the basis of their moral
convinctions.

In this section, the term 'foundation'
refers to the basis or ground from which a certain
moral matrix is derived and on which moral princi-
ples and actions are justified. It will be shown
below that several theoretical foundations of
morality are often relied upon, and that there can
be no theoretical consensus in a discussion about
morality unless a particular foundation (or cluster
of foundations) is mutually accepted as a basis
for rationalizing morality.

Some people consider 'intuition' to be the
ultimate foundation of morality. In intuitionism
it is asserted that truths may be known by intuition,
independently of observation and experience.
Regarding morality, intuitionism would imply that

moral judgement is intuitively known, <u>a priori</u>. 'Commonsense' and 'conscience' are sometimes substituted for 'intuition'. When a person relies upon 'commonsense' or 'conscience' as the basis for his moral judgement, it is difficult for other people to refute his moral foundation. However, difficulties arise when two or more people defend antagonistic moral options on the basis of their alleged 'commonsense', 'conscience' or 'intuitive judgement'. Intuitionism as a philosophical approach includes much more than this paragraph has mentioned, but these remarks suffice in this context.

Consider the issue of participation in war. If a nation decides to go to war against another and then a citizen of that nation considers such a war to be morally unjustified on the basis of his own 'intuitive judgement', how can he be persuaded to change his view? It is likely that no amount of argument will convince him. The provision for 'consciencious objection' to war does not really solve this problem, but recognizes the impossibility to resolve it. Such a provision is a compromise giving the conscienscious objector the benefit of the doubt. It is impossible to objectively and definitely establish the real motives for consciencious objection - It might be fear. At the same time it could be that indeed the objector's

option is genuine, in which case the provision of consciencious objection casts doubt on the absolute validity of collective decision. If the consciencious objector insists that the collective option of the nation to go to war is immoral, and if he is allowed to follow the demand of his intuition in this mater, it follows that his exemption from joining the war suggests that indeed the collective decision might be immoral. But there is no way of attaining an objective answer in such a matter.[9]

The example given above indicates two other theoretical foundations of morality, which are closely connected. One of these is 'majority opinion'. The opinion of the majority in a society may be considered as a basis for determining acceptable moral options. However, it must be appreciated that the term 'majority' refers to a collection of individuals. How do those individuals themselves justify their own moral options, as individuals? In the contemporary world where the mass-communication media greatly influence and sway public opinion, it is apparent that 'majority opinions' are an unreliable basis for establishing moral options absolutely. In any case, reference to the 'majority' suggests that there is also a 'minority' which holds alternative options. On what grounds can the 'minority' be considered

morally mistaken?

Another foundation connected with that of
'majority opinion', is the power vested in
institutional authority especially when such
authority is believed to have divine sanction.
For example, people in a society may think that
a certain moral option is desirable (or undesirable)
merely because their ruler has decreed it to be so.
They may also hold the same view with regard to
the moral option in question if they revere their
constitution as the absolute authority from which
all moral options are discerned. In this theore-
tical foundation of morality, moral options are
subordinated to the preferences arising from
institutional authority which is believed to be
unquestionable.

In the context of this foundation difficulties
arise when a person is confronted with two or more
authorities which vie as sources of moral direction.
On what basis does the individual then decide which
authority to rely upon for his moral judgements?
The confrontation between Jesus and his opponents
with regard to God and Caesar is a case in point.
Jesus was asked whether it was 'lawful' to pay
taxes to Caesar. The context of the question was
that in his teaching Jesus had proclaimed the
'Kingdom of God' which seemed to set God's authority

over and against Caesar's. Jesus answered that people should render to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's. But this was a case of a supernatural authority over and against a temporal one. What would be appropriate response if it was a matter of choice between two temporal authorities? This is the dilemma faced by victims of oppressive regimes in the contemporary world, for example in southern Africa. Should they vest their allegiance in their oppressors, or in their own movement of resistance against oppressive authority? In such cases, who wields the moral prerogative to arbitrate?[10]

Other people believe in their cultural tradition as the absolute foundation of their moral convictions. This view is also problematic, because a society may maintain a cultural tradition which is detrimental to the moral welfare of its members. For instance, it may be traditionally maintained in a society that it is right for one member to be sacrificed to a god in order to procure the benefaction of that deity for the rest of the society. The individual thus selected to be the victim for sacrifice is, in such a society, morally bound to accept his fate without protest. Yet it seems absurd to defend any moral option merely because it has been traditionally maintained within a

given society.

Religion may also provide a foundation for morality.[11] It is remarkable that every religion supports a moral code which is believed to be divinely instituted and absolutely valid for the followers of that religion in particular, and for all people in general.[12] One significant problem of religion as a foundation of morality, is that religious claims are dogmatically upheld, and it is not possible to dislodge a believer from his beliefs through rational argumentation or empirical demonstration.[13]

For example, if a person believes (as many Christians do) that all people are morally imperfect and cannot attain perfection through their own initiative, it is difficult to dissuade him and coerce him to accept an alternative view. If such a person maintains that moral perfection can be attained only through divine intervention, there is no way of validating or invalidating such a claim – it has to be accepted by faith. Another person may believe that human beings are born morally good, and are later polluted by society. Jean Jacques Rousseau held this view. He argued that 'man is naturally good, and only by institutions is he made bad'.[14] This view was the antithesis of the doctrine of 'original sin' and salvation through the Church - a doctrine which was still

widely held by Christians in the nineteenth century.

A person's religious convictions influence his moral values.[15] The converse is not true, a person's moral values do not determine his religious convictions. Religion includes moral commitment, but a moral disposition may not necessarily be derived from religion - indeed it may sometimes be the result of reaction against institutional religion, as in the case of Karl Marx and Friedrich Nietzsche.[16] Now, if in discourse the discussants are commited to a variety of religious traditions, they are unlikely to hold identical moral assumptions. It is true that some religious traditions are sufficiently close to encourage the realization of moral consensus among their adherents (for instance Judaism, Christianity and Islam on the one hand; Hinduism and Buddhism on the other). However, it is also true that the existence of distinctions between such religions inevitably leads to differences in moral priorities. Take Islam and Christianity for instance.

The greatest priority in Islam is for the Muslim to submit to Allah by observing the 'Five pillars' of that religion - declaring that there is no god but Allah and Muhammad is his Prophet; praying five times daily facing Mecca; fasting in the holy month of Ramadhan; giving alms to the

poor; and going on pilgrimage to Mecca at least
once in a Muslim's lifetime. For Christians, the
greatest priority is summarised in the 'greatest'
double sided commandment: to love God with one's
whole being, and one's other people as oneself.
It is apparent that in practice, following from
this difference in priorities, Islam tends to
place moral priority on the Muslim Brotherhood
whereas Christianity tends to be more individua-
listic.[17] This tendency in Christianity seems to
weaken its appeal in some cultures, for example
in Africa.

One of the points of misunderstanding
between Christian missionaries and their prospe-
ctive African converts, was with regard to morality.
In general, missionaries believed they had come to
Africa to introduce a moral order which was much
superior to that maintained in the African
cultural and religious tradition. Most mission-
aries believed that African peoples were morally
depraved whereas their native societies in Europe
had attained the highest possible degree of moral
life.[18] They thought, therefore, that they had
come to Africa with ready-made moral models for
Africans to copy faithfully. This evolutionist
prejudice prevented the missionaries from appre-
ciating the moral fabric of traditional African

society. Some Africans reacted strongly against
this missionary prejudice and resisted the missionary
claim to moral superiority. This resistance led
to serious cultural and religious conflicts, culmi-
nating partly in the rejection of Christianity as
a European religion, and partly in the establish-
ment of 'Independent Churches' which were more
appreciative of traditional African morality.
Most of those who accepted Christianity did not
abandon their traditional moral values; rather,
the new 'Christian' values were superimposed on the
old. Consequently, there continued to be misunder-
standings and controversies between African
converts and foreign missionaries over moral issues.[19]

Philosophical reflection can also produce a
foundation for morality. One remarkable example is
discernible in the philosophy of Emmanuel Kant.
Kantian ethics was based on what he called the
'Categorical Imperative' — the unconditional
imperative to do those moral acts which one would
wish tthat they were universally commendable and
applicable always. Kant contrasted the 'Categorical
Imperative' with the 'Conditional Imperatives',
the latter being those imperatives to do moral acts
which were applicable only in certain circumstances
and for certain people. This great thinker formulated
his ethical system on the basis of philosophical

argumentation and he was skeptical of religious dogma as a foundation of morality.[20]

Philosophy as a foundation of morality is appealing, especially because it is not dogmatic. However, it raises problem in discourse because it has no absolute authority. Hence it becomes difficult to resolve moral conflicts arising from two antagonistic philosophical systems or assumptions.[21]

The following example is an interesting illustration of this point. Capitalism as an economic system is based on the moral assumption that competition is better than co-operation. Socialism, in contrast, is based on the opposite moral assumption - that co-operation is better than competition. Both these assumptions are not divinely ordained; Capitalism may be traced to Adam Smith and Socialism to Karl Marx. There seems to be no way of reconciling the two philosophical assumptions on which these two systems are based. It can be argued that the ideological conflict between Socialism and Capitalism is rooted in the irreconcilable antagonism between the two assumptions from which the two systems are respectively derived.

This example leads to another foundation of morality, the last to be considered in this chapter. The international forum can be a foundation

of morality, especially with regard to moral conduct
in international affairs and relations. The League
of Nations, and the United Nations Organisation
after it, were both formed in order to enhance a
harmonious co-existence of nations in the world.
The former was established after the first world
war, and the latter after the second world war.

One of the common documents of the United
Nations Organisation, is its Declaration on Human
Rights. This document affirms the rights which
must not be denied of any individual, including
life, liberty, worship and expression. The
Declaration on Human Rights expresses basic moral
values which were enshrined in the document through
consensus in the international forum of member states
of the organisation. In the 1970s concern was
expressed in international gatherings (both religious
and secular) over violations of human rights all
over the world. Interestingly, only rarely have
those accused of such violations unequivocally
accepted their mistakes, even when they may have
ratified the Declaration. One reason for this
situation, is the lack of international consensus
with regard to moral priorities. For example,
although according to the document all people have
the right to life, it is widely regarded as morally
right that a person should lose his life in defence

of his country. Many people are dying in wars all over the world, as soldiers on both sides of the battle fronts; and as 'innocent' women, children and aged who are helpless.

Though peace is universally accepted as a positive moral value, it is widely considered morally right for a nation to defend its sovereignty even through war. Hence the accumulation of armaments in every nation, and the failure of international campaigns for disarmament. It is clear, therefore, that the international forum has not yet succeeded as a means of establishing consistent moral ideals to enhance peaceful co-existence between nations. Moreover, the power of Veto which some members wield in the United Nations Organisation often makes it difficult for this international body to make effective resolutions. The world-wide campaign against Apartheid is a case in point. Nevertheless this forum could achieve its ideals if every nation of the world were willing to compromise some of its self-interests for the sake of harmonious human relations on a global scale. It is not easy to meet this challenge, since mutual trust between nations is a necessary precondition for the realization of international peace and harmony.

The foregoing examples are enough to show that pluraity in the foundations of morality lead to diversity of assumptions and priorities with regard to acceptable moral options. This plurality makes it difficult for unanimity to be achieved on most moral issues. Consequently, compromises attained over moral controversies tend to be motivated more by self-interests (on the part of individuals, groups and nations involved) than by mutual trust or an objective consideration of the arguments presented by each interested party.

With regard to morality, discernment of meaning is often obscured by combinations of all the theoretical considerations discussed above. How can this obscurity be cleared? It would be pretentious to claim that conceptual (or theoretical) obscurity over moral conflicts can be totally eliminated. However, a way of reducing misunderstandings is proposed below.

It follows from the discussion in this and previous chapters, that the first decisive step is to recognize and appreciate the subjective interests of the individual (persons, groups or nations) involved in the conflict. The next step is to understand the assumptions on which the arguments of the interested parties are based. The third step is to propose such moral options as would least

interfere with the self-interests of all those
involved. Such a proposition necessarily demands
compromise on the part of all the interested
parties. Compromise is not easy to achieve when
some of the parties are reluctant or refuse to
give up some of their demands, yet it should be
noted that the refusal to compromise implies
failure to respect the moral integrity of others.
Why should one group consider its moral convictions
to be absolutely right and those of another to be
the opposite?[22]

There is a difficulty in this procedure,
which must be appreciated and dealt with. It is
possible for an individual or group to base moral
convictions on erroneous assumptions. (The example
of Apartheid has been cited earlier. Hitler's
Nazism is another glaring example). If such a
situation arises, it seems morally obligatory for
the rest of the community (parochial or global)
to condemn and fight against such fanaticism, for
the healthy survival of the society.[23] Fighting
against fanaticism can be very expensive, as the
second world war demonstrated. Yet such expense
must be undertaken, if humankind values its
capability to prefer certain moral options to others.

The theoretical foundations of morality
discussed in this section indicate that the question
'What is (morally) right' cannot be answered in a
straightforward way. Michael Keeling has shown
that to answer this question satisfactorily it is
necessary to look at it from the perspective of all
the parties involved in a particular issue.[24]
He has shown, for instance, that a comprehensive
moral assessment of the Vietnam war, should include
consideration of the convictions of all the parties –
American soldiers, the Vietcong, the helpless
villagers on whom bombs were often dropped, the
consciencious objectors in America, and so on.
Who was (morally) right in that war? It depends
on which side one would support.

MORALITY IN PRAXIS

The term 'praxis' in this context refers to
the translation of theoretical formulations into
practical results.[25] The definition of morality
articulated at the beginning of this chapter
includes theory (principles) and practice (actions).
It is worthwhile to emphasise that morality as
understood in this study involves an integrated
interaction between theoretical formulation and

practical implementation. This section will deal with some misunderstandings which arise in discourse concerning the implementation of moral convictions.

One misunderstanding generates conflicts over the _ends_ and _means_ of certain moral options. _Ends_ are the goals (ultimate or penultimate) which moral actions are aimed to achieve. _Means_ are the procedures, including actions, which are pursued in order to achieve certain ends. Machiavelli maintained that 'the end justifies the means'.[26] Some moral philosophers today would not accept this principle as valid. It is not necessary to digress here into an analysis of Machiavelli's philosophy. It is more interesting to examine the nature of conflicts that may arise from the implementation of this Machiavellian principle. Consider the following example.

Assuming that we all accept the view that 'liberation' is an ideal worthy of attainment by every human individual (irrespective of how 'liberation' is defined), some people may argue that any means are morally justifiable to achieve that ideal. Others may maintain that only some means are morally justifiable, and that others are damnable. For instance, proponents of selective means may insist that only non-violent means are acceptable in the project of achieving the universally acclaimed ideal of 'liberation'.

The contemporary debate between pacifists on one moralist extreme and militants on the other, is an indication that this issue is far from being resolved.

A critical review of discriminate and indiscriminate means to achieve a commonly accepted end, shows that Machiavelli's principle is valid if the end in question is held to be ultimate and therefore unconditional.[27] Long before Machiavelli, Saint Augustine had argued that if Christians accepted as valid the 'greatest commandment' to love God with your whole being and other people as yourself -, it would follow that loving God unconditionally necessarily implied loving 'your neighbour' as yourself.[28] Therefore, he proposed the maxim 'Love God and do what you like' as a sufficient guide in dealing with moral questions. Augustine subordinated all moral options to the 'great commandment'. Today, some Christian moralists like Joseph Fletcher and Michael Keeling have revived this Augustinian view, with some modifications, in an effort to formulate a viable Christian ethic in a 'permissive' and pluralistic society.[29] Love of God and neighbour is the only moral absolute to be observed, according to these thinkers, and a Christian's moral option in any particular situation must be based on a

consideration of whether that option supports or
undermines that absolute challenge. This 'Situa-
tion Ethics' rejects the view that the Bible contains
a strict moral code to be rigidly followed under
all circumstances. Rather, its advocates propose
that the unconditional command to love, determines
the right moral option in any given situation.
This view is in substantial agreement with
Machiavelli's principle.

In practice, however, the issue is not so
simple. We introduced this example by assuming
that there is a common agreement over moral ends.
But how can consensus over moral ends be achieved
especially in a multi-religious society?[30]
If the members of a society do not achieve unanimity
over ends, the Machiavellian principle would remain
valid only if the members mutually agreed that each
individual should identify his own ends and pursue
them through the means of his own choice. The
practical consequence of this alternative is moral
anarchy.[31]

Suppose that the members of a society agree
on what they consider to be acceptable moral options,
without specifying the ends which corresponding
moral actions are supposed to achieve. In this
case, it is inevitable that varieties of moral ends
may be presupposed, and since the members are not

obliged to pursue any common end, this situation would be considered normal. However, such a situation is bound to generate serious moral conflicts. The promotion of 'value-free' scientific innovation in the twentieth century has demonstrated that this is so. Practical consequences of scientific and technological innovation in any society inevitably affect the moral fabric of that society. What, for instance, are the practical consequences of 'genetic engineering' and nuclear technology? What are their moral implications for the world in general and for the particular societies in which they are introduced? The scientists involved in this exciting research may draw much professional satisfaction from it, but its ethical implications must be seriouly considered to ensure that its disadvantages do not outweigh its benefits to society as a whole.

Such ethical appraisal is not easy, and it is clear that there is no consensus yet with regard to the overall benefit of some technological innovations in the twentieth century. Alvin Toffler has written in favour of technological progress, arguing that those who hesitate to welcome it are suffering from what he calls 'Future Shock'.[32] However, it is reasonable to argue that uncontrolled open-ended technological innovation without clear moral

ends is bound to dislodge man from his capability to identify and pursue his own aspirations. Machines may become the masters of the men and women who have invented them. If this happens, man will lose his moral direction, and perhaps destroy himself.

The examples discussed above show that morality generates a problem of meaning in both the theoretical and the practical planes. If the peoples of the world could establish moral consensus in both theory and practice with regard to both ends and means, international peace would be realized. And if every parochial community could achieve such consensus amongst its members, harmonious living would be greatly ehnanced. Traditional African communities may have been weak in some respects (as in their failure to welcome positive innovation), but in morality they were highly successful. Social harmony in the traditional African setting has been much more integrated than in the contemporary western industrial setting, with its excessive individualism.

REFERENCE NOTES

CHAPTER FOUR

1. Here I distinguish between Ethics and Morality. According to the modal theory proposed earlier, Ethics is a stipulative discipline which defines and analyses the conditions under which moral values would have meaning and relevance. Morality is within the assessive mode of thought and expression, in the sense that when one prescribes a moral code, one does not have to give reasons why it is wrong or right to act in a certain way.

2. Interestingly, in the Bible slavery seems to be taken for granted as a normal practice in social life, in both the Old and the New Testament. Does God condone enslavement of one individual or group by another? In the Old Testament slavery seems to be viewed as God's instrument for achieving his plan in history - cf. the prophecy of Jeremiah, especially Jer. Chapter 22. In the New Testament, Paul was apparently not interested in abolishing slavery. Rather, he taught that slaves should obey their masters, and masters should treat their slaves kindly. cf. Ephesians Ch. 6:5-9. On Aristotle's view of slavery see B. Russell, History of Western Philosophy,

op.cit., pp. 197-8. On Aristotle and Aquinas see
B. Russell, op.cit., pp. 445-8

3. James H. Cone, A Black Theology of Liberation.
Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1970, p. 70-73.

4. Eric Williams, Capitalism and Slavery, Cambridge
University Press, 1964.

5. In this remark I do not overlook the fact that
there were abolitionists who were 'ahead of their
time', who tried to convince their contemporaries
to become more progressive with regard to the issues
of slavery and the slave trade. I also appreciate
the fact that many of the abolitionists were evange-
lical Christians. Nevertheless, their endeavour to
provide alternative economic arrangements to compen-
sate for the loss that might arise with the abolition
of the slave trade and slavery, supports my remark.
For a study of one of the most influential English
abolitionists, see Garth Lean, God's Politician:
William Wilberforce's Struggle, London: Darton,
Longman and Todd, 1980. See also Eric Williams,
Capitalism and Slavery, Cambridge University Press,
1964. With detailed documentation F. Shyllon has
shown that African slaves and ex-slaves suffered much
discrimination and poverty in Britain between 1555
and 1833. See his two books, Black Slaves in Britain,
London: 1974 and Black People in Britain, 1555-1833,
Oxford University Press, 1977. Also K. Little,

Negroes in Britain, London: 1948.

6. It is paradoxical that the modern missionary
enterprise was concerned to abolish the slave trade,
but it was not interested in compaigning against
colonization. Indeed, many of the leading missiona-
ries in Africa considered colonization to be a useful
means for the evangelization and 'civilization'
of Africa, e.g. David Livingstone. See Roland
Oliver, The Missionary Factor in East Africa, London:
Longman, 1952, 1970.

7. Ironically, the same biblical argument that were
used to justify the slave trade are used today to
justify Apartheid. See Alan Boesak, Farewell to
Innocence, New York: Orbis, 1976; Also Johannes
Verkuyl, Break Down the Walls; A Christian Cry for
Racial Justice, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans,
1973.

8. It is worthwhile to note that in the 'first world'
there are ethnic minorities who do not enjoy the
affluence they help to produce and maintain. These
groups include African and Asian immigrants in
Britain, migrant workers in continental Europe, and
the descendants of African slaves in North America.
In the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians

these minorities have been considered as an integral part of the 'third world'. See Kofi Appiah-Kubi and Sergio Torres, eds., <u>African Theology en Route</u>, New York: Orbis, 1979.

9. On intuitionism see B. Russell, <u>The Problems of Philosophy</u>, op.cit, ch. 11. Also John Passmore, <u>A Hundred Years of Philosophy</u>, Penguin Books, 1968, pp. 14-15, 190-91. For a discussion of various foundations of morality see William Frankena, <u>Ethics</u>, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1963, ch. 1; Frederick Vivian, <u>Thinking Philosophically</u>, London: Chatto and Windus, 1969, chs. 4 and 5; H.D. Lewis, <u>Philosophy of Religion</u>, London: English Universities Press, 1965, chs. XI and XXII.

10. The same question arises for consciencious objection with regard to the paying of taxes, because a portion of national taxes is used for the purchase or manufacture of arms.

11. In Judaism, for example, the Torah is accepted as the foundation for all Jewish morality. In Jewish history it became necessary for the context of the various social and political environments in which the Jews found themselves. For a detailed elaboration of this example see Max I. Dimont, <u>The Indestructible Jews</u>, New York: New American Library, 1971.

12. It is worthwhile, however, to distinguish between religious beliefs and moral values, even though every religion has its favourite moral code. Such a distinction does not contradict the view expressed in earlier chapters, that both religion and morality fit into one mode of thought and expression in discourse — the assessive mode.

13. The intelligibility and credibility of religious dogma depend largely on the ability of theologians to articulate, interpret and present the dogma to both converts and non-converts of their respective religions. Christian theologians like Karl Barth, Rudolf Bultmann, Paul Tillich, Emil Brunner and others devoted their academic and professional efforts in making Christian dogma intelligible and relevant in the context of 20th century western thought. For commentaries on these theologians see John Macquarrie, Twentieth Century Religious Thought, London: SCM, 1963; Colin Brown, Philosophy and the Christian Faith, London: SCM Tyndale, 1968.

14. For a summary of Rousseau's thought see B. Russell, History of Western Philosophy, op.cit., pp. 660-74; Colin Brown, Philosophy and the Christian Faith, op.cit., pp. 81-84; William Boyd, The History of Western Education, London: A. and C. Black, 9th ed. 1969, pp. 284-301.

15. How is it, then, that adherents of one religion differ over moral issues? How can we explain the fact that some Christians, for instance, are against war while others support it? The answer to this problem lies in the fact that the adherents of one religion may differ over the interpretation of basic dogma, and also over their views concerning the moral implications of the basic religious doctrines which they hold in common.

16. In the preceding pages it has been shown that religion is only one among several foundations for morality.

17. There is much more to be said about the differences and similarities between Christianity and Islam, but it is not necessary to deal with them exhaustively in the present study. The point being stressed here is that religious differences may lead to moral disagreement. Even among Christians there are religious differences, which are often manifested when adherents of different denominations embark on a search for moral consensus. The disagreement between Catholics and Protestants over the questions of abortion and birth control is a case in point. It is also true, of course, that on this as in many other issues both Catholics and Protestants differ amongst themselves.

13. There were other missionaries who went to spread Christianity abroad because they were disgusted with the rising indifference to Christianity in Europe. J.R. Mott, one of the founders of the 20th century ecumenical movement, promoted the slogan 'Evangelization of the World in this generation', and this concern became a major theme for discussion in the World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh in 1910. See Hans-Jochen Margull, 'The Awakening of Protestant Missions', in History's Lessons for Tomorrow's Mission, Geneva: World Student Christian Federation, c. 1960, pp. 137-38.

19. See Reference Note 17 above.

20. For a critical presentation of Kant's ethics see O'Neill, Acting on Principle: An Essay on Kantian Ethics, New York: Columbia University Press, 1975; also B. Russell, History of Western Philosophy, op.cit., pp. 675-90. Also, Colin Brown, Philosophy and the Christian Faith, op.cit.

21. Hendrick Kraemer and other Christian theologians have complained about relativism in ethics, generated by the collapse of morality based on divine commands as found in the Bible. On this point see H. Kraemer, The Christian Message in a non-Christian World, London: Edinburgh House Press, 1938, pp. 1-16.

22. Perhaps 'comprimise' is not the best term to use here, but I cannot find a more suitable one. 'Tolerance' could have been used, but tolerance in my view implies accepting that others are different without necessarily allowing oneself to be transformed by mutual interaction. 'Compromise', as I use the term here, implies mutual interaction to the extent that one's views are transformed in that process.

23. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German pastor during Hitler's rule, was convinced that it was morally right to assassinate Hitler before this ruler committed. more evil in the world. Bonhoeffer became involved in a plot to kill Hitler, was discovered, imprisoned and later executed. See Bonhoeffer's Letters and Papers from Prison, edited by his friend E. Bethge, London: SCM Press, 1953.

24. Michael Keeling, What is Right, London: SCM Press, 1969, See also Joseph Fletcher, Situation Ethics, London: SCM Press, 1967.

25. For an extended discussion of Praxis see John Hoffman, Marxism and the Theory of Praxis: A Critique of Some New Versions of Old Fallacies, London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975, pp. 7-19.

26. For a brief presentation of Machiavellis's thought see H. Hoffding, A History of Modern Philosophy, Vol. I, New York: Dover Publications, 1955. Also B. Russell, History of Western Philosophy op.cit., pp. 491-8.

27. But how can people have a consensus concerning ultimate ends, unless they share common religious presuppositions? Dragging 'the Ultimate' into discourse concerning morality tends to turn morality into a religious issue. But as we have shown earlier consensus is not easily attained on religious convinctions owing to the wide variety of possible interpretations of basic religious beliefs. Attaining consensus concerning ultimate goals remains a great problem. See Paul Tillich, Morality and Beyond, London: Collins Fontana, 1969.

28. For comments on Augustine's thought see Colin Brown, Philosophy and the Christian Faith, op.cit., pp. 13-15. Also Paul Tillich, A History of Christian Thought, op.cit., pp. 103-33; B. Russell, op.cit., pp. 351-63.

29. Michael Keeling, op.cit., J. Fletcher, op.cit. See also J.A.T. Robinson, Christian Freedom in a Permissive Society, London: SCM, 1970.

30. By the term 'multi-religious society' I mean a society in which there are varieties of religions and religious sects. The observation in this paragraph is consistent with the argument in the preceding pages.

31. The controversy over Birth-Control is a relevant example here: How are ordinary members of the society to decide what is morally right or wrong, if Christians among themselves within that society cannot agree over this sensitive issue? On the other hand. if the matter is left to individual decision, how can the society as a whole deal with the problem of population control? Either way, there seems to be a dilemma.

32. Alvin Toffler, Future Shock, London/New York, 1967.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE PROBLEM OF DESTINY

LOCATING THE PROBLEM

Whence has everything originated? Why is
everything in the universe the way it is now?
Whither is everything proceeding? These are basic
puzzles that challenge the mind of every philosopher
and theologian. Collectively, the question can be
regarded as constituting the problem of destiny in
discourse. In summary, these questions are concerned
with:

- ultimate origins
- ultimate purpose
- ultimate goals

Destiny as a problem of meaning in discourse
arises because when people embark on discussion
they presuppose a variety of answers to these
ultimate questions.

Presuppositions concerning ultimate questions
are entrenched in one's personality through the
same factors that are outlined in chapter one
above. Religion is the major source of those
presuppositions that concern destiny. Every
religion in its teaching includes doctrines about

ultimate origins, ultimate purpose and ultimate goals, of natural and human existence.

Christianity, for example, teaches that man was created in God's image and that the entire universe is God's creation. It is still not clear what it means to assert that man is an image of God. However, Christian doctrine continues to affirm that man was created with an injunction from the creator that man should live according to the will of God. The story of 'the Fall' in the garden of Eden shows that man's failure to live according to God's will can provoke the wrath of God, even though God is supposed to be the loving creator. Man is estranged from his creator by sinfulness, and the purpose of human existence on earth is to strive towards the perfection which was lost in the original 'Fall' and which is found ultimately in God. The ultimate goal of human existence, according to christian teaching, is to be re-united with the creator. History is the process through which humankind strives towards 'salvation' under God's guidance.

The Christian doctrines of 'predestination' and 'free-will' seem to contradict each other, even though they have been upheld throughout the history of Christianity. Is man's ultimate 'salvation' freely worked out by man himself, or is

it God who has predestined some people to eternal
reward and others to eternal damnation? On one
doctrinal extreme there are Christians who believe
that man cannot, by his own effort, effect his own
salvation. According to this view, God has
predestined some people to eternal salvation and the
rest to eternal suffering. Man's duty is to accept
God's gift, whatever it might be, with thanksgiving.
This is the Barthian extreme derived from the
theology of St. Paul (Acts 4:23-30; Rom. 8:28-30).
On the opposite extreme there are other Christians
who believe that man must take full responsibility
for his deeds and bear the ultimate consequences
of his beliefs and actions. This extreme is derived
from the epistle of James (James 1:22-27, 2:8-26).
According to this latter view, if man attains
salvation, it is his reward for what he has done
in and with his life. If he falls into eternal
punishment, it is the consequence of his deeds.

The doctrinal tension has not been resolved
between those Christians who emphasise deeds and
those who emphasise faith as the means to attain
ultimate salvation. Nevertheless, all Christians
are agreed that there will be a 'final judgement'
and that Jesus will return to sort out the good
from the bad.

The foregoing comments on destiny as it is viewed in Christianity, show that Christians are not agreed among themselves as to how the ultimate questions ought to be handled. This lack of consensus generates misunderstandings within Christian theological discourse. The same lack of mutual agreement over questions of ultimate destiny, is observable in other religious traditions, especially the scriptural ones such as Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism. Denominational polarities in various religions can be traced partly to divergence in the doctrinal interpretations of the relevant scriptures, particularly in matters concerning ultimate destiny.

Anti-religious ideologies, such as Marxism, postulate alternative theories to answer the basic ultimate questions. In Marxism, the ultimate origin of the universe remains unexplained. Marxist theory begins by affirming the givenness of matter, and proceeds to explain social trans- formation through the dialectic principle. God has no positive role in the dialectical process - man rather than God is the main actor in the drama of social change within history. The ultimate purpose of human existence is to contribute towards the positive transformation of society in order

that the ultimate goal of a classless, stateless universal society may eventually be realized.[1]

In traditional African thought the idea of evolutionary social change is absent. History is not viewed as progressing towards an ultimate goal, whether designed by human beings (as in Marxism) or by God (as in Christianity). Rather, the universe is viewed as having been brought into being by God in order to function according to regular patterns, rhythms and movements. Man has a significant place within the universe, but he is expected to live in such a way that he does not interrupt this established order. As long as man maintains his proper relations with fellow men and with nature, the universe will continue as it has always done, unless of course God chooses to change the course of events. African religious thought does not look for scape-goats, like Satan, to take blame for whatever goes wrong in the world. Instead, man searches his own conscience and conduct in order to discern what he may have done to disrupt the harmony that God has established. If man cannot identify any mistakes in his dealings with fellow men, God and nature, he concludes that only God knows why disorder and suffering are experienced.

This traditional African view of destiny does not necessarily imply that God is eveil, or even that God is deistically conceived of. Rather, it affirms God's omniscience and omnipotence in contrast with man's finite nature. According to the traditional African view of destiny, the ultimate goal of human existence is a matter of ultimate concern here, now and always, but not a matter of eschatological expectation.

Given the fact that there is such a wide variety of approaches to the question of destiny, how can people commited to different religions and ideologies engage meaningfully in discourse about this problem? In the modern Christian missionary enterprise Christians have answered this question by insisting that Jesus Christ is the only way to eternal life and eternal truth. In doing so they have alienated themselves from other religious traditions, even theistic ones including the African religious heritage. In Africa, many prospective converts to Christianity have found themselves unable to accept the Christian faith on the terms dictated by missionaries who are prejudiced against traditional African thought.

African responses to Christianity have been diverse: Some people have uncritically and unconditionally accepted this prejudiced missionary teaching.

Others have formed their own 'independent' churches
in which they interpret the Christian faith in
accordance with insights that accommodate traditional
African thought. There are others who have rejected
Christianity altogether, considering it to be alien
to, and incompatible with, the African heritage.[2]
Owing to the confusing proliferation of Christian
denominations and the rise of materialism, other
people have chosen to take an indifferent stance
towards Christianity and other religions, preferring
to live according to the dictates of contemporary
materialist existence.

Today there are some western Christian
scholars who are rightly urging for a critical
review of the bigoted missionary attitude which
refuses to acknowledge the internal coherence and
self-consistency of non-Christian religious
traditions. Among these is John Hick who argues
that Christians ought to affirm that salvation is
accessible through religious traditions other than
Christianity. Hick maintains that although
Christians can faithfully affirm that Jesus Christ
is the way to eternal salvation, this affirmation
should not be taken to imply that non-Christians
do not have access to salvation. He conceds that
there are many non-Christians, such as the

Mahatma Gandhi, who have access to God's salvation
within their own religious heritage. In Hick's
view, 'God is greater than all our theologies',
and therefore we should not limti God's interaction
with humanity to our own experience within our own
religious tradition. Hick is convinced that
Christians should be willing to accept the religious
heritage of non-Christians as God's revelation to
them. He concludes: 'When you know that there is
true sanctity within other great religious tradi-
tions as well as within our own, then you have to
enlarge your theology to fit the facts. The big
fact of which we have to take account is that the
salvific process of the creating of human animals
into children of God is not confined to the
Christian section of mankind'.[3]

Hick's open-minded approach to religious
traditions other than his own may, in my view,
enhance more effective dialogue in the problem
of destiny, especially in a religiously pluralistic
society. In such open-ended dialogue it will be
possible to clarify the meaning of such concepts
as 'salvation' and 'liberation', rather than
restrict discourse to Christian interpretation.
Contemporary African society in most countries
is religiously pluralistic, and such an open-
minded approach will help to reduce religious
antagonism while enhancing national unity, and

mutual understanding. However, this approach will
necessarily demand a re-definition of 'mission'
on the part of those who believe that they have a
divinely instituted obligation to convert everyone
to their own religious convictions.

HUMAN REGIMES AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD

On one extreme some Christian theologians
maintain that the 'Kingdom of God' refers to a
heavenly and eschatological realm. This view
provides its advocates with justification for a
type of milleniarist Christianity which places
emphasis on the future, rather than on the present.
Followers of such milleniarism are much more
concerned with the 'salvation of the soul' in
heaven, than on the welfare of man on earth.
The ultimate purpose of existence, according to
this view, is to prepare the soul for eternal
salvation, because the alternative to salvation
is believed to be damnation in hell.[4]

To milleniarists, involvement in social,
economic and political concerns within history
is viewed as distraction from the primary objective
of preparing for the salvation of the soul in
heaven. Among Christians in Kenya there is much
milleniarist preaching which can be heard in pulpits,

evangelistic rallies, street evangelism and also
in funeral services. Many Christian revivalists
echo in their sermons and songs, the view that
human beings are mere pilgrims in transit from
this world of human regimes to the heavenly kingdom
of God. Human regimes are considered to be not
only transient, but also evil. For that reason,
there is a strong tendency among milleniarists
to uphold a passive and sometimes negative attitude
towards socio-economic and political activities.
This tendency often brings milleniarists into
conflict with people who believe that man has an
obligation to make this world a better place to
live in.

J.S. Mbiti has suggested that the strong
appeal of milleniarism among some African Christians
may be attributed mainly to their 'discovery' of
the 'future dimension' of time, through missionary
teaching. However, the fact that such emphasis
is found also among milleniarist sects in Europe
and North America, suggests that Mbiti's view is
at best only a partial explanation of milleniarism
in Africa.[5] Why is it that milleniarism appeals
also to some Europeans who already possess a linear
understanding of history? Considering that not
all European and North American Christians are
sympathetic to milleniarism, it can be argued that
milleniarists have chosen to adopt this extreme

for their own theological reasons, based on a literal interpretation of those sections in the New Testament which refer to 'the Kingdom of God', 'the Kingdom of heaven', the resurrection and second coming of Jesus. The Church, according to this milleniarist theology, is believed to be the community of those people who have pledged themselves to await heavenly salvation.

On the opposite extreme, some Christian theologians maintain that Jesus was concerned with the transformation of human society here on earth, a transformation which would bring about free reconciliation between rich and poor, slaves and masters, Jews and gentiles, mean and women, old and young, rulers and ruled. The 'Kingdom of God' according to this view, refers to the inauguration of a new social order in this world, according to the insights which Jesus outlined in his parables and other teachings, and also exemplified in his own life. Thus the 'Kingdom of God' is viewed as an earthly alternative to those human regimes in which proper human relationships are undermined. The Church, according to this view, provides the model for secular societies to emulate, and functions as the agent responsible for showing the world the direction

towards which proper transformation should aim -
towards ideal human society, within history.

Unfortunately, neither of the two extremes
seem to succeed in the brands of destiny that they
offer to the world. The first extreme appears
irrelevant to most people, especially because of
its emphasis on spiritual eschatological salvation
while ignoring the pressing material needs of human
existence in contemporary society. The second
extreme risks isolating the Church from the rest
of the society, as if Christians were not an
integral part of the human community. The Church,
as a human institution, is not immune to human
frailties, prejudices and limitations. Consequently,
the Church cannot avoid becoming entangled in the
political and economic interactions within the
society in which it exists. It cannot be neutral
in matters of human relations, because its members
are ordinary human beings with vested interests.
Inevitably, therefore, the Church often becomes
subject to criticism from various quarters within
society, no matter what stance it may take with
regard to a particular issue.

In both extremes, the Church offers itself
as the guardian of the ideal towards which human
society should strive. Yet in contemporary society

the Church is only one among other pressure groups
which claim the right to influence the direction
of social change in history. On what grounds could
the Church have exclusive authority to determine
the direction of social transformation, especially
in a religiously and culturally pluralistic society?
It appears that it would have such authority only
in a homogenous society where all members would
be Christians belonging to the same denomination
and allowing on divergence of opinion. As far as
I know there are no such societies in the
contemporary world.

A further question arises from the foregoing
discussion: To what extent can the Church be
identified with the 'Kingdom of God' in the midst
of human regimes?

However the concept of the 'Kingdom of God'
is defined, it seems that identifying the Church
with that concept would lead to misunderstanding.
If Christians regard themselves as representatives
of the 'Kingdom of God' on earth, they necessarily
imply that non-Christians cannot share in God's
realm unless they are converted to Christianity.
Yet there are numerous brands of Christianity,
many of which are antagonistic to one another,
overtly or covertly. Moreover, the Christian faith

maintains that God is the author and director of all history. It would be contradictory to insist that God has doomed most human beings - his special creatures - to hell, merely because they have not become Christians for whatever reason.

In view of the fact that the concept of the 'Kingdom of God' is specifically Judaeo-Christian, it can be argued that human destiny does not have to be defined in terms of this concept, with all the theology and historical assumptions it signifies. For example, if the problem of destiny were approached from the traditional African perspective as outlined earlier, the outcome would be considerably different: resurrection, eschatology, the second coming of Jesus, the final judgement and other notions would have no place in the traditional African approach, since they are not integral to the African religious heritage.

CULTURAL TRADITIONS AND ULTIMATE QUESTIONS ABOUT DESTINY

The discernment of answers to ultimate questions about destiny is greatly influenced by the cultural tradition to which one belongs. Moreover, within the same cultural tradition both

divergent solutions to the perennial problem of destiny. The present section will illustrate this observation with reference to western Christianity in its Judaic and Graeco-Roman settings, and also to the African cultural background.

Throughout the missionary history of Christianity, Christians have had to explain in what ways the Christian message differed from the cultural and religious heritage of those to whom the Christian faith was being introduced. During the first Christian century, missionaries like Paul of Tarsus and the writer of the Gospel according to John resolved the conflict between the Christian faith and Graeco-Roman thought by proposing a synthesis between the two. By doing so, those missionaries aimed to show that Christian proclamation was largely compatible with the most influential views prevalent in Graeco-Roman society. In particular, the Christian view of destiny was synthesized with the Greek philosophy of _Logos_.[6]

Owing to prejudice and religio-cultural bigotry, most western Christian missionaries have not followed the positive and constructive example of the apostles while presenting Christianity to Africa in modern times. Their failure in this regard has led to confusion and conflict concerning the relationship between Christianity and the

African religio-cultural heritage.

It is ironical that Christian theological discussion about 'indigenization' of Christianity in Africa had to wait for at least a century until most African countries had achieved political independence, having triumphed over western colonialism. In the apostolic period the indigenization of Christianity within Graeco-Roman society was an integral part of missionary proclamation. In contrast, the modern missionary enterprise in Africa expected African converts to abandon their own world-view, concept of history, religious beliefs and cultural practices before they could be fully admitted into the churches established by western missionary societies. Western missionaries demanded of their African converts to totally substitute western ideas and cultural practices for everything that was African. Thus African converts in those churches became superficial imitators of their foreign missionary masters who came from a different cultural tradition proclaiming a new doctrine with its corresponding teachings about world history and human destiny.[7]

In Christian churches today there is much talk about the need to make Christianity deeply rooted in the African religio-cultural heritage. But why should this concern be articulated now,

when many Christians have already been brought up
to believe that there is nothing valuable in their
own cultural and religious traditions? Some of the
most outspoken opponents against the indigenization
of Christianity are staunch African Christians
fully indoctrinated to denounce their own cultural
roots, by missionaries who have not done the same.[8]
Effective indigenization of Christianity in Africa
will occur only if all the presuppositions under-
lying classical doctrinal theology are re-examined
from the perspective of traditional African thought,
as western Christians did in the great 'ecumenical
councils'.

The Christian view of history is centred on
the belief that in the beginning God created the
universe including man. God gave man the responsi-
bility to look after the rest of creation, always
following God's direction as outlined in the Bible.
However, man is a 'fallen' creature who disobeyed
God and in defiance placed himself in the place
of God. Christianity affirms that God is not
only the creator, but also the author of history.
The Hebrew understanding of world history as
recorded in the Old Testament is taken for granted,
but Christianity deviated from rabbinic Judaism by
affirming Jesus of Nazareth as the saviour of all
people. Hebrews interpreted every historical

event theistically - they believed that God was
their righteous and just master, who always
delivered them from all sorts of oppression,
political or otherwise. In return, they believed
that God expected them to obey him in respect of
the covenant which he had established with them
through Moses. The main role of the prophets was
to remind the Hebrews of the demands of this covenant,
and warn that God would intervene in history if the
Hebrews failed to honour the covenant. The Mosaic
covenant established the Hebrews as God's 'Chosen
People'. This doctrine of 'Election' brought about
a self-centred theology in which the 'Salvation'
of the human race was understood exclusively in
terms of the Hebrew destiny in human history.
Messianic expectations in Hebrew religious thought
evolved slowly as a way of inculcating hope among
a people who were often under the political domina-
tion of other nations.[9] If God was the author
of history, and if the Hebrews were his 'Chosen
People', why should they continue to be oppressed
by other nations? The messianic hope solved this
theological puzzle by affirming that this suffering
was only temporary and that eventually, God would
raise a Messiah to finally establish a theocratic
society characterized by righteousness and
justice.[10]

Christians believe that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah whom the Hebrew prophets anticipated.[11] Ironically, official Judaism did not accept this claim, although Jesus proclaimed his teaching in the context of Jewish messianic expectations. Christianity extended the messianic hope to all peoples, so that 'Salvation' was no longer presented as the monopoly of the Hebrews. This universalization of the Jewish messianic hope was a radical departure from the self-centredness of the Hebrew view of destiny. Jesus became the 'Son of God' whom God had sent into the world to become the 'Saviour of humankind'. Paul and other apostles taught that Jesus had come to dissolve the distinctions between Jews and non-Jews, masters and slaves, children and adults, men and women. Through Jesus all people irrespective of their ethnic belonging would be 'saved' if they accepted him and his message.

In an earlier chapter we have discussed the problem of clarifying the relationship between God and Jesus. How is Jesus different from other human beings? The Christian doctrines of divine conception, Trinity and resurrection reinforce the belief in Jesus as the unique God-Man who came to re-direct human destiny.[12]

In contrast to Christian theism as outlined above, one influential trend in Greek philosophy viewed human destiny as a process that was governed by Logos - a rational principle without any anthropomorphic attributes. According to that philosophy, the world was not created by a deity, but was held together by the Logos principle. The gods of Graeco-Roman religions were not free from the rational consistency of Logos. Christianity identified the God of Christian theism with Logos, and in Christian theology Logos was accorded anthropomorphic significance. It is not our concern here to judge whether this identification was a correct synthesis between the Christian faith and Greek philosophy. Nevertheless, it should be noted that this synthesis served to introduce a radically new interpretation of history into Graeco-Roman historical thought. This new interpretation has had a tremendous impact on the western intellectual tradition for the last twenty centuries, especially since emperor Constantine.[13]

When Christianity was introduced into the interior of Africa, the western missionaries involved in this enterprise were convinced that their Christian interpretation of history was absolutely correct. Indeed, they did not entertain

the possibility that African peoples had another interpretation which might also be valid. To this point we shall turn in the next section.[14]

Since the publication of Edwin Smith's African Ideas of God, it has been maintained in much Christian missionary assessment of traditional African religious thought that African peoples presupposed a defective concept of God and an inadequate understanding human destiny.[15] This view has been reached by applying Euro-Christian assumptions as criteria for judging the theological adequacy of African cultural and religious ideas. In an earlier chapter of the present study it has been shown that misunderstanding tends to arise whenever participants in discourse assume diverse starting points with regard to the topic under discussion. The Christian missionary assessment of African beliefs has been greatly hampered by the failure, on the part of most missionaries and anthropologists, to present the African cultural and religious heritage from the perspective of Africans themselves. This section will endeavour to outline the traditional African view of destiny from the perspective of African traditional thought as the present author understands it. The section will show that the African understanding of matter, duration and space constitute a complete system

which should not be judged against systems developed in other cultural traditions, such as the Euro-Christian one.

In traditional African thought the universe is one. There is no planetary plurality, as there is in Graeco-Roman cosmology in the context of which early Christian doctrines were formulated.[16] Reality in African thought has two modes of existence, the visible and the invisible (or the material and the 'spiritual').[17] An object which at one time exists in the visible material mode may continue its existence in the invisible 'spiritual' mode after an event of transformation. For example, a person is believed to continue existing after his death, even though the decomposition of his corpse is taken for granted. Death is the event in which the transformation occurs, from the material to the 'spiritual' mode of existence. Human life is believed to be indestructible, even though the material bodies in which it is manifested are temporally finite. Ancestors who died a long time ago are believed to continue influencing the lives of later generations, even though their bodies are not embalmed and preserved.

Existence of an object in the material mode is finite - it is limited in shape, size, spacial extension and also in duration. In contrast, the

'spiritual' mode is not so limited - it defies definition in terms of matter, duration and space.

Thus traditional African thought presupposes a monistic universe and a dualistic modal existence. When a person dies, he does not go to 'another world' since African cosmology does not entertain the possibility of any worlds other than this one in which we live. It would be misleading to claim that when a person dies he 'goes to the spirit-world' because all ontological entities - God, spirits, ancestors, the present generation, animals, plants and inanimate things - are believed to exist in this one world, some being invisible while the rest are visible.[18]

The spirits of ancestors influence the lives of the present generation through their interaction with particular individual persons. Other spirits manifest their presence in particular places and objects like trees, rivers, lakes, caves and mountains. 'God' manifests his will through particular persons and events.[19]

Personality in African thought is defined not abstractly in terms of a metaphysical 'soul' as in Platonic philosophy and classical Christian theology, but concretely in terms of known human individuals.

The origin of the universe is not a matter of theoretical speculation, but an acknowledged mystery known only to 'God' who is believed to have brought it into existence.

Questions about the origin of the universe are not live issues open for theological and philosophical argument. The theoretical debate between the evolutionist followers of Charles Darwin and conservative churchmen concerning the theory of evolution and the Christian doctrine of creation would be conceptually impossible in the traditional African setting.[20] Likewise, arguments as found in western philosophy between theists and atheists concerning the existence of 'God' would be irrelevant in traditional African theological and philosophical thought, because the existence of 'God' is taken for granted.

As for human destiny, the rites of passage from birth to death are endorsements of a pattern of change which is immutable. A person is born as a baby, grows up through adolescence to adulthood, after which he becomes an elder and then dies. At death he changes his mode of existence from the material to the 'spiritual' mode. Thus birth and death are integral to the immutable pattern of change in the world.[21]

In traditional African thought it is assumed
that the universe will continue to exist endlessly.
Changes may occur within the universe - there may
be floods, earthquakes, droughts and so on, but
the universe itself as a whole will never cease
to exist. There is no eschatological anticipation
in the traditional understanding of history.
The future is taken for granted, within the pattern
of immutable change as discussed above.

Traditional African thought is in a sense
deterministic. Its determinism is based on
existential experience, not on abstract mathematical
calculations like those of Newtonian natural laws.
The determinism in traditional African thought
presupposes 'God' not as a hypothesis to fill
gaps left unfilled by invented physical laws,
but as an ontological entity whose existence is
taken for granted. Thus traditional African
thought is intensely existentialist in the sense
that it derives its main ideas more from personal
experience than from abstract speculation. Owing
to this existential emphasis, the notions of matter,
duration and space are understood dynamically
in relation to the material aspect of reality,
not as abstract notions that could be discussed
without reference to concrete things. It is

interesting to observe, in passing, that Hegel's idealist philosophy which has influenced many modern western thinkers (both positively and negatively) would make no sense in the context of traditional African thought. Nor would the doctrinal debate on whether Jesus is 'of one substance' with God the Father.

J.S. Mbiti maintains that in traditional African thought there is no concept of 'future'.[22] It follows from the foregoing discussion that this assertion is not correct. In the context of their own cosmological assumptions, African peoples do have notions of past, present and future. Eternity is also understood, though it is not viewed metaphysically in terms of an infinite time scale.

Every human culture manifests the historical self-understanding of the people who produce it. Moreover, the social institutions of a cultural group express the expectations of the present generation in that particular group.

A critical period may be reached when a cultural group is forced by the circumstances of its own historical development, to review its estimation of its own destiny in the world. In the western intellectual tradition, such critical periods were experienced as follows: In the fourth and fifth centuries the Christian calendar was

adopted, reflecting a new interpretation of history. The conversion of emperor Constantine was an important factor in the popularization of Christianity in Europe. In the late fifteenth century, Europe began exploring across the oceans of the world, with papal authority to convert 'pagans' to Christianity. Those voyages of discovery and expansion led to the economic and political supremacy of Europe in the world. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, it became widely believed in pinnacle of human technological and theological progress. In the 1960s, writers like Alvin Toffler began to challenge the western part of the world to prepare for 'Future Shock'.[23]

Contemporary Africa is currently undergoing such a critical period. Colonization and the modern Christian missionary enterprise jointly shook the foundations of African culture, religion and thought. The shock waves of these two historical factors have forced Africans to review their own understanding of their place in history. Acceptance of an eschatological view of history, which is alien to traditional African thought. At the same time, modern empirical science promises to liberate African peoples from domination by natural forces. The ambiguity of science and technology makes it

difficult for many Africans to accept those promises wholeheartedly. Modern technology is producing both constructive and also destructive contrivances, and it does not seem obvious that the positive contributions outweigh the negative ones. The ethnical implications of modern techno-logical innovation do not seem to be accorded the serious attention they deserve.

A third factor which is aggravating the crisis, is that post-colonial Africa is directly and indirectly pressurized to accept foreign ideologies from East and West, with promises of diplomatic and economic support in return. Conse-quently, post-colonial Africa is facing a crisis of identity which can partly be viewed as a crisis of destiny. The problem of destiny, as a problem of meaning in discourse, is made immensely difficult in the contemporary African context, by the fact that African peoples have to re-define their identity - their historical self-understanding - in the midst of competing religions, ideologies and technological options, each of which claims to be the champion and guardian of peace, justice and truth. How can the problem of destiny be philosophically resolved in contemporary Africa? To this question we shall turn in the next section.

Through western-initiated schooling, many Africans have been persuaded to abandon their traditional world-view and adopt cosmological ideas derived from the Christian Bible and modern empirical science. Some students, even at university level, find it difficult to reconcile Christian teaching with scientific ideas. The modal theory proposed at the beginning of this study may help in providing a theoretical frame-work for such reconciliation. At the same time, however, these two world-views have somehow to be reconciled with the traditional African world-view, which is presupposed by the majority of African peoples living both in rural areas and in urban centres. Compelling Africans to abandon their conceptual assumptions does not seem to be a pragmatic strategy, considering that those assumptions are deeply rooted.

RESOLVING THE PROBLEM OF DESTINY IN DISCOURSE

There is no easy solution to the problem of destiny in discourse. However, a thorough under-standing of the problem will help in forestalling the temptation to impose one's view on other people, and in appreciating that other people also have their own views which deserve to be respected.

Throughout the present study it has been maintained that the first positive step in dealing with all problems of meaning (including the problem of destiny) in discourse, is to acknowledge, understand and appreciate the presuppositions of those people with whom someone interacts. This step is considered necessary because the failure to take it leads someone to assume that other people base their arguments as he does. More often than not, the assumptions of participants in discourse are discordant. Clarification of the assumptions upon which participants in discourse base their arguments, is an indispensable pre-requisite of effective discussion.

In resolving the problem of destiny this pre-requisite must be met. It is erroneous to presuppose that one's view of history is universally valid and absolutely correct. Moreover, it is an insult on the dignity of other people, for someone to insist dogmatically that he is right and everyone else is wrong.

The classical creeds of the Christian faith are dated documents, which were formulated in response to particular theological controversies arising from conflicts between 'ecumenical' Christian theology and 'heretical' views.[24] To an African Christian today, those creeds are

unintelligible without an understanding of the philosophical and theological background in which they arose. This background is unknown to most African Christians, and consequently the creeds do not have as much theological significance in modern Africa as they do in the western churches which have been having the creeds as the focal points of their doctrinal reference. Interestingly, to the so-called African Indpendent churches the classical creeds of the Christian faith do not arouse much interest: What is of crucial importance to those churches is the continuity of the Old and the New Testaments, manifesting God's unbroken involvement in the direction of history. In the religious history of the Hebrews as recorded in the Bible, these churches discern a new interpretation of the history of African peoples, particularly with reference to their experience of colonial domination in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The Exodus motif is a common theme to most of these churches, and it also became central to the Christian theology of Black slaves in North America.

New Testament eschatology is a theme which has received much attention among western theologians. The linear, three-dimensional view of history (consisting of past, present and future and centred on Jesus) is predominant in western Christian theology. According to Oscar Cullmann,

for example, the coming of Jesus into the world
is the mid-point in this three-dimensional linear
history. Cullmann suggests that the distinctive
element in Christianity - the element which it
does not share with other religious or philoso-
phical systems - is the biblical conception of time
and history.[25]

John Macquarrie agrees with Cullmann's
presentation of the conception of history as it
was viewed by the New Testament writers, but he
doubts that this view is the kernel of their message.
At the same time, Macquarrie criticizes Cullmann
for advocating a view of time and history which
'seems to be indissolubly linked with an outmoded
geocentric cosmology, with creation only a few
thousand years back and the end correspondingly
near in the future'. To stress his criticism,
Macquarrie asks: 'When we allow half a million
years or more for man on the earth, what sense does
it make to talk of sacred history as co-extensive
with all history? When we think of billions of
years of cosmic process, during which there probably
have been and will be millions of histories analogous
to terrestrial history throughout the universe,
what sense does it make to talk of a mid-point
of time?'[26]

Macquarrie's questions are pertinent to the concern of this chapter. We have to reckon with the fact that the most widely held interpretation of world history and human destiny is dominated by Judaeo-Christian presuppositions. This situation is the result of the permeation of western ideas in the world through colonial domination and the modern Christian missionary enterprise. Considering that non-Christian cultures have had their own interpretations of history and human destiny which are not necessarily wrong, we are obliged to ask: Is it necessary to think of human destiny exclusively in terms of Christian or Judaic eschatology? Is it necessary to view Judaic and Christian histories as the frame of reference for all human history?

In my view the correct answers to both these questions are negative. The Christian approach to history and human destiny is only one among others, and need not be presented as though it were the only correct view. In discourse concerning the problem of destiny there should be room to appreciate other approaches and consider their significance for those people who have built their cultures on presuppositions other than the Judaic and the Christian ones.

Following up the caution we have repeated
earlier against dogmatism, we may agree with
Macquarrie's concluding remark in his criticism
of Cullmann's view:

> This bizarre result shows us the danger of
> setting up a divine revelation which may not
> be questioned or criticized in the light of
> secular knowledge.[27]

In his book The Secular City Harvey Cox has
applied the same approach as Oscar Cullmann to
formulate a theory of Secularization. According
to Cox, the process of secularization can be traced
through the social and technological evolution of
the Hebrews as recorded in the Bible from the
creation to the time of Jesus, and extended through
the development of towns in the Graeco-Roman world
to the rise of modern cities in the twentieth
century. Cox sees the rise of the 'technopolis'
in the twentieth century as the culmination of the
social and technological evolution which started
with creation as recorded in the book of Genesis.
According to Cox, the motivation which initially
set in motion the process of secularization was
God's command to Adam to subdue the earth.[28]
This theory is not plausible when it is
assessed from the perspective of cultural traditions
which have not been in contact with the Judeo-

Christian tradition for many centuries, and have
created civilizations which were quite advanced in
comparison with Hebrew, Graeco-Roman and modern
European civilizations — for example, ancient China,
India, Egypt, Babylon, Inca, Aztec, Zimbabwe, and
so on.   Were these also motivated by the divine
mandate in the book of <u>Genesis</u> which the people who
developed these civilizations did not know about?
Karl Marx's anti-theological history of seculariza-
tion appears more plausible than Cox's theological
history, even though the political implications
which Marx derived from his interpretation of
human history are questionable.

J.S. Mbiti ciriticizes western theological
studies on biblical eschatology for over-emphasising
the three-dimensional linear concept of history as
the dominant biblical view. He remarks:

> The question of Time is not a major
> concern of the Bible. Consequently, there is
> no single or consistent view of Time in the
> Bible. Instead we find several views of
> Time... It seems as if the characteristically
> western notion of Time with a threefold
> linear dimension has so deeply and subcon-
> sciously governed our understanding of New
> Testament eschatology that we presumably
> have a distorted or exaggerated picture of the
> whole subject... The three-dimensional

linear concept of Time is clearly one of the biblical views, but why has it been allowed to dominate our thinking and understanding of eschatology to the exclusion of other views?[29]

In agreement with J. Marsh, Mbiti suggests that 'The Old Testament Jews were more concerned with the content than the chronology of Time'. He thinks that this Hebrew view is close to the African notions of Time, 'in which the actual event is far more important than chronology as such'. He adds, however, that a radical difference is 'introduced by the Jewish eschatological hope which increasingly permeates the later writers of the Old Testament and of which we find not even the remotest idea or parallel in African background'. 'Yet', Mbiti continues, 'even this Jewish two-fold dimension of history, with its "This Age" and "The Age to Come", is not strictly three-dimensional. It compresses Time into two contituents'.[30]

Here we need not digress into a detailed critique of Mbiti's theory of the African concept of Time and history. Our allusion to several scholars and their theories, suffices to show that the problem of destiny in discourse is highly controversial. Each scholar presents his theory thinking that he is solving the problem, but before long other scholars criticize him and in turn present alternative theories, which are also

demolished later.

How then, can the problem of destiny in discourse be resolved? For a clue it is necessary to probe deeper into the first step proposed at the beginning of this section. Understanding and appreciating the presuppositions upon which someone bases his interpretation of history, without imposing our own presuppositions, is the best approach to deal with the problem. In an earlier chapter it was shown that presuppositions are internalized as a result of combinations of several factors - cultural, psychological, educational, and so on. Moreover, a person's interpretation of history is greatly influenced by his total world-view - by his understanding of reality as a whole, in the context of his cultural environment. The presupposed relation- ship between matter, duration and space provides the conceptual locus in which one's interpretation of history is developed. One significant difficulty in Mbiti's theory of the African concept of Time, is that the notion of duration is analysed in abstract- tion from the comprehensive world-view which is the conceptual locus of the African interpretation of history.

It has been pointed out earlier that according to traditional African understanding, the universe is one, and reality consists of two aspects - the visible and the invisible (or the physical and the

'spiritual'. Duration in this world-view is continuous, with no break on actual events here and now. Logically, this world-view is wholly integrated and consistent. Conceptually, it entertains no possibility of other planets or other worlds. Therefore, God and all other ontological entities exist in this one universe, without end. There may be a change in the mode of existence, but both the visible and the invisible continue to exist in this one universe. Christian eschatology is therefore not only meaningless, but irrelevant.

The introduction of Christian eschatology into contemporary African thought has been accompanied by corresponding indoctrination to accept a new world-view and abandon the old one. Biblical eschatology has been inculcated into the African converts with a presupposition of the geocentric world-view, which the biblical writers took for granted. At the same time, modern empirical science is taught in schools, presupposing a heliocentric world-view in which the sun is just one of the smaller stars in a vast universe. Evolution of the human and other living species is accepted now as an integral part of biological education. This situation in which four world-views are presupposed at the same time creates a serious epistemological crisis among Africans, especially the younger ones who are exposed

to all the world views at the same time - at home they presuppose the traditional African view, in the Church they are expected to believe in the biblical view, in geography and physics they are taught the Copernican world view, and in biology they have to accept Darwin's theory of evolution.

In the contemporary African context, resolving the problem of destiny will inevitably demand the reconciliation between the biblical, the scientific and the traditional African world-views. It will also demand an appreciation of the role of the three modes of thought and expression as proposed earlier in the present study - the empirical, assessive and stipulative modes. The primary objective of the Bible (and most religious texts) is not to present scientific hypotheses about the world, but rather to articulate an assessive account of the place and predicament of man in the world and in history. Such articulation is done in the context of the prevailing world-view. In contrast, empirical science offers empirical descriptions of the physical aspect of the universe - descriptions which can be abandoned, modified or replaced when new empirical data are discovered. Philosophy provides the stipulative tools which facilitate the development of human knowledge. Therefore, religion, philosophy and empirical science are complementary as human endeavours, to attain a comprehensive understanding of reality.

APPLICATION OF THE MODAL THEORY TO THE

PROBLEM OF DESTINY

The endeavour of finding answers to ultimate questions concerning destiny is an assessive one. It involves people's evaluation of themselves in relation to natural and human history. Although some historical data can be objectively verified using methods that are generally accepted among historians, the significance attached to particular historical events depends largely on the interests and concerns of particular historians. A set of historical events is open to a wide variety of interpretations, depending on the underlying presuppositions of those involved in interpreting the events. The Judaic and Christian views of history may help to illustrate this point.

In the Old Testament the Hebrews recorded their interpretation of the historical events they went through. Their interpretation was not always agreeable with the views of history held by the peoples with whom the Hebrews interacted. In their exodus from Egypt, for example, the Hebrews believed that God (YHWH) was delivering them from bondage under the leadership of Moses. Egyptian rulers of that time did not consider Israel's quest for liberation

to be inspired by God. Rather, the pharaohs intended to maintain the status quo and resisted Israel's struggle until the exodus crossed the Red Sea. Israel's theistic interpretation of history was derived from the conviction that through Abraham, Isaac and Jacob God had established a covenant, giving Israel a destiny that could not be nullified or undermined by any human regime, within history. God's will would eventually triumph in favour of Israel, provided that Israel remained faithful to God. .

The disciples of Jesus were convinced that their master was the Messiah who had come to bring 'peace on earth and goodwill among men' (Luke 2:14; Matt. 21:1-9; Luke 19:28-40). Some Jewish leaders did not view Jesus in this way, but considered him as an impostor who claimed to be messiah without sufficient grounds. When Christianity spread to Graeco-Roman towns and cities, converts accepted Jesus as 'Lord and Saviour' of mankind. Other people, however, refused to accept Jesus as Christ, considering him to be an ordinary Jew who got in trouble with the authorities in Palestine and was executed. The affirmation that Jesus of Nazareth is Christ, is an act of faith but not an empirical fact.

While it is true that the life and ministry
of Jesus inaugurated a new era in human history
(as shown by the widely used Christian calendar),
it is also true that the significance of Jesus in
history was made known in the world by individuals
who had become his faithful followers. In Jesus
they believed that the 'Good News' he was proclaim-
ing brought about their own 'salvation' and self'
fullfilment. They were convinced that the teaching
of Jesus was meant for the whole world, not for
Jews only. Christian evangelization is founded on
faith in Jesus as Christ - on a particular inter-
pretation of the historical facts about Jesus of
Nazareth.

I have argued that religion, aesthetics and
morality belong to the 'assessive' mode of thought
and expression. Answers to questions about the
ultimate origins, purpose and goals of human existence
are closely tied to religious convictions. Thus
destiny as a problem of meaning in discourse can be
seen as an 'assessive' problem related to religious
and quasi-religious beliefs.

At the beginning of the present study it was
shown that misunderstandings in discourse arise both
within and between disciplines. If theology is
considered as a discipline, it is evident that
theologians are not agreed among themselves on how

human destiny should be viewed even within a particular religion. At the same time, theological views of human destiny face criticism from those thinkers who are opposed to religious institutions and traditions. Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud are significant examples.

It has also been emphasised that problems of meaning in discourse will be greatly minimized if the people involved mutually recognize and appreciate those presuppositions on which each argument is based. This requirement implies that absolutism, dogmatism, prejudice and bigotry (whether religious or otherwise) ought to give way to mutual respect and consensus based on premises that are commonly agreeable. Effective discourse can be very educative and enlightening, in the sense that those involved in it are enabled to get out of their epistemological cocoons in order to appreciate how other people view reality, and re-evaluate much that is taken for granted.

REFERENCE NOTES

CHAPTER FIVE

1. On this point see S.C. Neill, The Eternal Dimension, London: Epworth Press, 1963, pp. 11-15; Alisdair MacIntyre, Marxism and Christianity, Penguin Books, 1968. Also Enrique Dussel, Ethics and the Theology of Liberation, New York: Orbis, 1978.

2. I have dealt with this topic in J.N.K. Mugambi, 'Some Perspectives of Christianity in the Context of the Modern Missionary Enterprise in East Africa with Special Reference to Kenya', M.A. Thesis, University of Nairobi, 1977.

3. John Hick, 'Is there Only One Way to God?' in Theology, Jan. 1982, London: SPCK. See also his books God and the Universe of Faiths, London: Macmillan/ St. Martin's Press, 1973, and God has Many Names, Philadelphia: Westminister Press, 1982.

4. On Milleniarism see Bryan Wilson, Religious Sects, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1970. For a systematic presentation of 'The Kingdom of God' as a Christian theme see Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, Vol. 3 Part V, 'History and the Kingdom of God', University of Chicago Press, 1963.

5. J.S. Mbiti, 'New Testament Eschatology and the Akamba of Kenya', in D.B. Barrett, ed., _African Initiatives in Religion,_ Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1971. This essay is a summary of Mbiti's Doctoral Dissertation 'New Testament Eschatology in Relation to the Evangelization of Tribal Africa', Cambridge University, 1963, published as _New Testament Eschatology in an African Background,_ London: Oxford University Press, 1971. Mbiti expresses the same view in his _African Religions and Philosophy,_ London: Heinemann, 1969.

6. For more detailed discussion of this point see R. Bultmann, _Primitive Christianity in its Contemporary Setting,_ London: Collins Fontana, 1960. Also Paul Tillich Systematic Theology, Vol. 3 Part V, University of Chicago Press, 1963, pp. 394-423.

7. J.N.K. Mugambi, _op.cit._

8. For example Byang Kato, _Theological Pitfalls in Africa,_ Kisumu, Kenya: Evangel Press, 1975.

9. William Holladay has argued in an interesting article that the concern of the prophets was to 'comfort the afflicted and afflict the comofrtable'. The messianic expectations were a means of comforting the afflicted, during the periods when the Jews were

suffering under the rule of foreign masters. See William Holladay, 'Is the Old Testament Zionist?', in The Middle East Newsletter, Vol. II, No. 6, June-July 1968.

10. M.I. Dimont has shown that many people claimed to be messiah's during the many centuries of the suffering of the Jews, but they were not accepted as messiahs. Jesus was one of the claimants, but he was neither the first nor the last in Jewish history. See Max I. Dimont, The Indestructible Jews, New York: New American Library, 1971.

11. W. Holladay, op.cit.

12. cf. J. Hick, ed., The Myth of God Incarnate, London: SCM Press, 1977; M. Goulder, ed., Incarnation and Myth: The Debate Continued, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1979.

13. This point is discussed by several scholars in History's Lessons for Tomorrow's Mission, Geneva: World Student Christian Federation, c. 1960.

14. A similar criticism against the modern Christian missionary enterprise in Asia has been lucidly articulated by C.S. Song in his recent book The Compassionate God, New York: Orbis Books, 1982.

15. Edwin Smith, <u>African Ideas of God</u>, London: Edinburgh House Press, 3rd ed. 1961. Smith's views have been presented by M.J. McVeigh in his book <u>God in Africa: Conceptions of God in African Traditional Religion and Christianity</u>, Cape Cod: Claude Stark, 1974. For a critique of Smith's view see B. Idowu, <u>African Traditional Religion: A Definition</u>, London: SCM Press, 1973, pp. 61·69, 144 ff., Also E.I. Metuh, <u>God and Man in African Religion,</u> London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1981.

16. Prof. Mazisi Kunene mentions in his book <u>Anthem of the Decades: A Zulu Epic Dedicated to the Women of Africa</u>, London: Heinemann, African Writers Series 234, 1981, pp. xiii-xl, that in Zulu cosmology there are many 'worlds'. However, he clarifies that these 'worlds' are co-existent and overlap within this universe. Thus Kunene's presentation does not disagree with my assertion that the African world-view is monistic. I am grateful to Prof. Kunene for agreeing to discuss orally with me, especially concerning Zulu cosmology and theology. This was in May 1982, in Nairobi. See Also Kwame Nkrumah, <u>Consciencism</u>, London: Panaf Books, 1964, pp. 12-13.

17. The term 'spiritual' is not quite appropriate to refer to the invisible aspect of reality as understood in African thought, although in western thought 'master' has often been contrasted with 'spirit'. In traditional African thought the contrast is between the bisible and the invisible aspects of reality, or between 'embodied' and 'disembodied' existence. I owe the latter terminology to Prof. Mazisi Kunene, through my discussion with him in May 1982.

18. On the African World-view see for example, K. Nkrumah, op.cit.; K. Wiredu, op.cit.; Mazisi Kunene, op.cit.; J.K. Agbeti, 'African Theology: What it is' in Presence, Vol. V. No. 3, 1972, Nairobi, WSCF, pp. 5-8; E.I. Metuh, op.cit.

19. For further discussion of this point see J.N.K. Mugambi and N. Kirima, The African Religious Heritage, Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1976, reprinted 1982.

20. I have discussed this point im my essay 'The Theory of Evolution and the Doctrime of Creation', (hitherto unpublished). For details of the nineteenth century debate see I.T. Ramsay, op.cit., pp. 1-25, W. Irvine, op.cit., passim, B. Russell, op.cit., pp. 697-8; C. Brown, op.cit., pp. 147-51.

21. See J.N.K. Mugambi, 'Some Perspectives of Christianity in the Context of the Modern Missionary Enterprise in East Africa', op.cit.

22. Mbiti has written: 'according to traditional (African) concepts, time is a two-dimensional phenomenon, with a long past, a present and virtually no future. The linear concept of time in western thought, with an indefinite past, present and infinite future, is practically foreign to African thinking'. African Religions and Philosophy, p. 17. For an earlier critique of this view see J.N.K. Mugambi, 'The African Experience of God', in Thought and Practice, Vol. I No. I, 1974, Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1974. See also Reference note 5 above.

23. Alvin Toffler, Future Shock, London/New York: 1967.

24. For a study of the background in which the early Christian creeds were formulated see Alan Richardson, Creeds in the Making, London: SCM Press, 2nd ed. 1941. Also Paul Tillich, A History of Christian Thought, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963, Part I.

25. Oscar Cullmann's views are critically presented in John Macquarrie, Twentieth Century Religious Thought, London: SCM Press, 1963, pp. 326-28.

26. J. Macquarrie, op.cit., p. 328.

27. ibid., p. 328.

28. Harvey Cox, The Secular City, Penguin Books, 1968.

29. J.S. Mbiti, New Testament Eschatology in an African Background, London: Oxford University Press, 1971, p. 38.

30. ibid., p. 39.

CONCLUSION

At this stage it is worthwhile to summarise the insights to which the present study has led.

In the first chapter it has been shown that a combination of factors influences each person whenever he discerns the meaning of words in discourse. For effective communication to be accomplished, it is necessary for both the speaker and the respondent to appreciate each other's background. This will enhance understanding as the dialogue proceeds.

The second chapter proposes that there are basically three modes of thought and expression - the empirical, the assessive and the stipulative. These three modes are not mutually exclusive in discourse. Rather, persons shift from one mode to another as they endeavour to clarify what they intend to mean with the words they use. However, one mode may dominate in the discussion on a particular topic, while another mode dominates yet a different topic. Also, depending on the cultural and educational background of the speakers, one topic may be discussed from the perspective of any of the three modes of thought and expression.

The third chapter shows that description as a problem of meaning in discourse is complicated

in two ways. Firstly, when verbal language is used for the purpose of describing, understanding will be effected if the descriptive propositions are composed wholly of constituents with which we (as speakers and writers or as hearers readers) are acquainted. This if a writer describes a concept in terms with which the reader is not acquainted, it is not possible for the reader to understand the description. In religious discourse this is a common difficulty, because of the plurality of religions and claims to unique and revealed experiences.

Secondly, ambiguity and vagueness undermine the quest for clarity in discourse. For effective discourse to be accomplished it is necessary that ambiguity and vagueness be eliminated, by specifying how potentially ambiguous and vague terms are intended to be understood.

Discourse concerning ethics and morality is especially susceptible to vagueness and ambiguity. This point is explored in the fourth chapter, which further emphasises the necessity of clarifying what one intends to mean in order to avoid being misunderstood and promote appropriate response in discussion.

The fifth chapter posits destiny as another concept which evokes so many meanings that in discussions concerning it misunderstandings are

often inevitable. Again, this chapter confirms the insight already stated earlier, that for mutual understanding to be established between the speaker and the hearer in discourse, it is necessary for both to reciprocally clarify how they intend to be understood. Without such conscious clarification, persons may continue a conversation in which no effective communication takes place.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

ACHEBE, C., <u>Things Fall Apart</u>, London: Heinemann, African Writers Series.

_____, <u>Beware Soul Brother</u>, London: Heinemann, African Writers Series, 1972.

_____, <u>Girls at War</u>, London: Heinemann, African Writers Series.

APPIAH-KUBI, K. and S. TORRES, eds., <u>African Theology en Route</u>, New York: Orbis, 1979.

BARRETT, D.B., ed., <u>African Initiatives in Religion</u>, Nairobi: East African Publishing House.

p'BITEK, OKOT, <u>Religion of the Central Luo</u>, Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1971.

_____, <u>African Religions in Western Scholarship</u>, Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1970.

_____, <u>Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol</u>, Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1967.

BOESAK, A., <u>Farewell to Innocence</u>, New York: Orbis, 1976.

BONHOEFFER, D., <u>Letters and Papers from Prison</u>, London: SCM Press, 1953.

BOYD, W., <u>The History of Western Education</u>, London: Black, 9th ed. 1969.

BROWN, C., Philosophy and the Christian Faith, London: Tyndale, 1968.

BULTMANN, R., Primitive Christianity in its Contemporary Setting, London/Collins, 1960.

CAMPBELL, J.I., The Language of Religion, New York: Bruce, 1971.

CONE, J.H., A Black Theology of Liberation, Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1970.

COX, H., The Secular City, Penguin Books, 1968.

DELFGAAUW, B., Twentieth Century Philosophy, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1969.

DIMONT. M.I., Jews God and History, New York: New American Library, 1964.

DURRANT, M., The Logical Status of God, London: Macmillan, 1973.

DUSSEL, H., Ethics and the Theology of Liberation, New York: Orbis, 1978.

FLETCHER, J., Situation Ethics, London: SCM Press, 1967.

FLEW, A. and A. MacINTYRE, eds., New Essays in Philosophical Theology, London: SCM Press, 1955.

GOULDER, M. ed., Incarnation and Myth: The Debate Continued, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1979.

GREEN, M., ed., The Truth of God Incarnate, London: Hodderr and Stoughton, 1977.

HARTMAN, J.B., ed., <u>Philosophy of Recent Times</u>, Vol.
II, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967.

HARTNACK, J., <u>Wittgenstein and Modern Philosophy</u>,
London: Methuen, 1962, Eng. Trans. 1965.

HICK, J., ed., <u>The Myth of God Incarnate</u>, London:
SCM Press, 1977.

_____, <u>God has many names</u>, Philadelphia, Westminister
Press, 1982.

_____, <u>God and the Universe of Faiths</u>, London:
Macmillan, 1973.

HOFFDING, H., <u>A History of Modern Philosophy</u>, Vol. I,
New York: Dover, 1955.

HOFFMAN, J., <u>Marxism and the Theory of Praxis: A
Critique of Some New Versions of Old Fallacies</u>,
London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975.

HUDSON, W.D., <u>Ludwig Wittgenstein</u>, Richmond: John
Knox Press, 1968.

_____, <u>Wittgenstein and Religious Belief</u>, London:
Macmillan, 1975.

HUME, D. <u>Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion</u>, ed.
Henry D. Aiken, New York: Hafner Press, 1948.

IDOWU, <u>African Traditional Religion</u>, London: SCM
Press, 1973.

IRVINE, W., <u>Apes, Angels and Victorians</u>, London:
Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1956.

KATO, B., Theological Pitfalls in Africa, Kisumu, Kenya: Evangel, 1975.

KEELING, M., What is Right? London: SCM Press, 1969.

KENYATTA, J., Facing Mount Kenya, London: Secker and Warburg, 1938.

KOESTLER, A., The Sleepwalkers: A history of Man's Changing View of the Universe: Pelican Books, 1968.

KRAEMER, H., The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World, London: Edinburgh House Press, 1938.

KUNENE, M., Anthem of the Decades, London: Heinemann, 1981.

LEAN, G., Politician: William Wilberforce's Struggle, London: Darton Longman and Todd, 1980.

LEWIS, H.D., Philosophy of Religion, London: English Universities Press, 1965.

LITTLE, K., Negroes in Britain, London: 1948.

LUCKHARDT, G.C., ed., Wittgenstein Sources and Perspectives, Hassocks, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1979.

LYONS, J., New Horizons in Linguistics, Penguin Books, 1970.

MACINTYRE, A., Marxism and Christianity, Penguin Books, 1968.

MacQUARRIE, J., Twentieth Century Religious Thought,
London: SCM Press, 1963.

MASLOW, A., A Study in Wittgenstein's Tractatus,
University of California Press, 1961.

METTI, J.S., African Religions and Philosophy,
London: Heinemann, 1969.

_____, New Testament Eschatology in an African
Background, London: Oxford University Press,

_____, Concepts of God in Africa, London: SPCK
1970.

McVEIGH, M.J., God in Africa : Conceptions of God in
African Traditional Religion and Christianity,
Cape Cod: Claude Stark, 1974.

METUH, E.I., , God and Man in African Religion, London:
Geoffrey Chapman, 1981.

MOLTMANN, J., Theology of Hope, London: SCM Press, 1973.

MORAWETZ, T., Wittgenstein and Knowledge, London:
Harvester Press, 1980.

MUGAMBI, J. and N. KIRIMA, The African Religious
Heritage, Nairobi: Oxford, 1976.

NEILL, S.C., The EternalDimension, London: Epworth,
1963.

NKRUMAH, K., Consiencism, London: Panaf Books, 1974.

O'NEILL, Acting on Principle : An Essay on Kantian
Ethics, Colombia University Press, 1975.

OLSEN, H., African Myths about Christianity, Kijabe,
Kenya: AIC Publications, 1972.

OLSON, R.G., Meaning and Argument, New York
Harcourt Brace and World, 1969.

PEARS, D., Wittgenstein, London: Fontana Collins.
1971.

PEUERSEN, C. Van, Ludwig Wittgenstein: An Introduction
to His Philosophy, London: Faber, 1969.

PLATO, The Republic, Trans F.M. Conford, London:
Oxford University Press, 1941.

_____, Meno, New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1949.

RAMSAY, I.T., Religion and Science: Conflict and
Synthesis, London: SPCK, 1964.

ROBINSON, J.A.T., Christian Freedom in a Permissive
Society, London: SCM Press, 1970.

ROSENTHAL, ed., McLuhan Pro and Con, Penguin Books,
1969.

RUSSELL, B., The Problems of Philosophy, London:
Allen and Unwin, 1912.

_____, History of Western Philosophy, London:
Allen and Unwin, 1946.

_____, ABC of Relativity, London: Allen and Unwin,
3rd ed. 1969.

SAWYER, W.W., Prelude to Mathematics, Penguin Books,
1955.

SHIBLES, W., Wittgenstein, Language and Philosophy,
Dubuque, IOWA: Brown Book Company, 1969,

SHYLLON, F., Black Slaves in Britain, London: 1974.

_____, Black People in Britain, Oxford University Press, 1977.

SMITH, E., African Ideas of God, London: Edinburgh House Press, 3rd ed. 1951.

SONG, C.S., The Compassionate God, New York, Orbis, 1982.

STAFFORD-CLARK, D. What Freud Really Said, Penguin Books, 1967.

STERN, J.P., Nietzsche, London: Fontana/Collins, 1978.

TILLICH, P., The Courage to Be, Welwyn: James Nisbet, 1952.

_____, Morality and Beyond, London: Collins Fontana, 1963.

_____, Systematic Theology, University of Chicago Press, Vol. I 1953, Vol. II 1957, Vol. III 1963.

_____, A History of Christian Thought, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967, 1968.

_____, The Shaking of the Foundations, Penguin Books, 1959.

TOFFLER, A., Future Shock, London/New York: 1967.

VERKUYL, J., Break Down the Walls : A Christian Cry for Racial Justice, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1973.

VIVIAN, F., Thinking Philosophically, London: Chattos and Windus, 1969.

WAISMANN, F., _Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle_,
Oxford: Blackwell, 1979.

WILLIAMS, E., _Capitalism and Slavery_, Cambridge
University Press, 1964.

WIREDU, K., _Philosophy and an African Culture_,
Cambridge University Press, 1980.

WISDOM, J., _Philosophy and Psychoanalysis_, Oxford:
Blackwell, 1953.

WITTGENSTEIN, L., _Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus_,
London: Routledge, 1961.

WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES, _Faith and Science in an
Unjust World_, 2 vols., Geneva, 1980.

WORLD STUDENT CHRISTIAN FEDERATION, _History's
Lessons for Tomorrow's Mission_, Geneva: C
1960.