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# Attenuation of verbal signification

Barbara Helen Birch
*University of Windsor*

ACCEPTED BY:

Rev. E.C.Garvey
(Assumption)
Dr. A.H.Johnson
(University College)

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# The Attenuation of Verbal Signification

by

Barbara Helen Birch

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# CHAPTER I

## Introduction

When an institution of culture long taken for granted no longer fulfills the purpose for which it was instituted, it is no longer taken for granted. Recently language has become the subject matter for numerous and anxious disquisitions which question, either wittingly or unwittingly, its reliability. Language, whose purpose of institution is ostensibly that of conveying thought by means of symbols, performs its function so imperfectly that it is no longer a trustworthy instrument. This, in brief, provides our thesis with its point of departure.[1] We should like to ask, therefore: why does language in our culture fail to fulfill its purpose? And to answer, (since our question begins with 'why'), from the point of view of philosophy.

This paper is written in language: bad language in plea for better, as Stuart Chase would say? [2] Not necessarily. The language, as our thesis proposes to show, depends on how valid our plea is. The instrument is ruined by improper use.

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1. Cf. infra pp. 16-21, for a differentiation of a philological approach and a philosophical approach.
2. Cf. Stuart Chase, The Tyranny of Words (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1938) p. 17.

We have just said that language has become the subject matter of numerous and anxious disquisitions. In so saying we may have implied that the volume of literature devoted to language is a sign of its defection; otherwise it would be taken for granted. However, it would be naive to argue from these few observations that whenever there is an unprecedented concern over the fate of a cultural institution it is certainly defective. The fact that an unprecedented volume of literature is devoted to language and its problems may well be a sign of unprecedented interest in the subject. But there is another and more profound explanation which accounts for the appearance of so many books on language and one which does not necessarily imply that the voluminous discussion of it is a sign of its complete failure. This explanation shows that it is natural for language to reflect upon its own history and its own nature. Clio, too, has begun to write her memoirs. We have now 'histories of history',[1] as well as histories of men and events. Philosophy has also reached the stage in its career where it can reflect upon itself. It is not unreasonable to suppose, then, that language could be interested in language, that we can have words about words.

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1. Cf. James T. Shotwell, A History of History (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939).

This phase in the development of language, because it represents an advancement in the study of language, should not be considered as a certain sign of its deterioration. Reflection, however, has the unfortunate habit of taking its own movement for the first movement which it presupposes. We are familiar with this in philosophy and in the tragic part to which epistemology has been brought by placing the cartesian cogito (a reflex movement of the mind) at the beginning of philosophical knowledge. The advance which the study of language has gained has been won at the expense of losing its signification. Thus, when language began to use words about words, it forgot that words signified thoughts which in turn signified things. It remains now for language to reestablish its liaison with thought and things. This done, it will emerge immeasurably enriched by reflexive experience it has had, and will continue to have.[1]

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1. It is only on condition that we point out that human language is possible by virtue of the power of reasoning that we are justified in drawing an analogy between philosophy and language and between their respective histories, or for that matter between history and language. That man should become conscious of the language he uses is perfectly natural. That he should invent a 'sematic' language to talk about language is also reasonable, for whenever there is reflexive knowledge new concepts (reflexive) must make this known to the mind. Language, no less than any other human institution, obeys the progressive law of the human mind of which M Maritain writes: 'Cette loi de la progressive prise de conscience de soi-même est une des

This does not alter the fact, however, that language in the concrete fails to do what it is supposed to do. Descriptions of the plight of contemporary users of language abound. Authors like Hayakawa, Korzybski, Lee and Chase, to mention only a few of those engaged in trying to solve the problem modern language has posed, are aware of the difficulties involved in expressing their own thoughts, as well as the total effect that the breakdown of language has had on contemporary civilization. The perfection of so many techniques to facilitate communication, from which we expected so much, rather facilitated misunderstanding among individuals and nations:

> As this is being written the world is becoming daily a worse madhouse of murder, hatred and destruction. It would seem that the almost miraculous efficiency achieved by modern instruments of communication should enable nations to understand each other better and co-operate more fully. But, as we know too well, the opposite has been the case; the better the communication, the bloodier the quarrels.[1]

Techniques of communication have been perfected, and science continues to introduce newer and more efficient means of

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grandes lois du développement historique de l'être humain, et elle se rapporte à une propriété des activités d'ordre spirituel. Le propre de l'esprit est de pouvoir, disaient les anciens, revenir entièrement sur lui-même, accomplir une réflexion parfaite: l'essentiel ici n'étant pas le repliement, mais la saisi, la pénétration de soi par soi qui lui est liée.' Situation de la Poésie (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer et Cie, 1938) pp. 79-80.

1. S. I. Hayakawa, Language in Action (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1941).

communication. We have in mind here, not only the mechanical devices that are instruments of language, but also the techniques within language itself. This latter development, the 'semantic' approach, to language, reminds us immediately of Korzybski. But while the perfection of technique (for Korzybski a panacea[1]) facilitates communication, making the world smaller, as Professor Perry has so well demonstrated[2], no real improvement is made until what is communicated is improved.

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1. Despite what Alfred Korzybski claims: 'I must stress that I give no panaceas, but experience shows that when the methods of general semantics are applied, the results are usually beneficial, whether in law, medicine, business, etc., education on all levels, or personal inter-relationships, be they in family, national, or international fields.' Science and Sanity (3rd edition, Lakeville, Connecticut: The International Non-Aristotelian Library Publishing Company, 1948) p. v. Korzybski's practical techniques in the field of psychiatry have had some measure of success in World War II (loc. cit.), but his general theory of language, which may be described as mathematical and pragmatic, falls short of providing a true explanation of language as does any empiricist doctrine that takes the effect for the cause. If, as Korzybski says, we can lay a great deal of the trouble in the present day world at the door of language, it is because language has been vitiated by the same empiricism which never can comprehend the causes, ('causes', not in his 'non-Aristotelian' sense, but causes definitely in the Aristotelian and true sense), and by which he proposes to reform language and with it the world.

2. Vide Ralph Barton Perry, One World in the Making (New York: Current Books Inc., A.A.Wyn, Publishers, 1945). Professor Perry's work gives us an excellent description of what has happened to man's spatial consciousness in a world which has grown relatively smaller; in effect, One World, to use Wendell Willkie's expression. (cf. p. 13). There are, according to Professor Perry, two 'fundamentally different meanings of "one world"' (loc.cit.). The first 'oneness' has been 'brought about mainly by scientific and technological changes' (ibid. p. 13). The second 'oneness' is not yet achieved. It is this

A point is now easily made: no technique to facilitate the means of communication will ever replace the intellectual power necessary to sustain it. As St. Augustine taught, knowledge is acquired by proceeding from sense data to a knowledge of causes, by progressing from sign to symbol to the Truth. It is impossible to terminate a search for truth in symbols. To make this clearer, let us say that if a sign qua sign is itself known without means of another sign it is no longer a sign but a thing. Three things are required for knowledge; one, something to be known; two, a knower, and three, the means of effecting a union of the known and the knower. If the known is to be known, and not some substitute for it, then the means by which the knower is united to the known must in itself be unknown directly. This means is the concept, which is a pure sign whose essence is to reveal something other than itself. It is not therefore a representation which itself can become an object of knowledge or a working equivalent for the thing known.

The Middle Ages viewed the world as a sacramental

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second 'oneness' at which we should aim linguistically, politically, and so forth, and which, while not guaranteed by the unity achieved by science in the field of communication, could be facilitated by it.

universe, and its every sign an instrument. The symbols created by this era for its own culture reflected the sacramental character of the time. Today we have become adept at preserving these symbols, and have retained the liturgy of the Middle Ages, at least materially. But the tradition necessary to sustain the formal significance of these symbols has been broken:

> Nous vivons en un temps et dans un milieu saturés d'idées chrétiennes qui ne se souviennent plus de leurs origines. On procède autour de nous, dans les domaines les plus divers, à ce que Gabriel Marcel a si bien défini: 'une sorte de laicisation indue de notions religieuses dans leur essence, mais dont le ressort vital a été en quelque sorte préalablement brisé.' Des notions comme celles de vie intérieure, ou de vie spirituelle, semblent devenues le bien commun de poètes, d'essayistes ou de philosophes qui, non contents d'en faire librement usage, ce qui ne serait rien, prétendent parfois en déposséder la pensée chrétienne, dont ils les ont pourtant empruntées. [1]

This secularization of which M Gilson speaks in no sense impairs the security of the 'sacramental sign' in the sacramental system, that is, as a means of grace. This sacred language is beyond deterioration for its indefectibility is guaranteed by its divine institution.[2] The secularization

1. Etienne Gilson, Théologie et Histoire de la Spiritualité (Paris, J. Vrin, 1943), pp. 9-10.

2. Not every sign, even for Augustine, is a sacramental sign, properly speaking: 'Signorum vero alia sunt naturalia, ut fumus significans ignem; alia data.' Quoted by Libri IV, Sententiorum Peter Lombard (Florence: Typographia Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1916), from Augustine, loc.cit., n. 2. To this Peter Lombard adds: 'et eorum quae data sunt, quaedam sunt Sacramenta, quaedem non: omne enim Sacramentum est signum, sed non e converso.' (II, p. 746),

of which M Gilson speaks is, rather, to be found in literature and other forms of art that characterize our culture. In other words, what culture has sustained, with respect to religious symbols, are the secularized forms of sacred symbols which have lost their significance, not because religion has lost its significance, but because the symbols themselves are no longer maintained by the forces that brought them into being. Briefly, they have become things to be valued as heirlooms, not as instruments of grace.

It is clear then that symbols do not stand by themselves. They require minds to interpret them. The interpretation which minds give them depends ultimately on the intellectual vision of these minds. If the intellectual vision is precisely the same as that which made the symbols -- if, for example, we understand what Chaucer is trying to convey to his readers through the instrumentality of the language he uses -- we will interpret the symbols correctly. The problem of interpreting symbols, is, however, more complex than simply putting oneself in the place of their poet. When a tradition intervenes between the original signs and their present condition, as inherited from the past, it is necessary to interpret them with a mind that transcends tradition. Language does not provide its own intellectual gloss. Living minds must interpret the

principles within the context of an age,

> Everything directly conceived or thought of by our intelligence, everything of which we have a concept or 'mental word', may be expressed or translated into language. But despite the flexibility, the docility, the delicacy of any system of language-signs, this expression is always more or less deficient in relation to thought. The loftiest intellectual knowledge, which reveals a world of consequences within a single principle, must, so to speak, be scattered and diluted in order to be orally expressed.
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> Indeed it would be absurd to expect material signs, uttered one after the other, to duplicate or furnish a facsimile of the vital and immanent act of thought. Nor is it the purpose of language to furnish such a facsimile of thought: its object is to permit the intelligence of the hearer to think, by an active repetitive effort, what the intelligence of the speaker is thinking. From this point of view human language performs its function perfectly. Granted the interpretative effort and the intellectual activity of the hearer, it is a perfect system of signs; suppress this effort and this activity and there remains but a radically insufficient system of lifeless symbols.
>
> In other words, language not only supposes an effort... on the part of the one who expresses his thought, but also requires an effort on the part of the listener: a beneficent effort that keeps us from depending entirely on the sign and saves us from falling into what Leibnitz called 'psittacism', a parrot-like use of language.[1]

The point which Saint Augustine made, naive perhaps to the moderns, is that signs must signify something.[2] Inevitably

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1. Jacques Maritain, An Introduction to Logic (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1937), pp. 58-59.

2. 'Signum est, quod praeter species, quas ingerit sensui, aliquid facit in cognitionem venire.' De Doctrina Christiana, II, c, n.1. J. P. Migne, Patrologia Latina XXXIV, 35. The treatment Saint Augustine gives to signs is ostensibly for the purpose of elucidating the theology of the Sacraments: 'Sacramentum est sacrae rei signum'. De Civitate Dei, X, c.s. PL 41,282. Augustine's definition of sign is not a general definition. It designates what the schoolmen would call 'an instrumental sign'. Cf. John of St. Thomas, O.P., Cursus philosophicus thomisticus, I, Log. II, P.Q. XXI, 1, p. 646 a, 20-28. (Marietti, Taurini, 1930).

we must come to an end where signification ceases. God is the ultimate designatus in Augustine's thought. Saint Augustine's definition of a sign was retained throughout the Middle Ages.

In almost every phase of our culture there is apparent this concern with signs (or what we may better call 'sign-things'), with verification which has to do with the arrangement of substitutes for things as though they themselves were things, and not with what they signify. Verification has replaced truth; 'coherence' [1] has replaced logic. Maritain sees this as a contemporary intellectual tendency:

> We go to meet reality with a gush of formulas. Ceaselessly, we launch prefabricated concepts. At the slightest provocation a new concept is formed of which we make use in order to take advantage of being, while protecting ourselves from it and avoiding having to submit to it. We do not try to see, our intelligence does not see. We content ourselves with signs, formulae, expression of conclusions... We take more interest in verifying the validity of the signs and symbols we have manufactured than in nourishing ourselves with the truth they reveal. Has not the word truth itself become suspect to many contemporary philosophers? In fact our intelligence cares very little for the delights and enchantments of the truth, any more than for those of being; rather, our intelligence fears both;

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1. Cf. Bertrand Russel, The Problems of Philosophy (London: Thornton Butterworth Ltd., Home University Library Series, May 1928) pp. 190-193. Cf. supra p. 6. The term 'coherence' is particularly apt for things and words considered as things 'cohere'.

It is in this sense primarily that we intend the expression 'verification' to be taken, for ideas are 'verified' in the modern sense by testing them as though they were things.

> it stops at the level of verification, just as it stops at the symbol.[1]

There remains the most important reason, however, for the philosopher to look beyond the sign in his search for the truth signified. Philosophy is a search for wisdom. This has been so since the days of Thales, when the civilization of Miletos had reached a point in its development where it could allow enterprising men to wonder concerning what is taken otherwise for granted. Behind the phenomena of the world in which men ordinarily are absorbed lies the unknown. The realization that there are really two worlds, the known and the unknown, caused men to seek the reasons of the known in the unknown. Those who penetrated to this world of the unknown were counted wise, lovers of wisdom or philosophers. This is another way of saying that man began to philosophize when his mind confronted mystery, for mystery is nothing else than what is known in part and unknown in part. There is no philosophy without mystery. Nor is there any poetry.

In his discussion of the comparable activities of metaphysics and poetry, M Maritain points out:

> One snatches at the spiritual in an idea, by the most abstract intellection; the other glimpses it in the flesh, by the point of the sense sharpened by the

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1. The Ways of Faith, in 'The Commonweal', Vol. LI 4, November 4, 1949.

> mind. One enjoys its possession only in the secluded retreat of the eternal regions; the other finds it at every cross-roads where the singular and the contingent meet. Both seek a super-reality, which one attains in the nature of things, and the other is content to touch in any symbol whatsoever. Metaphysics pursues essences and and definitions, poetry every form glittering by the way, every reflection of an invisible order. The one isolates mystery in order to know it, the other, through the harmonies it constructs, handles and makes use of mystery like an unknown force.[1]

It is a demonstrable thesis which concludes that with a loss of the sense of mystery, the philosophy and the poetry of a culture lose their vitality. A case, equally cogent, can be worked out for language. When mystery disappears from language, it, too, loses its vitality. Language, at least in part, reflects common sense. It is for this reason that it growns rebellious, so to speak, when it is used to convey notions inconsistent with common sense. Inherent in common sense, though not made explicit, is the same sense of mystery we discover in the great philosophies of the world. Thus in those epochs of history, of which our own is the best example, when a sense of mystery has all but disappeared, we discover common sense in conflict with philosophy and the language of common sense in conflict with the technical jargon of philosophy. It is, of course, absurd to suggest that philosophy replace its technical vocabulary with the vernacular. But it is reasonable to propose that philosophy restore the place of mystery. There

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1. Art and Scholasticism with Other Essays (London: Sheed and Ward, 1947) p. 75.

is nothing inconsistent in saying that the mystery that gives vitality to common sense and expressiveness to its vernacular could not also give life to philosophy without sacrificing the precision of its vocabulary.

But how should philosophy regain its place by recognizing mystery? By reestablishing, we answer, its liaison with being, its proper object. It is this being of which Aristotle spoke and which he made the object of his metaphysics. Any deviation from the pursuit of this object, this ens mysterium, is bound to lead to philosophical failures and to a contamination of the language which tries to express it. History abounds with examples.

Consider, first, the difficulties of language raised by Heraclitus, which occasioned the discussion recorded in Plato's Cratylus. The Heracletian Cratylus, after whom Plato's dialogue was named, had to be content with a slight gesture of his little finger. Why so? Because the philosophy of his master could not be communicated. Parmenides provides us with a second example. Logically he could do little more than Cratylus for the reality he tried to make philosophically intelligible could be signified by one word, and no proposition could be constructed which was not a tautology. Plato himself had to resort to myth to describe his philosophy of nature, for his ideas were inexpressible.

It is the same for the Middle Ages. The glorious achievement of the Middle Ages came to an end when its culture lost its sense of mystery, and when what it continued to verbalize it no longer took seriously. The visible world of the Middle Ages could be signified in its symbols so long as that world was seen to be sustained by the Mysterious God Who brought it into being.

It is the same with modern thought. As soon as Descartes revised the traditional modes of thought, he had to revise the language of philosophy. Kant provides a more striking example. He had to create a new vocabulary to describe the Newtonian world which he mistook for the real world. The technical terms that Kant used are devoid of mysterious signification. The world that Newton created was necessarily a world in which mystery could have no place, a world in which the being of things was inaccessible. This was Kant's world. Its philosophy, Etienne Gilson has elected to call a 'physicism'.[1] But Kant had another world, the world in which men acted, a real world but which could be reached only in some affective way. Neither of Kant's worlds has any intelligible content. What his new vocabulary reflected actually was the debility of the modern intelligence.

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1. vide E. Gilson, Unity of Philosophical Experience (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937) pp. 223 ff.

Poetry has been quicker than philosophy to recognize the necessity of returning to mystery and to the source of its vitality:

> La poésie est l'expression, par la langage humain ramené à son rythme essentiel, du sens mystérieux des aspects de l'existence: elle doue ainsi d'authenticité notre séjour et constitue la seule tâche spirituelle.[1]

Poetry, in coming to grips with existence, has seen fit to restore the signification of language by reestablishing its relation with mystery.(a)

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1. Mallarmé, 'La Vogue' (April 18, 1886), in La Doctrine Symboliste, Guy Michaud (Paris, Librarie, 1947).

# CHAPTER II

## The Poetic Disposition of Language

> One must not confuse the poetry of revolution with a revolution in poetry.
>
> Jean Cocteau

> Modern poetry, with a courage which is sometimes ridiculous, has undertaken to scour language.
>
> Jacques Maritain

In this chapter our concern is the influence of poetry on language. The usefulness of a discussion of this kind does not require elaborate explaining: it is commonly accepted that the history of any nation's language is bound up with the history of its poets. In need of explaining, perhaps, is the posing of the problems for which this discussion tries to provide solutions as philosophical ones.

Generally, the task of tracing words to their original uses in the great poetry of a nation is assigned to philology. The result is a methodical classification of words used in poetry and in prose alike. The purpose of such philological research is to describe (within the limitations of its techniques) a particular language as a means of communication. Its biblio-

graphical products are, ultimately, word-lists or grammars in which are set down the conventional (or 'proper') meanings and usages of the spoken and written words of the language it studies. Thus the work begins with an examination of literature, proceeds analytically by lifting words out of their contexts, and ends with the writing of lexicons and syntactical 'rules'. The cycle recommences when those who use lexicons and grammars find them made obsolete by newer and sometimes better modes of expression.

That this is the case with philological research becomes evident when its method assumes the rôle of literary criticism. In this instance it appends its analysis to a particular work of literature, as if to reconstruct the work from the elements it has distilled out of the language in which the work is written. So doing, it places the work within the entire context of the language. The work thereby becomes a special instance of the universal rules which philology constructs. Departures from accepted meanings are noted and, if sufficiently numerous, can be embraced in wider philological generalizations. For this reason the method of philology is more readily applied to dead languages than to living. Here the scholar can work more comfortably, since the ground he investigates does not shift. He is able to remove a particular word, a particular poem or a particular dialect from the total corpus of a language whose limits he knows. Philology and

lexicography, when their concern is with a dead language, have the tendency to become coextensive: since there is no longer any problem of changing meanings and since the forces responsible for the formation of the language in the first place are no longer living, the only task that remains for philology to accomplish is a lexicographical one. The case of a living language is different. Its limits are unknown; its vocabulary is not fixed by a crystalized literature; its stability is constantly threatened by obsolescence. Thus the most ambitious project to establish fixed meanings of words and their uses is bound to fall short of its purpose. It is clear, then, that while the philology of living language tends to conserve language, it labours always behind a constantly moving frontier. Its purpose, it seems, is being undermined by agencies that fail to take cognizance of the fruits of its researches. What are these agencies? These agencies, briefly, are represented by those who write and speak without the help of dictionaries, lexicons and grammars, to wit, those who write poetry and those who speak in the vernacular. We do not, we hasten to add, exclude scientists who, while they speak a highly technical language, are also poets when they try to find new expressions not already existing in their technical lexicons. Philology does not, cannot, take into account the expansion of language. It is limited, therefore, to the data provided by non-philological sources.

The publication and use of dictionaries and other products of philological research are not, however, to be condemned as practices that typify a decadent culture. They serve a useful function in facilitating communication among the living members of a culture and in conserving the symbols of the past. In a culture as complex as ours philology is, therefore, an indispensable instrument whose uses must be maintained to keep what is good in literature and language. It provides, moreover, a linguistic orthodoxy without which education would be impossible. In these uses we discern simply the practical results of philological research and, as we have already said, these uses are described from the point of view of communication.[1]

But philology also presents us with a knowledge of a definite epistemological type. Its methods are positive. It draws lines, as it were, between points on a horizontal plane. Its object terminates, not in an intellectual knowledge of language, but in the senses and the imagination. Nevertheless, philology is a science, a science that affirms, yet without making the essences it handles explicit, the characteristics of words and language within the limits of its techniques.[2] For this reason philology does not consider

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1. v. supra p. 16.
2. Philology belongs to the type of science M Maritain would call 'la science de la constatation', as opposed to philosophy and mathematics, which he describes as 'la science de l'expli-

or make intelligible the mysterious forces that bring new words and new meanings into being.

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cation': 'Il y a des sciences qui portent sur ces essences comme connues, non pas certes d'une manière exhaustive, car nous ne savons le tout de rien, mais enfin comme connues ou manifestées (par leurs dehors): ce sont les sciences déductives, sciences philosophiques ou sciences mathématiques; déductives à titre bien différent d'ailleurs; car ici, dans le savoir mathématique, l'esprit saisit par leurs éléments constitutifs et construit ou reconstruit comme de plainpied des entités qu'il a primitivement tirées du donné sensible ou qu'il édifie sur celles-là, et qui dans le réel (quand ce sont des entia realia), sont des accidents ou propriétés des corps, mais qu'il traite comme si elles étaient des êtres subsistants et comme si la notion qu'il s'en fait était libre de toute origine expérimentale; là, au contraire, dans le savoir philosophique, il saisit des essences substantielles non par elles-mêmes, mais par leurs accidents propres, et ne procède déductivement qu'en se ravitaillant constamment dans l'expérience (méthode "analytico-synthétique").

Ces sciences-là sont proprement des sciences de L'EXPLICATION,...propter quid est, selon la terminologie des anciens; elles nous révèlent les nécessités intelligibles immanentes à l'objet, elles nous font connaître les effets par les principes ou raisons d'être, par les causes, en prenant ce mot au sens tout à fait général que lui donnaient les anciens. Il peut arriver, il est vrai, qu'affrontant une réalité trop haute et dont l'essence ne peut être connue que par analogie, elles doivent se borner (c'est le cas de la métaphysique en face de Dieu) à une connaissance de simple certitude de fait (supra-empirique), mais c'est qu'alors elles débouchent pour ainsi dire au delà de l'explication, et il reste que de soi elles demandent à découvrir l'essence.

Et il y a des sciences qui portent sur les essences comme cachées, sans pouvoir jamais dévoiler en elles-mêmes les nécessités intelligibles immanentes à leur objet, ce sont les sciences inductives, sciences qui (pour autant du moins qu'elles restent purement inductives, ce qui n'est pas le cas de la physique et des sciences "expérimentales" des modernes, Bacon et Mill se sont bien trompés là-dessous) ne vont de soi qu'à être des sciences de la CONSTATATION empirique.' Les Degrés du Savoir (4th ed., Paris: Desclée de Brouwer et Cie, 1946), pp. 65-67.

Now that we have described the method we wish to follow, we are ready to proceed with an examination of the use of language in poetry, science, and philosophy.

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'While the practice of poetry need not in itself confer wisdom or accumulate knowledge,' T. S. Eliot has written, 'it ought at least to train the mind in one habit of universal value: that of analysing the meanings of words: of those that one employs oneself, as well as the words of others.'[1] In times less turbulent than those during which these words were written, it would have been scarcely necessary for Mr Eliot to remind his readers that the office of poetry is not to be compounded with the office of wisdom. Still less would he have been obliged to make explicit reference to one of the special benefits that accrues from the practice of poetry: sensitivity to verbal signification. The essay which this apology initiates may well have been dispensed with, for what Mr Eliot has to say may have been said more effectively (in happier times) in conversation, as he explains in a later essay: "In a society of smaller size (a society, therefore, which was less feverishly busy) there

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1. The Idea of a Christian Society (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1940) p. 4.

might be more conversation and fewer books; and we should not find this tendency--of which this essay provides one example--for those who have acquired some reputation, to write books outside the subject on which they have made that reputation."[1] The fact remains, however, that Mr Eliot has published his notes on problems which theologians, philosophers and sociologists have discussed and continue to discuss. But where one might expect to discover Eliot the theologian, the philosopher or the sociologist, one finds only Eliot the poet.[2] With modesty proportionate to greatness, found only in a poet conscious of his mission, he declines the official responsibilities that accompany scientific pronouncements. His point of departure is, therefore, never a scientific one. It can be described by the term 'psychological', to the extent that this much-maligned word describes the nature of the extraordinary consciousness always a requisite in a good poet, rather than the impersonal doctrine whose truth he witnesses.

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1. Notes Towards the Definition of Culture (London: Faber and Faber, 1948) p. 86.

2. We do not suggest thereby that Mr. Eliot does not possess more than an ordinary understanding of theological and philosophical principles. But he himself claims only what has been accorded him as a poet: 'To aim at originality would be an impertinence: at most this essay can be only an original arrangement of ideas which did not belong to me before and which must become the property of whoever can use them.' Ibid., p. v. Cf. 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' in Selected Essays (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1917) III, 21.

Thus Mr Eliot, moved by 'the suspicion that the current terms in which we discuss international affairs and political theory may only tend to conceal from us the real issues of contemporary civilization'[1], is prepared to take his post among those 'guardians of the vast armoury of language', to use Coleridge's phrase.[2] The justification for broaching subjects alien to the work of poetry clearly lies in the extraordinary fact of being an extraordinary poet. With this we should not quarrel. In Mr Eliot we have a first class witness who describes in terms of experience what we intend to describe philosophically.

Behold, then, the poet. He is, as the word itself declares, a maker, a maker of language, a craftsman in words. A poet knows words as a sculptor knows marble, as a musician knows sound, or as a physician knows medicine. His knowledge of language is the sort acquired by a practitioner, belonging, as Aristotle would say, to the order of praxis. The poet comes to this knowledge, of the kind he can justly claim to have of words, by pleasing himself with regard to the manner in which he uses them. But how does the poet so please himself?

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1. The Idea of a Christian Society, p. v.

2. Miscellanies, Aesthetic and Literary (London: G. Bell and Sons Ltd., ed. T. Ashe, 1911) p. 143.

We answer simply by saying that the poet's pleasure is derived by making a poem out of words. That is, the poet pleases himself by making something, not in haphazard fashion, but in accord with the rules of his art.[1] It is thus the poet establishes a liaison with the mysterious being which makes the poem intelligible. In making the poem intelligible he gives it a form, a substantial form, which may be likened to the human soul. This substantial form is what Raissa Maritain calls le sens poétique as opposed to le sens logique.

> Le sens logique ou rationnel n'est pas exigible en poésie pour lui-même, il semble même extrinsèque à la poésie comme telle. Et cependant, d'une manière ou d'une autre, à un degré quelconque, il accompagne toujours l'oeuvre poétique: ou bien d'une façon explicite, ou bien en faisant implicitement appel au concours de l'intelligence. Faute de quoi la poésie elle-même disparaît. Voilà le paradoxe que nous voudrions considérer.
>
> Le sens poétique se confond avec la poésie elle-même. Si j'emploie ici l'expression sens poétique plutôt que le mot poésie, c'est pour marquer que la poésie fait être le poème, comme l'âme fait être le corps, en étant la forme (en langage aristotélicien) ou l'idée (en langage spinoziste) de ce corps, en lui donnant une signification substantielle, un sens ontologique.[2]

It is for this reason that the intelligibility of the poem and hence the meanings of the words which compose it cannot be discovered by any analysis which resolves it into its

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1. vide Jacques Maritain, Art et Scholastique (Paris: La Librairie de l'Art Catholique, 1948) pp. 57-72.
2. Situation de la Poésie (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer et Cie, 1938) pp. 13-14.

component parts if each part is considered as a word with a standard or logical meaning.

What transformation does language undergo when it becomes the language of a poem? First, the being of the language is improved; it becomes informed by virtue of being disposed. It receives, in the language of the Platonists, a splendor veri, the splendor ordinis, as St. Augustine says, and the splendor formae, as St. Thomas says.[1] It is because the intelligence loves beauty, form and truth that it makes the language conform to itself in the intuitive vision which the poet expresses in the poem. Second, the poet makes use of language but in so doing creates a speech. In this connection the differentiation alluded to by L. H. Gray is particularly useful.[2] There are three separate aspects of language conveyed by the words language, tongue and speech. But better rendered by the French: langage, langue and parole, which designate respectively language in its universal, its social, and its individual aspects.

Therefore the poet makes use of a langue to create a parole. When this is accomplished the poet should be pleased. 'If a writer wishes to give the effect of speech

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1. Cf. Jacques Maritain, Art et Scholastique (Paris: La Librairie de l'Art Catholique, 1948) p. 37.

2. Louis H. Gray, Foundations of Language (New York: Macmillan, 1939) p. 18.

he must positively give the effect of himself talking in his own person or in one of his rôles.'[1] This is what happens in the great moments of the history of our language when a Chaucer is born. It is not inconceivable that in creating a speech or parole that a poet please only himself by speaking in a language clear only to himself, not to others. James Joyce provides us with an example: 'En réalité, l'auteur' (Joyce) 'écrit dans une langue étrangère connue de lui seul, mais bien connue de lui.'[2]

Yet it is not necessary that the poet change the language from its grammatical and orthographical form in order to transfigure language. In fact, the poet can derive his vocabulary from the commonest speech. What Theodore Haecker has written of Virgil's talent to transform, much to the sorrow of translators, the words of daily social intercourse into poetry, illustrates precisely what we mean here: 'The rock on which translators come to grief lies in this inexorable law of classic art: out of the commonest words must be fashioned the most uncommon line; soiled and jaded words must be lifted up into the glory of the pure word...'.[3] This freshness which comes in the

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1. T. S. Eliot, 'Rhetoric and Poetic Drama', in Selected Essays (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1919) p. 38.
2. Raissa Maritain, Situation de la Poésie (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer et Cie, 1938) p. 31
3. Virgil (London: Sheed and Ward, 1937) p. 24.

making of language is sometimes discovered and not made by the poet, but for the same reasons.

> That upon which one in vain has sought enlightenment from books is suddenly illuminated by a flash of light at hearing one serving-maid conversing with another; an expression which one has tried in vain to torture out of one's own brain, in vain has sought in dictionaries, even in the 'Dictionary of the Society of the Sciences', this one hears in passing -- a raw soldier utters it, and does not dream what a rich man he is.[1]

For the same reasons it is understandable why a revolution in poetry brings with it all sorts of obscurity -- obscurities which result from the matter of the poem and not its substantial form: '...the material of art is never quite the same', says T. S. Eliot.[2] Thus when new matter is informed even by the same old ideas, it is the matter which gives rise to the obscurities. It is only after the matter has become familiar that these obscurities are removed. But the process of familiarization begins when the poet publishes his poem, when the poet's idiom becomes either part of the language in which he writes or part of a new language which he creates; and when, in effect, he surrenders himself to the common intelligibility which his poetry, now depersonalized, is bound to assume.

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1. S. Kierkegaard, Stages on Life's Way (Princeton: Princeton University Press, Trans. Walter Lowrie, 1940) p. 440.

2. Selected Essays (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1917) p. 16.

The use of unfamiliar matter to force a revolution may involve another language, as when an English poet makes use of French words; it may involve the use of archaicisms, as when meanings latent in language are once more revived; or it may involve the use of argot or slang. The need for new and unfamiliar matter is always present, not only for poets, but for artists of all kinds. The cubists in modern art are good examples: they needed new building blocks, so to speak. The constantly shifting ground on which the poet builds his verbal edifices should not, however, discourage poetry. It is imperative, in fact, that the poet keep on the move, ready always to endow the mercuric medium in which he works with a flash of the eternal light his soul reflects. If the soul of the poet is reflected in the work of the poem, the words must be indeed somewhat obscure. Every human soul is an unrepeatable mystery, never completely comprehended, not even by its possessor. Obscurity, then, should be welcomed if, in hiding the hackneyed and the common uses which wear language out, it reveals the mysterious order of the poet's soul.

The process which Mr Eliot has called 'depersonalization' does not prevent an increasing revitalization of language by poetry. 'Depersonalization' is of two kinds: the one 'creative', the other 'corruptive'. When a word becomes

purely a convention of communication and nothing more, its depersonalization is 'corruptive'. The word 'nice' is sufficient as an example: pleasing everyone, it pleases no one. In 'creative depersonalization' where life is given to a word without precluding its general use, it pleases everyone, by pleasing someone, the poet; and no less so if, in entering the language, it must suffer the pangs of obscurity. Thus the words of poetry ('reverse' signs) signify at once objects and a subject, the poet. By making a word signify what is in his own soul the poet accomplishes his revolution of language. Here we can understand the affinities between poetry and experimental science. The poet wishes to signify an order higher than that discovered by his senses, by improving what he discovers, by remedying the deficiency of sense knowledge. But he does not accomplish this revolution by destroying what he discovers. The final effect is achieved when the order which sensible, concrete things have in the poet's imagination (in his soul), is reflected by the disposition of the words of his poetry. The subject is revealed first, the object after. In science, on the contrary, it is the object which is revealed first by 'direct' signs.

# CHAPTER III

## The Influence of Science on Language

In this chapter we study the effect of science on verbal signification. The way in which we propose to do this is to examine various mythological literatures that result from an inability of science to reach the mysterious realm of existence. Modern scientistic mythology, it is our belief, has arisen from the disintellectualization of philosophy cut off from reality and existence by empiricism and idealism. The language that this mythology has created is a language of fictions which have meaning only in the arena of action.

There are three positions that merit our attention in this connection. The first position is that of Professor Cornford; of special interest here is his interpretation of Plato's Timaeus. The second is that of Hans Vaihinger's philosophy of 'As If'. And finally Jacques Maritain's thought on the purpose of Plato's mythology will be reviewed.

With the exception of M Maritain's position, which transcends the other two, we discover analogies of myth as a fictitious ideal. The purpose of reviewing these positions becomes clear when we consider the emphasis that contemporaries

place on attitudes. The effect on language has been tremendous. Words no longer signify an intelligible content, but a feeling. Language has its own modern mythology replete with meaningless symbols which evoke little thought but which can, nevertheless, serve as powerful instruments in firing men to action. It is almost true to say that a greater part of the modern vocabulary is a lexicon of attitudes.

We should first point out that the three positions we have chosen are not to be taken strictly as historical stadia. Rather they exhibit in a remarkable way the rôle that metaphysical thought plays in the drama of language. Cornford and Vaihinger have no metaphysics in the true sense of the word. For this reason they fall back upon erroneous explanations which betray the common source of their misconceptions. M Maritain, on the other hand, sees quite clearly what is wrong with the modern world, precisely because the centre of his philosophy is metaphysical. The conclusion which we here anticipate is that contemporary language is a language of fictitious meanings because the moderns have attempted to replace metaphysics with a disintellectualized empiricism. Words have nothing to signify except what relates to the practical order. Let us then consider first the teaching of Professor Cornford.

Here it is a question of defining the Timaeus of

Plato. Is it an exposition of the truth? Is it fancy? We let Professor Cornford answer:

> The Timaeus is a poem, no less than the De rerum natura of Lucretius, and indeed more so in certain respects. Both poets are concerned, in the first instance, with our practical attitude towards the world -- what we should make of our life there and how to face the prospect of death.[1]

Ostensibly Professor Cornford's answer here embodies a moral purpose. But such a purpose cannot be based on literal truth. Hence the mythological character of the Timaeus:

> There are two senses in which the Timaeus is a 'myth' or 'story' (Mythos)... no account of the material world can ever amount to an exact and self-consistent statement of unchangeable truth. In the second place the cosmology is cast in the form of a cosmogony, a 'story' of events spread out in time... Such a story was, to Plato, very far from being like the truth.[2]

Let us understand Professor Cornford aright. It is impossible, he seems to say, to represent a changing world in any other fashion than by a form of literature which is itself spread out in time. In this light the Timaeus is a reconstruction of sensible reality (or should we say unreality?) which cannot be represented literally. Thus then philosophical analysis fails, myth succeeds, and for the same reason, the Timaeus can be no more than a 'likely' story:

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1. F. M. Cornford, Plato's Cosmology (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Limited, 1948) p. 31.
2. loc.cit.

> ...the important point is that no matter whether you prefer to analyze the world or to construct it piece by piece, the account can never be more than 'likely', because of the changing nature of its object; it can never be revised and amended into exact truth.[1]

Professor Cornford adds to this, and quite rightly, that any interpretation of the Timaeus that considers it an allegory is incorrect. Though the myth of the Timaeus is a 'likely' story, it is not to be confused with the plausibility of modern scientific approximations. Yet his explanation was as good as that of Democritus:

> The cosmology of the Timaeus is poetry, an image that may come nearer to conveying truth than some other cosmologies. But the truth to which it can approximate is not an exact and literal statement of 'physical laws', such as modern science dreams of; it is the truth, firmly believed by Plato, that the world is not solely the outcome of blind chance or necessity, but shows the working of a divine intelligence. Plato would have claimed that, considered as an explanation of sensible appearances, his own theory of the simple primary bodies and their transformations was quite as plausible as the atomic theory of Democritus. He would also have claimed that it was a better explanation and nearer to the truth in that it attributes to intelligible design much that Democritus left to mere chance. This nearness to truth has nothing to do with the modern notion of 'approximation' indicated, for example, in the following passage: 'The accuracy of the observations is dependent on the limits to the discriminative fineness of our senses, and on the delicacy of our "instruments of precision"... When all possible precautions have been taken, the measurements of physical magnitudes are necessarily approximate and would remain so even if we had not to allow for the possible modifications of every hypothesis in natural science by the discovery of new "appearances"'.[2]

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1. loc. cit.
2. loc. cit. (Cornford quotes Taylor here: loc. cit. n.4).

If we interpret Cornford correctly on this point, we are left with the conclusion that Plato possessed a metaphysics in which he idealized plans for action and a poetic in which he expresses these ideals. On the same subject perhaps more interesting is Hans Vaihinger's philosophy 'As If'.

Fundamentally his thought resembles Cornford's ideas. Like Cornford, he regards Plato's myths as pure fictions.[1] And like Cornford, he evinces the same Kantian tendency to suppose only two limited worlds, the world of science and the world in which we act. Having denied the means of access to a knowledge of the world of things, he regards truth as an impossible attainment. The only alternative is to regard all hypothesis, abstractions, categories, and so forth, traditionally held to be instruments by which the reality of things was grasped, as fictions. Conceptual knowledge, ideational constructs and all such means and logical instruments are, consequently, to be abandoned. The beginnings of a theory of fictions, so construed, can be discerned in the history of Greek philosophy:

> Before there could be a logical theory of fictions, they had first to be created and employed in scientific

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1. vide Hans Vaihinger, The Philosophy of 'As If' (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1949), pp. 26, 140.

> practice -- for if there is any field where theory does not precede practice, it is here. The scanty beginnings of a practical employment of the fiction in ancient times hardly sufficed for the creation of a theory, and had anyone in those days really been struck by the peculiar characters of the fiction, he would certainly have at once confused it with an ordinary assumption or hypothesis. The view that we can and must think, without thereby necessarily implying anything as to the nature of existence, and yet be able to attain correct practical results, was one to which the ancients never attained. That we are compelled to think of something was always regarded as a proof of the reality of what was thought of. That what we are (apparently) compelled to think of, is not objective but can only be a means -- such an idea is an entirely modern product.[1]

It would be possible to disagree with Vaihinger's interpretation of Greek philosophy in this passage on the ground that he fails to consider the nature of judgment as affirming essences of existents, which would explain how conceptual knowledge is completed in an existential judgment. However, more urgent is the necessity of demonstrating exactly what Vaihinger means here.

First, it is clear enough what he means by 'scientific practice' if, as he intends, the expression is used in its modern sense. He refers principally to a type of verification. 'Scientific practice' is the ground on which certain theories are put to pasture. The validity of the practice could not, of course, be a priori determined until this verificatory or testing period were in some sense completed.

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1. ibid., pp. 139-140.

Patently, and this is our second point, lacking in Vaihinger's philosophy is a metaphysics and a philosophy of nature which would provide him with a true centre for moral theory, and not a fictitious one, for action; if he possessed this, he would not have interpreted Plato's Mythology as a necessary poetic which accompanies a philosophy unable to express the sensible real, in which action takes place.

Before considering Maritain's position, let us dwell on Plato himself. The philosophy of Plato, as it appeared in The Republic, was built on the theory that somewhere there exist archetypes of all the qualities of the sensible universe. These archetypes are concepts or ideas, and are the only objects which satisfy the requirements of science. These ideas exist in things by participation. The things themselves, since they are not ideas, are not reality; they belong to the realm of pure becoming (as Heraclitus had taught), and are the objects of imagination and opinion. Mathematics provides the prototype of the science which in a sort of Pythagorean excursus lifts the mind from a consideration of sensible things to a contemplation of intelligible necessities:

> ...arithmetic has a very great and elevating effect, compelling the soul to reason about abstract number, and rebelling against the introduction of visible or tangible objects into the argument...this knowledge

> may be truly called necessary, necessitating as it clearly does the use of the pure intelligence in the attainment of pure truth... Knowledge is the real object of the whole science...the knowledge at which geometry aims is knowledge of the eternal, and not of aught perishing and transient...geometry will draw the soul towards truth, and create the spirit of philosophy.[1]

But still Plato lacked a medium of communication. Mythology enabled him to speak of the physical world even though it is not an object of knowledge. He developed mythology to such perfection that had to resort to an explanation of the most abstract problems by means of these analogies. The finest literary example of this is found in his analogy of the cave, in which man is described as a captive in a cave, seeing only the shadows cast on the wall before him of the living things which move behind him in the sunlight of the intelligible world. He concludes this analogy thus:

> But the release of the prisoners from chains, and their translation from the shadows to the images and to the light, and the ascent from the underground den to the sun, while in his presence they are vainly trying to look on animals and plants and the light of the sun, but are able to perceive even with their weak eyes the images in the water (which are divine), and are the shadows of true existence (not shadows of images cast by a light of fire, which compared with the sun is only an image)--this power of elevating the highest principle in the soul to the contemplation of that which is best in existence, with which we may compare the raising of that faculty which is the very

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1. The Republic (New York: The Modern Library, Trans. by B. Jowett, 1945) VII, 525-527.

> light of the body to the sight of that which is brightest in the material and visible world -- this power is given, as I was saying, by all that study and pursuit of the arts [of mathematics] which has been described.[1]

The expression of metaphysical principles by means of mythology was not restricted to Plato alone. We find in the rituals of contemporary primitives a complete philosophy of life based on the explanatory principle of legend and myth. The powerful influence in tribal life of such ritualistic customs as black magic, totems, and voodoo, is difficult to overestimate. Jacques Maritain, in his discussion of the symbolic rites of primitives, explains it so:

> ...in order to re-endow things with the efficacity of an Archtypal-sign, which is their origin and from which they derive and in which they participate, the pseudo-Platonism of primitive man accounts for them, not by a supra-temporal Idea, but by a story (which reverts to a pre-temporal event). It has been said that the etiological myth justifies things, it 'validates' them. Already, in a nocturnal fashion, it assigns to them a 'cause' -- however different that cause may be from the 'causes' of our science. Already it corresponds to a seeking after knowledge, to a magical rough sketch of knowledge. But all this while making manifest its practical origin and its dependence with regard to the practical sign.[2]

Among civilized moderns, myths still hold an unconquerable realm. Though centuries have passed since

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1. loc. cit. p. 532.

2. Ransoming the Time (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941) p. 247.

the philosophy of Plato was established, man still clings to Platonist mythology to help him in his explanation of what should be explained abstractly. Climaxing his search for truth in the signs expressing it, and becoming ensnared in a mesh of the symbols of modern mythology, the searcher finds the result as confusing and futile as the mathematician's attempt to elucidate the eternal verities with numbers. Numerology is a kind of mythology. Perhaps the best example in our own culture is the myth of necessary progress. This myth, as others that rob time-honoured words (like 'science', 'democracy', 'history') of their treasured meanings, has no meaning in the sense that it expresses no truth. The genesis of this myth among the moderns is interesting to trace:

> ...the very idea of necessary and universal progress is, strictly speaking, not an idea at all. It is not a concept whose purpose is to furnish the intellect with a hold upon the real, and therefore the intellect cannot measure or rectify it. On the contrary it is one of those merely verbal formulas -- which are more perfect in their order in proportion as they are more independent of, and remote from, and arbitrarily imposed upon, things. If you would understand their origin, go back to the Cartesian clear idea. From the clear idea pass on to the facile idea -- facile in that it allows of the very widest application, and explains the greatest number of things with the least effort -- effort of thought particularly. From that you pass easily to the idea-feeling which, applied to things without taking account of their distinctive natures and enfolding within its wide sympathy all fields of thought, connotes no more than an effective state or a practical attitude of the thinking subject. And now at

> last, at a third remove from the clear idea, you arrive at what I can only call the idea-myth which, emptied of all intelligible content and having no other end save to stimulate in the imagination and the appetite certain well-recognised and pleasurable reactions, dominates despotically the whole field of representation and the individual himself, whom it sets a-quiver the moment it is put before his mind. Thus have come to birth those ideological divinities, those pseudo-ideas wherein the real is altogether swallowed up, which in their totality constitute modern mythology.[1]

This passage brings us to the heart of the problem created by contemporary scientistic mythology. The 'idea-feeling' of which M Maritain speaks has a verbal correspondent. If ideas are emptied of signification so also are the words that signify them. It is this loss of the ontological content of ideas that is responsible for the disintellectualization of language. This is the principle which makes M Maritain's explanation of Platonic mythology correct and the explanations of Vaihinger and of Cornford false. To substantiate these observations let us examine M Maritain's interpretation of Plato's myths. To understand his position it is

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1. Jacques Maritain, Theonas (London: Sheed and Ward, 1933) pp. 108-109. Cf. C. K. Ogden, Bentham's Theory of Fictions, (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co., Ltd., 1932) quoting Bentham's Works, Vol. III, pp. 593-594): '"Give us our rights, say the thousands and the millions. Give us our rights, they say, and they do well to say so. Yet, of all who say so, not one perhaps can say, not one perhaps ever conceived clearly, what it is he thus calls for -- what sort of a thing a right is."

necessary, first, to point out that he judges Plato's philosophy of nature in the light of his metaphysics. Plato's metaphysics he designates as une métaphysique de l'extra réel.[1] In other words, the objects of knowledge on which metaphysics bears are existentially separate from things. The scientific prototype of Platonic metaphysics is in this respect mathematical:

> Métaphysique extra-réelle qui est, en somme, concue par Platon à l'image des mathématique. La géométrie constitue, elle aussi, une monde extra-réel, et tout philosophe qui commence par la géométrie, qui inscrit à sa porte la devise platonicienne, sera tenté inévitablement de concevoir ainsi la métaphysique sur le type des mathématique et de colloquer les objets du métaphysicien dans un monde séparé.[2]

This understood it is easy to see how it is impossible to conceive of a philosophy of nature. Nature constitutes the sensible, imitable, contingent reality of things. But philosophy bears upon a world of changeless essences entirely separated from things. There can be, therefore, no philosophy of nature for Plato. What is known of nature is necessarily consigned to the category of opinion.(doxa):

> ...il n'y a pas, il ne peut pas y avoir de philosophie de la nature dans un système comme celui de Platon. D'un côté, vous avez la doxa, l'opinion, qui concerne

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1. Jacques Maritain, La Philosophie de la Nature (Paris: Chez Pierre Téqui, 1948) p. 3.

2. loc. cit.

> le monde sensible et son devenir, de l'autre vous avez le monde des archétypes éternels, objet de la métaphysique. Vous avez dIun côté l'opinion portant sur le monde du devenir et puis, en tant que science, vous avez le s mathématiques et la métaphysique, pas de connaissance scientifique de la nature, pas de connaissaince scientifique du monde du mouvement et du temps. C'est pourquoi lorsque le philosophe cherchera malgré tout à donner une interprétation de ce monde, et à s'élever au-dessus de l'opinion commune, de lIopinion vulgaire, il ne pourra procéder qu'a l'aide de mythes. L'usage de mythes pour interpréter la nature sensible est réellement indispensable dans la philosophie de Platon. D'une manière générale, je crois qu'on peut dire que le recours à des mythes explicatifs est rendu nécessaire par toute tentative d'expliquer les phénomènes de la nature à l'aide uniquement du savoir mathématique. [1]

From the above text, it should be manifest to the reader that a mathematicised science which lacks a philosophy of nature, a philosophy making motion and change intelligible, necessitates a poetic explanation of nature. Poetry (now no longer defined as the 'divination of the spiritual in the things of sense' [2]) has been saddled with the task of description, a task for which it was not originally intended, and for which it is ill adapted.

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1. ibid. pp. 6-7.

2. Jacques Maritain, 'The Frontiers of Poetry', in Art and Scholasticism with Other Essays (London: Sheed and Ward, 1947) p. 75.

The mistake, then, is not linguistic. Language has not deserted man; man has deserted language. Nor is it a scientific error. It is understandable that science must create a language with specialized syntax and grammar to express the relations it knows. It is, rather, an intellectual error. If, in fact, there has arisen a scientistic mythology which invests words once conveying deeper meanings with 'scientific' meanings, who, we may ask, are responsible? The only plausible answer is: the 'philosophers'. From Descartes to Kant we discern the first phase in the dilution of verbal meanings. It is an easy matter to trace, as M. Maritain has done, the transition from idea to idea-feeling, from Descartes' Discourse on Method to Kant's Critiques, from a mathematicization of language[1] to a frantic and futile attempt to restore its meanings

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1. Cf. Peter Wust, 'Crisis in the West', Essays in Order # 10, (New York: Sheed and War, 1940) p. 117. 'The insistence of science that perception shouod be as much dehumanized as possible was...properly speaking, an aspiration towards an utterly despiritualized reality, which was to present only an absolutely calculable mechanism. The beginning of this tendency is already typified by Descartes' discovery of analytic geometry. However important in the abstract this discovery may have been for mathematics, it became, so to speak, the prototype of the relativity mania which characterizes modern science. Just as in the first case the mathematical forms were reduced to their numerical ratios, so the whole domain of forms proper to being was to be resolved into similar relative values. It is hardly to be wondered at, then, if gradually space and time became

in the world of action by making it affective and from Kant[1] to the proponents of 'value theories' in whom the cycle is completed. We have, therefore, on the one hand laws[2], theories, hypothesis, and so forth, and, on the other, the world of values or the world of action. Two vocabularies are needed for each world. And in fact we do have two vocabularies, the one the physico-mathematical vocabulary of science, and the other the vocabulary of mythology. Neither of these vocabularies is sufficient, for neither is metaphysical, nor for that matter 'physical' (in the ancient sense). Since the language in which we speak of nature is mathematicized, only motionless essences are grasped. But nature changes, is in a constant state of

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the sole great irreducible factors of existence, the overcoming of which human thought set before itself as its almost exclusive aim.'

And so with language: The ideal to which contemporary semanticists aspire is, in the last resort, a language completely mathematicised.

1. R. A. Wilson, The Miraculous Birth of Language (New York: The Philosophical Library, 1948) p. 53. 'When Kant in his investigation of the nature and validity of human knowledge in the Critique of Pure Reason (1781) undertook an examination of space and time as the starting point in the discussion, he struck the path which all fruitful philosophical investigation has followed since.' And it is thus that Professor Wilson wishes to investigate language and so add to the long list of unphilosophical treatises that have since been written on other subjects, a time-space account of language. (cf. ibid. pp. 54-55).

2. Which Vaihinger defines as 'the summation of constant relations where the chance variations and apparent irregularities in detail are disregarded'. (ibid. p. 215).

change. Nor is it possible for a mathematicised language to describe 'goods', necessary for moral action, 'In mathematicis non est bonum', the ancients used to say. It is for this reason we should retain the term 'value' to designate what the moderns mean by incentives for action which have no foundation in the intellectual order but **merely** in the space-time world of Kant wherein there is no morality. Actually Hans Vaihinger's errors are more instructive than they might first appear. A 'summational fiction', he would say, is 'in theory a comparatively worthless construct'.[1] It is worthless because no plausible conduct can be based on it. This is quite true, if the theory is 'scientific' in the physico-mathematical sense. What Professor Vaihinger unwittingly demonstrates in his Philosophy of 'As If' is M Maritain's thesis that without a true metaphysics, there is no philosophy of nature and that without a philosophy of nature there is only mythology.

We need only to add that the language of science is not a universal instrument. It conveys only what it should convey. Should we try to make it convey more we are left with Professor Vaihinger's world of 'summational fictions', a veritable wasteland of meaningless symbols.

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1. loc. cit.

# CHAPTER IV

## Conclusion

Mme Maritain provides us with the important distinction which begins our conclusion:

> C'est là ce qui distingue tout d'abord le poème de toute oeuvre de mode prosaique, je ne dis pas de toute prose. Dans le mode prosaique, en effet, les mots ne sont presque exclusivement que des signes; ils sont là, avant tout, pour référer l'esprit à ce qu'ils signifient; eux-mêmes, ils ont une importance secondaire. Tandis qu'en poésie les mots sont à la fois des signes et des objets (des objets porteurs d'images) qui s'organisent en un corps vivant et indépendant; ils ne peuvent céder la place à un synonyme sans que souffre ou meure le sens du poème comme tel.[1]

On the one hand, we have then words which comprise the constituitive parts of a work of art, viz., a poem. On the other, we have words whose primary purpose is to point to something beyond themselves. It goes without saying that the words used in one case can be identical materialiter to those used in the other. There is no reason, therefore, to prevent our saying that the same dictionary could list all the words used in a given poem and in a given scientific treatise. But it is important to point out that the meanings of the words in the

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1. ibid., p. 15.

scientific treatise would be close to the meanings found in the dictionary. This we have already proved in Chapter II, when we demonstrated that a philological description of language that ends with the work of the lexicographer is not sufficient to account for the creative influx of new meanings. Every new poem proposes a new set of meanings. As we have indicated in Chapter II, the source of these meanings can be found in the unique experience of the poet; that is, where the language is poetic. This experience is spiritual:

> La source de la poésie et de toute intuition créatrice est dans une certaine expérience qu'on peut appeler 'connaissance' obscure et savoureuse, d'une saveur toute spirituelle, car à ces profondeurs tout est esprit et vie, et toute poète sait qu'il y pénètre par un recueillement de tous ses sens, si fugitif soit-il, condition première de la conception poétique.[1]

It is evident then that the term of this spiritual influx belongs to those things which the mind produces outside of itself. Thus language is generated neither by chance nor by nature. To make this clear let us examine a text from Thomas Aquinas' commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics:

> Tertio dicit, quod res acquirunt form m ex agentibus similibus; dicens, quod quaecumque substantia fit 'ex agente univoco,' idest simili secundum formam. Omnes enim substantiae, quae generantur, generantur aut a natura, aut ab arte, aut a fortuna, aut 'automato,' idest casu, idest per se vano. Differt autem ars a natura, quia ars est principium agendi in alio, natura autem est principium actionis et motus in eo in quo est. Manifestum est autem, quod ea quae generantur ab arte, fiunt ex sibi simili.

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1. Raissa Maritain, Situation de la Poésie (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1938) pp. 35-36.

> Aedificator enim, per formam domus quam habet in mente, facit domum quae est in materia.[1]

Manifestly, language is generated by art. There are exceptions which might be raised as objections to Thomas' treatment of things produced outside the mind; for example, it could be said that certain words enter the language a fortuna, as in the case of mistaken meaning, which is ascribed to a word and which gains currency. Or, it may be objected that certain words come into being a natura, as in the case of onomatopoeic words. In both these examples, it is the aptness of the word to convey an idea rather than its manner of coming into being that allows it to enter the language. This aptness always depends on the projection of meaning into it ab arte. But while the poet necessarily ascribes meanings to words he uses, his interest is in words as things, since they are for him the means of making a thing. For the scientist, on the other hand, there is a production of something in the mind; words are a means of conveying his thoughts. For the poet, words are (in a manner of speaking) the goal, which is making; for the philosopher, a means of conveying ideas.

The scientist, since he is concerned only with the speculative order, has as his intention knowledge for the sake of knowing. He is concerned with the truth itself, not with

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1. Thomas Aquinas, In Metaphysicam Aristotelis Commentaria (Taurini: Marietti, 1925) p. 691.

the means by which the truth is reached or communicated. For him, then, language is a system of signs. Words point the way towards concepts, concepts take the mind to things, but both are means to the end, and are not known directly in themselves. In a work of scientific abstraction, then, the medium in which a treatise is presented is made up of speculative signs; these signs may be changed in position, even substituted for by other signs which are synonomous[1], but the same meaning is derived from the whole.

A poem, on the other hand, cannot have the position of its parts altered, or the whole will lose its inference, and the poem is destroyed. In scientific prose, as we said above, the words are used almost exclusively as signs, and a treatise can be paraphrased without injuring the substance of the treatise or altering the meaning of the original; if a poem is translated, however, there is a substantial change; the only way in which there can be a poem before and after translation is to create a new poem with its own poetic sense. Since this is true, the 'parts' of the poem, the words, must be more than purely speculative signs directing the mind toward truth. They must be things in themselves:

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1. Strictly speaking, synonymous words are impossible. Where it is possible to substitute one word for another, it is because the word does not matter as much as that which it signifies. Such is the case in scientific treatises. In poetry synonyms are often used as diametrically opposed words,

> The birth of idea, and hence of intellectual life in us, seems bound up with the discovery of the value of meaning of a sign. An animal employs signs without perceiving the relationship of meaning. To perceive the relationship of meaning is to have an idea -- a spiritual sign. Nothing could be more suggestive in this connection than that kind of miracle which is the first awakening of intelligence in blind deaf-mutes...: essentially it depends upon the discovery of the relationship of the meaning of some gesture with regard to a desired object. The sign is the keystone of intellectual life.[1]

In a footnote, referring to the same problem, he adds:

> For the very genesis, for the first stirring of the idea as distinct from images, the intervention of a sensible sign is necessary...it is necessary that the relationship of meaning should first be actively exercised in a gesture, a cry, in a sensory sign bound up with the desire to be expressed. Knowing this relationship of meaning (signification) will come later, and this will be to have the idea, even if it is merely implicit, of that which is signified. ...Language properly so called (conventional sensory signs) develops out of this 'language' of natural sensory signs.[2]

To sum up, then, both poet and philosopher make use of words, each for their own purpose. The poet to communicate concrete images, to 'make' poems for the sake of expressing beauty, the philosopher for transportation from sensible things to the Real Truth. To quote Maritain again, 'the creative idea expresses itself finally in matter, as the speculative intuition of the philosopher does in the concept or mental word. And in truth these are analogous: to perform the inner word in the mind, and the work of art in matter.'[3]

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1. Jacques Maritain, Ransoming the Time (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1946) pp. 220-221.
2. loc.cit., n. 2.
3. Art and Poetry (New York: Philosophical Library, 1946) pp. 80-81.

Language is always a substitute for discourse of one kind or another. This is true for poetry as well as for prose; for any notation, mathematical or musical; in fact, for any kind of specifically human language. Words which compose language, living or dead, spoken or written, are in turn substitutes for things. But there is an important difference between a word as it appears by itself and as it appears in context. This we have already suggested. It remains now to make these notions precise.

A few moments of reflection raises disconcerting paradoxes. First, if words are substitutes for things, then it seems that context depends solely on the arrangement (or possible arrangement) of the things they represent. Second, if we say that words have two meanings, namely, the meaning they have by themselves and the meaning they have in context, it seems that it becomes impossible to use language; because to learn the first meaning is futile if it is obliterated in the context wherein it receives its second meaning. These two paradoxes must be resolved if only to avoid the alternative to them, that is, to say that meaning is derived from the use to which they may be put as purely practical signs.

Let us consider, then, the first paradox: Words are substitutes for things, but it is necessary to add, in an indirect manner. Directly they signify concepts. The

laws which govern the arrangement of concepts (which are studied in logic) are not the same as those which govern things. It is absurd, therefore, to suppose that any verbal arrangement will suffice to serve directly as a substitute for an arrangement of things. It is equally absurd to propose a grammatical arrangement as a substitute for a logical arrangement, for the grammarian considers the relations that exist among words as parts of speech. For these reasons it is necessary to rule out the claims of logisticians when they say that it is possible to dispense with logic and thinking by providing laws and rules that govern ideographic signs (which are things primarily rather than signs). But let us add this classification:

We have to consider three distinct realms, each having its own laws: the realm of concepts, the realm of words, and the realm of things. The office of the concept is to signify things, and the office of the word is to signify concepts. Now we might reasonably ask: How is it possible to correlate these three realms? To answer, let us consider respectively and by itself each of the three terms: concept, word and thing. By itself the concept is seen to be a formal sign, one whose essence is to signify. In so doing it does not reveal itself, but in a perfect fashion reveals or makes known something other than itself. By itself a word represents

the concept. It is a material sign which, for this reason, does not perform a purely significative function. It appears in order to make something else known. By itself the thing neither appears, nor reveals. To appear it must be objectised, i.e., it must become an object of knowledge. It follows, then, a word by itself signifies directly not a thing, but an object, or the thing, not as thing, but the thing insofar as it is known. It is necessary now only to point out that if the object is not a thing, then words cannot be directly substituted for things. It is impossible, therefore, to effect an arrangement of words as though words were due substitutes for things. The arrangement of words depends, it also follows, on the arrangement of concepts.

This conclusion has important practical consequences. The first and foremost is that no formula for action can be derived from the techniques of word arrangements. No self-adjusting formula which attempts to establish a direct connection between words and action is possible unless thought intervenes, any more than it is possible to construct a poem by using nothing else than a rhyming dictionary.

To give the above remarks more precise philosophical meaning -- there are two doctrines: first, the supposition of terms, and second, oration or discourse. Both doctrines are universally applicable to poetry and

prose. The doctrine of supposition enables us to understand how words are related to concepts and to things in every form of linguistic expression.

Let us distinguish, first of all, between 'material' and 'formal' supposition. The supposition or substitute value of a word considered materially merely takes it as a thing. For example, in the sentence 'Philosophers are arrogant fools' there are four words. If we ignore the differences of meanings, size, spelling, position, and so forth, of each word, and think of each word simply as it appears, its supposition is material. It would answer the question 'what is this thing?' by saying, 'a word'.

It is necessary to point out, however, that a word must be used in a proposition before it has even a material supposition. Hence: 'Homo est vox'; The word 'homo' receives its material supposition by being used in the sentence 'Homo est vox'. Any other word could be substituted for the word 'homo', but any word used would in every case stand for itself (pro seipso). But in so doing it is no longer simply a word; it becomes a 'term'. And, for this reason, the supposition refers not directly to the word itself but to its acceptance. We ask then: 'How is this word used?' and answer: 'as a word and nothing more'. It is quite evident, then,

that to use a word as a word is to make it a term, a term being, of course, part of a proposition. Now we are ready to define material supposition as: acceptio termini pro seipso.[1]

Such use of a word has no signification; its function is merely representative. The only knowledge gained of the word is that it is part (one of the material parts) of a proposition.

With 'formal supposition', on the contrary, a word assumes a significative as well as a representative function, for the word in this case stands in the place of a concept which in turn signifies a thing. A twofold division of formal supposition can now be made: proper and improper. In a proper supposition something is signified either immediately or mediately: immediately when a word signifies something without first signifying something else; mediately when it signifies something else first which in turn signifies its designate.

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1. For an adequate exposition of division of supposition (suppositionis divisio) consult Joseph Gredt, O.S.B., Elementa Philosophiae Aristotelico- Thomisticae. (Friebourg: Herder and Company, 1937) I, pp. 42-44. As for the term 'supposition', which translates the Latin 'suppositio', there is really no exact equivalent in English. Perhaps the English substitute value is sufficient to designate 'acceptio termini pro aliquo, de quo verificatur iuxta exigentiam copulae.' ibid. p. 42.

Proper supposition terminates a word with reference to the thing it immediately signifies, while improper supposition is nothing else than a metaphorical termination. A further division of proper supposition can be made into simple (or logical) and real (personal). Simple or logical supposition is the acceptance of a term for what it immediately signifies (i.e. a concept), while real or personal supposition gives a word a mediate signification. And finally, as with the division of concepts,[1] each term, according to its supposition has two objects which it signifies: formal or immediate and material or mediate. To illustrate, let us consider the word 'man': it signifies immediately the human nature and mediately the individual subsumed under the species. Proper nouns offer no special problem. For example, 'Peter' signifies immediately what is signified mediately by a common noun 'man', and 'man' mediately what is signified by the proper noun 'Peter'.

Now let us apply this doctrine to the distinction we alluded to at the beginning of this chapter between words used almost exclusively as signs and words used almost exclusively as objects. In strictly logical language (to the extent that this is possible) the

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1. cf. <u>supra</u> p. 46.

supposition of each word depends on the necessity implied in the copula-verbs that give the total discourse.meaning. Naturally we are dealing here with suppositions that are for the most part logical, but which nevertheless have an application even in the most poetic work. The supposition that a word receives in a poem while not derived from the necessity imposed by the copula is nevertheless there, being imposed by the fiat of the artist.

This brings us to our discussion of oration or discourse, and more especially of discourse for practical purposes. (oratio ordinativa), of which Maritain says:

> (a) There are four kinds of practical discourse (oratio ordinativa): discourse that summons (oratio vocativa) by which we move another to attention: "Rabbi"; discourse that interrogates (oratio interrogativa), by means of which we move him to answer: "Ubi habitas?"; discourse that commands(oratio imperativa): "Venite et videte," by which we move an inferior to perform some act, and discourse that implores (oratio deprecativa): "Domine aperi nobis," by which we move a superior to perform an act (for we are unable to move our superior as such except by the expression of our desire). Discourse that expresses a wish (oratio optativa) may be reduced to oratio deprecativa.
>
> (b) Logic omits from its consideration not only these four kinds of discourse, but also all the nuances of expression which in everyday language are mixed with enunciative discourse itself in order to make it signify not only what is, but also the opinion of the subject in regard to what is. In language Logic considers purely and simply the

> expression of thought from the point of view of the true and the false... We make use of a great many forms of speech that express something other than the simple identity (in re) of a Pr. and a S., but that is because, in these cases, these forms of speech are themselves something other than a simple enunciation.[1]

In these four kinds of practical discourse just described, it is quite evident that the purpose of language is not to convey ideas. It is directed to the accomplishment of some good. Prayer provides us with a good example: we say to God, 'Thou art good'. We are not informing God of something which He does not already know. Prayer, which is a type of discourse, does not assert an identity. Its purpose is not communication, but the sanctification of the one who prays. So also in poetry: the purpose is not communication, but the good of the work to be done. A poem does not assert, then, an identity expressible in logical language.

It becomes clear that if logic and poetry are confused, rhetoric, the purpose of which is to persuade (yet without using logical demonstrations), is apt to usurp the province of creation. The quarrel between art and prudence is one of the sad results of a confusion of art and rhetoric. The logic of language

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1. An Introduction to Logic (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1937) pp. 94-95.

is distinct from its poetry. It is important that we keep these two functions separate. Rhetorical modes have no place in poetry, nor has mathematical language.

The best example of the use of poetry in language is found in the Chinese language, which throws light on our forgotten mental processes, and thus furnishes a new chapter in the philosophy of language. Since poetry must appeal to the emotions with the charm of direct impressions, the language must be direct, the verbs concrete. But it must also deal with spiritual suggestions and obscure relations. Chinese does this by metaphor, the use of material images to suggest immaterial relations. Metaphor, the revealer of nature, is the very substance of poetry; contrary to the general belief that art and poetry deal only with the general and abstract, they deal with the concrete of nature. The Chinese written language has not only absorbed the poetic substance of nature and built with it a second world of metaphor, but has through its very pictorial visibility, been able to retain its original creative poetry with far more vigour and vividness than any phonetic tongue. The etymology of the word is constantly visible. After thousands of years, the lines of metaphoric advance are still shown, and in many cases actively retained in the

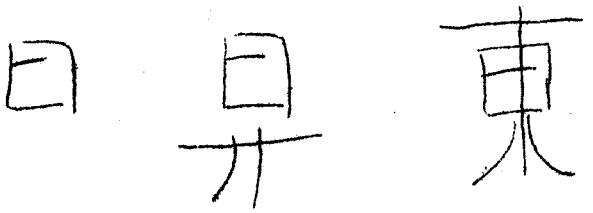
meaning. Thus a word, instead of growing poorer and poorer as with us, grows richer and richer.

The development of the normal transitive sentence rests upon the fact that one action in nature promotes another; thus the agent and object are secretly verbs. The verbal undertone of each noun should be kept in mind when reading Chinese poetry, for it is this activity which gives the language its power. The more concretely and vividly the interaction of things is expressed, the better the poetry; the great strentth of our language lies in the splendid array of transitive verbs, and their recognition of nature as a vast storehouse of forces. It is for this reason that Shakespeare is considered one of the finest of English poets: his persistent use of hundreds of transitive verbs, with rarely an 'is' or 'are', give his work a vitality seldom equalled by poets in the English language.

The poet can never feel or see too much. His metaphors are only ways of overcoming the lifeless copula. The ability of poetry to surpass prose in beauty and picturesqueness is due in particular to the poet's selection from juxtaposition of those words whose overtones blend into a delicate and lucid harmony. All arts follow the same law: refined harmony lies in the delicate balance of overtones.

Let us take for example the Chinese line: 'The

sun rises in the east':



Here the wealth of composition in characters makes possible a choice of words in which a single dominant overtone colours every plane of meaning; that is perhaps the most conspicuous quality of Chinese poetry. The sun on one side, on the other the sign of the east, the sun entangled in the branches of a tree. And in the middle sign, the verb 'rise', the sun is above the horizon, but beyond that the single upright line is like the growing trunk.

The Chinese language is almost unique in this extraordinary ability to lend itself so completely to poetic expression. In other languages, as we have pointed out, the poet is handicapped by the weakness and turbidity of a medium of expression which frequently proves a hindrance to his art. In the words of Baudelaire:

> Le Poète est semblable au prince des nuées
> Qui hante la tempête et se rit de l'archer;
> Exilé sur le sol au milieu des huées,
> Ses ailes de géant l'empêchent de marcher.

# APPENDIX (a)

An intellectual sense of mystery (ens mysterium) is indispensable in both metaphysics and poetry.

The word 'mystery' in its original meaning was religious and theological. No apology is required for the appropriation of the word by philosophers or by poets. Ens mysterium, like theobject of faith, is transcendental. The order reflected in the soul of the poet and made known by his poem is also transcendental. A brief history of the word and a few explanatory notes should make this clear.

The word 'mystery' itself has had a long and interesting history. The use made of it by the ancients, the Greeks and the Romans (mysterium) was principally religious. Generally it designated a secret service or rite that was performed in connection with the worship of a deity.[1] This was the first meaning of the word. The idea of secrecy was closely associated with its meaning:

> In addition to the public festivals, there were certain secret and mysterious rites performed in honour of particular deities. The most famous of these were the secret rites performed in honor of Demeter and her daughter Persephone at Eleusis, and known as the Eleusian Mysteries.[2]

In his De Natura Deorum[3] Cicero uses the word in practically the same sense. The notes of secrecy and sacredness are retained:

> Suscepit autem vita hominum consuetudoque communis ut beneficiis excellentis viros in caelum fama ac voluntate tollerent. Hinc Hercules hinc Castor et Pollux hinc Aesculapius hinc Liber etiam (hunc dico Liberum Semela natum, non eum quem nostri maiores auguste sancteque (Liberum) cum Cerere et Libera consecraverunt, quod quale sit ex mysteriis intellegi potest...

Another meaning in the Latin form of the word is seen among the Christians. With them it designates principally something transcending mere human intelligence. The Vulgate

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1. The Oxford English Dictionary (Clarendon Press, 1933), Vol. VI, p. 815 bff.
2. C. E. Smith and P. G. Moorhead, A Short History of the Ancient World (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1939)pp. 143-144.
3. Cicero, De Natura Deorum (H. Rackham) (London: William Heinemann, 1933) II, xxiv, 62, p. 182.

speaks of the mysterium evangelii, mysteria regni caelorum, and mysterium iniquitatis.[1] These excellent examples indicate the changed meaning of the word with the Christians. The emphasis has shifted from 'secrecy' to 'transcendence', or at least to transcendence with regard to the human intelligence. In these three examples the intellectual content of faith (fides) in the Pauline sense is indicated. But now the note of 'vision' is added. Saint Paul defined faith as 'The substance of things hoped for, a certification of things not seen.' In the Vulgate this appears as follows:

> Est autem fides sperandarum substantia rerum, argumentum non apparentium.[2]

Faith is a cognitive virtue, an intellectual habitus which perfects the mind in its knowledge of revealed truth. Assent is given to a proposition without its being proved. This explains the second part of the definition, 'a certification of things not seen'. Here we have the elements necessary for mystery: in one sense the mysterium fidei is grasped by the intellect and in another it is not. The clear-obscure vision[3] of things unseen implies no contradiction because 'things not seen' are not seen by the light of human reason (or philosophically) but by the highest light, viz., the authority of God revealing.

The mysterium fidei thus contains the notes of 'sacredness', 'transcendence' and 'vision'. The last note, perhaps needs some explanation. The object of faith according to Saint Paul and Thomas Aquinas, is not something demonstrable, that is, a knowledge which can be reduced to first principles which are self-evident.[4] Nevertheless the light of faith (lumen fidei) causes those things which are believed to be seen: Dicendum quod lumen fidei facit videre ea quae creduntur.[5]

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1. Eph. 6-19; Matt. 13-11; 2 Thess. 2-7.
2. Bibliorum Sacrorum iuxta vulgatam clementinam (Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, Mediolanensis, 1913.) p. 1122.
3. vide Garrigou-Lagrange, Le sens du mystère et le clair-obscur intellectuel (Paris: Desclee de Brouwer, 1934) pp. 134-156.
4. Thomas Aquinas, Sum.Theol. (Ottawa Edition, Ottawa, Canada, 1941) II-II, 1.4.c.
5. loc.cit. ad 3.

To believe does not involve a reduction to first principles but an election on the part of the will moved by the supernatural lumen fidei to assent intellectually to a given proposition, e.g., Christ and the mystical body of the Church are one.

A third meaning might be called 'sacramental', where for instance mysterium fidei designates the Lord's Supper.[1]

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Now let us see what notes are involved in ens mysterium, the object of metaphysics; here we are dealing with a natural lumen, the light of the human intellect. The first point to be considered here is that the human intellect is finite. Its power to grasp its natural object (which is being) is, therefore, limited, being dependent on what it has received as a created essence. The second point is that it confronts three orders: one which is above it, the superior order; a second order which is below it, the inferior order; and a third which is connatural with it. Hence, we have the human intellect considering divine things, things that pertain to God, that are at once 'sacred' and 'transcendent'. We have also the human intellect considering nature in the particular sciences. And finally we have man considering himself and those objects connatural to him.

Denial of mystery involves a confusion of orders:
1. A confusion of the superior with the connatural or
2. A confusion of the inferior with the connatural. A third confusion is possible, the inferior with the superior. As Garrigou-Lagrange points out, there are two fundamental errors that eliminate mystery from metaphysics, namely, spiritualism and materialism.[2] Into these two categories most of the moderns can be classified. The prime example of spiritualism is Descartes, who explained the inferior in terms of the superior.[3]

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1. vide A New Latin Dictionary, Louis and Short, American Book Co., New York: 1907) pp. 1183, c.

2. Garrigou-Lagrange, op.cit., p. 134 n5.

3. ibid., p. 106.

M Maritain's statement on the nature of mystery in Sept Leçons sur l'Etre provides us with a full explanation on how the term is used in metaphysics:

> Suivant une terminologie que j'emprunte à un philosophe français contemporain, M Gabriel Marcel,-- mais que j'applique, à vrai dire, d'une façon tout à fait différente,-- disons que toute question posée par une science présente un double aspect. L'aspect mystère, et l'aspect problème. C'est un mystère et c'est un problème; un 'mystère' du côté de la chose, de l'objet et de sa réalité extramentale; un 'problème' du côté de nos formules.
>
> La notion de mystère intelligible n'est pas une notion contradictoire, c'est la plus exacte façon de désigner la réalité; le mystère n'est pas l'ennemi, l'adversaire de l'intelligence, c'est Descartes et la raison cartésienne qui ont introduit cette opposition menteuse,-- opposition du rest inévitable en système idéaliste, en climat idéaliste. L'objectivité de l'intelligence est elle-même souverainement mystérieuse; et l'objet de la connaissance, c'est le 'mystère' amené à l'état d'intelligibilité en acte et d'intellection en acte: elle devient l'autre en tant qu'autre; elle amène au sein d'elle-même une réalité inépuisable ("trans-objective") vitalement saisi comme objet. L'objet, c'est le réel lui-même.[1]

The sacramental meaning of mystery is in no sense sacrificed in this explanation by M Maritain. The sacramental character of the universe is indispensable in a metaphysics which claims to be true.

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1. Jacques Maritain, Sept Leçons sur L'Etre (Paris: Chez Pierre Téqui, 1933) pp. 8-9.

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