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The Analogy of Meaning

(Transcription by R. Doran of 86700DTE060)

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1 Meaning is constitutive of

- (1) human communication
- (2) human potentiality
- (3) human knowledge
- (4) human living

2 Common meaning is constitutive of

- (5) the potential human community
- (6) the community of knowledge
- (7) communities of commitment

3 Human science

- (8) as distinct from natural science and from theology
- (9) as historical: the mediation of common meaning
- (10) and hermeneutics.

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Preliminaries

1 Meaning is paradoxical.

What is meaning?

An answer to the question either has no meaning or else it has a meaning.

If it has no meaning, it is useless and literally senseless.

If it has a meaning, then one is using meaning to say what meaning is.

2 Alternatively, meaning is self-explanatory.

The meaning of meaning is a meaning.

3 Practically, one can proceed in two manners.

Analytically, by working out the constituents of meaning, by determining the acts and structures in and through which meaning arises.

Descriptively, by enumerating the realities that result from meaning, that are constituted by meaning.

Both procedures presuppose meaning and use meaning; we shall begin from the second, descriptive manner, because (1) it reveals the importance of meaning and (2) it sets forth the consequents that are explained by analysis.

Begin from the problem, from what is to be explained.

4 We speak of meaning as constitutive.

We do not mean that meaning is the sole constituent but that it is one of the constituents.

There are very many true and interesting things that can be affirmed about man without mentioning meaning.

Man is subject to laws of physics, chemistry, biology; man is studied in metaphysical psychology; a man is a man when he [is] sound asleep, dead drunk, insane, in his infancy, and in his doddering senility.

Still, all of man's waking life, all his imagining, all his feeling, knowing, speaking, doing would undergo an essential change if their meaning were omitted.

Again, it is only through meaning that we think about, know, do anything either about ourselves, our neighbour, or the material universe.

Remove meaning and there vanish art and symbol, literature and history, natural and human science, families, states, religions, philosophies, and theologies.

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(1) Meaning constitutive of human communication.

(a) The meaning of everyday language.

(b) Intersubjective meaning; acting.

(c) Incarnate meaning; example.

(d) Affective meaning; symbol.

- (e) Non-linguistic expression; art.
- (f) Literary meaning.
- (g) Technical meaning.

Our purpose is not a study of each of the foregoing seven vehicles of communication, but rather a rapid survey that will illustrate the different things meant by meaning and thereby introduce us to the analogy.

- (a) Everyday language.

Everyday language is the language of the home, of conversation with acquaintances, relatives, friends, of the schoolroom and playground, of commerce and industry, of newspapers, radio, television, of politics and personal prayer.

In the use of language three components, vectors, dimensions can be distinguished:

- it is expressive of the first person; the optative mood
- it proposes, sets forth, the third person; indicative mood
- it impresses on the second person; imperative mood.

Technical language aims at being strictly impersonal (via third person) and purely indicative.

It omits all feeling, all free play of imagination, all verbal flourishes and magic. It is dry-as-dust.

Literary language is a work, a *poiēma*.

It is not just said to someone but rhymed (Homeric, bardic) and rhythmical or written out. It is mediate but permanent communication.

It tries to convey through words what in ordinary speech is communicated by presence, voice, countenance, gesture.

As a musical composition or a play, it has to be interpreted, re-created; on the shelves, it is not communication.

C. S. Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism*, Cambridge Univ. Press 1961

Everyday language is immediate and transient.

It can be purely expressive (ah! ouch!) or purely impressive (shhh! stop!), but commonly it is at once expressive, indicative, impressive.

It is modeled on the human situation: persons, number, tense, mood.

It develops from an oppressive concreteness. E. Cassirer, *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, I. Speech.

Its significance for human existence is illustrated by the description of Helen Keller's discovery of the word (water), by the veneration of the word in ancient cultures.

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It would seem that the human psyche floats with the weightlessness of images and the caprices of aggressivity and affectivity until it pins things down in words.

(b) Intersubjective meaning; acting.

The transition from spoken to written language is an enormous abstraction. Hence, today basic linguistic study is study of spoken language.

Spoken language is not merely the use of words but also the use of presence and of acting.

There already is a meaning in his or her coming to me, in my going to him or her.

The fact of encounter recalls, releases, sets in motion, the dynamism evoked, developed, modified by past encounters.

There is a mutual recognition, a tacit acknowledgment of the past, an implicit agreement to continue it or to change it, perhaps a struggle for the upper hand (upmanship).

There is all that is revealed by tone of voice, by cast of features, by the fleeting play of smile, seriousness, vivacity, silence.

Human communication is not a matter of a soul hidden in the unlocated recess of the body and employing some Morse code of signals to communicate.

Rather, there is no separation between soul and body; the bodily presence is the presence of the other to me; through every shift of eyes, countenance, lips, colour, of voice, tone, volume, of fingers, hands, arms, the soul expresses itself; the person expresses himself to another.

Phenomenology: data and insight. *Exercite to signate.*

Limitations: the way insights develop; the nature of judgment.

Max Scheler, *Die Formen der Sympathie*

F J J Buytendijk, *Phénoménologie de la rencontre*, Desclee 1952
La femme, Desclee 1954

Intersubjectivity: I and You to We
Mutual self-mediation

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(c) Incarnate meaning.

A person either in his totality or in his characteristic moment, his most significant deed, his outstanding achievement or sacrifice can be a meaning

that is cherished, revered, adored, recreated, lived
that is loathed, abominated, contemned

National heroes: Washington, Lincoln
National objects of loathing, contempt: Benedict Arnold, Simon Legree

The drama of the passion of Christ.

G. Morel, *Le Sens de l'existence chez saint Jean de la Croix*, Paris Aubier 3 vols 1960 1961.

(d) Symbolic meaning

Symbol: the affect-laden image – it evokes the affect; the affect finds expression, form, resonance in the image.

Freudian: family relationships crystallized from the cycle of the Seven against Thebes.

Jung: symbols of transformation, conversion, death and resurrection
The psyche as the born cooperator with the spirit, as anticipating and pre-forming man's spiritual destiny.

Interpretation: Mircea Eliade, *Forgerons et Alchimistes*, Paris Flammarion 1956; *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries*, New York Harper 1960; Paris Gallimard 1957.

Elementary symbolic meaning

Gilbert Durand, *Les structures anthropologiques de l'imaginaire*,
Introduction à l'archétypologie générale, Grenoble 1960

Basis: dominant reflexes

Daytime, ascensional symbols: synthesis, St George and Dragon

Nighttime, descent: synthesis, Jonah and the Great Fish

Compound: Tree, Serpent, Tao, etc.

L. Binswanger, *Traum and Existenz* Desclée 1954 Rollo May

Paul Ricoeur, *Philosophie de la volonté* Aubier I. 1950 II. 1960 (dialectic of
OT symbols of guilt)

(e) Artistic meaning.

Meaning beyond the reach of words / Break in routine meanings /

Ready-made man

Ready-made world

S. Langer, *Feeling and Form*, New York, Scribners, 1953

R. Huyghe, *L'art et l'âme*, Paris

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(f) Literary meaning

Aristotle discovered and formulated logic

He also discovered that poetry and oratory departed from the norms of the
treatise

Hence, the doctrine of the figures of speech and, antithetically, the fact that
the poet or orator does not first think out a treatise and then ornament it with
figures of speech.

Properly, logic and the treatise express not facts but ideals.

But besides the ideal of clarity and exactitude, embodied in the treatise, there
is also the exigence for self-expression and the aim of communication.

Literary meaning floats between the laws of discursive thought and, on the
other hand, the laws of image and affect.

It exploits intersubjective, incarnate, symbolic, artistic meaning.

In the measure that this occurs, there is a displacement

from the class concept to the representative figure: first, second Adam
from the univocal concept to simultaneous multiple meanings: death, life
from excluded middle to over-determination, ambivalence, love & hate
from proof to reinforcement: repetition, enumeration, variation, contrast
from bare negation to overcoming: imagination cannot just negate; Swinburne
from single theme, level, to condensation of several themes; Shakespeare
Langer p. 243

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(g) Technical meaning

a' Only primitives get along without any technical meanings.

b' E. Cassirer, *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*
Essay on Man

Karl Jaspers, *Vom Ursprung and Ziel der Geschichte*, München 1949 1950

Henri Frankfort, Mrs H.A. Frankfort, John A. Wilson, Thorkild Jacobsen,
Before Philosophy, Pelican Book 1949 ss.; Chicago U P 1946

Eric Voegelin, *Order and History*, 3 vols., Louisiana State UP 1958²

c' The ancient high civilizations (Egypt, Babylon, Crete, valleys of the Indus and Hoang-ho, Maya, Incas, Toltec)

developed the mechanical arts (irrigation, architecture, tools) and the organizational arts (book-keeping, state, armies, navies)

but at the summit were locked in myth (King was Son of God, ruler of the cosmos, ruler of the state)

The myth was broken by breakdown of AHC and replaced revelation in Israel, by logos in Athens

Plato's early dialogues depict Socrates asking the Athenians what is temperance, fortitude, virtue, justice

and while the Athenians knew perfectly well what they meant, still they could not give satisfactory universal definitions

Aristotelian Ethics worked out the answers, but the answers were technical:
habitus operativus bonus

d' The transition to technical meaning involves a differentiation of consciousness

A different subject: Thales and milkmaid; Newton

A different world: Eddington's two tables; giraffe

A different language: chemistry, botany, zoology, depth psychology

A different society: the specialist at work and at home

A different development of understanding

A different method of inquiry and investigation

From 'we both understand what is meant' to definition

From proverbs, rules as in grammar, to principles, laws, that are always valid or worthless

From seeing the point to logical deduction, detailed verification

e' Higher controls

Logic, math, phil, method

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(2) Meaning as Constitutive of Human Potentiality.

Constitutive, but not the sole constituent.

Human potentiality: not the whole of human potentiality (a man in a coma is a man), but the potentiality in man for what is distinctively human, the potentiality for the region or realm or field in which arise good and evil, right and wrong, truth and error, grace and sin, saving one's soul and being damned.

Meaning is constitutive of the symbols that express our affectivity and aggressivity (*concupiscibile et irascibile*)
our existential psyche: equilibrium, swallowing, mating
our deep drive for transformation and integration

Meaning is constitutive of our projects, of imagination bodying forth longing and dread, hope and fear, love and hate, joy and sorrow, delight and pain,
our tactics and strategy, our plans and counter-plans, our aims, goals, ideals, intentions,
our yet to be realized achievements

Meaning is constitutive of our endless questions, our acts and growing habits of understanding, of our explorations of possibility in mathematics, logic, fiction

Meaning is constitutive of our doubts, our affirmations and negations, our beliefs and opinions, our convictions and certitudes

Meaning is constitutive of our loving, our loyalties, our allegiance, our faith, our resolutions and fidelity, our deliberations and decisions

Meaning is constitutive of what we could say, do, make, either on our own or with others and always by God's help

We have spoken of the differentiation of consciousness, of two subjects, worlds, languages, societies, modes of understanding, methods of inquiry and investigation

Meaning is constitutive of the potentiality for that differentiation.

It also is constitutive of the potentiality for one-sidedness:

classicism (not classical culture) that has no grasp of theory, that never got beyond popularizations, the simplifications of professors to hold the attention of the tail of the class, – that on the other hand never managed to apprehend the concrete in its concreteness, that can think only of the universal, normative, ideal, exemplar, law

scientism, that has developed on the theoretic side, but remains rather primitive in common sense, in human affairs, in philosophy, in religion

It also is constitutive in the integration of the world of community and the world of theory: historical consciousness, existentialism.

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(3) Meaning as Constitutive of Human Knowing

a' Aristotle, *Post. Anal.*, II, 1, reduces all questions to four types: quid sit; an sit; cur ita sit; an ita sit.

Post. Anal., II, 2: 'These, then, are the four kinds of questions we ask, and it is in the answers to these questions that our knowledge consists.'

Knowing, then, for Aristotle in that passage is a matter of answering questions.

But meaningless questions and meaningless answers are neither questions nor answers.

It follows that, for Aristotle, meaning is constitutive of human knowing.

Judging by the endless arrays of questions that Aquinas asked and answered, it would seem that he too considered questioning and answering to be human knowing.

b' This view is obviously paradoxical for the perceptionist, for the person that thinks human knowing to consist in taking a good look.

We look with the eyes of the body and we see particulars; we look with the eyes of the mind and we see universals; we look again and we see the nexus between universals and so reach principles; we look still once more to see the connection between propositions and so arrive at syllogisms.

Knowing consists in looking; questions and answers are a mere epiphenomenon, a manifestation, expression, of the looking that constitutes knowing.

c' The same view is no less paradoxical for the idealist.

An idealist holds that, if we did perceive, we would know; but in fact we do not perceive reality; and so we do not really know; all we can achieve are the immanent activities of meaning, and all we reach by meaning is the meant.

We are boxed within a world of meaning, and as we cannot get beyond it, we can never know anything more than what we mean.

d' It happens to be my opinion that human knowing (as distinct from animal knowing, which also occurs in man) is true meaning.

I disagree with the perceptionist's fictions

I disagree with both perceptionists and idealists in their claim that true meaning is not knowing.

I grant, of course, that to accept what I call the realist view, what is also the dogmatic view (in the R.C. sense of dogma), presupposes a conversion.

One has to break from the world of the infant, the world as reached, and enter a different world, the world as mediated by meaning, by 'is' and 'is not.'

The world as mediated by meaning is the world of the believer, the world of the theologian, the world of realist philosophy, the world of human and natural science, and the world of common sense.

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e' The world as mediated by meaning is the world that is communicated by teaching and learning.

Teachers and professors at least have to carry on as if true meaning were knowledge.

By wonder, by the problem, by the question, the data are promoted to the world of meaning

By insight the data are enriched with possible meaning

By expression, definition, deduction, verification, one prepares the way for judgment, for the pronouncement that the possible meaning is true or false

If a teacher tells his pupils to look at universals, nexus, compound nexus with the eye of the mind, he is wasting his own and the pupils' time

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(4) Meaning as Constitutive of Human Living.

Meaning is constitutive but not the only constituent: there are also the respiratory system, the vascular, digestive, lymphatic, endocrine, locomotive, nervous systems.

Of human living, not of the whole of it, but of human living as distinctively human.

The closer one's living resembles that of an infant, of a moron, of a man in a coma, the less the importance of meaning.

Basically, meaning is constitutive of distinctively human potentiality.

But the potentiality becomes actual in two ways:

it reaches the actuality of knowing by judgment;

it reaches the actuality of one's living by one's choices, one's decisions, or alternatively by one's drifting, one's failure to confront issues and decide

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(5-7) Common meaning and Community

a' As meaning is constitutive of human potentiality, human knowing, and human living,

so common meaning is constitutive of community on the respective levels of the potential community, the community of knowledge, and the communities of commitment.

b' The potential community consists of those who can understand what any of the others means.

Learning a language is not learning word for word equivalents: it is learning to think of everything in a quite a different fashion; and if one has not learnt that, one is a helpless victim of one's own language.

The Oxford or Cambridge tutor of 35 years ago. Was it Babu Greek?
English and French: my experience; Blondel
The experience of Unesco.

Strangers are strangers because they are strange: they do not see things as we do; they do not share our values; they do not do things the way we do.

A European is odd in America, and an American is odd in Europe. The differences are far more radical as we move to Russia, India, China, Japan.

Occidental differentiated consciousness by discursive reason; Indian differentiated consciousness by mysticism.

c' The stratification of community

The Revolt of the Masses against the complexity of meaning, the abstruseness of meaning, in modern technology, economics, politics

The breakdown of the intermediate groups that mediated the meaning from the summit to the rank and file / Nisbet, Quest for Community, OUP

d' The community of knowledge.

A common common sense, a common religion, a common philosophy, a common specialty.

e' Communities of commitment.

The family, the state, the church: an absolute commitment

Conditional, limited commitment, in subordinate communities: partnership, corporation, legal firm, medical profession, teacher or professor.

f Meaning as constitutive of living and of communities of commitment is meaning as dependent on will.

There is a normative component but there is also an actual component: the family ought to be what one ought to mean by the family, but the family at best is what one actually means by the family.

States are not just instances of what ought to be; they are concrete embodiments of what peoples have de facto chosen them to be; England and the United States are democracies but not merely numerically different.