

# Language

## INTRODUCTION

THE liberal arts of grammar, rhetoric, and logic are all concerned with language. Each of these disciplines establishes its own rules for the use of language, each by reference to a special standard of excellence or correctness which measures language as an instrument of thought or communication. Together these three arts regulate discourse as a whole. Their relation to one another represents the relation of the various aspects of discourse—the emotional, the social, and the intellectual.

The tradition of the great books is the tradition of the liberal arts. Their greatness consists not only in the magnitude of the ideas or problems with which they deal, but also in their formal excellence as products of liberal art. Some of the great books are expositions of logic or rhetoric. None is a treatise on grammar. But they all plainly exemplify, even where they do not expound, the special refinements of the arts of language; and many of them, especially the works of science, philosophy, and theology, and even some of the poetical works, deal explicitly with the difficulties of discourse, and the devices that have been used to overcome them. Language is their instrument, and they are consciously critical in its use.

One of the great books—Augustine's treatise *On Christian Doctrine*—is directly and explicitly concerned with grammar in the broad sense of the art of reading. Wittgenstein, in his own discussion of language, comments on Augustine's treatise, criticizing it for its emphasis on the use of nouns rather than verbs. But he fails to recognize the special interest in reading that is focal in Augustine's treatise. Addressed to "earnest students of the word," *On Christian Doctrine* attempts to "lay down

rules for interpretation," and, in so doing, it is compared by Augustine to "one who teaches reading, that is, shows others how to read for themselves." It is not reading in general, however, but the reading of one book—the Bible—with which Augustine is concerned. We shall return later to this special problem of interpreting the word of God, or language which is thought to be inspired.

In our day, there is a lively interest in the problems of language. This is partly because of the development of historical and comparative studies of the various human languages, and the scientific formulation of what is common to all languages in origin, structure, and change. But it also results in part from the claims of a discipline popularly called "semantics" to have discovered the properties of language as a medium of expression, and especially to have discovered its limitations. The claims of semantics often go so far as to find in the misuse of language the origin of many human ills. The novelty of semantics is supposed to lie both in the diagnosis and in the remedies proposed.

Of these two sources of interest in language, the second calls attention to the vitality of the liberal arts, of which semantics is a contemporary formulation. It might almost be said that there is nothing new about semantics except the name. Hobbes, Francis Bacon, and Locke, for example, deal explicitly with the abuses of language and the treachery of words. Each makes recommendations for the correction of these faults. Plato and Aristotle, Augustine and Aquinas, Berkeley and Hume are similarly concerned with ambiguity in speech, with the multiple senses in which discourse of every sort can be interpreted, and with the methods

by which men can approximate precision in the use of language.

The other interest in language is also represented in the great books. Though the science of linguistics and the history of languages are researches of recent origin, speculation about the origin of language and, in that context, consideration of the natural and conventional aspects of language extend throughout the tradition. At all times the discussion of the nature of man and society considers language as one of the principal characteristics of the specifically human world or compares the language of men with the speech of brutes.

In addition there is the broad philosophical inquiry into the nature of signs and symbols in general. This is not limited to the problem of how written or spoken words get their meaning. The general question calls for an examination of every type of signifying and every sort of symbol, verbal and nonverbal, natural and artificial, human and divine. Though these matters are closely related to the problems of language and may therefore be touched upon here, their main treatment is reserved for the chapter on SIGN AND SYMBOL.

THE TREATMENT OF language seems to have a different tenor in ancient and modern times. It is only in modern times that we can find a philosopher, such as Heidegger, saying that "one of the essential theatres of speechlessness is dread in the sense of the terror into which the abyss of Nothing plunges us." Only in modern times do we find a physicist, such as Heisenberg, pointing out that in quantum theory "the most difficult problem" concerns "the use of the language." We have "no simple guide for correlating the mathematical symbols with concepts of ordinary language."

The philosophers of antiquity appreciate the need to safeguard discourse from the aberrations of speech. Plato and Aristotle usually preface their discussion of a subject with an examination of the relevant words in current use. Discovering the variety of meanings attached to common words, they take pains to enumerate the various senses of a word, and to put these meanings in some order. They pursue definitions or construct them to con-

trol the ambiguity that is latent in the language anyone must use to express or communicate ideas. But they do not expect to remove ambiguity entirely. They tend to accept the fact that the same word will have to be used in a number of senses; and they discriminate between the occasions when it is desirable to be precise about a word's meaning and those times when the purpose of discourse is better served by permitting a word to carry a whole range of meanings. They see no special difficulty in abstract as opposed to concrete words, or in general names as distinguished from the proper names which designate individuals, or in words which refer to purely intelligible objects like ideas rather than to the objects of sense-experience.

The mood of the ancients, which also prevails for the most part among the philosophers and theologians of the Middle Ages, seems to express a certain tolerance of the imperfections of language. If men do not think clearly, if they do not reason cogently or argue honestly, the fault is primarily the result of the misuse of their faculties, not of the betrayal of their intentions by the intractable character of language as an instrument. Even when men misunderstand one another, the inadequacy of language as a medium of communication is not solely responsible for the failure of minds to meet through the interchange of words. With greater effort, with a more assiduous application of the liberal arts, men can succeed even if language works against them.

Some things are inexpressible in human speech even as they are incapable of being fully grasped by human thought. "My vision," Dante says when he reaches the mystic rose of Paradise, "was greater than speech can show." Such knowledge as we can have of "the highest matters and the first principles of things" Plato thinks "does not admit of exposition like other branches of knowledge." In his *Seventh Letter*, he even goes so far as to say that "no man of intelligence will venture to express his philosophical views in language."

With these exceptions the ancients seem to adopt a mood of tolerance toward language. This does not imply an underestimation of the difficulties of using language well. It sim-

ply does not make of language an insidious enemy of clarity and truth. The deficiencies of language are like the weaknesses of the flesh. As man can in large part overcome them through the discipline of the moral virtues, so through the discipline of the liberal arts—by skill in grammar, rhetoric, and logic—he can make language express almost as much truth as he can acquire, and communicate it almost as clearly as he can think it. Men need not succumb to the tyranny of words if they will make the requisite effort to master language to serve their purpose.

But the liberal arts do not guarantee purity of purpose. Obscurantism, obfuscation, deception, and falsification are sometimes the aim. Men try to persuade others at all costs, or to win the argument regardless of where the truth lies. They try to confuse their opponents or mislead their audience. The use of language for such ends requires as much skill as its employment in the service of truth. If such use is a misuse, then language is equally available for use or misuse.

It is an ancient saying that only the competent in grammar can make grammatical errors intentionally. So, as Plato recognizes, the difference between the sophist and the philosopher is not one of skill but of purpose. When he criticizes the trickery of sophistic argument, he also acknowledges the cleverness with which the sophists juggle words and propound absurdities under the cover of superficially significant speech. The sophistic fallacies which Aristotle enumerates are seldom accidental errors. Far from being the result of the impediments which language places in the way of thought, they are in large measure artfully contrived equivocations. They are ways of using language against logic. According to Aristotle, they represent "foul fighting in disputation" and are resorted to only by "those who are resolved to win at all costs."

IN THE MODERN treatment of language there is more of an imputation that words cause men unwittingly to deceive themselves as often as they enable one man intentionally to deceive another. Men are duped or tricked by the tendency of words to counterfeit a reality which

does not exist. This, in the view of Hobbes or Locke, Berkeley or Hume, is particularly true of general or universal names—or words that signify nothing which can be perceived or imagined.

We cannot imagine anything infinite, says Hobbes. Hence a word like "infinite" is a form of absurd speech "taken upon credit (without any signification at all) from deceived philosophers and deceived, or deceiving, Schoolmen." In addition to the deceptions of ordinary ambiguity and of metaphoric speech, Hobbes pays particular attention to the absurd, insignificant, or nonsensical use of words "whereby we conceive nothing but the sound"; he gives as examples, not merely "round quadrangle," but "infused virtue," "free will," and "immaterial substance."

In the light of the examples, this theory of insignificant or meaningless speech explains what Hobbes means when he says that "words are wise men's counters, they do but reckon by them; but they are the money of fools." It also indicates how Hobbes uses the susceptibility of men to self-deception through language as a way of explaining the errors—he calls them "absurdities"—into which his predecessors have fallen. What is novel here is not that he disagrees with earlier thinkers on points of psychology and metaphysics or theology, but that he reduces what might be supposed to be an issue between true and false opinions to a difference between significant and absurd speech. His opponents might reply that unless his own views about matter and mind are true, his semantic criticism of them does not hold. They have been seduced by language into talking nonsense only if Hobbes is right in his metaphysics and psychology.

The criticism of arguments which seem to rely on metaphors is not peculiarly modern. In his attack on the Platonic theory of ideas, Aristotle dismisses the statement that the Forms "are patterns and other things share in them" as a use of "empty words and poetical metaphors." But Hobbes carries this method of criticism much further. He frequently rests his case against other philosophers entirely on the ground that they are talking nonsense. Though he himself catches the imagination,

almost as often as Plato does, by his skillfully wrought metaphors, he would insist that what he says can always be rendered literally, whereas the metaphors of others conceal the insignificance of their speech.

Bacon provides another illustration of the modern attitude which ascribes a diabolic character to language. "There arises from a bad and unapt formation of words," he writes, "a wonderful obstruction to the mind. Nor can the definitions and explanations with which learned men are wont to guard and protect themselves in some instances afford a complete remedy—words still manifestly force the understanding, throw everything into confusion, and lead mankind into vain and innumerable controversies and fallacies." He goes on to say that "the idols imposed upon the understanding by words are of two kinds. They are either names of things which have no existence . . . or they are names of actual objects, but confused, badly defined, and hastily or irregularly abstracted from things."

Here, as in the case of Hobbes, a theory of reality and of the way in which the mind draws its ideas from experience seems to underlie the charge that language tangles the mind in a web of words, so that it deals with words rather than with things. In the same spirit, though not from the same premises, Locke tells his reader why he found it necessary to include in his essay *Concerning Human Understanding* the long third book on language, which examines in detail the imperfections as well as the abuses of words, and the remedies therefor.

"Vague and insignificant forms of speech, and abuse of language," he says, "have so long passed for mysteries of science; and hard or misapplied words with little or no meaning have, by prescription, such a right to be mistaken for deep learning and height of speculation, that it will not be easy to persuade either those who speak, or those who hear them, that they are but the covers of ignorance, and hinderance of true knowledge . . . So few are apt to think they deceive, or are deceived in the use of words or that the language of the sect they are of has any faults in it."

Without judging the fundamental issues involved concerning the nature of things and of

man and his mind, one point seems to be clear. According as men hold different conceptions of the relation of language to thought (and in consequence assume different attitudes toward the imperfections or misuse of language), they inevitably take opposite sides on these issues. Whether the discipline of language is called semantics or the liberal arts, the standards by which one man criticizes the language of another seem to depend upon what he holds to be true.

The present work on the great ideas aims, in part, to record the agreements and disagreements among the great minds of the western tradition. It also records how those minds have used the same word in different senses or have used quite distinct words for the same thing. It could not do either unless it did both. This indicates the basic relationship between language and thought which the great books exemplify, even when they do not explicitly make it the basis of their discussion of the relation between language and thought.

THE IDEAL OF A perfect and universal language seems to arise in modern times from dissatisfaction with the inadequacy of ordinary language for the analytic refinement and precision of mathematics or science. As Descartes holds up the method of mathematics as the procedure to be followed in all other inquiries and subject matters, so his conception of a "universal mathesis" calls for a language which shall be the perfect instrument of analysis and demonstration.

It is sometimes supposed that the symbolism of mathematics is itself that perfect language. Lavoisier quotes Étienne Bonnot de Condillac to the effect that algebra, "in the most simple, most exact, and best manner, is at the same time a language and an analytical method." Of the analytic equations "which Descartes was the first to introduce into the study of curves and surfaces," Joseph Fourier remarks that "they extend to all general phenomena. There cannot be a language more universal and more simple, more free from errors and obscurities, that is to say, more worthy to express the invariable relations of natural things . . . Its chief attribute is clearness; it has no marks to ex-

press confused notions . . . It follows the same course in the study of all phenomena; it interprets them by the same language."

This praise of mathematical symbolism indicates that one feature of the ideal is an exact correspondence between words and ideas. "Like three impressions of the same seal," Lavoisier says, "the word ought to produce the idea, and the idea to be a picture of the fact." If there were a perfect one-to-one correspondence between physical symbols and mental concepts, there would never be any failures of communication. Men would be able to understand each other as well as if they could see directly into each other's minds. Though they still used external signs as a medium of communication, they would approximate the immediate communication which the theologians attribute to angels. In addition, the process of thinking itself, quite apart from communication, could be perfectly regulated by the rules of grammar—the rules for manipulating symbols.

In the sense in which Lavoisier says that "the art of reasoning is nothing more than a language well arranged," the rules of thought might be reduced to the rules of syntax if there were a perfect language. If the symbols of mathematics lack the universality to express every sort of concept, then it may be necessary, as Leibniz proposes, to construct a "universal characteristic" which would make possible a symbolic calculus for the performance of all the operations of thought. This conception seems to contain the principle and the motivation for the various logistic schemes which accompany the modern development of symbolic or mathematical logic, from George Boole and John Venn to Giuseppe Peano, Gottlob Frege, Louis-Alexandre Couturat, Bertrand Russell, and Ludwig Wittgenstein. The hopes to be realized by an algebra of logic find expression in William Stanley Jevons' plan for a logical abacus which, like an adding machine or comptometer, would be a thinking machine able to solve all problems that can be put in suitable terms.

IS THE IDEAL of a perfect and universal language a genuine hope or a utopian dream?

Not all modern scientists seem to agree with Lavoisier's point that the improvement of a science and the improvement of its language are inseparable. Faraday, for example, apologizing for the invention of new words to name electrical phenomena, says that he is "fully aware that names are one thing and science another." The utopian character of the ideal seems to be implied in Swift's satirization of a universal language. On his voyage to the cloudland of the scientists in Laputa, Gulliver learns of a project which is being considered by the professors of language. "Since words are only names for things, it would be more convenient for all men to carry about them such things as were necessary to express the particular business they are to discourse on." The substitution of things for words would thus provide a "universal language to be understood in all civilized nations."

In the ancient world the imperfection of ordinary speech gives rise, not to the conception of a perfect language which man should try to construct, but to the consideration of the distinction between a hypothetical natural language and the existing conventional languages actually in use. If there were a natural language, it would not only be the same for all men everywhere, but its words would also be perfect images or imitations of things. That human language is conventional rather than natural may be seen not only in the plurality of tongues, but also in the fact that existing languages embody contradictory principles of symbolization.

This fact, Plato suggests in the *Cratylus*, indicates that human language does not originate as a gift from the gods, for if the gods had given men the names they use, signs would be perfectly and consistently adapted to things signified. The hypothesis of a natural or god-given language is not proposed as an ideal to inspire men to try to invent a perfect language for themselves. It functions rather as a norm for the criticism of man-made language and for discovering the natural elements common to all conventional languages.

Like human society, human language seems to be partly natural, partly conventional. As there are certain political principles, such as

that of natural justice, common to all societies despite the diversity of their customs and institutions, so all conventional languages have certain common characteristics of structure which indicate their natural basis in the physical and mental constitution of man. In the tradition of the liberal arts, the search for a universal grammar, applicable to all conventional languages, represents not the hope to create a universal or perfect language, but the conviction that all languages have a common, natural basis.

THE HYPOTHESIS of a natural language takes another form and has another implication in the Judeo-Christian tradition, where it is discussed in the light of certain portions of revelation. Yet it retains the same fundamental relevance to the problem of the origin and characteristics of the many conventional languages which now exist.

Genesis relates how, after God formed every beast of the field and every fowl of the air, He "brought them to Adam to see what he would call them; and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof." The names which Adam devised constituted a natural language, at least insofar as, according to Augustine's interpretation, it is the one "common language of the race" both before the flood and for some time after. But there is the further question whether the names which Adam gave to things were their rightful or proper names—whether they were natural signs in the sense of true representations of the natures of the things signified.

Hobbes suggests one answer when he says that "the first author of speech was God himself, who instructed Adam how to name such creatures as he presented to his sight"; Augustine suggests another answer by identifying the original language of man with Hebrew, and by affirming the continuity of the Hebrew spoken after Babel with the language all men spoke before the confusion of tongues.

At the time when men began to build "a tower whose top may reach unto heaven," Genesis tells us that "the whole earth was of one language and one speech . . . And the Lord said, Behold, the people is one, and they

have all one language; and this they begin to do; and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do. Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech."

This, according to Hobbes, means that the language "gotten and augmented by Adam and his posterity, was again lost at the tower of Babel, when by the hand of God every man was stricken for his rebellion, with an oblivion of his former language." If the further implication is that the lost language was unlike any of the conventional languages in the historical record, then it may be supposed to have been that natural form of speech in which each thing is named according to its nature. The modern ideal of a perfect and universal language may even be looked upon as an impious wish to achieve what God took away from men at Babel.

THE PROBLEM of the origin of human language is not an easy one for the theologian. It is more difficult still for those who speculate about it in purely naturalistic terms. Rousseau tries to expose some of the perplexities in such speculations.

If speech did not become a social necessity until men passed from isolation in a state of nature to living together in society, how, he asks, could societies have been formed before languages had been invented? "If men need speech to learn to think," he remarks, "they must have stood in much greater need of the art of thinking, to be able to invent that of speaking." The development of languages already in existence, or the way in which the child learns to speak through living in an environment where speech exists, "by no means explains how languages were originally formed."

Rousseau imagines a primitive condition in which men uttered instinctive cries "to implore assistance in case of danger, or relief in case of suffering"; he supposes that to such cries, men may have added gestures to signify visible and movable objects, and imitative sounds to signify audible ones. Such methods of expression being insufficient to convey ideas about

absent or future things, men had at last to invent "the articulate sounds of the voice" and to institute these as conventional signs. But, as he observes, "such an institution could only be made by common consent . . . itself still more difficult to conceive, since such a common agreement must have had motives, and speech, therefore, seems to have been highly necessary in order to establish the use of it."

The problem of the origin of human language is not only connected with the problem of the origin of human society, but also with the problem of the origin of man himself. The faculty of articulate speech does not, according to Darwin, "offer any insuperable objection to the belief that man has been developed from some lower form." Though the habitual use of articulate language is peculiar to man, "he uses, in common with the lower animals, inarticulate cries to express his meaning, aided by gestures and the movements of the muscles of the face." The songs of birds and the speech of parrots show that animals can learn to make and repeat certain definite sounds, and even to connect words with things. It seems to Darwin quite credible that man's articulate language "owes its origin to the imitation and modification of various natural sounds, the voices of other animals, and man's own instinctive cries, aided by signs and gestures."

SUCH AN ACCOUNT of the origin of human speech is not credible, however, to those who disagree with Darwin's statement that "the lower animals differ from man solely in his almost infinitely larger power of associating together the most diversified sounds and ideas." Those who hold that human rationality differs in kind, rather than degree, from animal intelligence tend to find a corresponding difference in kind between human language and the sounds of brutes. Aristotle, for example, says that man is the only animal whom nature "has endowed with the gift of speech. Mere vocalization is only an indication of pleasure and pain and is therefore found in other animals," but men alone have the power to discuss the expedient and the just, and this fact distinguishes human association from the companionship of gregarious animals.

Human speech is, for Descartes, one of the two criteria by which we can "recognize the difference that exists between men and brutes. For it is a very remarkable fact that there are none so depraved and stupid, without even excepting idiots, that they cannot arrange different words together, forming of them a statement by which they can make known their thoughts; while, on the other hand, there is no other animal . . . which can do the same. It is not the want of organs that brings this to pass, for it is evident that magpies and parrots can utter words just like ourselves, and yet they cannot speak as we do, that is, so as to give evidence that they think of what they say . . . This does not merely show that the brutes have less reason than men, but that they have none at all."

The difference between men and other animals is more fully discussed in the chapter on MAN. Here we are concerned with opposite opinions on that subject only in relation to opposite views of human language and its origin. When, as in Descartes's view, human language is distinguished by syntax and grammar or, as in Locke's, by man's special power to use sounds "as signs of internal conceptions, and to make them stand as marks for ideas within his own mind," the origin of human speech does not seem explicable in evolutionary terms.

THE RELATION OF grammar to the other liberal arts and to the various uses of language is considered in the chapters on LOGIC, POETRY, and RHETORIC. Isolated from these others, grammar is primarily concerned with the distinction of the parts of speech, such as noun and verb, or particle and adjective.

"By a noun," says Aristotle, "we mean a sound significant by convention, which has no reference to time, and of which no part is significant apart from the rest." In contrast to the noun, the verb is defined by Aristotle as the sort of word which, "in addition to its proper meaning, carries with it the notion of time . . . Moreover," he continues, "a verb is always a sign of something said of something else." The grammatical function of nouns and verbs is, in Locke's opinion, more generally

recognized and better defined than that of particles, prepositions, and conjunctions. Such words, Locke writes, "show what connexion, restriction, distinction, opposition, emphasis, etc. [a man] gives to each respective *part* of his discourse . . . He who would show the right use of particles, and what significancy and force they have, must take a little more pains, enter into his own thoughts, and observe nicely the several postures of his mind in discoursing."

Grammar is also concerned with the difference between words (or phrases) and sentences, or, in Aristotle's terms, between simple and composite expressions; and with the rules of syntax which govern the order and agreement of words according to their function as parts of speech. By reference to these rules the grammarian criticizes the misuse of language and classifies a great variety of common errors.

One test of whether grammar is a universal art applicable to all languages—not just a set of rules for using a particular conventional language correctly—is the naturalness of its theoretical distinctions. Does Aristotle's distinction between noun and verb, for example, respond to something natural in all discourse, or is it peculiar to the Greek or to the Indo-European languages?

THERE IS A MEANING of language which includes more than the speech of men and brutes. From Hippocrates on, the physician regards the symptoms of disease as if they were a connected system of signs, a language for which his diagnostic art provides a grammar of interpretation. This is particularly true in the psychological realm where, in the psychoanalysis of the neuroses and especially in Freud's interpretation of dreams, both symptom and dream-symbol are treated as an elaborate language. That language serves to express the unconscious thoughts and desires which cannot be expressed in the ordinary language of social intercourse over which consciousness exercises some control.

These medical examples represent a conception of language according to which the whole of nature is a book to be read by the scientist.

He penetrates the mysteries of nature by learning the grammar of natural signs. To know the relation of natural things as cause and effect or whole and part is to discover nature's syntax. According to another conception, expressed by Galileo, the book of nature "is written in mathematical language, its symbols being triangles, circles, and other geometrical figures, without whose help it is impossible to comprehend a single word of it."

The book of nature may also be read as the language of God. Prophecy or divination is such a reading of dreams or of other events as omens and portents which bespeak the divine purpose. When he reaches the highest heaven Dante finds in the vision of the Trinity, "bound by love in one single volume, that which is dispersed in leaves throughout the universe." Berkeley goes further than this. All of the ideas which man gets by sense perception are words in a divine vocabulary. The uniform appearances of nature "may not unfitly be styled the Language of its Author, whereby He discovers His attributes to our view and directs us how to act for the convenience and felicity of life."

God speaks to man in still another way. Within the Judeo-Christian tradition at least, God is believed to have revealed himself to man through the vehicle of human language. Written by men under divine inspiration, Sacred Scripture is the word of God. Because it is at once human and divine, this language is the most difficult for man to interpret.

The art of interpreting the Bible involves the most elaborate theory of signs, and of the types and levels of meaning. It involves special rules of reading. The development of this theory and these rules by Augustine and Aquinas, Maimonides and Spinoza, Hobbes and Pascal, has deepened the liberal arts and enlarged the scope of man's understanding of other languages—his own or nature's. Since the heart of this larger consideration of language lies in the analysis of meaning and the modes of signification, the discussion of the symbolism of nature and the word of God belongs to the chapter on SIGN AND SYMBOL; and, in its theological aspects, to the chapters on PROPHECY and RELIGION.

THE DISCUSSION OF language, as we have seen, cannot be separated from the consideration of human nature and human society. "Linguistics," Lévi-Strauss maintains, "occupies a special place among the social sciences, to whose ranks it unquestionably belongs."

Because He "designed man for a sociable creature," God, according to Locke, "made him not only with an inclination, and under a necessity to have fellowship with those of his own kind, but furnished him also with language, which was to be the great instrument and common tie of society."

It is not merely that the fellowship of men depends upon speech. According to Locke, men cannot enjoy "the comfort and advantage of society . . . without the communication of thoughts." The fact that "man had by nature his organs so fashioned as to be fit to frame articulate sounds . . . was not enough to produce language"—at least not human language, "for parrots, and several other birds, can be taught to make articulate sounds distinct enough," and yet, Locke writes, they are "by no means capable of language. Besides articulate sounds, therefore, it was further necessary," he insists, that the sounds men formed should be the instrument whereby "the thoughts of men's minds [are] conveyed from one to another."

Rousseau, on the other hand, seems to think that under the primitive circumstances surrounding the origin of both society and language, the association of men "would not require a language much more refined than that of rooks or monkeys, who associate together for much the same purpose. Inarticulate cries, plenty of gestures and some imitative sounds, must have been for a long time the

universal language," he writes; "and by the addition, in every country, of some conventional articulate sounds . . . particular languages were produced; but these were rude and imperfect, and nearly such as are now to be found among some savage nations."

The plurality of conventional, historic languages seems to parallel the plurality of the nations or societies into which mankind is divided. But underlying the diversity of tongues there is also a unity which implies the possibility of mankind's unification. To the extent that language expresses thought, diverse languages are but different mediums for the same thing. "All men [may] not have the same speech sounds," Aristotle declares, "but the mental experiences, which these directly symbolize, are the same for all."

The human community conceived in terms of the communication of thought extends as far as the bounds of such communication among men. It is not limited by political boundaries. It overcomes by translation the barriers set up by a diversity of tongues. It includes the living and the dead and extends to those as yet unborn. In this sense, human civilization can be described as the civilization of the dialogue, and the tradition of the great books can be conceived as the great conversation in which all men can participate. The extent of this conversation measures the range of western thought. The vocabulary of its language is the stock of ideas with which each individual can begin to think for himself when he turns from dialogue to soliloquy; for, as Plato observes, "thought and speech are the same, with this exception, that what is called thought is the unuttered conversation of the soul with itself."