

A PERSPECTIVE ON THE QUESTION OF THE ABSENCE OR PRESENCE OF  
RELIGIOUS BELIEFS RELATING TO ELEMENTS OF MODERN ARTISTIC  
ENDEAVOUR, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE LIFE AND WORK  
OF FRANCIS BACON

THESIS

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## **PREFACE**

An awareness of certain contradictory perceptions and assumptions regarding religious beliefs today and their relevance to art prompted a question which led to the research undertaken in this mini-thesis. The question was: how significant is the absence or presence of religious beliefs to the modern creative process ?

The writings of some theologians, sociologists, psychologists, and anthropologists seem to indicate that religious beliefs are fundamental to the functioning of society and the individuals who are part of it. Furthermore, even a cursory study of the history of art will demonstrate the strong bond between pre-nineteenth century image making and organised religion. Today, however, this relationship appears uncertain or even non-existent. This is a result of processes which began to gain strength in the nineteenth century: these include the industrial revolution, scientism and materialism.

Peter Fuller, stated that among the most central questions affecting art is, "the severance of the arts from religious tradition and their existence within an increasingly secular culture." (Fuller, 1990, p. 189). This statement appears to bring the issues together very neatly. Firstly there is the assertion that religion has nourished and been a vital force behind art through the ages, and that, modern art has lost this source of vitality. Secondly, there is the contention that society, since the nineteenth century, has become increasingly secular, and that this has had (and is having) a radical effect on modern art.

That art has been divorced from religion and that religion is disappearing, or will do so, is the logical conclusion, according to theorists who insist on institutional religion as the only true form. Some artists, for whom the absence or presence or loss of religious beliefs are important issues, may in

this situation experience a creative crisis.

In order to address these issues it was necessary to investigate whether religious beliefs are important to artistic endeavour and, if so, what the consequences of the absence of beliefs might be. For this reason, research into the nature of religion and the modern religious situation was initiated. The purpose of the extensive discussion on the nature of religion was to establish definitions of, or a view of, religion which could provide a sound basis for this investigation of the issues that have been outlined. In order to demonstrate whether religious beliefs are important to the creative process, Francis Bacon was chosen for discussion because he appeared to be a modern artist who had no religious beliefs and was thus an ideal example by which the consequences of this could be gauged.



## CHAPTER ONE

In order to discuss the significance of religious beliefs to modern art and to establish whether such a study is possible, some understanding of the nature of religion is needed. However, no definitions of religion specifically relevant to art, have been formulated although the social sciences provide a number of perspectives and definitions of religion which may be useful in the art context. Such an understanding necessitates some discussion of definitions, and those practices and characteristics which help define religion.

The approach taken by the social sciences is useful because it attempts a general cross-cultural definition of religion. This approach is here deemed necessary in order to overcome narrow historically bound ethnic perceptions of what religion is, bearing in mind, that while social theories of religion tend to be cross-cultural, the focus of this thesis falls on western art and culture. It is necessary to understand religion as a general (cross-cultural) human phenomenon because western culture is not a monoculture. Throughout history and at any stage in its development western culture has had, and consists of, a wide range of belief systems. The following discussion will introduce some of the definitions and understandings provided by the social sciences. There is considerable overlap among the studies made in sociology, psychology and anthropology. However they all have different perspectives and emphases. In most cases writers have arrived at a "useful" definition, which then provides the basis for understanding within the ambit of the human science involved. As this thesis is, however, an attempt to understand an aspect of modern art, and not a scientific study of religion, the following discussion will try to come to some understanding of religion, and this will be followed by some examples of how many aspects of religion find expression in art forms. This, in turn, will be followed by a discussion on secularization which is very important in the modern religious and artistic context.

Chapter one of "A definition of religion" (Hargrove, 1979, p.3 - p.13) provides the framework for this discussion. It was chosen because it avoids "narrow application of sociological principles" (p.3) and includes discussions on anthropological and psychological perspectives. According to Hargrove there are a number of interrelated methods of defining and understanding aspects of religion. The approaches that will be discussed include the "historic approach", which will be illustrated by the perspectives of Sigmund Freud, Eric Fromm and Emile Durkheim. The comparative method looks for universal structure and function in the religions of the world. This will include a discussion on the nature of rituals, myth and the type of reality expressed in them. Finally, the aspect of religious change and evolution will be introduced with special mention of symbols and symbolic order.

The "historic approach" to defining religion attempts to trace its characteristics back to a source in the individual and in the development of human culture (p.4). According to this approach, humans are different from animals in that they do not have patterns of behaviour which are genetically fixed. Humans have "freedom of behavioural choice", as opposed to instinct (p.4). It takes ten to twelve years before a child will learn what to do. Behaviour is malleable and is shaped by culture. Thus, what humans are is mostly a result of social imprinting during "impressionable years" (Campbell, 1973, p.45). For the upbringing of a child, social order is necessary to ensure that appropriate behaviour for survival in a specific physical and cultural setting is learned. People are taught specific responses to situations and also the ability to make choices as new situations arise. This involves a process of "generalization, patterning and abstraction" (Hargrove, 1979, p.5) which takes place throughout life and becomes part of a shared culture. These generalisations, abstractions and patterns provide a basis for behaviour and, where unlimited choice is possible, "by providing a setting in which meaning can be found and consequences of acts predicted." (p.5). In other words

generalization is a means of preventing chaos and indecision.

Generalization imposes patterns upon the potential chaos of everyday life. However, patterns are not only conceived for day to day life, but for larger frameworks involving the meaning of individual histories for the whole of human life and the meaning of life for the universe. The search for meaning is extended to infinity (p.6).

Hargrove says that we thus live in three worlds: the world of nature - always present and relevant to every action; the everyday world of pattern in which we understand our existence; and an ideal world created by our extension of that pattern beyond every day reality. She then goes on to state that much of what is called religion is involved in keeping these three worlds in meaningful relationship with one other. To what extent these efforts involve the supernatural, and whether all efforts along this line can be termed religious, is debatable.

The perspectives of Freud and Fromm provide examples of the "historic approach". According to Freud, religion arises out of our helplessness in the face of nature outside us, and instinctive forces within us (Fromm, 1963, p.11). Initially people could not cope with the forces of nature through reason, instead, they countered these forces with emotions designed to suppress and control the rationally uncontrollable. Freud argues that, in order to cope with the irrational, people fall back on their individual childhood experience of protection by a superior father, provided transgressions of his commands are avoided (p.11). Religion also arises out of the need "to make amends for the deprivations that culture imposes on individuals." (Hargrove, 1979, p.6). Not everything in culture can be seen by individuals as personally beneficial. The maintenance of social order often depends on the repression of some personal desires and traits. For example, religious beliefs may provide the mental supports for the acceptance of certain taboos.

In his book, Psychoanalysis and Religion, Fromm states that while people are subject to physical laws of nature, human self-awareness, reason and imagination seem to separate people from nature. Through self-awareness, people perceive their powerlessness, the limitations of existence and the inevitability of death. People are forced to create images of the universe to try to provide an understanding of where they are and what they should do (Fromm, 1963, p.24). Fromm argues that religion is inherent in humanity because people will never be content with the mere satisfaction of physical needs. All people according to Fromm need a "frame of orientation and devotion," and in that sense no one can choose to have religious beliefs or not to have them, but they can choose between beliefs (p.24 - 26). Religion provides consolations for all the privations that life exacts, and it encourages people to accept positions in life, either in the form of emotional support for those who hold lowly positions, or relief from guilt for those who impose those positions (Hargrove, 1979, p.6). Many things which are uncontrollable or unexplainable, are explained through religion to provide psychological stability. Thus, the individual may look to religion to explain phenomena which do not fit cultural generalizations (p.7).

The historic approach to defining religion involves not only the study of the individual (as by Freud, Jung, Fromm) but also the study of religious practices and organisation in culture as far back as possible. But there is the major problem that evidence of beliefs in preliterate times is almost non-existent. In the Reader in comparative religion. An anthropological approach, William Lessa and Evon Vogt state "the origins of religion can only be speculated upon, they can never be discovered." (Lessa, Vogt, 1972, p.7).

Emile Durkheim studied the religion of a modern primitive culture (Australian aborigines) to understand the role of religion in general. Durkheim assumed that the aborigines could serve as a

model for an early stage of human development (p.57). This assumption has since been rejected (Hargrove, 1979, p.7). Durkheim's definition of religion was, "... a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden - beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a church, all those who adhere to them." (p.7). Hargrove says that while Durkheim's conclusions should be treated with care, the idea that nearly all religion involves community, that is groups who share beliefs and activities even if they don't physically practice them together, is useful. Religious institutions, acting as a "moral community" may have a strong influence on the behaviour of individuals.

The "historic approach" defines religion as something that arises out of individual and social needs to control or explain human experience. It is a means of reconciling cultural and physical constraints with personal desires and traits. Religion may help to maintain individual psychological stability and provide the basis for integration into the community.

Moral systems supported by religions are not the same in all cultures. Through the study of the religions of the world, the comparative method seeks to define religion in terms of an overlapping, universal function and structure. Anthropologists searching for religious functions which are universal to all religions generally accept the universality of integrative functions (p.8). Religion can provide a system of meaning; it can also provide the rationale for the structure of society and the individual's place in it. "Religious practice is also integrative because in most cases it brings people together in ritual re-enactment of their shared understanding of the structure of the world." (p.9). Religion is not only a system of shared symbolic meaning, it is also a system of action or shared behaviour. Shared values bind a group with a sense of belonging, of superiority to other groups, and of the essential rightness of their beliefs (Leslie, Larson, Gorman, 1973,p.443).



A further function is the reinforcement of social moral codes. Socially approved behaviour is determined and rewarded supernaturally and deviance supernaturally punished (De Waal Malefijt, 1968, p.300). A moral code is not subject to question by mortals. Religion can also be a source of identity and solace. A person believes in the values and goals set by religion and identifies with a particular social group; "...it expands his ego by making his spirit significant for the universe and the universe significant for him." (Leslie, Larson, Gorman, 1973, p.519). It provides solace by giving meaning to death, provides rationalization for failure and permits people to continue the struggle. It explains the otherwise unexplainable and protects the individual from emotional catastrophe (p.519). Ritual, commonly practised in times of crisis, offers the individual and society an "emotional safety valve and a source of shared enthusiasm which can restore equilibrium" (Hargrove, 1979, p.9).

Hargrove notes that, within the comparative method, when defining religion in terms of function it is important to distinguish between "manifest" and "latent" functions. "Manifest functions are those recognised and intended consequences of an institution that are often stated as goals or objectives. Latent functions are their unintended consequences." (p.9). For example, a latent function of religion may be the maintenance of class distinctions when the manifest function is to make all equal before God. Thus, trying to define religion in terms of function becomes nonsensical. For example many of the latent functions (suggested by writers such as Feuerbach, Nietzsche, Freud and Marx) are contradictory to the manifest functions.

Other universals found in religion are structure, myth and ritual. All religions are composed of a group of adherents, or a community of believers whether they are formally organized or not. Degrees of organization and hierarchial characteristics vary greatly. Myth and ritual are considered more universal. Myth is "assumed knowledge" (Lessa, Vogt, 1972, p.109) about the origins of the

universe, of society, and original ancestors. Myths are stories that provide the rationale for specific world views (Hargrove, 1978, p.10). Freud asserts that myths are public dreams; they are a manifestation of unconscious compulsive fears and delusions and are pathological. Freud claims that science will replace myth (Campbell, 1973, p.14). Gustave Jung, however, argues that mythologies are positive and life furthering and can never be replaced by science because myth serves to integrate subconscious urges (instinct) with the conscious control of everyday living (p.14). Joseph Campbell, in his book Myths to live by, states that mythology seems to be coeval with mankind and that organisation based on myth is the most important separation between man and animal (p.21 - 22). Early myth seems to be universally based on the awareness of mortality and the desire to overcome it; the realization that the social group comes before the individual and will continue after the individual has died; and on man's confrontation with the regularity, complexity, size and enigmas of the universe (p.22 - 23).

Campbell argues that, while adherents may believe their myths as historical fact, this is a mistake. They are not histories but themes of the mind. He goes on to say that because the mythologies of the world show universal features "...they must in some way represent general racial imagination, permanent features of the human spirit or psyche." or "enduring essential principles" or "secret motivating depth" (p.26).

Ritual is the physical enactment of myth and myths are the mental supports for ritual (p.26). Repetitive ritual activities, whether performed in groups or individually, give a sense of participation in the mythical system (Hargrove, 1978, p.14). "As the myth provides a framework for comprehension of phenomena outside ordinary experience, ritual provides a way of participating in it. It creates ways of acting out the fears and frustrations common to human experience, relating

them to a unifying myth, and obtaining social support in the process." (p.11).

Religion can be defined by the kind of reality that is expressed in symbols and myths. Cross cultural comparisons show that most societies distinguish between the "sacred" and the "profane". "Certain times, places, people, objects, or activities are invested with special meaning that sets them apart from the ordinary." That makes them sacred, holy (p.11). Religion is concerned with eliciting a sense of the holy, of something beyond the everyday, something awful, venerable and overpowering. These feelings, recognised as an aspect of genuine religious feeling, are aroused by the symbols of religion, by functionaries (for example priests), rituals and myth (p.11).

The next aspect that Hargrove points out as necessary to any definition of religion is that it is not static. Religion involves process, evolution, and changes. A definition must recognise the tension between religion with boundaries, dogma, fixed institutions, and the process of social change and evolution. De Waal Malefijt states, "If religion is meaningful as a social institution it must be related to human experience." (De Waal Malefijt, 1968, p.359). He says that incongruities between symbolic image and real life will always arise, and re-examination and reformation of religious principles need to take place for the religious system to survive. Conversely, he says meaningful change of symbolic order only takes place if social reality changes. He says romantic ideas that religion bestows social order and meaning and counteracts fear, dismay etcetera is not wholly true. Religion does not spring up to do these things. It can also act as a powerful disintegrative force.

In other words, while religion may have multiple positive functions it also has multiple negative effects. De Waal Malefijt says that the continued existence of religions as "symbolic affirmations of social reality," and "symbolic image of social order," depends on the fact that "most religious systems are so rich in symbolic content that they permit flexibility of interpretation and re-interpretation." (p.359).



According to Lessa and Vogt, a symbol is something representing something else. Religious symbols are "multi-referential" or ambiguous, they promote understanding and give meaning by translating abstract to concrete, formless to formed and complex to simple. They express what is mysterious by what is already understood (Lessa, Vogt, 1972, p.108). A religious symbol is both a model of and a model for reality. Models of reality are culturally held perceptions of the way the world actually is organised. Models for reality define people's ideals as far as people can influence them. This sets ideal goals for behaviour. The belief in religious symbols sets cultural understanding and cultural norms (p.108).

Hargrove concludes her discussion by saying that enough has been said to provide a definition for the sociological study of religion. Her definitions will be quoted in full, as will definitions by other writers. It is clear that an absolute definition of religion is not possible and even the ability of the social sciences to come to grips with the nature of religion is questionable, because at the base of religion are a series of intangibles, unverifiables which will always elude final conclusions.

Before concluding, here is a series of definitions:

"Religion is a human phenomenon that functions to unite cultural, social, and personality systems into a meaningful whole. Its components generally include (1) a community of believers who share (2) a common myth that interprets the abstractions of cultural values into historic reality through (3) ritual behaviour, which makes possible personal participation in (4) a dimension of experience recognised as encompassing something more than every day reality - the holy. These elements are united into recognizable structures that undergo processes of change, development, and deterioration." (Hargrove, 1978, p.12).

Fromm defines religion as "any system of thought and action shared by a group which gives the individual a frame of orientation and an object of devotion." (Fromm, 1963, p.15).

"A system of beliefs and practices directed toward the 'ultimate concern' of society." (Lessa, Vogt, 1972, p.1).

"The sum total of a people's religious beliefs about the gods, the world, and their own nature are guide posts to the system of life." (De Waal Malefijt, 1968, p.170).

"Belief in supernatural power which governs the universe; recognition of God as an object of worship; practical piety; any system of faith and worship; reverence; holiness." (Collins Contemporary Dictionary, p.408).

This discussion contains a series of possibly bewildering abstractions and generalizations. These abstractions, however, do provide a sufficient basis on which examples of the relationship between religion and art can be discussed.

Byzantine mosaics are examples of art which cannot be separated from their religious function. Fear of idolatry caused a continuous debate between iconocules and the iconoclasts on the merits of images in churches. Byzantine iconcules thus had a clearly articulated intellectual purpose for their art. Primarily, the mosaics were a means of communicating Christian beliefs to the illiterate. The "manifest" function of The miracle of the loaves and fishes (A.D. 520) from the Basilica of S. Apollinare Nuovo, Ravenna, is to illustrate the gospel story of how Christ fed five thousand people. Gombrich points out that it is not only an illustration but it is also a transformation of the story - through the manner of depiction into something solemn, miraculous and sacred. The artist also

intended the image to act as a symbol of "Christ's abiding power". As He fed the five thousand so He will feed the beholder (Gombrich, 1954, p.96). In terms of Hargrove's definition, this can be clearly seen as "common myth" which is "interpreted into historical reality" which has been experienced and, in part, objectified by means of an image. The image illustrates and promotes the story as objective reality. The standardization and strict consistency of the sacred images was essential to the reality of the stories. Artists had to follow guidelines as to what the deities, saints and martyrs looked like so that the symbolization would be recognizable and consistent and thus more real.

An enormous number of Christian myths, beliefs and values are expressed in church "decorations", from simple parables, to the grand consoling images of Mary, Mother of Christ, who would provide solace in times of need; Christ on the cross who provides redemption from the problems of the world; to Christ/God the all-powerful who warns against sin. These images expressed and empowered the shared beliefs embodied in the church.

It has already been said that the Byzantine mosaics were not only didactic but also embodied "something more than everyday reality - the holy." The artists went to great lengths to give expression to the sacred purpose of these images, to imbue the images with that which separates the holy person from the ordinary person. In fact they were so successful in this that the images became more than illustrations, they were "mysterious reflections of the supernatural world." (p.97). David Freedburg states, "The image, once properly prepared, set up, adorned, and decorated, becomes the locus of the spirit. It becomes what it is taken to represent." (Freedburg, 1989, p.31). The iconacles believed that the sacred image was a direct link with the spiritual being.

By being in the presence of an image of Mary and looking into her eyes a person could pray and

communicate directly with Her. This required a consecration ceremony which gave the man-made image effectiveness as a holy image. Freedberg gives examples of a wide range of beliefs and rituals where the images themselves are potent. He argues that although these forms of idolatry are normally associated with non-Christian practices, there is ample evidence of "Actual practices" where Christians expect things from images or even "treat them as if they were alive." (p.91). The important point here is that many Christian images not only expressed a feeling of the holy, but in many cases placed the believer directly in the presence of the holy.

This very brief discussion on Byzantine art has shown on a simple level the relationships between the components in Hargroves definitions and images. It has been shown that church "decoration" illustrates Christian myths and also promotes these myths as "historic reality". It has also been shown that images have been an integral part of the ritual participation in the experience of the holy.

The focus of this thesis is, however, on modern art. The element in Hargrove's definition of most importance, therefore, is the aspect of "development, change, and deterioration." The following discussion, therefore, will include the concept of secularization, the nature of modern religion, and will introduce the relationships between modern art and religious beliefs.

Secularization, as an idea spawned by philosophers and made into a theoretical model that predicts the end of religion, has been widely used and discussed by social thinkers. That it is a very persuasive concept is not in doubt. However, the correctness of some secularization theories have been disputed.

What is secularization and why is it significant in this thesis on Francis Bacon ? If the theory of

secularization could be accepted as fact then it would be easy to place Francis Bacon's professed atheism and anti-spirituality in the context of a general and inevitable trend that is taking place in society. The breakdown in religion predicted by secularization theorists could be accepted as a fact in Bacon's life and a trend in society as a whole. However, the concept that "modern, industrial society will inevitably lead to the disappearance of religion" (Baum, 1975, p.140) is not the only theory pertaining to modern religious evolution.

According to Hargrove, the term secularization came into common use in the post-Renaissance period; the term described the transfer of church holdings to private or state ownership. It has now come to mean the transfer of things and ideas from the sacred realm to the profane. It is used to describe the reduced importance of religious institutions in society. Examples are the transfer of welfare from church to state, or moral education from church school to public school (Hargrove, 1978, p.26). Hargrove states that it has been generally assumed that primitive man experienced a large portion of the world as sacred. It is assumed that people confronted with awesome, uncontrollable, unexplainable forces, experienced this as magical. As people began to understand some aspects of these forces, symbolic explanations of sacred power were discredited to some extent. As humanity changed, people began to understand the dynamics of nature as well as those of our personal and social lives. Even religion has become the subject of scientific understanding. The logical conclusion to this line of thought is that once science has eclipsed the sacred/holy so religion will disappear. This concept is expressed in the Comtean theory that rational scientific explanation would replace religious myths. This was linked to the philosophy of progress based on reason, science, technology and liberal democracy (Baum, 1975, p.140).

Karl Marx predicted the disappearance of religion, basing his argument on the theory that religion was a symptom of alienation and would disappear as people overcame economic and social



deprivations and the frustrations imposed on them (p.12).

Weber's theory was based on his perception of the changes brought about by the industrial revolution. Weber feared the destruction of human passions including religious experience by technocracy, that is, a world dominated by technology and bureaucracy, reducing humanity's awareness to "pragmatic concerns of efficiency and bodily comfort." (p.12). Some philosophers interpreted the perceived waning of religion to be the result of the victory of enlightening reason; others perceived it as a sad development, taking a pessimistic view of modern society. People like Marx, Freud, Sartre, Russell and Feuerbach perceived the end of religious illusion as a pre-condition for the liberation of humanity.

Baum states that "What all these social thinkers observed, quite independently of their particular theories, was the passage of European society from an old order in which religion was a taken-for-granted dimension of social, cultural, political and personal life, to a new, as yet undefined order where religion was losing its social, cultural and political importance and where even its significance for personal life was being questioned by more and more people." (p.141). Baum says that sociologists are divided as to the correctness of the secularization theory. He concludes that there is no fixed law describing the relationship between modernization and religion (p.158). Hargrove notes in her introduction that since religion has refused to die, the pre-1970 sociological assumptions that secularization would bring an end to religion, should be re-examined (Hargrove, 1978, p.2). What is relevant here is not whether specific sociological laws are universally true or not true, but that religious phenomena may be manifesting themselves in modern times in new forms.

An alternative to the secularization theory is proposed by Emile Durkheim and people influenced by him, such as David Martin, Robert Bellah and Andrew Greeley (Baum, 1975, p.159). These

sociologists see religion as an enduring part of society. Religion may be less present or more present through time, "...but as society finds itself and assumes a more stable form, people will come to express their encounter with the ultimate in religious symbols and rites." (p.158). "Society generates its own religion in the same process in which it constitutes itself as a strong and self-confident community." (p.158).

David Martin argues that secularization theorists only consider organised religion as religion, whereas people like Bellah and Greeley find new religious movements and religious manifestations in industrial society outside the decline in formal church membership (p.159). Hargrove devotes most of her book to a description of the change from inherited institutionalised religion and includes two chapters on "new religious movements". Referring to the 1970's, she states that "this is a period of tremendous religious activity" (Hargrove, 1978, p.248). She points out that sociologists found that in America evangelical religion, forms of mysticism, eastern religions and occult practices were on the rise.

Hargrove poses the possibility that the final result of the secularization of Christianity may be the re-sacrilization of secular life. She makes this suggestion with specific reference to secular theology which proposes that transcendence is "immanent in human life" and that the holy comes from within rather than some outside source. She points out, as does C. P. Henderson in his book, God and science. The death and rebirth of theism, (1986) that the frontiers of science are uncovering areas of unpredictability, randomness and wonder. Physicists are discovering a whole world at subatomic level which seems totally beyond our grasp. Scientists are finding paradox and complexity. The world of scientific and technological control seems to have its limits.

Religion may be disappearing in one form but continuing in other less obvious forms. Joan Brothers

points out that although the death of God has been announced over and over again He is taking a very long time to die (Brothers, 1973, p.48). She points out that in England in the 1960's very few people could describe themselves as non-believers, although church attendance was very low.

Brothers points out that it is not always easy to separate what is sacred and what is not in society. Also, the secular need not replace the sacred. An example of this is someone who will take an ailing loved one to hospital and pray for recovery (p.51). Brothers argues that the assumptions that previous societies were religious, pious and unsceptical, or that rural peasant societies are devout, are questionable in the extreme (p.52 - 53). If church membership is the only criteria measuring the religiosity of society then America and Britain up to the 1960's experienced a decline in religion (p.54). However where Church attendance is no longer expected behaviour, religious activity could be located outside inherited institutions. She states that, according to Luckmann, the institutional specialization, (family, state, welfare, education, business etc) that has taken place has freed the various institutions from the overarching norms/values embodied in church religion. This has reduced the relevance of institutionalized church religions as a means of "integration and legitimation of every day life in modern society." (Brothers, p.56 - 56). Church membership is a very narrow and limiting measurement of religious activity.

Both Baum and Hargrove refer to the work of Bellah. Bellah puts forward a theory of religious evolution proposing a series of stages from primitive, archaic, historic through to early modern and modern. In his interpretation of modern religion he states that "the analysis of modern man as secular, materialistic, dehumanised and in the deepest sense areligious", is fundamentally misguided (Bellah, 1972, p.50). He points out that much modern liberal theology attempts to ground religion in the realities of modern society. Among many intellectuals, religion has not been abandoned, but re-interpreted to embrace modern science and modern values. On mass religion Bellah claims that



in the 1970's ninety-six percent of Americans claimed to believe in God (p.50). However, doctrinal orthodoxy is taken lightly and the idea that credal statements should receive personal re-interpretation is widely accepted. While the dualistic world view (heaven/earth, sacred/profane) persists for many people, other people have developed elaborate, often pseudo-scientific, rationalizations to make their beliefs seem more valid in the 20th century (p.50).

Christianity may be the historical basis for the modern western situation, but it no longer dominates or controls it. "The symbolization of man's relations to the ultimate condition of his existence is no longer the monopoly of any groups, explicitly labelled religious." (p.50). Society has become a market place for beliefs, including religions. Doctrinal orthodoxy has been abandoned by the leading edge of society and fixed positions have become fluid in order to make sense out of the modern situation. Symbolization is more abstract and broad. This allows for the co-existence of a diversity of life styles and cultures in a pluralistic society (Hargrove, 1978, p.56). In a diverse society, what are or are not religious beliefs becomes ambiguous because these beliefs do not arrive out of a shared community experience. In a situation where individuals and groups are entitled to their own beliefs and no one belief can be accepted as more legitimate than the others by society as a whole (they are merely different), beliefs become marginalized and trivialized (p.56). Bellah however, says "This involves a profounder commitment to the process of religious symbolization." (Bellah, 1972, p.85). He says that there is an awareness that people are responsible for their own choices, that single points of view or moral purity cannot be enforced.

Bellah claims that with the collapse of clearly defined doctrines, modern culture is characterised by the search for adequate standards of action, personal maturity and social relevance as a means of salvation. He refers to "... the increased acceptance of the notion that each individual must work out his own ultimate solutions and that the most the church can do is provide him a favourable

environment for doing so without imposing on him a prefabricated set of answers." (p.86).

To sum up thus far, it has been indicated that the secularization theory predicts the end of religion. Comte, Marx, Weber and others reasoned from different philosophical perspectives that religion would disappear. Out of this came the sociological theory of secularization. In essence it stated that modern industrial society will inevitably lead to the disappearance of religion. Hargrove's, Sociology of religion (1979) shows quite clearly that this has not taken place. Martin, Brothers, Baum and Bellah have provided further criticism and evidence against the idea that religion will disappear. What has taken place, according to Baum and Hargrove, fits more closely to Bellah's theory of religious evolution. That is, religion is not disappearing, but changing, going through a complex process of decline and rejuvenation, with some forms disappearing, some adjusting and some new forms appearing. What then is the nature of religion in contemporary society? The views of these writers described so far have included some perceptions of modern religion.

The view of religion expressed by Thomas Luckmann, in The invisible religion (1967), which has many similarities with other perspectives by people such as Fromm, and Bellah, will be introduced shortly as it is central to an understanding of Bacon's religious context. This, in turn, necessitates some backtracking to the general nature of religion as expressed by Luckmann. It must be noted, however, that conclusions reached on the significance of religious beliefs to contemporary art may well differ greatly depending on the view of religion that is taken.

Hargrove refers to a "multiplex world of modern religion" and a "proliferation of new groups." (Hargrove, 1978, p.131). This can be understood in terms of Bellah's "religious evolution", which describes a process of increasing complexity. He describes the change from "primitive" religion to

modern religion. However, he claims that this does not describe an inevitable change from a lower form to a higher form. Modern forms may include characteristics of any of the previous stages described, and forms which would be classified under earlier stages may still be observed today (Bellah, 1972, p.74).

According to Wuthnow (Hargrove, 1978, p.130) there are a number of processes which are effecting the relationships between the different religious world views and society as a whole. They are, "commercialization" where religion vies for the hearts and minds of people in a common market place; "privatization", where religion is a private matter so that different beliefs and choices won't cause conflict; "ritualization" which is a process where religious activity is restricted to certain times so as not to interfere with the general activities of society; and finally "isolation", which refers to the confinement of religious activity to spaces away from public life. Modern religion is tending to become a "... personal, idiosyncratic pursuit which provides certain emotional gratifications considered enriching to the individual." (p.130).

The idea that religious beliefs have become a matter of private choice is central to Luckmann's view of religion in modern society. Luckmann's perspective is useful because it avoids ethnocentric and narrow ideological views of religion. He sees religion (as do Durkheim and Bellah) as an enduring part of social life which is as unlikely to disappear as economic or political phenomena. He starts from the point of view that religious institutions are not universal, but that the phenomena which may give rise to religious institutions are universal. In other words, there are phenomena involving the individual and social order which can be described as religious and which underlie religious institutions. The functions of these phenomena may become institutionalised in familiar forms such as tribal religion, ancestor cults, church, sect etc. Thus, what is commonly perceived as religion, consists of "... specific historical institutionalizations of symbolic universes. Symbolic universes are

socially objectivated systems of meaning that refer, on one hand, to the world of every day life and point, on the other hand, to a world that is experienced as transcending every day life." (Luckmann, 1967, p.43). People are born into a socially constructed "symbolic universe of meaning" which provides a frame of orientation, in everyday matters, and in relation to ultimate meaning.

Before going on to Luckmann's analysis of modern religion, mention of some of his conclusions on the "general anthropological condition" of religion is necessary. He argues that a universal form of religion (a "world view") functions in all societies and all individuals. The world view as a whole is a historically given universe of meaning which underlies any social order and is the basis for human transcendence of biological nature (p.56). As a universal phenomenon it is non-specific and empty of empirical content. In its subjective form it appears in the individual as an "internalized system of relevance which forms the basis for personal identity" (p.78). The structural hierarchy of significance within the world view can become concentrated in specific social forms "which range from an articulation of a sacred cosmos" to "full institutional religion" (p.78). Thus for some people the sacred cosmos manifests itself as an "individual system of ultimate relevance" and for other people it may be found in church orientated religiosity (p.78). While the world view is inherited, rather than invented, by the individual, it is "internalized" and thus appears as a configuration of subjective and objective (socialized) meaning (p.70). The church is a specific historic institutionalized religious form (official meaning). Complete congruence between "official" meaning and "subjective" meaning is not possible in a complex pluralistic society (p.80).

Luckmann arrives at a basis for understanding religion in contemporary society through a discussion on the interaction between the "official" model of religion, private religiosity, and rates of social change. He concludes that the marginal position of church religion today is one aspect of a process involving the "... long range consequences of institutional specialization of religion and global

transformation of the social order." (p.90). What may be taking place is the replacement of institutional specialization of religion by a new form of social religion. Hargrove echoes this by saying that the diversification of religion may not result in "the elimination of religion but a realignment of its structure and function in society" (Hargrove, 1978, p.247). Eric Fromm essentially agrees with his view that people cannot choose between religion and no religion, but between religions (Fromm, 1963, p.26).

So, according to Luckmann, while traditional, specifically religious institutions are still present today, and the Christian models have played a significant role in creating modern world views, the nature of religious institutions has been completely transformed due to their loss of the monopoly in defining the "sacred cosmos" (Luckmann, 1967, p.107). The autonomous individual is relatively free to choose a source of "ultimate significance" (p.109). Sacred cosmoses which have connections with traditional institutionalized forms of religion have an advantage in the open market as they alone are perceived to be specifically religious (p.108).

Luckmann states that it is very difficult to define the dominant themes in the modern sacred cosmos. This is because they do not form a clearly and consistently articulated sacred cosmos. In other words the themes are not brought together into one dogma and described as religion. Themes that are arrived at privately are unstable and are open to revision. Traditional religious themes may survive as rhetoric which may hide newly emerging themes (p.109). Finally, the different social strata in industrial society "internalize themes of ultimate significance" in different ways (p.109).

After acknowledging the difficulties of locating the dominant themes in the modern sacred cosmos, Luckmann does put forward some tentative possibilities. These will not be described except in the case of one, which will serve as an example. One theme which Luckmann suggests is that the



"modern sacred cosmos bestows something like sacred status upon the individual by articulating his autonomy." and that, "Individual autonomy thus comes to stand for absence of external restraint and traditional taboos in private search for identity." (p.109 - 110).

There is no point in trying to describe the vast range of churches, denominations, sects and cults which seem to be proliferating. What is important, is that (according to Luckmann's perspective) even the people who do not participate in any of the above mentioned religious phenomena are not necessarily areligious. Simply, their religious beliefs ("world views", concerns of "ultimate meaning") are not expressed socially in the form of institutions. Rather, these beliefs are articulated at an interpersonal level involving friends and family. There is, however, an aspect of this "private search for identity" which deserves some discussion.

In both Hargrove's discussions and Greely and Baum's book The persistence of religion (1973), interests in the mysterious, mysticism, and the occult are indicated as elements involved in the modern process. These elements can be related to the search for the spiritual in art which has been described, for example, in the book The spiritual in art: Abstract painting 1890 - 1985 (Tuchman, 1989).

According to Hargrove the primary factor in religious experience is the entering into "a frame of reference outside the empirical" (Hargrove, 1978, p.26). She states that mysticism is a deliberate attempt to create religious experience outside institutionalized religion. Traditionally the occult was seen as involving socially illegitimate activities. Today, however, it would be better to describe the occult as activities involving the sacred and the mysterious, which take place outside what used to be "official" religions. Interest in the occult and the mysterious (among the middle class) appears as a counter-image of "modernity" (Remy, Servais, 1973, p.75). They describe "modernity" as "...

the situation which confers legitimacy on scientific and technical procedures, on the sense of calculation and productivity which reduces everything to needs to be satisfied by calculated effort, ...(and).... gives high value to control of the world on the basis of the right to privacy and individual autonomy." (p.75). Remy and Servais argue that "modernity" oppresses the sacred, yet at the same time, socially legitimate practices and beliefs embodied in "modernity" are partly beyond the control of the middle classes. For example, professions within medicine, science, politics are only really understood and controlled by those people who are initiated into those spheres of activity. Thus the middle classes turn to the "illegitimate sacred" for a sense of security in the modern universe.

Hargrove describes essentially the same thing. She states that there is a growing awareness in modern society that technical progress and scientific knowledge may not lead to utopia. In fact "modernity" might lead to a loss of humanity and even total destruction (Hargrove, 1978, p.274). She then goes on to say that, "According to Bellah, when change has undermined common assumptions, there is danger to the commitment people have to any system of faith, for many structures upon which they have rested their faith are changing or disappearing. The result of this may be one of three responses: people may sink into a condition of permanent undercommitment or loss of faith, becoming alienated from any faith system; they may create changes in the symbol system which make it responsive to a changed environment . . . or they may react by forming an overcommitment to the present system." (p.275).

These responses may include involvement in a wide range of phenomena ranging from "secular human potential movements": eastern religions such as Buddhism, Zen, Yoga, etcetera; historical western mystic traditions, through to evangelism and Christian fundamentalist movements. Central to this is that people became alienated from institutional forms of religion in society due to rapid social change. This fits very well with Luckmann's perspective, that in times of rapid social change

an increased degree of incongruence between the individual's beliefs and activities, and the beliefs embodied in social institutions (which are relatively fixed) will occur. This will lead the individual to seek guidance in relation to ultimate meaning from elsewhere. Thus, people alienated from the primary religious institution (the church) will seek "world views" from other sources. While a "world view" may not constitute a religion, it can be called religious.

Evidence of this need for religious beliefs outside institutional forms can be found in what Martin Marty describes as an "explosion" of interest in the occult and the mysterious. This interest manifests itself differently in different social classes. According to Marty, among affluent intellectuals the phenomenon shows up in a number of ways. Firstly, something in people "strives to be expressed". This could be a "sense of wonder" or "the mystery of being". Secondly, mass higher education, mass communication, travel opportunities, and access to other cultures create a situation where westerners seek "primal" experience in Africa or a oneness with "the all" by following Eastern traditions. Thirdly people may delve into past western mystical traditions oppressed by Christianity (Marty, 1973, p.34).

Marty uses a number of expressions to describe mystical search. These include "the apprehension of an ultimate nonsensuous unity in all things"; "the search for higher states of consciousness" on the part of people who seek an escape from the grind of living; an "infinite all"; liberation from "oppressive surrounding order". In essence, this amounts to the desire of people to define themselves apart from the realm of necessity, work and professionalism, a desire to "perpetuate a richer model of man than projected" by "modernity" (p.44).

It is quite clear that many modern artists have struggled with expressions of this kind. It seems that



what is usually referred to as the "spiritual in art" can be described as fundamentally religious. Hargrove's definition of religion includes "a dimension of experience recognised as encompassing something more than everyday reality - the holy" (Hargrove, 1978, p.12). Earlier on there was reference to a process of patterning, generalization and abstraction. This process involves the creation of what Luckmann would term, a "world view", which he describes as an elementary, nonspecific, social form of religion. This "world view" consists of a number of levels of significance and meaning. At the simplest level of this "hierarchy of significance" is the ordinary every day world of routines and pragmatic decisions; a familiar world grasped by the ordinary senses (Luckmann, 1967, p.58). This reality is "concrete, unproblematic and as we may say, profane." However, "... the strata of significance to which everyday life is ultimately referred ... are neither concrete or unproblematic," (p.58). This strata within the world view (a domain transcending everyday reality) is experienced as different and mysterious. In other words, as Hargrove states, the search for "meaning" is extended to infinity. This mysterious, ungraspable, superordinating dimension of the world view tends to become separated as a "sacred cosmos" (p.59).

The book The spiritual in art. Abstract painting 1890 - 1985, documents a wide range of artists who have "turned to a variety of anti-materialist philosophies, with concepts of mysticism or occultism at their core" (Tuchman, 1986, p.18). Tuchman defines mysticism as "the search for the state of oneness with ultimate reality" (p.19) and describes the occult as mysterious: a phenomenon not perceived through ordinary understanding or scientific reason. Individuals and groups interested in "the spiritual" found sources of inspiration from the Bible, holy books of conventional western religion; also "Heretical" Judeo-Christian writings; earlier forms of Christianity since discarded; holy writings of mystics; eastern philosophy and religion (p.19). These may include alchemy, anthroposophy, fourth dimension, neoplatonism, spiritualism, taoism, theosophy, and Zen Buddhism (Kasinek, Kerdimun, 1985, p.361 - 391). Wassily Kandinsky was one of the most important artists

who dedicated his art to the expression of transcendent reality. His rationale for abstract painting was based on theosophical and anthroposophical writings (Tuchman, 1986, p.35). His beliefs were strongly anti-materialist, utopian and idealistic. He believed that abstract painting might help awaken the individual to the spiritual values necessary to bring about a "utopian epoch." (Long, 1986, p.202). Kandinsky wanted forms to express higher realities and cosmic orders rather than merely to describe everyday reality (p.202). Frantisek Kupka, Piet Mondrian and Kazimir Malevich were abstract pioneers whose art was permeated with spiritual ideas. Mondrian believed that "through the exact reconstruction of cosmic relations", his art was a "direct expression of the universal." (p.323).

American artists like Jackson Pollock, Adolf Gottlieb and Richard Pousette-Dart found inspiration not in mystical writings but in American Indian culture and the spirituality embodied in its art. They believed that "... primitive art was a reflection of a universal stage of primordial consciousness that still existed in the unconscious mind." (Rushing, 1986, p.273). Pollock attempted to become at one with nature ("pure harmony") by losing himself in ritualistic action painting. Rothko and Gottlieb in "Statement 1943" (Chipp, 1968, p.544) expressed the desire for "... adventure into an unknown world ... (to) ... destroy illusions and reveal truth ... (and they were) ...violently opposed to common sense." In essence they wished to escape everyday reality and the restrictions imposed by society.

Can it not, therefore, be said that much of what is termed "the spiritual in art" is an attempt by artists to express a relationship between themselves and some higher form of reality ? Have these artists not been trying to evoke some kind of "sacred cosmos" ? If they have, is it not true that these artists have been struggling with religious beliefs, and that their art can therefore be described as religious? It seems quite clear that for these phenomena not to be described as religious because,

for example, they fall outside official Christian views, would be very narrow-minded.

Unlike "official" religion, mystical-occult belief systems can be directly accessible to the individual without need for intermediaries or authorities. These beliefs are assimilated and reflected upon privately (Tuchman, 1986, p.19). However, many people do turn to some forms of mystical or occult beliefs because these provide some authority outside themselves. This authority may come in the form of a spiritual leader, medium or book, which provides guidance. These activities can be interpreted in terms of the sociological understanding of religion provided by Bellah and Luckmann. The large number of artists discussed under the topic "the spiritual in art" is evidence of the strong religious dimension retained within modern art up to the present day. The effectiveness of modern works of art in embodying religious beliefs (spiritual values) or the quality of the work inspired by modern religion is irrelevant at the moment.

The question of the importance of religious beliefs goes deeper than the continued interest by artists in established mystical and occult phenomena. The diverse attempts of artists deliberately to involve their art in religious beliefs reflects the process of increasing "complexity", "commercialization" and "privatization" that is taking place in the modern religious process. But, what about the artists who are not consciously struggling with "spiritual" values ? Do these artists have no religious beliefs with which they struggle, or do their beliefs simply not play a role in their art ?

## CHAPTER TWO

In chapter one the social sciences were used towards an understanding of religion and the nature of the modern religious situation. The collapse of the traditional authority of the church has not left a situation devoid of religious activity. What has appeared is radical pluralism and relativism, where different belief systems compete for adherents and co-exist at the same time. In this situation no one can hold beliefs without being aware that there are many other competing/conflicting beliefs. It is a situation where the final choice is up to the individual. The spiritual in art was then described as evidence of the continued relationship between religion and art. But this was a new relationship created by the marginalization of the church, and the "commercialization" and "privatization" of religious beliefs. It is in this light that the question of the importance of religion as private belief comes to the fore.

Having identified private beliefs as the central issue in modern religion, the question of how to recognize religious beliefs remains problematic. No one can escape from the relativism which is inevitable in any perspective taken on religion. But even the social sciences, which try to understand religion as subjective, as something that appears in different cultures, individuals, and in different times in different ways, offer a perspective which is not immune to criticism from a religious fundamentalist position for example. For this reason, the significance of different perspectives will be illustrated and discussed. To this end the views of Peter Fuller and H. R. Rookmaaker will be introduced. This hopefully will serve to balance the perspective which arises logically out of chapter one. This discussion will then provide a means of approach to the question of Francis Bacon's religious beliefs.

Every writer potentially has his own religious beliefs and beliefs about what should be called

religion. Fuller was a proclaimed atheist (Fuller, 1990, p.189) with very strong views on the importance of religion and even on what Christianity should preach if it is to do any good. Rookmaaker was an art historian who believed in the complete authority of the Christian Bible and who has interpreted and judged art in accordance with his Christian values. In his Modern art and the death of a culture (1970) Rookmaaker described 20th century art and culture as the end product of the Enlightenment, which was the beginning "of a deep reversal of spiritual values" (Rookmaaker, 1970, p.11). This "reversal" included the change from understanding man's relationship with the universe based on the "facts" of the Bible to an understanding based on "common sense" and science. The truth of the Bible has been pushed aside for the "reduced reality" of "scientism", "evolutionism" and "rationalism" (p.43 - 47). Before the Age of Reason, science was a tool with which to uncover God's greatness. "But now it was elevated by rationalists into the tool to know all truth, the foundation of all knowledge. But the world was no longer open to a transcendent God. It had become a closed box ...." (p.47). Rookmaaker asserted that modern art in its meaning, content and spiritual message is a consequence of the principles of the Enlightenment. The nature of modern art, Rookmaaker argued, is the result of the victory of anti-Christian forces. Modern art has reflected this victory, reacted to it and propagated its message. Central to Rookmaaker's theme was his belief in the factuality, the truth, of the Christian Bible.

In contrast, Fuller in Images of God, devotes the chapter "The Christs of faith and the Jesus of history" (Fuller, 1990, p.298 - 311) to open questioning of the "facts of the Bible." Fuller based much of his art theory on Marxist, structuralist approaches using sociology, biology and psychology to "get to grips with the nature of aesthetic experience" (p.xiiv). However, he claimed in Images of God that "everyone now seems to acknowledge the intellectual, ethical and aesthetic bankruptcy of Marxism" (p.xiiv). He went on to say that he was among the first to realise this, and that although he remains an "incorrigible atheist" there is, "something about the experience of art, itself,



which compels me to re-introduce the category of the 'spiritual'" (p.xiv). As will be shown, Fuller's understanding of religion is essentially sociological. Rookmaaker, on the other hand would reject a sociological understanding because it ignores the transcendent reality of God's purpose for humanity, reducing people to objects determined by natural laws and to be studied by means of scientific methods (Rookmaaker, 1970, p.47). Rookmaaker bases his arguments on faith in God's word and rejects "scientism" which he describes as "faith in reason" (p.47).

How then did Fuller understand the importance of religion to art? He stated that culture "... is grounded in man's highly specific psycho-biological nature, it is also a means through which human history transcends natural history." (Fuller, 1990, p.10). He believed that there is "continuity between human aesthetic experience and 'natural' (or biological) life", but at the same time there can be "rupture". Things can go wrong. The biological aspect of aesthetic life needs a "facilitating environment" which includes "... appropriate modes of work and materials, and a socially given symbolic order such as provided by religion ...." (p.10). The marginalisation of religious beliefs has slowly destroyed the "socially shared symbolic order" and industrialization has "deaestheticised" work (p.11). Thus Fuller saw the most important aspect of religion as its sociological function in providing a shared symbolic order. This symbolic order provides a common base for understanding life and in the same way it plays an integral part in providing a shared artistic language. Modern artists are unable to play a role in social life because their language is too fragmented, too subjective and thus incommunicable to others. The real clue to Fuller's understanding of religious beliefs comes when he tried to find solutions to the problem he outlines. He stated that if belief in God could no longer provide a shared symbolic order, nature could. Nature must not be denied, but "grasped and transfigured". In this way the artist's practice becomes "one of re-conciliation, in illusion, between the self and social and physical worlds." (p.16). This means that, at the very least, the artist can transcend the need for religious beliefs by finding a shared symbolic order in nature.

Thus, although Fuller believed in the importance of religious beliefs in providing shared symbolic reality and grand "redeeming illusions" and that materialists are far from understanding the positive role that these religious illusions play, he also believed, it appears, that people can cease to have meaningful religious beliefs. Atheists and many modern Christians, "... have lost all their redeeming illusions and are thrashing around in an all too human and depressingly material world." (p.193). In an essay on the artist, Cecil Collins, he called for a wilful suspension of "mundane disbelief" in order for the work of art to communicate its "consoling illusions" (p.124 - 129). People need these illusions in order to live at peace with one other and the world, and the value of "demythologising" such experiences through psychology and science is questionable. The best artists are looking at nature again, and creating genuinely consoling illusions through imaginative transfiguration of the visual world. Artists like Henry Moore, for example, don't fall back on references to the past iconography of faith, but are actively and imaginatively engaged with natural and human forms (p.91). It may be that this is what Fuller was referring to when he called for the re-introduction of the "category of the spiritual" (p.xiv). A spiritual art that communicates "consoling illusions", an art which should not be demythologised and interpreted in terms of psychological and social context, because to do so would ignore the real social value of art. This is a kind of secular spiritualism which promotes the social and psychological well-being of individuals in the absence of faith in historic religious teachings.

It is not exactly clear how Fuller understands religion. He avoids generalized, abstract, sociological demarcations of what is religious and what is not. He tends to judge specific beliefs by their ability to provide genuinely "redeeming illusions" and a "shared symbolic order"; he asks whether certain beliefs can do anything for anyone, rather than whether they can be called religious or not. Fuller's whole attitude is defined by his atheism and his intellectual grounding in the human sciences. Rookmaaker could never talk about "consoling illusions" because Fuller's "illusions" are

Rookmaaker's true facts of the universe.

Rookmaaker argued that pre-18th century art depicted "the great facts of history" (Fuller's grand illusions); myths expressed human truths and biblical scenes expressed religious facts. However by the time Gustave Courbet was painting (1819 - 1877), the rationalist age had made it impossible to express anything "exterior to man" (Rookmaaker, 1970, p.58). Courbet rejected the dead tradition of history painting and opted for only what he could see (p.59). Stemming from the Enlightenment was a process of rationalism/scientism/materialism which made the naturalism of Constable and the realism of Courbet possible. These artists reflected the changing values of society. In their art they began to approach reality as only that which can be seen, measured and understood scientifically. The senses were the only source of understanding reality. The "true reality", the humanity beyond the factuality of the senses, was ignored (p.62 - 80). Thus there was a process where rationalist philosophies began to dominate the world, suppressing the transcendent reality expressed in the Bible. The artists, Goya, Courbet, Manet and the Impressionists fell in line with this new view of reality (p.80). Bourgeois academic art held on to a past which they could no longer believe in. Progressive artists perceived the fake nature of this art and attempted to bring art into line with reality as it was understood in their own time (p.81). Many artists, however, were thrown into a quandary because they could not accept the consequences of materialist philosophies and they tried to transcend the "reality" expressed in modernity. Artists such as Blake were anti-reason and anti-industrialization and exalted the mysterious, the spiritual and the imagination (p.63). This, Rookmaaker argued, was a reaction to a loss of humanity which took place with the victory of rationalist (un-Christian) forces over pre-18th century faith. This victory sealed off the transcendent dimension, a dimension beyond biological senses, placing humanity in a "box" (p.47). Pre-18th century art could reveal this "reality beyond the senses" simply by illustrating the truths of the Bible. Attempts to rediscover a spiritual 'cosmic' reality by modern artists such as Marc or Kandinsky



failed (according to Rookmaaker) because they started from man. They did not question the basic principles of the Enlightenment, starting from man's senses and man's perceptions, which automatically closes off the transcendent reality (p.112). No artist will find the ultimate reality behind the universe if he or she ignores God the creator, who is that reality. Perhaps if people did experience some meaningful spiritual revelation by standing in front of a Kandinsky, or any modern painting supposed to show some greater divine reality, then the 20th century would be deep in Kandinsky's dream of a "new spiritual era" (Long, 1986, p.202).

In many ways Fuller was in agreement with Rookmaaker in that he questioned the ability of any artist to pursue meaningful spiritual goals outside "any informing religious tradition." (Fuller, 1990, p.191). Anthroposophy may have provided an "informing religious tradition" for Kandinsky, but the pursuit of spiritual goals becomes increasingly subjective. The spiritual claims made by some of the American Abstract Expressionists, for example, had no foundation in any religious tradition. Claims may have had some basis in Jungian psychology, and intuitive references to primal American Indian iconography, but beyond this, the religious nature of these paintings had no authority outside the artist's private intuitions and the recognition accorded by the art world, specifically the critics, dealers and gallery owners. Thus, while Fuller may describe Mark Rothko as an artist of some merit, he would be highly sceptical of the supposed religious dimension of Rothko's work. Thus, Fuller's arguments pose the questions: can the subjective, religious beliefs unsupported by tradition, sustain a vigorous spiritual art? Can a spiritual art communicate or fulfil any religious function in a society that has no hegemonising shared religious world view? Fuller's view, based on religion's role in determining the ethical, cultural and spiritual aspects of community, finds modern religious activities to be without much value or credibility, or at most, highly diluted (p.191 - 193). Rookmaaker, on the other hand, resigned himself to a world where the 'true' religion has suffered a defeat and tries to provide the good Christian with a way of going forward in such a world.

According to some sociologists modern religious beliefs have been retrenched into the private sphere, something Fuller and Rookmaaker might accept as true, but certainly would not accept as desirable. Both these writers have shown that the whole question of the importance of religious beliefs is tied up in philosophical value judgements. Questions such as whether these beliefs are good or bad, useful or destructive, or good for art or bad, need to be asked. For instance, it is quite clear that religious beliefs in the modern world are not the hegemonising force that Fuller would wish them to be. (Whether they were in the past is not relevant). It is equally clear that Rookmaaker's God and the accompanying Christian symbolic universe is one of many in a pluralistic society, and this is not something that would please him.

To sum up, in writing about religion the writer cannot escape his/her own religious beliefs. The impartiality of the sociological perspective is thus only relative. Fuller and Rookmaaker have been used to illustrate different religious perspectives which will be referred to in the following discussion. Rookmaaker interpreted modern art in terms of a loss of ability to have religious beliefs, not in the sociological sense, but in the specific qualitative sense of losing Christian truths about the nature of the universe. Fuller described a situation where religion no longer provides a system of shared beliefs which would provide a common base for interpreting reality; and also a situation where people have lost the "consoling illusions" provided by religion. Such philosophical concerns are necessary to the debate. However, for the moment, the discussion must return to the perspective provided by sociologists.

Surely if modern religion is fragmented, diversified and essentially a dimension of private life then its significance should be sought in that sphere? Luckmann has demonstrated how rapid social change erodes institutional forms in society. The marginalization of one of western society's greatest institutions, the Christian Church, is something of extreme importance to the nature of society.

Fuller stated, "Certainly, historically, in most aesthetically healthy societies religion and aesthetic life were inextricably intertwined: this is true whether you look at Aboriginal arts, ancient Egypt, Greek sculpture and architecture, African tribal cultures, Muslim decoration, seventeenth-century Spanish painting or the arts of the East. Traditionally, religion has sustained the ornamental systems of a society, shaped its principal architectural forms and given rise to its iconography." (p.189). "The Gothic world's aesthetic achievement had rarely been approached by any previous culture; nothing like it has been seen since. And this achievement, of course, was inextricably bound up with the cultural triumph of the Christian Church." (p.189).

So, certainly, the fact that the church is no longer the glorious primary institution that it may have been at certain times in the past is significant. However the relationship between art and institutions is not the focus of this thesis. Hargrove and Luckmann have demonstrated that much of modern religious activity takes place outside traditional religious institutions. The relationship between art and non-institutional forms such as the occult and mysticism has been described. Thus, the focus now falls on the importance of religious beliefs as a private phenomenon. The discussion will be based on the perspective which began to emerge from chapter one. At the end of chapter one a question was posed: what about artists who do not consciously struggle with spiritual values ? Do these artists not have religious beliefs with which they struggle, or do their religious beliefs simply not play a role in their work ? There are a number of ways to approach the question of the absence or presence of religious beliefs at an individual level. The following discussion will outline three broad perspectives, and justify one approach to Francis Bacon's beliefs.

Firstly there is the Christian approach (Rookmaaker) which says that genuine religious beliefs do not come from man but from an outside source. This dualistic world view claims that the Bible, for example, is the word of God, written by His prophets. Thus, Francis Bacon's religious status would be understood in terms of the absence or presence of Christian beliefs. This approach could, of

course, be based on any one religion.

Secondly there is an attitude which could be described as essentially atheistic. Fuller for example does not accept the reality of God. Thus God's word can only have come from man. Marx and Freud, for example, would describe many religious beliefs as illusions, or at very least reject their supernatural justifications or foundations. Often included in this, is the perception that religion can or will disappear, and be replaced by rational, scientific understanding. In this sense, Bacon's religious position would be seen in the light of the absence or presence of religious illusions.

Thirdly, an attitude which need not accept the empirical factuality of historic religious beliefs, but accepts the religious dimensions of humanity as enduring and inseparable from being human. Religious beliefs are not just a passing phase in human development. Beliefs change but the need for religious beliefs will never pass. Religious beliefs are thus facts, in the sense that they are believed to be true. According to this perspective the question of the absence or presence of beliefs becomes redundant. The question changes to, what are Bacon's religious beliefs, and can they be found ?

The first approach is rejected because it implies that one religion out of the present array of religions, is the true religion. Also, within any one tradition there can be a diversity of theological perspectives with very significant differences (Rupp, 1979, p.9 - 10). The second perspective is also rejected because many of the assumptions arising out of this perspective have proved to be false. For example, as described in the discussion on secularization, the assumptions that religion would disappear, or that religious explanations would be replaced by scientific explanation are at the very most highly disputable. There is also a strange problem created by implying that religious beliefs are necessarily illusions. This will be illustrated shortly. The third view will form the basic

approach to be taken in the rest of this thesis. The logic behind this view has already been argued in chapter one, and arises out of the views of Bellah, Fromm, Luckmann and Hargrove. There is, however, an objection to this approach which needs to be dealt with. Does the implication that everyone has to have religious beliefs not render the term meaningless ? Surely it would be more useful and convenient to use the word "religious" to describe only activities and beliefs pertaining to things that are historically accepted as religions ? Fuller stated that Bacon was a man with no religious beliefs and no doubt Rookmaaker would agree (Fuller, 1990, p.69). Bacon himself claimed to have no religious beliefs at all (Haseldon, 1992, p.25). If religion is perceived in terms of specific historical forms, it is easy to understand how such a view is reached. In terms of the first approach, it would not be difficult to describe Bacon as having no Christian beliefs. In terms of the second approach it would be easy to describe Bacon as having no Christian illusions. Is it not then simply nonsensical and perverse to suggest that Bacon does have a religious position ?

When discussing the significance of beliefs as a function of the private sphere, to limit the description of religion to certain publicly articulated dogmas or creeds becomes problematic. There may be beliefs which may perform the same functions as those beliefs encapsulated in a religion; for example, beliefs determining our ethical and moral codes and spiritual life, but which are not articulated socially in the form of a religion. Is the description of a belief as religious dependant on that belief's shared nature, and its articulation beyond the private sphere ? Surely there are many beliefs that are shared by many but do not immediately appear to be articulated collectively ? For example there are no doubt many people who share the belief that there is no life after death, but this belief is only articulated privately. Is life after death described as a religious belief because it belongs to a body of publicly articulated beliefs, or is it because of its specific quality or zone of meaning ? There is life after death; there is no life after death; there may or may not be life after death. According to the third approach these could all be religious beliefs. It is easy to imagine



that each of these versions is shared by many people. One version may be well articulated in the public sphere because of the historical dominance of Christianity in the west. The other versions may have limited public articulation but may be widely held. All these versions are in the same zone of meaning, that of the zone or strata within a world view which is, as Luckmann describes, beyond the everyday. The beliefs about life after death can be described as religious because they pertain to a zone of ultimate meaning.

Judging from his essay on Bacon, Peter Fuller would describe life after death as a religious belief and the belief that there is no life after death as irreligious. Fuller seemed to believe that religious beliefs are consonant with illusions. Fuller also believed that these illusions may be more useful than previously thought; "...the historical Jesus, and the beliefs accrued around him, should cause us historical materialists to consider just how far we are from understanding the positive role which such great consoling illusions play in determining man's ethical, cultural, and indeed spiritual life." (Fuller, 1990, p.311). It would be stating the obvious to say that there can be nothing consoling about a concept such as salvation and forgiveness through Christ, if it is not believed by the individual. Thus in terms of actual human experience religious beliefs can never be illusions. They will always embody for the believer, the truth or reality.

Fuller, for example, could not embrace the institutionalised truth/reality provided by Christianity. Instead, "historical materialism" provided him with a way of understanding the world, an understanding in which he could have faith. For a part of his life, Marxism provided him with a belief system, but he lost faith in that intellectual system (p.xiiv). When Fuller was a Marxist he did not regard his beliefs in Marxism as illusions. Similarly, Christians do not regard their beliefs as illusions. Thus it is possible to say from a materialist point of view that Christian beliefs are illusions, or from an intellectual point of view that Marxist beliefs are illusions. While it is always,

therefore, possible to regard beliefs held by others to be illusions, it is essentially meaningless to say that religious beliefs are necessarily illusions.

Another minor point is that not all beliefs can be described as consoling. Eternal damnation is not an idea which is held because it is consoling. It is a frightening Christian truth, which causes Christians to ask continuously for forgiveness of sins. Life after death may be consoling to Christians, but surely the possibility of eternal damnation is not? The point here is that Christianity, or any religion or belief system, is not just a set of heart warming beliefs, but is essentially a perceived truth about the universe. While a religion, as a whole, may provide a means of salvation, not all its individual beliefs may provide consolation.

Thus, according to this perspective, which is typified by Fuller's view, the problem of Bacon's religious beliefs would mean determining the absence or presence of illusions. This would then be followed by speculation on the significance of the absence of certain religious beliefs - like the existence of God for example. This would, of course, be highly problematic. Which beliefs would be chosen as significantly absent? Also the distinction between beliefs that are labelled religious and those which are not can become ambiguous and arbitrary, especially when a cross-cultural approach is taken. How then should the question of Bacon's religious beliefs, which are articulated in the private sphere, be approached?

Simply, in accordance with the third approach, Bacon must not be analyzed in terms of beliefs he does not have, but on the basis of the beliefs he does have. Using Luckmann's perspective, Bacon would have a fairly clearly defined personal symbolic universe concerning everyday activities and their relevance in relation to ultimate meaning. George Rupp provides a useful structure on which any discussion on Bacon's religious position can be based. Rupp's understanding is based, in part,

on Bellah's "Religious Evolution" (Rupp, 1979, p.25). Thus the remainder of this thesis will involve two broad questions. Firstly can Bacon's personal "world view" or symbolic universe be located? In Rupp's terminology, what is Bacon's religious position? Secondly, can his painting be related in any meaningful way to his "religious position" or "world view"?

Rupp outlines a series of modern responses to the question of God. In order to understand his perspective, Bellah's stages of religious evolution mentioned in chapter one need to be expanded upon. Out of the five stages, three are of importance. Bellah contrasts "Primitive" and "Modern" religious perspectives with the "radical world rejection of 'historic religion'" (p.28). The phenomenon of world rejection appeared in the first millennium B.C. all across the Old World. It was characterised by a negative evaluation of man and society and the "exaltation of another realm of reality as alone true and infinitely valuable." (p.28).

The "primitive religious" type is characterised by a single cosmos, fused religious and social structures, and a mythic world which is related "to detailed features of the actual world" (p.28). Thus actual life was invested with religious value through myth and ritual. Religious myth, ritual and organisations served to induct the young into the norms of behaviour, and it promoted solidarity and cohesion within the tribe.

"Historic religions" are dualistic. This dualism is expressed in various ways, including the distinction between natural and supernatural, and the difference between life on earth and life after death. Rupp states that "whatever the specific contrast, the effect is a negative valuation of this life in comparison to another realm." (p.29). Under the historic types, distinctions between religious and political organisation begin to emerge. Also arising out of this dualism, is "a clearly structured concept of the self" - "a responsible self, a core self or a true self," (p.29). Hence, religion, while still

functioning to legitimize the existing social order, also provides the basis for rebellion and reform movements within society. World rejection provided religions with a critical edge and accordingly a greater role in social change (p.29).

The most significant change from "historic" to "modern" religion is the collapse of dualism. The modern situation is characterised by radical pluralism. Life is no longer characterised by simple dualism, or undifferentiated monism. It has become "an infinite possibility thing." (p.29). The "world acceptance" of the modern type necessarily includes the recognition that there is the possibility of changing the world (and therefore the responsibility to change) according to value demands (p.30). It is important to note that previous religious world views persist, even "primitive" religious experience such as direct participation in myth and symbolic systems are elements in modern pluralism. However, "self consciously modern people" cannot simply reaffirm inherited symbolic systems. Any symbolic order in the modern situation "...entails at least an implicit conceptual and imaginative translation into the modern situation of cultural pluralism combined with the collapse of any ultimate metaphysical dualism." (p.32).

Rupp then argues that because of the collapse of metaphysical dualism in the post-Enlightenment west, the question of God has to be reformulated. The question cannot "...refer to the existence or non-existence of a being or entity beyond the world. Instead the question of God becomes, more or less selfconsciously a query as to the character of the cosmos - the nature of the self's ultimate environment." (p.32). The reformulation of the question does not, implicitly, remove the possibility of transcendence. It merely requires that transcendence, in the historic dualistic form, be reconceived. Rupp also points out that any attempt to address the question of "the self's ultimate environment" will include, at least implicitly, the question of transcendence (p.35).

Rupp argues that the reformulated God question ("the query as to the nature of the cosmos") should be approached from the perspective of its relation to human activity. He writes that the different responses can be classified with reference to four distinct positions (p.35).

The first religious response to the "God question" is one of uncompromising nihilism. According to this position, the universe is such that it will frustrate all human action. There is no cosmic support for human efforts, and there is no hope of those efforts being realised. As a consequence, life has no meaning, and no value, transcendent or otherwise (p.35 - 37). Rupp states that he believes unqualified nihilism to be an untenable philosophy because no one actually holds to it. "That people continue to live is itself an implicit denial of total nihilism. And even suicide is an act which at least affirms its own significance." (p.36).

The second response is exemplified in Zen Buddhism, but not confined to it. It is the complete opposite of nihilism in that it "affirms all that is" (p.35). Human life is part of a totality which only needs to be perceived correctly to be "appreciated without qualification.". Transcendence is achieved by attaining a human perspective totally different to ordinary experience - "a perspective from which the truth of the whole of reality becomes visible." (p.36).

The third response is expressed most often in the literature and philosophy of existentialism. It views "...human agents as struggling in a neutral or indifferent universe, but struggling with the prospect of realizing limited though still significant goals." (p.35). Transcendence achieves expression in "individual authenticity" as opposed to social conformism. "It is an ethical transcendence that sets the true mode of human orientation and action over against its trivialization in conventional life." (p.36).



The fourth response is represented by many philosophical, religious and quasi-religious traditions. But Rupp singles out the philosophy of Hegel as the prime articulation of this response. This perspective includes an "ultimately positive appraisal of the cosmos," it also affirms a process of "becoming good even though that potential is not yet fully actualised." It emphasises the creative power of human activity (p.35). In the Hegelian type, "... transcendence is affirmed in the tension between the actual and the ideal, the already attained and the ultimate goal.". It is a historical process where every present state of affairs is questioned according to the ideal (p.36).

Hopefully Rupp's system will provide a basis to comprehend Francis Bacon's particular world view or religious position. Quite obviously any discussion on an individual's private beliefs presents some serious difficulties. Fortunately Interviews with Francis Bacon 1962 - 1979 (Sylvester, 1980) documents sufficient statements of belief by Bacon to proceed with the discussion. Luckmann points out that the private sacred cosmos is often poorly articulated, inconsistent and revisable (Luckmann, 1967, p.109). However, as will be shown, Bacon's religious position is at one level shockingly clear. Robin Stringham points out another problem, namely that Bacon was fond of making unusual statements. Sometimes it is not clear whether he was "straining for profundity" or simply having a good laugh at the audience's expense. Stringham argues that it is possible that his paintings and statements in the fifties were created to elicit a strong response (Stringham, 1985, p.85). This places any discussion on Bacon's beliefs deeper into the realm of speculation. It will be assumed that although Bacon may have used some colourful language at times, his statements to David Sylvester are truthful, because they appear reasonably consistent through the whole book and in other interviews.

John Russell describes Bacon as one of "nature's unclassifiabiles" (Russell, 1985, p.12), and he

demonstrates how Bacon's early life was conducive to his special nature. Many of the people that surrounded him were reflected in his character: his gregarious mother; an individualistic, gambling father; a grandmother who loved to entertain; and a great number of aunts and uncles, some of whom were extremely eccentric (p.12 - 13). He had no formal schooling and spent most of his time "with people who were used to doing exactly what they wanted" (p.14). Drink, gambling, outrageousness and extravagance seemed to be a way of life for the people he met. Russell states that the important thing was that his childhood experience was one of "human strangeness" (p.13).

During his school age he had the desire to do nothing, and ran away from school consistently (p.14). He was banished from home at sixteen. Russell states, "It was a matter of inmost instinct with him that he should shift his ground, settling nowhere, identifying with his own vagrant impulses. He never stuck to any one thing - one school, one home, one office, one profession, one way of life, one country ...." (p.12). His life was a series of "improvisations", voluntary or involuntary. Russell sums up: "Anyone who knows a few of the facts can trace the effect of Bacon's childhood and boyhood on the impulsive, open-handed and noctambular way of life which he led for many years afterwards. The generosity, the love of gambling, the acceptance of others' frailties and the ability to be at home in all societies ... Berlin and Paris gave him the notion of the big city as an erotic gymnasium ... But there is also, in Bacon's make-up, a paradoxical austerity which he traces directly to his father." (p.15 - 16).

Up to 1939 Bacon was "Marginal Man personified". He lived an entirely private life. He was indifferent to society's rituals, canons and taboos. He did nothing, took odd jobs, gambled, and appeared to have no ambitions or direction. According to Russell, Bacon was in fact educating himself. He started oil painting in 1929 and continued to paint on and off until 1944 when he started in earnest with the Three studies for figures at the base of a crucifixion (Leiris, 1983, p.257).

The above should act as a brief introduction, before delving into the extremely tricky question of Bacon's religious position. Bacon stated, "I think that man now realizes that he is an accident, that he is a completely futile being, that he has to play out the game without reason." (Sylvester, 1980, p.28). This remark appears to lie at the heart of his symbolic universe. Or, in Eric Fromm's words, this statement forms part of "... an all-inclusive mental picture of the world which serves as a frame of reference from which he can derive an answer to the question of where he stands and what he ought to do." (Fromm, 1963, p.24). Bacon reiterated this position a number of times. He said that Rembrandt and Velasquez were "slightly conditioned by certain types of religious possibilities, possibilities which have now been "completely cancelled out" (Sylvester, 1983, p.29). Thus man can only try to make something positive by beguiling himself, by the way he behaves and by living longer. On another occasion he stated, "I think of life as meaningless, but we give it meaning during our own existence. We create certain attitudes which give it a meaning while we exist, though they in themselves are meaningless really." (p. 133). Later he argued that "Our drives" give this "purposeless existence" a meaning (p. 134). He believed that life is ultimately futile, but people still have the energy to do things they believe in. Bacon tried to point out that the "believes in" is a means of existence "for nothing" (p.134). In a different form Bacon said the same thing: "our basic nature is totally without hope, and yet one's nervous system is made of optimistic stuff." (p. 80). He also referred to life as "banal" and "completely artificial" (p.135).

It appears that Bacon's religious position included a strong element of nihilism. (nihilism in the sense that Rupp uses it). Ultimately life has no meaning and no value, transcendent or otherwise. He regarded life as "a meaningless span which we invest with apparent significance and direction by the creation of attitudes, beliefs and goals which themselves lack meaning." (Moorhouse, 1989, p.23).

Bacon's apparent nihilism appears in those statements which need the least interpretation. But it will be shown that Bacon's belief system includes characteristics which would fall under Rupp's existential and even Zen religious positions. These elements will emerge not only from his statements but also from his actions. This is because "... any satisfying system of orientation implies not only intellectual elements but elements of feeling and sense to be realized in action in all fields of human endeavour." (Fromm, 1963, p.24). Thus far it appears that Bacon's ultimate frame of orientation and object of devotion is that there is absolutely no "ultimate" meaning or value to human existence. The only correct orientation in such a situation is "to play out the game without reason.". The nervous system insists on living. For Bacon, life was a game and art was one means by which he could beguile himself. "All art has now become completely a game by which man distracts himself." (Sylvester, 1980, p.29). In order for art to be a successful means of amusement for whiling away time, the artist must "really deepen the game." (p.29). Bacon rejected "shallow hedonism" as a completely boring way of existing (p.134). According to Bacon, to avoid the boredom of "just wanting to have a good time" (p.134) a person needs to have dedication even though all efforts are ultimately futile. Thus, already any charge of complete nihilism is being diluted. Bacon understood quite clearly that life would be intolerable without some purpose or intention (object of devotion) or without something to strive beyond physical satisfaction. It seems that there may have been in his make-up some desire to transcend the banality of life even if that transcendence was snuffed out with the termination of his life.

It is self evident that art (painting) provided Bacon with a means with which to play the game of existence. Not only did it provide a means of whiling away time, but it also provided an object of devotion and an arena in which to strive. Painting set up the possibilities, the struggles and the goals in which he believed. During his lifetime painting provided meaning for him, even though he

insisted that his work had no significance beyond his own desires and his own death. Thus, while Bacon asserted (in words) ultimate meaninglessness, his position included the "prospect of realizing limited though still significant goals" described in the existentialist alternative (Rupp, 1979, p.36). In this sense there is a place in Bacon's symbolic universe for a kind of limited transcendence. This transcendence was expressed in his words and actions, his ideals and his artistic goals.

It is very interesting to note the similarities between Bacon's aesthetics and some Oriental philosophies of art. This serves to demonstrate further that, in a multicultural world, what is and what is not religious belief is often difficult to distinguish. The similarity lies in the Oriental idea of life as the "art of a game" and "art as an aspect of the game of life". This makes life "action for its own sake, without thought of gain or of loss, praise or blame." (Campbell, 1973, p.123 - 124). It has already been shown that Bacon viewed life as a "game to be played without reason", and art itself as a game. Art as a game becomes a means to such a life. Campbell states that the best, most fun games are the ones that are dangerous, difficult, hardest. The artist is not content to do the simple things. "The artist seeks the challenge, the difficult thing to do; for his basic approach to life is not of work but of play." (p.123). This accords well with Bacon's view that the "game has to be deepened" to be worth anything. This involves his "obsession with doing the one perfect image" (Sylvester, 1980, p.22).

Bacon's view of life and art, like the Oriental view described, is very different from the conventional Christian western view. According to Campbell, in the Orient, nature is conceived as inherently innocent, even that which appears to human eyes as cruel. The world is "God's play", a "thoughtless play", rough, cruel, wondrous and dangerous (Campbell, 1973, p.123). Bacon stated that he did not have enough talent to trap the real horror and violence of life in his paintings. This horror was, in his view, "marvellous, but yet ... awful." (Gilder, 1983, p.17). Just as in the "God's play" view,



Bacon saw violence and death as just a part of nature.

"I don't think I'm trying to do anything beyond make images that excite me. I've nothing to say in that sense. I think images say a great deal, but each person interprets an image as they want. In so far as I could say what I'm trying to do, I'd say I'm a maker of images, that's all. But images not for other people. Images for myself." (p.20). While this statement of Bacon's suggests an art that is near to being completely orientated to the self, which is totally contrary to the spirit of Oriental art and life, it does correspond well with the Buddhist saying, "Visions are born and die in those who behold them," (Campbell, 1973, p.125). Bacon's vision of reality arose out of himself, was created for himself, and in this sense has died with his own death.

In contrast to this, the Christian western view, according to Campbell, is based on the "mythology of universal guilt." (p.123). Nature is not innocent after "the fall". Every act of nature is an act of sin, and acknowledgement of guilt. To Rookmaaker, under the load of this inherent sinfulness, the artist can only strive to fulfil God's purpose/will in his or her life and art. Rookmaaker states that art needs no justification. It "has meaning as art because God thought it good to give art and beauty to humanity." (Rookmaaker, 1970, p.229 - 230). Art and life find ultimate meaning and purpose in submission to God's will. Bacon submits to that which is inevitable and greater than himself, that is, the ultimate futility and meaninglessness of life. This is the way things are and they must just be accepted. Rookmaaker also submits to that which is greater than him, a God who has willed all things. Bacon says ultimately art has no meaning because life has no meaning. Rookmaaker says art, like a flower, or mountain, or man, has meaning because God has made them (Rookmaaker, p. 229 - 230). Bacon "plays" life, which includes the need for challenges, to make it interesting. Rookmaaker works at being a good Christian by striving to obey and fulfil God's word which is given to man in the Bible.

Rookmaaker's views fall (mostly) outside Rupp's four responses to the question of God. In his mind, "metaphysical dualism" is essential to any transcendence and to humanity. Without a God and an after life which is totally other, a different reality, humanity is placed in a "box". Some of Fuller's remarks fall clearly into Rupp's existentialist category. Fuller stated that the world is "all too human and depressingly material." (Fuller, 1990, p.193). But he stated, "We are not mere victims of chance; we possess imagination - or the capacity to conceive of the world other than the way it is. We also have powers of moral choice, and relatively effective action, whether or not we believe in God." (p.69 - 70). This has the elements - an indifferent universe, the prospect of realizing limited but significant goals, and an emphasis on the ethical ("power of moral choice") - which are all parts of the "existentialist" alternative. Thus, for Fuller, art is one means of "conceiving the world other than the way it is," art provides "reconciliations, in illusion, between the self and the social and physical worlds." (p.16).

Bacon, Rookmaaker and Fuller illustrate how three different religious positions create three different attitudes or basic motivations behind life and art. These religious positions provide the different meanings for art at the broadest level. Once the ultimate (unique) truth of Christianity in the west is questioned, the truth becomes subjective (privatised) leaving people to choose religious truth. Bacon's "truth" is clearly not acceptable to Rookmaaker or to Fuller (p.70). In the same way Bacon states, referring to people with religious beliefs, "I can't help admiring but despising them, living by a total falseness which I think they are living by with their religious views." (Sylvester, 1980, p.134). For Fuller and Bacon, Rookmaaker's reality, the reality expressed by the church and in the Bible, stands totally discredited. In this situation where the dominant socially objectivated world view collapses, the individual has no choice but to construct or find a new reality. As Hargrove, Fromm, and Luckmann have pointed out, people need these generalizations of ultimate meaning in order to know what to do. These "abstractions", "frame of orientations" or "world views" may or

may not be found in historical institutionalized forms of religion. It is quite clear that the three views described appear in the different individuals for the same fundamental underlying reasons.

This discussion could be placed under the "historic approach" in Chapter one, which traces the characteristics of religion back to its source in the individual and society. The historic and comparative methods provided a number of characteristics which can be found in varying degrees in Bacon's religious system. Some of these religious elements are relevant to, or find their direct manifestation in, his art. It is interesting to note (as will be shown) that the question of the significance of religious beliefs to Bacon's art in many cases reverses itself. In a number of ways, Bacon's art was significant to his religious position. It has already been suggested, for example, that painting provided an "object of devotion" for Bacon, which, according to Fromm, is a central part of any religion.

Two interrelated things arise out of Bacon's symbolic universe: one is to play the game, and the other is to deepen that game in order to make it worth while. Dedication is required to deepen the game. Although these two things cannot be separated, in Bacon's statements the two sides of the coin, or two strands in the rope can be differentiated: the desire to play, to entertain himself, to avoid boredom, his "greed for life" (p.122), and the other strand, the desire to deepen this play. These two strands which arise out of his symbolic universe can be perceived in the way he lived, the way he painted, and in what he said about himself and his art.

The central statements which suggest the play element appear in the interviews with Gilder and Sylvester. To Gilder he stated, "I don't think I'm trying to do anything beyond make images that excite me." (Gilder, 1983, p.20). To Sylvester he stated that he was not trying to say anything, he

was "just trying to make images as accurately off my nervous system as I can." (Sylvester, 1980, p.82). He also agreed with the idea that, "the motivation to do it is the doing of it, the excitement of solving problems," (p. 89). Quite simply, the basic motivation to paint is the excitement it provides. It can be argued that the primary reason behind Bacon's whole painting process was avoidance of boredom. When asked why he had started using colour again after a period of dark paintings Bacon answered, "I suppose just getting bored" (p.12). He avoided boredom by playing with paint; he used it thin and very thick, he used it spontaneously and, in some areas with great care and precision. He threw paint, splattered it, wiped it, used his hands, rags, big flat brushes, small brushes and palette knives. He experimented wildly with colour from almost monochromatic, for example in Two figures (1953) to violent pinks, oranges and electric blues. He threw a bucket of white paint onto Jet of water (1979). Much of the canvas is left untouched in Water from a running tap (1982). Head II (1949) took him about four months to complete, letting the paint build up until it was very thick (p.18). All these techniques, at one level, simply provide a means of keeping the painting process alive, dynamic and entertaining. He also avoided boredom through the way he constructed his paintings. The constant figural distortions, the re-invention of space and the figure, the visual games, the ambiguities: all provided a constant source of exploration and excitement outside everyday appearances. All of this revolved around his use of chance. The chance juxtaposition of images, for example in Painting (1946), Bacon described as "one continuous accident mounting on top of another" (p.11): the chance brush mark, or wipe which may create excitement; the final splatter of a handful of paint, just to see where it landed, and whether it suggested something new.

The element of chance will be discussed in more depth as it is tied up in his view that man is an accident, but for now it is enough to say that chance was a primary source of excitement for Bacon. This element of play not only characterised his painting but his life in general. "I'm greedy for life

... I'm greedy for what I hope chance can give me far beyond anything that I can calculate logically." (p.122). He was greedy for food, drink, for being with people he liked, and for the excitement of activity. "Because life is so short and, while I can move and see and feel, I want life to go on existing." (p.122). He tended to run his life on impulses. He rejected security and being "nursed by the state" as uncreative and boring. "After all, as existence in a way is so banal, you may as well try and make a kind of grandeur of it rather than be nursed to oblivion." (p.125). Life can only be accepted as it is, and the game should preferably be played out with grandeur. This has an element of Rupp's Zen position in the sense that Bacon accepted what is, without qualification. Of course, that is as far as the correlation goes: there is no ultimately positive valuation of the universe in Bacon's religious position. Gambling provided another arena (other than painting) in which to play with chance. Bacon described how, by chance, he made a lot of money gambling in Monte Carlo, when he had very little money. This provided him with enough money to indulge in luxury: the luxury of food, wine, a villa and lots of friends. He enjoyed luxury but would have hated to have had it all the time. Constant luxury would be very boring (p.52). In the Monte Carlo story, Bacon spent all his winnings in ten days. Money was to be spent and enjoyed. This strong desire to play, to avoid boredom, which pervaded his life and art is consonant with his world view.

There was, however, the other strand in his life, the strand which makes the playing more worthwhile; the deepening of the game which is essential in avoiding shallow hedonism. At the centre of this are Bacon's values, the things he strove for, and the things he was devoted to. The elements to be discussed are firstly, at the broadest level, Bacon's concept of "exhilarated despair" which arises out of the ultimate futility of life, the freedom it gives and the devotion it requires. Secondly, there are his values in relation to people, his relationships, what he admired and disliked, and, central to this, is the autonomy of the individual. Thirdly, there are his artistic ideals. Why did he paint ? What was he striving for ? What things deepened the game of painting ?



Bacon's "exhilarated despair" is a spiritual state of total submission to the ultimate meaninglessness of life. For Bacon, absolute dedication to futility, was a means of achieving transcendence. Absolute futility was complete freedom. For Zen, transcendence is a human perspective that has to be reached and from which all life can be "appreciated without qualification" (Rupp, 1979, p.36). Similarly in Bacon's religious system the ultimate futility of life has to be comprehended for the individual to be liberated. This is illustrated in a statement about his painting. He said, in perceiving the absolute impossibility of the things he was trying to achieve in his painting, that he might as well have done anything. He was free to try anything and see what happened (Sylvester, 1980, p.13). In perceiving the futility of life a person is freed to do anything. It is the freedom of knowing that this is all; that everything is as it is; that everything is now because death is final. "What would you do if you had one year left to live?" This is the situation in which his peculiar beliefs placed him. Bacon's life was his answer to that question.

Before discussing the specific role of his art, there are other aspects within Bacon's sacred cosmos which are relevant to the "deepening of the game". Luckmann has argued that one of the central themes in the modern, sacred cosmos is the autonomy of the individual; freedom from "external restraint and traditional taboos in the private search for identity." (Luckmann, 1967, p.109 - 110). This can easily be perceived in Bacon's sacred cosmos. Russell described him as being indifferent to society's rituals, canons and taboos (Russell, 1985, p.15 - 16). Bacon always lived according to his own impulses. His success as an artist allowed him to do as he pleased, to gamble, travel, throw parties or simply do nothing. The facts that he ran away from school when he was young and that he had a stated rejection of "security" as a life style, suggest that he would have lived the same sort of life with or without the commercial success of his art. The fact that he was homosexual is another expression of his own autonomy in the form of freedom from a specific taboo.

This desire to live according to his own beliefs and his own choices is once again expressed strongly in his art. Surely freedom of artistic expression is one of Bacon's most important values in his sacred cosmos. He has stated that he painted for himself and that, except for a few people, he would not care whether any one even saw his paintings (Sylvester, 1980, p.20). Equally important in his value system, was his strong belief in the truth as he saw it. The fact that he believed in his truth and lived according to that truth is more than can be said for a lot of Christians today. Fuller stated: "Bacon's view of man is consonant with the way he lives his life." (Fuller, 1990, p.69). Bacon's vision of the truth comes through his painting also: "just such a view of man ... made so powerfully real through his painterly skills." (p.69). He lived a life dedicated to his values, to his view of life, to his religious view. This dedication to certain values was essential to the deepening of the game. The only example, available to someone reading about him, of any compromising of his beliefs and values comes by his own admission. Bacon admitted that his homosexuality at one point in his life had made him into a crook (Gowrie, 1992, p.24). Presumably he was referring to his trying to hide the fact that he was gay.

The next element in Bacon's sacred cosmos is the importance of friends and relationships. In Bacon's obituary Tim Hilton stated, "The enclosed world of his friendships was most important to him." (Hilton, 1992, p.24). He has already been quoted as saying he was greedy to be with people he liked. According to Russell the qualities Bacon prized the most in his friends were "forthrightness, endurance, quick-wittedness, and readiness to take a risk." (Russell, 1985, p.86). The major catastrophes in his life were the deaths of two of his boyfriends, Peter Lacey in 1962, and George Dyer in 1975 (Hilton, 1992, p.24). The breakdown of his friendship with Lucien Freud also caused him a great deal of pain (Gowrie, 1992, p.24). Gowrie states that Bacon had "reduced things to work and love." (p.24).

Thus far a number of elements have been described as important parts of his sacred cosmos involved in the deepening of the game. They are "exhilarated despair" as a spiritual state; the autonomy of the individual and the freedom to live his life according to his own beliefs; dedication to his own beliefs; the truth; freedom of artistic expression; love and friendship. These are sacred. Clearly Bacon's gambling, his love of intermittent luxury, his night-clubbing, are elements of free play that entered the game but were dumped once they got boring. It is also easy to speculate that it would have been very difficult to alter a mature Bacon's view of the truth, or cause him to live other than according to those beliefs. The point here is that he was a man with very strong beliefs that may either be acceptable or offensive to others. He was not a person who did not know what to believe, or who didn't care one way or another, or who simply never bothered to think about things. Bellah has already described the modern awareness that people are responsible for their own choices and that single view points cannot be enforced as "a profounder commitment to the process of religious symbolization." (Bellah, 1972, p.85). Certainly Bacon's religious position was the result of a profound commitment to this symbolization process.

Francis Bacon made many references to the "shortness of the moment of existence between birth and death" and to his constant awareness of mortality (Sylvester, 1980, p.80). He was obsessed with that short moment, and his primary means of expressing that obsession was his art (p.63). His art was thus not only a means of passing time but also involved things which deepened the game of painting. This section deals with broad issues of his basic artistic motives and their role in his symbolic universe.

What was Bacon striving for in his painting ? What deepened the game of painting ? He stated that when he daydreamed, "what I see is a marvellous painting", "I see extraordinarily beautiful paintings" (p.134). He explained that his paintings did not necessarily turn out like his dream

paintings because he did not know how to make them. He relied on chance and accident to make them for him. So here are the first two ideals he strove for: something astonishingly wonderful, and something extraordinarily beautiful. Very similar to this and equally tied up with chance, was his "obsession with doing the one perfect image." (p.22). In a world cluttered with "visual garbage" it is the artist's prerogative, not just to add to the chaos, but to "make the great single images which will halt the wandering eye." (Russell, 1985, p.59). Great art "thickens life" (Sylvester, 1980, p.89), and it unlocks "the greatest and deepest things man can feel." (p.28). He stated, "I think great art is deeply ordered ... I think that they came out of a desire for ordering and for returning fact onto the nervous system in a more violent way." (p.59). Great art is a reporting or recording of the "mystery of fact" (p.58), of certain feelings about situations (p.43), of "living facts" (p.57). It appears from these statements that Bacon wanted to express the truth about life as it came to him. These are high ideals, and Bacon stated and restated the hope that chance and accident would bring results. Fuller pointed out that "Bacon exercises a consummate control over the effects that chance give him". He went on to say, "The religious artists of the High Tradition attributed their inspiration to impersonal agencies, like the muses or gods; and Bacon, too, is possessed of an overwhelming need to locate the origins of his own imaginative activity outside of himself." (Fuller, 1990, p.67). What Bacon hoped chance would bring him was something out of the ordinary, something more than the everyday, something awesome. This is a manifestation of the desire for the holy. An image brought into being through the agency of chance, that somehow expressed "the greatest and deepest things man can feel" would be a miracle. It would be a sacred image.

The hope and despair created through this kind of fantasy are the emotions which make the game worth playing. Without them, the game would be boring, shallow, and its futility overwhelming. It should be apparent by now that the significance of private religious beliefs to Bacon's art is inseparable from the significance of his art to his religious needs. Perhaps this needs to be illustrated

again. He said, "I've always been more interested in what is called behaviour and life than in art. If my pictures come off, it is because of a chance conjunction between actual living and art. Painting makes me more aware of behaviour ...." (Russell, 1985, p.98). At the same time he said, "I'm not a preacher. I've nothing to say about 'the human situation'." (p.99). His painting was a means of articulating his understanding of human behaviour. By painting human behaviour he came to understand it. At the same time his understanding was not objective; it arose out of his own world view. Thus his successful paintings both reflected and created his world view. His beliefs about the nature of humanity and life were expressed and discovered through his art. In this sense it is possible to say without misuse of terminology that painting was, for Bacon, a ritual participation in his mythic system, his symbolic universe.

In chapter one, myth was referred to as "assumed knowledge" about the origins of the universe, of society, and the "original ancestors." (Lessa, Vogt, 1972, p.109). It would be very easy to argue that Bacon's assertions that "man is entirely an accident" and that life is futile, fall under the heading, "assumed knowledge". Bacon's religious system revolved around his acute awareness of mortality, which Joseph Campbell argues is an important component upon which all myth is based. His painting, was a repetitive ritual activity, which gave "a sense of participation in the mythic system," (Hargrove, p.14).

The final aspect of the deepening of the game, is the question of community and shared beliefs. This is an aspect which seems to be emphasised in the definition of religion on page nine. In the context of pluralism, relativism and privatisation of beliefs, was Bacon's religious system divorced from any sustaining tradition? Was he some freak with unique beliefs who spontaneously appeared without any foundation in society? While there is that which is "irreducibly Bacon" (Russell, 1985, p.73), it is very difficult to imagine him holding his beliefs, alone, without some form of



social/communal affirmation. Rookmaaker holds Bacon up as the end product of the Enlightenment, of the onslaught made by scientism, rationalism and atheism on metaphysical dualism. Positivism, humanism, existentialism and nihilism are all philosophical trends without which Bacon's belief system would be inconceivable. In short many people have thought like Bacon and do think as he did. His beliefs are not unique; even some oriental beliefs have been shown to be similar. Bacon was part of a tradition. On a more personal scale, he would have found affirmation of his beliefs in the literature and poetry he read, and in the conversations with friends and acquaintances and finally in the critical response to, and acceptance of, his painting. This tradition is conventionally perceived as anti-religious, and its triumph would mean the death of religion. This view is only possible if religion is understood in terms of being one unique set of beliefs. This perspective has already been rejected.

In this chapter the question of "privatised" religious beliefs has been discussed with specific reference to Francis Bacon. The findings were based on the view that religion is an enduring element of society. The views of Rookmaaker and Fuller were included to contrast with the perspective derived from Chapter one. Rupp's religious responses provided an interesting means of categorising Bacon's beliefs. Bacon's religious position included his understanding of life and his motivations to paint in relation to ultimate meaning. His art at the level of broad ideals, ultimate values and basic motivation is critically entwined with his religious beliefs and needs. The next question is whether these abstractions, which occupied his symbolic universe, had any concrete effect on what he painted and what his paintings communicate.

### CHAPTER THREE

The interpretation of Bacon's work provides some serious difficulties. He himself said that he did not know what half of his paintings meant (Sylvester, 1980, p.82). Bacon also stated "I think images say a great deal, but each person interprets an image as they want." (Gilder, 1983, p.20). As will be shown, Bacon was completely correct when he said this. Interpretation of his work is the only means of discovering how his religious position finds expression in the subject-choice, content and meaning. But all interpretations will be more or less different. Whose interpretation should be given most credence ? How can insight be expressed in words when the images are supposedly directed to the nervous system, without the interference of the intellect ? Campbell states, "Significant images render insight beyond speech, beyond the kinds of meaning speech defines. And if they do not speak to you, that is because you are not ready for them, and words will only serve to make you think you have understood thus cutting you off altogether." (Campbell, 1973, p.102). A meaning expressed in words can never be the same as the meaning expressed through the image. The translation from pictorial language to words immediately cancels a big part of the visual meaning. What is said about an image and what is actually experienced when looking at an image are two different things. However nobody has accepted that nothing can be said about an image. Much of modern art is inseparable from all the chatter that surrounds it. All the manifestos, statements, books, and professional interpretations and criticism are very often as much a part of an image as the paint itself. In fact all of these things grow out of an image and are thus an extension of the image, and they are thus inseparable. Indeed, often the success of an artist depends on how well his or her work translates into words.

What do Bacon's paintings inspire people to say about them ? This is all that can be asked if it is taken that visual meaning, by definition, is lost in its translation into words. Robert Stringham points

out that the number of ways Bacon's images can be interpreted "is limited only to the number of people who view it." (Stringham, 1985, p.86). Michael Peppiatt argues, "to explain them, we should have to explain less the influences they have absorbed than the influences they have on us." (Peppiatt, 1984, p.18). Peppiatt also suggests that it is a sign of the strength of Bacon's images that they resist interpretation (p.4). This is consistent with Bacon's own view that he was trying to paint sensation which comes across directly. If their statements are in any way correct, it seems logical to say that any interpretation says more about the interpreter than the image. All people have their own set of beliefs and their own axes to grind, which will be superimposed onto Bacon's work. In a sense images cannot escape being mirrors which reflect the viewer's own set of beliefs, pessimism and fears. That the images reflect, or accord with, Bacon's own fears and beliefs can be taken for granted. It would, however, be difficult to describe that accord, or say which things are reflected in his images.

It is in this context that the following series of interpretations by different writers must be seen. Hopefully this discussion will illustrate the difficulties suggested above, and at the same time provide a basis for a further discussion on the relationship between Bacon's symbolic universe (religious position) and the actual subject content and meaning of his paintings.

John Berger interpreted Bacon's own statements on his painting process, and stated, "The appearance of a body suffers the accident of involuntary marks being made upon it. Its distorted image then comes across directly onto the nervous system of the viewer (or painter), who rediscovers the appearances of the body through or beneath the marks it bears." (Berger, 1980, p.113). Berger argued that Bacon sought to capture a moment which would become all moments, a moment characterised by physical pain (p.113). The wounds that his figures bear are self inflicted. This is the wound that the species, not the individual, inflicts on itself. According to Berger, Bacon's

world view offers no alternatives and no escape (p.113). He stated, "For Bacon, the worst has already happened ... man has come to be seen as mindless." "Man is an unhappy ape. But if he knows it, he isn't." Berger interpreted Bacon's portraits as empty shells of "a consciousness that is absent." Bacon depicted a humanity which is ignorant (p.115). Bacon's images try to "... persuade the viewer to accept what is. They propose a position where the worst is true, that both refusal and hope are pointless." (p.117).

Berger extracts an extremely bleak view of humanity from Bacon's images. What does he mean by "unhappy apes" or "mindlessness"? Perhaps this can be understood in the following way: the human expressions of warmth, love, hatred are merely configurations of nervous facial tissue which people are programmed to create and react to. In this sense the brain is a giant nerve which articulates or determines the human response to life. It functions automatically and involuntarily to carry the species through life. So, contrary to what is believed, people are mindless - the life urge is an involuntary reaction of the nervous system (brain) to the environment. Berger concluded, that Bacon's obsession with this position (his constant reiteration of the same world view), demonstrates "how alienation may provoke a longing for its own absolute form - which is mindlessness." (p.118).

Bacon's vision is thus seen as the logical extreme of his own alienation. Donald Kuspit states that modern art "... is at heart dissatisfied, rebellious, angry, violent and violative, an incisive reflection of the discontents of civilization." (Kuspit, 1986, p.55). Bacon however did not try to transcend the world, but to recapture it with all its anxiety and absurdity. According to Kuspit, Bacon's painting forces the recognition that the "uncategorisable, contingent personhood of the portrayed" can never be properly expressed with paint. "Bacon's portraits seek to destroy the vestige of personhood available in the everyday appearances of the figure by assimilating entirely into painterliness." (p.55). "What is now left is a raw helpless being." (p.55). Berger argued that this is all Bacon

wanted to do, to render the person mindless, to remove the personhood. Kuspit differs, saying that Bacon wanted to destroy the conscious image of that personhood so that the unconscious image could come through (p.56). What is presented to the viewer is a "repressed yet nagging memory" of some archaic experience of personhood. The thereness and not thereness, the forgotten and the remembered, and the representational and non representational, exist together in Bacon's figures. The unconscious desire of the viewer to see an image creates anxiety, and forces the viewer to try and remember the figure or person (p.58 - 60). The illusion of a "raw-being" is created by the interaction between Bacon's ambiguous marks and the observer's desire to see, to remember, and complete the figure/person. Like the ambiguity between the remembered and forgotten there is tension between socio-historical appearances and the irreducible and unchanging naked being (p.60). For example in Bacon's 1982 - 84 Dyptych the presence of cricket pads suggest a certain time and class, a social particularity. This superficial social appearance is undermined by the unchanging reality of naked flesh (and sexuality) which is the constant in human existence. The image is saying that, while everything changes, nothing is new (p.59).

Bacon's obsession with excluding any form of narrative caused him to paint only one figure to a canvas in most cases. "His figures are alone but they are utterly without privacy." (Berger, 1980, p.114). Kuspit sees the geometric space of Bacon's paintings as an "isolation ward" or a protective aura or membrane (Kuspit, 1986, p.55). This membrane suffers intrusions by lumps of meat, observers, foreign shadows and arrow signs. Gilles Deleuze takes a different view. He describes the space in many of the works as something that envelopes and imprisons the figure. "An extreme solitude of the figure, an extreme enclosure of bodies that exclude all spectators." (Deleuze, 1983, p.9 - 10). According to Deleuze these bodies try to escape, by means of a spasm, some wild and athletic contortion. He states, "A scene of hysteria. And that's how all of Bacon's series of spasms might be described: scenes of horror, vomit, and excrement, where the body is always attempting



to escape by means of one of its organs in order to reach the expanse of colour." (p.10). The animal-like shadow that he often paints is the body escaping. The scream, is another means by which the entire body escapes (p.10). The logical extreme to the isolation of Bacon's beings, is annihilation, simply to disappear into the surrounding nothingness. In the Study of the Human Body (1983), does the figure which is unlocking a door, perhaps want to step through it and disappear into the orange void which dominates the picture ?

Deleuze brings up another aspect which is perhaps less esoteric than his assertions thus far. This is the question of the body (flesh, meat) and spirit. Deleuze argues that meat is the thing that Bacon pities the most. "Meat is the common ground between man and beast, their zone of indiscernibility...." (p.12). Bacon states, "It's certain that all of us are meat; all of us are potential carcasses. Whenever I go into the butcher shops, I'm always surprised that I'm not there instead of the animal." (p.12). Every person who suffers is meat, and all pain and suffering is stored up in the meat (p.12). Then, on the matter of spirit Deleuze states, "The head does not lack spirit; rather, it is spirit in bodily form, the vital breath of the body, an animal spirit, the animal spirit of man ...." (Deleuze, 1989, p.34). Sometimes the shadow of a person takes on a life of its own, an animal existence. In Triptych 1976, a bird-like form escapes from a carcass. There is an ambiguity between man and animal. "Man becomes animal, but animal at the same time becomes spirit ... the physical spirit of man ...." (p.34). To interpret this, there seem to be a series of ambiguities or zones of indiscernibility which make up a human being. Man is meat and bone, man is animal, animal is spirit and spirit is flesh.

Bacon paints the scream because it suggests the horror of an invisible force in his paintings (p.38). "Life screams at death; ...; death is an invisible force which life detects, flushes out and reveals with a scream." (p.40). The violence in Bacon's work is mostly not represented in the form of blood,

gore and mutilation (although it does appear in some images) but is locked into the paint, the colour, the marks and the distortions. It is the "violence of sensation." (Deleuze, 1984, p.68). Deleuze concludes that the act of representing "... horror, mutilation, prosthesis, ruin and failure, his figures are indomitable through their insistence and presence. He has given a new and immediate power of laughter to the living." (Deleuze, 1989, p.40).

Most writers have discussed the elements of violence and mortality which arise out of Bacon's work. Paul Moorhouse states, "There is a correlation in Bacon's mind between the way animals being led to slaughter are aware of what is going to happen to them, and the essential feature of crucifixion which is that the victim has to endure the torture of knowing that death is imminent and inevitable." (Moorhouse, 1989, p.27). The crucifixion is thus a means of dealing with an existence in which death is unavoidable (p.27). Russell quotes T.S. Elliott's poem, 'Sweeny Agonistes' (apparently the inspiration for a 1967 triptych); "Birth, copulation and death." (Russell, 1985, p.148). He (Russell) links love with murder, and asks, is love a mimed death scene where one partner steals the life of the other ? Is the world a huge killing pound (p.148)?

Russell states, "Bacon's pre-occupation is the problem of what a man is to do when he is alone in a room by himself." (p.152). It is the "primal situation" which Bacon struggles with: "we are born and we die"; "to be and not to be" (p.149 - p.152). According to Russell what takes place when a person is alone in a room, and what Bacon paints is "the disintegration of the social being." (p. 38). The animal and the human become blurred. The individual is "flawed, variable, self-contradictory, subject to the fugitive and the contingent." (p.84). Bacon's portraits are of people stripped down, exposed without their social costumes and masks. But the human being is not just reduced to a flawed animal. The stripping down also exposes an aspect of "heroism" in the human character. The hero is the one who chooses activity over passivity. "Heroes can be lewd, lazy and

dishonest." It is the unidealized hero which Bacon presented on his canvases (Russell, p. 125). For Russell, Bacon's images stand for human activity pushed to its limit (p.149) and this is the domain of the hero.

Michel Leiris describes an image as a point of anchorage for the human eye, it is a "civilized site" which holds chaos and wilderness at bay (Leiris, 1983, p.12). The artist makes his/her own statement in a sea of chaos. He argues that Bacon's images act at the level of myth because they provide "direct access to an order of flesh-and-blood reality" (p.14). For Leiris, Bacon painted only things relevant to his time, and his images thus appear "immediate" to the contemporary viewer. Bacon's images convey no message, nor do they aestheticise modern life (p.20 - 21). His images contain no symbols, and nothing "foreign to the everyday context." (p.21). The best of his pictures express the rhythm of life. Bacon's swirls of energy (the figures), of disorder, are placed in a neutral zone where nothing is happening - large areas of flat colour, serving to form a place (p.24). This, according to Leiris, is just like the real world where exceptional moments (of adventure) "... stand out against the humdrum nature of ordinary living" (p.23). Leiris states that Bacon's images have no "hidden depths" and call for "no interpretation other than the apprehension of what is immediately visible." (p. 45). Bacon paints, "pure living presences indicative of nothing other than themselves" (p. 45). He argues that the images correspond to the modern state of mind - the awareness "that we are no more than this, have no real power, and are what we are only for a ridiculously limited time." (p. 46). The "human condition" expressed by Bacon is of "man dispossessed of any durable paradise when able to contemplate himself clear-sightedly." (p.46). The human being is "a contingent, but questioning, being with no transcendent dimension.". Bacon paints the dark side of life (the reverse of the bright surface), the "horror spangled with enchantment," or in Bacon's own words, an "exhilarated despair." (p.46 - 47).

Fuller pointed out correctly that Leiris goes along with Bacon's own view of his painting. This is the idea that Bacon is a realist, painting only "naked reality", or the truth about life. Fuller argued that Bacon's images are the result of his own violent imagination, rather than "recordings of visual fact" or "transcriptions of truth." (Fuller, 1992, p.64). He asked whether "... Bacon's distortions are indeed revelatory of a significant truth about men and women beyond the facts of their appearances; or whether they are simply a horrible assault upon our image of ourselves and each other, pursued for sensational effect." (p.64). Fuller then proceeded to interpret Bacon's work (using quotes from Interviews with David Sylvester), and seems to paraphrase Bacon's own views on his work almost without exception. He states that Bacon's view of life, of man, is powerfully expressed in his paintings. However, Fuller does not accept Bacon's view of reality: "... there is more to life than the spasmodic activities of perverse hunks of meat in closed rooms. And perhaps, even if the gods are dead, there are secular values more profound and worthwhile than the random decisions of the roulette wheel." (p.69). The important point here is not that Fuller rejected Bacon's "truth", but that Fuller believed that the view of man and of reality expressed in Bacon's images is consonant with Bacon's view of life and the way he lived it.

The discussion will now refer more directly to the elements of Bacon's symbolic universe referred to in chapter two. It was suggested that in Bacon's symbolic universe there was some desire to transcend the banality of everyday life. There are a number of images which can perhaps be linked to this desire. There are two types. The first type depicts a figure which is tangled in a geometric space, and seems to go through some kind of spaceshift - the figure appears to be both on one side of a door, wall, or screen, and on the other. In, Study from the human body (1981), a figure steps through a black screen, which becomes a black void. The figure has one foot in the room and one in the void. The right hand image of Triptych (Inspired by Oresteia of Aeschylis) (1981), shows a pink figure literally caught up in a door, being on both sides of it and flowing underneath it at the

same time. In both instances the figure is struggling, in a nightmarish fashion, to pass through the door or into the black. The second kind of image shows a figure using a key to lock or unlock a door. A good example of the second type of image is Study of the human body (1983), which shows a ghostly, deformed body turning a key in a door. Triptyche (1971), shows a figure both tangled with the door and turning a key. Painting (1978), shows a figure turning the key with its foot. What is on the other side of the door ? Will the figure - if it can untangle itself - disappear into the paint void and discard flesh and blood existence ? Or will the door let something in ? Or, as in physics, is what is on the other side of the door a matter of probability to be determined only on opening the door ?

The door provides an enigma, a mystery, the possibility of stepping into, or letting in, something new, unknown and surprising. It is a symbol of the desire for an escape from the mundane everyday existence, or even a symbol of escape through self annihilation, the void. Clearly this is a very literal interpretation. Man stepping into a void equals man trying to escape. Deleuze made a similar interpretation, not from any direct representation in Bacon's paintings, but, from a feeling that the figures are trying to escape into the surrounding paint by a spasm or contortion.

The importance of love and friendship in Bacon's sacred cosmos is demonstrated by his choice of subjects for his portraits. In most cases when Bacon painted a portrait, it was of himself or someone he knew and cared about. The choice of his friends as subjects was essential to the "poignancy" of the images - for him that is. Bacon stated that when he was painting somebody he was "trying to get near not only to their appearances but also to the way they have affected you" (Sylvester, 1980, p. 130). Bacon suggested that he was painting the effect these people had on him, and that every mark had a certain "implication". These "implications" must surely be lost on anyone but himself. To expand on this, Bacon wanted to paint an exact likeness out of irrational marks (p.126).



He recognised that this was an entirely theoretical idea and that inevitably some form of illustration had to come into it (p.126). This combination of illustrational and non-illustrational marks was the only way that he could make the image "... more immediately real" for himself (p.43). Thus Bacon revealed his portraiture to be of an entirely personal nature. Any observer may recognise by comparison with a photograph the features of Isobel Rawsthorne or Lucien Freud in Bacon's portraits of them. However the precise implications of the irrational distortions are the results of Bacon's very own personal feelings and response to his close friends. Bacon's friends and friendships are thus in a sense locked in the paint, where they are visible but incomprehensible to others.

The importance of love and relationships also finds expression (with emphasis on the sexual side) in the many images he made of two figures coupling. Two Figures (1953), for example, is not, however, some sentimental recollection of homosexual love. There is nothing nice or beautiful about the wild animalistic struggles that take place in Three studies of figures on beds (1972). It is not Bacon's vision of sexuality, but the frequency with which he painted these scenes and their frequent central placement in triptyches, for example Triptych August (1992), that reflects their importance in his sacred cosmos. In other words, it is the choice of subject matter (the physical and sexual bonding of two people) which suggest its importance to Bacon. The actual interpretation of these scenes will be discussed later as part of his vision of humanity and nature.

It was argued in chapter two that Bacon strongly asserted his own autonomy, his freedom to live according to his own vision. Of course this is something which can't really be illustrated or represented in his paintings, beyond his creation of a personal style. His paintings do not illustrate how individuals assert their autonomy, but his insistence on painting the "truth" as he felt it, does. If this element of his sacred cosmos manifests itself in the content of his work in any way, then it is possibly in his tendency to isolate the figure and strip it of any meaningful social activity or

environment. His individuals sitting alone in a room have only themselves to fall back on as a means of existence.

This brings up the whole question of social environment which, for Bacon, is totally artificial. This could not be more clearly illustrated in his work. The environments in which he places his figures often have references in a fairly illustrational manner to everyday interiors, chairs, beds, walls, skirting-boards, toilets, basins, pictures, mirrors, doors, lights, blinds, cigarettes and so on. However, even with these objects which anchor the images to every day reality, the environment appears, more or less foreign and artificial. The beds and chairs are often not ordinary at all, and quite often the figures are placed on weird jungle-gym-like structures, which, other than their spatial quality, have very little reference to the inside of a room. The image From Muybridge - Studies of the human body - woman emptying a bowl of water, and paralytic child on all fours (1969) is a good example of this. A woman and a child appear on a circular plank-like structure which is itself suspended in three large colour fields, one purple, one red and one orange. Studies of the human body (1970) shows this kind of environment reduced to its limits. In this triptych three figures are placed on a horizontal strip/plank which divides a unified pastel mauve background. In Portrait of George Dyer Crouching (1966) Bacon creates a completely absurd environment. The figure is crouched on a diving-board-like-structure which is suspended above a couch which has rounded on itself to form a circular seating enclosure. The artificiality is often accentuated through the use of unexpected pinks, bright oranges and purples in juxtaposition with fairly naturalistic browns, greys and flesh tones. His figures exist and do things, and appear more real in these artificial environments. While his figures take on their own fleshly, cartilaginous existence, the backgrounds are extremely unreal but yet always seem to have the effect (if not appearance) of some modern interior.

While the environments give a strong feeling of an artificial existence, the activities of the

inhabitants suggest no meaningful social endeavours. People stand, sit, lie down or are locked into some convulsive movement. Biological realities are represented: sex (birth), vomiting (which suggests feeding), defecating, and of course death and mutilation. There are suggestions of people reading, opening doors, turning on lights and filming, of voyeurism and even murder. The social world that has, in idealized and unidealized forms, been the subject for so many painters is almost totally excluded or reduced to its barest minimum. This has a lot to do with Bacon's neurotic desire to exclude all forms of narrative and story-telling. Any form of story telling would interfere with the feeling of reality that he was trying to achieve, and part of that feeling was that social life is completely artificial.

This vision of reality, which requires that no meaningful activities secular or spiritual are depicted, includes his belief that "man is a completely futile being". Any painting that in any way conveyed Bacon's concept of "exhilarated despair" would necessarily preclude anything too optimistic or anything with deliberate social message, content or function. Jacques-Louis David's two paintings The Oath of Horatii (1784) and The Death of Socrates (1787) both display situations of despair. David used these situations to promote certain secular ideals. David's heroes offer their lives for the greater good of the republic, while Bacon's "heroes" live and die, that is all, because all is ultimately futile. Of course to Bacon, the allegorical activities of David's heroes are neither more nor less futile than the activities of his own beings. "I know that you can say that all life is completely artificial, but I think that what is called social justice makes it more pointlessly artificial." (p.125).

The next element in Bacon's symbolic universe which is related to this is the idea that "man is an accident". This belief is directly symbolized in his painting process. Quite literally, he tried to paint figures through a series of accidents. Thus what the viewer sees is an accidental being, whose

features are, theoretically, the result of the chance interaction of irrational marks. Clearly, there is no way of proving or even supporting this assertion. Its possibility is, however, there to be considered.

It is very difficult to say anything about Bacon's concept of beauty. It is, however, quite clear that Bacon's images were created by someone with a strong personal vision of beauty. His works display an intense pre-occupation with aesthetic qualities. The arrangement of colours, marks, drawing, composition; the movement of paint from thin to thick, from controlled to free; and the interaction between form, space and the flatness of the canvass; all these things interact to create a special Baconesque beauty to which the onlooker responds at a visual level rather than an intellectual one. Having made this general statement, which could apply to any artist, there are some things to which one can perhaps point which give Bacon's images their peculiar flavour. Leiris argued that beauty arises out of the "mutual antagonism" of opposites; the stable and the unstable, "... which can present itself either as an area of calm invaded by a tempest or as a state of frenzy which struggles to disguise itself behind a mask of impassivity." (Russell, 1985, p.89). Ideally there should be a balance: "On the right hand side, a beauty that is immortal, sovereign, sculptural" and facing it on the left, the sinister, misfortune, accident and sin (p.89). Russell states that, "Somewhere behind even the most radical of Bacon's injuries to the norm of beauty there is the counter image ...." (p. 89). Bacon's beauty is a function of "ambiguous coupling" of the "self-regenerative" and the "self-destructive." (p.90). This idea of beauty can be perceived in terms of the mutual entanglement of rational marks and irrational marks, the representational and non-representational in Bacon's paintings.

Coming back to Bacon's sacred cosmos, there seems to be a link between beauty, the extraordinary, and chance. The really beautiful painting would come about by chance and it would be

extraordinary. Perhaps in this sense the crucial aspect in any image which is beautiful is its ability to surprise. Take for example the animal carcasses painted by Rembrandt and Soutine and by Bacon in Head Surrounded by sides of beef (Study after Velasques) (1954). These are all undoubtedly beautiful paintings, and an essential element in them is the power of surprise. Bloody, smelly, fly ridden carcasses, which suggest death and suffering are not considered, traditionally or in every day life, as objects of beauty. The conflicting emotions, and the element of surprise, make the whole effect that much more potent. This surprise factor, or even novelty factor, pervades most of Bacon's work in the colours he chooses, in the distortions and in all the familiar objects made unfamiliar. Perhaps a very neat example is Water from a running tap (1982), where the surprise of the unfamiliarity of an everyday object creates an image of rare and enigmatic beauty.

Bacon's vision of nature in his symbolic universe revolved around two perceptions: the "real horror and violence of life", and an acute awareness of mortality. These are important elements in his symbolic universe and they pervade all his paintings. Bacon stated, "When you go into a butcher's shop and see how beautiful meat can be and then you think about it, you can think of the whole horror of life - of one thing living off another." (Sylvester, 1980, p.48). Also, "I have a feeling of mortality all the time ... I'm always surprised when I wake up in the morning." (p.78). Bacon painted carcasses, open wounds, bandaged limbs and in Three studies for a crucifixion (1962), he painted someone machine-gunned to pieces. All of these things are expressions of the inherent violence of nature, of life, and of the vulnerable, fleshly nature of human existence. Consider the extreme amount of violence against animal flesh which is needed to fill a butchery with meat for human consumption. Bacon had a vision of nature (spurred by trips to Africa) which is violent and predatory. It is interesting to note that Bacon's sex scenes take on predatory dimensions. For example, in the two sex scenes in Triptyche inspired by T.S. Eliott's poem "Sweeney Agonistes" (1967), the figures appear to be devouring each other. The presence of teeth, rather than any open



signs of sexuality, dominates the mood. Consider also the incredible amount of violent attrition, shattering and battering that must take place to form a beach full of sand. Bacon's subjects are not in any way immune from this violence. This is symbolized in the act of painting. The subject of a portrait has no control over the attacks of Bacon's brush. The final appearance is the result of the (theoretically) random violence of Bacon's painting process.

The abstract distortions which result from this painting process also serve to remind the viewer of his or her own fixed fleshly nature/mortality. How do Bacon's images do this? The ways in which these distortions work depends entirely on the sensibilities of the different people who look at his work. Perhaps people consciously, but probably unconsciously, imagine the pain that would be caused if a real face was smashed into a likeness of a Bacon portrait. Because Bacon's figures and heads have some kind of integrity between painterly abstraction, and real human deformities on a representational level, the viewer would automatically wince at the violence of the distortions and in this way become more aware of his or her own physical nature. It is similar in a way to someone witnessing or just being told about, a vicious blow to the shin or someone being stabbed in the eye, the vision of this violence creates a kind of after-echo in the spectator or listener who has the same, but imagined, experience. In almost exactly the same way the spectator, or more appropriately the spectator's flesh, recoils as it experiences the echo of the violence in Bacon's paintings. It must also be remembered how sensitive the social being is, and needs to be, toward the nuances of facial expressions. The part of the human brain, which specializes in picking up and interpreting facial expressions must experience a confused and violent assault when scanning Bacon's distortions.

For Bacon the classical image of "man" was too tied up in illusions, or simply did not correspond with his feelings of reality. The image of man in Michelangelo's David (1501 - 1504), needed to be stripped of its illusions and returned to what it really feels like to be made of bones, meat, blood

and plenty of other slimy and crunchy things. Bacon needed to find some expression of this complete earth-boundness to fit with the total materialism of his symbolic universe.

Bacon also emphasized the physical side of humanity through more representational means. He painted, as has already been pointed out, people defecating, vomiting, wrestling, and having sex. All of these are more or less taboo, and are activities the more optimistic social being tends to ignore, gloss over, or deny (for example, as in transcendental religion, where the spirit is more important than the body, or when life after death is more important than life.). Another method he used to express this physical nature more "poignantly" was by juxtaposing an open carcass with a figure. For example in Three studies for crucifixion (1962) he painted a beast/man/carcass with exposed vertebra, teeth and ribs in a blood red colour field.

Except for the scream, Bacon avoided showing facial expressions, expressions of social interaction or even consciousness. He seemed far more interested in this feeling of fleshiness, of teeth, devouring, of underlying bones and sinews and the vulnerability of the body to violence, disease, natural deformities and, of course, death and decay. This is a constant in all his figures. In classical painting the figures tended to have ideal proportions and strike idealized poses no matter what the subject was, be it Raphael's School of Athens (1510 - 1511) or Titian's, Adam and Eve (c.1570). In Bacon's work a feeling of mortality is an essential and inseparable aspect to any painting of a human being. He religiously adhered to this view, or feeling for humanness, throughout his career.

Joseph Campbell described the Hindu legend of the god Shiva. Shiva created a monster to devour a demon which had been causing trouble. The demon saw that this monster was quite capable of eating him up, so he asked for the mercy of Shiva, who was then obliged to protect the demon. The monster then asked Shiva whom it should then eat, and the god answered that it should eat itself,

which it did. "And the god, thereupon was enchanted. For here at last was a perfect image of the monstrous thing that is life, which lives on itself." (Campbell, 1973, p.103). "All societies are evil, sorrowful, inequitable, and so they will always be. So if you really want to help this world, what you will have to teach is how to live in it ... in joyful sorrow and sorrowful joy of the knowledge of life as it is." (p.104). The recognition of the nature of life is exactly the element in Bacon's symbolic universe which pervades all his paintings.

There is one final aspect to do with death which is interesting to note. In contradiction to Bacon's assertions of ultimate meaninglessness, and painting merely to pass the time, was his near obsession with the art tradition and evolution; with what came before him; with what the correct way to paint was in his time, and with how his paintings would be judged after his death. Bacon said that what pervaded his work was "... the technical difficulty of making appearances at the present stage of the evolution of painting." (Russell, 1985, p.99). Bacon wanted to transcend the "documentary element" which is best done by the camera. He had to find a way of "recording" life, which the camera could not reproduce.

Bacon thus revealed his obsession with his position in the development of art. He stated, "... successful artists you may say - have no idea whatever whether their work's any good or not, and will never know" (Slyvester, 1980, p.61). This is because he believed that it takes seventy five to a hundred years for an image to separate itself from the theories and fashions surrounding it and thus show its true value (p.60 - 61). "Time is the only great critic." (p.88). He admitted that he would like his best paintings to survive his death and become some of the few "great things" which "thicken" life (p.89), although he added that this was a logically stupid and vain desire because he would be dead and would not know anything about it. The survival of his paintings have given a kind of futile immortality to Bacon. Two contradictions arise: firstly while he claimed that life is

futile he still worried about how he should be painting in the twentieth century; and secondly, while he described painting as "rationally futile" and put it down to vanity, he still wanted his images to live on and be judged by time. Thus Bacon was profoundly ambiguous about what he thought was the ultimate value of paintings and artists.

This discussion began with some interpretations by various writers then moved on to a more direct correlation between subject choice, meaning, and the elements of Bacon's symbolic universe (suggested in chapter two.) The fallibility of these observations is obvious. They are all subject to the problems of interpretation suggested at the beginning of this section. However all that has been attempted here is a demonstration of the affinity between Bacon's symbolic universe (or even just the likelihood of such a relationship) and the subject, content, and meaning of his work. The idea that the content of Bacon's images arises out of Bacon's own set of beliefs, which can be termed religious, seems too obvious to be worth saying. However, this is not as trite as it seems. This relationship between belief and content never stays the same. Artists throughout history have had very different relationships between themselves, what their beliefs are, and what they actually paint. For example, what was the artist-belief-content relationship in Byzantine art? The Byzantine artist had to be very careful about what he painted. Canons and instructions laid down by the church had to be strictly followed in order to correspond with the content and message of the Christian symbolic order. The images had to be true to the standard representations to be real. The difference between the Byzantine artist and Bacon is, that the former expressed a relatively fixed symbolic reality according to a doctrine (the private beliefs of the artist were irrelevant to the commission) and the latter was expressing a much more fluid and revisable symbolic reality as honestly and accurately as he could from his own feelings and beliefs. Obviously the two artists were products of two different situations, and yet, they were both doing a similar thing: painting models of reality. Bacon's symbolic universe, as has been demonstrated, does manifest itself in his work. (Also the

reverse; his art in his symbolic universe). The question is, why does this happen, and how does it happen ? It is when these questions are approached that the relationship between religious beliefs and modern artistic endeavour begins to show itself.

It has been shown that Bacon has what has been termed a sacred cosmos or symbolic universe. This consists of a set of beliefs about the nature of life, death, and about the relationship between everyday activities and ultimate meaning. This belief system acts as a guide as to what to do and how to behave. Also it contains the things that are "sacred" and worth striving for. In a situation, it has been argued, where religious beliefs have become a function of the private sphere, an individual's symbolic universe can be termed a "religious position." It has been shown that Bacon's religious position was a significant force in determining the content of his work. Bacon never set out to illustrate his beliefs. He was more interested in aesthetic qualities than saying anything in particular. While Bacon mostly started a painting with an image in his head, the final appearance of the painting depended on a series of accidents. His images were thus the result of a series of intuitive responses to the painting process he set in motion. Each intuitive response required a decision, based on a feeling, that some element was right or wrong; decisions about which marks should be destroyed, which should be preserved, what more should be added. Would the addition be the careful drawing in of an eye (for example), or would the painting need to be exposed, once again, to more accidental marks ? Then the final decision: was the painting complete ?

Bacon stated his central struggle with figuration: "How are you going to make this thing look real, how are you going to make it real to the way you feel about the thing or real to the instinct ?" (p.164).

This needs to be taken slowly. His concept of "real to the instinct" is tied up with his ideas on illustrational and non-illustrational paint. Bacon described how he was struggling to paint a portrait



when, "... suddenly this thing clicked, and became exactly like this image I was trying to record. But not out of any conscious will, nor was it anything to do with illustrational painting." (p.17). According to Bacon an image achieved in this way is more "poignant" than an illustrational painting because it has a "life completely of its own", "... it lives on its own, and therefore transfers the essence of the image more poignantly. So the artist may be able to open up or rather, ... unlock the valves of feeling and therefore return the onlooker to life more violently." (p.17). On the difference between illustrational paint and paint which conveys directly, Bacon stated, "This is a very, very difficult problem to put into words. It is something to do with instinct. It is a very, very close and difficult thing to know why some paint comes across directly onto the nervous system and other paint tells you a story in a long diatribe through the brain." (p.18). Thus a painting was complete for Bacon when it was "living" and "real" or contained "living fact". It addresses not the intellect, but elicits a far more involuntary and intuitive response from the viewer. All he did, on occasions, was feel instinctively that the painting was somehow "real" or "accurate" about the things he felt.

The point of this is that, for Bacon, to feel that a painting was somehow accurate or real, that it was working, the image would have to have accorded with his symbolic universe. Without this accord or compatibility, the image would appear untruthful, or contrived, or just in some instinctive way, not right. Thus it is precisely in his intuitive decisions that Bacon's symbolic universe penetrated his paintings. The painting process is being emphasized here because it is really the thing that has the final and most significant say in the content of the image. Of course much of the content of Bacon's paintings was determined by deliberate subject choice. Also much of the content was pre-determined because he always started with an image in his head. However, Russell argues that even these starting images or visions, arose out of "involuntary prompting from within," (Russell, 1985, p.24) or what he referred to as "unconscious scanning" (p.22). This is a form of daydreaming

(lateral thinking) where the artist allows the chaos of experience to flood in without trying to control, order or analyze anything.

Clearly all experience is subject to this kind of mind wandering. Peppiatt describes a compost heap of source material which must have entered into this day-dream world. Bacon collected piles of illustrations and photographs which he kept in his studio. Their subjects ranging from Himmler and Goebbels, Velazquez's Portrait of Innocent X (1550), to Egyptian art and drawings by Michelangelo (Peppiatt, 1984, p.5 - 6). Peppiatt lists images by Monet, Rembrandt, Velasquez, Goya, Degas and Picasso as being particularly important to Bacon. Figures in movement photographed by Muybridge, X-rays, medical photographs and war photographs all provided subject matter. Bacon also turned to literature. Peppiatt lists Greek tragedies, works by Shakespeare, Yeats, Elliot, Proust and Joyce and Van Gogh's letters as important examples (p.7 - 9). And of course it must be remembered that he lived through two world wars and grew up in Ireland when people were being "shot all round" (Gilder, 1983, p.17). These are a few of the ingredients which may have entered into this process of "unconscious scanning". They would have influenced his symbolic universe and at the same time these ingredients would have been subject to the higher frame of reference presented by this same symbolic universe. As Luckmann has argued a "world view" is revisable, and there is thus a two way relationship between belief and experience. Bacon's symbolization of nature made him turn to butcheries and books on diseases to find source material which accorded with his symbolization. At the same time, these experiences would have been added ingredients to his view that nature is violent and accidental.

It is thus safe to re-state that "how" his symbolic universe enters his painting, is through (most importantly) intuition, whether through instinctive responses during the painting process, or through the scanning process which preceded this. The "why" is because Bacon wanted to paint what felt

real to himself, and any image had to accord with his symbolic universe (which is a model of reality) to feel truthful. The "why" question, however, can be taken further.

It has been suggested that Bacon approached painting as a game, a source of entertainment and excitement with which to pass the time. For the game to be worthwhile he had to try and paint exactly what he felt about life. Without the battle to make his paintings accord with his own model of reality, he would have found painting very boring. His paintings couldn't just be nice, pleasant or beautiful; they had to be true to the way he felt about things. When discussing the implications of a painting with Peppiatt he stated, "It's something which reverberates within your psyche, it disturbs the whole life cycle within a person. It affects the atmosphere in which you live. Most of what is called art, your eye just flows over. It may be charming or nice but it doesn't change you." (Peppiatt, 1989, p.32). Bacon wanted his images to convey "feeling in the grand sense." (Sylvester, 1980, p.60). His feelings were translated into the painterly reality of his images. This provided Bacon with a means of seeing his beliefs or emotions. In this sense, by painting, Bacon returned himself to his beliefs, which, perhaps, made him believe them with greater feeling. This has returned to the point made in chapter two that painting is a ritual participation in a religious system (symbolic universe). Campbell's perspectives may drive the point home.

Campbell talks about "living mythological symbols." (Campbell, 1973, p.58). A number of things he says about mythological symbols correspond quite closely to what Bacon said about his paintings. It must be noted that when Campbell talks about myth he includes all the great religious traditions. Campbell states that an effective, living, mythological symbol does not address the "... brain to be there interpreted and appreciated .... if this is where it has to be read, the symbol is already dead." (p.88).

The living symbol "talks directly to the feeling system and immediately elicits a response, after

which the brain may come along and make interesting comments." (p.88). Quite clearly Bacon was saying exactly the same about his images.

According to Campbell, "... the first and most important effect of a living mythological symbol is to waken and give guidance to the energies of life. It is an energy-releasing and directing sign, which not only turns you on ..., but turns you on in a certain direction making you function in a certain way ...." (p.88). Bacon's idea of "returning the onlooker back to life more violently", is the same as Campbell's, "turn you on". Bacon has already been quoted as saying that he gained understanding of behaviour by painting it, and that a painting should "change you", it should affect the "atmosphere you live in." So perhaps, although this could never be proved, like Campbell's mythological symbols, Bacon's paintings "waken" and give "guidance". Clearly this can only be a tentative proposal. But, surely modern artists are not restricted to dredging up past "mythological symbols", which are dead in any case ? Surely the process by which people symbolize their assumptions about the nature of the universe is a never ending process ? People today cannot rely on Byzantine iconography to provide "living mythological symbols" with in any real power. All that has been suggested is that Bacon was trying to create images of reality which would be powerfully real and "living", for himself and his time. It must be remembered that Byzantine symbolic reality was relatively set by Christian dogma. In modern culture, on the other hand, it is generally left to the individual to decide upon or discover his/her own image of the universe.

## CONCLUSION

In this mini-thesis, the amount of space that is devoted to attaining a perspective on religion relevant to art is an indicator of the great difficulties the initial question posed. This is at least partly because the nature of the subject precludes any possibility of objectivity. Therefore, the arguments presented here can only be described as an exploration of belief. Once the meaning of the term, religious, is extended beyond going to church, or praying, or simply something pertaining to Christianity, it becomes rather broad. On the other hand the term becomes facile when it is limited to its popular understanding, as religion is a very real and enduring aspect of humanity. Hopefully the broad perspective taken has been sufficiently coherent to be of value.

The perspective taken suggests that, contrary to the views of secularization theorists, the forces of modern industrial society have not resulted in the disappearance of religion, but rather in a shift from institutionalized to non-institutionalized spiritual beliefs. The modern religious situation is characterised by pluralism, relativism and privatisation of beliefs, which for many people, has gone hand-in-hand with the break-down of metaphysical dualism. Beliefs are often the result of private search and choice rather than the simple acceptance of socially constructed dogmas.

This search manifests itself clearly in what is termed the spiritual in art which is evidence of art's continued relationship with religion even after its separation from the Church. Artists such as Kandinsky, Mondrian and Rothko turned to various forms of mysticism to redefine their symbolic universe. Thus, freedom of artistic expression took on a profoundly religious purpose as artists began to look at reality in new ways and struggled to create new images of the universe. There have been many explanations for the explosion of rapidly changing artistic styles which has characterised modernism. It is being suggested here that perhaps, at the broadest level, this was a symptom of the



marginalization of the superordinating world view provided by the Christian Church, the privatisation and commercialization of religious beliefs, and thus of a society trying to redefine its symbolic universe.

With the perspective of Bellah, Luckmann, Fromm and Rupp discussed in chapters one and two, the term "religious beliefs" seems to become muddled and more or less interchangeable with a number of other terms and phrases. These include sacred cosmos, world view, symbolic universe, religious position, frame of orientation and object of devotion, belief system and mythic system. These terms all have slightly different emphases and are used quite loosely in this thesis. This is a natural outcome of the wide perspective taken.

Chapter two sets out to finalise the approach to the question of the absence or presence of religious beliefs at the level of the individual. This section concludes that it is very difficult to say what are and what are not religious beliefs when dealing with personal beliefs, and that it is more logical to discuss the beliefs that Bacon did have rather than the ones he did not have. This is based on the acceptance of a religious dimension to humanity which, in spite of changing forms, is enduring and essential.

The discussion on Bacon establishes that he did have a symbolic universe or religious position. Of course, Bacon's actual belief system would have been far more complex and constantly open to revision through his life.

While, admittedly, it would be easy to be inventive in interpreting Bacon's art, there seems to be sufficient evidence that the iconography, content and meaning of Bacon's paintings reflect elements of his sacred cosmos. This is demonstrated in chapter Three.

It is also asserted that the content of Bacon's paintings necessarily accorded with his symbolic universe and that this accord was achieved through his intuitive painting process. It can therefore be said that his art was in this way a means of ritual participation in, and affirmation of his own symbolic universe.

By discussing Bacon and his work in terms of an example of an artist who did not appear to be religious and who did not consciously struggle with spiritual values, it can be said that he did have spiritual beliefs which played a critical role in directing his motives to paint and in forming the subject and content of his paintings. In his case, at least, the question of the importance of spiritual values seems to have been answered.

The logical conclusion of the arguments presented in this mini-thesis is that it is not possible for an individual to have absolutely no beliefs. Furthermore, Bacon's nihilistic atheism points not to a lack of beliefs but to a different belief system set outside of any institutionalized form of religion. This fact presented no problems to Bacon's own artistic endeavours. If this can be found true for Bacon, it may reassure other artists who do not feel bound to any religion or who experience a perceived absence or loss of belief and who may see this as a problem for creative activity. It has thus been shown that the question of the absence or presence of religious beliefs need not present a problem for the modern artist.

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