

1

Conventionalism and hieroglyphs

In mathesis, in the theories of language and knowledge, in the theory of money, in the theories of ceremony and in connection with various other functions of the human mind conventionalist doctrine emerges claiming that the meaning of these intellectual functions lies in the use of purely conventional signs. The subject of the debate is invariably the role of conventional signs, whether they play a central part or a secondary one in these different areas. Meanwhile both sides assume the nature, the inner structure of conventional signs to be basically well-known. If our movie ticket shows seat 8 in row 5, we know where to sit and we conclude hastily that we also perfectly well know the fundamental nature of conventional signs. The positivist Ernst Mach's witty remark illustrating how unclear the fundamental concepts of number theory are should however warn us: "That we know how to multiply and to divide only proves, given the situation today, that the paper and the pencil are more intelligent than we are". So too are we in relation to our ticket to seat 8 in row 5: we have just been shown our way by these conventional signs! They have done their duty properly, whereas we are still unclear as to the fundamental nature of conventional signaling. Yet this does not prevent us from basing our epistemology, our philosophy of language and our theories of money and of religion on it.

2

Where is it necessary and where is it possible to signal, to send signs?

What is the conceptual minimum of signaling? To a first approximation perhaps: the minimal requirements are a sign and a referent, an emitter and a recipient, i.e. a signal emitter and a signal receiver.

Ad sign and referent:

- a) the sign and the referent can not coincide;
- b) the sign and the referent can not be absolutely alien to each other.

The same holds for emitter and recipient.

Are there any isolated, solitary signs? Béla Zalai gave the following negative answer, albeit in a different context. Every question and every statement makes sense only within a well-defined system. Transferring the question to another system will change its very meaning, provided the transfer is possible at all. The question of being has a different function in epistemology (contemplation) and in metaphysics.¹

3

As far as conventionalism is concerned, conventional sign may also mean arbitrary sign, a sign chosen at will, Is an arbitrary sign possible? This is in fact a variation on our previous question, whether solitary signs are possible.

Every so-called arbitrary sign is the *rational* extension of natural signs or systems of signs.

The prototype of a natural sign is a trace (determination of identity).

Every sign is directed to a geometric or metaphorical point. The real and ideal requirement for every signaling is a *will* to fix such points.

¹ Béla Zalai, *On the Types of the Concept of Reality*, I, II, Atheneum, 1911. Béla Zalai: Hungarian philosopher (1876-1914). He discussed the problem of philosophical systematization after the collapse of the leading German systems of Idealism.

Difference and similarity of sign and image.

The sign barely needs to resemble the referent.

The sign needs not and must not resemble the referent beyond the minimum.

What is an image? And what is a form?

Proportion! Function! (A “scaled-down model”)

What is a metaphor? The root of (all) naming, of (all) word (Humboldt, Geiger, Noiré, Max Müller).

We use every word *meta-phorically*, in a *trans-ferred meaning*, for every word is a metaphor. This makes of every word a relay torch of meaning and reason (the basic function of metaphor is present in music, in painting, in art as well).

The metaphor, *carrying* the light of *reason and meaning* is the root of all word: it points and illuminates! Sign, image, word, sentence, inference, theory and language are all rays of its cosmocentric radiation.

Identity is the crest-like realization of the integrity and unambiguity of (all?) webs of signs (Dingler: „Eindeutigkeit“). What contradictions (lies, errors, bunkum etc.) do is shake our faith in the texture of signs. Those who do not tend this texture of signs, and do not carry it further, but indeed attack it instead are an enemy of life and spirit more harmful than those who poison a well.

Translated by Christophe Kotányi and István Cziegler