

ASPECTS OF LANGUAGE

BY

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EDITOR'S PREFACE

THE untimely death of William James Entwistle took from us one of the most learned philologists of the English-speaking world. He had long been distilling from his vast experience of languages reflections on general theoretical problems of linguistics, and it is some measure of consolation for a grievous loss that shortly before his death he delivered to the publishers the completed typescript of the present book. In a letter to me at the time he wrote 'My *Aspects of Language* is a complete ms, done for the tenth time'. For an editor who knew Entwistle's amazing neatness, carefulness, and power of work there remained nothing except the mechanics of proof-reading. His own text stands without emendation except for obvious typing errors. In the same letter he alluded to friends who had read his typescript 'as the range of languages is too wide for my unsupported testimony'. I would ask those unnamed friends to accept from me the grateful acknowledgement which he would have made explicit.

L. R. PALMER

PREFATORY LETTER

12 FYFIELD ROAD
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Dear Mr. de la Mare,

Many years ago you suggested this book, but I dare not hope that this is the book you asked for.

Our problem then was to find some way of commending as reasonable to small boys two languages constructed on systems so very unlike those of their own—and in their view, uniquely sensible—mother-tongue. A better linguist than I has expressed a hope of 'an elementary grammar for children, free from the usual taint of abstraction and unreality which those hardest and sanest of critics are so quick to detect and condemn'. His thought was of English, but perhaps he came up against the same difficulty that we did, namely, that the very young get on very well with an arbitrary discipline, but are perplexed by general principles which we elders fondly believe will simplify their labours. Simplification is not simplicity; simplicity is as often as not arbitrary and, on analysis, puzzling and inconsistent.

You left your barb in my mind, which has itched ever since. Something, I have felt, should be done for somebody, if not for the irreflexive young. The same notion has been in the minds of many persons since the war, and one of the problems of this book has been to keep pace more or less with the endless flow of new literature by linguists and philosophers on the topic of language. Perhaps the undertaking would have been impossible if it had not been that no two ventures agree in principles or presentation. The topic is far greater, far more interesting, than the efforts to exhaust it, and one more attempt in yet one more direction may even be welcome. There are dogmatists among language experts, but I do not hesitate to describe the present moment as one in which no dogma is imperative, but the whole matter is up for open discussion among men of good will. Language is more wonderful than linguistics; perhaps it is the greatest wonder within the reach of man.

The motion of this book is then discursive and undogmatic. It is unphilosophic, though recognizing that philosophers may have their own legitimate interest in language. It is not based on a hypothesis of the unity of the human understanding, nor yet on the assumption that there is much diversity. The savage and civilized minds are differently endowed, but they have means of entering into each other to some extent.

Thousands of languages have their independent grammars not by infinite variations of principle—which would make language-learning impossible—but by permutations and combinations of the few solutions available for each problem in self-expression. I do not find language either systematic or wholly unsystematic, but impressed with patterns, generally incomplete, by our pattern-making minds. They are not logical or illogical. They may be alogical, but those of civilized Europe and China have had logical principles stamped upon them.

No man can really know more than his own language, it is said, but I do not happen to be an Anglicist. I must use what light has been given me. A distinguished continental linguist, when asked how many languages he knew, has said that he had no obligation to know more than one, that his business was with the principles of language itself, and that there could be nothing less scientific than learning languages.

Alas, I have always felt this unscientific yearning, though wanting skill as an executant. Another might have written this book on the basis of English, but I am impressed by the eccentric position of our mother-tongue, which would have to be twisted into very queer shapes if it is to ape the methods of so many others. The experiment has been tried; I can never persuade myself that Anglo-Eskimo or any other combination is either the one or the other. Moreover, I have a certain pleasure in seeing the foreign forms objectively as they occur and as alone they can combine with each other to make human speech. I hope I have not loaded this text, and that the examples will be regarded only as they are offered, *exempli gratia*.

Among all my predecessors I find myself most in sympathy with Wilhelm von Humboldt, who sought so diligently among all the tongues of men for the common principles of expression. To offer to solve these problems on the basis of one language, be it English or French, or of one family ultimately reducible to one language, such as Indo-European, seems to me insufficient for (as it were) linguistic triangulation. I offer my suggestions, therefore, on the basis of languages known in some degree to me and separated as widely as possible in space and idiom. It is only so, I suppose, that one can reach a universally valid proposition or, at any rate, a list of the alternative solutions which have been adopted by races of men.

I am grateful to Mrs. D. R. Sutherland, Mr. A. Sillery, and Mr. R. E. Russell for having the patience to read this disquisition in manuscript, and I expect to incur other obligations as it goes through the press. I am indebted for books to Mr. C. S. S. Higham of Messrs. Longmans, Mr. D. M. Davin of the Clarendon Press, and the Secretary of the New York Viking Fund, as well as to friends and colleagues who have so kindly kept me posted concerning their achievements over thirty years. I am aware that there are many books I have not read and ought to. A scholar

is no Croesus, and often a book in the hand is worth a dozen in a library. No one can read to an end the enormous literature of language, and if he is to make any contribution at all, he must lay down his book and take to his typewriter.

To you who spoke to me of this thing, or of something akin to it, I now offer it with its sins upon its head, hoping that the intelligent discussion of questions of language, without preconception or pride of intellect, may help to restore to the first place in our interest our first and solely human activity.

Yours sincerely,

WILLIAM J. ENTWISTLE

Richard de la Mare, Esq.

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I

LANGUAGE

MAN is the talkative animal. All other definitions lead up to or away from this crucial talent for speech. Man stands erect and looks at the stars. The posture is awkward and requires a great increase of mental control. Even the fifteen degrees of difference between man and gorilla seem to require more than double mental capacity. With this increase of brain goes the increase of those frontal areas on which man depends for the co-ordination and reproduction of speech-sounds. Man invents, thanks to his opposable thumbs; but chimpanzees would be twice as inventive if they could communicate their inventions by speech. In gregariousness, sociability, or political efficiency man is perhaps less competent than wolves, bees, or ants, if we measure means and ends, but man alone can alter his polity by discussion. Man is rational; his reasons are recorded in his language along with his unreason, his emotionalism, and his subconscious urges (so far as these can be known). Man has a history; but knows it only because of speech, not merely in rudimentary forms, but as an art of oral or written record, and by means of language he knows his own history and that of animals and material things. The higher apes have most of the organs of speech, and a chimpanzee or gorilla is said to have been educated to the point of greeting Florida friends by the exclamation *Hi!* But there is no evidence that the animal made the discovery of speech for himself, nor does his conversation seem to have much variety. The apes use a visual intelligence and follow what they see. They locate sounds only imperfectly, pay no attention to speech symbols, but are capable of establishing routine reactions to sounds and understand their owners as dogs do. This understanding is of the broadest kind and easily surrendered; it is bound by routine and cannot be voluntarily reproduced.

This supreme human characteristic, however, is not due to a primary endowment of speech. The brain seems primarily concerned with the co-ordination of movements; it receives stimuli, reacts, and issues orders. The nose, windpipe, lungs, and diaphragm inhale and exhale breath. The teeth tear food which the tongue

rolls round and tastes. The lips protect the buccal cavity. Only the glottis (Adam's apple) is concerned with the production of sound, either without impediment (breath) or by friction (aspiration) or by vibration of the vocal chords (voice) or by stoppage and consequent explosion (glottal stop). It is able to regulate the volume of air and even to give it definite musical wave-lengths, but the greater part of talk results from shaping the air current in the mouth by blocking or leaving more or less open the passage through the nose or by constricting or blocking the air stream between tongue and palate or at the lips. The result is a continuous emission of symbolic sounds. But, like the apes, we locate and differentiate sound with difficulty. Our sight is much keener, so that we habitually speak of *knowing* in terms of sight. We can take in much information at a glance, but the same report must be spelled out slowly in a successive or linear fashion by the symbols of language, and these have to be retranslated in some mysterious way so as to correspond with things seen. Doubtless there would be other possible systems of symbols, if we could use them, such as those vibrations which butterflies are able to transmit or the scents which a dog seems to interpret to its own satisfaction. It may be that the grossness of hearing is of particular importance for the preference given to language, since vision gathers information faster than it can be analysed and always retains too many details in the general picture. Thus *house* [haus], spelled slowly to the ear in a succession of four sound-symbols, is mentally translated as 'any house', but the sight of a house would necessarily inform us whether the building is red or grey, of brick or stone, thatched or tiled, &c. These symbols, too, are necessarily separated by broad divisions. No language uses narrow distinctions such as a musician could no doubt make with accuracy, but aims at a common measure of intelligibility, so broad that adjustments affecting as much as the whole system (as between Scottish and southern English) are overlooked in favour of broad conformities. Perhaps because of its very sluggishness, language confers the power of generalization, so that a herd of sorrels, greys, duns, roans, bays, chestnuts, piebalds, and creams, for instance, can and must be generalized as a herd of *horses*. By doing so language weaves a cocoon around our consciousness. What we are aware of are concepts and representations. It is a world into which the speechless animals have no entry, but from which we humans, no doubt, have no exit.

Thus when we *know* anything we hold the right language about it. We do not call a whale a fish in zoology, though as a means of livelihood we are as capable of going whale-fishing as fishing for tarpon or salmon. We learn to call water H_2O in chemistry, though it is not with H_2O we wash our hands. In medieval English history we learn that a manor was a social unit and the wardrobe an organ of government. We are informed by Plato that justice is the state of society in which every man receives his due. A physicist tells us that a table, or any other object we see, is a field of electrical forces. The anthropologist, anthropometrist, and linguist require us to distinguish between a community unified by some pattern of life, by physical characteristics, or by a common means of communication, i.e. between society, race, and language. In all these directions we may, and probably do, progress towards some objective truth. The physical scientists in particular are soon checked for error, though philosophers are not called upon to pay a forfeit for a misconception. Yet there is verbalism in all knowledge and no knowledge without words—the words, so far as we are concerned, of our own particular language. All true thinkers struggle to escape from the bondage of words, but a total evasion is impossible for men.

Language is an art, and the arts are best defined as languages. In each case some material—a column of breath, vibrations mathematically spaced, pigment, wood, stone, metal, &c.—is deliberately shaped as a sign of something not connatural with the material. Music may perhaps constitute an exception, if it is concerned only with the combination of vibrations for their own sake, but music has also been held to give healthy exercise for the emotions. The remaining arts are all marked by the intrinsic unlikeness of the signifier and the signified, as between certain lengths of lines on paper and natural distances, or of stone and human flesh. Each art enjoys its own advantages and conveys its own message in a way otherwise less complete, but the art of language is more universally applicable and can express more of the content of other arts. It is Everyman's Art. The poet, according to Mr. MacNeice, 'is a specialist in something which every one practises',¹ but he is not the only linguistic specialist. The poet's objective is beauty or imaginative truth or something of the kind. But the orator makes an art of persuasion from the material of breath, and the logician and the scientist specialize variously in the art of precise statement.

¹ L. MacNeice, *Modern Poetry*, London, 1938, p. 178.

The punster, the comedian, and the tragedian are preoccupied with the linguistic arts, but so also are the social climbers, the purists, and those who sink to avoid the opprobrium of snobbery.¹ The ordinary man, framing an ordinary sentence, endeavours to arrange it for some special effect, and his methods are not always unhappy. The vivid American metaphors now flooding the English language are of anonymous origin, but commend themselves by their vitality.

It is natural, then, that every man should be interested in the questions of language which flare up now and then into newspaper polemics; and it is the more natural since he renders thereby homage to the power of the spoken word. In the word lies the power to name things. According to magical thinking knowledge of the name gave power over the thing, as when Adam named and became ruler of the animals. In some cases the name had to be concealed, as that of *Yahwe* under the form *Jehovah* and those of P'oenician gods under the style of *Baal*. An enemy who learned the real name of a tribal god took the god and the tribe into his own hands. But the real strength of the name is to bring something into effective existence, even if, like *phlogiston*, *Aryan race*, or *the square root of minus one*, it is 'a thing which is not'. A college discussion on the evils of *nepotism* evolved the word *nepot*, and within a few minutes the *nepots*—those who presumably benefited by unfair favouritism of the kind—were being freely discussed as if they were a known social class. So *capitalism*, *democracy*, *Islam*, *jihad*, *pan-Americanism*, *pan-Turanianism*, *ninepence for fourpence*, and *Lebensraum* are examples of words of power. There are no 'mere words'. The antithesis of word and deed which Thucydides drearily reiterated is fallacious, because the word is a deed. The act comes from a formalized intention which may be expressed in one word (such as *operation Overlord*) or in many (such as an Act of Nationalization). Words may also be used to draw attention away from the deed veritably intended or to cloud the whole issue by vague or contradictory talk, but it is none the less true that all human deeds of importance have their origin in the faculty of speech.

But though the art of language occupies Everyman in some fashion all the time, the science of language earns in England scant recognition. Everyman shies away from knowledge in this matter

¹ V. Grove, *The Language Bar*, London, 1949.

if it is positive, objective, definite, and consistent. Exact analysis has no charms for him, and the artists in words, like Plato, prefer to make a mystery of their arts lest their depths be plumbed. The services of the linguist, too, are rendered in association with all secondary types of human activity, and (in times of danger) under the seal of secrecy. Society, which values diamonds above coal and ennobles the distiller rather than the milkman, leaves the linguist unrewarded for his practical services and unknown in his science.

LANGUAGE AND PHILOSOPHY

As a vehicle of thought language has fallen under the severe scrutiny of philosophers, and many of the terms used by grammarians are of philosophical origin. Both linguists and philosophers discuss the sentence, predication, subject and object, grammar, logic, function, form, hypothesis, affirmation, condition, meaning, and similar topics. The grammarian also uses derivative philosophical terms such as 'accusative case'. Case implies falling away from the upright nominative, and the nominative names the subject (the underlying matter) of the sentence. The verb is completed as action or motion by the accusative (*αἰτιατική*), and by the well-known identification of ends and causes (*αἰτίαι*) the complement of the verb is given as the cause of the whole action. Philosophical terms enter grammar, however, only on condition that they lie down peaceably together. The grammarian uses them positively and cannot afford to stray into the camp of Agramante of the philosophers, who tear them up, rearrange, discard, and supersede them. The good philosopher for the grammarian is the dead one; the best of all is Aristotle. None the less, the incursions of philosophers into the linguistic field are episodes of grave importance, and especially so at the present when their attention, after a period of distraction, has been called to the 'profound and almost unrecognized' influence of language. 'With sufficient caution, the properties of language may help us to understand the structure of the world.'¹

¹ Bertrand Russell, quoted by M. Black, *Language and Philosophy*, 1949. See also G. Ryle's 'Systematically misleading expressions' in A. G. N. Flew, *Logic and Language*, 1951; R. Carnap, *Die logische Syntax der Sprache*, 1934, and *Introduction to Semantics*, 1942; C. Morris, *Signs, Language and Behavior*, 1946; C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards, *The Meaning of Meaning*, 3rd ed., 1930; A. Korzybski, *Science and Sanity*, 2nd ed., 1941. W. K. Kneale's inquiry into *Induction and Probability*, 1949, is a good example of 'reflection on the way in which we use words'.

Philosophers make it their business to define words, to lay down the rules for precise communication, and to discover whether signs point to realities. Psychologists, in addition, hold out the hope of knowing some day what happens in the brain. All this is of great importance to the linguist, who is seeking a new Semantics, a theory of communication to underlie his grammatical structure, and may be dissatisfied with traditional grammar. He sees in philosophy a powerful ally, but he must approach with the caution of friendly armies on the Elbe. At the last major conjunction of the sort a violent controversy arose between Wundt and Delbrück with regard to which the only certainty seems to be that the blows of the Titans did not fall on each other. They were talking of different things; the 'language' of the philosopher may not be that of the linguist, even if the former acknowledges that his business is largely 'to thrash out "what it means to say so and so"', and even if he goes farther and binds himself to accept what we 'commonly' mean.

'Philosophy (according to a distinguished Spanish exponent) is the enemy of knowledge, that is, of the ascertained fact.' The linguist cannot deny any fact of language (such as the French subjunctive or the third person singular) and remain in office. The philosopher is bound to question realities which the linguist is bound to accept. The philosopher defines meanings and rejects those which he deems unsuitable. If he lights on a sense for which there is no word, his business is to invent the word. A considerable part of our civilized vocabulary consists of inventions by philosophers and scientists, many of them made serviceable by loss of their exact application (e.g. *energy*, *idea*). It appears, however, that the rejection of 'systematically misleading statements' in philosophy does not prevent their being directly intelligible (and even necessary) in language, as when we say 'Mr Pickwick is a fiction' intelligibly, though the expression is 'misleading in virtue of a formal property which it does or might share with other expressions' (*Logic and Language*, p. 19). The strenuous attempt of the late Viggo Brøndal to base universal grammar on Aristotelian logic (*Ordklasserne*, 1928) has coincided with the relegation of Aristotelian logic to the exclusive domain of language, and even with a furious attack on Aristotle as an impediment to the espousals of Science with Sanity.¹

¹ It appears, however, that Count Korzybski's Aristotle was not the man who wrote in Greek (cf. M. Black, *Language and Philosophy*, p. 230).

R. Carnap teaches, unless I go astray in a world of horse-shoes and other cabbalistic signs, that to become logical each sentence must be rewritten. 'A thing is a complex of sensory experiences' must become 'Each phrase in which a symbol for a thing appears resembles in content a class of phrases in which no symbols for things appear, but only symbols for experiences', and 'Numbers are classes of classes of things' becomes 'Expressions of number are class-expressions of the second stage'. If this rephrasing be necessary the linguist may be tempted to say good-bye to logic, since the primary condition of his task is respect for the language-material in front of him. Yet it is probably not enough to say, with Vossler, that language is intrinsically 'alogical'. The term is too negative. Language has been savagely indifferent to much that scientists and philosophers have revealed; it has barbarously invented a superfluity of categories on the basis of superficial and magical resemblances; but for the last 2,300 years in Western Europe its grammars have shaped expression as much as possible according to the dominant system of logic. And some advance must be made in discussing the relation between signs and realities or meanings if linguistic science is to take the step forward which now seems imminent.

On the other hand, the linguist can hardly fail to observe how much philosophy is not only shaped by language, but by particular languages. For E. Sapir's conviction that Kant might have written as well or better in Eskimo there is little enough evidence.¹ The German of Kant's day was still fluid and malleable, though it had been exercised (as Eskimo has not) in Latin and French schools of thought, and even in those of Greece and England. German philosophy owes a great deal to the linguistic resource of composition, which, by naming instead of describing, brings into existence a thing. *Völkerpsychologie* is, in this respect, more potent than *la psychologie des peuples*, since one can proceed (as Wundt does) by a simple formal analogy from *Individualpsychologie* to *Völkerpsychologie*. The French idiom requires a much more analytic treatment. The discussion of the Blessed State in Aquinas's *Contra gentiles* is determined by the word *beatitudo*, derived from *beatus* which has some quite earthy connotations in Latin. Cartesianism depends on the facility of the phrase *la raison ou le bon sens*, though Latin *ratio* and *sensus* (the latter neither good nor bad, but a true

¹ E. Sapir, *Selected Writings*, Berkeley (Cal.), 1949, p. 154.

sensual report) cannot be thus identified. Locke's *ideas* correspond to a fortunate breakdown of the Platonic *idea*. If we compare

'What do we mean when we say right, probable, mind?'

and

'Qu'est-ce qu'on veut dire par droit, vraisemblable, esprit?'

there is, apart from the doubt about the exact correspondence of terms, a difference in the way the question is posed. Each question assumes that the terms are sufficient for discussion. The first formula asks: 'What do we (English, whose words correspond so well with things) mean . . .?' and the second 'What does *on* (*homo sapiens*, whose language is, of course, French) mean . . .?' The Chinese would eliminate person, though still supposing the adequacy of their own term, and ask baldly 'Right is what thing?', and would perhaps prove systematically misleading. Chinese philosophy consists of apophthegms, not only because the language is laconic, and laconism has been reckoned a prime virtue of style, but probably also because the relevant works were written on bamboo tablets which did not afford much flat surface for writing. If, for Aristotle, virtue lies in the mean, it was because, on the whole, the language offered him systematically equal and opposite vices for each virtue. Where a blank occurred, he wrote in *megaloprepy*, as the language permitted, though few have been able to understand megaloprepy as a virtue.¹ His logic and his grammar cover each other because the Greek language had been ceaselessly exercised in rational statements since Homer's day, and the tendency had been speeded up by the Sophists and Socrates. The weakness of the classical scheme of grammar is its assumption that *all* language is reasonable, confusing a strong tendency towards pattern with the achievement of a perfect system *où tout se tient*.

The philosopher deals with Language, but is not bound to

¹ A curious case of invention occurred in Professor C. D. Broad's Marett Memorial Lecture of 1949. The problem was whether there could be any motives completely unrelated to self. He distinguished self-centred motives from those which were self-regarding (e.g. the love of a mother for *her* child, or the death of a martyr for *his* religion), and proposed to call the hypothetical class of motives without regard to any self 'other-regarding'. But in English *self-* is a common prefix, *other-* is rare, and *other-regarding* is not a term which explains itself. In Greek *auto-* and *allo-* are of the same frequency, and such creations as **auto-bleptic* and **allobleptic* would imply each other. In Greek the lecturer's distinction would have been assured of an immortality which is much less likely in English, not for its intrinsic worth, but merely because the languages are what they are.

inquire into languages. The linguist studies languages to see whether anything may be affirmed about Language. His business is with linguistic routines; the philosopher's is with 'serious thinking'. The philosopher may call for an ideal language (with Bertrand Russell) or consider such undesirable (with Max Black), or hold that precisely defining certain terms by means of the indefinites of customary speech sets up tensions which break down (J. Holloway). In all this the linguist is interested but incompetent, as he is also incompetent to determine whether universals give classes to particulars or particulars are generalized as universals. The presence of such powerful and loquacious neighbours keeps the linguist uneasy, but not entirely unhelpful. At best he may be allowed to take over some useful category or principle of arrangement of categories; at worst he is sure to fall under a shower of new terms and routines as raw materials for his studies.

THE DIALOGUE

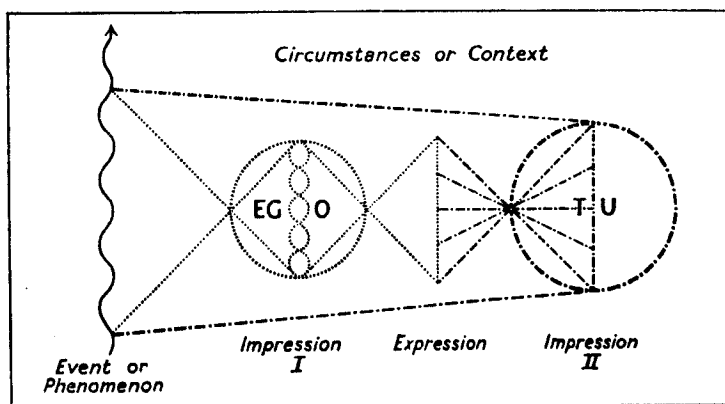
The universe of speech is egocentric. At the centre is the speaker (*ego*) and the listener is slightly off-centre (*tu*). The listener becomes a speaker in his turn and the axis of the universe shifts slightly, but these are the two persons of speech, and all others are objects to be pointed out. *Ego* spreads symbols in front of *tu*, but *tu* is the arbiter of intelligibility. If *ego* makes unintelligible noises or speaks Greek to the Eskimo *tu*, there is no communication and therefore no language. If *ego*'s symbols are unsatisfactory or unsatisfactorily arranged, *tu* demands a new set or a better arrangement. Since speech is a function of action, *tu*'s acts determine the sense of *ego*'s symbols to the extent that *ego* must either acquiesce or come to a new understanding.

Soliloquy, meditation, and 'arranging one's thoughts' are imitations of dialogue. They have involved in past time even movements of lips; hence the theatrical convention that the soliloquy and the read letter can be overheard. But *ego* does not speak to *ego*; he has far quicker ways of understanding himself. He soliloquizes before an imaginary *tu* and he arranges his thoughts with a view to addressing later some real *tu*.

The dialogue occurs within a frame of reference provided by circumstances and concerns some event. Sir A. H. Gardiner¹ describes speech as four-sided, with the four factors of speaker,

¹ A. H. Gardiner, *Speech and Language*, Oxford, 1932, p. 62.

listener, words, and things. The things, however, should be those of a given moment, forming an external and concrete association which we call circumstance. It is better to think of them as external and concrete, because so they are in all languages, including savage ones. Two persons may discuss the square root of minus one in an oubliette at midnight and so reach an extreme of abstract speech, but the topic is no more than the last of a long series of abstractions which began with the sum of two flints or cave-bears or the



like. A square was once a pattern on the ground. If one says to another 'the unexamined life is not worth living' there has to be a context of ethical discussion to determine what is 'life', 'worth' or 'examination'. An insurance agent might be puzzled by the phrase and emend it to 'the medically unexamined life is not worth insuring'. Even so, though more concrete, his language represents the end of a complex process of civilized abstraction. That speech should be possible without visible circumstances is a relatively late development, and is achieved by the creation of contexts. The context of a discourse consists of spoken conventions which enable us to dispense with visible objects, by siting the discourse well enough to give the supplementary information that would otherwise have been derived from circumstance.

The language even of savages contains some abstraction, since they speak of some parts of circumstance and neglect others. Yet the Australian Arunta cannot count or distinguish times or identify themselves. Basque *bost* 'five' probably means 'closed fist', and counting in multiples of twenty (Basque *ogei*) was achieved by

counting fingers and toes. Getting lost in the higher figures, it might prove simpler to proceed by subtraction (Lat. 19 *undeviginti*, 18 *duodeviginti*, Finnish 9 *yhdeksän*, 8 *kahdeksän*, cf. 1 *yksi*, 2 *kaksi*, and the Indo-European for 10). Chinese characters are singularly illuminating concerning the relations between concrete and abstract. 'Benevolence' is 'man plus two' (a man who thinks of another beside himself), 'happiness' is 'one mouth supported by a field', 'peace' is 'a woman under a roof' (indoors), 'home' is 'a pig under a roof' (food and shelter), 'spirit' is the skeleton of a great man, a 'great' man is one who has not only legs to obey but arms to enforce, 'father' is a 'hand holding a whip'. These written analyses are, no doubt, scholarly and sometimes whimsical. It is not exactly in that way that abstractions have been derived from objects and contexts substituted for circumstance, but the language of savages is astoundingly concrete and only fully intelligible when spoken in the presence of the objects of discourse.

Communication lies partly in what we say, partly in the circumstances. The latter fill in so much that actual speaking is elliptical, erratic, incomplete, and imprecise. Even the elliptical words may be further curtailed by substituting gestures,¹ which refer one back vaguely to the circumstances. Thus one may overhear:

A. Hullo! How's tricks?

B. So so; and the boy?

A. Bursting with energy, thanks.

The first is not a question but a breach of silence,² and establishes the conversation on the basis of casual familiarity. It does not seek or receive an answer, but an opening is made for A's principal interest (which is known from the circumstances), and A, when replying with information, acknowledges the kindly intention of B. It is possible to say quite intelligibly 'Old what's-his-name is just bringing in the thingummy', if, at a Burns dinner, Mr. McLeod is seen piping in the haggis. It is even better to be imprecise, and to say 'my heart went pit-a-pat', 'the tray came bang, thump, crash down the stairs', or 'whiff, it's gone', because, while the circumstances

¹ Gesture-languages seem, however, to be translations of the spoken word or of set phrases as a whole. The Arunta are said to have a gesture-language of 250 signs. This seems to be different from the gestures which refer directly to circumstance.

² 'To a natural man, another man's silence is not a reassuring factor, but, on the contrary, something alarming and dangerous.' B. Malinowski, *Magic, Science and Religion*, Boston, 1948, p. 248.