

Questions for Symbol and Analogy seminar, 11/17/77:

In his recent lecture at BU on Religious Language and Poetry, Prof. H.-G. Gadamer noted initially and in passing that the differentiation of poetic and religious ways of speaking is a phenomenon peculiar to Western culture. (For example, the Qu'ran is composed in rhymed couplets; the NT in its present form is essentially prose.) To what may we attribute this differentiation of speech and of consciousness in the West? How would you weight the following contributing factors?

- the Greek philosophical tradition
- the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ
- the Protestant ethic and the rise of capitalism (rationalism vs. traditionalism)
- advances in physics, chemistry, math and astronomy
- the industrial revolution

J. Parsons

Prof. Gadamer and myself have in common a fundamental trait that separates us from mainline Aristotlean thinking.

Others put primary stress on knowledge of the universal and necessary; we emphasize above all knowledge of the concrete and contingent. What commonly passes for universal usually is provisional, and what commonly passes for necessary usually is contingent.

The radical agreement however leaves room for many differences: he speaks of different languages; I speak of several differentiations of consciousness with equivalent meanings expressed differently in accordance with differentiations of consciousness.

EG is the language of theology the language of religion: G would say, I suspect, that religious people do not talk that way; I would be inclined to urge that that theological language is clarifying and purifying what religious are trying to say

Again is all religious expression linguistic; does there not exist a non-linguistic utterance

With regard to poetry one may note with Vico that poetry is primary: it is an expression of largely undifferentiated consciousness; it can be at once thought and feeling, song and dance, an undifferentiated expression of the unexpressible with its thought lying too deep for tears. *It is the native language of myth.*

It can differentiate into epic, lyric, tragic, comic; it can become the vehicle for philosophy, science, a Lucretian world view; it can be transmitted orally for centuries before being written out; it can be dictated to a scribe, a slave, and thereby diffuse the many styles of differentiated thinking into common language. *But it opens into the matter of fact language of everyday life, of business, the law, the courtroom, of technical skills, trades, scientific investigation, historical narrative*

More radically, a comparison of poetry and religion may be no more than a rhetorical device and then it is harmless

But if one really seeks the answer to the question in our age of historical mindedness one has to run through the whole history of human thought and expression and determine the schematisms of each successive age of each culture and the relative roles of poetic and religious expression in each.

One will find, I expect, that poetry is more alive original creative, religion more deeply vital, more repetitive, more symbolic

*rhythm
and metre*