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The Picture in Our World

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1. We make ourselves pictures of ourselves. The Bible tells us that God created us in his own image. Hegel and Marx tell us that we create ourselves. These are two of our pictures of ourselves and our world, and the second picture fits well into the first. If we are created in the image of our Creator, we are ourselves creators, and we are creators of that which the Bible tells us that God created. He created us and our world and we do the same, with that which God has already created, and our own ancestors before us, as our conditions and our material. And as God created us in his own image, we create what we create in our own image. Thus the picture of our creation that the Bible shows us, exhibits our own features.

2. In our world there are mountains, forests, islands, houses, telephones, boats, fish, nets, pots and kettles, numbers and calculations, wagons, rivers, bridges, ballads and poems, paintings, maps, clocks, inventories, etc.

Being ourselves creators, we can divide the things that are in the world into two. There are those things that we made ourselves and there are those things that were already there.

Here *we* may be read in two ways, giving us two divisions into two of the things that are, where the one division crosses the other. If we read *we* as *we humans*, that gives us a division between the things that are nature's own works, such as mountains, forests, and islands, and the things that are the works of men, such as our houses, cities, and states. If we read *we* as *any one of us*, such that any one of us can read *I* at that place, that gives us a division where the things that are the works of nature and the things that have already been made by others are all on one side of the division, and where the other side is made up of the things that I have myself brought into the world, which are not the same things for each one of us. On this second division, everything that is not of my own making shall be seen as one collection of things, with no distinction between the works of nature and the works of men. It is everything that is already there.

3. It is the second division that is the basic one, in the history of each one of us. The trees and the birds, the tables and the chairs, the plates and the cups, are already there. But the tower I build with my bricks was not there before I built it. It is my own work. This is where we begin, and only slowly will some of the things and arrangements that are already there come to light as the works of men.

3.1 I come to break a pin off the hay rake. One of the grown ups carves a new pin, knocks out the stump of the old one, and hammers the new one into position. This may teach me to see, not only this pin, or the row of them, but the whole rake as a made thing. And it may open up for a concept of rakes as made construction out of made parts.

This is a simple story about a simple insight. But even such a simple insight may come slowly in a society where things are in shops, and where we learn that things can be taken out of shops for money long before we learn how money comes into the purse or how the things come into the shop, or that they come into the shop in the first place, from somewhere else.

3.2 The road that I walk on is part of the landscape, like the brook and the stones in it, before it comes to light as an adjunct to the landscape and as a work of man. But the plank I lay across the brook, I know as an adjunct and as my own work when I lay it across the river as made by someone, at some earlier time and I learn to see the road as having been built, even if it lies in the ground and its construction is hidden.

Slowly the works of others come to light as the works of others and slowly the world comes to light as having a history before my time or my world.

3.3 What we learn from what we ourselves do or make teaches us to understand what others have done or made. The things we have yet to understand are the things that are the products of actions as yet unknown to us, and the things that have been produced to be used in actions as yet unknown to us. As our own actions teach us about those actions, they also teach us about those things.

If it is true that even nature refuses to show us her forms and her ways of working unless we live with her, cultivate her, struggle with her, etc., then it is from our own work and from our own actions that we understand all that there is to understand.

We are ourselves both nature and works of man. The blacksmith owes his existence to his mother, who bore him and fed him, and being a blacksmith he also owes his existence to iron and to all that technology and economy that iron owes its existence to. He is the work of nature and also the work of our history. He is both creature and creator, and he is the creator both of the things that he has wrought and of himself as one who knows to work such things.

4. On this picture of our world, our world is intelligible to us to the degree that it is our own work, or to the degree that we have learnt to imitate that which nature has already made, and we are intelligible to ourselves to the degree that we are the makers of what we have made. But not everything we do or make fall into place in this picture of our world. Only that falls into place which has a place within our practical doings. That is, things like shoes, clothings, boats, fishing gear, houses, ovens, ploughs, wagons, pots and kettles, etc., and institutions like division of work, buying and selling, taxation, courts of justice, schools, etc. For each one of the things or institutions in this list, or for different groups of them, we can tell a story about what they make possible that would not have been possible without them, or what they simplify that would have been more complicated without them.

A map or a working drawing has a clear place in this picture of our world. The map of a town, for example, makes it possible for anyone who can read it to find the simplest way from any house to any other house in the town. But what place can we give to Kittelsen's or Werenskiold's pencil drawings, or to all the drawings we have made ourselves since we could hold a pencil or a crayon, of trolls and princesses, of houses with doors and windows and smoke rising from the chimney, of the fishing boats anchored in the harbour, of the farm with the forest behind it and the hills and the mountains above it? What is the use of such works and such activities? What, for example, is the use of my drawing of this rocky stretch of coast? Well, I may show it to people who have not themselves seen this place so that they can see how barren it is, or how hopeless it is to reach from a boat, or how suitable a place it is for the building of a power plant. But nothing of all this was in my mind when I worked on the drawing.

A drawing may serve as a map, and whenever it does it has a clear place in our world of useful

things and practical activities. But what is the good of all those drawings and paintings that we never use in this way or in any other way? For simply looking at a picture, or contemplating it, cannot be called using it. And what is the use of making such pictures if they have no use?

5. We live and work in the midst of our own works, and much of our understanding of ourselves and of our world rests on our understanding of our own works. We understand our own works from their place in our practical dealings with each other and with the world around us, and we understand our practical dealings from the good they do.

But there is a border here somewhere, between those of our practices that are good for us, or that we are better served with than without, and those of our practices that are constitutive of our being, those of our practices, that is, that could not *not* be ours without ourselves being a different kind of creature altogether (we cannot imagine what kind, because we do not know what we are then to imagine). If, for example, it is constitutive of our being that we work and speak within a community of people working and speaking, then we cannot ask what good *that* is to *us*, since we cannot then separate *that* from *us*. We cannot then be outside of any such community and still be us.

We may well ask what is the good of this or that, but the question has broken down if it turns out that what we ask is what is the good of us. We cannot, therefore, ask for what good we make ourselves and our own world, but we can ask what it is to do so, in what order we do it, what is the place of tools and materials in this world-making, etc. And we cannot ask for what good we work on our own understanding of ourselves and our world, but we can ask what it is to do so, where we should look first or what we should do first, etc.

6. It belongs to our ways of being in the world that we make ourselves pictures of our world and of our ways of being in it. This very sketch is one attempt at making such a picture. It also belongs to our ways of being in the world that each of us tests his way of looking at the world against that of others. Only those ways of looking at the world that are public to some community are valid, and they are valid only where they are public, because only then do they let a world be seen. Where my way of looking at the world is not valid, there I am a stranger. And that is always a possible situation for any one of us. It belongs to our way of being in the world that we try to see what has not already been seen, and to give form to what has not already been given a form. Our pictures give form and shape to our world, they make what is visible become visible and what is close come close.

It is hardly possible to distinguish between our world and our world as we see it. Instead of speaking about the world as that which is depicted in our pictures, we may speak of the world as the picture's material and the picture as the world's form. That is, the picture is the world's form where it is valid and for as long as it is valid. When it is not valid any more, we say that it is just a picture, or just a myth, or just a poem. When we say that, we have changed our pictures. We speak from some other picture which is now valid and which is now the picture that is one with the world's form. We may distinguish between the pictures we see the world with and the pictures we look at. For some the story the Bible tells about the creation of ourselves and our world, is a picture they see the world with, for others it is one of the many pictures in the gallery.

The forms of the landscape become visible to me as I try to draw it. If I make it, the forms of my drawing are the forms of the landscape, because the criterion that I have made it, is that I now see the landscape like that. My drawing is my concept of that landscape, or of that landscape on a day in January, as seen from here. And at its origin, here is where we live, and what we see from here is the form of the world at this place. That is what we try to capture. We begin early with the concept of the house. The house has door and window and a chimney letting out a thin line of smoke. This is still the picture we see the house with, at this place.