

Topic number 1- Aristotle

We can grasp the exterior world through our sensitivity. Even the simplest action provides countless stimuli which affect our senses. In order to be able to understand what happens to us, we needed to split these sensations in categories, to depict them. And then we discovered that there are causal relations between what happens outside and what we feel, we realized that we feel a wave of heat because the sun is shining and that the beautiful smell from the park emerges from the trees which are in bloom. However, this process of analysis does not reduce to the sensations we get from the sensitive apparatus, but also applies to the whole spectrum of emotions. We identify a certain feeling and then we give it a *name*, so that we can recognize it. But this is not the only purpose of the naming process. Perhaps the most important consequence of language is that it makes us realize that we are not the only ones to feel certain emotions or sensations. Language helps us share the world, as we get to know it.

Aristotle depicted the human being as an *animal rationale* which disposes of the *logos*, the speech. In his conception, what makes us human resides in our ability to communicate through linguistic signs. In the given quote, Aristotle poses the problem of the language as a matter of diversity: the spoken and written sounds are different among different people. Yet, in his conception, despite the fact that there is a whole domain of different signs, the things which are expressed by them are the same for everyone. More clearly, he depicts a hierarchy which includes the spoken sounds/the written marks, the affections of the soul and the actual things. He finds that the sounds and marks we use are not the same, whereas the *affections of the soul* and the actual things are the same. This problem has become a major topic of philosophical inquiry. Is the linguistic domain a field where we express the same sensations in different ways? Can we be sure that the words we use refer to the same sensations and to the same actual things? Isn't the diversity of language an indicator of the plurality of the ways of perceiving the actual things?

My thesis is that not only the written symbols and spoken sounds are different, but also the affections of the soul (as Aristotle called them).

In order to explain this, I will firstly problematize the way language is supposed to express our sensations, our feelings and I will present the conception of language as a

convention. Further on, I will rely on Sextus Empiricus' and Frege's conceptions in order to explain that even the same words can mean different things to us. Afterwards, I will delve in the philosophical critique of language as to prove that the diversity is not only in the signs, but also in the affections of the soul. Finally, I will explain that we do not have any indicator of the similarity of what we consider to be the actual things.

In his dialogue *Cratylus*, Plato aims to depict the structure and the emergence of language. The claim is that language was developed as an evolution of the natural sounds, which is formally called the onomatopoeisis principle. If this were the case, then our words would be just sounds we have grasped from the nature to which we have allocated written symbols. It is not important to our topic whether or not this thesis can be proven, but I will continue the framework that language is a convention. What Aristotle aims to depict is that the whole plurality of different languages is just *a matter of different conventions* and that, in fact, what is represented in language is the same. What the English call *sky* is the same as what the Germans call *Himmel*, and so on and so forth.

But this claim (i.e. that the difference is only in the signs allocated to certain external things or sensations) was counterargued in the XX century, as anthropology began to shake the foundations of what was regarded as certitude. A serious counterargument is the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, which claims that our sensitivity is prefigured by our linguistic apparatus. To be more clear, I will instantiate it. Think of the continuous spectrum of colors, which is depicted in language discontinuously. The English language provides us as an instrument to differentiate between nuances the expressions *lighter than* and *darker than*. As a result, we cannot perceive subtle differences, and most of us can recognize only the basic colors and few nuances. But a people speaking another language may recognize fewer or perhaps more nuances, depending on what apparatus their language provides. Therefore, even if the first people which invented languages did it as a matter of necessity, in order to describe the outer world, today language is a structure which imposes certain restrictions on us. Language makes us understand the world in a certain way, but we are born *in language* and our whole spectrum of perceptions is delimited by it. What I perceive as a nuance somewhere between yellow and blue, other people from somewhere around the world may see as a totally different color. But these distinctions are not be found only in the domains of perception. For instance, the Hopi Indians do not have a distinction between past, present and future as we do. Therefore, the way they regard time is, indeed, very different from ours, as opposed to Aristotle's claim. Another instance I can think of are the Piraha people of the Amazon, which have a counting system that admits only *one*, *two* and *more*. Based on this, their way of interpreting the exterior world is certainly very different from ours, since we tend to contabilize everything and have a clear representation of the quantities. It follows that not just the spoken sounds and written marks are different, but the whole world of sensations which they represent is different.

Another point which I want to emphasize here is that we cannot be sure that the meanings we have attached to the words are the same for all of us. If I tell someone that *the wine is sweet*, I have told him how that certain wine affects my senses. However, I cannot know if we regard sweetness in the same way- for me, a sweet wine produces a pleasant sensation but I cannot have any idea of how you perceive it. Of course, biology can explain that sweetness is the sensation which is produced when certain molecules reach certain areas of my tongue and stimulate my brain so as to perceive the wine as being sweet. But if this was all there is to sensations, then why don't we all perceive the tastes in the same way? Why do some like the taste of coffee, whereas others cannot stand it? The answer would be that it *affects our soul in different ways*, which provides us another counterargument for the Aristotelian standpoint. Another answer is provided by Frege, in the conceptual framework of the analytical philosophy. Frege relies on Sextus Empiricus' conception, as he stated that there is more to the meaning of a word than the sound or the written symbol and the signs we have attached to it. Therefore, Frege depicts that the words have both a sense and a reference, and the sense is the way we perceive the reference or the cognitive significance of the word. Think of the following two examples:

Ludwig Wittgenstein is Ludwig Wittgenstein.

Ludwig Wittgenstein is the author of *Tractatus*.

To someone which has some philosophical knowledge, these two sentences appear to have the same "a=a" form. For someone that knows that Wittgenstein wrote *Tractatus*, it is clear that *Wittgenstein* and the *author of Tractatus* refer to the same person. But think of someone who does not know this, or someone who may have forgotten that *Tractatus* is one of Wittgenstein's works. To this person, the second sentence appears to be an "a=b" type, because his knowledge of Wittgenstein's name is not by any means related to him writing *Tractatus*. My point here is that, just as a sweet wine may have a taste for me and another taste for you, so do the same words refer to different things to different people. And, as I stated, Frege explained this by introducing the concept of reference. In a dialogue, we may talk about Wittgenstein and think of the same person that existed, but for me this produces a certain affection of the soul, as I have enjoyed his work, whereas for you it may be just a name of an Austrian philosopher. This contradicts the idea that the same actual things yield the same affections of the soul.

So far, I have attempted to explain that what Aristotle perceived to be the same for everyone may actually be just as different as the linguistic signs are. At this point, I will further problematize how the actual things cannot be given to us (in language and outside of it) in the same ways and why we should relinquish the idea that we should use language to share the same sensations, emotions.

The idea that language is supposed to be a representation of the actual things became of major importance during the linguistic turn, when the philosophical aim was to delimit what can be said with sense and what cannot be said at all. In this context, Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* presents language as an image of the world (according to the sentences 3 and 4), as the *logical image of the facts is the thought* and *the thought is the proposition with sense*. The idea is that language can only represent what exists, and what exists is understood as the totality of facts. But in order to do so, language would need to have the same structure as what it represents, to be a connection which is similar to the connections which entail the facts. If this would be the case, then the language would be a fixed structure whose limits should not be exceeded, because what is beyond the limits is simply nonsense. To return to the Aristotelian stance, if language would represent the same actual facts for all of us, than it would be a clear set of denotations and symbols, in the same way the different chess pieces are meant to make certain moves. Therefore, the aim of language would be simply to provide an algorithm that helps us find our way in the world, and it would work just like a set of instructions which are attached whenever buying a new product. But the world does not give itself to us as a given set of objects which are supposed to entail certain affections of the soul. The *actual things*- by which I mean the physical entities around us- are not situated in the world in the same way objects in a room are. And even if they were, in order to depict them it would not be enough to say *there are two chairs, a table, a bed and a nightdesk*- since this would not tell anything about how the room actually looks like. In order to describe it, I would have to say what are the relations between these objects. And the way I perceive these relations is surely different from the way you perceive them. I will instantiate this with one of Paul Klee's paintings, which is called *The Bridge*. When seeing or hearing the word bridge, we are tempted to think of a structure that is meant to connect two different roads or streets. But the artist, instead of seeing this, perceived the bridge as the objects that crossed it in a certain day: an umbrella, a pair of shoes, a broken heart, a hat and so on. My point here is that the actual thing- the bridge- does not give itself to us in the same ways and therefore it is not the same actual thing for us, as Aristotle claimed. When thinking of a bridge, Klee thought of its crossing rather than its structure. Russell explained this by stating that the actual things do not give themselves to us, and that what we perceive is a serie of different appearances of the same thing. It is not just our perception that is the different, but also the thing itself. But this difference in perceiving is beyond the realm of the differences between signs, it resides in our subjectivity - or perhaps in our humanity.

To conclude, I want to explain the idea that language should not be considered to be a domain where the same affections of the soul are shared and the same actual things are described. As I stated above, if this were the case, than language would not be anything but a fixed structure which is used an apparatus to cope with the world. I would like to go back to Aristotle's idea that what makes us human is exactly our speech, our *logos*. The world we

perceive is not a singular world- not a geographical space which has its orders and is populated by different beings, but it is rather a collection of interpretations. We need to understand that the philosophical paradigms have changed, and not to rebuff Aristotle's conception. Habermas explained that we should no longer expect to find any certitude, any clear information about an actual thing, because today certitudes are split across all universes of discourse and it is no longer possible to depict a hierarchy. We do not expect anymore to find a common ground in communication, as Aristotle found to be essential to language. The aim of all these spoken sounds and written symbols is, in this now that we are living, to represent as many different affections of the soul, to enlarge the existent diversity. We are no longer looking for the actual things- since the possibility of knowledge has been under constant doubt- but rather for different ways of perceiving these things, for different ways of seeing the world. And, in the end, these differences which emerge within language can constitute an ethical ground. If we relinquish the idea that we should expect the others to see what we see, then we could understand the differences between us as the very essence of humanity. Levinas explained that, provided that we perceive the other with openness and do not attempt to sharpen his horizon so as to fit ours, then we open ourselves to the alterity which occurs in the dialogue between You and I. And if this dialogue would be seen as more than an exchange of facts about the same reality- as Aristotle grasped it- maybe the infinite serie of conflicts against humanity, against difference would find its end. In the end, we do not get to know anything about the actual things, and all we dispose of are these *affections of the soul*.

Magritte expalined our condition through one of his artworks- i.e. *Human Condition*. The painting shows an open window, partly covered with a canvas with another painting. The painting on the canvas seems to perfectly resemble what is outside, but in the painting there is a tree which we tend to consider to exist as an actual thing, although it is only in the painting and we have no indicator of it existing outside. Magritte's aim is to show us that what we think to be the external world is just our internal interpretation of it. We can never be sure that what we perceive as being there actually is there, or if a certain affection is caused by what we believe it to be- this would be a mere inference. And the only weapon we dispose of to fight against this uncertainty is to accept our condition and to share, by means of spoken sounds and written symbols and by any other means- all the different affections we experience and all the things that we believe to be actual.