THE ORIGIN OF LANGUAGE

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THE ORIGIN OF LANGUAGE

by

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ABSTRACT

Although in recent times there has been all but unanimous agreement that the problem of language origin will never find a suitable context for modern investigation, G. Revesz has tried, in his formulation of the Contact Theory, to reintroduce the problem into contemporary thought. His Theory establishes a speculative evolutionary sequence of language "growth" from the earliest forms to the more highly developed. While his sequence is admittedly theoretical, Revesz attempts to show that all available evidence tends to verify his hypothetical order.

The Contact Theory, however, is developed without adequate attention to the traditional problem of 'mind-body interaction'. Man's vocal activity is problematic especially insofar as it becomes a"vehicle" for thought. The problem is how physical speech processes gave rise to, or were the result of, or were originally incorporated with, the processes of abstract thought. Revesz insists that his theory is based on neither an empiricist nor a rationalist view, but does not adequately clarify how he achieves this.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology overcomes the basic weaknesses in Revesz's Theory by diffusing Descartes' dichotomy and providing a suitable method for approaching the critical moment of language origin. By means of the phenomenological description, Merleau-Ponty attempts to uncover the "grounds" of consciousness, and in so doing introduces his concept of the "body-subject", the practical synthesis of mind and body which we "know" by living it. This "body-

subject", in its preconscious activity, provides the basis for all "second-order" or cognitive experience, including the conscious use of language. Merleau-Ponty suggests that man has not outlived this level of "primitive being". The "body-subject" continues to be creative prior to conscious awareness. Conscious thought merely discovers what is created for it by the preconscious life of the intellect.

If we grant Revesz's conclusion that language origin was a creative act, like those creative acts which occur daily, an examination of human creativity should provide some insights into the process which gave rise to human speech. This creative process, according to the accounts of the more eminent minds of both Art and Science, involves a dynamic which is hidden from the conscious mind. This dynamic can be described, in Merleau-Ponty's terms, as the preconscious activity of the "body-subject".

Seen in this context, man's language continues to originate from preconscious creative acts which give man speech before his discovery of it in rational terms. Thus, by avoiding Descartes' dichotomy, and by removing primitive man from an evolutionary context, the language problem can become a contemporary question.

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INTRODUCTION

> "If there is one thing on which all linguists are agreed, it is that the problem of the origin of human speech is still unsolved." (1).

The problem of language origin was recognized very early in the history of Western thought. Pythagoras and Plato, for instance, believed that language arose out of "inherent necessity" as a form of "natural gesture", while Democritus and Aristotle argued that it was established by "convention" or "agreement". "Solutions" have continued to be conflicting and controversial to the point of frustrated abandonment of the problem in more recent times.

Generally speaking, past theories of language origin have been classified into four categories: biological, anthropological, philosophical, and theological. Further sub-classifications have been made, of the anthropological, for instance, into imitative and ontogenetic; and the ontogenetic, in turn, into six distinct theories: the "babbling theory", the "child speech theory", the "theory of psychological disposition", etc. (2). The problem, then, at least in the past, has certainly been taken seriously.

Yet some modern day names for past theories reflect, perhaps, a less than serious approach to the issue. The theory that language arose, for instance, from natural expressions of joy, surprise, etc., has been labelled the "pooh-pooh"theory. Those who maintain that language began through man's imitation of natural sounds are said to adhere to the

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1. M. Pei, The Story of Language, p. 24.
2. G. Revesz, The Origins and Prehistory of Language, pp. 20-81.

"bow-wow" theory. Various other explanations are referred to by such names as "ding-dong", "ta-ta", "sing-song", and "yo-he-ho". (3).

The aim of the present exercise is not to summarize, paraphrase, defend, or refute any of these theories. This has already been done with an intensity that has often evolved into rage, even to the extent of having the issue disallowed in certain learned societies as a theme for academic discussion.

One recent theory, however, does deserve attention. The Contact Theory, developed by G. Revesz, attempts to make the problem of language origin a more suitable one for reputable consideration, and does so with all the detail that has become available through the careful findings of modern research. Chapter One of our discussion includes a summary of this theory as a starting point for further analysis.

In Chapter Two we concentrate on aspects of the Contact Theory which are philosophically problematic, and find that these problems are given elaboration and clarification (not as peculiar to the Contact Theory, but as general problems) in the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. This phenomenology supplies a descriptive method which seems more appropriate to the problem of origins than Revesz's method of rational thematization, and also avoids Revesz's tendency to view man as a rational animal within the context of evolution. Given these two advantages, we may begin to view the problem of language origin in a new context.

The intent of our 'argument', however, is not to stress the apparent

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3. M. Pei, The Story of Language, p. 25.

failures of the Contact Theory. One of the merits of the theory, in fact, is that it leads us far enough and consistently enough into the problem to enable us to focus more clearly and emphatically on problems that might otherwise elude us. The theory is perhaps most interesting in its suggestion that the origin of language was a <u>creative</u> act. By locating the problem within the specific context of human creativity, Revesz invites us to examine creativity with the hope of gaining further insight into the language problem. This examination provides the theme of Chapter Three.

Our discussion does not pretend to offer solutions. It does aim to make more explicit (at least to some extent) those difficulties which seem to be partly to blame for the frustrations that efforts to deal with the problem have led to. Our final claim is that the origin of language is not an irrecoverable event in man's primitive past, but a continuing process out of man's primitive present - a process fully deserving of contemporary investigation.

CHAPTER ONE - THE CONTACT THEORY

A. In his Origins and Prehistory of Language, G. Revesz classifies the various theories of language origin (4), and claims that all these theories are inadequate. He then attempts to establish more feasible grounds on which to base speculation about the origin problem. His considerations deserve special attention because his effort is, first of all, a more contemporary attempt (1954) to deal with the problem, and he makes use of a considerable amount of empirical data, more recently made available by modern research in the various human sciences. These data are not only brought to bear upon conclusions of previous theories, but are also relied upon to provide evidence for the construction of a new theory, the Contact Theory.

But, while Revesz makes use of empirical data, he also acknowledges the limitations of a narrowly scientific approach, and insists that "what is proved to be correct in the realm of experience is...an important detail, but not a decisive one." (5). He holds that certain questions cannot be answered if we confine ourselves solely to what is empirically provable. Thus, although Revesz is a psychologist, he calls his work "a philosophical and psychological discussion." (6).

This recalls Merleau-Ponty's intention in The Primacy of Perception "to relate philosophy to psychology in such a way as to make the existence of the one compatible with that of the other." (7). Revesz is equally

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4. G. Revesz, Origins and Prehistory of Language, PP. 20-81.

5. Ibid., p. 80.

6. Ibid., Preface.

7. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, The Primacy of Perception, p. 95.

intent upon bringing the two disciplines into a working relationship. A great deal of criticism which he brings in common against former theories stems, for example, from the failure of their originators and adherents to subject their concepts to critical analysis. Some theories have taken 'origin' to refer to conditions immediately antecedent to language; some, to the form of language in its earliest manifestations; some, to the causal factor which effected the change from prelinguistic to verbal man. It is difficult, he suggests, to discuss the origin of language unless all such aspects or implications of the term 'origin' are considered. Therefore his own theory takes them all into consideration so as to properly locate and specify the exact problem. The result, he maintains, is an explanation which is comprehensive enough to uncover the beginnings of language in a much broader context than previously achieved. This becomes possible, he explains, by seeing the problem from a philosophical viewpoint.

Another philosophically interesting feature in the development of Revesz's theory is his rejection of the traditional rationalist and empiricist doctrines, while recognizing that both offer important insights. (8). His hope is that his own theory reconciles the two fundamental positions. We shall see later how Merleau-Ponty held the same kind of reconciliation possible. (9).

We must note at this point our agreement with Barral that Merleau-Ponty's thought "can be so easily related to that of others – it almost

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8. G. Revesz, The Origins and Prehistory of Language, pp. 65-66.

9. See below, pp. 33-35.

compels one to make all sorts of connections and to see innumerable similarities with other thinkers." (10). But our motivation here is somewhat more than this. Our end concern is the problem of the origin of language, and especially that part of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy which has some bearing on the topic. Merleau-Ponty had intended to bring together his related views in a book which he was to have called Expression. He unfortunately did not carry out his intention (death prevented him), but his interest in the question is evident throughout his completed books and published notes. Because Merleau-Ponty did not bring his views to a conclusive formulation, while Revesz (a contemporary of Merleau-Ponty) did his own; because the two writers are both psychologists of a 'philosophical bent'; and because both claim to reconcile the rationalist-empiricist views; it becomes tentatively compelling to give attention to Revesz, even though his work is not the primary concern of our discussion. The origin of language, of course, has long been abandoned as a respectable topic for contemporary investigation. Revesz, then, who explicitly attempts to bring the problem back into modern thought as a deserving issue, becomes a good starting point for further reflection, especially since his insights point out many of the reasons for previous abandonment of the problem.

The attempt in this chapter shall be to summarize Revesz's Contact Theory, noting those aspects of it which have the most significance in light of Merleau-Ponty's views, which shall be discussed later.

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10. M.R. Barral, Merleau-Ponty: The Role of the Body Subject in Interpersonal Relationships, Preface.

B. Revesz claims that a basic and instinctive need for contact, in some form or another, is a vital requirement for all forms of animal life, including man. (11). This need may be felt and satisfied in different ways, giving rise to varying forms of contact, all of which, however, are related by the underlying contact urge which they have in common. The most primitive and simple contact need is physical and is satisfied by physical means. The most complex is language.

What Revesz proposes to do is to examine the various forms of sound contact, in an attempt to arrange them in some order, such that each type of contact may be seen as slightly more differentiated, mature, or complex than the consequent one. This arrangement into stages, of course, might have little to do with any order in which the various types of communication might have actually evolved (if they did indeed evolve). Yet, if the order established on such a speculative basis can be shown to be consistent with the accepted facts of biological evolution, and with the data which have been uncovered by psychological, anthropological, and linguistic studies, then the suggested sequence would gain some credibility. On the other hand, it may be shown that a given stage in the progression should not have succeeded the one suggested as its immediate source, because too much evidence seems clearly to the contrary. If this were the case, the proposal would seem to have less merit. Hence the initial hypothesis is subject to relative 'verification' or rejection, according to its degree of plausibility when measured against all available evidence.

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11. G. Revesz, The Origins and Prehistory of Language, pp. 86-137.

Revesz, then, is not trying to prove that language necessarily evolved from more primitive types of social association, but he does suggest eventually that his theory does not go against such a possibility. What he is most emphatic about is that, if some possible steps of evolution are traced, then those steps must be chosen according to some principle, or some essential quality, which all the stages have in common. The principle which Revesz so carefully chooses, and according to which he groups the kinds of communication, is the need for contact and the instinctive effort to achieve it. He examines the kinds of contact, even on their precommunicative level, and then reflectively classifies the forms of communication into stages of pre-history, proto-history, and linguistic history. On this basis, distinctions are made between various categories of empirical data, until he defines language, in its developed state, as a tri-functional form of symbolic communication. (12).

By uniting the forms of communication under the contact principle, Revesz believes that much confusion is avoided. All animal sounds do not originate out of a contact requirement. We must recognize, claims Revesz, "the psychic forces that are at the root of both linguistic activity and the genesis and growth of language." (13). Mere sound itself played a necessary role in language formation, for it is the medium through which language evolved; but this does not qualify any sound whatsoever as a contact sound. By recognizing "the inner forces

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12. Ibid., p. 124.

13. Ibid., p. 82.

that must have governed the entire process of development", the important distinction can be made between sound elements belonging to the communicative stage of language genesis and those with other motivation. On this basis, Revesz suggests that some phonetic phenomena, even though they may be highly developed and habitual, cannot be viewed as having any causal influence upon language growth. To have such an influence, the sounds must be a means of satisfying the contact need, and must originate from this need. Thus an error of past speculation has been to construe, as important influences in speech growth, those vocal productions which have only an external and superficial similarity to actual language. Revesz's own findings lead him to use three classifications of actual contact sounds (fulfilling the contact need):

(1.) non-communicative contact

(2.) communicative contact (non-verbal)

(3.) communicative contact (verbal)

C. (1) Non-communicative contact occurs in what Revesz calls the Contact Sound, which is common to animals of all species, but especially social animals. These Sounds seem necessary for the feeling of security, and function in holding the herd together for purposes of sleeping, swarming, feeding, migrating, etc. They are not communicative sounds, for they simply give the assurance of co-presence. The animal's place, as it were, is in part defined in terms of Contact Sounds, smells, etc., which together provide some kind of vague environmental "harmony" or suitability. This form of contact seems the most devoid (perhaps completely devoid) of any degree of individual purpose or intention. It is difficult, however, to see how Contact Sounds serve the purpose of

"holding together" or "providing the feeling of security" unless some form of communication is involved. Revesz seems to be referring to a sound influence similar to the part that smell seems to play in the animal's environment. The animal makes no effort to smell the way He does to other animals. Yet smell is an important factor in the animal's social totality. The question is to what extent, if any, the animal 'is aware of' the influence smell has in his 'social functioning' or to what extent volition or intention, for instance, is involved in the kind of 'communication' that animal scent sometimes appears to entail.

A problem here is how to specify activities which are conscious ones and those which are biological only. The beating of the heart is an example of a biological activity with no element of consciousness seemingly required for its process. For some other activities, however, a need is apparently felt and the choice of ways and means to fulfill the need seems to result in some sort of conscious decision and awareness on the part of the 'subject'. Revesz recognizes the need for seeing the difference in the two kinds of activity, but stresses also that an easy dichotomy is an oversimplification of the issue. This problem occurs again in his description of the second type of sound contact, which Revesz claims is on the level of communication.

(2) The most archaic form of actual communication (non-verbal) is the Cry, which is "an intended indication of vital needs." (14). The context of the Cry is more particular and manifests a degree of

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14. Ibid., pp. 134ff.

individuality not in evidence in the Contact Sound. The Cry relates always to a relatively specific kind of action, required to meet a relatively specific need, and is accompanied by "inner excitement" and a feeling of expectation. The Contact Sound, on the other hand, meets a more constant or general need, and is manifest more as a communal or group phenomenon. It seems that whereas we might be specific in saying, "That was a Cry", we should rather refer to Contact Sounds in the plural, or in the collective as a "general hub-bub", etc., with no "special acoustic or motor characteristics". Even so, the Cry, although it is somewhat better defined than the Contact Sound, "is still unconcentrated and vague; but it is already directed. It does not aim at contact with definite individuals; it is merely an endeavour to induce the environment or more generally speaking the external world, to co-operate by performing some appropriate action." (15). Hence the Cry, although it is not yet a linguistic phenomenon, is closer to verbal communication than is Contact Sound, in that the Cry is directed, has imperative intent, is aggressive and expectant, and has discernable acoustic and motor characteristics. Most animals, including man, make use of the Cry, as in cries of alarm which are not addressed to definite individuals; mating calls which have no specific direction; and infant cries which are demanding though not explicit in aim.

But how does one stage (Contact Sound) relate to the other (the Cry)? Or are the two stages related at all? If the Cry is "an intended

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15. Ibid., p. 158.

indication of vital needs", what is the nature of this intention, and in what way does it evolve (if it does) from the level of mere Contact Sound? The question again is: how does what is basically "biological" differentiate into what is to some degree "conscious"? The question becomes even more explicit in the nature of the Call.

(3) The Call is a more specialized type of Cry, "based on the ability to direct significant signs to particular persons by means of a wordless (non-verbal) indication of the desired aim". (16). The Call requires the exercise of discriminatory powers, to the extent that individual, or distinct, parts of the environment are addressed, in a demand for a specific co-operative act.

While the Cry is purely instinctive, the Call proceeds from experience. The Call, according to Revesz, can only result after the animal "learns" from its activities, and from the "world's responses" to them, which parts of the environment can satisfy a certain need. Thus a mating 'call' in its earliest manifestations, may be no more than a cry directed toward the environment in general. The repetition of patterns then enables the individual to recognize that part of the environment which his sound productions can manipulate or affect most satisfactorily. The Cry thus becomes a Call in finally being addressed to appropriate recipients.

Because some Cries do mature into Calls, some instances, of either, are difficult to classify as one or the other; although the overall

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16. Ibid., p. 161.

difference between the two can be easily grasped. The same kind of maturation, claims Revesz, takes place in the 'language' development of the human infant. There seems to be a period during which he does not distinguish himself from his environment, yet he makes noises when he is unwell or uncomfortable; not, however, with any evident intent to communicate or to appeal to his surroundings. Yet, at some point, the same types of cries, under the same types of conditions, do become directed with some degree of intention, and the child does indicate a level of awareness and expectation not evident with his earliest activity.

Once again the unanswered question about this maturation process is posed. If the Cry is related to the Call, what is the nature of this relationship? What is the 'dynamic' according to which one stage differentiates into the next? It could be claimed, of course, that the Call is not a more specialised form of Cry, but a phenomenon which originates rather out of its own distinct and independent 'dynamic'. The question about the origin of language might also be asked in this perspective. Language may be approached as a phenomenon which does <u>not</u> develop out of related (but less specialised and less complex) forms of communication, but which is different in <u>kind</u> from other systems of sound contact. Revesz's hypothetical sequence has not yet reached the language stage. Although the Cry and the Call are considered by Revesz as forms of communication, they are still non-linguistic. The first stage of linguistic communication, however, does appear next, and thus the problem of relationship between the stages becomes a crucial one.

(4) The first stage of linguistic communication begins with what Revesz calls an Imperative language. The use of this Imperative language marks the beginning of word use. Revesz is careful to distinguish between word-use in a fully developed language, and the linguistic forms of the Imperative language. Between the two, in fact, he places another stage which he describes as "language with a primitive structure". He sees the history of the word, then, as having three stages - the archaic form, the primitive form, and the fully developed form. Revesz would have us guard against trying to "bridge a gap" between word usage in modern languages and the initial use of sounds in the archaic linguistic sense. But he hopes that the "gap" between the Call and the archaic Imperative language is viable in a possible "evolutionary" sequence, as would be the "gap" between the Imperative language and the primitive language, and finally between primitive languages and a modern one. However small, of course, the "gap" cannot remain a vacuum. Revesz claims to have established at least a basis for development in the underlying contact urge, which all forms of communication stem from, but his final treatment of the problem (a problem which recurs in each of the stages) is (again) best taken up at another point.

D. Apart from their origin in a need for contact, another common characteristic of the Cry and Call is their imperative quality. This quality is only vaguely present in the Cry, and perhaps (but only perhaps) not at all in the Contact Sound; but in the Call it undergoes an interesting degree of development and use with domesticated animals (those which live on a fairly intimate basis with man, and to a large extent

share his environment). It is common for such animals to combine gesture and phonetic utterance to express their desire in categorical form. The request can be complex enough to express (in the Call) a highly specialised aim such that only a well-defined response satisfies the demand; to require action by a definite individual indicated by gesture; and to indicate either the 'object' to which the required response pertains, or the place where the response is to be concentrated or carried out. (17).

The domestic animal's non-verbal imperative is the highest level of communication antecedent to language. The most primitive languages studied have a degree of complexity, maturity, and differentiation which far surpass the potential, promise, or capacity evident in any known kind of animal communication. Examination of such languages shows that they have already attained the three essential functions which are, Revesz claims, characteristic of the more highly developed languages; namely, to ask questions, describe situations and events, and to order or command (the interrogative, indicative, and imperative functions). (18). These 'early languages' are also known to be symbolic in word and gesture and to make use of distinguishable parts of speech which may be classified. The only basic similarity which some languages have to animal communication is the use of the imperative. And it is here in the use of sounds that have an imperative function that Revesz sees a possible

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17. Ibid., pp. 163-164.

18. Ibid., p. 61.

'link' between animal and human 'world'.

Since men and animals seem most directly able to communicate on the level of command-response (in the sense of being able to establish some kind of contact system which enables the two species to co-operate in organised activity), it seems tenable that any differentiation from animal to human 'language' would occur across the imperative 'channel': for just as the imperative represents the highest achievement in animal communication, it is also the most primitive or earliest form of human communication. Revesz claims that the imperative, for instance, is the mode through which children first grasp the significance of words and begin to use them. Even when they use nouns meaningfully and intentionally, in the early stages of language acquisition, these nouns function in fact as imperatives, each noun being a request or demand for some action or other. And this occurs in spite of the fact that adults 'teach' children nouns as names of objects. "Observation has shown," claims Revesz, "that of all phonetic and gestural expressions acquired by the infant, the very first is the understanding of imperative words."(19). "Nothing but activities or commands concerning activities (apart from calls, which produce a reflex turning toward the source of the stimulus) will claim the child's attention." (20). "Some time must elapse before the period of exclusive demanding and desiring comes to an end and makes room for the indicative and significative functions of language." (21).

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19. Ibid., p. 181
20. Ibid., p. 181
21. Ibid., p. 182

Further evidence for the "priority of the imperative" can be seen in those languages in which nouns, adjectives, and verbs are not clearly defined or clearly separated from each other, both nouns and verbs functioning as imperative expressions. (22). The first speech gestures of deaf mutes are also of an imperative nature. Similarly children with mental deficiencies or disturbances which show aphasia seem capable for a long time of expressing and understanding only in imperative terms. (23). In linguistic science, Scaliger was the first to point out the priority of the imperative in phylogenetic development, and Revesz finds support for this view from researchers including W. Wundt, F. Mauther, M. Breal, and C. Brockelmann. (24). Furthermore, the imperative generally displays the root of the word which may have various forms; is never absent in any verbal language (while other modes are); is capable alone of expressing a complete sentence (in all its uses); is essentially expressive of an affective experience (which is "closer to the archetype of linguistic expression than the indicative, which presupposes an objective attitude, more dependent on the intellect"); is not "multifunctional in the sense of being able to replace other modes" (as, say, when the indicative can express an imperative in "You will..." thus illustrating supposedly, its less primitive and more structured or conscious derivation); and finally the imperative "continues to be accompanied by gestures and articulatory expressions of

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22. Ibid., p. 183.
23. Ibid., p. 184.
24. Ibid., p. 184.

face and movement, a phenomenon indicative of archaic relations because they are constituent parts of the language of present- day primitive peoples." (25).

Had we no such evidence pointing to the priority of the imperative, we would nonetheless be inclined to posit its precedence on 'circumstantial' grounds. The kind of contact provided, for early man, by the imperative form, would fulfill an obviously more important need than could be met by either the interrogative or the indicative forms. Since his survival supposedly depended so much upon appropriate action in defense, in hunting, etc., it seems likely that simple and exact action words were a greater necessity than descriptive sentences or questions. It is certainly probable that early man, for survival, depended upon various instinctive urges reinforced by the use of a highly developed non-verbal imperative which eventually differentiated into a "transitional form which can be fitted in between the non-verbal imperative call and language as defined by its three special functions (imperative, indicative and interogative). This early form of language would have the character of an imperative language." (26.)

But no such imperative language has ever been found even among the most primitive peoples known. No language has ever been found 'just beginning'. The imperative language which Revesz describes will likely never be shown to be more than a hypothetical one. But

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25. Ibid., pp. 180-186.

26. Ibid., p. 187.

since "the imperative speech act is psychologically more primitive than all other speech acts" and "the likelihood of the priority of the linguistic imperative can be shown ontogenetically, and on the basis of linguistic history, also phylogenetically" (27), Revesz is led to suspect that it may be through the imperative mode that the Call can mature into the mode of expression which we call the word. Once attained, although imperative in its first manifestations, this mode of expression (as Revesz sees it) would have had the potential to differentiate into the interrogative and indicative forms, combining word, gesture, and tone into various linguistic structures.

Such essentially is the general outline of the Contact Theory. It provides a theoretical evolutionaly sequence, which has, according to Revesz, the support of sound empirical evidence (most of which we have had to omit here). Its advantages over previous theories are, Revesz claims, many. But chiefly the theory gains over the others in its emphasis on "the forces that are productive and formative of language", instead of paying too much attention to the medium itself, i.e., sound and movement. (28). The theories mentioned in the introduction have not been careful enough in treating the language phenomenon as an organon with a purpose, and have thus sought the origin of language in vocal exclamations, or grunts, or song (as pure expression). Revesz seems to suggest that the type of sound from which language grew is

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27. Ibid., p. 124.

28. Ibid., p. 220.

unimportant. Man's earliest language may have sounded like grunts, or exclamations, or singing, or babbling, but its most basic features were its growth from the need for contact, and its imperative quality, both of which we shall attempt to relate, in the following chapter, to Merleau-Ponty's concepts of the body-subject and the 'speaking-word'.

CHAPTER TWO - MERLEAU-PONTY'S VIEWS ON LANGUAGE

A. Whatever the advantages of the Contact Theory, there are certain philosophical difficulties which it leads to and acknowledges, but fails to develop and meet in a totally convincing way. It must be admitted that these problems perhaps would not seem as acute were the Contact Theory not viewed in the light of another attempt to deal with the problem of language origin; namely, that of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. The latter's effort, in fact, may be seen as an appropriate and adequate method of meeting the major problems which the Contact Theory brings into focus. While there are many details in the two approaches which are in strong conflict, it seems that in a broad and general sense, Revesz's discussion of language origin establishes excellent grounds for further speculation, and that Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, or at least that part of it which is most pertinent, indicates the form and content such speculation should have.

The critical moment in Revesz's theory appears to be the point at which the hypothetical Imperative language began. The levels of communication prior to this development have been viewed as differentiations in degrees from one manifestation of the contact need to another. The issue with the linguistic Imperative is that as language it should reflect the thought processes of the human mind, and thus claims, or supposedly should claim, to be much more than a mere modification of another type of communication (the communication of

animals). Revesz is careful to note that we should not mistake the hypothetical Imperative language as a fully developed one; nonetheless, at some critical point, conscious thought must be seen (in the context of this theory) as developing from the basic biological contact need, and a problem is posed as to how bodily processes interrelate with mental ones.

Revesz recognizes this problem and claims that, while a dichotomy must be acknowledged, care must be taken in how this dichotomy is viewed:

> "A firm distinction must be made between objectives set on the basis of rational and voluntary decision and those toward which the individual is compelled involuntarily by biologically based drives. One must nevertheless guard against an error reaching back to Descartes which has been aggravated by psychoanalysis and which has triumphed in Behaviourism." (29).

We must not err, warns Revesz, by limiting the idea of consciousness to higher consciousness, placing the unconscious "into a twilight zone, belonging neither to the sphere of purely physical phenomena, nor yet to the phenomena of consciousness." (30). What is conscious is not, according to Revesz, necessarily "clear and distinct" or intellectualized. There are forces which have been labelled 'unconscious' or 'subconscious' which Revesz describes as instances of "dark and confused" consciousness, but nonetheless forces of consciousness. He wishes to indicate that the need for contact can come

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29. Ibid., p. 133.

30. Ibid., p. 134.

"to the consciousness of the animal at least as a 'dark pressure'." (31). Although this urge may be basically biological, it is at the same time somewhat more, and does become manifest on some kind of elusive conscious level. This manifestation "is so primitive that it is quite impossible to provide an altogether adequate linguistic formulation of the contact urge." (32).

What seems to happen is that, in its concentration upon differentiation and hypothetical evolutionary stages, the Contact Theory begins to be guided by some such principle as: the smaller the 'gap' the better the sequence. It appears highly unlikely that a biologically based drive should directly project itself as "clear and distinct" consciousness. Yet a complex biological process is more readily associated with a "slight glimmer" of vague consciousness. And from the 'glimmer' a 'bright light' can develop. Thus Revesz asks us to note that, in his theory, "care is taken that the gap between the individual stages be as small as possible." (33).

Although there is something appealing (perhaps) about this kind of "narrowing down", the basic difficulty remains of establishing an inter-relationship between what is abstract or immaterial, and what is concrete or physical. The traditional problem of how "ideal substance" and "material substance" can interact is not removed by attempting to establish "degrees" of ideality or physicality. If

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31. Ibid., p. 134.

32. Ibid., p. 152.

33. Ibid., p. 199.

we admit "degrees" of consciousness, we refer, perhaps, to degrees of clarity but not, it seems, to degrees of ideality. Nor do we have reason to suppose that consciousness, in becoming less clear and distinct, becomes more and more physical.

In the hope of providing a reconciliation between rationalism and empiricism, the Contact Theory further fails to clarify what position or viewpoint is to be maintained as one chooses between the two. The theory attempts, in other words, to establish a mediating position without establishing its own grounds in the effort to do so. The argument too easily adopts "empirical evidence" and then "rational evidence", from either point of view, without sufficient attention to its own methodology.

A remaining feature of the theory which initially raises doubts, finally proves to be an asset in the light of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's contributions. We may recall that in his discussion of the distribution of the forms of contact, Revesz points out that the earliest stages of communicative contact, the Cry and the Call, are still used by infants and sometimes by adults. And although the hypothetical Imperative language has not been found as such, even among very primitive social groups, the imperative verb is still a common form in all languages, and is, moreover, the first linguistic form (functionally) used by children. Revesz has also tried to establish that the Cry, the Imperative Call, and the linguistic Imperative, occur as <u>consequent</u> stages of language development in children. Why then can we not concentrate on these stages of development in order to uncover the process of language origin?

It appears that, however fruitful such endeavours may prove, the fact remains that language must have undergone a great deal of development since its first employment, and that the cultural situation in which it "rehappens" makes it difficult to reach conclusions about the original state of the language. Yet it is significant as well that Revesz argues that "man made language, and language fashioned man and made him human." (34). "One cannot escape conceiving of man from the very beginning as a thinking being, and therefore as one endowed with speech." (35). Revesz apparently holds that as soon as a certain animal began to think, he used language; and when he first used language, he began to think. Moreover, "every new word, every new concept, and every new linguistic expression owes its existence to a creative human act; and it must have been essentially so from earliest times." (36). This we find is Revesz's final description of the act of language origin. "No fundamental distinction can be made between the original creation of language and the creative acts which occur daily." (37).

In view of these tenets it must be asked why it is necessary (relative to the problem of language origin) to examine speculatively the prehistoric development from non-communicative contact, to communicative non-verbal contact, and then to communicative verbal contact.

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34. Ibid., p. 210.

35. Ibid., p. 211.

36. Ibid., pp. 211-212.

37. Ibid., p. 212.

From the very start man was, in Revesz's view, a thinking animal endowed with speech, which he still is; language was a form of communicative contact which could be seen in relation to other forms of communicative contact, which is still the case; and language was originally a creative act like the creative acts which still recur daily in every new word, concept, or linguistic expression. It would seem that "external" cultural situations would not be a contributing factor to the basic "inner dynamic" of the creative act. While cultural factors may have a bearing upon the nature of the creative "product", the creative process (in Revesz's own view) remains fundamentally the same. It appears as well that Revesz contends that of all man's creative acts, the language act was his first and definitive one. Hence any insights gained into the nature of human creativity, in any form, would be considerable insights as well into the nature of language origin. This suggests that the 'dynamic' of language origin is not buried forever in prehistory, and that it is upon the nature of those creative acts, which occur daily, that attention must be focused, in order to throw more light not only upon the origins of language, but also upon the recurring origins of man.

Thus the Contact Theory locates the problem of the origin of language in a specific and meaningful context of human creativity. In whatever ways the theory may fall short, it nonetheless establishes important aims, if only by bringing certain difficulties into focus. In the following sections of this chapter, an attempt will be made to indicate that Maurice Merleau-Ponty's treatment of the problem of origins (especially of language) has much to offer in overcoming

these difficulties. In summary, these difficulties are: (a) the lack of a consistent method and point of view in approaching the critical moment of language origin, (b) the failure to give sufficient attention and analysis to the question of mind-body interaction, and (c) the failure to pursue the idea that language origin was a creative act, like those creative acts which occur daily.

B. In Merleau-Ponty's view, a central difficulty in modern thought is that tradition and consciousness ignore their origins. His own thought was largely an effort to change this situation. Philosophy, he held, should seek contact with "Brute Being". His particular style of philosophy has been sometimes described as "an archeology", in that it "digs" beneath man's conscious levels in search of their preconscious "grounds". We would therefore expect the problem of language origin to be an important one for the phenomenologist's consideration. Husserl, a phenomenologist whose thought was held in high regard by Merleau-Ponty, recognised the significance of the problem:

> "I do not wish to elaborate here on the problem of the origin of language... although I am perfectly clear that a radical clarification of the mode of being of ideal complexes finds here its last condition." (38).

We have noted how Revesz, in attempting to describe how the biological contact urge surfaces in consciousness, spoke of a "dark pressure", so "primitive that it is quite impossible to provide an altogether adequate linguistic formulation" of it. (39). Merleau-

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38. M. Merleau-Ponty, The Primacy of Perception, p.84.

39. G. Revesz, The Origins and Prehistory of Language, p. 152.

Ponty, on the other hand, saw phenomenology as an attempt to explore and "translate" the "darkness" of prereflexive reality. Thus while Revesz sees a problem that is finally too obscure to deal with, Merleau-Ponty sees the same area of difficulty as a most suitable one for philosophizing. Their differences of view seem to relate to their differing methods.

Merleau-Ponty's method does not attempt to explain, or give rational analysis, but rather to describe. The attempt to describe serves the purpose of "reawakening the basic experience of the world of which science is the second-order expression." (40). Schematization or thematization, the attempt to explain the world in terms of rational or logical systems, such as Revesz's Contact Theory, results, for Merleau-Ponty, in an "abstract and derivative sign-language" which he compares to a geography in relation to the land or countryside which we can experience without any scientific explanation of it. (41). In trying to describe the world we should not be "looking for what it is as an idea once it has been reduced to a theme of discourse"; we should rather be "looking for what it is as a fact for us, before any thematization." (42). While theories and systems (such as the Contact Theory) try to reconstruct experience into some logical form, phenomenology attempts instead to give an account of experience as it is lived (not as intellectually worked out). The resulting account

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40. M. Merleau-Ponty, The Phenomenology of Perception, p. viii.
41. Ibid., p. ix.
42. Ibid., p. xv.

is not to be subjected to scrutiny in terms of mathematical or logical principles. It must remain an account or description that is "understood" in terms of its appearance in consciousness as a process of experience which one can "duplicate" over and over again, with hopefully more and more insight. This is not, in Merleau-Ponty's view, to abandon insight to the empirically given, nor to acknowledge that insight is the way in which mind orders or interprets experience; it is rather to acknowledge as insight that which is fully lived. The experience we live is what is real, and can be "dichotomized" only in an arbitrary sense, apart from the way we live it. Thus, phenomenology is a description which demands no other verification than being encountered by a properly attentive consciousness.

The phenomenological description, however, is never complete. What it reveals is not a complete world of objective knowledge, but "a world as strange and paradoxical." (43). This mystery is not to be explained away on some "second-order level", or given some rational "solution". Thus Revesz's attempt to establish a theory of language origin would fall short of Merleau-Ponty's expectations. However, insofar as the attempt describes the language phenomenon, it succeeds; for the description brings to light at least a process, upon which further reflection can take place. This act of reflection must "duplicate itself infinitely" for it is a "dialogue, or infinite meditation." Thus "the unfinished nature of phenomenology and the inchoative atmosphere which has surrounded it are not to

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43. Ibid., p. xiii.

be taken as a sign of failure, they were inevitable because phenomenology's task was to reveal the mystery of the world and of reason." (44).

But the description which phenomenology calls for is nonetheless posited verbally, and gives the impression of "escaping from existence into the universe of things said." (45). The verbal description is certainly not the experience it describes. In a sense, the phenomenological account has the weakness of a "second-order" or scientific account, such as Revesz's, for both are mere representations of what is actually lived.

According to Merleau-Ponty this "state of separation" in phenomenology is merely apparent. The universe of language rests upon "the antepredicative life of consciousness." The meaning of words and the meaning of things, as well as the acts of meaning and expression, take place round a core of primary meaning "in the silence of primary consciousness". (46). This is not a meaning which we supply after "thinking through" an experience. It is an immediate meaning which occurs, for instance, in rediscovering "in my actual presence to myself, the fact of my consciousness which is in the last resort what the word and the concept of consciousness mean." (47).

The type of meaning Merleau-Ponty speaks of becomes clearer in his distinction between the "Speaking Word" and the "spoken word".

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44. Ibid., p. xxi.
45. Ibid., p. xv.
46. Ibid., p. xv.
47. Ibid., p. xv.

both of which are used by the 'body-subject'. In the latter concept we shall also discover the synthesis between rationalism and empiricism which Revesz saw was necessary, and claims to have achieved, even though the empirical body as well as the ideal mind remain basically necessary concepts in his theory. Merleau-Ponty, we shall see, provides, or reveals, in the 'body-subject', a "level of being" that meets Revesz's needs, and is consistent with the phenomenological method.

C. In his Phenomenology of Perception, Merleau-Ponty rejects traditional empiricism and rationalism, as did Revesz, and attempts to "get to the root" of mind-body synthesis through an original examination of the act of perception. He finally claims to have displaced the mind-body dichotomy altogether, and offers a new concept, the 'body-subject'. (48). But he also claims to have achieved as much in his less extensive phenomenology of language, and seems to intend giving language the special attention that Husserl had in mind. "In trying

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48. It can be noted here that (as we shall see) Merleau-Ponty uses phrases such as "condition of my body", physical gesture", and "brute being", which may be easily interpreted as having a purely empirical meaning. Such an interpretation, however, is misleading. Often, too, in Merleau-Ponty's usage, it would misleading to interpret such terms as "mental" or "mind" as meaning something in the purely rationalist tradition. This is particularly confusing in some of his explanations, for he often presents a view as he thinks a rationalist, for instance, might present it. At other points, he uses empirical terms as though he were an empiricist. Yet on other occasions, and very often, he uses the same terminology, neither in the rationalist nor in the empiricist sense, but in the peculiar sense which he himself intends for the concepts. Thus the reader, especially in reading isolated parts of Merleau-Ponty's work, is often tempted to misconstrue a particular argument as "pure rationalism" or "pure empiricism" because of an unfortunate misunderstanding of some of the writer's key concepts.

to describe the phenomenon of speech," Merleau-Ponty suggests, "we shall have the opportunity to leave behind us, once and for all, the traditional subject-object dichotomy." (49).

The Contact Theory also hopes to leave the dichotomy behind, but does not quite clarify what it intends to leave in its place. The human speech act, in Revesz's view, has physical foundations, yet it must transcend those foundations in order to become a process of thought and consciousness. Neither empiricism nor rationalism can allow for such a differentiation without seriously qualifying its own basic position to such an extent that its view is no longer a true empiricist or rationalist one. Revesz readily admits his willingness to make such qualifications. Thus the Contact Theory is presented as neither an empiricist doctrine nor a rationalist one. But the only discernable "meeting place" within this theory is the "dark and primitive" region which is too vague to be grasped and given rational eludication as a part of our cognitive experience. The complexities of highly structured physical, biological (and supposedly chemical and electrical) processes give rise to a "dark pressure" - an unaccountable, but nonetheless minutely conscious, pressure. This is the need or the urge for Contact, which becomes more and more conscious as it makes itself manifest in more complex ways and begins to achieve elementary levels of communication. Such (perhaps too briefly) is essentially the reconciliation which the Contact Theory provides between the traditionally opposite doctrines.

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49. M. Merleau-Ponty, The Phenomenology of Perception, p. 174.

It fails in being eclectic. It is not a productive synthesis, for it cannot establish a unity by "narrowing down difference". If a modified empiricism and a modified rationalism can give rise to some novel viewpoint which, in itself, is tenable as a philosophical position, then this novel viewpoint must bear the burden of defending itself from its own resources. No such position emerges from the Contact Theory.

Merleau-Ponty's treatment of the two basically divergent views also attempts to show that neither view is correct in itself, but that each has a certain element of truth in it. His final view (which follows naturally from his method) is that the empirical body is somewhat other than the idealists grant, and that the ideal mind is somewhat other than either the empiricists or idealists admit. A reconciliation can occur, he argues, only if we (in the phenomenological method) examine human nature as we immediately live it, rather than in terms of some abstract reconstruction of it. The interaction of 'mind' and 'world' can be rationally analysed, but should be 'understood' first in terms of its lived becoming. While realists have viewed the results of this becoming as an independent reality, idealists have generally seen the meaning of reality as a projection of mind. Both viewpoints fail to give sufficient (if any) attention to the 'body' as a preconscious 'body-subject', and do not acknowledge the preconsciously constituted meaning to which consciousness must refer.

"All consciousness," claims Merleau-Ponty, "is consciousness of something," (50), and starts from a primitive meaning which is already there, and from which a 'second-order' (intellectual) meaning is rationally structured. If the body simply undergoes 'empirical' influence passively, then it ceases (in his sense) to be a body. The 'body', for Merleau-Ponty, is a 'body-subject' which continually situates itself and maintains a definite modulation of existence. Such "situating" is a "becoming" which does not reveal itself explicitely to consciousness, but is the <u>hidden ground</u> of consciousness.

Our "second-order" abstractions have 'split' human nature into two substances that have no "first-order" foundation in the living man, whose most immediate awareness of himself is as one being. Similarly we are capable of isolating various aspects of speech, as we shall find Merleau-Ponty has done; but these aspects of speech do not <u>really</u> occur in isolation. In the faculty of expression, we find in actual experience that the notions of motility and intelligence are basically one, and cannot be lived as separated ways of being. While in reflection we may detach ourselves, as subject, from ourselves as object, we can never <u>live</u> that detachment. However much I reflect upon myself as subject, it is only as subject incarnate that I have ever been capable of reflecting. On the other hand, however much I think of myself as physical motility, it is only by thought that this motility becomes thinkable- - the motility I think is never mere motility as such. "The body is not an object...

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50. Ibid., p. xvii.

my awareness of it is not a thought...Its unity is always implicit and vague. It is always something other than what it is." (51).

Strictly speaking, however, Merleau-Ponty does not totally condemn empiricism or rationalism. He in fact recognizes science and other 'second-order' activities as extremely valuable. What he wishes to emphasize, it seems, is that intellectual systems should not be "reified". We do not live within systems or doctrines, but through our experience, from which doctrines and systems can be abstracted. It is this lived experience that is real. If scientific or logical theories have difficulty providing a synthesis between mind and body, it is because they attempt to relate an "explained" mind to an "explained" body. If the theoretical version of one is incompatible with the theoretical version of the other, it is the incompatibility of two theoretical versions that must be acknowledged. Any such acknowledgement, at the same time, is made, Merleau-Ponty claims, by a unified body-subject that "knows" itself, not as a theorized version of body, or of mind, but which lives its own practical synthesis.

Given this view, the Contact Theory is no longer in the awkward state of having to choose between two incompatible positions, both of which it wishes to utilize in its development. The need for contact can be readily accepted as a need or requirement of the intentional body-subject. This, of course, does not solve all problems. But it at least places the important "biological" urge on a level

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51. Ibid., p. 198.

of being which is not purely objective, and to which Merleau-Ponty attributes all the abilities necessary for an act of creation such as human speech. How the body-subject achieves this end will now be considered.

D. In keeping with his aim of "digging beneath our cognitive life", Merleau-Ponty cannot agree that language may have arisen in the form of convention, for this becomes a regressive explanation. If men agreed among themselves that certain sounds should have certain meanings, they must have had some form of communication to begin with, and the origin of that form becomes itself a problem, etc. "Conventions are a late form of relationship between men; they presuppose an earlier form of communication, and language must be put back into this current of intercourse." (52). This distinction in language between a late form and an earlier form is an important one which Merleau-Ponty makes frequently in various ways. Revesz found a similar distinction necessary, although his formulation of it, and his reasons for it, are by no means identical to those of Merleau-Ponty.

The initial Imperative language forms, in the Contact Theory, were posited as the source from which less primitive, and finally fully developed, language grew. It was realised that the highly involved complexities of a mature language with which men (sometimes) 'reflect' calculated thought and careful rationality, must have had origins in less 'refined' grounds. The grounds in the Contact Theory, although acknowledged, remain hypothetical and out of reach. Revesz

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52. Ibid., p. 187.

saw no reason to suspect that the language process should any longer require its earlier forms (as such) once the process had differentiated. Thus his distinction is a historical or temporal one. For Merleau-Ponty, however, the 'grounds' of the originally creative language act are never lost for as long as one can "live" such a moment in consciousness. Attention reveals, for Merleau-Ponty, that the human speech act continues to originate, or "swell up" from its hidden source, as the body's natural intention to express, and that such expression is creation. This is not to say that every human utterance is an original and novel one. Merleau-Ponty contends that there are two types of human speech, both of which are continually employed.

He at times refers to the "conceptual or delimiting meaning of words" as opposed to "emotional content". The emotional content he variously describes as the word's "gestural sense", "the speaking word", "originating speech", or "authentic speech"; this is to be distinguished from "the spoken word", or the word's "second order" (intellectual) significance, sometimes referred to as "secondary speech". (53). It is the level of the Speaking Word which seems to constitute for Merleau-Ponty the "current of intercourse" where we must search for human language in its earliest manifestations.

The word's gestural sense, he tries to show, is the word itself. On the preconscious level of brute being, where language has its grounds and origin, the word and the emotion are one. Speaking

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53. Ibid., pp. 174-199.

Words "extract and literally express... emotional essence". (54).

This is more obvious in the case of those "physical" gestures which we generally think of as "natural" ones; i.e., a smile or a gesture of anger. It is a mistake, Merleau-Ponty holds, to take such gestures as the signs of emotions. The emotion is completely integrated in the gesture, and can only be thought of as something separate. As used and meaningfully employed, an angry gesture "does not make me think of anger, it is anger itself." (55). But how does another person's anger become meaningful for me, unless I understand the gesture as a sign?

The 'recognition' or grasp (non-rational) of such a gesture is possible because its significance is a potential state of my own being. Had I never been angry myself, and were I incapable of experiencing or expressing anger, then I should be unable to properly 'receive' the angry gesture of another person, except perhaps to 'think about' what the gesture 'means' in other terms. Similarly, a child who is incapable of adopting a 'sexual attitude', is unable to derive meaning (other than a 'thought' one) from human sexual gestures. The gesture, in order to have full or 'lived' meaning as gesture, must coincide with one's own "inner possibilities".

Merleau-Ponty argues that, on the level of the Speaking Word, it is the same with words as with gestures. Just as a gesture is its own meaning, so is the word in its gestural sense. The obvious dif-

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54. Ibid., p. 187.

55. Ibid., p. 184.

ference is that, while most gestures are seen, vocal gestures are heard instead. But hearing, too, is 'taken up' in a responsive 'physical' process. What I see as gesture gives meaning to my body as a possible gesture of its own; similarly what I hear has meaning in becoming a condition of my body. This kind of 'gestural language' has its source on a vague pre-conscious level and is not a rational thought process in its "becoming". The whole difficulty, Merleau-Ponty claims, "is to conceive this act clearly without confusing it with a cognitive operation." (56). "The act by which I lend myself to ...(it)...must be irreducable to anything else. I join it in a kind of blind recognition which precedes the intellectual working out and clarification of meaning." (57).

E. But unless the Speaking-Word of the body-subject is a cognitive operation, or unless there is initially a thought process behind it, what makes speech any more than mere sound? In the Contact Theory, the early language of man was posited as a hypothetical Imperative language, but no adequate clarification was given of the process by which the use of the Imperative becomes more than a non-rational process of communication. An essential feature of language is the thought it "carries". But the Speaking-Word, as such, "takes place" on a preconscious level, and is therefore, it seems, also non-rational. Thus neither Revesz's hypothetical Imperative language, nor Merleau-Ponty's Speaking-Word, seem to have been given

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56. Ibid., p. 185.

57. Ibid., p. 185.

a discernable relationship with the processes of thought and rationality. In each case there is a "dark" or "primitive" urge which manifests itself finally as verbal communication or as human speech - in Merleau-Ponty's phrase, as "authentic speech".

Revesz, as we have seen, decided that the process was too obscure to fully explain. Merleau-Ponty, on the other hand, does not attempt to explain. But he does try to examine the act of speech and to describe the process in such a way as to "bring to consciousness" the way speech "happens" in experience.

Merleau-Ponty suggests (in his description) that speech accomplishes thought rather than being the result of it. (58). Careful observation, he holds, will verify this. What misleads us into believing that we think before we express is that previous expressions and speech processes are recollected in a kind of "inner language" which we mistake for something other than language itself. If we ever express a thought which occurs to us before speaking, it is no more than a prior organization of "silent words" that we utter. We in fact "speak to ourselves" in word forms which we have already created by utterance at some previous time. No thought comes to us wordlessly, and it is very often the case that no thought is complete (not even silently) until it is "uttered". We can never consciously mean anything until we have said it in words, nor form our own meaning in thought, and <u>then</u> decide upon words to express that meaning. There are times when, after expression, we correct

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58. Ibid., pp. 177ff.

ourselves, claiming that we "didn't mean that". This seems to imply that the words we use are not always the thought or meaning we intend, that we have a meaning or thought separate from the words we have used, and that these words are not in fact the thought we had. In this case the thought does seem to be something that we have apart from the words themselves. This situation, however, throws into doubt the very point which it appears at first to make. If my thought were distinct in my experience from my words, then I might be correct in saying "I know what I want to say, but I can't say it." But the case, it appears, would be more correctly put in the claim that I know I want to say something, but don't know what it is, and I don't know what it is precisely because I haven't found the words for it.

The intention of the 'body' here is to orientate itself in existence through a phonetic gesture. The accomplished orientation, in the phonetic attempt, is somewhat inadequate for its intention, and further speech gestures must occur in the way of adjustment. If the orientation were already achieved in some kind of conscious but wordless thought, then the same kind of adjustment should not prove necessary in one's private 'thoughts'; but we know that the same kind of adjustment is often needed. One does feel privately, at times a "mental openness" which is inadequately filled; what one is "thinking" is not the proper intention or orientation which the "body" requires. If one does not allow that this is a requirement of the 'body-subject', then one must posit a thought behind the inadequate one, and hence become involved in regressions. Given

the 'bodily' origin of the requirement, however, and its existential manifestation in speech, one more readily makes sense of the whole matter. The process is admittedly an intricate one, plagued by habitual illusions, but it seems the fairer claim, according to Merleau-Ponty, that speech accomplishes thought; rather than thought, speech.

Thus, while it is commonly held that we derive sense from language because of the common stock of meanings which we bring to it, Merleau-Ponty believes that the opposite is true of gestural language. The Speaking Word creates its own meaning, and often changes the meanings which we already have. Even in "everyday speech" there is an element of surprise and novelty. In spite of "stock phrases", "pet sayings", and "small talk", (and even these have origins) there is at least a measure of originality in daily conversation. If one "catches oneself" in the act of speaking, it is certainly not usually the case that one finds his words are being chosen <u>after</u> one has <u>thought about</u> what to say. In fact, spontaneous conversation often "catches" an individual saying what he "didn't mean" - a realization that occurs as an after <u>thought</u>. There seems to be in these situations an "interplay" between "levels" as one speaks, thinks, adjusts, corrects, qualifies, etc. But the thought is, it seems, created by what is said. There is a difference, of course, when there is more deliberation, and one thinks silently (in words) and considers the result before saying what one wants to. The effect is then to a degree like that of a prepared speech and should be considered as "secondary speech", or "spoken word". But there is always the "primary production". Even in prepared speech, the initial "language

formation" issues from somewhere, and is then consciously assessed and reproduced.

Merleau-Ponty's position is that the "universe of language" is preconsciously constituted as the gestural word. It is the creation of the body-subject as one of its way of being in the world. The creative result is sound, but it is more than this in the sense that one's angry snarl has an immediate meaning in one's own experience other than what one rationally explains as a sign. The gesture is lived as a momentary way of being, and the Speaking-Word is a gesture. The meaning of the Speaking-Word is thus, so to speak, given; but this is not its rational meaning which stems from a second-order "working out".

If we admit the concept of the body-subject, and give credence to the 'dynamic' of the Speaking-Word, there is much less difficulty with the 'gaps' which the Contact Theory attempts to bridge. There are still difficulties, but the concept of differentiation becomes more manageable in view of Merleau-Ponty's position; a living synthesis is considered as given; a method is suggested which does not confine itself to arbitrary systems, and which places the concept of 'origins' in the context of the continuing present.

It appears that Revesz was asking how language originated, while Merleau-Ponty was asking how language originates. The primitive for Revesz constitutes an outlived past, while for Merleau-Ponty it is the basic core of present being. An attempt follows to further relate their positions with the aim of providing more description of the language process as it occurs in "secondary speech",

which is the realm of scientific discourse. The moment of crisis in language origin has not yet been fully elucidated. It is not clear what the meaning of the Speaking-Word is, as thought, if we are to distinguish it from the thought of the spoken-word.

F. As we have noted, Merleau-Ponty claims that speech accomplishes thought. But there are two kinds of speech. If the body-subject's expression in the Speaking-Word accomplishes thought, is it (the thought) the same as that of the spoken-word, which occurs rationally on a "second-order" level? Given the two types of language, or speech, there is difficulty in determining what "thought" means at any given time: e.g., how does the meaning of the Speaking-Word differ (in terms of "thought") from the meaning of the spoken-word? What, in other words, is the relationship, if any, between the "thought" of "authentic speech" and the "thought" of the second-order level? Merleau-Ponty's account of this relationship will be dealt with later. First, however, it is to be noted that Revesz also discerns that there are different "stages" or "levels" of thought to be acknowledged in the process of language development.

In spite of his effort to provide an evolutionary sequence which gives "an account of the antecedent and early forms of language", Revesz does not accept the idea that there was an animal without language that could be considered human. Mention has already been made of Revesz's claim that "man made language" and "language fashioned man and made him human". He adopts the view that there was "no man without language and no language without man." (59). He also argues

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59. G. Revesz, The Origins and Prehistory of Language, pp. 6-7.

that thought and speech form an inseparable duality, that there can be no speech without thought, and no thought without a speech "process" of some kind. (60). Revesz admits that there are cases in which people seem to have what might be mistaken for wordless thoughts, as when someone anticipates or recognises a move in chess. Such thoughts, however, are, according to Revesz, dependent upon a capacity, of some sort, for language:

> "A thorough study of all the varieties of thought ...including wordless thought, presupposes the linguistic function in every conceivable instance." (61).

Thus the "inseparable duality" of thought and speech appears to be part of what is really an inseparable trinity, and Revesz's claim (above) must be extended to the view that (1) man made language and thought, and that (2) language and thought fashioned man and made him human. All three - man, thought, and speech - seem to be mutually complementary.

Yet elsewhere Revesz seems to suggest that thought must be given some sort of precedence, as though it were a precondition of speech, and in some sense a process which occurs before language. He claims, for instance, that "the use of speech without previous thought is unknown" (62) , that "speech is introduced by thought... governed and controlled by thought" (63) , and that "every act of

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60. Ibid., p. 100
61. Ibid., p. 100
62. Ibid., p. 99
63. Ibid., p. 102.

speech is prepared and accompanied by a thought process." (64).

But if thought thus precedes, prepares, and controls speech, and, at the same time, cannot exist without speech, there must be some form of speech which lends existence to the thought which is said to prepare and precede speech. There seems also to be at least a possible difference between the thought which prepares speech and the thought which the prepared speech expresses.

That language has "levels" is made explicit by Revesz in the various "stages" of his theory. But these levels seem to be evolutionary in the sense that levels which have occurred have been somehow outlived or (vaguely) lost, as with the Imperative language, and 'archaic' language.

> "At first language served only for mutual communication and the influence of one person by another...At a higher level...it also became a means of ordered thinking..."(65).

Revesz also distinguishes between the "original purposes" and the "secondary purposes" of language:

> "The original purpose of language, to which it owes it existence and in part it development, is the establishment of mental contact, of inter-individual communications, by means of the exchange of thoughts and the transfer of will." (66).

> "Now it can also be shown that apart from the primary purpose language also has other purposes... The secondary pruposes of language relate to the

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64. Ibid., p. 99.

65. Ibid., p. 212.

66. Ibid., p. 8.

> different fields of mental activity, and especially to thought..." (67).

While it appears that, in this distinction, mental activity and thought occur on both levels, the levels are again viewed as evolutionary ones, as they are when Revesz also suggests that man has evolved (in some sense from "man"):

> "Stone Age man started off with a much more primitive mental constitution...(than modern man)

and

> "Man has...experienced a mental...evolution that has completely recast his individual capacities." (68).

Revesz's findings are that all three (of thought, language, and man) have undergone levels or stages of development. The origin of either of the three, of course, remains problematic in the context of this discussion. Nor does it become clear in Revesz's considerations that we can ignore the necessity of having, for a speech act in the present, some sense in which thought precedes speech, and yet needs speech for its own formulation.

In the following section Revesz's "levels" will take on significance outside of their evolutionary context. It will also be seen that Merleau-Ponty was aware, after direction from Plato, that even though speech accomplishes thought, thought must not only precede speech, but also itself.

G. In the Contact Theory there is an implicit distinction between "man-who-made-language" and "man-made-by-language", and also between "language-at-first" and "language-on-a-higher-level". Since there

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67. Ibid., p. 8.

68. Ibid., p. 6.

was "no man without language", there is a need for some concept of "man" (without language, who made language-at-first). Contradictions seem to arise here, especially in view of Revesz's implied "inseparable" trinity of man, thought, and language. The concept required seems to be of "man" who is precognitive (cognition requires thought which requires language) but is nevertheless creative ("he" creates language-at-first, and hence man-made-by-language).

Merleau-Ponty's body-subject, as we have seen, is preconscious, precognitive, both "thought" (in a sense which is further examined below) and motility, and creates the gestural word as a way of becoming (there is a sense, too, in which the body-subject, in this way of becoming, is created by what it creates). It seems that by positing the body-subject as Revesz's "man-who-made-language-at-first" we supply his discussion with a concept which he seems to have sensed but did not make explicit. Similarly, Merleau-Ponty's Speaking-Word, or authentic speech, provides a level of lived meaning, suitable for "primitive becoming", and taken as "language-at-first" can be the "means of ordered thinking" which Revesz requires for "language-on-a-higher-level".

But, while the concepts of the body-subject and authentic speech are helpful, there remains the difficulty (for both Merleau-Ponty and Revesz) of establishing how language could develop without prior thought. Merleau-Ponty's claim that speech accomplishes thought poses a problem of recognition. The body-subject's "sound gestures", as such, could be no more than mere sound without some already existent 'rationality' to recognize more than sound in these "gestures".

To say that vocal activity accomplishes thought is to become engaged in the same problem that Revesz finds when the biological contact urge evolves (eventually) into a conscious verbal imperative.

Merleau-Ponty attempts to meet this problem when he suggests that thought be defined

> "in terms of that strange power which it possesses of being ahead of itself and of launching itself and being at home everywhere, in a word, in terms of its autonomy." (69).

The problem is essentially the same paradox which Plato points out in the Meno, and which Merleau-Ponty interprets as follows:

> "How will you set about looking for that thing the nature of which is totally unknown to you? Which, among the things you do not know, is the one which you propose to look for? And if by chance you should stumble upon it, how will you know that it is indeed that thing, since you are in ignorance of it?" (70).

Thus the body-subject, as the centre of human creativity, must pre-form, or in some sense, "think" its aims before they can be recognized on a rational level. The body-subject, one might say, "knows" what it wants before it is produced and consciously recognized. There is, in other words, a thought process (of some sort) which precedes rationality in the intellectual sense. As Merleau-Ponty otherwise puts it:

> "Unless thought itself had put into things what it subsequently finds in them, it would have no hold on things, would not think of them, and would be an "illusion of thought"." (71).

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69. M. Merleau-Ponty, The Phenomenology of Perception, p. 371.

70. Ibid., p. 371.

71. Ibid., p. 371.

The main import of these observations is that "thought must be defined in terms of its autonomy". The Speaking-Word or authentic speech is not the result of a cognitive act. Secondary speech, however, is cognitive. The relationship between authentic and secondary speech is thought itself which begins preconsciously and manifests itself as Speaking-Word in which the body-subject recognizes, on a second-order level, the thought which it has created.

Language has often been described as an organic whole. It constantly changes as words, phrases, and certain forms or styles of expression 'die out', and new modes of expression develop. Earlier mention was made of Merleau-Ponty's claim that the Speaking-Word not only creates its own meaning, but often changes the meanings which we already have; and of Revesz's claim that "no fundamental distinction can be made between the original creation of language and the creative acts which occur daily." (72). "Every new word, every new concept", claims Revesz, "owes its existence to a creative human act; and it must have been essentially so from earliest times." (73). If we can indeed make no fundamental distinction between the original creation of language and everyday creative acts, we should perhaps consider at least some general views on the nature of creativity, especially in the light of Merleau-Ponty's claims for the autonomy of thought.

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72. G. Revesz, The Origins and Prehistory of Language, p. 212.

73. Ibid., p. 212.

CHAPTER THREE - THE CREATIVE DYNAMIC

Revesz, we recall, makes use of considerable evidence to establish the "priority of the imperative" and relates the origin of language to expressive commands which were some kind of attempt to "order" or bring about a required pattern or style of existence at a given time. He emphasizes the "inner-forces" which have governed language development, and sees the origin of language as fundamentally the <u>same kind</u> of creative act as those creative acts that occur daily. He finally posits the need for a hypothetical Imperative language.

Yet, he abandons this Imperative language to the realm of the "unlived" as far as modern man is concerned. In so doing, he fails to pursue the possibility that, since the creative act was the context in which language developed, then an examination of <u>other</u> creative acts might throw at least some light upon the original language "process". He seems to bring the critical moment of language origin into view (as a <u>creative</u> act) but fails to analyse it.

An essential characteristic of Merleau-Ponty's body-subject is that it is <u>creative</u>. The problem with its creative becoming, however, is that "thought", in this process, must function on a <u>pre</u>conscious level. We are fortunate, then, in that the human creative experience, in its widespread and supposedly frequent "occurrence", has been described by others. An examination of these descriptions, may supply for us whatever we hope Revesz might have achieved in an analysis of his own; and, at the same time, we may see to what extent the descriptions tend to confirm Merleau-Ponty's suggestions, especially his paradoxical claim that "thought" must precede itself.

We shall look later to more dramatic accounts, but since, apart from instances of 'genius', all men supposedly think and use language, it is useful to concentrate on a descriptive analysis of the creative thought process, not as confined to a particular discipline, but as experienced in a more general sense or in a less spectacular context. The effort to determine whether or not there are different types or styles of thought, or to analyse the various 'ways' of thinking would be too extensive a task in these considerations, but it may be possible to determine that for almost everyone, at least on occasion, a level of intellectual activity occurs, and is creative, outside the realm of rational thought.

If it is supposed that a "line of thought" follows from, say, A to B to C, where C is some sort of conclusion; then before the "arrival" of C, or somewhere subsequent to the awareness of B and prior to the awareness of C, an activity (of some kind) is responsible for C's production. If we were to describe what "takes place" between B and C (if anything does take place) we should, it may be supposed, be describing what a part of the "thinking process" is.

But can this intermediate stage (if there is one) be described as a conscious process? It is difficult to recognise anything intermediate before some kind of consequence is already derived and is "there" to be assessed. The "source" of the conclusion, or the process which brings it to mind, is not easily elucidated.

One may, of course, follow an established method. But an explicit method already known is a method which, in some instances, was a product of original and creative thinking. The discovery of

such a method and the recognition of it as a reliable one, requires its own examination. After the method is known, however, it does not offer the same kind of problem.

The various "steps", for instance, taken to find the product of 23 and 17 would in all probabilities make no demands upon one's rationality. To find the product, one generally utilizes a mechanical method requiring no demanding rational decision. One accepts the answer as the method yields it, beginning with 7 times 3 is 21. Similarly one may perform certain exercises in logic by making use of a truth table. The conclusions reached again rely more upon the simple logic of minor stages than upon the rational grasp of a total process. Conclusions, it seems, are reached, not with a total logical argument in mind, but more in the belief that the method itself yields the answer.

In other cases, however, the intervening requirements (if any) between B and C, by which one reaches C, must admit either (i) thought processes behind the process from B to C, or (ii) a rational and conscious determination of the direction of thought in a more or less willful manner.

In the latter case (ii), we become involved in Merleau-Ponty's (Plato's) paradox pointed out earlier. This point of view implies that thought must in some sense precede itself. We shall not attempt to dismiss this paradox, but shall approach it again in sections B and C of this chapter.

If we admit the former case (i), that there are thought processes behind the process from B to C, such that C is produced as the out-

come, then it seems that thought occurs on a rather vague "level" of consciousness, or else we begin to entertain the latter case (ii); namely that thought is deliberate, in which case we beg the question. If we are to say, on the other hand, that the "vagueness" of what occurs between B and C is the result of some such exercise as "thinking in the back of one's mind", we still have to insist upon elucidation of the process as a rational one, deserving to be called human thought, or else describe the process as something less (or more). The critical question is to what extent we can maintain that the process is a conscious one, or that it has formal structure as a cognitive act before there is some sort of C given to consciousness. In other words, is it possible to catch "reason" building the bridge, or does she merely test what is constructed for her through some other dynamic?

There are problems here which we do not pretend to solve. However, insofar as human thought, in its everyday occurrence, at least sometimes, looks for novel solutions without recourse to mechanical methods, it seems to involve a verification of those solutions, by reason, only after reason has been given solutions to verify. To say that reason herself posits the solution for her own consideration, without being able to "catch her" in the act of positing, before the solution, is to admit that she works in ways hidden from conscious view.

It is in this sense that Merleau-Ponty, who gave Hegel credit for "inventing" that reason which is more encompassing than the con-

scious intellect (74), claims that "deliberation follows decision" (75), the decision being assigned to the "precognitive" level, and the assessment of the decision, by reason, coming afterwards. There has been an increasing attack, since Hegel, especially by those who have been called existentialists, against the exaltation of conscious reason. The attack, we shall see, is given impetus by the witness of the more eminent scientists and mathematicians. It is less surprising, perhaps, to find that creative artists have also given credit for their originality to sources that are non-rational. That artists rely on the "Muses", or upon "madness", or that they are "dreamers", is more or less an acceptable and established point of view. But that this "source" of creative inspiration is a form of human "intellect", or a level of "thought", is perhaps less affirmed as a popular belief.

B. Jacques Maritain, in a study of creative intuition in art and poetry, examines what he calls "the preconscious life of the intellect", and suggests that "any discovery which really reveals a new aspect of being is born in a flash of intuitivity before being discursively tested and justified." He speaks of "the primeval activity of the intellect" which exercises itself "far beyond logic and concepts". (76).

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74. M. Merleau-Ponty, Sens et Non-sens, pp. 125-126.

75. M. Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, p. 434.

76. Jacques Maritain, Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry, p. 55.

> "The universe of concepts, logical connections, rational discursus and rational deliberation, in which the activity of the intellect takes definite form and shape, is preceded by the hidden workings of an immense and primal preconscious life." (77).

Maritain recalls that Aristotle also posits "the existence of a merely active and perpetually active intellectual energy...the intellect agent," which Aquinas further suggested was the "inherent part of each individual's ...intellectual structure...the primal quickening source of all his intellectual activity." (78). This preconscious intellect, according to Maritain, is not to be confused with the Freudian unconscious, which is "structured into a world of its own apart from the intellect." The latter is held to "be deaf to the intellect", and is "the unconscious of blood, and flesh, instincts, tendencies, complexes, repressed images and desires, traumatic memories..."; it is "the automatic unconscious" as opposed to the "Illuminating Intellect". (79.)

Aurthur Koestler also suggests that "the knowledge of unconscious mentation has always been there." He refers to L.L. Whyte's book on "The Unconscious Before Freud" to show that the unconscious "has an impressive pedigree, reaching back to antiquity":

> Plotinus - "the absence of a conscious perception is no proof of the absence of mental activity."
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> Lichtenberg (18th century professor of physics) - "It thinks, one ought to say. We become aware of certain representations which do not depend on us."

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77. Ibid., p. 68.

78. Ibid., pp. 70-71.

79. Ibid., pp. 66-74.

> Wilhelm Wundt (19th century experimental psychologist) - "Our mind is so fortunately equipped that it brings us the most important bases for our thoughts without our having the least knowledge of this work of elaboration. This unconscious mind is for us like an unknown being who creates and produces for us, and finally throws the ripe fruits in our lap."
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> Nietsche (19th century philosopher)- "Consciousness is the last and latest development of the organic, and is consequently the most unfinished and least powerful of these developments. Every extension of knowledge arises from making conscious the unconsciousness. The great basic activity is the unconscious. (80).

What is notable is that each of these individuals refers to thought processes or rational activity which the individual does not consciously control or order. They seem to hold, with Maudsley, that "the most important part of mental action, the essential process on which thinking depends, is unconscious mental activity." (81). Each seems (at least in a general sense) to agree with Lamartine, whose observation was: "I never think - my thought thinksfor me." (82). These thoughts, "thought not yet conscious," (as Fichte puts it) "none the less positively carry the specific character of Intelligence." (83).

We recall Revess's reference to the Cartesian error which characterises thought as that which is "clear and distinct". Koestler calls this same error the "Cartesian Catastrophe". Since Descartes there has been a growing tendency to relate thought to the consciously

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80. L. L. Whyte, The Unconscious Before Freud, pp. 150-161. See also Arthur Koestler, The Act of Creation, pp. 148-153.

81. Ibid., (Koestler), p. 152.

82. Ibid., p. 150.

83. Ibid., p. 146.

rational, or to view it as a process which occurs exlcusively on what Merleau-Ponty calls the "second-order " level of consciousness. So it is that men of science "in the popular imagination...appear as sober ice-cold logicians, electronic brains mounted on dry sticks." (84). Koestler, however, suggests that many of the great original discoveries in science and mathematics have been made, not as a result of a logical and conscious thought process, but as the result of a sudden and unexpected insight that was a "flash" of recognition bursting into consciousness from an unrelated context. Logical explanations generally refer, not to the process of discovery, but to the process of verification after the discovery is made. Speaking of scientists, Koestler says:

> "...if one were shown an anthology of typical extracts from their letters and autobiographies with no names mentioned, and then asked to guess their profession, the likeliest answer would be: a bunch of poets or musicians of a rather romantically naive kind. The themes that reverberate through their intimate writings are: the belittling of logic and deductive reasoning (except for verification after the act); horror of the one-track mind; distrust of too much consistency...; scepticism regarding all-too-conscious thinking...This sceptical reserve is compensated by trust in intuition and in unconscious guidance..." (85).

Some of the numerous examples quoted by Koestler are as follows:

> Henri Poincare, concerning one phase in the discovery of his Fuchsian functions: "the idea came to me, without anything in my former thoughts seeming to have paved the

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84. Ibid., p. 151.

85. Ibid., p. 146.

> way for it...I did not verify the idea...but I felt a perfect certainty...On my return...I verified the result at my leisure."

and

> "In regard to my other researches I would have to say analogous things." (86).

> Karl Friedrich Gauss, after proving a theorem which for four years seemed insoluable: "At last I succeeded, not by dint of painful effort but so to speak by the grace of God. As a sudden flash of light, the enigma was solved...For my part I am unable to name the nature of the thread which connected what I previously knew with that which made my success possible." (87).

> Andre Ampere, after whom the unit of electric current is named: "I gave a shout of joy...I had found by chance a solution, and knew that it was correct, without being able to prove it...At last, I do not know how, I found it." (88).

Koestler gives many other examples and claims that "The quotations could be continued indefinitely," yet "I cannot recall any explicit statement to the contrary by any eminent mathematician or physicist" (viz., a statement that unconscious or preconscious thinking does not occur). (89). Quite contrary to the view of the scientist who moves logically from step to step to his conclusion, Einstein, one of the greatest creative scientists, went so far as to say that "no path leads from experiment to discovery." Instead of gaining new insights from the security of carefully developed rational tenets, the discoverer, according to Einstein, feels "as if the ground had been pulled

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86. Ibid., p. 115-116.

87. Ibid., p. 117.

88. Ibid., p. 117.

89. Ibid., p. 147

from under one, with no firm foundation to be seen anywhere, upon which one could have built." (90).

Thomas Kuhn claims that some such crisis is inherent in most scientific discoveries before new solutions or theories (paradigm shifts) are accomplished. Kuhn is not so emphatic in stressing the part which the preconscious plays in scientific thinking, but he does note that "often a new paradigm emerges, at least in embryo, before a crisis has developed far or been explicitly recognized," and that "what intervened between the first sense of trouble and the recognition of an available alternate must have been largely unconscious." (91).

It appears that, not only in art, but also in science, there is considerable witness to the view that there is some preconscious "thought level" which "puts into things what is subsequently found". To avoid the "Cartesian Catastrophe", of course, we cannot posit this preconscious activity as mere biological or bodily processes. It can be more readily seen as the activity of a creative body-subject.

C. While human creativity seems to spring from a preconscious 'dynamic', and language origin is also viewed as a creative act, there is a sense in which an attempt to recover the "birth process" of language offers special difficulties. As Revesz puts it, "Language is the most wonderful creation of the mind of man. Its origin is

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90. Thomas Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, p. 83.

91. Ibid., p. 86.

hidden in the distant darkness of an irrecoverable antiquity." (92). Hence it is difficult to view it solely in terms of "present-day" creative acts.

The problem of language "beginnings", for the individual who is born into a language-culture, does not seem to be the same problem as the first use of language by those who initially created that culture. The assumption is that if a language is already in existence, it is not the same to ask how people learn or adopt that language, as it is to ask how that language was <u>at first</u> developed, before there was a language. There is an assumed difference between man <u>learning</u> language and <u>creating</u> language. While we have unlimited resources with which to study the former (for almost every child learns a language) it is generally held that the original creative act by which language came-to-be can never be recovered. Nonetheless, it is worth studying an ostensibly pure case of language-<u>learning</u> to see if the original creative language-act cannot be in fact discovered.

One of the most dramatic records of language-learning is that of Helen Keller. When she was taken into the tutorship of Miss Sullivan, she began <u>learning</u> "words" by means of a manual alphabet. But, she reports, "I did not know that I was spelling a word or even that words existed; I was simply making my fingers go in monkey-like imitation." The circumstances under which she discovered that imitative hand-play meant things began as follows:

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92. G. Revesz, <u>The Origins and Prehistory of Language</u>, p. 1.

> "Someone was drawing water and my teacher placed my hand under the spout. As the cool stream gushed over one hand she spelled into the other the word water, first slowly, then rapidly. I stood still, my whole attention fixed upon the motions of her fingers." (93.)

Up to this point Helen Keller was not a language user. Her perception was limited to smell, touch, and taste. She could neither see nor hear. She was "human", we may suppose, only in a potential sense. Her experience was empty (and always would be) of things seen and things heard. But under the conditions described above, when Keller's experience for the moment consisted of meaningless finger-play on one hand, and the meaningless feeling of water on the other, when she could neither see Miss Sullivan nor hear her (and had never seen or heard her):

> "Suddenly I felt a misty consciousness as of something forgotten - a thrill of returning thought..."

It is interesting to note that at this point in the description the concentration is upon neither the finger-play nor the water, nor was there anything for this seven year old girl to see or hear, nor is what follows attributed to, or seen, in terms of anything Miss Sullivan may have been doing at that specific instant.....

> "...and somehow the mystery of language was revealed to me."

Keller does not venture to say how the message was conceptualised, or indicate the <u>source</u> or <u>form</u> of her "knowing", but

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93. This, and the following five quotations, are from Helen Keller's <u>The Story of My Life</u>, quoted in Arthur Koestler's <u>The Act of Creation</u>, p. 223.

> "...I knew then that the particular bit of finger-play meant the wonderful cool something that was flowing over my hand."

The association seems simple enough. Miss Sullivan must have been hoping for some time that Keller would make that association, but it was Keller who had to make it. Whatever Miss Sullivan may have been thinking at the time, or whatever she may have been trying to do, Keller describes the instant "miracle" in terms of her own consciousness:

> "That living word awakened my soul, gave it light, joy, set it free..."

What is puzzling is how Helen Keller knew, without the encouragement of a smile, or the sound of a congratulatory syllable; how she could be aware in the vagueness and meaninglessness of all her experience, that this instant was special. It seems that, as she was "awakened", the external world was awakened for her:

> "As we returned to the house each object that I touched seemed to quiver with life. That was because I saw everything with the strange new sight that had come to me."

After acquiring this "strange new sight", Keller went on to learn a language. We may suppose that Miss Sullivan could have at this point invented whatever signs she wished for the "names" which Keller was so eager to learn. What specific language she learned was not as important as the fact that she had acquired the "insight" necessary to learn one.

Many would stress the importance of repetition in Keller's experience, and suggest that the development that took place as Keller was given other names, was crucial to the learning experience. It

certainly cannot be argued that her acquiring of a vocabulary was of little significance. But it may have been a different kind of significance. Not only from Keller's own account, but also as witnessed in her frenzy of "naming" afterwards, it is obvious that the joy, the thrill, the light, the awakening, occurred at the water-spout. She had touched objects before, and engaged in finger-play (although meaningless) before, but immediately after the water-spout, as she returned to the house, each object that she touched seemed to "quiver with life" in her "strange new sight".

But how did Helen Keller know? Miss Sullivan was powerless to explain things to her. Keller had no way to thematize her experience. How could she even "say to herself" something to the effect that "this f-i-n-g-e-r-p-l-a-y is a 'name' for water, or represents water"? She did not yet have a "name" for finger-play, or a name for 'name'. As Miss Sullivan touched Keller's hand with her fingers, Keller had no visual or verbal concepts for 'fingers' or 'hands' or 'touching' or 'play', but an awareness of some kind, or an experience, the meaning of which could have been no more for her than the immediate living of it. That lived-experience could, in fact, mean nothing - it was itself. If the experience "went away" and Keller wanted it back, how could she formulate the "notion" of wanting it back, or conceptualize the thought: "I want."? She must have felt a difference between wanting and having, but what was her notion of difference? How could she be aware, apart from the living of it, that "Now I have"? How could she know that she felt a need? All she could feel for the

moment was a *living* without a name, or more specifically a *feeling*-without-a-name as a "way-of-being" that was perpetually black and silent. However much of a miracle had occurred when she made the distinction between the feeling on the one hand, and the feeling on the other, and then established (for herself) an *abstract* connection between them; it is even more startling in her "dark-and-primitive-silence" that she should make the "jump" to: "Other feelings also have names" and "I must know them". While she may not have conceptualized these *thoughts*, there was certainly some sense in which she "knew" what she was after, and had already made the kind of abstraction that is singularly human.

Whatever the "external circumstances" (including Miss Sullivan) had "brought" to Keller, it seems that Keller herself "brought" something to these same circumstances. It appears that her act of *learning* was in some sense an act of *creation* as well. In Merleau-Ponty's terms, of course, it was the creative act of the body-subject, and not a cognitive or second-order (consciously rational) one. The pre-conscious act resulted in the Speaking-Word, the meaning of which was *itself* and the *living* of it. This Speaking-Word was for Helen Keller more obviously a gesture, and her language a 'gestural' one. But it would be pointless to claim that *vocal* gestures have less potential as a vehicle for language and thought. The type of gesture is not as important as the fact that with its own lived meaning it *creates* a world and is a way-of-becoming.

The achievement of being able to fix w-a-t-e-r in her world,

even in the absence of the thing it stood for, enabled Keller to control, and manage, and put together more than the immediate. Keller found in the gesture, for herself, something which she could "hold on to."

The previous instance was no longer in conflict with the more vivid presence of the "now", for she had achieved another way of being, in that the past could be retained in the simplicity of a name.

One cannot feel or live sadness in a moment of joy, but one can speak joyfully of his lack of 'sadness'. Thus the world becomes more than the moment. It becomes the manipulative world of language.

But if Keller had some kind of awareness through her feelings, was it not possible for her to recall, in a "neutral" moment, some feeling, say of sadness, that she had previously had? It would seem that if such a "recall" were to occur, it would have to be in terms of the feeling itself and the reliving of it. Moreover, such a means of retaining the past would be purely introspective and subjective. To "fix" a feeling "out there" required a "vehicle" to "carry" it. It required, for instance, a gesture, to make it manifest apart from itself and the subjective living of it. As suggested earlier, the scream of pain does not merely represent the pain, it is an integral part of the total living experience. To recognize the scream as something separate requires, first of all, that it be there, and while its "coming-to-be" may not have been the result of any rational process, once it has come-to-be its being there can provide a "ground"

for abstraction. The imitation of the scream without the pain, for instance, could be the precondition for its being used as a 'name'. But a feeling without gesture (of some kind) is self-enclosed and unexpressive. Feeling itself cannot 'materialize' in the form of feeling, as such. Keller, of course, could not see her own physical gestures, or hear her vocal ones. She could not smell or taste them, so she was confined to feeling them. Thus her attempts to express were capable only of "falling back upon themselves" in their initial 'form'. There was no "residue". For her there was no gestural word.

Keller's miracle at the well occurred after a moment of intense concentration. In the flux of her feelings, two were predominant and occurring simultaneously. At first the sudden impact of the water pouring over her hand must have been a distinct enough feeling to surpress whatever other feelings she may have had at the time. It was enough, we may suppose, to "saturate" or completely permeate and embody her experience for the moment. Against such a total and complete "background" the finger-play was thrown as a conflicting "now". While the "full" and engrossing experience of the pouring water was sufficient to "absorb" her total momentary way-of-being, that way-of-being called for expression. It found a vehicle in the distinct but simultaneous feeling of fingerplay. The fingerplay was not Keller's, but the feeling of it was, and the feeling against feeling, made so suddenly distinct, placed one in being as a sign of the other. The fingerplay, as "residue" was something she could recreate, not as feeling but as gesture. She had acquired a manual tongue. Objects would now "live" for her because she could make them manifest in her

own creative activity. She had found a new way-of-being for both herself and her world.

But let us suppose that Miss Sullivan had fallen into the well when Keller made her discovery. Would objects for Keller have gone on quivering with life, or would she have lost her strange new sight? It seems unlikely that she would have acquired the language which Miss Sullivan enabled her to adopt. But would she have made any kind of linguistic development whatever? How far would her strange new sight have taken her? It is perhaps futile to speculate and guess at likelihoods. But would it be at least possible for someone with Keller's linguistic aptitude, if given the added impetus and profound advantage of the world of vision and of sound, to gain the "strange new sight" through an independent creative act, given any number of conditions which could possibly have motivated it. And once having been "awakened" and "set free" could not such an individual influence others to acquire the same "vision"? Then could language develop from this vision? We do not know. What we do know is that, as Sapir puts it, "There is no more striking general fact about language than its universality." "We know of no people that is not possessed of a fully developed language." (94).

It would appear, in any event, that the "discovery", such as Helen Keller's, which is the seed from which language can develop, is not so much "passed on" as self-produced. However much Miss Sullivan was able to do, out of her own genius, in setting up appropriate

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94. Edward Sapir, Language, p. 22.

conditions, it is difficult to maintain that at the water-spout she passed on a vision.

D. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In considering the problem of language origin, Revesz has warned us against an "error reaching back to Descartes". Revesz sees the origin of language as a creative act out of a consciousness which had its preconditions as a "dark pressure". This dark pressure is said to have made itself felt out of the underlying contact urge. Thus the problem is approached by "pushing it back" to the "dark and primitive" region, where the demand for explanations becomes presumably less acute. As Revesz has it, thought, which is inseparable from language, arises from consciousness, which has developed from a "less clear and distinct" consciousness, which has developed from the contact "urge", which begins more or less as a biological "tendency". In this way the Contact Theory relies upon a regressive explanation, and finally begins to ignore its problematic preconditions. Attempting to avoid Descartes' dichotomy, Revesz would have us "evolutionize" language development so that "man-who-made-language" is placed in the primitive past of pre-history, and "language-at-first" becomes a lost language. The "clear and distinct" thus merges with the "dark and primitive" in a kind of synthesis that is supposedly less difficult to accept than the evolution of that which is "distinctly" mind from that which is definitely matter.

Merleau-Ponty more firmly faces the seeming contradictions inherent in the language problem and recognizes more explicitly that paradox is essential to that problem. His attempt, moreover, is not to

thematize the primitive past, but rather to recapture the primitive present. Merleau-Ponty is less inclined, than is Revesz, to isolate man in modern times as a second-order rational animal. He insists that preconditions are problematic and attempts to "bring forward" the prereflexive reality that constitutes the "grounds" of rationality.

These "grounds" were recognized by Maritain as the "preconscious life of the intellect", a process of mind which is rational and intelligent, but unknown as a conscious operation. Koestler also refers to the "Cartesian Catastrophe" and concludes, from the basis of claims made by many major creative thinkers, that the Cartesian criterion for certainty, and the consequent reliance upon conscious reason as the source of scientific insight, are academic misfortunes that have blinded us to a realm of intelligence that underlies the less productive processes of conscious thought. Keller's "thrill of returning thought" seems also to have had precognitive grounds. It is difficult to argue that the "thought" was returning to Keller from Miss Sullivan. Miss Sullivan may have supplied motivating conditions by engaging in physical activity, a type of activity she had engaged in with Keller before; but it was Keller who had to be creative, and find in that activity, or give to it, her own revolutionary synthesis, for herself in her own vague consciousness. The preparatory source of such a synthesis seems somehow to have yielded the same "dark pressure" or "primitive urge" of which Revesz speaks, and which Keller calls "a misty consciousness."

But if we posit that original insights (such as first "language

insights") are patterned for consciousness by a preconscious "intellect", we do more than dismiss Descartes' dichotomy. We have established, at the same time, a trichotomy which in no way removes the basic problem of interaction. Ours cannot be a tenable trichotomy until we have shown the world our "missing link". We cannot stand on keeping it a guarded secret, especially from ourselves.

As we have seen, Merleau-Ponty's "missing link" is, for him, an obvious one. It is ourselves as we "know" ourselves in our living. This is not a rational knowing. To ask for this kind of knowledge is to allow reason to isolate herself from us in her own reification. Reason forces the dichotomy upon us to begin with, and reason will not allow us to dismiss it. In many ways, Merleau-Ponty takes the idea of "rational man" as a myth, or as a "second order" fabrication which is a severe limitation of the fullness of what-we-are. Thus, for him, there is no "living" dichotomy to begin with. Nor is there a real trichotomy. There is instead the lived unity of the body-subject, with preconscious thought as its creative 'dynamic'.

The confusions stemming from the tendency to 'dichotomize' are compounded, in the consideration of language origin, by the tendency to 'evolutionize'. What Revesz calls language "on a higher level", Merleau-Ponty describes (at least implicitly) more as language on a limited level; and while he agrees with Revesz's view that language must have primitive preconditions, he claims, to the contrary, that these preconditions are not outlived. Nor does it seem, in Merleau-Ponty's view, that the preconditions are as limited as that which

proceeds from them. Man's use of language "on a higher level" (for Revesz) is, for Merleau-Ponty, grounded in the "language" of Brute Being, and the "evolution" of the former from the latter is continuous. Revesz's "more fully developed" language is Merleau-Ponty's "spoken word". This "secondary language" is established out of "authentic speech" or "Speaking Word", which is a precognitive act out of primitive being. But this "authentic speech" is not a mere product which we abstract from the act and "give a meaning to". It is the preconsciously concentrated attempt of the body-subject to "utilize" a way-of-becoming. This "word-in-the-speaking" is both more and less than a rational exercise: it is more as a momentary style-of-becoming which is its own lived meaning, it is less in being less limited. As Merleau-Ponty puts it, there is a "residue" to the Speaking-Word which "falls back" upon the "grounds" of preconsciousness. It is this "residue" which is left in momentary surfeit of the act ("like a wave which hurtles beyond its own limits") and, at a temporary distance from its precognitive confines, takes on meaning as the limited "stuff" of consciousness and spoken word. So, in one of its ways, the body-subject establishes a "layer" of being for itself, distinct from itself only as "meaning" is from "living".

It is Revesz's evolutionary approach also that prevents him from pursuing, in human creativity, the 'dynamic' by which language came to be. By many accounts, this 'dynamic' involves a preconscious structuring. We do not rationally know either the 'form' or 'content' of this preparatory process, except that we may tend to call it "thought" by virtue of its product in consciousness. But the generally accepted

difference between the creative acts of modern man and the original language act is that the former stem from an established "layer" of awareness that language origin must have preceded. The origin of language is not "just another" creative act, but is the forerunner of many other types of human creativity. Revesz and Merleau-Ponty seem to agree that the origin of language is basic in this sense, but that basis derives from differing points of view. The origin of language, for Revesz, is initially basic to his concept of rational man in a long process of evolution. Language, for Revesz, is an accomplished fact. Man, of whatever culture, now learns an already existing language. He admits that people still use language creatively and develop new words, phrases, and expressions. But they have a language already, to work from. The present creative act, in other words, stems from the novel use of an already established (second-order) language, which has long outlived the original creative act.

The difference for Merleau-Ponty is most important. In his view man must still use language in an originally creative sense before he adopts a "second-order" language. The body-subject's culture is more limited and defined than the body-subject is. Merleau-Ponty, it seems, would have it that man first engages in the language process by preparing, through his "authentic speech", to use any second-order language to which he is 'exposed'.

The body-subject "aligns" itself in being, not only by "projecting", but also by "taking up". The body-subject is not ordinarily passive, but continually seeks its own meaning in reception as well as in expression. It "takes up" gestures as possible conditions for

itself on its level of lived meaning. In receiving the gestures, vocal or otherwise, of the culture in which it becomes, it takes for itself that cultural way-of-being.

But where there is no established language, the body-subject's creative gestures, or its authentic speech, we assume, would continue as attempts to "become", with consequent 'sedimentation'. And it is here, in this process of becoming that we must search for the 'dynamic' of language origin. Plato suggested, in his own peculiarly suggestive way, that language arose out of "mimetic gesture". When we posit that at first there was no given language to mime, we mean, of course, that there was no second-order language to take up. But we may assume at the same time, in the context of Merleau-Ponty's views, that, if there were other body-subjects, then their own "authentic speech" could have been the means through which they could together establish a common "alignment" in being. Preconscious thought could thus find in the "residue" of such 'becoming' something which it could "take a hold on".

Thus the problem of language origin has been viewed in the context of two unfortunate influences in modern thought. First is the evolutionary view of man without sufficient distinction between his "second-order" level of being, and his continuing level of primitive being in which the former is grounded. There is a tendency to equate rational evolution with human evolution. The equation holds, however, only for man on a rational level. To search for insights into language origin on this level may well be futile, for in terms of its origin language does not begin as a second-order rational exercise. Its

primitive beginnings, however, are not buried in the primitive past, but rather in the primitive present. It is in this context, as Merleau-Ponty has attempted to show, that the 'dynamic' of the original act may be uncovered.

In the second place, man's "biological" beginnings, before his attainment of language and thought, have been viewed in terms of the physical, as a distinct realm in Descartes' dichotomy. Hence the origin of rational consciousness out of this 'material' basis has been problematic. We have seen that Merleau-Ponty's preconscious body-subject diffuses this distinction by being the locus of the "preconscious life of the intellect". Without such a locus, conscious thought, in the distinct realm of her dichotomy, is faced with being more of a discoverer than a creator. The content of her discoveries seems preformed for her in a 'dynamic' which she herself does not consciously control. Insofar as the 'dynamic' of language origin must also be the 'dynamic' of thought, and as long as we isolate thought in this dichotomy, we lose sight once more of the "grounds" where origins take their start.

Earlier mention was made of Aristotle's concept of the "intellect agent" which Aquinas later pointed to as "the primal quickening source of all...intellectual activity." (95). Our discussion has indicated a widespread acknowledgement of some such basic force, which, though not conscious, bears the "specific character of intelligence."

Plato, as well, suggested (notably in the Philebus) that things

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95. See above, p. 56.

come-to-be as a limit of the unlimited, and that the dynamic which causes the mixture is Cosmic Reason. This Reason governs not only human coming-to-be, but universal coming-to-be. The "process" of becoming is therefore (for Plato) one of limitation, and the cause of the limitation is a basic, more than humanly-conscious Intellect.

If we again try to avoid Descartes' dichotomy, we discover that the origins (or the coming-to-be) of the universe, for consciousness, is no less peculiar, in the final analysis, than the origin of language. Perception, too, relies upon the body-subject's preconscious 'operations'. The dynamic out of which the universe "takes form" in consciousness, as the "physical world" of perception, does not reveal itself in conscious awareness. Again the conscious mind and second-order reason are more discoverers than creators. The creative acts occur outside of consciousness.

Even as understood (or thematized), acts of perception, which are ways of 'opening' on the world, are in every case also a 'closing' or a limiting. There is a sense in which all sounds together are silence, and "sound-in-consciousness" must be a limiting, a selection from or modification of the 'totality'. Man hears by 'becoming' deaf. "Blinding visions", it would seem, are also more than metaphor. Bright light narrows the pupil. Darkness opens men's eyes, but always to a point of no vision. The darkness before colsed eyes is unlimited.

It is somewhat in this sense that the creative language act, in Merleau-Ponty's view, has much in common with every means man has of developing a second-order consciousness. Language is not only expression, but also limitation. To use Sapir's terms, it is both a fetter

and a key. Just as Plato's concept of becoming (in the Philebus) involves "Limit" and "Cosmic Reason", so all conscious knowing, for Merleau-Ponty, involves the dynamic of "thought before itself" which must be defined "in terms of its autonomy". If we accept that there is preconscious thought (not to deny conscious thought), language can be seen originating out of Brute Being which, in a creative process of becoming, modifies itself for consciousness in the "residue" of its coming-to-be.

But if we locate reason in the isolation of Descartes' dichotomy and "evolutionize" man from the primitive, language origin must obviously be relegated to a realm of "irrecoverable antiquity". And if our consideration of this problem has been an attempt to escape from the "Platonic Cave", we should have to regard Descartes and Darwin as the Non-Dynamic Duo.

This is not to say that the origin of language is not a problem, or that it requires no elucidation apart from that which Maurice Merleau-Ponty has given it. But seen as a creative act which continues to originate from man's primitive present, the origin of language is not the same problem that it has been traditionally, for so many, for so long.

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