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TOWARD A THEORY OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

The belief that man is capable of a direct apprehension of the world around him, in a manner which would lead to a fully objective knowledge capable of being shared by all men, has been repeatedly disconfirmed. Marx, Engels and, later, Mannheim (1931) have shown that a man's perception of the environment depends on the human environment within which he is raised. Psychologists, seldom in agreement on theory, are nevertheless agreed that knowledge comes from a combination of experiences, and such experiences are in the last analysis unique for every individual. This is shown with particular clarity in experiments on perception and social perception carried out by the «transactional school» (Kilpatrick, 1961). It might be said that the gist of anthropology consists in describing cultures as systems of action and cognition. Linguists have attempted to show correlations between linguistic forms and other areas of behavior (Whorf, 1956; Hoijer, 1954; Glenn, 1966).

In spite of all of this, we most often continue to assume at least the possibility of full objectivity on the part of communicators with vastly different backgrounds. In consequence, we tend to underestimate the possibility — even the probability — of misunderstanding in international and intercultural communication. Yet this possibility is very real. Side by side with conflicts due to differences of interest loom conflicts due to misunderstanding. Such conflicts will be hard to avoid until we come to understand the manner in which national and class cultures affect the formation of world-views (Weltanschauungen), the determination of values, goals of action, and forms of expression.

An example of an actual misunderstanding will clarify the nature of the problem.

An East European visitor to the United States was describing his impressions to an American host. Among other comments, he expressed a criticism of the American automobile industry, which he found to be extremely wasteful. In particular, the frequent changes of models, the diversity of such models and the huge publicity campaigns introducing each of them to the public, appeared to him economically costly and useless. The American replied that the publicity, although costly, paid for itself, since without it introducing a new model to the public on the basis of mass production would be impossible. It would be necessary to begin with exposing the public to small numbers of new products to test their reaction. Since the cost per unit of limited production is so much greater than that of mass production, an insufficiently publicized model would be costlier than one introduced by adequate publicity, despite the cost of the latter.

The East European was not convinced. A right way to do things, he suggested, would be for the government to appoint a commission of experts who would determine which model of automobile was the *best possible* in the present state of technology. This *best possible* model would be the one to be manufactured and mass production could begin immediately.

Up to this point, the conversation seemed to be about automobiles and about the way in which they are made and sold in the United States. Yet, it would be a misunderstanding to interpret it in such a manner. The real gist of the difference was whether the expression „the best possible” is meaningful when applied to objects such as automobiles. The East European, who may or may not have been representative of his culture, obviously considered such an expression meaningful. Americans, as a culture, would disagree. They do not believe that what is „the best” can be objectively determined in those cases where a simple measurement does not provide the answer. Beyond this, there are simply matters of taste.

It seems clear that if it can be genuinely established what model is *the best*, the approach suggested by the East European visitor should indeed be followed. On the other hand, the entire process of production and consumption in the United States is geared to the culturally held belief that in regard to such questions there are only matters of taste. (If Americans

quite often use expressions such as „the best” or „the biggest,” it is precisely because they do not take them seriously.) There is a sign at the outskirts of an American town proclaiming it „the biggest small town in the world.” Obviously enough, this cannot be meant to be taken seriously. Why, then, has it been erected? To proclaim, in a humorous way, the very genuine fondness of the inhabitants to their own town.

Noticing the existence of cultural differences capable of causing misunderstandings is one thing; describing them and classifying them is quite another. Differences can be analyzed as variations on common dimensions and the definition of such dimensions is an arduous task. A survey of the manners in which various researchers approached this problem would require more space than it is possible to find in one article. In consequence, what will follow is the presentation of one broad method of approach, followed by references to a number of researchers some of whom have reached similar results without being aware of one another's work.

The gist of the method consists of seeking to describe not the *contents* of culturally held beliefs but rather the *forms* of reasoning and problem-solving *preferred* in specific cultures. It may be suggested that the misunderstanding described above was based on such broad forms of approach to entire ranges of questions. The point of the difficulty was not the specific opinion of the East European and American concerning one or another model of automobile but rather the belief of one party — the East European, in the possibility of a rational solution of this *and many other problems* and the belief of the other party — the Americans involved — that the most normal approach is empirical. It is impossible to determine rationally what is the best; therefore, what is done is to find out empirically what is preferred.

As soon as the question is presented in this manner, it becomes evident we are not merely dealing with a difference of opinion between one East European and one American, or even (assuming that the two men are really representative of their nations) between the East European and the American cultures but rather with a basic philosophical opposition defining a generally human dimension by which individuals and cultures may be compared.

One of the poles of the dimension may be illustrated by the philosophy of Plato. Truth, according to him, can be reached by reason alone and

only by reason exercised independently from experience. All input from the senses can only bring in confusion due to false appearances. Descartes approached the problem of human knowledge in a similar manner, counseling doubt in regard to everything and seeking a solid basis for knowledge in some proposition which could not be doubted. In the end it is within his own thought that he found the »cogito ergo sum« — the idea so obviously clear that it could not be rejected. Clarity and distinctness of ideas are for Descartes and Plato the hallmarks of truth.

At the other extreme can be found nominalist philosophers such as Roscelinus and William of Occam, and empiricists such as Locke and Hume. Their position can be summarized as follows: (a) Words correspond to class names or universals. Such universals — man, dog, etc. — have no independent existence. They are merely a convenient manner in which to summarize what is known from the observation of the particulars or members of classes — this man, that dog, etc. — subsumed under them. (b) All knowledge is derived from experience.

The child at its birth has a clean slate — *tabula rasa*. Experience writes on the slate. Since the experience of any two men is bound to be somewhat different, so also is the knowledge and truth they believe, respectively.

What has all of this to do with national cultures? Let us assume for the moment that we accept Locke's position. One of the major facets of experience is the socialization or enculturation of the child to the culture of the society within which it lives. Thus, the handwriting which appears on the erstwhile clean slate is not only that of private experience; to a much greater extent it is the handwriting of the accumulated traditions, language, civilization, and beliefs of the national or class culture. Ultimately, it is the core of ideas consecrated by the collective culture which will appear to the individual as clear and distinct. Thus, empiricism and rationalism are not mutually exclusive. In reality they complete one another. Human knowledge springs from (at least) two sources and follows (at least) two traditions.

Under the circumstances it is only natural that the extent of the influence of each of these two traditions may vary from society to society and culture to culture. A culture is a way of coping with the problems of reality. In some cases the manner in which this coping takes place is almost entirely determined by the nature of the situation and in many other cases man has eno-

ugh freedom to approach his problems in a variety of ways. In the latter case, culture may play the part of a mind-set (*Einstellung*) which will predispose man — or a collectivity of men — to take one or another approach. For example, to rely on reason and set up a centralized program based on reasoning, or to rely on the trials and errors of empiricism and decentralize decision-making so as to seek the answer in the competition between a variety of possible approaches. *

The following example of a possible cultural mind-set may clarify the point. Both Paris and New York needed and developed subway systems. The French engineers designed a network of unparalleled clarity of conception, covering all of Paris through a system of interconnections in such a manner that the visitor has no difficulty in using the Métro to visit the city and go from one point of interest to another. Compared with this, New York subways appear to be an enormous failure. There are no connections from the Metropolitan Museum of Art and its medieval annex at the Cloisters. Interconnections are sparse, and comprehensive maps which would enable the visitor to find his way have been provided only since World War II. Yet, there is one thing which the New York subways do well — much better than their Paris counterpart: they get huge numbers of people from home to work and back home again. Lines are laid out to follow the most usual and massive routes of travel — home to work. Low-density routes are left without service; high-density routes are provided with express trains. It can be suggested that those who presided over the development of the Paris Métro had in mind Paris itself — the collective entity. From Paris as a point of departure, they proceeded deductively: the lines they traced were those needed to travel throughout Paris. They called the system the Métropolitain, thus expressing their preoccupation with the city. Their New York counterparts were preoccupied not with the city as such, but with the actual routes of travel of its citizens. From there they proceeded inductively to determine the layout of lines. There is no trace of the idea of the city as such in the way New Yorkers refer to their »Metro:« they call it the subway. (Glenn, 1954).

Subway lines are easy to visualize. Many other examples are easy to find. A group of French business leaders visits the Harvard School of Business Administration. They are interested in

*) (Let us take note that no culture is sufficiently distrustful of reason to let empiricism rule mathematics and no culture trusts it sufficiently to let it rule one's love life.)

cost accounting and ask the leading American specialist in the field what his *principles* in the field are. »What do you mean by principles?« asks the American. »Tell me your problem and I will try to tell you how I would go about solving it.« (d'Haucourt, 1956).

The tendency to begin with the general and to go from there to the particular is exemplified by French (and, more generally, continental European) jurisprudence, the mainstay of which is the code. The opposite tendency — to begin with the particular — is exemplified by American (and English) jurisprudence, the mainstay of which is the accumulation of precedents and in which (in spite of the principle of *stare decisis*) the court has a much greater latitude in each case than do French courts in similar circumstances.

The polarity between an orientation which may be called theoretical, universalistic (though in a sense somewhat different than the one given to this word by Max Weber) or word-dominated, on the one hand, and on the other, an orientation which may be called empirical, nominalistic, or leaning toward the organization of thought on the basis of particular case (though quite different from Weber's particularism) was extensively studied by Karl Pribram (1954). As noted above, he found that the earlier-named orientation considers that thought and reality can be identical and, therefore, that the results of logical deduction can often be accepted as definitive truth. The latter orientation derives from a critique of the earlier one and considers that the best that reasoning can do is to propose hypotheses. Thought and reality are not identical and the validity of the hypotheses suggested by thought must be verified through experience. Where the earlier orientation tends towards broadening the universe of discourse — common words stand for universals, the latter tends toward narrowing the frame of reference: experiences are always particular.

The existence of one or the other orientation does not mean that the participants in the corresponding cultures adhere consciously to the philosophical position in terms of which the orientation can be described. Their preference may be habitual and subconscious. An explanation of this possibility can be found in McClelland's study (1958) of the patterns of socialization prevalent in Germany and in the United States, respectively.

According to this study, socialization proceeded in Germany through the inculcation in the young

of a specific code of decency and morality. Further, the young were taught that the greatest satisfaction to the individual comes from his ability to discipline himself so as to obey the code.

Such a direction of socialization is deductive: what comes first is a series of general precepts. Particular personal behavior is then derived from them, resulting in a rational organization of personal strivings.

The situation in the United States is vastly different. Socialization proceeds through the inculcation in the young of strivings for high personal achievement. At the same time, children are placed very early within peer groups and receive only a minimum of supervision from adults. Within the context of these peer groups, the young learn rapidly that purely selfish striving meets with resistance from the human environment, and that the best way to succeed is to learn to get along with others.

In this case, development is inductive: what comes first is personal empirical experience. General principles — usually fairly vague in their formulation, are derived from it.

Given the deductive approach of their socialization, it may be expected that Germans, faced with a problem situation, may tend to seek the general principle permitting the deductive search for a solution. Under the same circumstances, Americans would tend to concentrate on the specific particularities of the problem and seek the solution inductively. This would be likely to occur even in situations where the nature of the problem is not moral or ethical.

So far, in examples to illustrate the polarity between theoretical and pragmatic cultures, the latter tendency was found to be more characteristic of the American and the English cultures. It should be noted that these cultures are and have been for considerable time in the forefront of technological development. Now, technology and engineering do not derive from pure or naive empiricism. They are solidly anchored in science; i. e., in a body of disciplines which put forward a world view (*Weltanschauung*) consisting of broad theories verified by experimentation. Thus, it appears that the empiricism, nominalism, and the particularism of the English and American cultures cannot originate in an unawareness of theory. Rather, they correlate with a reaction against possible excesses of pure theorization and place the emphasis on the use of theories as sources of hypotheses demanding verification. A particularism of this sort may be

linked to the concept of *cases*, whether in jurisprudence, medicine, business, or engineering. Each case is considered as a possibly unique intersection of many general categorizations. The emphasis is not on the categories as such, but on the manner in which their combination modifies their consequences.

Again, an example may be helpful. Chinese usage precludes describing the same person as "cousin" and "friend." In relation to ego, relatives constitute one category; non-kin, including friends, fall into another one (Métraux, 1953). In English there is no incongruity in statements such as "my cousin is my best friend." This can be translated as "from the point of view of kinship, 'X' is my cousin; from the point of view of affect, he is my friend." The universal categories "kin" and "friendship" are not ignored, but subordinated to the particular type of involvement — the case, in the subject's mind.

A different and much more radical opposition between a cultural tendency which can be characterized as theoretical or universalistic and another one which can be characterized as particularistic or intuitive, can be found in the analyses of the opposition between West and East (in the sense of non-European cultures), as conducted by F. S. C. Northrop (1953), and by D. T. Suzuki (1960).

The essence of the polarity in this case may be introduced by the two basic ways in which we can approach the meaning of words. One of these corresponds to the sense of "connotation" in everyday parlance: the semantic field of the word is not strictly bounded. Rather, it includes all of the suggestions carried by the word. The word "beauty" is difficult to define strictly, but its affective suggestions are almost unlimited. What is there in common, strictly speaking, between the beauty of a sunset, a woman, a thought, and a work of art? At most, there is a similarity in the subjective response on the part of some subject or subjects. This may be opposed to the other approach, as before, in polar opposition to the first one. This approach is congruent to the meaning which the word "connotation" takes in logical analysis: the strict definition of a concept in terms of other concepts. Examples may be taken from science or mathematics. The word "triangle" has exactly the same meaning for anyone acquainted with geometry as long as we keep to the strictly mathematical meanings and stay away from such metaphorical suggestions as marital triangles. Contrarily to the *subjectivity* of the earlier

usage, the latter approach seeks *objectivity*; (this matter is discussed more thoroughly by Glenn (1969b).

Northrop finds that the cultures of the East can be best understood in terms of a preponderance of the nondefinite tendency which he describes in terms of the esthetic continuum, somewhat along the lines of the comments above on the concept of "beauty." In contradistinction, the cultures of the West are theoretical — not only in the narrow sense which opposes theory to practice (and in terms of which we distinguished earlier between two broad subdivisions within the Western family of cultures), but rather in the very broad sense that the West seeks to isolate from the continuum of experience a structure of specific concepts such that the sharing of identical thoughts or of structures of thought making up theories about the world is possible between different subjects. The basic indefiniteness and subjectivity of Eastern cultures makes the sharing of thought possible only on the basis of shared experience. Hence, the importance of the master-disciple relationship. The definiteness and objectivity of Western thought makes sharing possible simply on the basis of common reading.

Suzuki illustrates this difference by comparing two poems dealing with the same subject — a humble wild flower.

One is by the Japanese poet Basho, and it reads — in translation:

When I look carefully
I see the *nazuna* blooming
By the hedge!

The other is by Tennyson:

Flower in the crannied wall,
I pluck you out of the crannies;
Hold you here, root and all, in my hand,
Little flower — but if I could understand
What you are, root and all, and all in all,
I should know what God and man is.

The Far Eastern poet is passive. His feelings may be too deep or too fluid to be expressed. Like a true work of art, his poem brings about feelings in the reader or the listener which may be quite different from those which the flower brought about in the author. The Western poet is active. His feelings may be poetic — for the moment. What he ultimately seeks is understanding; the flower is but an example of nature. Even in poetry there is a whiff of science.

"In the West, 'yes' is 'yes' and 'no' is 'no'; 'yes' can never be 'no' or vice versa. The East makes 'yes' slide over into 'no' and 'no' into 'yes'; there is no hard and fast division between 'yes' and 'no.' It is in the nature of life that it is so. It is only in logic that the division is ineradicable. Logic is human-made to assist in utilitarianistic activities" (Suzuki, 1960).

Where the West seeks the abstract knowledge of a concrete world and, to find it, goes through cycles of theorizing and experimenting, the Asian East seeks more the *intuitive* grasp of the right action and the right feeling — without quite distinguishing one from the other.

The intuitive diffuse and the rational pragmatic specific orientations appear in striking contrast in comparisons between the Western family of cultures and many other such families — including the great cultures of the East, even though the latter maybe very different among themselves (cf. Nakamura, 1960). However, behavior corresponding to either orientation may be found to a greater or lesser degree in all individuals and societies. This is made clear by Parsons, et al. (1951). Glenn (1966a) has tried to sum up the characteristics of the intuitive-diffuse mode by calling it *associative*: it often appears to be guided in its beliefs by simple associations of ideas. The opposite, rationalistic orientation was called *abstractive*, since it is congruent with the definition of precise concepts.

From the point of view of social organization, the associative orientation is congruent with Tönnies' *Gemeinschaft*: a human community deriving its cohesion from shared feelings. Such feelings are often unformulated and irrational. The abstractive orientation is congruent with *Gesellschaft*: society based on specifically formulated law (Tönnies, 1887; Glenn, 1969a).

In the political context, nationality in the ethnic sense and nationalism based on ethnicity are associative. The state with accompanying concepts such as citizenship, and the entire body of practices of public administration is abstractive (Glenn, 1970). This helps to understand why nation and state are not always mutually supportive. Only too often, the two find themselves in conflict.

The next question is that of putting together the two polarities presented above. One way is simply to assume the two dimensions to be mutually orthogonal; i.e., representing variations in behavior essentially independent from one another. The result of this procedure is the simplified

Glenn-Wedge matrix (Glenn, 1966a; Wedge, 1968; Glenn, Johnson, Kimmel, and Wedge, 1970).

Although each of the dimensions represents a continuum, a comparison between any two cultures for the purpose of analyzing communication between them is most easily carried out if each dimension is dichotomized. This leads to a fourfield matrix with the following combinations of characteristics:

- (1) Associative-particular or case-oriented
- (2) Associative-universal oriented
- (3) Abstractive-universal oriented
- (4) Abstractive-particular or case-oriented.

Field "(1)" represents part of a culture which is dominated by specific traditions or rather by basically irrational practices specific to the culture and justified only on the basis of either tradition or fashion. In a comparison between two cultures, the one more dominated by such practices within the context of the comparison (for example, in politics) would be placed in the field. From the point of view of communication the field is characterized by frequent appeals to tradition, authority or simply statements such as, "It was always done this way" or "everybody does it this way."

Field "(2)" represents social movements or cultural beliefs without a rational basis, capable of spreading far and wide on the wings of shared emotion or under the influence of charismatic leaders. Beginnings of new religions, apocalyptic movements, such as those which periodically swept the Middle Ages and which found a modern counterpart in Nazism, may be cited (Cassirer, 1946; Lanternari, 1960; Cohn, 1957; Viereck, 1941; Kohn, 1960). In communication, the field finds its expression in appeals to unbounded emotion.

Field "(3)" represents those parts of the culture which are dominated by rationalistic theorizing. Within religion, mysticism would belong to field "(2)" and theology in field "(3)". Among the social political practices congruent with field "(3)" one may note centralization: if there exists a sound theoretical reason for following certain practices, those practices should be uniformly applied everywhere. The style of the field within communication is that of theoretical reasoning and of a belief in the universal applicability of reason.

Field "(4)" represents those parts of the culture which are dominated by the application and the modification of universal principles to the needs

of particular situations. Engineering may be taken as an example. Within communication, the style is based on the presentation of facts and statistics.

The usefulness of the matrix in the analysis of problems of international communication has been demonstrated by Wedge (1968). In studying the patterns of communication between the American information services and Brazilian university students, he showed that *regardless of the content of messages* Americans tended to trust argumentation based on an exhaustive presentation of facts. In contradistinction to this attitude, Brazilian students tended to trust either argumentation based on deductive reasoning or appeals to emotion. Thus again, regardless of the content of messages, communication between the two groups is difficult and miscommunication likely.

In spite of its practical usefulness, a matrix based on direct observation in the absence of all theory leaves much to be desired. What is needed is a well-grounded, general theory of cultural evolution. It is only such a theory which may make possible an understanding of possible conflicts between cultural trends. As of this writing, only the most tentative steps toward the development of a general theory have been undertaken.

Glenn (1963, 1971) suggested that cultures in the early stages of their development are likely to contain many beliefs derived from associations of ideas. A society with a relatively narrow contact with the environment, such as primitive societies — described by Redfield (1953) as poor in techniques but rich in moral bonds — needs common beliefs to insure its inner solidarity. Whether the beliefs in question are true, matters relatively little outside of the area of necessary contact with the environment. What truly matters is that the beliefs be shared. Examples of shared beliefs obviously based on associations are easy to come by. Australian aborigines believed that the catching of a hunted animal could be made easier by placing hot embers on its tracks. The paw which made the imprint would be burned by the ember in contact with the imprint. The same belief was documented as recently as the last decades of the 19th century among German and Danish hunters (although a nail taken from a coffin was recommended, instead of embers) (Frazer, 1922). The existence of beliefs obviously not based on observation in cultures so distant from one another suggests a natural tendency of the human mind toward forming them. Their content suggests that the

process in which they originate is generalization by association.

The multiplication of such beliefs robs them of their efficiency. They become too numerous to be truly shared. The culture needs a critical consolidation. Examples of such consolidations may be found in various codifications of laws — from Hammurabi and Manu to Solon. Also, in the codifications of belief such as those elaborated by the Ionian philosophers, with Confucius playing a role somewhat intermediate between the two. What is particularly significant in such codifications is their critical character in regard to existing practices, and, as is particularly evident in Plato, their exclusive reliance on reason with a concomitant rejection of all empiricism.

The result of such abstractive critiques is bodies of belief characterized by a reasonable degree of inner consistency, but by only a limited applicability to the physical world. This calls for renewed critiques, this time based on empirical observation. It is significant to note that empirical tendencies became ever bolder and more radical, as time went on. One may think of the passage from Aristotle to the medieval nominalists and then to the English empiricists, from Locke to Hume. One may think also of the comparison between Aristotle and the position occupied by him in the Western medieval and postmedieval civilization. Although originally he called for observation, he became the originator of texts considered as sacred, irrefutable and the source of arcane comments excluding all observation. In consequence, empiricism developed in opposition to Aristotelianism. Thus, empiricism which one might naively assume to be the immediate response of man to the concreteness of the environment comes, in fact, late in cultural evolution as the result of a critique of associative beliefs.

Two points should (in addition to insisting on its tentative character) be made in respect to the theory above. One is its resemblance to the scheme put forth by Auguste Comte in the first half of the 19th century. The other is that if the three processes — association, abstractive critique by pure reason, and abstractive critique by empirical observation are really universal to the human mind, the entire process should be cyclical since all three processes are likely to be in operation at all times.

It is within the context of such a cyclic character that associative reactions should be viewed. (Described earlier under the heading of associative universalism).

To sum up:

The study of intercultural communication began in the purely pragmatic consideration of misunderstandings arising in such communication and the means to avoid them. Because misunderstandings tended to be patterned according to the two cultures in contact in each case and often according to the two broad families of cultures involved, analysis led to the possible discovery of very general categories of human understanding.

The study of the latter is still in its infancy. Although the problem received sporadic attention in the 19th and early 20th centuries in the works of Taine and de Madariaga, systematic research did not begin until the 1950's.

As of this writing, the field appears to be full of promise. It is as yet too early to offer any definitive perspectives.

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