

Contemporary Issues in Philosophy, Culture, and Value

Contemporary Issues in Philosophy, Culture, and Value

Edited by

Bhaskar Bhattacharyya

**Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing**



Contemporary Issues in Philosophy, Culture, and Value

Edited by Bhaskar Bhattacharyya

This book first published 2024

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2024 by Bhaskar Bhattacharyya and contributors

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-5275-5300-0

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-5300-2

*Dedicated to my father,
the late Bijan Krishna Bhattacharyya*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword	ix
John Clammer	
Preface	xi
Acknowledgements	xii
Chapter 1	1
A Philosophical View of Language and Culture	
P. R. Bhat	
Chapter 2	25
Philosophy, Culture and Value: Gandhi and Wittgenstein	
Ramesh Chandra Pradhan	
Chapter 3	37
Indigenous Knowledge and Modernity	
Mrinal Miri	
Chapter 4	46
Economics as Philosophy? Value, Culture and Decisions in the Practical	
Philosophy of Everyday Life	
John Clammer	
Chapter 5	62
Where Relativism Hits Rock Bottom	
Daniele Moyal-Sharrock	
Chapter 6	77
Spiritual Culture and its Relevance in Our Life: A Study in Sri Aurobindo	
Ratikanta Panda	
Chapter 7	92
Life Worlds and Living Words	
Ananta Kumar Giri	

Chapter 8	113
Just War: Reflections on the “Value” of Violence	
V. Prabhu and S. Nengneithem Haokip	
Chapter 9	121
Understanding Ethics in the Lens of Buddhism and Wittgenstein	
Rajakishore Nath	
Chapter 10	135
Wittgenstein’s Concept of Self: An Analytical Exposition through	
the Philosophy of Language	
Bhaskar Bhattacharyya	
Contributors.....	149
Index	153

FOREWORD

The discipline of philosophy in many cases has become a sterile and technical activity far removed from its original links to the pursuit of wisdom and to the wisdom traditions found in many cultures. This volume valuably breaks with this narrow conception of philosophy to relate it comprehensively to much wider questions of culture and philosophy's own cultural context. These include questions of selfhood, ethics, modernity, the possibility of their being such a thing as a "just war" and economics on the one hand, and the relevance of individuals and traditions that normally fall outside of the purview of academic philosophy, including Buddhism, Gandhi, Sri Aurobindo and the plural knowledges found in indigenous traditions. Of course, in a sense all of us are "indigenous": it is just that certain philosophical and epistemological forms have become, if not hegemonic, at least dominant. When I was a student of philosophy, alternative traditions such as Indian or Chinese philosophy were entirely ignored, as was even the possibility of their being any kind of philosophy worthy of the name to be found in indigenous traditions. Indeed, the division of knowledge at that time ensured that forms of Asian thought were to be pursued in the school of Oriental Studies, and not in the department of philosophy, and that indigenous traditions were to be studied in the anthropology department, and even then primarily in terms of their social structures and not as the embodiment of forms of knowledge that should be taken seriously in their own right.

Fortunately, in many ways the world has moved on, in part because of the problems that we have created for ourselves (climate change, war, terrorism, violence, corruption) in part because of our inadequate thinking about the actual nature of the world, and hence, the renewed search for alternatives in many fields. This all points to the need for "applied philosophy" – the application of philosophical insights to issues in that real world – economic, political, aesthetic, ethical and more – as they arise. Questions of the environment, medical ethics, AI, violence, and many others, now dominate the global landscape. The essays in this timely volume address a range of these issues and imply yet others, including the possibility that there can be plural philosophies arising from the specific cultural, religious and cosmological roots of different societies. While the individual chapters

address one or another of the possible questions of this nature, the book as a whole should alert us to the need to see philosophy as an intensely practical discipline, and one which speaks to the existing and emerging questions that our civilization faces, and without viable solutions to which, we face an increasingly unsustainable future, not only in the physical sense, but also one in which intellectual horizons have shrunk and in which the possibility of alternative forms of knowledge have been banished.

—John Clammer

PREFACE

This edited book volume *Contemporary Issues of Philosophy, Culture, and Value*, in a nutshell, is a product of the one-day E-International Conference on Philosophy, Culture and Value. The theme of the conference (Philosophy, Culture, and Value) had been chosen with the broad objective of augmenting the critical thinking and understanding among philosophers in general through the deliberations of eminent personalities of India and abroad vis-à-vis the various dimensions of philosophy, culture and value, embracing both the Indian and the Western perspectives.

This book presents an analysis of the contemporary issues of philosophy, culture and value. It basically focusses on three dimensions of philosophy, culture, and value. But in reality, the various issues of culture and value are converged into the wider perspective of philosophy. Philosophical reflection is the backbone of the various issues of culture and value, which the book primarily focusses on.

The present book volume has not only laid emphasis on the common philosophical discourses but also the emerging issues such as violence, war, economics and COVID-19, although they are not the part of mainstream philosophical discourse. This book in a sense attempts to explore new areas of philosophy by reasserting the centrality of values.

This book also entails that there are divergent views on philosophy, culture and value in eastern and western perspectives, yet in the ultimate analysis, it argues that there is commonality on the aspects of harmony, peace and unity which are emphatically asserted by all civilisations, whether eastern or western, through cultural dialogue and value study.

In a nutshell, the title of the book presents an optimistic outlook flourishing the philosophising spirit among the readers and it would develop an understanding of a peaceful, tolerant, and a loving society through the various contemporary issues of philosophy, culture and value inviting both eastern and western perspectives.

—Bhaskar Bhattacharyya

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Professor Robert Clammer for his kind encouragement, co-operation, and guidance in bringing out the book from a very raw form to making it a reality, without whose continuous inspiration the present work would not have been accomplished. I would further like to express my gratitude to Professor Clammer for not only kindly agreeing to write the foreword of the book but also for contributing a very interesting research paper in this edited book volume. Thus, I extend my deep sense of gratitude and thankfulness to Professor Robert Clammer. I also express my special thanks to Professor Ananta Giri for not only showing me the ray of hope to publish the research papers in a book volume but also for guiding me in case of selecting one of the reputed publishers of the globe, namely, Cambridge Scholars Publishing House, UK. I am also enormously grateful to Professor Ananta Giri for showing me his profound interest to contribute a research paper in the edited book volume. Thus, I express my deep sense of appreciation of support to Professor Ananta Giri. I am also especially thankful to Professor Mrinal Miri for his inspiration and contributing a research paper without any second thought in the volume. I am also extremely thankful and owe a special debt of gratitude to Professor R.C. Pradhan for extending his helping hand in the context of selecting a proper title for the book volume, and I am also being ever grateful to him for writing an insightful research paper in the volume. My special thanks to Professor P.R. Bhat for his support and contributing a research paper in the volume. I wish to acknowledge my deep sense of gratitude and thankfulness to Prof. Daniele Moyal-Sharrock for showing keen interest in writing a thought-provoking and illuminating research paper in this volume. I am pleased to acknowledge my sincere thanks and gratitude to Professor V. Pravu, Professor Rajakishore Nath, and Professor Ratikanta Panda for their valuable suggestions and continuous co-operation and also for contributing interesting papers in the edited volume, without which this volume could not have been complete.

I am particularly thankful and grateful to the authorities of Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University for extending all kinds of support to conduct E-International Conference on Philosophy, Culture, and Value, the product of which actually is this book volume. Thus, I must sincerely acknowledge the generous help that I received from my university.

I also extend my heartfelt thanks to my wife Dr. Manjuri Bhattacharyya and my daughter Kamalakshi Bhattacharyya for their constant co-operation, encouragement and substantial help, without whose love and care during the progress of the work, I would never have been able to complete the task. Thus, I am greatly indebted to my family. I sincerely thank Lorna Peirce, one of the recommended proofreaders of CSP, for shouldering the pain of proofreading the manuscript. Finally, I will be ever grateful and thankful to all the members of Cambridge Scholars Publishing for extending their ample help and support, without whom this volume would never have materialised. Thus, I offer my most heartfelt gratitude and appreciation to all of them.

—Bhaskar Bhattacharyya

CHAPTER 1

A PHILOSOPHICAL VIEW OF LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

P. R. BHAT

Abstract

The world is viewed from two different points of view: the world as it is and the world as inhabited by living beings. The world where no living beings exist would be fully mechanical, and the world with living beings, like human beings, can have all the richness of language, culture and philosophy. Events are necessarily caused and actions are contingent. Contingent actions are called free. The base of any institution is human freedom. Everything that belongs to language and culture is necessarily institutional. Language was the first institution built by human beings and then came the other institutions. Cultural realities are the human-constructed realities that include every aspect of our culture.

Philosophy, too, belongs to our culture and there can be different cultures co-existing like several languages that co-exist. There could be many philosophies co-existing along with different cultures. Philosophical growth enhances the quality and richness of a culture.

Key words: culture, freedom, institution, language, linguistic issues, nature, substantive issues.

Introduction

The universe is so large that we cannot even comprehend it. We can reasonably know about our solar system. Earth is a part of this solar system and we know relatively more about this earth. Earth consists of matter, plants and living beings. All living beings consume either the products of nature, i.e., grass, plants, fruits, nuts or other living beings. Of late, we are

realising more and more about our inevitable dependency on the environment, which includes the conditions of our mother earth and of other living species. When we focus more on our species, we realise that mere survival is one thing and surviving well with dignity is another. Many wonder whether we can survive with dignity in this century.

Science has advanced enough to give us an idea as to what might happen to our mother earth if we do not care for it sufficiently. We know that there are other planets in our solar system and sometimes we wonder whether there are lives on those planets. Though we are not very sure, our hunch is that there is no better place than earth to live on in this solar system. If we reflect on either the moon or the planet Mars, which are closest to our earth, we know that all laws of nature that are applicable on our mother earth are applicable on them as well. They seem to behave fully based on the laws of nature that are known to us. If we assume that there are no life forms on these two solar entities, then there is no being that has freedom on these. If there is no free being, then there is nothing that alters the natural course of events on these entities. Any change in any of these two entities can be explained purely in scientific terms.

The situation on our mother earth is drastically different from these two abovementioned entities of our solar system. The two main things humans on the earth have created using their freedom are language and culture. Language could be fully developed, which we call natural language or mother tongue, and the culture could be viewed as life-supporting, on one end, and total destruction, on the other end. Human history has shown all along that human beings are the biggest threat to humanity on this planet. That has not changed, perhaps it will never be changed. Man has become a more and more serious threat to planet earth. More countries than one can destroy our mother earth six times over, we are told. Naturally, one should wonder why there is any need to destroy the earth a second time, let alone a fifth or sixth time. As we know, the earth is only one. Perhaps no suicide bomber had an atomic bomb of this capacity; that we are still alive is the proof of it. Ethics seems to fail to touch the minds of such hard-core criminals.

Freedom and Determinism

Both on the moon and Mars, there are no living beings and, hence, there are no languages and no cultures. This is because there is no human life; hence, no civilisation either. No monitoring of any type. Any change due to a storm or the wind goes unnoticed. Changes in weather, temperature, dust particles,

mountains and valleys are all uncontrolled. No course of events will be changed at will on these entities. In contrast, when we consider our mother earth, for almost everything, excluding volcanoes and earth-quakes, attempts are made, at least marginally, to direct changes in the course of events. Human efforts are made to control or direct floods, famine, fire and other natural calamities. These are at least thinkable since human beings inhabit this planet in large numbers and they have good intelligence and technology to their aid.

The world is determined by the laws of nature. But, within this world, there are living beings that can bring changes to the situation because the laws of nature apply favourably to them. For instance, gravitational law will apply everywhere to any solid or liquid thing. Rains bring water and, due to gravitational law, water will flow from a higher altitude to a lower altitude. But human beings can change the path of the water flow by altering the conditions on the path of the flow of water. This is what we do when we do not want the rainwater to pool on the roads by constructing rainwater drainage. We have not changed the behaviour of water flowing from higher altitude to lower altitude; we have not done anything to gravitational law either; but we have constructed rainwater drainage in such a way that water now flows into this drainage without spilling onto the road. Human beings cannot change the gravitational law but they can position themselves in such a manner that gravitational law does not hurt them and, instead, comes to their aid. They use the same gravitational law to construct boats and to go fishing in the rivers and the deep sea. Human beings have known that the Archimedean principle is nothing but the complicated application of gravitational law. They constructed floating ships from iron.

All living beings are governed by the laws of nature. They cannot escape obeying physical, chemical and biological laws. Any unsupported physical object would come straight down and land on the surface of the earth. Further, only carbon and oxygen together produce carbon dioxide. Hydroxide cannot be produced from anything else but hydrogen and oxygen in the proportion of two molecules of hydrogen to one molecule of oxygen. We cannot produce living cells from physical or chemical substances but we will be able to produce full living creatures from a biological cell, which is known as cloning. If we care to speak about every event, then we can find sufficient explanation for the cause of every event. This leads one to universalise the cause and effect relationship, which is known as the universal law of causation. The universal law of causation simply claims that everything that happens in this universe has sufficient causes. Given the

causes, it is inevitable that effects will follow. This is known as a causal necessity.

Philosophers have found the situation paradoxical. On the one hand, human beings have been claiming that they have done profound work and they deserve praise for it and, on the other hand, the universal law of causation, if and when accepted, makes no room for free action. Certainly, physical action is in the world of space and time. The law of causation is applicable in this physical world. There is no chance that human beings can perform their action outside of the causal series. If they are part of the causal series, then they cannot claim that they are free. For instance, we cannot differentiate between my hand going up and me raising my hand. There could be many causes that make my hand go up but, in the case of my act of raising the hand, my intention is most important. The latter is what is counted as voting and not the former.

The universal law of causation must apply to all physical objects. If that is the case, our human body, being part of the physical structure of this earth, must be subject to physical laws. What is the difference between an action and an event? Let us consider a typical situation. Assume that there has been heavy rain in our town and water has flooded everywhere. I notice that someone is being drowned in the water. For a moment, I thought I would help the person to reach a safer place since I can swim very well. But when I recognised the person I let the water sweep him away. In this situation, I did nothing and, hence, I can claim my innocence and, hence, I am not held responsible. On the other hand, it was the flowing water that swept the drowning person away. If he is found dead, no one except the heavy rain is responsible for his death. We do not hold natural events as responsible in an ethical evaluation. Determinists will have to agree to this analysis and they cannot hold me responsible even if I claim that I could have saved him. Similarly, no one should be rewarded for their work and no one should be punished for any failure. Hence, treat the human habited world as one like Mars or the moon, where no action is performed by anyone.

The above is an absurd consequence given the fact that we do act and are not always carried away by the forces of nature. The universal law of causation is true for all non-living things. Living beings have something called voluntary actions. One needs to distinguish between voluntary action and an event. Non-interfering in the course of a natural event can be voluntary action too. In the above example of my letting the person drown in flood water, this was a voluntary action even if I did not do anything. A voluntary action without intention will not be truly voluntary action. Reflex

actions could be of this kind. When my hand is withdrawn from a hot-plate, this is an involuntary action. This kind of action is not an intentional action. They are very few and they hardly matter much unless it is a very special situation. The intentions of the person followed by actions are the most relevant to our discussion.

As knowledgeable human beings, we may know how certain laws of nature are going to act in favour of, or adversely to, our interests. Our voluntary action in alignment with a law of nature can yield a favourable result. A group of individuals dig a canal deep enough to a brook or river so that water starts flowing in the canal; this water can be used to irrigate the land to grow crops. With proper planning, we dig a canal and succeed in making our lives more comfortable.

Action and events are different. The universal law of causation speaks about events. Every event is sufficiently caused. In other words, given the causes, effects would follow. Nothing can happen without sufficient causes. It would be a big mistake to treat actions to be happenings. Events are happenings. But actions are the result of intentions meant to make changes by humans. They make something happen voluntarily, otherwise, it may not happen in the desired way. As noted earlier, if we were to believe that the universal law of causation covers even our domain of action, then there would be no point in even discussing the issue.

Contingency and Freedom

We have just noted, above, that there is no exercise of freedom on Mars and the moon. Hence, there is no freedom and, hence, no institution, like language or culture. Suppose we say that even our intentions are sufficiently caused, would then the actions turn out to be events? Sometimes it happens that we think that we have made a choice but, actually, we were not in a situation where we could make a choice. For instance, a drug addict might think that he has full control over himself and can stop using the drug at any time. He might think that he has chosen to steal something and buy the required drug to meet his daily need. But this may not be considered a voluntary action since he has no control over himself because he has already become a slave to the drug. These are not normal instances of voluntary actions. Anyone who is under the influence of serious drugs or a threat to life loses the status of a voluntary being. Therefore, it would be inappropriate to call such an action free action.

A voluntary being is capable of performing contingent actions. If something has to happen necessarily, then it is an event, as our universal law of causation claims. But a voluntary being does not do such necessary things. Whether a voluntary being wishes, or not, sufficiently, then a caused event is going to happen. The willingness or unwillingness of the being is irrelevant. If the person feels very dry and wants the rain to fall and the clouds to bring the rain, there is no connection of action or event between what one has wished and what has happened. But in the case of the canal being dug to bring the water to irrigate the land, it was the contingent actions of the agents involved that made it happen. Anything that naturally happens is an event, any change that happens due to human intervention is an action.

Do we need to examine what contingency is? In the mechanical world of Mars and the moon, there is nothing that is contingent. Every change is a necessary change, introduced by the previous state of affairs and the laws of nature operating on them. Can we reject the laws of nature and yet speak of contingency? The idea of going against the law of nature is futile—that cannot be contingent; we can never do that. However, if we are in a position to alter the situation in such a way that the natural course of events becomes as intended, then these would be contingent voluntary actions. The example of digging a canal to get the water for irrigation is a contingent action. If we had postponed the act of digging the canal, nothing voluntary would have happened. Water would have flown as usual through the brook or the river. We chose to change the course of water flow using gravitational force; we planned to dig the canal and we did it. Our contingent action is the voluntary action that made it possible for us to irrigate our land. We are responsible for our actions—good or bad. We may claim that a contingent action is contingent since it might be performed, or not performed, at our will. Something that we want to act or perform and, at will, that we can perform or not perform is called contingent action.

We hold someone responsible if and only if we can claim meaningfully that they could have done other than what they did (Campbell 1951). If this is correct, what is claimed is that what they did was a contingent action that they chose to do and, hence, they are responsible for the action and the specifiable consequences of that action. In all those situations where we can entertain different courses of action, we could claim each one of the alternatives as contingents. The favourite expression that we use to indicate freedom—“you could have done other than what you did”—makes sense here. If one could assert this meaningfully, then that action in question is contingent and, being a contingent act, it is a free act. If it were not a free act, we could not have meaningfully claimed that you could have done

anything other than what you did. The contingent act is necessarily linked to the notion of freedom. The choice is present in only those cases where one could perform a contingent action.

To aid our imagination, one could make the concept clearer by using the possible world expression. Let us say, we are examining the situation as to whether the agent in question is free. We could construct several possible world situations at this juncture. In one situation, the person does not pay attention to whatever happens. In another, he thinks of doing something but feels very lazy and does not do anything. In the third situation, he decided to act following his moral principle, which he accepted long ago. The fourth situation is where he becomes an opportunist and decides to go against his own moral principle and act differently. Each one of them is a possible world since it is stipulated. We have imagined what he could do. Each one of them is different from the other with a minor difference between the previously stated possible world and the present. Eventually, the agent could perform only one action that would become actual; the rest will vanish into the thin air. But, as of now, all these possible worlds are possible, and are equally achievable. At this juncture, one could meaningfully maintain that the agent could act in one of these stipulated ways and each one of them is contingent.

Closely examine how we dig the canal. Water always flows from higher altitudes to lower altitudes because of the gravitational force. How can I alter that? We cannot; since we are also governed by the same gravitational law we have no chance of altering the gravitational law. But we can perform some contingent actions after careful planning. We can get some instruments to dig the earth and remove soil and stones and put them elsewhere. Of course, lifting the soil and stones against the gravitational force is possible. If I do not lift the soil in a container tightly, the soil would fall on the surface of the ground again. The same is the case with stones. Even my lifting of soil and stones is done by the biological structure of my hands and legs. We cannot overlook the ergonomic principles and the structure of the muscles that are in operation here.

To cut the long story short, we are capable of moving our motor organs willingly to perform certain actions. We are also technologically advanced and capable of acting remotely. Note that, in using our motor organs or a tool, we never go against the laws of nature. We make use of these laws of nature to develop tools to easily perform what we want to do. No technologist works against the laws of nature. The laws of nature are his friends; he will use them meticulously to design his technology.

Our analysis of the above example shows that freedom and contingency go together. We do not hold someone responsible if the supposed action turns out to be an event. For instance, a lorry driver is blamed for an accident without the facts being sufficiently known. If the driver concerned is given a chance to defend himself he can show how he could not have avoided the accident since the lorry was fully loaded and it was going down a slope at a certain speed within the prescribed limit and when he tried to put the brake and control the speed of the lorry, the break failed. Even the attempt to put the lorry into first gear did not succeed since the lorry was already at a high speed as it was going down a slope. Given this, the whole incident is taken to be an event rather than an action by the driver. That is to say, the causes made the effect inevitable and there was no human intention and agency involved in bringing about the result.

We are correct to the extent that we claim that nothing could happen without sufficient cause. But to claim that we are part of this kind of causal chain would be wrong. All our contingent actions are not part of the series of causes and effects in this world. We could become the cause of something like setting fire to the stubble in the paddy fields. If we had not lit the fire, the fire on its own would not have burnt the stubble. In the model of determinism, there is no scope for contingent things to happen since everything is sufficiently caused to happen. Determinists cannot speak of contingent actions at all. Given their interpretation, there are only events and no actions. Everything is caused the way it happens on Mars and on the moon. But, as we see, all living beings, how-so-ever small they may be, capable of self-initiated actions and those actions are contingent. An earthworm, for example, eats mud and excretes it, and that mud makes the land fertile. This process is not always a natural event; it could be the result of vermiculture. Human beings create a comfortable environment where these earthworms grow naturally and human beings succeed in enhancing the fertility of the soil. Earthworms do eat earth for their survival and human beings make use of them to create a better situation for their agriculture.

Language as an Institution

We would not know which came first, whether language or other institutions like marriage. It should not matter to us much since we are not giving any historical account of human history. Conceptually, we need to make room for culture and that would easily be possible by giving an account of language. There is no doubt that language played an important role in shaping culture. We, perhaps, realised the strength of the institution of

language and then implemented a similar structure in other institutions. There are many languages and many dialects associated with them. We are going to concentrate only on natural languages. We speak of language in general terms. What is true of one natural language would be true of another as well. We are interested in understanding language and then seeing its link with culture.

We may begin with the question of how language is possible. We are going to attempt to answer this question without getting into what language is.¹ Let us simply state: the ability of human beings to make something stand for something else is the basic strength on which language is founded. Proper names are a good example of this. Note that developing a convention is a free human act. However, all words in a language are not proper names. Wittgenstein rightly pointed out that a list of names does not make a language. This is one of the reasons why he gives importance to facts and not just objects in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (Wittgenstein 1922). A language is very complex and it consists of several types of words: some are descriptive, some are action words, some are prepositions, some are evaluative, some are critical, and some are appreciative, and so on. But all words have functions and that is why they are there as words of a certain type. A language is a tool developed by human beings to perform certain acts.

An institution is built on mutual consent. A group of individuals decide how their convention is going to work. They might explicitly state the constitutive rules of the institution or might repeatedly use them in a particular manner and that becomes the convention. In the case of language, certain practices are introduced that may initially accompany certain gestures. Children tend to learn action words easily. Come, go, sit, stand up, walk, get me the toy, etc., are some action words. They seem to be relatively easy for the child to pick up. Then, the child might use a predicative term like mine. The possessive nature of a child might help it to pick up this word. Maybe then the conventions like good morning, good evening etc. They may also use one-word sentences like hurt, hungry, ants, etc. In this process of acquiring language, the child knows conventionally what is allowed and what is not permitted. The parents already know the language with which they help the child to correct themselves and the child becomes a new member of this institution of language speakers.

¹ Language is understood, here, as natural language, which is the mother tongue of someone.

Giving an account of language is not easy; at the same time, every aspect of language is known to us. To familiarise ourselves, once again, let us begin the discussion on the simplest units first. Language uses proper names. We may expect one to pick up pronouns to stand for proper names next. These words—he, she, it, they, etc.—function like proper names in proper contexts. There are common names or generic names. These are the names of groups or many members. Trees, stones, hills, rivers, etc., are all general names, sometimes called common nouns. Apart from these, one could also speak of abstract nouns such as societies, democracies, religions and so on. One can describe a thing by using proper names and common nouns. X is a boy where X is the name of the person and boy is the general noun. This would be a singular sentence. “These are boys” would be a plural sentence. One could use two general nouns and have a general sentence. For instance, boys are taller than girls. These are all descriptions and descriptions of things that are there.

An institution is something that has members. And it has rules; some of them may be called syntactic rules and some of them may be semantic rules. Syntax deals with the different relationships among the words. The sequencing of words in the form of a sentence is possible by following syntactic rules. The semantic rules are the ones that give meaning to words. “Dogs are eating food” is ok, but one cannot say “stones are eating food” unless it is a poetic situation and metaphor is being used. When we describe something, we speak about something other than the language. And when we request someone to get us something, again, it is about that thing other than the verbal object that is indicated. When we ask someone to do some actions, the performance is indicated through such sentences. When I express my feelings, it is the feelings that are referred to. Language, thus, becomes a communicator. Communication is possible if, and only if, there is already understanding about the words that are used as tools. Underlying rules for these words are known to both parties: the speaker and listener or the writer and reader. For an alien, nothing makes sense if he does not become a member of this language-speaking community. It might take quite some time before he could become proficient in that language.

Of the institutions humans have built, it is language that seems to be basic. Anthropologists have never found a civilisation that has no language. That is good enough for us to recognise the importance of language in our human history. Among the institutions that humans have built, language is the lasting, basic institution that persists through human history. Language would change in many ways: new vocabularies would be added, new grammatical forms may be introduced and new phrases and new conventions

may be introduced and the old ones are modified. When a human being is awake, he would use language explicitly or implicitly. His thoughts are aided by language. His feelings are expressed through language. His needs are communicated through language. If someone had to spend a day without using language, one would be able to conceive of what the notion of hell would be like.

It becomes obvious that, if language is a humanly constructed institution, if a civilisation perishes, and if no individuals are speaking and using its language anywhere, their language becomes a dead language. A living language is something that keeps changing due to the different needs of the speakers of that language. A dead language does not change, and may remain only in books. It may be used on very special occasions, such as in rituals, etc., but may not become anyone's mother tongue.

The Culture

Culture, too, is an institution consisting of several institutions within it. A culture would have at least one language and several rituals; for example, Hindu culture with rituals such as birthday celebrations, or the thread ceremony for a boy in Hindu Brahmin culture, marriage ritual, and cremation after death. Every year, the death ceremony is performed in a certain manner. There would be many religion-based ceremonies. The birthdays of lords like Rama, Krishna, and Ganesh are celebrated by Hindus. They have *Diwali*, *Holi*, new crop harvesting festivals, and the worshipping of trees, rivers, snakes, etc., are also found. In the modern days, we also find national festivals like Independence Day, Republic Day, the birthday of the father of the nation, etc.

Each culture might have different ways of celebrating its cultural events. Sometimes, there might be some elements from the traditions they follow, sometimes the environment plays some role in this. The history of the civilisation, too, may have some part in the celebration of some festivals specific to a geographical area. Some cultures might allow the participation of their domesticated animals; some might even eat the meat of these animals, sacrificed to their God. When celebrations are there, there can be music, dance and dance-drama, singing, and special worship of deities, followed by delicious rich food. Themes may be part of these rituals; sometimes these themes include poetry, drama, literature and, even, films. Culturally familiar themes are often chosen, such as *Ram Leela*, to enact a certain drama. These celebrations also re-impose the values they stand for.

Celebrations are organised by members of society. Some preparations are done in individual homes, some require bigger grounds. If *Holi* has to be played, individuals need to come out of their residences and meet one another to put colour on others. If *Diwali* has to be celebrated, it is not enough that you light some lamps at home. There would be public celebrations and lighting arrangements would be made. The Ganesh festival, too, would be celebrated, sometimes for eleven days. *Navaratri* is celebrated for nine days and dancing would be there for all nine days. Sweets are exchanged on *Diwali* and *Holi*.

Anything that is done repeatedly is very likely to be part of that culture. Saluting the sun in the early morning is part of Hindu culture. This is done by many every day. This culture will not remain part of Hindu culture if one generation stops this practice. Greeting someone when you meet them for the first time in the day also is part of this culture. Taking blessings from elders and teachers is also a part of this culture. Celebrating religious festivals also forms a part of this culture. Wearing a ring given by a spouse could be part of a culture. Wearing headgear can be part of a culture.

Any culture is retained only by practice. It is like the virtual memory in a computer. If it does not get stimulated, it does not exist. Similarly, if the cultural activities are not performed, they will not last. *Bharata Natyam*, *Karnataka music*, arts and crafts are all linked to Hindu mythologies in India. One could visit grand temples in southern India, which are the centres of cultural activities. Temples like Tirupati support every important religiously oriented activity. People have built different institutions and these would not exist if the rituals were not practised and retained: the culture could, then, only be traced by reading books, discovering artifacts, etc.; it would become a part of history and, at best, one could identify some of these cultural objects in an archaeological museum.

Apart from language, anthropologists also did not find any civilisation without the semblance of a religious institution. Tribal religions may not be well developed, but worshipping something or the other is found in all civilisations. Religion is important from the cultural point of view. Religions have mythologies, epics that provide moral stories to a large number of followers of those religions. Several cultural activities are related to such mythological stories. For instance, the dance drama in Karnataka, known as *Yakshagana*, is fully built on the mythological stories of the Mahabharata. Similarly, committees are made to provide free food to pilgrims, high educational institutions for members of the societies, and medical hospitals for the treatment of the diseased. Architecture, music,

dance, drama and many literary works do centre on religious institutions. They provide the means of livelihood to many artists and also promote education in these specialised areas. The administrations in these institutions are also equally committed and, hence, the system as a whole would be very efficient and farsighted.

Advanced societies have taken many things for granted, even if some inventions have taken centuries to become affordable to the common man: travelling by air, the presence of TVs, washing machines, gas connections for cooking, air conditioning, if necessary, the availability of public transport and some vehicles of their own, 24/7 electric and water supply, no shortage of milk, fast food, and restaurants for weekly eating out. Personalised medical facilities, insurance and a home to live in are also assumed to be normal amenities. One cannot think of a member of an advanced society without a mobile, computer or laptop, and internet access. Internet and the concept of working from home have pushed the luxuries of having a computer and internet access into becoming necessities because of the Covid-19 pandemic. In this advanced society, human beings have been made more dependent on technology. Doing shopping, banking and many other activities digitally, while staying at home, became a necessity. Even once the pandemic situation changes, the work from home concept is going to remain, especially if you are employed by multinational companies. Human beings have become more and more global, and these attitudes also change the lives of such global individuals. Rather than only reading local and national news, we have now become aware of international news. There are no international boundaries on the internet if one is surfing online.

The fast life that one leads, equally unreasonable work demands and the pressures of the modern society have made human beings less patient, less healthy, and more ambitious. You are measured by the position you hold and the amount of money you can spend. Anonymity and recognition are both parts of one's personality. You want to be known to some specific people and you want to vanish into the crowd at other times. City life has become multilingual, multi-religious, multi-cultural and multi-national. Given all these mixtures of factors, one does not know how to express one's identity. There is no guarantee that you will have an identity that will be soothing for you. Sometimes, individuals have to do more than one job to make ends meet and to have some luxury. The standard of living is always more than what you can afford and you need to struggle to meet the expectations of everyone related to you. The net result is, of course, suffering from anxiety, ulcers, blood pressure, sleeplessness, diabetes, etc. In our busy schedules, we all have to find some time for our spouse, children

and their birthdays, etc., religious festivals, national festivals, community gatherings, and so on.

We have come to a stage of civilisation where the value of a human being is far reduced since a machine can serve better, more obediently and more efficiently. Some patients want a machine to operate on them rather than an expert doctor. When human beings can be replaced by machines and, if it becomes cost-effective as well, human dignity gets reduced because we are expecting more than what normal human beings are capable of. The dignity of a human being should be upheld simply because they are human. There is only one species on this planet growing more and more, especially with advanced knowledge and technology, and that is human. There would be no loss to anyone if the world population became just half of what it is now over the years without any tragedy or calamity.

At a certain level, nature and culture are contrasted. Nature is opposed to culture in a certain sense. As we have noted, nature follows its laws and, hence, mechanical, inevitable things happen in nature. Culture is opposed to nature in the sense that human freedom is the basis of culture. Anything that is done by human beings is part of their culture. Even the act of restoring nature by human beings is culturally rooted. Some groups, who are environmentalists, would like to see that equal importance is given to nature. They see beauty, good health and a peaceful life in nature. But technology, as a tool of society, could be very destructive to nature. It may bring so much change to nature that it becomes unsustainable. The carbon level in the air might go so high that living beings might find it difficult to survive. Or the level of plastics in the environment may grow so much that growing food grains may become quite difficult. Unless human beings become aware of the results of their actions, saving both culture and nature would be impossible. Man is the master of the world. He can help the environment to help him or he may recklessly destroy it and eventually destroy himself.

Both nature and culture need not be opposed to one another. One could make nature a part of our culture without much difficulty. The growing of different food grains, vegetables, fruits and flowers is important for supporting both culture and nature. When human beings were living as nomadic tribes, they were fully in harmony with nature. Only of late have we started neglecting nature because of the advancement of science and technology. Our assumption that technology can solve all our problems has made us reckless and it is time to reassess our stand against nature.

Language and Philosophy

Language is used in a broad sense in philosophy. It covers, on one end, the natural cries of animals to the use of the most developed languages like English, on the other end. Some philosophers include thoughts as a part of language. If we do not have language, we cannot have abstract thoughts. Given the role played by language, we can create very complex thoughts. Take, for instance, the concept of money. Maybe economists were correct when they said that there was only a barter system in the olden days. Then, that system was replaced by something like gold, which was used as a thing that was valued by all and, therefore, every exchange was made in terms of gold. Maybe the concept of the coin was introduced and coins could be of different metals or materials. Wealth exchanges were made, using coins. When civilisation grew, they had the concept of *Mahajans*, who were the lenders or who behaved like small banks. Once the need arose, individuals thought of the institution of the bank. Once there was the notion of a bank, other things, like interest on capital, lending concepts, etc., were introduced. When the industry developed, there was the need to pool the money of many individuals and the concept of sharing with a face value was introduced. Then, came, perhaps, the exchange of shares in a share market and so on.

We are good at symbol manipulations. Symbols are sociocultural realities. Their manipulation creates some other sociocultural realities. Logic, mathematics, etc., are all great inventions of human beings. These languages aid human thinking, which one would not have succeeded in developing without the aid of language. A meta-language can be created over a natural language, and another level of language can be further created if need be. This is what is done on computers. At the bottom-most level, there are only 0 and 1 binary systems. Next is the level of machine language, for example, ascii characters. Over and above these, there are programming languages. Using programming languages, one can achieve what one wants. Sometimes, these programming languages can help us improve our natural language, for example, a grammar check in an essay. All of these functions are nothing but symbol manipulations. They are nothing but virtual realities or culturally created realities.

Wittgenstein, in *Tractatus*, believed that the important function of language is to depict the picture of reality. He held the view that what can be said can be said clearly. He thought that the language that is used in science can be unambiguous and that one could put all meaningful sentences into two categories: true and false. But he encountered many sentences that appear to be descriptions but do not describe anything that can be said to be true or

false. Some metaphysical statements have the structure of a description, but they do not correspond to any facts. For instance, ideas are real. Or take the statement “God is kind.” No factual statements can be identified that can verify these statements.

Wittgenstein distinguished statements that are not significant from those which can be true or false. The purpose was not to confuse one for another, since their structure could be similar. As just mentioned above, metaphysical statements can have the appearance of descriptions, but they do not describe any facts. Similarly, ordinary commands, which involve activities, and some of the religious commands, could be different though they share the same structure. Similarly, some of the uses of terms in epistemology like “know” could mislead. I may claim that I know there is a tree visible from my window. This is certainly an epistemic statement, known through sense experience. But if I claim that I know that I am not dead, the use of the term “know” is misplaced or misused. Knowledge from sense experience is legitimate, but we cannot claim that we are not dead because death is not an event in our lives. To mention Wittgenstein’s example from subsequent writing: what is the colour of the red rose in a dark room (Wittgenstein 2009, § 514, § 515)? This puts us into a difficulty of a certain sort. If we are logicians, we tend to claim that it is tautological to claim that the red rose is red. If we are empiricists, we should say that it is an inappropriate question, since we cannot perceive the colour of a rose in the darkness. If we are realists of a certain brand, we might say that the red rose is red irrespective of whether we can perceive it or not. The red rose remains what it is even if we do not constantly perceive it, unless it is destroyed within a second after I turn my head. We also get confused with the ordinary use of the word “good” with its ethical use. For instance, we claim that a person is a good runner. What that means is simply given certain facts about the person we claim that he could run very fast, i.e., he can cover the distance within the shortest time, which most other individuals cannot do. Thus, he pointed out that the ordinary use of ethical terms is different from the ethical use. Someone who is a good person is different from someone who is a good runner. The former is an ethical judgment and the latter is a descriptive judgment in a context. Wittgenstein claimed that we can reduce the statement X is a good runner to descriptive statements. Coming from a science and engineering background, Wittgenstein thought he had solved many important philosophical problems and that the solvable and the unsolvable ones need not bother us much since they are based on the misuse of language. His remark that a philosophical problem arises when language goes on holiday is striking (Wittgenstein 2009, § 309).