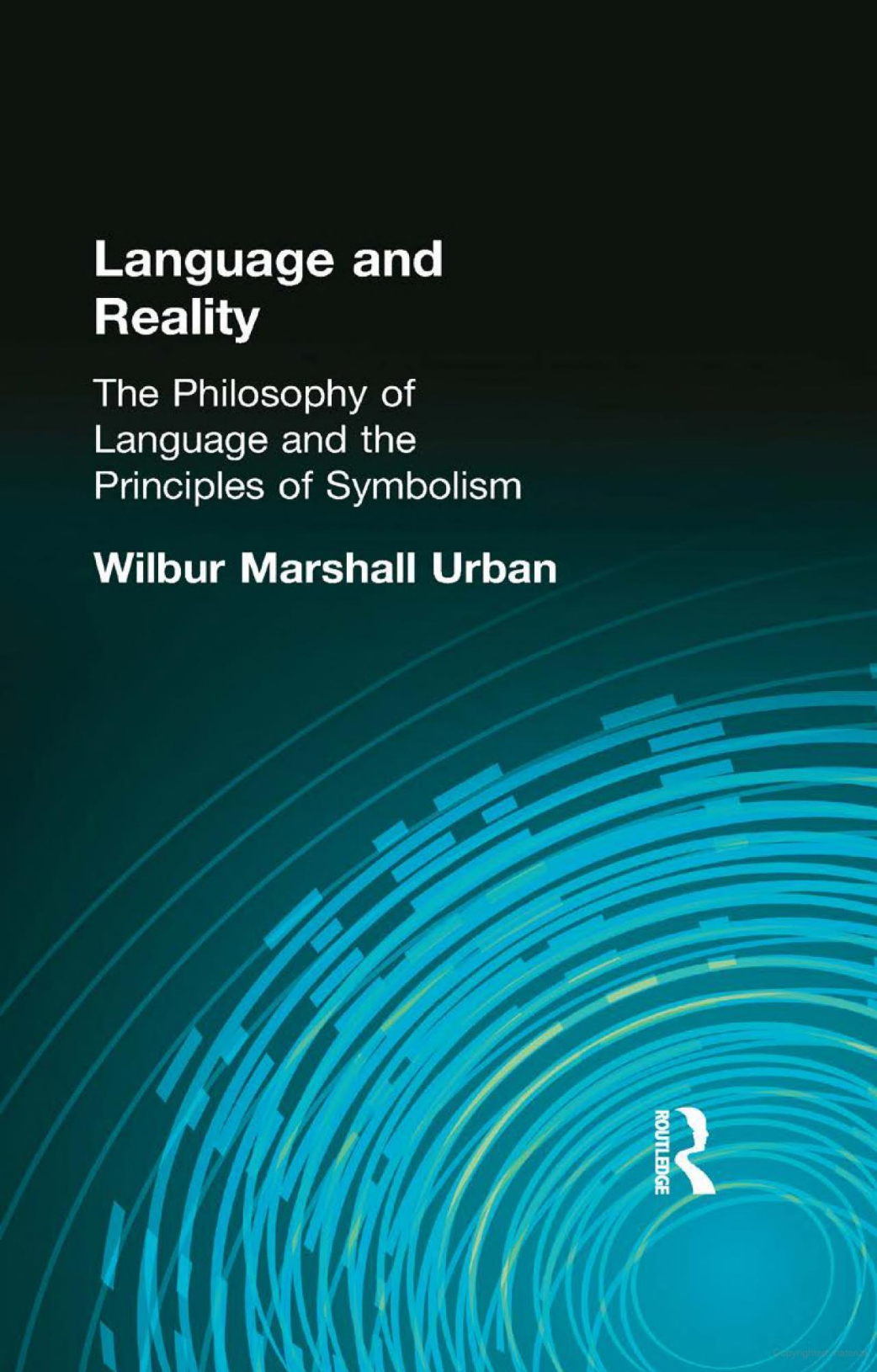
Language and Reality

The Philosophy of Language and the Principles of Symbolism

Wilbur Marshall Urban



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Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 1939 by
George Allen & Unwin Ltd.

Published 2013 by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A CIP catalogue record for this book
is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-0-415-29603-8 (hbk)
Language and Reality
ISBN 0-415-29603-X
Metaphysics: 17 Volumes
ISBN 0-415-29532-7
Muirhead Library of Philosophy: 95 Volumes
ISBN 0-415-27897-X

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THE PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE

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CHAPTER I

LANGUAGE AND REALITY: THE THEME OF A PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE

I

INTRODUCTION: THE PROBLEM

A

LANGUAGE is the last and deepest problem of the philosophic mind. This is true whether we approach reality through life or through intellect and science. All life, as Henry James has said, comes back to the question of our speech, the medium through which we communicate. Life as it is merely lived is senseless. It is perhaps conceivable that we may have a direct apprehension or intuition of life, but the meaning of life can neither be apprehended nor expressed except in language of some kind. Such expression or communication is part of the life process itself.

It is not different when we approach reality through knowledge or science. In a very real sense the limits of my language are the limits of my world. Science, in the last analysis, is language well made. It is true that science in some of its more sophisticated forms and stages may eschew natural language —may have recourse to graphs and equations, and may even deny that these either can or need be retranslated into words, but the fact remains that such graphs and equations are, after all, but means by which the mind takes possession of its objects and operates with them. Until they are interpreted they say nothing. The question as to "what science says" can be answered only in natural language.

It is not surprising, therefore, that reflection on language is one of the oldest and most constant preoccupations of the human mind. In the Upanishads we are told to meditate on speech. "If there were no speech, neither right nor wrong would be known, neither true nor false, neither the pleasant nor the unpleasant. Speech makes us understand all this. Meditate on speech." Now, whether it be true or not that if there were no speech nothing would be known, that there

would be no such distinctions as true and false, right and wrong, is indeed precisely one of the fundamental questions of a philosophy of language. The relation of cognition to language is one of the central themes of the present treatise, as, indeed, it is of all present-day philosophy. In any case the problem of what we can know is so closely bound up with the question of what we can say, that all meditation on knowledge involves meditation on speech. It may not be true that, as Parmenides said, "Name is everything, everything that mortals have established in confidence that it is the truth," but it *is* true that until something has been fixed by names there is little if anything of which either true or false, or even meaning, can be predicated.

II

THE PROBLEM OF LANGUAGE IN THE HISTORY OF THOUGHT

Reflection upon language is, then, one of the oldest and most constant preoccupations of men. This preoccupation has been deepened at all critical points in human culture. It is precisely because we have reached such a turning-point that there has been a revival of interest in the philosophy of language.

Of such critical turning-points in Western European culture we may note five: (*a*) The period of the Greek sophists and sceptics; (*b*) the latter part of mediaeval scholasticism; (*c*) the epistemologists of the eighteenth century; (*d*) the idealistic reaction in the course of the nineteenth century, and finally these early decades of the twentieth century when the full effects of the Darwinian epoch of evolutionary naturalism are being felt.

A history of European thought and culture might well be written about this problem of language. It is not my purpose to attempt this history here. It will suffice to make clear the main outlines of this story and the outstanding characters of the epochs that are chiefly significant for its understanding.

A

High and Low Evaluations of Language

"Culture is the measure of things taken for granted." Among the most important of such things is language in which, as Hegel says, "culture is actualized." The relation of the word to the thing is, as Parmenides saw, the key problem about which all culture and all knowledge finally turns. The history of European culture is, accordingly, the story of two great opposing valuations—high and low evaluations of the *Word*.

It may be taken for granted, I suppose, that the notion of a traditional philosophy, of a *philosophia perennis*, in the sense of the Greco-Christian tradition, is more and more being accepted as a true description of the story of Western philosophy. However diametrically opposed the evaluation of the tradition, as, for instance, in John Dewey's *The Quest for Certainty*[1] and in the present writer's *The Intelligible World*, the account of the driving-force of that tradition and of the assumptions that give it unity and continuity does not in the two cases materially differ. I suppose that it would also be agreed that this same tradition is based upon a high evaluation of language; on a doctrine of reason which identifies it, in some degree at least, with the Word, the *Logos*. Bergson is certainly not far wrong when he tells us that this entire tradition is based upon a trust in language. This high evaluation of language is the underlying assumption of all periods of rationalism and is uniformly accompanied by some belief in the reality of universals, since the very naming of anything immediately universalizes it in some sense and to some degree.

As opposed to this high evaluation, with its trust in the word, there is the low evaluation which appears in all critical periods of culture. Scepticism is always ultimately scepticism of the word. If being *is*, so we find it in Gorgias, it is unapprehensible and unknowable by man; but even if it is knowable, it is inexpressible and incommunicable. Scepticism of the word is the underlying assumption of all periods of empiricism and is again accompanied by some form of nominalism—by disbelief in the reality of the universal, the reality of the universal being at once the condition of valid naming and of communi-

[1] Published by George Allen and Unwin Ltd.

cation of meaning. The inseparability of the word and the thing is, then, in one form or another, the postulate of all positive cultural epochs and the loosing of the word from the thing the beginning of scepticism and relativism.[1]

B

Sophistic Scepticism and the Reinstatement of the Word

Sophistic scepticism had already loosed the word from the thing. In the time of Plato, therefore, the relation between word and thing, name and object, had become a customary topic of conversation. In Xenophon's *Memorabilia* (III, 14, 2) we read that at a banquet in Athens the question of the proper usage of language was the topic of discussion. This is also the theme of the dialogue, *Cratylus*, of which more will be said in the sequel. The criticism of the Sophists by Socrates was in principle an attack on the conventional theory of language and an attempt to re-establish a trust in language. The doctrine of the Idea of Plato and, still more, the logic of Aristotle, were, on the whole, a reaffirmation of the natural trust in language which the scepticism of the Sophists could only disturb and not actually destroy. The Stoic philosophy of language, with its postulate of natural language and the *Ursprache*, signalized the final triumph. This scepticism of the word did not fail to leave its mark even on Plato. He found himself compelled to make a sharp distinction between two meanings of the *logos*, one which becomes of immense importance in the Seventh Letter, in which his philosophy of language is most clearly expressed, a distinction, namely, between the pure concept, the concept or idea as such, and the concept expressed in language. But this distinction tends to disappear in the main current of philosophic thought, its influence being largely felt in Neoplatonic mysticism. It is doubtless too much to say that Aristotle built his logic wholly on language, that the fundamental distinctions upon which his logic is built are determined en-

[1] A history of the philosophy of language is, as Ernst Cassirer remarks, still to be written. The best contribution to such a history is his own sketch, which is found in his *Die Philosophie der Symbolischen Formen*, Vol. I, Chapter I,entitled "Das Sprachproblem in der Geschichte der Philosophie."

tirely by the Greek language. Nevertheless a trust in language is the basal supposition of that logic.

Viewed broadly, this trust in the word is the dominant note of mediaeval culture and one of the chief keys to its understanding. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God." This notion of the primacy of the word not only made inevitable the "realism" which is the basis of mediaeval culture, but made possible that trust in language on which the *via eminentiae* was built—that bridge by means of which, through natural language and its analogies, a way to the nature of Deity is found. Nominalism thus becomes, for this culture, the most fundamental of all heresies. The philosophy of common sense of classical scholasticism is essentially a philosophy of the *sensus communis*. The great contrast of this philosophy with the sophisticated epistemology beginning with Descartes' philosophy of doubt, is rightly seen to lie in the fact that it starts with the assumption that we *have* knowledge. But no less important is the "realistic" assumption that in language and its categories we have the structure of reality.

C

Nominalism and the Realistic Reaction

The nominalism of the late mediaeval period and of the Renaissance represents, then, a veritable crisis in culture of the same general character as that of the Sophistic period. Again, scepticism of the word is the key to the moral relativism and scepticism of the period. From our point of view, however, the attack on the Aristotelian logic which began at this time is highly significant. It was precisely with the philologists of the Renaissance—such figures as those of Lorenzo Valla, Ludovico Vives, and Petrus Ramus—that the attack began. By their linguistic and grammatical studies they sought to overthrow the scholastic-aristotelian philosophy as the exclusive systematic of the spirit. The rhetoricians join with the physicists in their attack on the dialecticians and in the demand for a return from the word to the thing.

Seen against this background, the philosophical rationalism of the Continent appears, on the whole, to be dominated by

the spirit of the *philosophia perennis* and an attempt to reinstate that trust in language which is part of traditional philosophy. Descartes' *de omnibus dubitare* may indeed be viewed as expressing the scepticism of the Renaissance, but it may also be looked upon as an answer to that scepticism. The doubt of everything was not only a doubt of all knowledge, but also a doubt of language in which that knowledge is embodied or expressed. The meeting of the doubt and the reinstatement of innate ideas meant also the reinstatement of the trust in the word with which the idea is bound up. This was clearly seen by the sensationalist critics of the doctrine who denied innate ideas partly on the grounds of the non-innateness of language.

Descartes himself did not make language a special problem in his chief works, but in the single connection in which he refers to it (a letter to Mersenne) he gives it a particular turn which is highly significant and widely influential in the thinking of the rationalists. He insists upon the inseparable character of the relation of reason and language. As in all forms of knowledge, there is always one ground form of knowledge, the human reason, so there must be in all the different languages one language, the universal, rational, form of language. The mathematical ideal of knowledge, with its emphasis upon universality, brings with it also a demand for a universal language. The demand for a *Mathesis universalis* includes in it, for all parts of knowledge which are not mathematical, the demand for a *Lingua universalis*.[1] Herein we find the stimulus for the many systems of universal language which followed in swift succession, an activity in which Leibniz also took part.

One aspect of the rationalistic philosophy of language requires special comment. The trust in language which, as we have seen, dominated on the whole the preceding epochs of European culture, is in the main continued in the rationalistic movement. It is precisely from this trust that, from one point of view, the dogmatism which Kant ascribes to it proceeds. Such words as Self, external world, and God are not "empty words" but refer to objects. They embody an intellectual as opposed to sensuous intuition, that intellectual intuition which Kant later subjected to criticism. The doctrine of innate ideas

[1] Letter to Mersenne, November 20, 1829, *Correspondence*, ed. Adam-Tannery, I, 80 ff.

presupposes, as we have said, the trust in the word with which the idea is bound up.

D

Empiricism and the Transcendental Reaction

The critical point in the philosophy of language of modern times came with the empiricism of the eighteenth century. This movement naturally approached the problem in an entirely different spirit from that of rationalism in that, far from assuming linguistic validity, as in principle the rationalists did, the very heart of empiricism was the questioning of it.

Indeed, Locke was the first to have realized that meditation upon language must be, if not the propaedeutic, at least the constant accompaniment of philosophical reflection. Thus he confesses: "When I first began this discourse of the understanding and a good while after, I had not the least thought that any consideration of words was necessary to it. But when, having passed over the original and composition of our ideas, I began to examine the extent and certainty of our knowledge, I found it had so near a connection with words that unless their force and manner of signification were well understood, *there could be very little said pertinently and clearly concerning knowledge*; which being conversant about truth had constantly to do with propositions: and though it terminated in things, yet it was, for the most part, so much by the intervention of words, that they seemed scarce separable from our general knowledge."[1]

For the empiricist no less than for the rationalist, words are inseparable from knowledge, but the inferences drawn from that fact are wholly different. Add to this statement of Locke, the further thesis that all words originate in sense experience of physical things and are then carried over to the non-physical, a thesis which Locke develops in great detail, and the entire problem of the "force and signification of words" is set. All words "being ultimately derived from such as signify sensible ideas," the problem of their valid reference to non-sensible ideas is immediately raised. This is the systematic ground upon which all treatment of language problems within empiricism,

[1] *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book III, Chapter IX, Section 21.

from Locke to the logical positivists, is directly or indirectly based.

The empirical philosophy of language becomes the basis for a theory of knowledge which eliminates the universal. Berkeley seeks to show the impossibility of abstract ideas and he traces them to the source from which they flow, namely, language. He even proposes "to confine my thought to my own ideas, divested from words." He does not "see how he can then be mistaken." He even doubts whether language has contributed more to the hindrance or the advancement of the sciences.[1] This sceptical view of language Berkeley was not able himself to maintain, his doctrine of notions being in reality a reinstatement of innate principles in another form, but it continued as the basis of the entire empirical movement, and is in a sense the ultimate ground of the scepticism of Hume. In the mind of the empiricist this principle of the inseparability of knowledge and its expression in language becomes the final argument against innate principles and the extension of knowledge beyond the empirically observable. The "one irresistible argument," according to William Godwin, "proving the absurdity" of such principles is that it is impossible that a principle should be innate unless the ideas expressed in the proposition are innate also. The "near connection with words" of which Locke wrote makes that impossible.[2]

The philosophy of language of empiricism precipitated a crisis in culture as its theory of knowledge precipitated a similar crisis in the sphere of technical philosophy. As Hume woke Kant from his dogmatic slumbers, so the critique of language we have been considering gave birth, indirectly at least, to a new and higher evaluation of language connected with what is called the *Romantic* movement. The philosophy of language connected with this movement, as, for instance, expressed in Herder, is at the same time a reaction against this account of language and against the arid intellectualism of the later rationalism as exemplified in the logical investigations of Leibniz.[3]

[1] *The Principles of Human Knowledge*, Section 21.

[2] William Godwin, *Political Justice*, Book I, Chapter 4.

[3] The best single treatment of the philosophy of language of the Romantic period is that of Eva Fiesel: *De Sprachphilosophie der Deutschen Romantik* (J. C. B. Mohr, 1927). All the fundamental concepts of this philosophy, its notion of inner

E

Von Humboldt and Hegel: The Idealistic Philosophy of Language

Kant is then indirectly the answer to that scepticism of the word which constitutes the underlying assumption of sensationalistic empiricism. That answer is transcendentalism. But so far as the philosophy of language *eo nomine* is concerned, that answer is given by von Humboldt. In him we find the embodiment, so far as meditation on language is concerned, of that change in the *Zeitgeist* which marks off the nineteenth century from the eighteenth. This, of course, is not to overlook the contributions of Hamann and Herder and many others of lesser moment. It is merely to seek in one outstanding figure the key notions of this epoch.

Something of the spirit of this entire epoch is expressed in a letter of von Humboldt to Wolf, written in 1805. "Im grunde ist alles was ich treibe Sprachstudium. Ich glaube die Kunst endecket zu haben die Sprache als ein Vehicel zu gebrauchen, um das Höchste und Tiefste und die Manigfältigkeit der ganzen Welt zu durchfahren."[1] As for Locke, so also for von Humboldt, language and cognition are inseparable. But the important thing for him is that language is not merely the means by which truth (somehow already known without the instrument of speech) is more or less adequately expressed, but is rather the means by which the not-yet-known is discovered. Cognition and expression are one. This is the source and the assumption of all Humboldt's researches in language. Here, then, through the mediation of Kant and Herder, he returns from the narrow logical conception of speech of the later Leibniz to the deeper and more comprehensive notion of reason which underlies Leibniz's philosophy as a whole and which expressed the real spirit of rationalism.

The influence of von Humboldt's germinal ideas on the

form and of language as creative, together with its distinctive doctrines of the origin and development of language, are brought out with enlightening detail. An excellent presentation of Humboldt's conception of language is also given. Although not reckoned with the Romantics, the close relation of many of his fundamental concepts to this movement is shown.

[1] From a letter to Wolf (1805), quoted by Cassirer. For a fuller treatment of von Humboldt's entire philosophy of language, see *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 98 ff.

science of language is not the theme of the present discussion. It is everywhere apparent and will receive attention in the appropriate places. We are concerned rather with the place of his "meditation on speech" in the cultural and philosophical life that followed.

The inseparability of *Geist* and *Sprache*, the organic conception of language, the reciprocal dependence of thought and word, all passed as necessary presuppositions into the idealistic movement which we associate with the name of Hegel. It would not be too much to say that the notion of language as the vehicle by which to reach the highest and the deepest is the unspoken assumption of the entire Hegelian philosophy, for which language is "the actuality of culture." It is not to be doubted that the Hegelian dialectic involved a critique of language. The principle of negativity by which the dialectic proceeds is, from one point of view, the denial of the adequacy of the word, but this is merely a step in a dialectic which finds *better words* for the expression of reality. The significant point is that reality *can be expressed*, that language is a vehicle for the exploration of the highest and deepest of the world. Hegel's doctrine of the categories differs from the Kantian primarily in that, while the latter takes as the key or the *Leitfaden* for the discovery of the categories of the real, the fundamental grammatical forms of language, denying a categorial character to those "ideas" which are merely "regulative," for Hegel the latter also are constitutive, *Leitfaden* which, through the dialectic, lead to an understanding of the real.

F

From Hegel to Darwin

It was when this philosophy of language was at the height of its influence that, like the general philosophy with which it was bound up, it collapsed and with its collapse precipitated a crisis in culture the full meaning of which is probably not yet realized. This we may describe as the step from Hegel to Darwin, from *Geist* to *Natur*, from idealism to naturalism. It was only to be expected that this crisis would, as heretofore, bring with it renewed meditations on language.

From the more general cultural standpoint it is the complete "naturalization of the intelligence" which is the significant element of the movement. With this naturalization of intelligence followed the naturalization of language with which intelligence is bound up. The consequences of this movement for the methodology of the science of language will be considered in a later context.[1] Here we are concerned solely with its general significance. Scepticism of the word has returned with renewed virulence, but it is now a scepticism the like of which has not hitherto been seen.

The characteristic common to all these sceptical periods has been nominalism in one form or another and the distrust of language which inevitably follows. That which characterizes the present epoch is a form of nominalism which may be characterized as Neo-nominalism. Its distinguishing characteristics will engage our attention in the ensuing section. Here we shall emphasize a single point. The naturalistic and ultimately behaviouristic view of language which has developed of necessity from Darwinian premises, has brought with it a scepticism of the word, a distrust of language more fundamental than any hitherto experienced. The naturalization of language makes of it, in the last analysis, merely a method of adaptation to and control of environment, and denies to it *ab initio* all fitness for apprehending and expressing anything but the physical, all those functions which have belonged to it by virtue of its traditional association with reason and with *Geist.*

This low evaluation of language is, as we shall see, the key to the most significant movements of the present day in general culture and in technical thought. Against this evaluation and the premises upon which it is based, movements of reaction are evident. Even in the sphere of linguistic science itself, as we shall presently see, there are "idealistic" reactions against this naturalism. In the main, however, we are in one of those critical turning-points of human culture of which we have spoken, and here, as always, the philosophy of language has, as we shall also see, become a chief preoccupation.

[1] Chapter II, pp. 59 ff.

G

Summary and Conclusion

The preceding account is not intended to be a complete story of the philosophy of language or of those reflections upon speech which have been the inevitable accompaniments of the development of European thought and culture. To be complete it would need to be little less than the story of Western philosophy and science itself. It has served, however, it may be hoped, to make clear two things. It has justified, in the first place, our initial statement that preoccupation with problems of language has universally been deepened at all critical points in human culture. It has shown also that the story of that culture is not only bound up with reflection upon language, but must be understood as an age-old conflict between two great evaluations of the word, which we have described as the high and the low evaluations.

It is clear, in the second place, that throughout these movements, whether the valuations be high or low, whether the movements be rationalistic or empirical, one underlying assumption determines them all—namely, the inseparable relation between the problem of knowledge and the problem of language. For the Sophist, no less than for Plato and Aristotle, for Locke no less than for Descartes and Leibniz, for evolutionary naturalism no less than for the idealism of von Humboldt and Hegel—it is this assumption which creates the problem of language for the philosopher, and it is at this point, now as always, that the problems of the philosophy of language arise.

III

THE PROBLEMS OF A PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE; LINGUISTIC VALIDITY

A

The revival of interest in philosophical problems of language is accordingly one of the outstanding features of the present cultural situation. The reasons for this revival are not far to seek. They are, to be sure, *mutatis mutandis*, the same funda-

mental issues as forced meditation on language at any of the crucial points of human thought and culture. In the present instance, however, the problems have been given a new turn by reason of two distinctively modern developments.

The first of these is the purely naturalistic view of language which followed upon the application of Darwinian principles to all cultural forms. The step from Hegel to Darwin, which, as we shall see, changed the face of linguistic studies in the nineteenth century, eventuated in a tendency not only to explain but to evaluate language in purely biological and naturalistic terms. Our language became "the cries of the forest corrupted and complicated by anthropoid apes," and the question was very properly asked how such a mere extension of the tool-making function of man, this mere organ of adaptation to environment, could become the vehicle even of "physical" knowledge, to say nothing of its being, in von Humboldt's terms, a vehicle for travelling through the highest and deepest and the manifold of the entire world! In short, what has been called the behaviouristic theory of language, of which more shall be said presently, has raised entirely new problems.

The second distinctively modern development has come from the physical sciences: the increasing elaboration of the technical, non-linguistic symbols of science, the ever-increasing divergence of these symbols from natural language and the ever-growing difficulty of communicating their meaning in ordinary language.

If we look about us, it is true, as Paul Valéry[1] writes, that "we see speech dwindling in importance in every field where accuracy is on the increase. . . . Undoubtedly common speech will always be used to teach the manufactured languages and adjust their strong and accurate mechanisms to minds as yet unspecialized. But by contrast speech has become more and more a means for the first rough approximations and is being ousted as systems of purer notation develop, each one more adapted to one special use. . . . A kind of picture writing is growing up to connect qualities and quantities, a language whose grammar is a body of preliminary conventions (scales,

[1] Paul Valéry, "Leonardo and the Philosophers," *The Hound and Horn*, Vol. IV, No. 2.

axes, quadratures, etc.), and whose logic is the dependence of figures or parts of figures, their properties in situations, etc. . . . Words doubtless call the graphs into being, give them meaning and interpret them, but words no longer consummate the act of the mind's possession."

This is, I take it, in the main a true picture of the present situation. The dwindling of speech in importance, its ousting by systems of purer notation, is part of the modern problem. It is, I think, becoming quite clear where this problem lies. In the sphere of physical science itself the issue is clearly understood. Can the physical object of science be connected with the physical object of "common sense," or have modern methods of analysis created a dualism which we must be content to leave unbridged? In terms of the philosophy of language we have the same problem in other words. Is there a dualism between the "manufactured" languages and "natural" language which we must likewise be content to leave unbridged? Must we be content to leave mathematical formulas uninterpreted? Words no longer consummate the mind's possession of its objects, so science bursts through natural language. But the fact remains that it is words that call these systems of purer notation into being, words in the last analysis alone give them meaning, and interpretation can ultimately be in words alone. In sum, we have here what Hönigswald calls the principle of the essential "Worthaftigkeit des Denkens." Whatever manufactured languages we may create, is not the ultimate symbolism from which they all come and to which in the last analysis they must all return, the language of words?

These two modern movements create a unique situation in the philosophy of language. They have united to form what I have described as neo-nominalism.[1] As distinguished from earlier nominalism, both that of mediaeval thought and of sensationalistic empiricism, its special characters are quite clear. In its earlier forms, nominalism denied the reality of universals; neo-nominalism is thoroughgoing and denies the reality of individuals also. In its more extreme forms, it denies reality to all except the flux of sensations and eventuates in a panfictionism, according to which to name a thing at all is to turn

[1] See my article, "Modernism in Science and Philosophy," *The Journal of Philosophical Studies*, Vol. V, No. 18.

it into a fiction. It is this neo-nominalism, in its varied forms and far-reaching ramifications, that has made the problem of language the central one in present-day philosophical thought.

B

Neo-Nominalism and "Modernism" in Philosophy

All types of philosophy are thus being forced to take up the problems of language again, and what is called the philosophy of language has become a special and relatively distinct department of philosophical activity. Language has, so to speak, become the *Brennpunkt* of present-day philosophical discussion.

There is scarcely a characteristic philosophical movement of our time which does not turn, at some crucial point, about its conception of language and the relation of language to reality. The Bergsonian philosophy is an outstanding illustration of the situation. The conception of metaphysics as the science that seeks to dispense with symbols is based upon a definite philosophy of language. Scarcely less significant, however, are the logical atomism of Bertrand Russell and the organic philosophy of Whitehead as developed in *Process and Reality*. For the latter the very possibility of a metaphysics rests upon the redesigning of our language, and an entire reconstitution of the categories embodied in our language.

The chief point, however, at which the linguistic issue appears is in the position of logical positivism, more especially with regard to metaphysics. As is well known, this form of positivism, like its progenitors, is characterized primarily by the wholesale elimination of large regions of so-called knowledge from the realm of actual knowledge and the reinterpretation of such knowledge as remains, namely, scientific, in a fashion not wholly acceptable to scientists themselves. The fields eliminated are those of morals, religion, art, and, above all, metaphysics. These are relegated to the sphere of feeling and emotional expression. The view of science maintained is that it is merely descriptive and that all "metaphysical" propositions are meaningless here also.

So much the old and the new positivism have in common.

The point of divergence of the new from the old, although from a more general point of view not important, is precisely that which, from our standpoint, makes it highly significant. The new positivism is based upon the "analysis of language" and ultimately upon a philosophy of language. For the older positivism, the statements or propositions within the spheres of discourse known as the value sciences and metaphysics were untrue—useful fictions perhaps, but still fictions. Such is, for instance, still the positivism of Vaihinger. For the new positivism, they are not untrue but meaningless. They deal with questions and assertions concerning which the problem of truth or falsity really does not arise, for the questions and assertions are themselves meaningless. The standpoint is well expressed in the well-known article of Carnap entitled *Die Ueberwindung der Metaphysik durch die logische Analyse der Sprache.*[1] The details of this position belong to later discussions; here we are concerned merely to indicate the way in which language has become the central problem in philosophy.

C

What is the Philosophy of Language?

What, then, is this philosophy of language the basal issues of which are, as we have seen, involved in all distinctively modern forms of philosophy and upon the solution of which all in the last analysis turn? What is the philosophy of language and how is it related to linguistic science? We may best approach this problem by considering a series of questions about language which, as we have seen, have been continually asked in all epochs of human culture and are still asked with increasing insistence to-day. Any field of knowledge may be defined by the questions it asks and by the type of answers which it gives.

What is the nature and function of language? Is it a God-given hand-maid of reason, as Schlegel says, or merely a form of animal behaviour—in the words of Anatole France, the sounds of the forest corrupted and complicated by anthropoid

[1] *Erkentniss*, Vol. II, No. 4.

apes? Is its function to mirror the world, to be a vehicle by which the spirit comes to self-consciousness as Novalis says, or is it only at home when used to manipulate physical objects, for which manipulation it was primarily made? Are the powers of language limited to the practical functions for which it was "primarily made," or has it, in its development, achieved a freedom which makes it, in the words of Humboldt, "a vehicle for traversing the manifold and the highest and deepest of the entire world?"

Examination of these and similar questions makes it clear that there is a group of problems regarding language which have to do with its *evaluation*, with the determination of its significance in the total life of the human spirit and as a means for the apprehension and communication of reality. The philosophy of language, we may then say, to begin with, is concerned with *the evaluation of language as a bearer of meanings, as a medium of communication and as a sign or symbol of reality.*

This idea that there are distinctively philosophical problems of language and that these problems are problems of evaluation, is by no means unknown even in the field of linguistic science itself. No less an authority than Jespersen has said that the limitations of theories of language in the past, the lack of breadth of vision in modern linguistics, is due to the fact that linguists have neglected all problems connected with the evaluation of language.[1]

The philosophical problem of language is, then, the problem of its evaluation or the problem of *linguistic validity*. In its earliest form, as in the discussions of the *Cratylus*, it was, as we have seen, the problem of the "natural rightness of names." But behind this simple formulation there lies a deeper question which has been constantly restated in all the critical periods of culture. Do language and the word belong entirely to the realm of subjective "opinion" and convention, or natural process, or does there subsist between the realm of words and the realm of being some deeper connection? The Sophists denied, the Stoics affirmed such objective validity of the word. This denial and affirmation constitute two opposing valuations throughout the entire history of European thought. These have been called the high and low evaluations of the word,

[1] See Ogden and Richards, *The Meaning of Meaning*, p. vi.

and, although the opposing valuations have been always present, it is the high evaluation which has in the main dominated Western thought.

D

The Philosophy of Language and Linguistic Science

Philosophical problems of language are then, in the first instance, connected with the evaluation of language, or with the question of linguistic validity. But there is also linguistic science and it is also important to determine the manner in which distinctively philosophical problems are related to those of linguistic science. We shall consider certain specific problems of linguistic science in the following chapter. Here it is desirable merely to establish the general relation in a preliminary way.

The science of language may be clearly marked off both by material and method. What is language? asks Dauzac, a French linguist, in the introductory chapter of his *La Philosophie du Language*, and the answer given is distinctly in the terms of linguistic science. Language, he replies, is a collection of articulate sounds—that is the first aspect that strikes the linguist. The study of the sounds constitutes phonetics and it involves relations with physiology and physics. Language may, in the second place, be envisaged as an instrument of thought. This is the subject-matter of semantics and includes the analysis of grammatical relations, morphology and syntax, and the significance of the life of words. Here relations with psychology are important. Finally, language is social fact, as medium of communication, and at this point linguistics makes important contacts with the social and cultural sciences.

This answer by a linguist to the question, What is language? represents fairly adequately for our purpose the three main divisions of linguistic science. In the following chapter, we shall see that the scientific study of language has actually passed through these three phases. In the earlier stages the emphasis was on phonetics, with a corresponding emphasis upon physics and physiology. Later the turn was to problems of meaning, with a corresponding emphasis upon the psychology of language and its function as a social and cultural

phenomenon. All this is a subject for later consideration; here we shall concentrate our attention upon the division of linguistic science known as semantics.

The meaning of words, which constitutes the subject-matter of this division, is, as has already been indicated, the point at which linguistics and psychology come together. It is also, however, the point at which the chief problems of the philosophy of language arise. The nature of meaning is, from one point of view at least, the central problem of both language and philosophy. The linguist cannot solve his problems without trenching on the philosophical, nor can the logician and philosopher solve theirs without linguistic analysis; it is for these reasons that the special field of the philosophy of language has been developed. Over against semantics in the linguistic sense we may set the field of philosophical semantics.

Semantics, in the linguistic sense, deals with the analysis of grammatical relations, morphology and syntax, and the "significance of the life of words." But all these problems have their philosophical aspect, for they raise the question of the relation of these words, forms, and relations to reality. The philosophical aspect of semantics may be seen specifically in the "empirical criterion of meaning" as formulated by logical positivism. The object of this criterion is to find a means of distinguishing the meaningful from the unmeaning in language, apparent words from real words, pseudo-sentences from real sentences. This criterion is found in the reference to observable entities, and, it is held, where such reference cannot be shown, language is meaningless. It is not our purpose to examine this criterion at this point, but merely to use it as an example of philosophical semantics—to point out that it is a criterion, and as such seeks to establish a norm in terms of which language may be evaluated. That the formulation of such a norm makes assumptions of a philosophical character is obvious—assumptions which it is the task of philosophical semantics to examine.

The general relations of the science to the philosophy of language have been well stated by Karl Vossler. After enumerating the various conceptions of language with which linguistic science makes us familiar—"a meaningful sound, a sociable noise, a passing to and fro of signs, which men make chiefly

through the mouth and take in through the ears, and by means of which they communicate with each other—through gestures, hands, eyes, etc.," he writes as follows: "No one denies that behind this shifting pattern something is at work that may be called Force, or Meaning or Will, or Mind or Body or Soul of Man, or anything else. But as soon as we inquire what this 'something' is, opinions begin to diverge widely. The pious see in it the divine breath, the enlightened a natural disposition that is to some extent shared by animals. The origin of language is attributed by psychologists to the psychic part of this disposition, by phoneticians to the bodily part, by sociologists to the communal life of man. The clash of opinions becomes most violent when it comes to the problem of the *value* of language [italics the author's]. Overestimation stands against underestimation. On the one hand language is thought to be error and illusion, a veil hiding truth and self-deception; on the other it is looked upon as the first and most important educator of our thought. If we wish to pick our way among these clashing views, we have to realize that we need the help of philosophy and even metaphysics which will lead us to the ultimate foundations of the human spirit."[1]

It is not necessary to subscribe to this passage *in toto* in order to see the philosophical problems which inevitably arise in any adequate consideration of language. There are certain problems which linguistic science cannot itself solve. These problems culminate in that of the value of language or linguistic validity, and this problem can be solved only by reference to those wider considerations to which we give the term philosophical.

IV

THE SPECIFIC PROBLEMS OF A PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE

We have now distinguished between the science and the philosophy of language. We have also determined in a general way the theme of the philosophy of language as that of linguistic validity. With these conceptions in mind, it is now possible to formulate more accurately the problems of language which

[1] *The Spirit of Language in Civilization*, London and New York, 1932, p. 1.

are more distinctly philosophical in character and implication. Linguistic validity is concerned with the problem of the evaluation of language as a *bearer of meaning, as a medium of communication and as a sign or symbol of reality.* The further development of this theme leads us, I think, to four distinct problems.

It is not easy to formulate these problems of language without using in the very terminology employed some theory of language and of its relation to reality, in other words, without begging the questions at issue in the very form of their statement. Thus Mr. Bertrand Russell, in his introduction to Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, formulates the four problems I have in mind, but in his very statement there is assumed a conception of linguistic fact which is itself open to question. This is especially evident in his statement of what is called the logical problem of language. "What relation, it is asked, must one fact or set of facts, such as a sentence, have to another fact, the proposition, in order to be capable of standing significantly for them—of being a valid surrogate for them?" In this apparently obvious formulation is hidden a whole nest of questions, the chief of which is precisely the separation of the two sets of facts, the sentence and the proposition. Whether such a form of statement is valid or not, is not the issue here. The question is raised merely as a warning against so formulating the problems of a philosophy of language as to beg the issues involved.

A

Language as the Bearer of Meaning. Linguistic Meaning

There is then, in the first place, the problem of language as the bearer of meanings. In the words of Cassirer it is this: how in general a particular sensuous content, such as a collection of sounds, can become the bearer of a universal or spiritual meaning. It is at this point that linguistic science and philosophy first come together, for meaning is a central notion in both. It is precisely because the problem of meaning in the one cannot be answered without reference to the other that a philosophy of language is inevitable. The nature and differentiation of linguistic meaning is the primary problem, but the solution of it takes us far beyond the limits of linguistics them-

selves. The existence of "meaning" in some sense prior to the development of language, raises the further problem of the nature of this meaning and of the relation of linguistic meaning to it. A theory of linguistic meaning is but part of a larger problem of the nature of meaning and cannot be answered without an analysis of the "meaning situation" itself and the development of a general theory of meaning. The questions raised here are partly psychological, but they are also phenomenological and philosophical. Meaning is the first specific problem of a philosophy of language.

B

Language as Medium of Communication

The problem of language as a bearer of meaning passes directly into the problem of language as a medium of communication; for, as we shall presently see, it is part of the modern speech notion that language, *as language*, has no reality except in the speech community.

The problem here involved may again be expressed in different ways. We may, with Mr. Russell, ask how shall we use language so as to convey the meaningful rather than the unmeaning, the true rather than the false? Or we may ask, how is meaningful, intelligible communication possible? This may be described as a sociological problem, for it is in part concerned with language as social fact. But the problem is really more than this. Answers to questions such as these involve an examination of the entire process of communication, or of the conveyance of meaning, which is ultimately a philosophical, not a sociological problem.

The study of language as a medium of communication involves consideration of the relation of linguistic to other forms of communication and the determination of the nature and limits of such communication. In the pursuance of such questions subsidiary problems of far-reaching import arise. The fundamental notions of "expression" and "understanding" (*Das Verstehen*) must be examined and analysed—in short, the conditions of intelligibility and intelligible communication. It involves, finally, an examination of the entire problem of the

relation of communication to knowledge; the relation of meaning to verification and verifiability, and the relation of these notions to communication.

C

Language and Logic

The third problem of a philosophy of language we may describe, following Mr. Russell, as the logical problem, or the relation of language to logic.

This problem has been an important one ever since logic itself came into being. As logic began with an analysis of language, so its development has involved a continuous analysis and critique of linguistic forms. The central character of this problem to-day arises out of the fact that the developments of modern logic have been in the direction of the detachment of logic from the linguistic matrix in which it formerly had its being. The logician has come to think of logical entities and relations as something wholly different from words and their grammatical relations. We have, therefore, the problem of language and logic stated in this way: What is the relation of the one set of facts—in the case of language the word or sentence—to another set of facts—in the case of logic, the terms or propositions? Or expressed normatively, what relations must the first have to the second in order to be capable of standing *significantly* for them—of being a valid surrogate for them?

This may not be, as we have suggested, the right formulation of the problem, but the problem, however formulated, raises the question of how far "logical analysis" of language may determine the meaning of terms and the sense of propositions as constitutive of discourse—in other words, how far logic is determinative of linguistic validity. The issue as here presented is, perhaps, the central one in present-day philosophy of language. For, as has already been made clear, on this issue turns, for many minds at least, the whole question of what shall and what shall not be included in meaningful or intelligible discourse.

D

Language and Knowledge

Finally, we have a problem which underlies all the others—a problem which I shall describe as the epistemological or metalogical problem of language.

As formulated by Mr. Russell, it is this: What is the relation subsisting between thoughts, words, and sentences, and that which they refer to and mean? This problem of *reference* belongs, he tells us, to epistemology. In similar fashion Carnap distinguishes this problem from the logical problem of language and describes it as metalogical. This problem of reference or of the relation of language to reality, I shall then, following Carnap, call the metalogical problem of language.

This is not the place to distinguish in detail between logical and metalogical problems of language; enough to emphasize the essential point of difference. It has been well expressed by Wittgenstein: Logic assumes that terms have meaning and that propositions have sense; it is not for logic to determine that meaning and that sense. Metalogical problems of language arise precisely at the point where we seek to determine this meaning and this sense. Meaning and sense are inseparable from reference to reality, and it is the nature of this reference which must here be investigated. The relation of sense datum or of idea to thing has always been the problem of epistemology, but if, as our historical orientation has shown, "knowledge is scarce separable from language," or if, in other words, language is involved in the intuitive process itself, the epistemological problem of language is the final problem of a philosophy of language.

E

A Synoptic View of these Problems: Problems of Intelligibility and of Truth

These four problems of the philosophy of language are recognized in one form or another by all who are engaged in the study of language, and they must be recognized and distin-

guished if there is to be any intelligent discussion of language in the philosophic sense.

I have attempted to formulate them in such a way as not to beg the issues involved, the very questions which it is hoped our study will help to solve. In stating the problems of meaning and meaningful communication, I have avoided all assumption as to the nature of meaning, whether behaviouristic or causal, whether naturalistic or idealistic. In stating the problems of the relations of language to logic and cognition I have avoided, so far as possible, all assumptions as to the relations of words and sentences to terms and propositions, all assumptions as to whether there is or is not knowledge prior to language and description, and all theories, whether realistic or idealistic, as to the nature of knowledge. We have, so to speak, temporarily at least, put all these assumptions or prejudices "into brackets." Only so is any real solution of our problems possible.

The foregoing statement of the problems of the philosophy of language invites further comment at this point. In the first place, a more synoptic view of these problems shows that they may be naturally divided into two groups, namely, problems of intelligibility and problems of truth. The very formulation of the problems involved the use of both of these conceptions. What is it to use language so as to convey the meaningful rather than the unmeaning? What is it to use language so as to convey the true rather than the false? Problems of meaning or of intelligibility and problems of truth are closely related, but they must also be carefully distinguished. Meaningful, intelligible discourse *may* be one thing; discourse that conveys truth may be another.

Certain uses of language, it is often held, may convey meanings and yet have no reference to reality. The expressive language of poetry is often held to be of this type. Other uses of language, it is also sometimes held, express neither intelligible meanings nor contain references to reality. Such, on certain views of language, is the language of metaphysics, which is supposed to play with empty words which have no objects, and to attempt with these words to express meanings which in their very nature cannot be expressed. It is not our purpose to go into these problems here, but merely to indicate the relation between problems of intelligibility and problems of truth.

Enough has been said to make it clear that these problems which arise in the use of language cannot be solved without going into the philosophical question of the nature of meaning and truth and of their relations.

V

THE PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE AND THE PROBLEM OF SYMBOLISM

A

The metalogical problem, as above defined, is concerned with the evaluation of language as a sign or symbol of reality. This aspect of the subject brings the study of language into close relations with the more general problem of the nature of symbols and of symbolism. The philosophy of language passes therefore inevitably into a philosophy of symbolism.

For any but the most primitive and naïve views of language the word is never identical with the thing, and the relation is therefore, in some sense and to some degree, symbolic. Whatever be our views of the origin and development of speech —questions which we shall consider in the next chapter—it may be accepted as certain that words and articulated speech have departed more and more from the "original source of their being." The movement of speech may indeed be described, in the formula of Cassirer, as a passage through three stages: the mimic or imitative, the analogical and the symbolic. How far this general account of the progress of language accords with the facts and conceptions of the development of language as understood by linguistic science is a problem for later consideration. It suffices for our present purpose to maintain that language, in its developed form at least, is a form of symbolism and that the philosophy of language becomes ultimately a philosophy of symbolism.

Language is, however, but one form of symbolism, and one of the problems which develops out of the philosophy of language is the relation of linguistic symbols to other forms of symbolism. Language, in the sense of articulate speech, is, we may assume, from the standpoint of practice and social communication the most important form of symbolism. But it is not necessarily the only one or, indeed, the most adequate.

There are, so to speak, other "languages," the language of mathematics and the language of art. On one view of science, at least, mathematics is both a more accurate and a more ultimate symbolism than that of articulate speech. On some theories of art, forms and colours, tones and rhythms, may express the ultimate character of reality in a way that language cannot. In general it may be said that, on some views of language at least, it is both the inner tendency and the valid goal of experience and thought to burst through the "husk of language" to non-linguistic forms of representation and symbolization as more adequate means of expression. It is at this point that one of the most pressing, as it is one of the most fundamental, problems of the philosophy of languages arises—namely, the evaluation of language in its relation to other symbolic forms. The problem as it has arisen in science is the most striking, but in principle it is no more important than that of the relation of language to other symbolic forms, such as those of art and religion.

B

Symbolism in Science and Philosophy

We have seen how the problems of a philosophy of language pass over into the larger problems of a philosophy of symbolism. The same special conditions which have led to the revival of interest in the philosophical problems of language have led to a renewal of interest in problems of symbolism.

It is primarily because of far-reaching changes in the physical sciences that this has come about. The "copy" or model theory of physical concepts which dominated the physics of the earlier nineteenth century has, as is well known, gradually given place to a purely symbolic theory. From the time of Heinrich Hertz's *Principien der Mechanik*, in which this turning-point is most definitely marked, until the present moment, the symbol concept has continually grown in importance. This is the place neither to trace the stages of this development nor to investigate the notion itself—these are problems of a later chapter—but merely to register the fact of this change and of its far-reaching implications for philosophy.

The acknowledged symbolic character of our physical concepts inevitably raises the question of the evaluation, not only of the scientific symbol but of symbolic forms in general. It is for this reason, among others, that the problem of the symbol and of symbolic forms has become, as Cassirer says, the *Brennpunkt* of modern science and philosophy. So long as the copy theory of physical concepts prevailed, so long, in other words, as men were literalists and fundamentalists in science, the problem of symbolism and of symbolic knowledge was of but minor interest and might be left to the spheres of art and religion which, for the literalist, are not, strictly speaking, forms of knowledge. With the abandonment of this literalism in science, however, the entire problem of symbolic forms—of which science is but one—is again brought into the foreground of the theory of knowledge and of philosophy generally. A theory of the scientific symbol is an essential part of every philosophy of science, but it is also a necessary part of every general theory of knowledge.

Moreover, the influence of this change is felt in the sphere of metaphysics, and the problem of the meaning and possibility of metaphysics is being explored from new angles. Is, as Bergson holds, all science essentially symbolic while metaphysics is the science that claims to dispense with symbolism? Or is metaphysics itself a form of symbolism—that form of thought, indeed, which carries the symbolizing activities of the mind to their highest pitch? Here, again, the object is to indicate problems, not to solve them. Enough has been said to make it clear not only that the philosophy of language leads inevitably to a philosophy of symbolism, but that it is precisely the central place of symbolism in modern thought which has of necessity revived and deepened the philosophical study of language.

VI

THE FINAL PROBLEM OF A PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE

A

Both the philosophy of language and the problem of symbolism, so closely related as we have seen, stand at the centre of modern culture. The reasons for this centrality should now be clear.

The two distinctively modern movements which have brought these problems into the foreground are the naturalistic conceptions of language and the symbolic theory of scientific concepts. These two developments have united to produce what I have described as neo-nominalism, and to generate problems which are distinctively characteristic of our epoch.

The centrality of the symbol-concept in modern science is undoubtedly the outstanding feature of the situation, but if is in language, after all, that the deepest roots of the modern problem are to be found. For language, in the sense of articulate speech, is that out of which non-linguistic symbols develop, and it is to this natural language that all conventional symbols, if they are to be understood and interpreted, must inevitably return. Language in the sense of speech may emerge from non-linguistic forms of expression and communication, to become a relatively autonomous form of activity. The spirit which embodies itself in this autonomous form may, in order better to achieve its ends, seek to burst through the husk of language. For the better realization and manipulation of its objects, and in the interests of a clearer notation, it may seek to substitute for language non-linguistic signs. But when we work with such substitute symbols we merely manipulate; we *say* nothing. In order to say anything about reality such symbols must again be translated into linguistic forms.

The fact remains, then, that mind or spirit is inseparable from language and linguistic form. To language it inevitably comes and to language, after all its alarms and excursions, it inevitably returns. Life, to be sure, is deeper than language, but that which is thus deeper is sense-less. I may have a sense of life, but life has no sense or meaning until it is expressed, and in the last analysis that expression must be verbal. Reality is in a sense, doubtless, beyond language, as Plato felt so deeply, and cannot be wholly grasped in its forms, but when in order to grasp reality we abandon linguistic forms, that reality, like quicksilver, runs through our fingers. In sum, language is the actuality of culture, as Hegel said. It is that alone in which both life and knowledge are actualized. In a very real sense science itself, in so far as it is defined as knowledge that is verifiable and communicable, is language well made. In an equally fundamental sense, the limits of my language are the

limits of my world. All life comes back to the question of speech, the medium through which we communicate.

B

Language and Reality

It is here, then, that the real, the deepest problem of the philosophy of language is to be found. It is the critical problem of the relation of linguistic forms, and of symbolic forms in general, to the immediately given reality.

This problem arises from a fact which, however it may be interpreted, will be universally admitted. The richer and more energetically the human spirit builds its forms and symbols the more it appears to depart from the original sources of these forms and symbols. In so doing it seems also to depart from the original sources of its own being. More and more, it seems to find itself caught in the toils of its own creations. In language, in art, and in the intellectual symbols of science, it appears that, in Bergson's words, a veil has been woven between us and reality which only a *tour de force* of intellect can tear away. Now the fact itself—that reality as we know it is other than the hypothetical pure experience out of which our knowledge has developed, is an ideal construction in which language has been the chief creative force—is indeed beyond question. The only real problem is whether our creations have taken us to reality or away from it, whether they have become a veil to be torn away, or are, after all, when properly understood, the only road we have to reality.

The former view, in one form or another, is a common assumption of a large part of modern culture and philosophy. In the words of De Gaultier, "the existence of language, civilization, culture is at a price—an evil ideology."[1] This evil ideology is the theme of the new morality, the new logic, in fact of everything that is distinctively modernistic in both science and philosophy; and since language is the actuality of culture, it is precisely against language, which "takes the word for the thing," that this sceptical animus is chiefly directed.

[1] *La Fiction Universelle* and other works.

In a sense this is the theme of Whitehead's *Process and Reality*, in so far at least as the problem of language is involved. Natural language, though valid to a certain extent for practice, has created a set of categories, an evil ideology, which distorts reality. The elimination of this ideology, and the redesigning of language to conform to reality conceived of as *events*, is the first condition of an adequate metaphysics. For the anti-metaphysical, on the other hand, it is this evil ideology which has made possible metaphysics *überhaupt*, and we have only to get rid of that to get rid of metaphysics.[1]

This is one possible answer to the question of the relation of language to reality. Language is *not* "moulded on reality," to use Bergson's terms. It is either a veil that has been woven by practice between us and reality, and which must be torn away, or else it is a distortion of reality which must be corrected by the invention of other instruments and symbolisms.

Suppose this entire assumption of a reality known independently of language, of a hypothetical pure experience, were itself an illusion; suppose reality, as we know it, is to an incalculable degree an ideal construction in which language itself is the chief organ of that construction. Then the problem would be wholly different and its solution must inevitably take another direction. The notion of a language moulded on reality would itself be a fatal metaphor and the so-called ideology of language, far from being necessarily an evil, would be the very source and stimulus of a critical dialectic by which alone experience could be interpreted and evaluated. In that case the solution of the problem of the relation of language to reality would consist, not in tearing away the veil of language, but in completing and perfecting the principles of expression and

[1] This theme of the evil ideology of language has even become grotesque in messianic hands. Count Alfred Korzybski, in his latest panacea, semantics (as developed in *Science and Sanity*, 1934), has apparently found not only the source of all evils in natural language and the subject-predicate logic, but also a cure for these evils, individual and social, in a true semantics based upon science. Wrong identification of words with things may, because of false evaluations, ruin human life, science or the entire social system. True identifications will cure insanity, create right social relationships, and eliminate from science the evil ideology which, in this case, is the survival of Aristotelianism. It would not be just to make too much of these extreme developments, but it is only fair to say that it is in principle the same theme which, in a more moderate form, underlies a large part of recent philosophic thought.

symbolism. It would proceed upon the assumption that the more richly and energetically the human spirit builds its language and symbolism, the nearer it comes, if not to the original source of its being, at least to its ultimate meaning and reality.[1]

These, then, are the two possible ways of solving this final problem of the philosophy of language. Which of the two is the valid solution it is one of the objects of this whole study to determine. In any case the statement of the problem serves but to emphasize from another angle the thesis of this entire chapter, namely, the central place of the problem of language in philosophy as a whole.

C

Plato on Language

Language, we ventured to maintain, is the last and deepest problem of the philosophic mind. It is to be hoped that this statement may now not seem so extravagant as it doubtless at first appeared. Plato's wrestling with the problem of language might well be taken as a gloss upon our theme.

The *Cratylus* has a sits main theme the problem of linguistic validity, or the relation of language to reality. Its real purpose was not the origin of language, but its nature and function, although, as Plato saw, the question of validity could not be wholly divorced from the question of origin. In this remarkable dialogue, in which most of the fundamental problems of language are already found in germ, "we see," as Jowett says, "grammar and logic moving somewhere in the human soul."

The basal problem is that of the *rightness of names*. Does knowledge of names give knowledge of things? Cratylus is inclined to think so. The way to the discovery of things is through the discovery of the meaning of names. Hermogenes doubts any natural rightness of names, any primary reference of name to thing. He wants to know wherein consists this natural rightness. Socrates admits that he cannot show it exactly, but he insists upon the fact. In our derivations we cannot go back indefinitely; somewhere we must come upon self-authenticating

[1] For a statement of this point of view, see Ernst Cassirer, *Die Philosophie der Symbolischen Formen*, Vol. I, Chapter I.

words. All words are intended to show the nature of things, and the secondary derive their significance from the primary. Into the detail of the argument of the *Cratylus* we need not enter—either into the form of the copy theory which seems to be here proposed or into the fanciful etymology, which Plato himself recognizes as being very crude, an etymology in which he seeks to find the relations of names to things by the analytical way of breaking words up into letters or the primary elements of which they are composed. Enough for our purpose that in this dialogue Plato not only insists upon the basal character of the problem of language for knowledge and philosophy, but likewise upon the existence of some *intimate and primordial relation between the word and the thing*, as the necessary condition of there being any knowledge whatsoever. One may recognize fully the experimental and even playful nature of much of the thought of this dialogue and yet sense the seriousness that runs through it. If the view put into the mouth of Socrates may be taken as indicative of Plato's position, it is clear enough what that position is. "Confidence in names should not go so far as to lead us to develop a metaphysic from them, but on the other hand it would be equally fatal to deny a fundamental relation of language to reality."[1]

Thus the Plato of the *Cratylus*. The Plato of the *Seventh Epistle* is a different matter. Through what disillusioning experiences he must have passed to justify the almost peevish expressions of this letter![2] The statement that "no intelligent man will ever be so bold as to put in language those things which his reason has contemplated," and that "if he should be betrayed into so doing then surely not the gods but mortals have utterly blasted his wits," cannot but surprise us in one for whom discourse was the very actuality of reason and for whom the one way of attaining to truth was through communication from mind to mind. But let us see what lies behind these astonishing statements.

In this letter the attempt is made for the first time in the history of thought to determine the knowledge value of language in a purely methodological fashion. It is therefore of

[1] See A. E. Taylor on this dialogue: *Plato: The Man and His Works*, pp. 75 ff.

[2] On the genuineness of this epistle, see A. E. Taylor, *op. cit*, p. 15 f. and Wilamowitz, *Plato*, I, 641 ff., II, 282 ff.

outstanding interest to us and may, in a certain sense, set the problem for the ensuing studies. Language is indeed recognized as the first step in knowledge, but it is only the first step. For everything that exists, we are told, there are three classes of objects through which knowledge about it must come: the knowledge itself is a fourth, and we must put as a fifth entity the actual object of knowledge which is the true reality. There is something, for instance, called a circle, the name is the very word I have uttered. In the second place, there is a description of it which is composed of nouns and verbal expressions. . . . In the third place, there is the class of objects which are drawn and erased and turned on the lathe and destroyed, processes which do not affect the real circle to which these other circles are all related, because it is different from them. In the fourth place, there are knowledge and understanding and correct opinion concerning them; all of which we must set down as one thing more, that is found not in souls, nor in shapes of bodies, but in minds; whereby it differs evidently in its nature from the real circle and from the afore-mentioned three. Of all these understanding approaches nearest in affinity and likeness to the fifth entity, while the others are more remote from it.

Language is represented as the *first* step in knowledge, but only the first step and, so to speak, at fourth remove from reality. Language is, as such, representation—presentation of meaning by means of a sensuous sign. So long as philosophical thought remains in this sphere of "existence" which is language, it cannot reach true being. Language and the word strive towards the expression of pure being, but they never reach it because there is always mixed with the reference to the pure being a reference to another "accidental" character of the object, therefore that which makes language incapable of representing the highest, the content of purely philosophical knowledge.

We understand now why, according to Plato, no intelligent man will put in language those things which his reason has contemplated. Plato should then have kept silent regarding this true knowledge, for even if it is attainable to him, it is incommunicable. But not only was Plato not silent, but he felt compelled to communicate the points of difference between

the word and the object. Such communication was possible only through language, and, if the communication is veridical, language itself must be capable of expressing something of true being. Evidently there is something radically wrong here. It is evidently impossible to escape the principle of the inseparability of language and knowledge, of intuition and expression, which as we have seen is assumed in different ways by empiricism and rationalism alike. It is with language that knowledge begins and to it it must inevitably return, if the notion of knowledge or science includes in it any conception of the verifiable and communicable.

There is apparently one way of escaping from this conclusion, that of mysticism, as developed in Neoplatonism and expressed in modern form by Bergson. Language, by reason of its lowly origin and nature, is incapable of apprehending and expressing reality. But language may be used in another way, not to *represent*, but to bring the hearer to a point where he himself may transcend language and pass to incommunicable insight. It is a dialectical ladder which, when we have ascended, may be kicked away. This view of the function of language, so beautifully developed in Bergson's *Introduction to Metaphysics* is, I take it, in principle the same as that of Plato. But the whole question is whether this insight and intuition, if wholly incommunicable, is *knowledge*. It is certainly unverifiable. It is true that there are other symbols than those of language, namely, the symbols of art and of mathematics, by means of which meaning may be communicated. But those symbols themselves require interpretation, and interpretation is only possible in terms of language. This, then, is only an apparent escape from the principle of the inseparability of language and knowledge. The Plato of the Seventh Letter should have been silent—even about the nature of language.

Thus Plato wrestled with the problem of language, and it is clear that, with all his wrestling, he failed to solve it. As all the fundamental problems of the philosophy of language are already in germ in his treatment of the question, so also the two possible ways of solving the problem of the relation of language to reality are already struggling for mastery in his mind. For him also language appears to be a way to reality. Some intimate and primordial relation between the word and

the thing seems to be the necessary condition of there being any knowledge. But language also seems to him to be a veil woven between us and reality which must be torn away if we are to see reality face to face. Plato failed to resolve this contradiction. Perhaps it cannot be resolved. In any case it is this contradiction that makes language the last and deepest problem of the philosophic mind, the problem upon the solution of which, in the last analysis, all our philosophies turn.

CHAPTER II

WHAT IS LANGUAGE? ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT THE SCIENCE OF LANGUAGE

I

A

IN Anatole France's *Revolt of the Angels* there is much argument on high matters. Arcade, "having at great length set up his scientific idealism in opposition to Zita's pragmatism, the beautiful archangel told him that he argued badly. 'And you are surprised at that!' exclaimed young Maurice's guardian angel. 'I argue, like you, in the language of human beings. And what is human language but the cry of the beasts of the forest or the mountains, complicated and corrupted by arrogant anthropoids. How then, Zita, can one be expected to argue well with a collection of angry and plaintive sounds like that? Angels do not reason at all; men being superior to the angels reason imperfectly. I will not mention the professors who think to define the absolute with the aid of cries which they have inherited from the pithecanthropoid monkeys, marsupials, and reptiles, their ancestors! It is a colossal joke! How it would amuse the demiurge if he had any brains!' "

In this well-known passage we have in peculiarly vivid form a characteristic philosophy of language of our time—namely, the determination of the nature, function, and limits of language in terms of its supposed origin. "Colloquial language," we are told, "is part of the human organism and is not less complicated than it. From it it is impossible humanly to gather immediately the logic of language."[1] Again, "language was invented to serve the uses of the familiar world: it may not readily be invoked to convey the meanings appropriate to another."[2] Even more important for our purposes are certain statements of Whitehead on this point. The basal thesis of *Process and Reality*, in so far as it concerns language, is also that language was invented to serve the uses of the familiar world, and that this "literary

[1] L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, p. 63.

[2] C. E. M. Joad, *Philosophical Aspects of Modern Science*, p. 307 (Published by George Allen & Unwin Ltd.).

language breaks down completely in the task of expressing in explicit form the larger generalities." More specifically, certain notions, above all the notion of substance, have entrenched themselves in language. Useful as they are for many purposes of life, whenever we attempt to use them as a fundamental statement of the nature of things, they prove themselves mistaken. Pragmatically natural language is defensible; in metaphysics it represents sheer error.[1]

B

Quaestiones Facti and Quaestiones Juris

Such statements as these—about the nature, origin, and purpose of language—constitute the premises upon which philosophical evaluations of language proceed. We know, it is argued, what language is, that it is the sounds of the forest and the mountains, "a series of squeaks and grunts," or what not; therefore we know what it can and what it cannot do. We know how it began and "what it was made for"; therefore we know that it is incapable of doing certain things—of expressing certain meanings, of "defining the absolute." These things we say we know. They are questions of fact. If so, the only source of such knowledge, of such facts, is the science of linguistics. It is accordingly incumbent upon us to find out just what linguistic science has to say on these questions, to determine, in a summary fashion at least, the prevailing notions on these and allied questions. The philosophy of language cannot proceed without this reference to the science of language.

It is obviously neither possible nor desirable to try to cover the range of linguistic science in a single chapter. We shall therefore deliberately confine ourselves to certain problems upon which fundamental philosophical issues turn—to those points in linguistic science to which appeal is made as a factual basis for the philosophical evaluation and critique of language. There are, I think, three such main points: (*a*) The question of what language is; including the question of the fundamental speech functions; (*b*) the question of the origin and development of language, including such problems as that of the *Ursprache* and that of levels of speech development; (*c*) the

[1] *Process and Reality*, pp. 16, 122.

problem of the parts of speech, or the grammatical elements of language, including the question whether these forms or elements represent in any sense "a necessary intuitive analysis of reality, or merely our ability to compose that reality into a variety of formal patterns."

Our concern is, then, with the views of present-day linguistic science on these basal questions in so far as they can be ascertained. Current philosophical evaluations of language are uniformly based upon certain assumptions regarding these three points. Our problem is to determine, if possible, to what extent these assumptions are justified by linguistics. Before proceeding to these specific questions it will be well, however, to preface our discussions by some comment upon the general situation in present-day linguistic study.

II

THE GENERAL SITUATION IN LINGUISTIC SCIENCE

A

Problems of language are, we have seen, as old as human thought; the problem of the "word" is as old as the problem of the "thing," but the scientific study of language, in the modern sense, is largely a product of the nineteenth century. The step from Humboldt and Hegel to Darwin, as Cassirer describes it, which gave birth to linguistic science in this sense, was the step from *Geist* to *Natur*, the same step which was taken in all the humanistic sciences.

The underlying assumption of the new science of language was that language is a part of nature and must therefore be studied by the methods of the natural sciences. This general assumption included also certain further assumptions, namely, that, as part of nature, it must have not only a purely human, as opposed to divine, origin, but also a natural in the sense of animal or sub-human origin; secondly, that as all other parts of nature, it must be conceived as evolving through external forces, from the simple to the complex, and that changes in speech forms must be conceived as following laws analogous to the laws of other natural objects.

It was only natural that in the pursuit of this programme

the first approach to language should be through its physical and physiological basis. Whatever else speech is, it is a collection of sounds and sounds as such can be studied only physically and physiologically. Phonetics, or the study of the origin and changes of the sounds of the human voice employed in communication, proceeded on the assumption that here also natural laws of a mechanical character analogous to those of physical nature could be formulated. This was the first stage in the scientific study of language. That interesting and useful facts have been ascertained on this assumption no linguist would deny, but that it leads us far into the understanding of language is doubtful. It is, perhaps, an exaggeration to say with Vossler that "the belief that phonetic and analogical mutations are due to the operation of natural law" is exploded and that all purely mechanical explanations are discredited, but it is beyond question that in the general methods of linguistic science, such conceptions have fallen into the background and this phase of linguistic study has in a significant degree been passed.

Similarly the step from Hegel to Darwin brought with it Darwinian conceptions and analogies, so powerful in all the humanistic sciences of the nineteenth century. S. Schleicher maintained that the theory of evolution which Darwin had developed for the species of plants and animals must be no less applicable to the organisms which we call languages. On these assumptions concepts of origin and evolution by a kind of natural selection were introduced analogous to these notions in biology. Here again it would probably be an exaggeration to say that such notions are wholly abandoned, that "naturalism no longer really fools us in the guise of biology," but most linguists would probably agree with Ch. Bally[1] that all such extensions of Darwinian doctrine were mistaken, and although they almost succeeded for a time in directing linguistics along a wrong track, that danger is in general past.

That which in the first instance brought linguistics back from its false methods was the increased emphasis upon semantics, more particularly the study of meaning from the psychological point of view. For the psychologist the meaning of words is but a special case of meaning in general, and the way to

[1] C. Bally, *La Langue et La Vie*, Paris, 1913, p. 14.

the understanding of linguistic meaning and its mutations is through the study of psychological facts and laws.[1] Add to this the field of social psychology (the *Völkerpsychologie* of Wundt, for instance), the study of language as "social fact," and the picture of linguistics at this stage of its development is complete.[2]

The psychological stage in the development of linguistics was of great importance. Even in the matter of phonetic laws (*Lautgesetze*) physiological causes tended to be displaced by psychological. Whether the psychology was that of Wundt or that of Herbart, as employed by H. Paul, the important point is that the key to language is found in mind and not in things. Significant as this change was, the limitations of the psychological point of view became evident. The revolt against *Psychologism* in the cultural sciences in general appeared in linguistics also. For one thing, language still remained a part of nature, for mind as conceived by psychology was still conceived more or less mechanically. But more important still is the notion of meaning. For meaning, while a psychological notion, is variously conceived by the different psychologies. For *Gestalt* psychology meaning is, so to speak, the primary fact, while for Behaviourism it is wholly secondary and in extreme cases extruded from psychology. But more than this. Meaning while a psychological notion is more than psychological. So soon as this truth is recognized the psychological standpoint is transcended.

[1] Pillsbury, *The Psychology of Language*, pp. 7, 14.

[2] The study of the languages of primitive peoples, such as that of Malinowski, may serve to give us not only quite different ideas as to what is necessary to language but quite different notions of its functions. The older purely intellectual notion of language, of its primary function as expression of ideas, gives way to the idea that it is indeed for communication, but not primarily for the communication of ideas. Again, such studies as those of Lévy-Bruhl in his *Fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures* may make it clear that the "indication" of a person or an object, which to us seems the only function of a name, is in the eyes of the primitive something secondary. For him the meaning of the name does not lie in this. It expresses rather the relation of the individual to his totem group, with the forefathers whose reincarnation the individual totem is, with the individual totem or guardian angel who has revealed himself in dreams, with the unseen powers which protect the secret societies into which he enters. The name did not therefore originally express the individuality of a single being, but creates and at the same time indicates the community with other beings.

B

The Autonomy of Linguistics: The New Speech Notion

In his summary picture of the present situation in linguistic studies, G. Ipsen describes their development as having passed through three stages, the physical or physiological, the psychological and the phenomenological. And with this has come what he calls the "new speech notion" and the postulate of the autonomy of linguistic science.[1] Now I should not wish to say that the term phenomenological represents the standpoint and assumptions of the whole of present-day linguistic study—certainly not the term as used in a narrow technical sense—but that which Ipsen has in mind in the use of the term is certainly beyond dispute. The idea that language is an *Urphenomen*, neither reducible to nor explainable in terms of non-linguistic fact, seems to be a common assumption of linguistic study. In other words, language is a unique phenomenon and the phenomenological standpoint consists in studying it, in the words of Ammann, in its *absoluten Besonderheit*.[2] We shall have more to say in detail of the phenomenological standpoint in a later context. Here we are concerned only with one phase of the question, namely, the significance of this stage for linguistic science. This may be expressed as the principle of the autonomy of linguistics. This principle denies that language can be reduced to or explained in terms of non-linguistic fact, and that the science which deals with this fact can be made a part of the natural sciences—of physiology, psychology, or even sociology in terms of which it was earlier defined. This notion of the autonomy of linguistics is, to be sure, but a phase of that larger movement which has been called the decentralization of the sciences, and which is closely connected with the general doctrine of emergent irreducible levels of qualitatively different fact. In any case, this new speech notion, with its doctrine of autonomy, has fixed itself more and more in linguistic science and is part of the revision of the assumptions of linguistic science of which we shall presently speak.

[1] Gunther Ipsen, *Sprachphilosophie der Gegenwart*, 1930. An excellent account of the development of linguistic science and of the philosophical problems involved.

[2] H. Ammann, *Die Menschliche Rede*, Vol. I, pp. 10 ff.

The key to the passage of linguistic study through these three stages and to the development of the present "speech notion" is to be found in the problem of meaning. It is the recognition of the fact that the essence of language is found in meaning and of the unique and irreducible character of meaning which constitutes the phenomenological standpoint.

This principle of the *Primat des Sinnes*, as Cassirer calls it, may be stated in this way. The sole entrance into the understanding of language is through meaning, for meaning is the *sine qua non* of linguistic fact. Language for modern linguistics is not the sound, nor again the motor and tactual sensations which make up the word—not even the associations called up by the sound or the motor processes; it is the meaning itself which, while conditioned by these, is not identical with any or all of them. The nature of this meaning is the problem of the next chapter; here we shall consider merely the significance of this principle of primacy for linguistic study.

This significance is far reaching. It means negatively, as we have seen, the denial of the adequacy of physical, physiological, or even psychological, approaches to language. But it involves also significant changes in methodology. Earlier methods proceeded from the elements to the whole—from the sounds to the words, from words to sentences, and finally to the meaning of discourse as a whole. The present tendency is the exact opposite—namely, from meaning as *Gestalt* to the sentences and words as elements. The spirit which lives in human discourse works as a totality constituting the sentence or proposition, the copula, the word and the sound.[1]

C

The Return from Nature to Mind: Revision of Assumptions

If, then, we attempt to envisage this movement within linguistics as a whole, it seems clear that, as Cassirer has said, methodologically understood, it has been a movement in a circle. So far as the assumptions underlying its procedure are concerned, a revision has taken place to such an extent that it is again approaching the standpoint from which it started. As it took

[1] *Die Philosophie der Symbolischen Formen*, Vol. I, pp. 110 ff.

the step from mind to nature, so now in a very real sense it is turning again from nature to mind.

Linguistic science, it was held, should be based upon natural science in order that it may attain the same certainty and the same exact character, with the same universal laws. But gradually these notions of physical and physiological, of biological and psychological "laws" showed themselves mistaken and untenable. The entire conception of nature and natural law upon which it was sought to build turned out to be merely a fictitious unity, including very disparate elements. Thus, as the naturalistic and positivistic scheme which constituted the programme of the science tended gradually to break up, there has also been a tendency towards a gradual return to the traditional notion of language. An outstanding representative of this tendency is Karl Vossler, who in his *Positivismus und Idealismus in der Sprachwissenschaft* (1904) and *Sprache als Schöpfung und Entwickelung* makes clear both the grounds and the stages of this return.

It is not our desire to over-emphasize the importance of this revision of assumptions or to exaggerate the extent of this change of view among linguists. The positivists are doubtless still many. For the purposes of our discussion it is enough that the opposition exists. For it challenges the dogmatic assumptions upon which so much of the philosophy of language has been reared.

III

WHAT IS LANGUAGE? THE MEANING FUNCTIONS OF LANGUAGE

A

With this general picture of linguistic science, we may turn to the more specific problems concerning which the philosopher must go to linguistic science for an answer. The first of these is, what is language? What, then, is this thing language about which philosophers and scientists make statements upon which so much hinges? This question is presented with certain grave difficulties at the outset. Is there any such thing as language as such? Are there not after all merely languages and not language? Is not language after all merely an abstraction made by the grammarians? It is often said that it is a paradox of

linguistic science that it has come to doubt the existence of its own object. Now language, in the sense of a universal language, is doubtless an abstraction of the grammarians. Purely empirically there are only languages and not language. Nevertheless it is about language and not languages that the logician and philosopher talk. All their statements as to what language is and what it does are about language as such, not about the language of Hottentot or philosopher, of Greek or Chinese. There must be *some speech-notion*; otherwise we can make no statements about what language is or does. Has linguistic science anything to say about what language as such is? If so, it is important to know just what it says.

B

The Nature of Linguistic Fact: the Primacy of Meaning

Every field of study or science is concerned with a certain type of facts. What, then, are linguistic facts? By language in the widest sense is often understood any means of communication between living beings. It includes all expressive movements and all secretions.[1] Under the term language is often included non-linguistic means of communication such as the "language" of art, mathematics, and various forms of symbolism. These broader uses of language are justified in certain contexts. Speech as a form of "behaviour" cannot be isolated from other forms of behaviour with which it is closely connected genetically and functionally. Again, it is the character of communication and representation to break through the husk of speech and to develop other forms of symbolism. The functions of language in the narrower sense cannot be understood without reference to these non-linguistic "languages." On the other hand, a definition of language that is extended to cover all forms of communication and types of reference, becomes, as Sapir tells us, utterly meaningless, and linguistic science must start at least with speech, with expression through articulate sounds.[2] This, then, is the first element in the speech-notion as understood by linguistic science. This it is that constitutes "linguistic fact." What, then, is the nature of that fact?

[1] Pillsbury, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

[2] Edward Sapir, *Language*, p. 3.

We may best determine this notion by considering what language is not, by a process of elimination. First of all, language as *linguistic fact* is not the sound. The word "house" is not a linguistic fact if we understand by word merely the effect of the vowels and consonants that compose it. These latter may be studied by phonetics, and changes in the vowels and consonants may throw light on certain aspects of the development of language, but by themselves they do not constitute language. Nor is language the motor processes and tactual sensations that make up the articulation of the word. These, too, are important from the standpoint of the physiological and psychological studies of language, and in some extreme theories identical with linguistic fact; but while speech, as meaning, is closely related both to muscular reaction and tactile sensation, it is not identifiable with them.

On the question as to what linguistic fact is not, linguists are in general agreed. They are also agreed upon what it is that constitutes positively linguistic fact. The *sine qua non* of language is precisely the *meaning* of which the sounds, the motor processes and tactual sensations, are the *bearers*. This is the principle of the primacy of meaning of which we have already spoken. What, then, is the nature of this meaning? The answer to this question is of course possible only on the basis of the analysis of the following chapter and we shall not anticipate the results of that analysis here. Two points are, however, of importance in the present context. In order that we may understand what is involved in this new speech-notion these must be brought out clearly.

The first of these concerns the *differentia* of linguistic meaning, that which for ever differentiates the meaning of "words" from the meaning of "things." The essence of language is the representation, *Darstellung*, of one element of experience through another—the *bi-polar relation* between the sign or symbol and the thing signified or symbolized, and the consciousness of that *relation*.[1] Until this element of *Darstellung*, of predication in some form however potential arises, language and linguistic meaning cannot be said to exist. The significance of this con-

[1] The two most important influences in the development of this speech-notion are said to be F. de Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale*, edited by Ch. Bally (1916, 1922), and E. Husserl, *Logische Untersuchungen*, second edition, 1913.

cept of linguistic meaning will be brought out more definitely in the next section on the meaning functions of language and in our discussions of the origins of language. Here we wish merely to emphasize the fact that it is a necessary part of the present speech-notion.[1]

The second element of importance in the new speech-notion is that language and linguistic meaning exist only in the speech community. In other words, part of the notion of meaning in the linguistic sense is communication and communicability. In this connection linguists frequently distinguish between speech and language. This is the basal theme of A. H. Gardiner's book entitled *The Theory of Speech and Language*. The distinction is of such importance for the philosophy of language that it will be well to consider it briefly.

On this view, speech is the primary notion and language the derivative, the product of speech. Language is, then, the *petrifact* of living creative speech. This distinction, with its emphasis on the primacy of the speech-notion, has important consequences for both linguistics and the philosophy of language. It affects the methodology of the study of language, turning our attention to the wholes of meaning within living speech, rather than to the merely analytical study of the elements of a petrifact.[2] On this view the problem of the necessary parts of speech becomes, as we shall see, significantly different from that of the grammatical forms of languages. It throws doubt, as we shall also see, upon that artificial standpoint in logic which would relate words as things or entities with terms in propositions, also conceived as entities. All these consequences are of importance. Here, however, I wish to emphasize only one thing. Language, when viewed as speech, has reality only in a speech community. When abstracted from that it loses its reality. Meaning, we have seen, is the *sine qua non* of linguistic fact, and this meaning includes as part of its nature communicability. Meaning does not first exist and is then communicated; it exists only in communication. Intuition and expression are one.

[1] On this general point consult E. Cassirer, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 126 ff.; Vol. III, pp. 126 ff.; and G. de Laguna, *op. cit.*, p. 75 ff.

[2] *Op. cit.*, Chapters II and III.

C

The Meaning Functions of Language

To the question, What is language? modern linguistics answers uniformly in terms of meaning. Language in the sense in which the notion is used in present-day linguistics has as its central and determining concept that of meaning. It is *not* the sounds of the forests or mountains, however complicated they may be, but those sounds as the bearer of non-sensuous meaning. Moreover—and this is an equally important part of the notion—this meaning is a function of communication. The question now arises, what does this notion of meaning include? What are the meaning functions of language?

We have already seen that one meaning function, namely, that of representation, *Darstellung*, predication, is in general conceived to be part of the nature of language as such. To this is generally added two other functions which we may describe as the indicative and the emotive or evocative. Speaking generally, it may be said, I think, that present-day linguistics recognizes these three primary meaning functions of language, three types of meaning which are present in some form wherever there is linguistic fact, and which are irreducible one to the other. Different terms are often used for these three functions, but the notions underlying the terms are the same.

The significance of the question here raised is found in the fact that it is part of the question, what language is: the answer to it is in terms of what language does. But it has a further significance in the fact that in many quarters there is opposed to this conception one which we may describe as a theory of dual functions. In many philosophies of language it is assumed, either explicitly or implicitly, that language has but two functions, namely, the indicative and the evocative or emotive—any primary representative function, either intuitive or symbolic, being denied. An important element in this theory is the view that these "uses of language" are independent of each other in the sense that some uses of language are wholly indicative and some wholly emotive and evocative. On these assumptions, as to fact, certain normative conclusions, as to what language ought to be, are based and

a critique of language is undertaken which involves vital issues for philosophy. The entire philosophy of language of Ogden and Richards is based upon these premises, and it is also a cardinal assumption of the so-called Vienna School being explicitly asserted by Carnap.[1]

This is not the place to go into all the issues raised by this dual theory, nor indeed to attempt to refute it as an element or assumption of a philosophy of language. The question will be considered more fully in the chapter on the Phenomenology of Linguistic Meaning and in other contexts. Here we wish merely to maintain that it finds no justification in linguistics —that from the point of view of linguistics a use of language which was purely indicative would be no language at all. Still less would a purely emotive. The *sine qua non* of language, according to the present speech-notion, is the presence of all three functions.

From the point of view of linguistics the question has both a phenomenological and a genetic aspect. The first aspect has to do with what is intrinsic to the speech-notion itself. Few would deny that developed language fulfils all these functions, and that these three functions are the *sine qua non* of linguistic fact. Ejaculatory words express feelings, emotions, inner states; names indicate objects and many words are distinctively representative in character—not only indicative but stand more or less adequately for objects. The modern "speech-notion" insists, however, that only when these three functions are present do we have language. In other words, there is no emotive expression without indication and representation in some degree; no indication without the other functions, and, similarly, no representation without expression and indication.

The genetic problem is, of course, of quite a different order. From the beginning one of the problems of linguistics has been the attempt to derive developed language, with all its meaning

[1] The origin of this theory seems to be in certain distinctions made by Hughlings Jackson in his studies in abnormal psychology (*Brain*, XXXVIII, p. 113), more especially of disturbances of speech functions. In these studies he distinguished between "emotional" and "propositional" language, between "inferior" and "superior" speech functions. Now, whatever value such a dual distinction may have for the purposes for which he made it, it serves merely to distort the picture when applied to linguistics and the philosophy of language. On this whole question, see E. Cassirer, *op. cit.*, Vol. III, pp. 246 ff.

functions, from one primary function. The interjectional, onomatopoeic, and other theories represent this attempt. Of these theories and their failure we shall speak briefly presently. As a result of their inadequacy, however, recent views stress the presence of all three functions on the lowest levels of linguistic development. Thus Professor de Laguna attempts to derive articulate speech from animal cries and stresses the presence of all three functions (implicitly) in these cries. Her thesis is that in the animal cry of the proclamation type all three functions are present. The cry proclaims the presence of the object and is thus indicative; it expresses an emotional attitude, as in the warning cry; and, finally, it has at least the *potentiality* of predication, in that it proclaims or "says" something about the object which it indicates. On this genetic aspect of the question we shall have more to say presently when we come to problems of origin. Professor de Laguna's theory at least serves to emphasize the general view of linguistics that all three functions are intrinsic to the speech-notion as such.[1]

D

Definitions of Language: the New Speech-Notion

The discussions of the present section are all subsidiary to the basal question, What is language? When one asks what anything—any subject of discourse—is, it is customary to answer with definitions. It is, however, precisely such things as religion, science, language, etc., which are hardest to define because of the plurality of contexts in which such terms are used. The chief difficulty, however, lies in the fact that if our definition is to be framed so as to cover all forms of the cultural phenomenon in question, it will take one form; if, however, it is to be so framed as to characterize intensively the developed forms of religion, science, or language, as the case may be, it will inevitably take another form. This it need hardly be said is peculiarly true in the case of language. We have no desire by definition to beg the very questions which the further discussions of this chapter necessarily raise, but merely by a tentative definition to indicate the general standpoint from which language is now viewed.

[1] *Speech: Its Function and Development.*

A definition given by Sapir represents in part at least this present standpoint. "Language is a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions, desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols."[1] This definition is even more significant for what it denies than for what it affirms. It denies by implication the entire reductive point of view of the naturalistic approach and in so far expresses the tendency towards autonomy in linguistics. Positively it stresses the voluntary creative character of symbol formation in language and to that extent also expresses the present tendencies in linguistics.

This definition has been criticized by Professor de Laguna as belonging to the older intellectualistic tradition which defined language as a medium for expressing and communicating ideas and which therefore assumed a dualism between ideas and words, between content and medium. Such a conception, she holds, is wholly inadequate for a successful psychological study of speech and proposes a purely behavioural and objective conception.[2] The issue here is not what is language for the *psychologist*, but for the linguist. And from his point of view *expression* and communication are the *sine qua non* of language. The traditional conceptions may have over emphasized the idea side of language and made too sharp a dualism between content and medium, but the essence of that conception is still fundamental in the present speech-notion. Language, according to Humboldt's famous definition, is "the ever-repeated labour of the mind to utilize articulated sounds to express thoughts." That definition, properly interpreted, is as much a characterization of the new speech-notion as of the old.

IV

THE ORIGIN OF LANGUAGE

A

From the beginning reflection upon languages has been preoccupied with origins. In the *Cratylus* Plato was primarily concerned with questions of linguistic validity, but he could not separate them from questions of origin. In the latter part

[1] *Op. cit.*, p. 4.

[2] *Op. cit.*, pp. 9 ff.

of the eighteenth century when language first became an object of special study and not merely an appendix to philosophical inquiry, a common title for such works was the origin and nature of language. In such classical works as Lord Monboddo's on *The Origin and Progress of Language* and Herder's *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache*, the two problems were never separated. Nor are they in fact separated to-day. As the quotations at the beginning of this chapter indicated, the questions of the nature, function, and limits of language are still answered in terms of their supposed origin.

Our present concern with questions of origin is limited wholly to their bearing upon philosophical issues—that is, solely to origins in so far as they are appealed to as a basis for evaluations. From this point of view it is important to recognize that the problem of origins has had very different meanings. Of these we may distinguish three, namely: (*a*) the problem of ultimate or metaphysical origin; (*b*) the problem of the *Ursprache*, or the original functions of human speech, and (*c*) the origin of articulate speech from non-linguistic expression.[1]

B

Meanings of the Concept of Origin

To the "pre-scientific speculators" on the subject of language the metaphysical problem was uppermost. Language seemed to them a structure of such marvellous perfection that it could not be conceived as the work of man, but must be God-given, of more than human origin. This notion passed, largely through the work of Humboldt, into a conception of origin which, while still metaphysical, displaced the notion of the Divine mind by that of over-individual mind or *Geist*. Language seemed to him to "spring out of the depth of humanity in such fashion that it forbids being conceived as the mere product or creation of peoples. It involves an independence or self-sufficiency, obvious although not explainable ultimately, and is, when viewed from this aspect, not a creation of our activity but

[1] Closely connected with the problem of origin is that of the development or "progress" of language. In so far as this notion is significant for the philosophy of language, it is treated in Appendix I.

an involuntary emanation of the spirit (*Geist*), not the work of nations but a gift of inmost fate or destiny."

With this metaphysical concept of origin is closely connected the question of the *Ursprache* or the character of original language. With the emphasis upon *Geist* and creativity, it was only natural that the original form of language should have been conceived as poetic and the emphasis put on the relations of myth and language. This notion was developed especially by Herder in his *Abhandlung*. On the basis of a cultural philosophy and a critique of modern science with its intellectualistic tendencies, he developed a conception of the *Ursprache* which had great influence in his own day and survives in the conceptions of language of Croce and Vossler to-day.

With the triumph of "scientific" conceptions of origin both of these problems receded into the background, and with the notion of evolution from simple to complex the problem for linguistics became that of the origin of the simple elements out of which the articulate complicated speech developed. The older problems receded into the background but, as we shall see, were still there, to reappear in new forms.

C

Scientific Problems of Origin: the Doctrine of Primitive Roots

The step from Humboldt and Hegel to Darwin transformed then, for the time being at least, the entire problem of origin. The methodological assumptions which resulted from that step were that language is but a part of nature and must be studied as such; that, as a part of nature, it must have a purely natural origin; and finally, that it must have evolved by purely natural laws from simple uncomplicated elements to complex and articulated forms. Theories of origin therefore took the form of a doctrine of primitive roots. The problem of linguistic science was to discover the most primitive and elementary sounds which are immediately intelligible and to develop all mediated and extrinsic meanings from them. In the words of W. D. Whitney, it is the problem of "immediately given self-significant and self-authenticating sounds." It is at this point that the famous theories known as the interjectional and

onomatopoeic came into play. Their bearing upon our problems must be considered briefly.

The interjectional theory would explain speech in somewhat the following way. The interjection *ach* conveys an immediately intelligible emotive meaning. By a well-known process of association, this sound becomes a name for the mental state expressed and we have the noun *ache*. Now it is true that emotions constantly give rise to meaningful expressions, but few specific names of objects or even of mental states can be traced to these expressions. All attempts to explain the origin of language in this way have been fruitless. There is no tangible evidence, historical or other, tending to show that the mass of speech elements or processes has evolved out of interjections.

The onomatopoeic theory is in much the same case. Names given to objects, especially to animals, are often imitations of the sounds made. Evidence for this is found not only in the languages of primitives, but in that of children. Many words which we do not now feel to have a sound-imitative value can be shown to have once had a phonetic form which strongly suggests their origin as imitations of natural sounds, such as the English word laugh. For all that, it is quite impossible to show, nor does it seem reasonable to suppose, that more than a negligible portion of the elements of speech, or anything at all of its formal apparatus, is derivable from an onomatopoeic source. However much we may be disposed on general principles to assign a fundamental importance in the languages of primitive peoples to the imitation of natural sounds, the actual fact of the matter, as is generally recognized, is that these languages show no particular preference for imitative words. The most primitive peoples of aboriginal America, for instance, particularly the Alaskan tribes of the Mackenzie River, have languages in which such words seem to be nearly or entirely absent.[1]

Linguists are, accordingly, pretty generally agreed in their evaluation of this type of theory. The general position of linguistic science may perhaps be expressed in the following way. No one of these theories, taken by itself, is capable of explaining human language. Each explains part and there is nothing to hinder us combining them. But even when com-

[1] Sapir, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

bined, they do not explain everything, especially they fail to explain the central parts of language and its complex structure, the fundamental parts of speech and their grammatical relations. Moreover, all three theories make certain unconscious assumptions which are in harmony neither with the facts of recent linguistic science nor with our present notions of psychological functions. So far as the former are concerned, such theories assume that single words are the units of communication and develop in isolation, whereas it is probable that sentences and larger unities came first and that words are the result of analysis helped by written language. Psychologically also, the notion that sentences and larger unities came first and that single words are the results of analysis is more in harmony with the present notion of the primacy of *Gestalten* and of elements as the results of analysis. In all these theories a further assumption is tacitly made, namely, that up to the creation of language man was, so to speak, mute and inexpressive, whereas it is much more probable that he had already been able to communicate both by vocal and other organs through something which was not yet speech but might lead to speech. It is as a result of the reconsideration of these assumptions as much as of the inadequacy of the theories themselves that the theories of the origin of language in gesture and in animal cries arose.

Despite the inadequacy of theories of this type there is one notion which underlies them that must be noted and understood. They all assume the idea of the necessity of immediately intelligible self-significant elements or aspects of speech and that out of these the indirectly significant or symbolic forms develop. This assumption must, it would seem, be held fast to in some form. It is true, of course, that developed language is a racial acquisition, a non-instinctive method of communication, a system of *voluntarily* produced symbols. But the thesis that all language is convention is difficult to make intelligible —in plain words, nonsense. If we go back to any point at will and assume that no symbolic or representative element or means of communication were present at all, it is extremely difficult to see how it could ever arise. With regard more specifically to the onomatopoeic theory, it is undoubtedly true, as we have seen, that while imitative sounds actually play a slight

rôle in primitive languages and that what is called the formal apparatus of language is not directly derivable from that source nevertheless the relation of the word to thing, implied in these imitative elements, seems to have been determinative in the primitive speech consciousness.

D

Speech and Gesture "Language"

The dispute over *Urworte* has then, as Cassirer says, largely disappeared from linguistic science. The doctrine of primitive roots is no longer the concept of real historical existents, but of pure abstractions. So far as the problem of origins remains in linguistic science, the problem has been transferred from the linguistic to the non-linguistic field. Modern theories of origin seek to derive linguistic from non-linguistic communication and to understand human language by carrying it back to non-human, animal forms of communication. With the development of activistic as distinguished from intellectualist conceptions of language, the problem of language was subsumed under the more general psychological problem of expressive movements and motor reactions.

Of outstanding importance in this movement was Wundt's theory of language developed in his *Völkerpsychologie*. Oral speech has arisen, according to him, as a modification of more general expressive movements of the body which constituted a sort of primitive gesture language. He points out that two main forms of gesture are to be distinguished, the imitative and indicative. With his hands man points and imitates or represents. If, therefore, the intimate relation between sound movements and other movements is recognized from the beginning, we have in principle the means of understanding how the various functions of language arose. The arms and hands, Wundt points out, are from the earliest stages of man's development the organs with which he grasps and controls things. These obviously original uses of the organs of prehension differ from analogous activities in nearly related animals only in grade, not in nature. Out of these primitive functions arise, by one of these gradual changes which in their results form

important elements in progressive movement, the first forms of pantomime movement. The latter are nothing else than the grasping movements weakened to functions of indication. This development, Wundt also points out, appears in all stages of the child life, from the simplest to the most developed. The child also grasps at all objects which, because they are too far away, he cannot reach. Thereupon these movements pass involuntarily and immediately into pointing movements. After oft-repeated attempts to grasp the objects, the pointing movements become established of themselves.[1]

The triumph of Wundt's psychology of language, a linguist has recently said, is the inclusion of language in the field of expressive movements, and there seems to be no reason to doubt the importance of gesture in the development of the indicative and representative functions of primitive sounds. Its significance, in contrast to the earlier theories, is to be found in the fact that it helps to make intelligible the "meaning" or *Deutung* function in language. This function is derived from the merely biological functions of grasping and manipulating, but once it is developed it has already been inseparably united with the sound movements, conceivably merely emotive or imitative at the beginning. Through this association, the sounds themselves gradually take on the functions of indication which were primarily if not exclusively subserved by gesture. The earlier theories, we saw, were not able to explain the origin of non-significant sounds in language and the fundamental parts of speech. This the gesture theory to some extent at least does.

E

Human Speech and Animal Cries

The reflections of the latter paragraph lead us to consider the problem of the origin of language from animal cries, in other words, the question of its sub-human origin.

Traditionally speech was that which distinguished man from the lower animals. Whether it was looked upon as a special gift of God or as a creation conscious or unconscious of Reason, whether considered as a native human endowment or

[1] Wilhelm Wundt, *Völkerpsychologie*, Vol. I, p. 129 f.

as developed in experience, it was still conceived as the unique possession of man. With the step from Humboldt to Darwin, speech like every other human character became a part of nature; the general reductive procedure was applied to speech also. However "complicated" later, it is, in its essence and nature, the cries of the forest and mountains, and between these and its complicated forms there is in principle no difference. This assumption, so long taken for granted, is now undergoing revision at the hands of linguistic science itself, and it is important to see just what the situation is. The statement already quoted that language is a *purely human*, non-instinctive activity is a fair indication of the situation. It is important to see just what that statement means.

The question of an animal language is, of course, partly a matter of definition. If we define language at the beginning as any means of communication of living beings, we have by that definition already asserted the existence of animal language out of which the human develops. If, on the other hand, we define speech so as to include the notion of meaning, and the three meaning functions of language, emotive, indicative and representative or symbolic, the problem is quite clear.

The view that all the meaning functions of language are present explicitly or implicitly in animal cries is often maintained. This thesis is ably expounded and argued by Professor de Laguna. In animal cries of the proclamatory type all three functions are inherently present. The cry proclaims the presence of the object and is thus indicative; it expresses an emotional attitude, as in the warning cry; and finally, it has at least the potentiality of predication in that it proclaims something about the object or situation which it thus indicates.[1] The question here raised is obviously one of fact and not of theory. It is equally obvious that the question of fact is one upon which the animal psychologist is alone competent to pronounce. It must be admitted also that in so far as conclusions have been reached they are scarcely favourable to the above thesis.

All students of animal psychology agree that the great apes, for instance, have a considerable range of different sounds or cries and that they are ordinarily used in the expression of emotional attitudes. There is a difference of opinion as to

[1] *Op. cit.*, p. 28.

whether these sounds are connected with particular objects or situations and so constitute what is called a *real* language, but the weight of opinion is that they are not. Thus B. W. Köhler insists that the phonetic expressions of animals, even of the higher apes, lack entirely the indicative and representative functions. "It may be taken as positively proved," he writes, "that their [the apes'] gamut of phonetics is entirely 'subjective' and can only express emotions, never designate or describe objects. But they have so many phonetic elements that are also common to human languages that their lack of articulate speech cannot be ascribed to secondary (glossolabial) limitations. Their gestures, too, of face and body, like their expressions in sounds, never designate or describe objects."[1] Again, in another article he speaks of the enormous manifold of *Ausdrucksbewegungen* through which the animals "understand each other," but there can be no talk of any sort of speech between them—of any *Zeichen und Darstellungsfunction* of specific sounds or movements.[2]

We may doubtless challenge the statement of Köhler that it is "positively proved" that these meaning functions are absent in the lower animals. Professor de Laguna deplores the absence of empirical evidence one way or another, an absence which she frankly admits. But we may surely say with Cassirer that the observations of recent animal psychology seem to widen rather than narrow the gulf between animal communication and human language. The most that we can say, perhaps, is that there are in animals functions analogous to those which characterize human language. In summarizing the situation he insists that of the three speech functions, the only one that is definitely present in animals is the expressive or emotive. Of the indicative function we may find analogies, but whatever element of indication may be present it is of the vaguest sort and refers only to the vaguest situations. Of the element of representation, or predication in any significant sense, there seems not the faintest trace. I am disposed to agree with Cassirer that this third meaning function is an absolutely *sine qua non* of any meaningful speech-notion, and that what is called animal

[1] *Mentality of Apes*, p. 317; also *Zur Psychologie des Schimpansen*, Psych. Forsch., Bd. I, Sections 27, 29.

[2] *Zur Psychologie des Schimpansen*, Psych. Forsch., Bd. I, Sections 27, 29.

speech "seems to be permanently held fast in a pre-linguistic stage."[1]

In any case this is the growing conviction of linguists, and what is called the *hiatus* between animal expression and human speech is more and more emphasized, leading, as we have seen, to the definition of speech as a "human, non-instinctive function." The hiatus is found precisely where Aristotle found it long ago. The step to human language is first made when the pure meaningful sound achieves supremacy over the affective stimulus-born sounds and this achievement has in it the character of a unique level of being. The notion of speech as an *Urphenomen* which is part of the new speech-notion in linguistics seems more and more confirmed by studies in animal psychology.

F

The Question of the Ursprache

From the earliest reflections on speech, when it was looked upon either as a divine gift or a human invention, the question of the nature of that original language was uppermost in men's minds. With the step from *Geist* to *Natur*, it naturally fell into the background, but the problem, in a different form, is becoming significant again.

For a philosophy of language the question of origins in this form is if anything more significant than the question of its sub-human origin, for it is upon views as to what human speech is in its original or primary form that many conclusions are based as to its intrinsic functions and limits. Speech was made to do so and so; it may not readily be invoked to do other things.

In the pre-Darwinian period the problem of the *Ursprache* revolved wholly about the question of the "logical" versus the "poetic" character of the primary language. For those to whom language was essentially *Geist* the problem was solely as to the aspect of *Geist* which is primary in language. Those who, in the spirit of Leibniz and the rationalists generally, looked upon sense and imagery as confused idea, thought of the *Ursprache* in essentially intellectualistic terms. For the anti-intellectualist tendency of the Romantics the *Ursprache* was "poetic" in

[1] *Op. cit.*, Vol. I, Chapter III, p. 127 f.

character and the strictly logical aspects a later development. Closely bound up with this problem was that of the nature of myth and of its relation to language.

Herder in his famous work *Ueber den Ursprung der Sprache* had emphasized the primarily mythical nature of all words and speech forms—in other words, the origin of language in myth. The linguistics of the romantic period carried this theory further. Schelling, for example, saw in language a "verblichene Mythologie," which retained in abstract and formal distinctions that which mythology had apprehended in concrete and living differences. With the nineteenth century the opposite road of explanation was followed. Mythology was derived from language, in some cases considered a "disease of language." Max Müller and others followed this line, holding that by means of comparative mythology the derivation of myth from language could be shown.

This battle over the temporal priority of myth or language really is not so much a question of temporal priority as of the ideal relations between these two forms of symbolism, the mythical and the linguistic, and of the way in which each influences the development of the other. The question of actual priority cannot, of course, be empirically determined. That which seems undoubted, however, is that from the beginning language and myth stand in inseparable correlation, out of which they gradually developed as independent processes. Both are expressions of one fundamental tendency to symbol formation, namely, the principle of radical metaphor that lies at the heart of all symbolizing function.[1]

Since the Darwinian epoch the problem of the *Ursprache* has, as I have suggested, taken another form. It is no longer a question of the primacy of the rational or the poetic and mythical, but of the primacy of the "practical." Here again the question of actual priority cannot, of course, be empirically determined. The primitive languages open to our study are already "developed" in the sense that the fundamental groundwork of language is already present. They are also developed in the sense that the practical and the poetic are equally present, the question of the primacy of the one over the other being purely speculative, the determination of which can be

[1] Ernst Cassirer, *Sprache Und Mythos*, pp. 69 ff.