

DISCUSSION I

WHOSE FRAMEWORK?

In the article, "Language and Conceptual Framework : A Note on Strawson"¹ Das discusses and defends Strawson's view that ordinary language "discloses the structure of reality" and "lays bare the conceptual framework of human mind."² In this small review, my contention is to show that the author fails to defend Strawson's conceptual framework against the attacks/offences.

When the knower knows or claims to know the objects of the world, his knowledge is conceptualized in a network in the form of belief-system. Such networked belief-system can be called "conceptual framework" a person has about the world. The conceptual framework provides the blue-print or the reference point and acts as the norms or guiding principle for theorization about the world. Language plays a vital role in the framework, since concepts/beliefs are essentially linguistic entities and are the only link between the belief-system on the one hand and the objects of the world on the other. The traditional debate of which language ordinary or artificial--provides the basic fabric in a conceptual framework, was lively topic for discussion during the height of analytic philosophy in Oxford and Cambridge.

Strawson, one of the most influential linguistic philosophers, sides with philosophers like later Wittgenstein, Austin and Moore,³ who have argued that ordinary language is adequate enough to build our conceptual framework to describe our thought about the reality.

According to Das, Strawson's ordinary language based conceptual framework, is closely related to Strawson's celebrated distinction between "descriptive and revisionary metaphysics" developed in his book *Individuals*.⁴ Descriptive metaphysics is the description of the actual structure of our thought about the world whereas the revisionary metaphysics is concerned to provide a

better structure of thought about the world.

To know descriptive metaphysics, i.e., the fundamental categories of our thoughts of the world, according to the author, we need to do analysis the ways we use ordinary words--words of common people and find their meanings. Such a method is called "descriptive analysis", since it describes, "the logical behaviour of the linguistic expression of natural language."⁵ Thus the author argues, "the use of words in ordinary language does not only unveil our conceptual scheme, it also determines our ontology."⁶ The basic ingredients in the conceptual scheme drawn by Strawson are the concepts of "basic particulars" and the concept of space and time through which the basic particulars interact with each others and link themselves with the world. The basic particulars are the "massive cores of human thinking"⁷, which remain unchanged and are a-cultural. The author summarises Strawson's conceptual framework by saying, "the ordinary man's ontology being constant, a process of linguistic analysis world reveal a conceptual scheme the central core of which is invariant and changeless."⁸ The structure of that core thinking can be unveiled through the descriptive analysis of ordinary language.

This conceptual framework, in turn, acts as a logical link between the language and objects of the world, explaining the otherwise problematic phenomena of reference, identification, communication etc. The success of the framework is measured in terms of the degree of clarity and efficient communication it does.

Such a conceptual framework has been severely criticized by different philosophers on different grounds over the years and Prof. Strawson himself and others have tried to answer the queries. However, Das defends Strawson's conceptual fraqmework against the criticism particularly raised by Prof. E. A. Burtt.⁹ Burtt argues that the changeless thinking which Strawson's conceptual scheme envisions rests on illusion. The history of ideas will guide us to believe that there is not a single concept which has not undergone changes in the course of its history. Besides, there are different natural languages spoken by different people in different parts of the world. If Strawson were right, we would have the same conceptual scheme for the understanding the world. Anthropologists and the

historians of language will tell us that our conceptual scheme is relative to culture and social practices.

Das fails to defend Strawson's linguistic framework validly against Burt's criticism. Das only repeats what Strawson has to say that there is timeless and a cultural scheme without providing any new argument.

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NOTES

- 1 Das, Kantilal, "Language and Conceptual Framework : A Note on Strawson", *Indian Philosophical Qly*, Vol. XXVII, No.1-2, pp. 1-11.
- 2 *Ibid.*, p. 2.
- 3 *Ibid*, pp. 1 ff.
- 4 See Strawson, P. F., 1959, *Individuals*, Mathuen, Londen. Also see Das, *op.cit*, pp.3 ff.
- 5 Das, *Op. Cit.*, p. 4.
- 6 *Ibid*, p. 4.
- 7 As quoted by Das, *Ibid*, p. 8.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 10.
- 9 *Ibid.*, pp. 7 ff.

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