PROBLEMS OF PARADIGM DISCRIMINATION.

It is fairly clear that as soon as the attempt is made to elucidate the truth-grounds, or the rational grounds, for discrimination between paradigms then there arise a set of intractable, and to some extent imponderable problems. In the case of religious and non-religious paradigms one can, of course, deny outright that there are any paradigm-independent criteria of rationality which would enable paradigm discrimination to take place. The advocates of this view contend that criteria of rationality are paradigm-relative and hence there are not available to us any criteria of rationality which would enable us to judge between paradigms, and this is to rule as non-rational those processes of paradigm-discrimination and paradigm-displacement which, in fact, can be observed to take place. Nevertheless, in spite of what appear to be these obvious defects, such a view is implied in a Wittengensteinian "form of life" argument with its insistence that the criteria of assessment are intrinsic to the "form of life". And we find in the work of Peter Winch the implications of a "form of life" argument developed systematically and in some detail. One important implication of such a view is, of course, that the sociologist or social anthropologist is prohibited from making critical judgments about the beliefs he studies. But it is not only in the fields of linguistic philosophy and sociology that we find such a view for if we turn to the work of Thomas Kuhn in the philosophy of science we find the claim that we cannot have truth-grounds for theory-choice. We can find elements of the same thesis in the work of Whorf on language and, with certain provisions, in Mannheim's work in the sociology of knowledge. In one form or another therefore the claim that criteria of truth and rationality are paradigm-relative is widespread.

If paradigm-choice is ultimately shown to be a relative, arbitrary and somewhat non-rational affair then the modern purveyor of paradigms may well find that he is faced with a market situation in which the final and only remark he can make to his potential consumers is, as Aldous Huxley once put it, "You pays your money you takes your choice". However if this fate is to be avoided then one would need to show that there are paradigm-independent criteria of rationality which simply are the criteria of rationality: the existence of such criteria being a prerequisite of paradigm-discrimination. By making this move one could avoid the charges of "extreme relativism" or "irrationality" though one might, nevertheless, admit that there was a certain element of provisionality about the criteria one arrived at. But provisionality is not relativism. It is of some importance, however, that we are able to specify in some way the criteria of rationality which it is hoped can be provisionally accepted. Unfortunately, it is considerably easier to specify what will not do than what will do, and it is certainly easier to show that there is a process of rational discourse, which embodies appropriate and acceptable criteria, ranging across various disciplines than it is to show that there is a process of rational discourse, embodying appropriate and acceptable criteria, ranging across Weltanschauungen.

Initially let us see what will not do as provisionally acceptable criteria of rationality. This can be accomplished, somewhat indirectly, by considering the case of paradigm-choice between religious and non-religious paradigms. Both these categories of paradigms have been charged with possessing the feature of logical invulnerability and to be found in possession of this feature is to be found guilty of a serious rational defect - one might even say, if we accept this criticism, that any paradigm coming under either of these categories is ipso facto irredemably defective. One answer to this charge runs as follows:

to construe the alleged feature as a feature of logical invulnerability
and hence as a rational defect not only involves a misconstruction, but
it is a misconstruction which results from applying an inappropriate
and restrictive standard of rationality. In short, what is required is
a non-falsificationist thesis of rationality which will do justice to a
wide range of intellectual and creative activities which may properly be
called rational activities but whose procedures cannot adequately be
characterised in verificationist/falsificationist terms. It thus seems
plausible to contend that there is a scale of rationality ranging over
such things as the choice of scientific theories, the nature of
philosophical agreement and disagreement, critical exegesis, historical
judgment and so on. There is, or so it seems, an "overlap" between the
criteria of rationality employed by different disciplines: literary
criticism is no less rational an activity than sub-atomic physics. But
note: the comparison so far is between different disciplines not between
different world-views. The sheer scope, range, and practical and moral
import of Weltanshauungen make it substantially more difficult to
conceive of what criteria of rationality could usefully be employed to
discriminate between them. Clearly we can talk of good and bad science,
good and bad philosophy, good and bad literary criticism but can we in
the same sense so readily talk of good and bad world-views ? Perhaps,
one might find parallels between the processess of rational discourse at
work in relatively restricted areas like literary criticism and the
processes of rational discourse at work in say Theravada Buddhism. What
does seem more likely is that one will find parallels, of the required
kind, between the literary critic qua literary critic and the anthro-
pologist qua anthropologist. That this is more likely stems from the
fact that there is some large measure of agreement amongst the respective
practitioners about what constitutes good literary criticism and what
constitutes good social anthropology and, one might add, there is a
large measure of agreement, even amongst non-practitioners, about the
relevance and importance of literary criticism and social anthropology.
In both, it could probably be shown that the rational procedures of the
literary critic and the social anthropologist do not presuppose, nor
could be rendered in terms of, tightly knit decision procedures or a
set of inductive or deductive procedural rules. Consequently, if we are
to consider such activities as literary criticism and social anthro-
pology as rule-governed and rational activities our notion of a "rule"
has to be sufficiently broad to account for what actually goes on in
these disciplines. At least one rationally acceptable precept is that
in a serious study of a given phenomenon the techniques of investigation,
and the kind of explanation or assessment which may be forthcoming, should
be conceptually appropriate to the phenomenon under investigation. Such
a methodological precept allows for the possibility that the investi-
gation of a specified phenomenon may commence without having laid down
in advance, as it were, tight decision procedures, for the nature of the
phenomenon under investigation may require the investigator to make
relevant judgments which cannot be rendered in such terms but, never-
theless the procedures may well be rational and rule-governed. Con-
sequently, one may discern some overlap in the rational procedures of
the literary critic and the social anthropologist: they may both be
said to satisfy the logical and evidential senses of the term
"rational". And even though their procedures are not cast in the
falsificationist mould they are nonetheless rational. But then again
the anthropologist and the literary critic are not in competition, but,
in some central sense the Marxist, the Christian and the Buddhist are.

However, it is also the case that there is a "critical lack of
fit", or an element of incommensurability, between paradigms and it is
of some importance to notice that an overlap in their respective

criteria of rationality is a necessary precondition for talking about
their incommensurability. We need a reasonable and sympathetic working
knowledge of Buddhist doctrines in order to recognize that there is a
"critical lack of fit" between them and say the Marxist Manifesto. In
order to do this we need to be able to translate the Pali canon. In
so far as we are committed to the view that we can, in fact, translate
these canonical Buddhist texts, we are committed also to the view that
there is some overlap in the rationality of the Theravada Buddhist and
the translator which makes this possible. The question may arise,
therefore, whether there is a suitable analogue to the notion of a
"critical lack of fit" in say the disagreements between literary critics
about the interpretation of a play or in the disagreements between
philosophers or in the disagreements between anthropologists ? But
even if we could detect suitable analogues would this not mean that we
would have to say, as indeed we could argue for in the case of religious
paradigms that such disagreements result from different paradigms
employing different antecedent presuppositions. In the case of
religious paradigms one might say that the critical lack of fit between
paradigms is not <u>necessarily</u> a result of any rational defect but that
it results from the fact that they carve the world up in different ways.
For example, the Buddhist and the Christian paradigms seem, on the face
of it, to be making competing claims about "what is the case". But on
closer inspection we find that they constitute the world in such radi-
cally different ways that it becomes questionable whether they are deal-
ing with the same phenomena, and, of course, if they are not dealing
with the same phenomena, then in what sense can it be claimed that they
are competing ?

This dilemma is not a superficial one. Paradigm disputation
equally resembles an argument about what the evidence is as it does
an argument about the correct or most plausible interpretation of the
evidence. That there is some common ground between paradigms in order
to get the dispute going seems undeniable just as it seems undeniable
that there must be some implicit overlap in criteria of rationality if
the translation of the Pali canon is to be accomplished. Difficulties
arise in relation to the former because once the alleged paradigm-
independent evidence is incorporated into a specified paradigm then its
nature - and not only its significance - undergoes change. And this is
not intended to be "over-charitable" to the rationality of paradigms.
But it is to say that in a certain sense two paradigms could fulfil
both the evidential and logical criteria of rationality and yet a
dispute arise between them. Earlier it was suggested that the kind
of assessment or explanation which may be given of a phenomenon must be
conceptually appropriate and, of course, what is considered to be
conceptually appropriate will depend on what one considers to be the
nature of the phenomenon. It is precisely at this point that the
disputes arise: some types and kinds of explanation will be ruled out
of court or considered redundant. The Marxist will not concede that
suffering, evil and death are in need of the kind of explanation given
by the Christian or the Buddhist. How then is it possible to judge the
plausibility of a paradigm's antecedent presuppositions ? One answer is
that the only way is to work through the paradigm, as it were. But
clearly if this is the only possibility then not only are paradigms world-
constituting they are also self-verifying. It is also the case,
however, that to do justice to the plausibility of a particular set of
antecedent presuppositions, there is an initial requirement to give a
phenomenological account, bracketing questions of truth, and elucidating
the standards of intelligibility and judgments operating within the
paradigm. The objection is that this is all that we can legitimately
accomplish, for we cannot make further logical or cognitive judgments
without presupposing an equally problematical set of antecedent

presuppositions. On this account the demand for non-context dependent criteria of rationality which would serve as a provisionally acceptable critical standard is misconceived. What this amounts to saying is that the logical behaviour of such words as "rational", "explanation", "plausible", "evidence" and so on, in their non-nursery contexts, is such that they are related and relative to a set of antecedent pre-suppositions which, in turn, are given their mature expression in a specified paradigm.

But whatever substance there is in this kind of characterisation of the logical behaviour of such terms as "rational" it can hardly be said to be an exhaustive account for there are a number of eminently rational precepts (e.g. that the kind of assessment and explanation given of a phenomenon must be conceptually appropriate) in which the appeal to antecedent presuppositions seems redundant. And yet the force and implications of such precepts seem undeniable. For example, it is of crucial importance to realise that the kinds of explanation of physical phenomena given by the physical scientist are conceptually inappropriate for understanding social phenomena. Causal explanations, at least of the type given of physical phenomena, are inappropriate because, to put it crudely, we cannot attribute intentions to an electron - we cannot ask an electron what its reasons for behaving thus are - but we can, and must, ask agents for explanations of their behaviour. Naturally, this presupposes that people, as opposed to ob-jects, are of such a nature that they are capable of having intentions and performing intentional acts. But then this presupposition is not in dispute by any religious or non-religious paradigm. It is not the kind of presupposition we have in mind when we talk about differences in antecedent presuppositions. Hence, it need not worry us unduly that a precept presupposes a common way of differentiating and interpreting our experience of the world.

One of the implications of these remarks is that there is a need for a non-falsificational theory of rationality. For example, Kuhn's notion of a paradigm, and its analogues in non-scientific contexts, complicates the problems involved in assessing the rationality of a particular paradigm or paradigm-category. On Kuhn's account we cannot, with any precision, lay down in advance what will verify or falsify a whole paradigm. Descriptively speaking, paradigms can be shown to tolerate, or accommodate, all kinds of "refutations" so that if a falsificationist thesis is to account for the nature of scientific progress it needs to be amended to incorporate degrees of falsification. Such an amendment seems contrary to the intentions of the falsificationist thesis. There remains the interesting possibility that the incommensurability of paradigms is not the result of any defect in their rationality, but, rather results from the fact that they constitute the world in different ways. This possibility warrants further investigation particularly in relation to paradigm analogues in the religious and non-religious categories. Two implications seem apparent: (a) it may be possible to have non-context dependent criteria of rationality which would not be restricted to the verificationist/falsificationist type, and (b) judgments between paradigms might rest on considerations of the plausibility of a paradigm's antecedent presuppositions rather than resting on whether or not a paradigm meets the canons of falsificationism. Let us call this the non-falsificationist thesis of rationality.

The term "rational" tends to be applied in two related, though distinct, senses: we talk of the rationality of belief and we talk of the rationality of action. Let us consider the rationality of belief. Beliefs can be characterised as irrational if they are illogical in some sense (e.g. they are inconsistent or contradictory) or if the beliefs

have been arrived at in some way that is thought to be unsatisfactory
(e.g. they are based on irrelevant considerations or they are based on
insufficient evidence or they are not held open to refutation). For
example, religious beliefs are often taken to be irrational because,
it is held, they are not open to disconfirming evidence. But both the
logical and evidential criteria of rationality require reassessment if
we apply a non-falsificationist thesis. To demonstrate the extent of
such a reassessment let us consider some of the arguments used by
MacIntyre in his "Is understanding religion compatible with believing?"
(in Wilson (ed)).

MacIntyre raises the following question: how is it that what
appears intelligible in one social context can appear not to make sense
in another ? He cites Christianity as a case in point and he further
notes that the internal incoherences in Christian concepts did not go
unnoticed in the Middle Ages, but they were tolerated. They were
tolerated, according to MacIntyre, because they were indispensable to
the forms of description embodied in the prevailing social structure:
the concepts derived their point from the prevailing social patterns
of behaviour. The process of secularisation deprived the concepts of
their point, and, hence, the incoherences were no longer tolerated or
tolerable. MacIntyre's argument rests on two distinct claims: (a)
that we first identify incoherences in a given paradigm and (b) that
paradigm displacement is not the result of rational argument, but,
results from changes in the structures of societies. The second claim
seems sociologically correct but it tells us little, if it tells us
anything, about the rationality of a given paradigm. It is only when
we have first established that a given paradigm is rationally
defective, either in the logical or evidential senses or both, that we
can ask the Durkheimian question why do the adherents hold on to such
beliefs in the face of such problems. Then sociological explanations,
or the like, become the only ones available to us. Methodologically,
there are two conditions which need to be fulfilled before one can
legitimately be in a position to establish that a given paradigm is
rationally defective: the first condition requires us initially to
detect the standards of rationality, or intelligibility, operative
within the specified paradigm; the second condition specifies that we
necessarily invoke our own criteria of rationality as the final critical
standard. The first condition is a prerequisite of sociological
investigation and the second condition makes critical evaluation
possible. There is little need to quarrel with these two conditions
but so much depends on what we take to be our own standards of
rationality: we need to be fairly clear as to what constitute the
criteria of rationality which we claim we are invoking when we commence
sociological investigation. Matters of verification and falsification
do have application within religious and non-religious paradigms. They
do constitute an important part of a paradigm's plausibility, but,
they do not encompass the entire plausibility-potential of such
paradigms. Neither should they. Paradigms appeal to a common strand of
rationality which allows the individual adherent to employ his own
judgment in interpreting and evaluating evidence and counter-evidence.

For example, the Christian paradigm does not demand of its
practitioners that they should ignore arguments which may be levelled
against the paradigm; neither does the Christian paradigm demand that
all recalcitrant evidence be treated as only apparently recalcitrant.
Nevertheless, paradigms do tend to lay down the general direction in
which such judgments should operate, but, it is difficult to
characterise this as a rational defect. The Christian tradition
delineates the relationship between "love" and "suffering" in a
substantially different way from the Buddhist tradition; the ways in

which such relationships are delineated are a function of the inter-
pretative capacity of the paradigm. And this is partly - and only
partly - independent of the paradigm's identification of what constitute
cases of "loving" and "suffering". A Christian paradigm, for example,
specifies that a believer's final judgment should be not to deny God's
love in spite of counter-evidence. But does this amount to a rational
defect ? What is responsible for it being called a rational defect is,
in part, a misconstruction of how the evidential role operates within
a paradigm and, in part, it is the result of a restrictive view of what
constitute the criteria of rationality. The role of evidence in a
religious paradigm does not operate on a one-track or linear basis;
neither are religious beliefs in any useful sense characterised as
provisional or tentative hypotheses. The evidence presented by a
religious paradigm is not presented in terms of a sound deductive argu-
ment, that is, in terms of an argument whose premises are taken to be
true and in which the truth of the conclusion follows logically from the
truth of the premises. Indeed, the sheer scope and the profound
practical import of religious and non-religious paradigms makes it a
rather hopeless task to seek paradigm justification in these terms.
Theodicies indicate that typically religious paradigms are concerned to
elucidate the meaning of suffering, evil, death and so on. Religious
paradigms present important judgments on, and explanations of, such
matters, but, to insist that such judgments and explanations be
rendered in terms of deductively sound arguments or hypotheses is to
apply a restrictive and inappropriate standard. A Christian paradigm
simply does not operate like a rule-book on hypothetico-deductive method.

It seems correct to suggest that in the case of non-scientific
paradigms we cannot lay down in advance a set of rules governing the use
of evidence; rather the rules operative within a given paradigm may
only be discernible by examining the judgments made by its practitioners.
In a sense what those practitioners judge it reasonable to infer
constitutes what it is reasonable to infer. Different practitioners
may arrive at different conclusions depending on what weight they
attach to various elements within a paradigm. Judgments of this kind
do not fit into a simple linear pattern, but this does not mean that
they are, by virtue of this fact, to be considered as rationally
defective. Even in the cases where the beliefs are in principle
falsifiable, but in practice not, the problem about their rationality
cannot simply end there. MacIntyre's argument in so far as it rests on
an assumption concerning the linearity and provisional nature of
religious claims is, therefore, inconclusive and somewhat wrongly
directed.

But though a non-falsificationist thesis allows for a broader-
based concept of rationality the notion of a paradigm complicates the
issue still further. One might be prepared to argue that the disputes
arising between non-scientific paradigms cannot be settled by an appeal
to further evidence as the paradigms, as it were, aim to accommodate
all the evidence that is presented to them. It then seems plausible to
contend that the disputes arise because paradigm's interpret the same
evidence differently. But it is not clear that this account is
straightforwardly correct. A Buddhist paradigm would characterise what
is allegedly independent evidence in such a radically different way
to a Christian paradigm that it begins to look as if it is implausible
to say that we are dealing with the same evidence. This point requires
further clarification. Given, as Ninian Smart argues, that existential
questions about religious entities are more like their counterparts in
science (e.g. Do electrons exist ?) than like the simpler existential
questions of the nursery then it seems a genuine possibility that we may
run into similar problems to those which Kuhn alludes to in relation to

scientific paradigms. I think it can be shown that we do. For example if we take, say, the nursery sense of "suffering" then we can identify (independently of an appeal to a scientific, religious or non-religious explanation) cases of suffering. But, when we ask for an explanation of the causes of suffering we are inevitably lead back to paradigm-tied explanations. The types of answers which are forthcoming will depend on the type of suffering one has in mind. The answers proferred by religious paradigms tend to make us see suffering where we formerly believed it to be absent. Even if one assumes that religious and non-religious paradigms appeal to paradigm-independent evidence one can still discern that such evidence undergoes important changes once it is incorporated within a specified paradigm. The kind of changes which such evidence undergoes cannot be fully accounted for in terms of the ways in which paradigms weigh and interpret the various evidential strands. Theodicies are informative in this as they raise the general problem of the relationship between paradigm-independent and paradigm-constituted evidence. It may be the case that the arguments which are raised about the univocal, equivocal and analogical uses of language are instances of this more general problem.

Consider the following oversimplified example. The first two of the Four Noble Truths declared by the Buddha are (1) that all existence is sorrowful and (2) that the cause of sorrow is craving. Prima facie it seems that the first assertion can be taken independently of the second. That is, it seems as if we can first know, in a paradigm-independent manner, that all existence involves suffering and then we can look round for an explanation which is given, in part, by the second assertion. Of course, the explanation in terms of "craving" is only partially adequate as we cannot understand the full import of what is meant by "craving" until we understand the concept of "nirvana"; only when this is accomplished is the explanation deemed to be relatively complete - at least, from the Buddha's point of view. What is clear is that the all-pervasiveness of "suffering" is explained by the all-pervasiveness of "craving": "craving" is both a necessary and sufficient condition for the existence of "suffering". But the Buddhist doctrine of "Not-self" importantly determines the meaning of the terms "suffering" and "craving". In the ordinary sense we can identify x as a case of suffering independently of knowing that x was caused by y. However, in the Buddhist paradigm once we have come to understand that the cause of suffering is craving we have also come to understand that "craving" is a central feature of all human enterprise as we normally conceive it. The nursery sense of "suffering" has been extended to cover situations to which it does not usually apply. The person who is normally described as being more or less content with his life-style (e.g. has achieved his professional ambitions or has a good relationship with his wife and family) would, nevertheless, on the Buddhist schema, be under the intoxication of wordly influence: he would be "suffering" whether he knew it or not. The whole force of the Buddhist paradigm is to help the individual to see that he really is suffering - that is, its aim is to help him see suffering where he previously thought it to be absent. It is no answer to the Buddhist to insist that he has committed the error of generalising one side of a polar term, for the distinction between "suffering" and "non-suffering" does have application within the Buddhist paradigm. What it is important to note is that the Buddhist paradigm does not rest content with simply pointing to commonly agreed features of human life (that men sometimes suffer); rather, the basic concepts of Buddhism (e.g. tanha, dukkha, nirvana) central to the Buddhist explanation of the world constitute the world in such a way that the appeal to paradigm-independent evidence involves a recon-stituting of what that evidence is. There is a conceptual link, as well as a causal relation, between "suffering" and "craving". The position equally resembles an argument about what the evidence is as much as it

resembles an argument about the correct interpretation of the evidence. Generally, theodices possess this twofold characteristic: they initially appeal to paradigm-independent evidence, but, once such evidence has been incorporated into the paradigm, its nature and not only its significance, undergoes change.

What can be fairly said at this point is that the phenomenon of alternation taken cumulatively into account with other salient features of a sociological perspective begins to constitute grounds for denying the plausibility of religious paradigms. The sociologist can offer us rational grounds for preferring his sociological paradigm. Let us briefly summarise some of the relevant sociological considerations: (a) the sociologist can offer us an account of why the practitioners of religious paradigms hold on to their beliefs in spite of the fundamental problems about the truth-valuability of such beliefs (e.g. Durkheim), (b) sociologists can highlight the unintended consequences of particular religious meaning-systems and reveal hitherto important and unnoticed characteristics of social structure not accounted for from within a given religious account of what the world is like (e.g. Weber), (c) the sociologist can show that the demand for an over-all interpretation of human experience (that is the demand for a Weltanschauung) is equally as great as, if not greater than, the commitment to give a true account of the world (this element can be seen clearly in the work of Berger), (d) the sociologists can point to a fundamental shift in the "inner-meaning" structures of religious paradigms (cf. Luckmann), (e) it can be shown that religious paradigms are not displaced by rational argument but rather cease to be relevant because of large scale changes in the structures of societies (cf. MacIntyre), (f) the sociology of knowledge can indicate that in the case of Weltenshauungen socio-historical circumstance largely determine what is taken at any given point as constituting a plausible over-all interpretation of the world (cf. Mannheim). If one takes these points cumulatively one can see that the general disenchantment with the plausibility of religious paradigms is the result of a variety of sociological endeavours. It is also interesting to note that whatever the force of this cumulative disenchantment there is no appeal to what has become the characteristic philosophical critique of religion, namely, the claim that religious beliefs are rationally defective because they are unfalsifiable. Even in the case of Durkheim's critique the concern is to give a coherent account of diverse and incompatible religious belief systems: he is not concerned to say that religious beliefs are irrational because they are unfalsifiable - what he is concerned to do is to say that such belief systems are inadequate characterisations of what really is the case; they are to be considered "false" only in this sense. One might therefore be inclined to wonder why sociologists have not directly assaulted religious claims in the way that some contemporary philosophers have done. The reason is, I think, not difficult to find. Sociologists would be disinclined to derive their model of rationality from the physical sciences. They would not want of course to claim that the physical sciences do not embody an acceptable standard of rationality, but, they would want to claim, as for example Mannheim does, that the physical science model is simply not suitable for the social sciences.

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