

## LANGUAGE, THINKING, AND REALITY

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The following idea must again be the starting-point: The main distinction between man and all other existing forms of matter is the fact that in order to live as human beings according to human principles, we have to change the world we live in, and of which we ourselves form an essential part, in order to achieve our human aims — that means to change nature as well as our own society.

The possibility actually to achieve the aims we have in view while changing the world is based on two fundamental premises. On the one hand, we can always achieve the aim desired only so far as we are able correctly to comprehend the objective laws of the processes both in nature and in society which are caused by our actions. On the other hand, we comprehend these objective laws only through actions aimed at changing the world, and that not only by our success but also by our failures. The second premise is the fact that we can change the world for our human aims only by social co-operation. No isolated individual is able to provide the conditions of his human existence if he is dependent on himself alone. Otherwise we would have to write by ourselves the books from which we gain knowledge and would also have to produce by ourselves the paper, the penholder, the ink, and so on. That means that the process of recognizing the objective laws in nature and society is in its essence a social one and beside all its individuality socially conditioned though of course it takes place only in the brains of individual persons.

Language, too, could only originate in social intercourse out of the necessity of mutual information while achieving human aims desired by all members of society. If, e.g., at the beginning of the development of mankind, a horde wanted to provide food, they had to encircle the stag in the forest in order to drive him to that person who had to kill the animal by throwing a well-aimed stone. Therefore, they had to signal to each other that some of the beaters should rush forward or step aside.

Such a communication, without doubt, must have taken place in form of primitive utterances like those of animals but already with

goal-oriented variations. As a result of the ever-increasing purposes aimed at by society in order to change the world, these utterances necessarily had to become more and more differentiated and complex and had to develop into words and thus into language.

One must take into consideration that a word is nothing but the linguistic expression of a mental abstraction, of a concept. «The immediate reality of thought is language, «Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels stated in their work written jointly «Die deutsche Ideologie» (The German Ideology) <sup>(1)</sup>. In a concept and in a word — its «immediate reality» — we collect many individual things, processes, etc. none of them identical in reality. We collect according to what these individual things, processes etc. have in common due to their essence and what at the same time distinguishes them from all that does not come under this special concept. We leave out of consideration the vast number of special peculiarities of individual things, processes, etc. Let's pick out the concept (the word) «man» for an example which is especially obvious to us. If we call anybody a man only, we say very much of that man, but we don't say anything whether that man is a male or a female, old or young, clever or stupid, whether that man has brown or blue eyes, whether that man's abilities are developed or crippled, whether that man is a worker or an employer and so on. The concept of «man» is abstracted from all these predicates.

That means, our concept, our words reflect reality, but they reflect it abstractly, that is not absolutely exactly. I can add a great number of words to the word «man»: a man aged 34, with brown eyes and black hair, five feet tall, with a strong muscular system, father of three children, a skilled mechanic with great insight into technology and so on — I can never describe or comprehend him in the whole infinite variety of his actual qualities and relations. But in order to achieve a certain purpose together with him or for him we *must* comprehend those aspect of him essential in this connection.

If I speak of concepts here, then, of course, I mean the true genuine concepts tested by practice, and not those coined arbitrarily in order to veil an actual ignorance or to serve as trickery or swindle. The dynamics of concepts in our consciousness is called thinking. The dynamics of reflections and the relations between the concepts in human thinking are abstracts of the dynamics and the relations in the real world, in no case absolutely exact and comprising all aspects. It is true, thinking occurs concretely in the brains of different human

<sup>(1)</sup> Karl MARX/Friedrich ENGELS, *Die deutsche Ideologie*. Dietz-Verlag, Berlin 1953, S. 473.

individuals but its concreteness is conditioned by the social intercourse of the individual concerned.

Thinking then determines the starting-point of the individual will of man to achieve social changes in the world for a human purpose, at least as far as we really behave as humans. Besides we are influenced by conditional and unconditional reflexes not determined by previous thinking. At best we can meditate on them afterwards. We are not able to deny our animal ancestors completely. We don't behave specifically as humans if we only react physically.

So we comprehend the enormous importance of the concept and of the word in the process of human development. Concept-formation, word-formation and language itself constitute a most intricate complex. Each language has its own development defined by the whole history of the men using that very language. The number of existing things and processes abstractly summed up by one concept differs in different languages. Therefore, translation from one language into another rather often is difficult. The conceptual content of a word may also change within one and the same language during its historic development. In each language, for instance, at a certain stage of its development a level is reached when concepts are used metaphorically. Then one and the same word may have two different concrete meanings. In the case of a metaphor, however, these different meanings are related, similar or partially overlap. Thus, for instance, we say in German «unsere Mutter Erde» («our mother Earth») transferring the German word «Mutter» metaphorically, figuratively to another concrete content. But if we want to analyse the real biological connection of motherhood scientifically we must eliminate «Mutter Erde». Or let's examine the concept of German «Freiheit» (liberty, freedom) which essentially includes certain social relations of men among one another and towards nature and the possibility for men to achieve intended human purposes in a social connection.

We also metaphorically speak of restoring «Freiheit» (liberty) of a captured animal or of the number «Freiheitsgrade» (Margins) in a mechanical system. But if we want to analyse the essence of human freedom scientifically we must not include these metaphoric meanings because otherwise we inevitably bring about substantially wrong results.

But without regard to metaphoric usage one and the same word can be the expression of two completely different senses. Let's use the German word «Vorstellung» for an example. Apart from the German «Theatervorstellung» (theatrical performance) and the Ger-

man «Vorstellung einer Person gegenüber anderen» (introduction of a person to others) we on one hand understand by it the sensuous image, the copy of reality produced by the mere sensuous perception in the brain, just as the higher developed animals with a central nervous system possess it. On the other hand we understand by it the conceptual idea possessed by man only.

You can easily understand that in such a case you must make it plain to the listeners or the readers which of the different conceptual contents of the word is meant. Lenin gives a good example in his work «Materialism und Empiriocriticism» where he uses the German word «Vorstellung» (sensuous image —conceptual idea) in both its philosophical senses on one and the same page. (The Russian language, too, has one word only for the two senses.) But it is always unequivocally clear which of the two senses is meant.

It is a pity ? can't state this of all contemporary speakers or writers nor of us philosophers. The ambiguity of the conceptual content in the use of a word is often only the expression of careless thinking on the side of the speaker or writer.

But even so it very easily may lead to mental confusion of the listeners or the readers. And certainly all of us have already come across the other possibility of intentional use of such an ambiguity of the word for the purpose of trickery and swindle. To use words with one conceptual content in the premise, sometimes with the same, sometimes with a completely different conceptual content in the course of the argument and the conclusion has from times immemorial been a favourite method to direct listeners and readers in the guise of logic to factually wrong conclusions against their own social interest.

Now let's return to the starting-point ones more. There is no genuine concept but is expressed by a word. And there is no word, no meaningful one of course, but is a linguistic expression of a concept. Sometimes you can hear; «This or that is completely plain to me, but I am not able to express it verbally». Such a statement is wrong. If something is plain to me, then it is plain in concepts, in words. And if I can't find the words, that is the concepts, to express it, then in fact something of the implied connection is not plain to me yet.

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