Talking Animals

Philosophische Hefte

λογος

Die Open-Access-Stellung der Datei erfolgte mit finanzieller Unterstützung des Fachinformationsdiensts Philosophie (https://philportal.de/)

DOI: https://doi.org/10.30819/5145

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Band 13

Herausgegeben von
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Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über http://dnb.d-nb.de abrufbar.

ISBN 978-3-8325-5145-2
ISSN 2567-1758

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http://www.logos-verlag.de

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Preface

Human beings are the only animals that can talk ("homo loquens"). They are, more generally, the only animals that can use symbols (words, pictures, graphs, and numbers), bridging thus the gap between one person and another, conveying thoughts, desires, feelings, and being able truly to understand. Human beings are the only mammals that can laugh at jokes, tell lies, and do arithmetic. The study of language is nearly coextensive with the study of human behaviour, especially, if we take this to be a practice of sharing attitudes, conventions, traditions, knowledge, and culture.

Human beings are talkers. Talkers are social beings. They act, and interact. Speech is interaction between partners, united by a shared community of understanding. Talkers share rules that regulate the arrangement of words and sentences. They share conventions concerning how to use words and combine them. They share assumptions and claims connected to what they utter and say. Speaking a language is a matter of relatedness and patterning.

Human beings are the subject matter of the following two essays: human beings "sub specie linguae".

Situated Utterances

The "philosophy of language" is an attempt to analyse certain general features of language such as reference, meaning, truth, speech acts, and logical structure. The philosophy of language is, therefore, the name of a subject matter within philosophy. "Linguistic philosophy", on the other hand, consists in the attempt to solve philosophical problems by analysing the meanings of words, and by analysing logical relations between words in natural languages. "Linguistic philosophy" is the name of a philosophical method. However, the two (subject and method) are intimately connected. Most of the influential linguistic philosophers like Bertrand Russell, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Rudolf Carnap, Willard Van Orman Quine, Peter Strawson, John Austin, John Searle, and Donald Davidson, to name only but a few, have been in varying degrees philosophers of language.

It is the task of philosophers of language to say something about the relation between language and world, mind and reality, the productivity (or "generativity") and efficiency of language, the relativity of speaking this or that language, and the many functions of language (like passing information, maintaining relations, and trying to persuade other people to do certain things).

Accomplishing their task, philosophers of language are confronted with general philosophical problems they cannot avoid, problems that have been treated in the history of philosophy in such a way that wrong conceptions, opposing views, and confusions came about. Philosophers of language can (frequently) clarify certain questions by appeal to syntactical and semantic considerations. Examining the workings of language, they develop conclusive arguments and eliminate all sorts of distortions that tend to proliferate in philosophical matters.

Concerning language, linguists are the professional scientists who do the hard piecemeal work. Philosophers of language tend to put forward and defend general perspectives and programmatic statements. However, when linguists operate with unnecessary, idle and obscure ideas, the critical work philosophers accomplish becomes valuable. Do we really need “possible worlds” to explain modal terms? Is there really a “universal grammar” or an innate (genetically implemented) grammaticality competence? Is “rules fitting” behaviour “rules guided” behaviour, i.e. a behaviour that applies inborn necessary rules? Affirming less, and doing it hypothetically, even if it may be sometimes disappointing, could be the right way to arrive at well-founded explanations.

Then in linguistic matters, like in many other domains, less is frequently more.

1 Coordinated Reference

Infants learn language. Language is instrumental to doing something in the real world. Language is effective. Using language, infants get things done with words.

Learning language presupposes a series of general non-linguistic functions like predicting the environment, interacting, getting to goals with the aid of others, and the like. The acquisition of language facilitates and makes possible better accomplishments of those functions.

The acquisition of language is a highly interactive affair. "Language Acquisition Support Systems" (like relevant "others", routines, procedures, games, and rule-governed interactions) play an important role (Bruner, 39ff.).

Interacting with others, infants learn to refer to aspects, things, and events in the world. Referring is getting connected with what there is. At the same time, referring is directing others' attention by linguistic means, i.e. coordinating reference. "Deixis" may be the source of reference, as John Lyons and many others argue. But reference is

more than that. Reference is also relating one's own referential acts to the acts of other people in specific situations. Jerome Bruner speaks of reference as being "negotiated": "... the achievement of reference by the child depends upon his mastery of discourse and dialogue rules as much as upon his individual skills at linking percepts with sounds and with representations of the world in his head" (Bruner, 88).

Interacting with others, children get to grammar. There are steps in the direction of becoming a standard speaker of a language.
One-word-utterances are followed by two-word-utterances, and then by three-and-more-words utterances on the way from simple syntax to a more complex syntax that makes possible conversation, questions, passing information, describing and narrating discourses.

The acquisition of so-called "first verbs" during the 2nd year of life seems to be a major turning point in children's transition to adultlike grammatical competence. Such verbs, like the verb "to give", contain what has been called "grammatical valences". They are responsible for much of the grammatical structure of a language. The verb "to give", for example, is used to designate an event (a happening) involving at least three entities with

well-defined roles: giver, thing given, and person given to.

Acquisition of language and learning grammatical competence involves always innate abilities, behavioural patterns, and interactional practices.

2 Meaning and Truth

Saying that words and sentences have meaning is not like saying that cars have wheels, people have legs, and trees have leaves. Using language, people understand what others say. And when they utter words and sentences, others understand them most of the time.

Understanding is not possible because speakers and interpreters of sentences are somehow connected to mysterious “meanings” and “senses” that are attached to what is said.

For Donald Davidson who wants to get rid of unnecessary intermediary mental entities like “meanings”, “senses” and “sense-data”, understanding is possible because sentences have truth-conditions and the people uttering and hearing them know what would be the case if the uttered sentences were actually true. This means that giving truth conditions for a sentence, any sentence, amounts to saying what it is to

understand it, i.e. giving the "meaning" of a sentence.

Such a procedure is not to change, improve, or reform a language, but to describe and understand it, sentence by sentence, and utterance by utterance. And if we take truth to be a property, not of sentences alone, but of utterances, or speech acts, we have to deal then with ordered triples of sentences, times, and persons, that is, we are on the way to a semantics of natural languages. We are confronted then with counterfactual or subjunctive sentences, with adverbs, attributive adjectives, mass terms (like "fire", "water", "snow", "gold", and "silver"), verbs of actions implying purpose, imperatives, optatives, interrogatives, and a host more.

The basic situation of speakers of natural languages is one that involves two or more persons, simultaneously in interaction with each other and with the world they share. It is what Davidson calls "triangulation": "... the result of a threefold interaction, an interaction which is twofold from the point of view of each of the two agents: each is interacting simultaneously with the world and with the other agent. To put this in a slightly different way, each creature learns to correlate the actions of other creatures with changes or objects in the world to which it also reacts" (Davidson, 2001,

128). Using and understanding a natural language is, in other words, sharing and knowing that one shares a world, and a way of thinking and speaking about the world, with someone else.

Another way of putting the point would be to say that "grasping the meaning" of words and sentences of a natural language is being able to say what has to be the case for sentences to be true when we understand them relative to speakers and times, and never forgetting situation sensitive elements that contribute to fixing their concrete truth conditions.

3 Grammars

People, interacting with other people, use languages. "Language" and "dialect" (Italian, French and Spanish developed out of dialects of Latin) are terms applied to ways of speaking that are perceived as different. The idea is that languages and dialects are determinate linguistic systems within which units and elements form a self-contained set of relations, each linked, directly or indirectly, to each of the others. Linguists, investigating those systems, look for sets of contrasts. Rules are an essential part of the systems linguists describe. Rules are, among many other

things, ways in which words are combined and ordered.

Describing languages as systems, linguists describe structures and regularities present in speech, in what people say or could say. Like that, they reconstruct grammars (in the plural form!).

Grammars can be compared with other grammars. And different types of language families are distinguished after having found detailed correspondences that cannot reasonably be explained unless common ancestors existed. At the beginning there was something irresistible about a classification that started with two poles, exemplified by Chinese and Latin, and throwing everything else into transitional types. In such a way arose the still popular, but superficial classification of languages into an “isolating” group, an “agglutinative” group, an “inflective” group, and a “polysynthetic” group.

Languages are different. Most of them distinguish “singular” and “plural”, “one” and “more than one”. Some languages can quite normally use the same form to refer indifferently to more than one and one only. Another perfectly objective difference, important for some languages and not that relevant for others, is between things that can be seen and things that are invisible (being somewhere else or simply hidden). In some

languages one is forced to distinguish events entirely in the past from events that bear a relation to the time of speaking. And some languages require the use of so-called "evidentials" that mark whether the speaker has actually seen what he or she is talking about, or the reference is to something the speaker only heard about or has been told.

Languages can indeed be wonderfully varied: in the categories they make explicit, in the kinds of words distinguished, and in how their speakers speak in general about the world. But the question is: when different languages draw different distinctions, do their speakers still perceive the world around them in the same way, or do they think of it differently? One thing seems to be certain: that we must be careful not to infer ways of thinking or perceiving from the evidence of languages alone.

The fact that some languages do not draw certain distinctions does not necessarily imply that their speakers are not able to make or to think them. As Guy Deutscher wisely put it: abolishing the words "greed", "pain" and "death" does not make human beings better, it does not eliminate suffering, and it doesn't make the human animal immortal. And do not forget that we can always explain new and abstract concepts to people who speak languages that do not have terms or words for them.

4 Speech

Acting according to certain rules, "fitting rules", is not "being guided" by rules. Falling bodies fall "fitting rules", but they are not guided by rules while falling. We can logically analyse speech behaviour, speech acts of people. But this does not necessarily imply that we expose thereby a logical structure that lays hidden in the sentences uttered (Quine, in: Davidson, Harman, 444 and 451). When we go from speech and verbal sentences to logical formulas (what formal grammarians somehow do) we are merely retreating to a notation that has certain technical advantages. And every formal notation (or formal grammar in our case) is as good as every extensionally equivalent grammar, and to be preferred only for its simplicity and convenience.

Utterances of ordinary language can be formally paraphrased. Not always an easy business, especially if we take into account that they are heterogeneous and accomplish diverse tasks and functions. So-called "speech acts" (others would prefer Wittgenstein's terminology and speak of "language-games", knowing that, in a strict sense, "language-games" are not exactly "speech acts") are serviceable for giving orders and obeying them, describing objects and giving their measurements,

reporting events, forming and testing hypotheses, making up stories and play-acting, solving riddles and making jokes, asking, thanking, cursing, greeting and praying, among many other things. That all these language functions are "acts" or "activities" is not a conclusive argument against a "truth-theoretic semantics" for natural languages.

The truth-functionality of sentences and situation-sensitive utterances is a fundamental trait of efficient and functional language without which "speech acts" and "language games" are neither meaningful nor understandable.

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Words and Being

We read in the Hebrew Bible that God "spoke" ("dabar") and the world came into being. In St. John's gospel we find the announcement that at the beginning was the Word ("logos") and that God is the Word. As we did not exist at the beginning, we cannot say what exactly happened then, "at the beginning". But in the middle of it, speaking and using languages we arrive at understanding and describing what there is, that is, world and world structure.

The following thoughts, organized in six short sections, are about being and language, that is, about how (for us human beings) language and reality fundamentally hang together.

1 Hegel's Conception of Logic

What is the role of thought in knowledge? This is the question Hegel attempts to answer in his "Science of Logic". Kant had shown that when knowing we do not simply receive the impressions of sense. Knowing, we distinguish and compare. We organize and structure sense experience, arriving in such a way at knowledge. Kant's categories identified the basic principles of organization. Hegel goes further. He shows that

the principles of organization are dynamic processes that relate concepts to each other, and that the so related concepts are real. They grasp what there is. They grasp world structure.

Hegel's logic (such as it is developed in the "Science of Logic" and in his "Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences") is not like formal logic about symbols and rules. Of course, Hegel speaks about the traditional categorical syllogisms, induction and analogy, hypothetical and disjunctive inference. But he does it speaking at the same time about their structure and validity, and also their limitations showing that the form does not do full justice to what is to be expressed thereby.

When Hegel presents the various logical forms, he does not simply present them as a contingent list. Rather, he shows how one leads to the next, the latter always following in order to correct the former's inadequacy.

Logic, for Hegel, is not simply the abstract form of valid syllogisms, but rather the process and activity of reasoning. It is "reasoning about reasoning", as John W. Burbidge expressed it (Beiser, 87), or thought thinking about itself, as Hegel himself would have said.

Logic as reasoning about reasoning thinks about its own operations, that is, the operation of

determining or defining concepts, the movement of going to what the concepts imply, and the total movement from original fixed concepts to their opposites establishing thereby the overall perspective or ground that will explain how contraries fit.

Rational thinking as the activity of dialectical, speculative reason involves integrating all such operations into a single complex of thinking in which conceptual determinations fixed by understanding are brought together with their opposites in (dialectical) transitions manifesting how differences form complex and comprehensive identities.

Logic as reasoning about reasoning or thought thinking about itself is not separated from reality, that is, from real contents. The contents of thought and reasoning are, in Hegel's conception of logic, an integral part of logical reasoning. Therefore, Hegel's logic is in a certain way Hegel's (post-Kantian, speculative) "metaphysics", a concept he himself would not have liked as he used it to name the abstract, traditional metaphysics that created wrong dualisms and dichotomies, such as the dualism of subject and object, the intelligible and the empirical, thought and being. Reasoning is always reasoning about something, and thinking is always thinking about something. Therefore, the

contents of thinking are always relevantly present in the thinking about thinking that logic is.

In logic, thought considers how its own operations integrate subjective activity and thought objects. In logic, the moments of distinguishing and unifying are maintained as distinct within a comprehensive unity. In logic, simple thoughts require resolution in other, more comprehensive thoughts. Therefore, Hegel's "Science of Logic" is a distinguishing and unifying process of reflection on ever more complex levels that mutually determine each other and are themselves determined by that interaction.

2 Language and World

Hegel's conception of logic is fundamental if we want to understand how language, that is, our conceptual, propositional and inferential thinking is related to reality. In "Method and Metaphysics" Donald Davidson affirms in a quasi-Hegelian way that if we have the semantics of a language right, the objects we assign to the expressions of the language must exist, so that the "proper semantic method leads to metaphysical conclusions" (Davidson, 2005, 40). And Davidson explains why this is so referring to the "systematic character of semantics" (Davidson, 2005, 41). He ends his article avoiding solemn vocabulary: "Thus it seems

that truth is like the proverbial door which no one can miss; at least it is a door one cannot miss most of the time" (Davidson, 2005, 45).

"Method and Metaphysics" confirms the view Davidson had already presented in "The Method of Truth in Metaphysics". In this article he had expressed his metaphysical opinion that lead him to believe that making manifest the large features of our language we make manifest the large features of reality (Davidson, 1984, 199). Davidson presupposes that massive error is simply unintelligible, and recommends if we want to bring into relief general features of the world to analyse what it is in general for a sentence in a natural language to be true. In other words, revealing in a (Tarski-like) theory of truth the structure of a natural language is revealing world structure. For Davidson, this was the method in metaphysics practised by philosophers as widely separated by time or doctrine as Plato, Aristotle, Hume, Kant, Russell, Wittgenstein, Carnap, Quine, and Strawson (Davidson, 1984, 199 and 201f.).

Using natural languages we can refer to spatially located and bounded things which surround us, that is, to particular things in the world (Blackburn, 303). We can then use quantifiers to say, for instance, that there is at least an instance of F, or that everything is F in a specific domain

(Blackburn, 305). And, of course, we can introduce definite descriptions to characterize something or somebody we already know, or even without knowing who or what satisfies the description (taking the description thus to express identity-independent information). Therefore, the analysis of language is a good starting point for an analysis of what there is. Speaking, we individuate things (individual things, events, structures), say something about them characterizing them and describing relations and contexts they may be in. Analysing our utterances is therefore a good start. But we need regimentation through logic and scientific terminology to be more precise about what we say and how we describe the objects we speak about.

3 Saying and Showing

There is a distinction that pervades Ludwig Wittgenstein's "Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus": the distinction between what can be said by meaningful propositions and what can only be shown, that is, the distinction between "saying" and "showing".

If we take some comments and remarks Wittgenstein himself made, we can say that the "Tractatus" has two parts, a logical part (containing

an atomistic ontology, a picture theory of language and truth, tautologies, and a certain conception of mathematics and science), and a "mystical" one, this "mystical" part being the one he did not write about as it contained everything that is, according to him, not-sayable.

The logical core of the saying-showing distinction is the assertion that although the rules of logical syntax cannot be expressed in philosophical propositions, they show themselves in the logical structure of normal propositions. In other words, the conditions of symbolic representation (the rules of logical syntax) cannot themselves be represented by normal propositions. In Wittgenstein's case, this is the impossibility of a picture depicting its own method of projection. If a proposition represents a specific state of affairs as a picture represents something, the "pictorial form" of the proposition cannot be depicted by the same proposition.

Going beyond Wittgenstein's picture model of propositions and linguistic representation of real states of affairs, the distinction between saying and showing seems to be an important philosophical distinction to understand why certain fundamental phenomena in human life are not easily accessible to linguistic strategies of symbolic representation. Such phenomena are brought by Wittgenstein

under the category of the "mystical" and concern the ethical, aesthetics, and the meaning of life among many others.

4 Goodness, Beauty, and Meaning

The concept of "supervenience" has become popular in the philosophy of mind to explain how mental phenomena come about and how they can be appropriately understood. According to supervenience terminology, mental phenomena exist because or in virtue of the fact that they have a relevant "base" on which they are dependent, with which they vary, and to which they are not reducible. The base and base-properties of mental phenomena are physical. The mental and mental properties supervene on the physical base or on physical properties. It is, however, not quite clear how such a supervenience relation is to be understood precisely, whether as a general dependence relation, or a relation of entailment, or a relation of necessitation.

Although the idea of supervenience appears to have originated in moral theory (to explain how ethical predicates co-vary with descriptive, non-moral and non-evaluative properties and predicates) and to have become relevant in the philosophy of mind (to understand how mental phenomena are to be

conceived of), supervenience is a general, methodological concept that is entirely topic-neutral, that is, not subject-specific, so that its use is not restricted to any particular problem or area of philosophy. It is precisely this subject-neutral character of supervenience that makes it an appropriate tool of meta-philosophical inquiry.

Jaegwon Kim, when explaining what supervenience actually is, insists on the fact that supervenience is not "a mere claim of covariation" between mental and physical properties but "an ontological thesis" including a claim of existential dependence of the mental on the physical. This existential dependence justifies saying that a mental property is instantiated in a given organism at a time because, or in virtue of the fact that, one of its physical "base" properties is instantiated by the organism at the time. Jaegwon Kim defines supervenience as follows: "Mental ... properties supervene on physical/biological properties. That is, if any system s instantiates a mental property M at t, there necessarily exists a physical property P such that s instantiates P at t, and necessarily anything instantiating P at any time instantiates M at that time" (Kim, 2005, 33).

Mental causation, that is, the problem of explaining how the mental can inject causal

influence into the causally closed physical domain can be seen in the following (supervenience) terms: M (as a mental event) has a physical (supervenience) base P so that the occurrence of M depends on, or is determined by, the presence of P, and since "ex hypothesi" M is a cause of P1 (the case of mental causation to be explained!), P appears amply to qualify as a cause of P1. P's causation of P1 cannot, however, be thought of as a causal chain having M as an intermediate causal link since, according to supervenience, the P-to-M relation is not a causal relation.

Existing and happening things have certain qualities and properties that make them what they are. Those properties and qualities are neither good nor bad in themselves. But due to certain interests of persons and agents, and in certain contexts and situations, those properties and qualities can be good or bad depending on whether or not they contribute to the satisfaction of the interests involved. Therefore, what people characterize as "good" is always something that answers to certain interests. Aristotle spoke, instead of interests, of ends. Being good was for him always being conducive to or constituting the attainment of certain goods or ends.

For Aristotle, every art, every inquiry, every action, and every pursuit aims at some good. And,

as there are many and heterogeneous arts, inquiries, actions and pursuits, their ends or aims also are many. The end of medical art is health. The end of shipbuilding is the construction of vessels. The end of military strategy is victory. The end of economics is wealth. Not all aims are reached in the same way either. And their character varies too. Some ends are activities. Other ends are products that exist apart from the activities that produce them.

Some ends or goals are merely instrumental. We aim at them in order to get something else. Others are final, ends in themselves. We do not aim at them for the sake of something else. The final end everyone aims at is called "happiness". Views concerning what happiness actually is may vary. But it is generally agreed that the final good for human beings is happiness. Whatever else human beings may want, they want certainly to be happy.

Ethical goodness is, for Aristotle, what leads to a happy life, and such a happy life is in his view a continuous activity according to the nature of one's own soul.

For Immanuel Kant, in a strict moral sense, only a will can be good. The First Section of the "Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals" starts with the sentence that presents Kant's view as an assertive statement: "Nothing

can possibly be conceived in the world, or even out of it, which can be called "good" without qualification, except a Good Will" (Kant, 151). Not intelligence, judgement, and the other talents of the mind. Not courage, resolution, and perseverance. And not power, riches, honour, or health. Nothing can be called in a strict sense "good" but the will when it proceeds in a specific way. A good will is not good because of what it brings about, performs or effects (by its utility), but simply "by virtue of the volition", by the way it wills. Such a will can only be according to Kant a will determined exclusively by Reason: Reason itself willing. Not the purpose to be attained decides whether the will is morally good or not, but the "principle of volition", by which actions take place, without regard to any object of desire. Therefore, for Kant, the purposes which we may have in view in our actions, or their effects regarded as ends and springs of the will, cannot give to actions any unconditional or moral worth. Kant was interested in moral autonomy, and such autonomy was for him only to be had if and when the will (that is, the desiring, willing person) is not dependent on external things, but is exclusively determined by pure Reason.

For Utilitarians goodness can only be the beneficial effects or consequences of our actions. Acts or

actions are good if they contribute positively to our well-being, that is, if they have positive good effects or results. A positive effect or result is a “utility”.

Many Utilitarians from Epicurus to Jeremy Bentham identified “utility” with pleasure or the exemption of pain. Pleasure and freedom from pain are for them the only things desirable as ends, so that all desirable things are desirable either for the pleasure inherent in them, or as means to the promotion of pleasure and the prevention of pain.

As such a view excited in many minds considerable dislike, John Stuart Mill stressed that the pleasure meant by Utilitarians could not be the pleasure experienced by beasts but the pleasure or pleasures that correspond to human beings who have many mental faculties more elevated and subtle than animal appetites. There are different kinds of pleasure (intellectual pleasures, emotional pleasures and pleasures of the imagination), and all of them were included, so Mill, in the concept of pleasure used by Utilitarians.

For Utilitarians, goodness is not a thing that exists in the world, independently of our interests, strivings and aspirations. “Good” therefore, is for them what is effectively beneficial for our happiness.

We call things beautiful on the basis of certain properties they may have and the combination of such properties in specific appearances and constellations. We tend to like heterogeneous but interrelated components of a phenomenally objective field. We like intensity when we concentrate our attention on natural phenomena or works of art. We appreciate unity and complexity. And many other (objectively detectable) features of things tend to please us.

Disputing with other people about such features we arrive at inter-subjective judgements and pronouncements that affirm that something (the thing having those features) manifests or instantiates "beauty". Therefore, it is completely appropriate to say that the quality of being (aesthetically) beautiful or valuable supervenes on objectively detectable traits or characteristics of natural and artistic phenomena. Beauty, like goodness, supervenes on something else, and always depending on our interests, sensitivity and taste.

"Meaning" in the life of individual human beings is also a supervenient phenomenon. Human lives are human lives, the lives of single individual organisms, neither meaningless nor meaningful. They are simply lives. But due to the way individual human beings connect to the world, the

way they engage and get committed, they can feel that, somehow, their lives are worth living. They can experience that their lives are, subjectively, meaningful.

"Meaning" is not an objective property of human life. It is something that supervenes on what individuals do, on how they actively lead their lives, and on how they relate to the world and to other people.

In his book "The View from Nowhere", Thomas Nagel tries to see the world and what happens in the human realm "both from nowhere and from here" (Nagel, 86). Thus, combining an objective and a subjective perspective (or standpoint), he arrives at the conclusion that, objectively speaking, "nothing seems to have value of the kind it appears to have from inside" (Nagel, 209). Thomas Nagel is right. Meaningful experiences and the experience of (existential) meaning in human life depend fundamentally on the view from inside.

5 Poetry

"Poets" as "makers" ("poiesis") arrange words. In so doing, they convey information, a message. But in poetry, the way of saying things, the way of conveying information, is somehow all-important. Poets say something, and the way of saying it

stimulates in the hearer or reader feelings and attitudes. Arranging words, working with language, poets presuppose common (everyday) experiences. But in their symbolic creations they break with the reader's actual environment making possible intensified forms of experience. This is the reason why "poetry" is a matter of differing "in degree". Therefore, the "reality" of a poetic work is more intensively significant than actual reality. Devices used by poetry do not intend to describe precisely world states or to state what S. K. Langer calls "discursive ideas". Poets may describe certain things and scenes. But they do it in a very special way, showing the pervasive ambivalence which is characteristic of human feeling or (in Langer's words) creating "the symbol of a feeling ... by weaving a pattern of words" (Langer 230).

Poems are, according to such an insight into the working of poetry, "non-discursive symbolic forms" as the poet uses linguistic forms on a specific semantic level, not simply referring to things and facts of the world, but facilitating new ways of experiencing and feeling.

The devices poets use are various and heterogeneous. They may be used to imitate nature, or to transcend what there is, i.e. the brute reality of present facts. And they may be

intentionally used to cause pleasure and delight, or to move and to teach.

Some devices consist in a strategy of "de-familiarizing" by departing from the norms of usage, breaching the rules and operating with so-called purposefully introduced "ungrammaticalities". The unfamiliar usage that departs from the norms of grammar or syntax is an important element of poetic language and its effectiveness.

Other elements and devices used in poetry are: alteration of diction in single terms ("tropes") and in longer units of syntax and grammar (sometimes called "schemes"); all kinds of metaphors and analogies; rhyme, metre and phonetic or sound effects (via alliteration and assonance); further kinds of patterning both in the form of words and in their combination.

All these poetic devices manifest a turning away from the normal functioning of language. And all these devices contribute to give us a sharper sense of reality and all the things that really matter in life.

6 Being Mortal

Human beings are not Greek gods. Their lives are limited. They have an end. Greek gods were like

human beings. They fell in love. They got angry and furious. They desired things and hated. But they were immortal. We, however, are mortal beings. Even if we have been active, mighty and potent, in the hour of our death, we are absolutely impotent. We do not actively die. Death happens to us when our lives come to an end. Death is not an activity, our doing. It is an occurrence, an event we are confronted with, something we do not do, but something that we suffer. All the projects that made our lives meaningful come to an end, and we go, nowhere. We simply go, disappear, and end. Our friends, our companions, and people we are acquainted with may miss us. But they will go too. All this is completely natural.

Religious persons believe, without knowing exactly how, that death is not the last word about them and their lives. What can such an expression mean?

The question about the existence of God is present in all classical philosophical texts. Is God a first unmoved mover? Is God the cause of all causes? Is God the being that, according to its own concept, must necessarily exist? Is God a postulate of reason? Is God a necessarily presupposed idea? Is God the meaning of history? Is God the completely Different, the completely Other?

There are certainly good abstract arguments for the existence of such a being. But there are also

weighty counterarguments. We really do not know. But if God existed, there are reasons to believe that, in our last hour, we are not alone.

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ISBN 978-3-8325-5145-2
ISSN 2567-1758