

The Principle of Differentiation

What *is* language? This question seems to be as fundamental and inescapable for philosophical reflection as it is paradoxical, if not abysmal. It is fundamental since philosophy cannot and should not escape questions concerning its own basic medium, the element of its self-realization or the means of expression of its conceptualized claims and propositions. It is paradoxical since it is essentially self-referential. There is no possibility to pose it from without, and every attempt to answer it by non-linguistic means seems questionable. This observation, as trivial as it is, leads us to two general points which are more complex.

First, philosophy is not capable to completely master itself, but rather acts from within the realm which efficiently escapes all attempts at providing more or less ultimate definitions and descriptions. That means, philosophy, while confronted with language, uncovers one of the main features of its own “essence”, that is, a radical impossibility of grasping that very essence, an impossibility of a strong self-identification. It is condemned to the permanently undertaken process of re-defining and re-conceptualizing itself. Every such attempt is made within a historically reshaped horizon of language. In other words, philosophy always comes to itself through/with language which is never immutable, ahistorical, objective, or neutral.

Second, language is a creative process, and as such is permanently passing. It is, as Wilhelm von Humboldt aptly suggested, no-thing, no product, but never-ending, relentless activity.¹ As such language *in itself* and *by itself* resists all ultimate objectifications, as well as all attempts at presenting it exclusively in terms of its pragmatic function. It does not mean we cannot provide tentative definitions, systematizations, schematizations, and objectifying descriptions. But all definitions which do not distort its ephemeral nature “can... only be genetic...”²

1) Wilhelm von Humboldt, *On Language: On the Diversity of Human Language Construction and its Influence in the Mental Development of the Human Species*, ed. Micheal Losonsky, trans. Peter Heath (Cambridge: Cambridge Univeristy Press, 1988), 49.

2) Ibid.

In other cases, they are either distorting, or are metaphorical in nature – the “formative organ of thought” (von Humboldt) or the “metaphysical organ of human being.”³ The same holds for structuring systematizations and schematizations – phonology, morphology, grammar, syntax and so forth – concerning linguistic phenomena. The thing is that all these objectifying attempts – whose inherent value is not to be undermined – put aside what is essential in language and what as such cannot be explained in, more or less formalized terms, that is its living reality. In effect, they leave us where we have started – in a state of confusion when confronted with this simple, almost childlike question: what *is* language?

Both aforementioned points indicate a fundamental circularity which is implied by this very question – to pose it we have to be already somehow immersed in what we are asking about. The very possibility of that question as well as all potential (and always partial, imperfect, and factual) responses to it suggests the existence of a particular *realm* which precedes the sphere of objective (or quasi-objective) relations between language and reality, words and things, speech and human being. Philosophy named this *realm* in numerous ways. To point to just a few: the living, non-intentional self-presence of egoic consciousness or the originary structures of *Lebenswelt* (Husserl); the ethical relation with the Other (Lévinas), *Es gibt* (Heidegger), *différance* (Derrida), language games understood as communal forms of life (Wittgenstein). The differences between them are clear and often fundamental, but what they do have in common is that they equally underscore the ontological (and, in fact, logical as well) priority of this realm over all objectified forms of language. So, it is out of this *realm* that all factual, linguistically mediated, apprehensions of reality can and do stem. It is out of this *realm* that the multiplicity of languages (always implying different worldviews/perspectives on reality), in all their diversity, as well as different forms of the pragmatic objectification of the originally irreducible phenomenon of language, arise.

Here, the main task of philosophy of culture would be the analysis of the ways in which these diverse languages emerge – what are their conditions of possibility, what forms of experiencing reality and modes of self-understanding are implied by them, and what (and whose) particular intentions and motivations underlie them. In other words, philosophy of culture should undertake here two basic forms which sometimes coincide: that of the phenomenology of linguistic experience, or rather different forms of experience as linguistically mediated; and that of hermeneutics which by means of genealogical and archeological analyses investigates motivations and powers hidden behind, and operating within already constituted languages regardless of their character – being it a colloquial everyday language, a highly formalized technical/scientific idiom, or a system of religious symbols and so forth. But as hermeneutics it should not limit itself to the practice of suspicion which reveals and deconstructs ideologically distorted apprehensions of reality. Its task is also a creative exploration of the words, uncovering new, unnoticed before connections between them. In this way it allows us to see the world we inhabit in a new light, from a different perspective. Thus from the perspective of philosophy of culture we should rephrase our initial question and rather ask: *how* language *is*? And, why it is so crucial for philosophy of culture, if not to answer this question, then, at least to pose it, reflect on it, and keep it as a constant point of reference?

Language is not one among other cultural phenomena. One can say that taken broadly it is identical with culture as such. It is so, not simply because of the fundamental, constitutive role it plays in the universe of cultural meanings. It is so mainly because it shares and co-constitutes what I have called elsewhere the apophatic character of culture.⁴ Language *in itself* and *by itself* is nothing but the principle of signifying differentiation. That means, it is not only constituted by a set of differences between: signifiers and signifieds, materiality and

3) Bruno Schulz, *Opowiadania, eseje, listy*, ed. Włodzimierz Bolecki (Warszawa: Świat Książki, 2000), 337.

4) Przemysław Bursztyka, “The Inevitability of Symbols,” *Eidos. A Journal for Philosophy of Culture*, no. 5 (November 2018): 1–6.

ideality, intention and fulfillment, synchronicity and diachronicity, schema and usage, expression and performance, form and content, sense and meaning, said and saying and so forth. It uncovers and maintains the aporetic, “tensive” character of culture. Culture is then understood as the realm constituted by the series of oppositions and unsurpassable tensions between: arche and telos, presence and absence, identity and otherness, immanence and transcendence, facticity and spontaneity, and so forth. Each linguistic act, in its original form, is an open-ended movement of signifying differentiation. It is an oscillation between what is material and ideal, immanent and transcendent, identical and other, said and not-yet-articulated. Each linguistic act is a creative action, undertaken from within a certain situation of cultural facticity – even if it seems to be purely repetitive, it introduces a moment of difference, of innovation. Each linguistic act is teleological in both its structure and its trajectory, if not in its basic motivation. These tensions and characteristics are not to be released. Their complete effacement, the state of pure indistinction would mean either a utopian idea of a completely fulfilled and absolutely adequate expression, or an experience of the cruelest dehumanization in the face of which we would be left speechless. In both cases the effect would be the same – the incapacity to speak, which is identical with being thrown outside of the human world. “Where the word breaks off, no thing can be” (Stefan George).

Philosophy of culture understood as hermeneutics of human linguisticity is necessarily engaged with axiological considerations. Values are inherent to language. There is no language – as Nietzsche already taught us – that would be axiologically indifferent. Language constitutes itself by means of differentiating its own elements, and in this way ascribing particular values to its different elements. It always consists of elements and rules distinguishing – in a more or less systematized way, more or less explicitly – what is good and what is bad, what is effective and what is useless, what raises aesthetic delight and what causes disgust and repulsion. Needless to say, that language, as a particular “worldview”, is always already permeated by a whole range of cognitive values, of expressions and standards establishing implicit criteria for truthfulness and falsity. Even the aforementioned teleological orientation of each particular linguistic act is, by its very nature, axiological. It seems that the same holds for all theories of language stressing its completely self-referential, autotelic character, which, in fact, expresses a pursuit of radical emancipation from all external frameworks. In other words, it is more a kind of neutralization of external references than negation of, at least implicit, values.

The problematic of language, in the perspective of philosophy of culture, evokes also the problem of the subject. It seems that these two questions parallel each other. Whenever one reflects on language a question arises: who speaks? It does not come as a surprise that, for example, the parting of the order language and that of representation – leading to the autonomization of language – coincide with the deep crisis of the Cartesian/post-Cartesian paradigm of the monological subject.⁵ Neither is it surprising that phenomenological analysis will send us either to transcendental consciousness/I, or to transcendental intersubjectivity as a subject inhabiting a particular life-world (*Lebenswelt*). Or that the Wittgensteinian concept of language games will confront us with a similar idea of the subject constituted by, and never transcending, communal linguistic and extra-linguistic practices. Equally clear, seems to be that post-structuralist theories of language, understood as completely self-referential structures, announce in a solemn and at same time joyful tone that there is no need for this category, since it is language “*who*” speaks.

This issue of our journal is devoted precisely to these problems. The essays collected in the Thematic Section undertake questions concerning (among many others): the ontical, epistemological, and cultural status of language (and its constitutive structures and elements) and different linguistic and extra-linguistic practices; phenomenological and hermeneutic analyses of our being-in/with-language; how language determines and

5) See Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, trans. Alan Sheridan Smith (London: Tavistock Publications, 1970). Especially chapter 9 – “Man and His Doubles.”

differentiates the ways of our self-understanding and the modes we perform ourselves on the stage of everyday life – whether we like it or not.

We start our Thematic Section with the impressive outline of James G. Hart's transcendental-phenomenological theory of language. The aim of the essay is to show language as the medium of the manifestation of being. Hart analyzes a whole range of linguistic phenomena, starting from the basic infant's spontaneous linguistic and pre-linguistic acts, and shows how in the synthetic process of truthful presencing operate the basic transcendental-ontological couples: presence/absence, identity/difference, rest/motion, and sameness/otherness. The author argues that from the phenomenological-transcendental perspective one can speak of transcendental instinct (the fundamental interest in being) which takes on the form of the "Ideal of adequate presencing of all true being" and as such is the basis of "all axiology, pervades and unifies the various levels and kinds of agency, that is, passive, active, kinaesthetic, conative, emotional, intellectual and so forth." Thus understood, this idea of transcendental instinct also supports a thesis about the universal language instinct. However, In Hart's (and Husserl's) perspective, the living, pre-reflective reality of the transcendental, primal I appears to be the ultimate fundament of all manifestation of being (including the linguistic manifestation).

A thorough presentation of the main theses of Husserl's semantics is the starting point of the essay by Maria Gołębiewska. In her impressively well-researched paper, Gołębiewska shows in great detail how these theses were received, criticized, deconstructed and reformulated in the works of French philosophers inspired by structuralism (e.g. Gilles Deleuze, Jean-François Lyotard, Jacques Derrida). The leading motives of her analyses concern the ontological, epistemological and cultural status of linguistic (and extra-linguistic) signs, of sense and meaning, terms and concepts.

A highly original reformulation of the theory of language-games and its implications for understanding human subjectivity is offered in the essay by Adam Lipszyc. In order to enrich and enliven Wittgenstein's theory Lipszyc applies here Foucault's theory of power and Derrida's concept of iterability. In this perspective, the human subject is constituted and fully determined by his/her participation in the whole set of linguistic and extra-linguistic (bodily) practices, which not only express the dominant relations of power (always already present in all discursive practices) but that are also marked with an "essential" theatricality. The logic of iterability introduces into the heart of subjectivity a moment of inauthentic authenticity. Thus while playing our roles we not only reproduce the dominant relations of power, but we also do it in the form of differentiating repetition/citation. In the last interpretative step, Lipszyc refers this model to two films by Ingmar Bergman and Liv Ullmann. This move introduces an affective dimension and thus presents a full drama of "the subject captured-but-also-established by language, the creature tormented by the strangest interplay between being subject-to and subject-of."

The creative aspect of language comes out in an inspiring essay by Katarzyna Weichert who analyzes, on different levels, the complex structure of metaphor as it is presented in Paul Ricoeur's theory. The creation/generation of metaphor is analyzed by comparison with the Kantian theory of transcendental schematism, where discursive and sensible elements are essentially combined. The object of special concern are different imaginative aspects operative in metaphor. Weichert shows how the linguistic imagination by creating metaphors allows us to transcend our mundane experience, and in this way leads to a broadened and enriched understanding of reality.

The relation between theory and practice is by no means new in philosophy. However, it constantly returns in new forms and guises. In her essay, Anna Michalska analyzes the controversies around the so called Logical Connection Argument in accordance with which in every action (linguistic or extra-linguistic) it is impossible to separate meaning and expression, intention and performance, and content and form. In the next step, Michalska analyzes this relation in a neuropsychological perspective, focusing on exploratory behaviors.

She concludes that the relation in question is not rigid and stable, and requires a “regulative principle which motivates mutual adjustments.”

In the Forum section we present two essays by Carlos João Correia and J. Edward Hackett. The first of them presents an original interpretation of Susanne Langer’s understanding of art in terms of non-discursive presentational symbols. In the second essay the author presents a comparative analysis of the systems of values in Max Scheler and Edward Sheffield Brightman. The author shows in a convincing way how these two theories supplement each other and provides an outline of his original version of a process metaethics.