

Going Back to Metaphysics in the Attic.

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Abstract.

The paper aims at understanding the implications of the Heideggerian poser that Western languages are languages of metaphysical thinking only. In this regard, a sentence, “Let us begin at the beginning,” randomly taken up, is subjected to rigorous analysis to check the proposition in the manner of Analytic philosophy, not forgetting Continental philosopher Jacques Derrida’s aversion to the “trace,” obviously of metaphysics. An attempt is made to find whether language or discourse analysis point a way out. Can the binary of percept and concept help explicate the proposition; whether percept stands for subject and concept predicate; and whether analytic truth is all there is to know or whether synthesis by means of philosophical analysis, i.e. by comparing each term with others, reveals the big picture? Regardless of true and false knowledge, the attempt is to begin at the possible beginning to find how humanity came to speak in the cave. By confronting humanity with the elements, it is sought to be proved that the elemental is nothing but metaphysical. An unconscious realization and confirmation is that most of philosophy is giving expression to preconceived opinion. It is also a humble submission that the paper has limitations of space and time and knowledge.

Let us begin at the beginning. To start with what does the ‘English’ word ‘let’ mean? Lexically it means ‘to go’ or ‘pass in’ (perceptual); with first person plural ‘let’ is used to make a suggestion as in ‘Let’s go,’ also in requests and commands; and used to express an assumption etc, and hence conceptual. Both suggestion and assumption arise from, and in, the mind, but suggestion is verbal and assumption internal. Therefore, concept flows from percept through cognition. Suppose someone were to say “Let’s ...” and not complete the sentence, ‘let’s’ cannot be called a percept, unless you add the verb ‘go’ or some other specific act such as read. ‘Let’ alone can be perceptual, because it is an act that can be seen or cognized; and ‘let us’ as phrase stands in midair. So the question arises, is concept a predicate? If we take the sentence, ‘John has two books,’ what is the percept and what the concept? The sentence is perceptual insofar as one can see John having two books. The question of concept does not arise in the proposition, for concept figures only when one wants to use the knowledge to prepare a model for a particular purpose. While concept is not straightway evident, ‘John has two books’ arguably projects the concept of possession. Therefore, for a percept to become a concept there has to be an intermediate stage, called intercept. Intercept is the intermediary that

can turn a percept and thought about it into an idea and a concept. Cognition mulls over a percept before converting it into a concept. However, it is not essential to turn every percept into concept. Those percepts that enhance knowledge are concepts. Even so, ‘let’s’ has become a handy phrase for initiating conceptual knowledge such as starting a sentence. Perception follows conception: Is one right in saying so? Does not conception precede perception? Normally it should, for conception is an act enacted by two agents to give birth to an idea. ‘Con’ literally means together. A concept is therefore fusing of the percept and the intercept. A concept forms only when a thought, a notion, or cognition arises from a generic idea derived from particular sensual instances. For conceptualizing a phenomenon has to occur more than once at least. It is more accurate to say, causally, that a percept goes through the mill of intercept and effect before the concept is constituted. Thus, four stages are essential for achieving knowledge, the percept, the intercept, the effect and the concept.

Percept, Cognition ~~ Intercept ~~ Effect ~~ Concept
 (-----Cause-----) / (---Effect-----)
 (-----Knowledge-----)

First, a percept has to be cognized by sensual knowledge and validated by mind after generalizing the generic phenomenon before a model is ready for further use. Perception does not need the elaborate procedure, for every phenomenon is immediately perceptible. The only thing needed is that a phenomenon has to recur together with assessing its generic value before a concept evolves. Percept is immediate to sensual knowledge, which can be cognized in a flash. The effect, however, has to stand repeated testing before validation and formulation. However, once a concept is validated, tested and attested it is time to move forward. A percept is temporary and lasts as long as it is untested, whereas concept can be permanent because it is validated. Since the noun form, conception, attracts connotations, it is better to confine to the shorter noun ‘concept’. Curiously, concept and conception are noun forms standing in for abstract thought, whereas they are actually the result of causal fusion.

Going back to the primordial beginning, because we proposed to begin at the beginning: ‘God said, Let there be light: And there was light.’ Before God said it, there

was clearly no light hitherto! At least till He said it, the Copernican revolution of the heliocentric nature of the solar system not having been proved well into the middle ages, it was mythical, mythological and chaos, going by the book and also by science. The question, therefore, arises, is it for man to determine what God said or did not say and when? The metaphysical question arises can man speak on God's behalf and attribute things to Him? Must we take it that to assign things to God that are essentially human conceptions is one of the great delusions of humankind? Why not put faith in physics of physics that is metaphysics till such time as no clearer understanding is achieved?*

It is not that the heliocentric nature of the solar system by itself proves the nature of light. What it proves is that the earth itself is not the centre of the universe just because of the presence of "man". Besides, humanity's presence is a contingent factor evolution and the greater scheme of things. Even assuming Sun is a star, what endows Him with energy? `Even Assuming...`, but is not Sun a star before the assumption? Is humanity a measure of all that is metaphysical? Concept as science, as truth, nullifies constructions of man. It may at best validate scientific knowledge that humanity has acquired despite taboo.

Anyway, since God said it, would it be a percept or concept? If God said it all of a sudden then it would be a percept. Because He would not have experienced the intercept or seen the effect before the concept of "man" arose, unless he has created the model elsewhere. (Even so, Analytical philosophers are fond of saying "The proposition must be true in all possible worlds," knowing well it will not be because different possible worlds have different gravity, relative to the Cosmic Force). Since percept is only a perceiving and not thinking constructively, when God said it, should it not be a percept-concept occurrence? He obviously had the conception of light in Him when He made the pronouncement due to his attribute of omniscience. While perception is immediate to the senses and reflection on it alone leads to a model or concept, in the specific case of the Creator, it is the chicken and egg question, wherein the concept apparently comes first and the series of percepts thereafter. Much better, since it is in the realm of metaphysics, the two are together, phenomena fused in, and driven by, noumena. For a fact, "Let there be light," is not specific in its address to anyone; and it is for the believers to take it for granted. When nobody heard when it was said, how can it be assumed that it was said in the first place? In other words, most of concepts found in the books, or preached or

posited, have divine sanction, irrespective of science! Thus, there is room for hermeneutics. ‘Let’ in metaphysics may arise de novo as much as creation, as in ‘God said it...’ By the same yardstick, is it valid to say: ‘Let also rises,’ like sun rises? Hardly. Thus for the ordinary man ‘let’ is luxury of playing God. Because the need for ‘let’ arises for him to describe such situations as that existed even before “man” came out of the mud. ‘Let’ generalizes a situation, as in ‘Let’s go.’ It does not specify that Tom, Dick or Harry will have to accompany someone. They may go together or severally. The use of ‘let’ avoids inconvenient specifics. By generalizing, the word tends to address the other, the many and the whole. ‘Let’ as the starting word, initiates happiness and stresses the positive more than the negative. The word presupposes leadership, resolution, pleading and so on for one using it. Hence, ‘let’ is purely a ‘creative’ word. Since ‘let’ covers a binary of two opposites, command and pleading, and since it is a handy word for the Creator, it is metaphysical, as used by King James, because the Bible itself is translated into English. The exact words in ‘The First Book of Moses, Called Genesis’ Chapter 1, reads:

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. 2. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.³ And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.

‘Let’ comes from the Book. In other words, ‘let’ may not be originally English and must have first come in for use as perceptual word through the Latin route before entering the conceptual arena. Conceptual knowledge lies in perception, cognition and working on it. When it is stated ‘let’ is foreign (exotic to English), it does mean outwardly, that is external to the original core of the English language, but very much a word in some other language from which it has been affixed into English. To start with, since liturgy has generally been in Latin, the word could have been borrowed from that language, and Latin from Greek since the etymology of the word finds place in the latter and stands for the attic. ‘Let’ is thus virtually pulling something out of the attic! And attic, too, sounds a borrowed word, for ‘ataka’ in the Dravidian language of Telugu it stands for the same.

Perception – seeing, hearing, feeling, touching or tasting – prepares the ground for a signifier such as the word ‘light’ – that which dispels darkness – into concept light, that which enables one to see/understand something better. Simply put, without ‘let’ there is no letting in of light, or conceiving, imagining or positing a God or Prime Mover who said, ‘Let there be light.’ ‘Let’ thus is without hindrance. ‘Let’ therefore came with the conception by an ancient people who recognized that it is the Prime Mover that made the Sun, the moon and the stars and the human. Synchronic words such as let and light came in the diachronic field of time and space. The binaries such as percept and concept, analytic and metaphysic and skepticism and bewitchment and so on are therefore dependent on the bearing we give to a word rather than its use in language. To understand a concept such as God, Prime Mover or Higher Power also needs ‘let’ which is signified. Signifier ‘let’ for individual and local needs and universal ‘let’ cutting across cultures and languages point not necessarily to English but universal conception. This is perhaps what linguist Ferdinand de Saussure had in mind when he defined synchronic as popular use (as opposed to diachronic use) of let.

‘Us’ too is another binary as we see in ‘us and them.’ ‘Them’ raises the question of other minds, and the misunderstanding starts. ‘Begin’ is another binary that has an *end* as its antonym. The third and the sixth inflectional words ‘begin’ and ‘beginning’ are related, and sound and mean the same, but one is a verb and the other gerund. The proposition, “Let us begin at the beginning,” is more analytic inasmuch as “a tall man is man,” if only one tends to overlook the fact that both sentences have recursive words. The preposition ‘at’ refers to space that cuts both ways in space and time. In the sentence our dealing with ‘at’ relates to time rather than space, although the latter too is not incorrect. We shall not complicate matters at this stage by trying to find whether space and time are coterminous at infinity and so on, except to make the obvious observation that space and time take the same preposition.

However, we seem to be concerned only with the English language. Why the English language alone? For the simple reason that we are essentially dealing with western philosophy, linguistic philosophy, discourse analysis and philosophy of language, because logical positivists have come to put so much in store by language analysis. For instance, philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, one-time positivist, says in

Tractatus, “Most of the propositions and questions of philosophers arise from our failure to understand the logic of our language ... (obviously German).” In the same vein, Martin Heidegger frames the question in a more forthright manner: “Do our western languages have an intrinsic metaphysical structure so that they are forever destined to be onto-theological in their nature or do they harbour other possibilities of thinking?”* Not only Western languages but also their possible progenitors such as Sanskrit and Semitic have also the same problem to contend with. The solution to the metaphysical problem, if any, is clearly outlined by Wilhelm von Humboldt:

Even if we find ourselves in possession of the necessary lexical and grammatical details of two important language stems, e.g. Sanskrit and Semitic; that will still not take us very far in our effort to sum up the character of each of them in such a way that we can make fruitful comparisons between them and specify their proper places in the general enterprise of language creation, as measured by their relation to the spiritual-intellectual capacity of the nations. What is still required is a special seeking out of the common sources of the individual peculiarities, the gathering together of the scattered features into the picture of an organic whole. That is the only way to enable us to get a firm hold on the particulars.**

Continuing with our original sentence, “Let us begin at the beginning,” we come to the definite article. A binary to the definite article is the general, the common, and not particular. When we say ‘the beginning’, do we mean particular beginning or beginning of the beginning? Regardless of particular, universal or primordial, thanks to Plato because there cannot be ‘beginningness’ as cattiness and tableteness and since beginning has to be made in the mind for it to be initiated, stated or grounded, we shall begin at the primordial beginning. Where else can such a beginning be but in the cave, even if it may have family resemblance to Plato’s cave? Let us posit a group of the nascent Homo sapiens in the cave, since by historical materialism we have a pretty clear idea that the first man was neither Adam nor the first woman Eve, since monads and gonads go together. In terms of ‘Origin of Species,’ Adams and Eves were always in the making, without it being possible to isolate the first Eve. Instead, we shall assume there were Adams and Eves in the cave and they constituted a group of common hunters for food gathering, whenever they ventured out. Let us not be so cruel as to confine our Adams and Eves to the cave and light a fire behind them, or to erect an impenetrable wall in front of them to facilitate the shadows to fall on the wall, and then derive a philosophy out of it that *it* is all shadowboxing after all! We shall also not force Adam to chase a mirage, but help him come out of the cave to see the nature of true form; if not in its full resplendence, which is impossible, at least in part. We shall also not beguile him into believing that the restricted forms of shadows falling on the impenetrable wall are all

there is. We shall thus refrain from condemning him to false knowledge. Instead we shall give him freedom to think for himself, as is humanly possible, and to find for himself the rudiments of true form through nascent semiotics. At the same time, we shall not be taken in by the shadowy forms on the wall as reality or by sensual feelings lit up by sunshine at the mouth of the cave. (Or the analogue of moonshine in the dark!). Neither do we attribute to the one who got away for the pleasure of roaming in the early morning sun as basking in any extra-knowledge. We must be clear what million suns meant to nuclear scientist J.R. Oppenheimer and the spectre under which we are living ever after.***

Let us, therefore, begin at the beginning, in the cave, giving enough freedom to the hunter-gatherers dwelling therein. It maybe assumed that these hunter-gatherers do not yet have a full-fledged language, let alone ‘our languages,’ even in the proto form. So how would this man communicate with the other minds, the outside world, his fellowmen, fellow Adams and Eves? First of all what do we mean by naming our man Adam? We have named our man Adam for convenience after the first man in the book before setting him in the Garden of Eden and finding him the consort Eve, locating him near the tree of knowledge bearing fruits, the bite of one of which became the bark of the world, goaded of course by the slippery serpent. We have named him Adam but not christened him. Our Adam is a strapping, sturdy youth, what with feeding on unpolluted food given by Mother Nature. So our Adam, as he comes out of the shadows, sees but bright sunlight and for what purpose – food gathering. As he comes out of the cave and takes a few uncertain steps, he finds he has crossed a long slithering thing in the grassy path. After crossing, he reminds himself of his good luck that he has not come to any harm, for he remembers in a flash something of the nature being gestured about back in the cave. Despite the luck, he has had a sinking feeling. In fact, contrary feelings envelop him, all occurring and hitting him at the same time. While tension mounts, he could kill the snake on his own, but it is a rather risky affair. Rather, the killing can be in quick time by alerting others in his tribe. As is usual, the first human reaction would be to shout and that would have to be onomatopoeic as well. So he says something sounding like ‘hissss’ ‘buss’, for the snake makes a hissing sound when faced with danger and man refers danger to him by that very sound. While the signifier is hisss, it maybe conveyed to others (if only those in the cave or coming out of it) who know what it signifies. So how

would Adam1, coming next out of the cave after our Adam, register the sound? When there is a snake in the grass, birds in the vicinity start frantic twittering. Once this is observed *a priori*, cause to effect, it becomes standard knowledge. Next time, one sees frantic twittering by birds, *a posteriori*, one knows that there is a snake in the grass around, or at least some form of danger such as the approach of a hawk or a bird that preys on smaller birds or a wild animal lurking in the shadows.

Thus alerted Adam1 runs back into the cave and makes the same ‘hisss’ ‘busss’ sounds demanding, of course by gestures, those of his age group to rush out, with whatever rough-edged weapons they may have. While they are so preparing, an elderly matron and master gesture the cause of commotion to others in the cave that there is some kind of danger outside the cave. This is done in ‘didn’t-we-tell-you-so’ gestures.

After the snake is killed and danger warded off, and as the tribe seats itself down to a meal of venison or whatever, they will reconstruct in their own onomatopoeic ways and nascent words the episode of snake and how they have encountered it. In the process, they may coin more words for such concepts as ‘lurking danger’, ‘to sound the bugle’ (‘bugul’ fear in Telugu) and the creatures that cause it such as lion, tiger, snake and so on or phenomena such as heavy rain, hail, heavy wind, forest fire, flood, rapid flow of water, and earthquake or human-made dangers that engender fright. Some of the more thoughtful in the tribe would continue to reflect on the day’s happening and the knowledge gleaned into the night, burning midnight fat sometimes. For it is the darkness of the night that holds and throws light on more of the nature’s secrets and mysteries to mankind. Night is the time of thought, reflection. At some point in thought, images are not enough like in the silent-era films. Words need to be formed first for objects. To describe a percept such as the snake in the grass in the early morning sun while going out for food-gathering, there ought to be a chain of words. Even assuming that the cavemen have graduated to naming all objects of importance to them, there cannot be an unbroken succession of words to describe the percept or the series of percepts. The informer can hardly run out of breath if he has to make himself intelligible to his fellowmen and women. So he has to take a pause – after uttering a phrase which makes some sense -- or complete a sentence about the perception, committing himself to a subject, predicate and

object, as ‘I saw a snake in the grass, and so be on alert’ even in proto language. The coherent sound, syntax and semantics – all reflections of the mind -- take a long period to come to fruition. It may be days and nights, years and ages to develop a workable language. Even so, it needs mention that while the day is for various episodes to occur, the night-outs are for reflection and epiphenomena. Night is the time for clearer demonstration of metaphysics -- shooting stars, comets cutting across and phenomenal knowledge. Darkness is the time for transcendence from dark to light and back again. The darkness is time to light up the space, isolate an object such as a star, or nocturnal animal, or a buzzing bee or an idea that needs codification. It is perfect time to mull over a phenomenon, an object, which in transcendence becomes the subject. This transcendence transforms the idea or subject into a concept and object. Thus transcendence is the search engine for an idea inasmuch as language.

In the night of transcendence, there is room for individual genius. Modern science in fact describes transcendence as higher consciousness. Higher consciousness relates to deep inner peace, bliss, unbounded awareness and oneness with the elements - the particulars and the universals. A recent scientific study in the area claims it has quantified brainwave patterns in some of those people who experience transcendence in their daily lives and compared them with those who show no signs of such experience. Based on the neuro-physiological markers obtained from both the groups, the study has drawn up ‘an integration scale’, a gamut of transformation in brain activity corresponding to integration of transcendent experience with daily activity. The study implies first that transcendence is inborn in some, that it is it is not necessarily learnt, practiced and perfected as by philosophers and that there is for some transcendence in daily activity also. It also explains that higher consciousness does not automatically mean higher intelligence but higher awareness, higher happiness and greater scope for understanding, integrating and rationalizing. In short, it is higher understanding of phenomena that may result in science.

It is very much possible that some ancients individually thought of the necessity for naming things and donning words to describe them, who also thought up the subject and inserted the predicate to find the object. Rationalistic theorists in Germany argued that the solution to the problem of the origin of language lay in the consideration of the condition

of primitive man, of the similarities and differences between man and the animals, and of primitive forms of expression. Since the primitive man had the same structure of the brain and activity as any specie of *Homo sapiens*, it is possible that he soon realized that he is gifted by nature in that he could trap animals more ferocious and bigger than he is. What's more, he could domesticate them if he so wished, he could drag them where he went on his little finger, that he could use nature's gifts like no other species could, and that he was endowed with mind that was a quantum jump over animal instinct. When the primitive human realized that s/he had the gift of the gab, it made all the difference.

How did s/he come to know s/he had it in him/her? There is a distinct animal instinct in the origin of human languages as s/he uses emotive words. Man has biological memory that he could imitate animals better: the poor animals could not repeat the sounds of man. Man is reminded of his innate vocal gift, right from birth, when the new-born comes out of the safety of the mother's womb and into the reality of the world with a piercing cry. (There is room for rationalist reason rather than empirical experience in the birth-cry). The birth-cry is not common to all species, but perhaps unique to humans. The immediate shouts of joy or commotion created by those present at the time of delivery are somewhat of a response and reassurance to the infant who may then take a nap. As the child grows, it starts using the technique of crying to demand responses when those that protect it play truant. As it grows older, it recognizes the importance of sound, to learn the sounds uttered by others, to repeat them in fits and starts, to check their effects, to standardize its speech, in short to learn a language by experience. That is not all: the human knows s/he is privileged in nature because s/he has well developed organs of vision, hearing, touch, taste, and above all mind, to synthesize the data obtained by the senses.

The communal setting of primitive man consolidated the small gains such as rudiments of language, order, and division of community work. Inherently being individualistic, there are bound to be differences between man and man over possessions, power and pelf. Language only grew because of ontological predicament. Man had the knowledge that his vocal chords were amenable to various sounds, whereas those of animals are fixed by nature. Dogs can only bark, lions roar, snakes hiss, bees buzz, the crow only crows, horses neigh, sparrows twitter, cow mews, but only man can talk and talk, making all kinds of sounds. He could imitate these and more sounds. He used the

knowledge as decoy to trap his food. This knowledge he developed to understand nature, now to claim control over nature and currently to go into frontiers where no man had gone before. The origin of language is, therefore, “environ-mental.” That is man-coined words to name the objects in his environment whether it is cave, forest, hill, mountain or plain. Then he further used his mental capabilities to describe how the immediate objects are of use or danger to him. In the night he looked to the sky for thought, reflection and metaphysical ideas. As the day follows the dark, he pursues the two worlds, the natural and the metaphysical. Without confusion, but after much thought, he relates one to the other. By the synthesis, he derives further language and knowledge.

Back to metaphysics then: The fact is we are never out of its hold. For we are creatures of physics and metaphysics one way or the other. As the sentence, “Let us begin at the beginning,” although randomly picked and allowed to develop on its own, amply demonstrates, the binaries are built into each of the six words. The proposition has an in-built metaphysical structure that may point to immediate beginning or the beginning of the beginning. That there is no escape from metaphysics, however much one may try, is the Absolute Idea.

Notes.

♣ Let me explain: physics is phenomenon such as $F=MA$, force= mass x acceleration, $E=MC^2$ energy is equal to mass multiplied by the square of the speed of light, and so on. All these can be proved if not seen by physical principles. But what is that that is behind these: force, mass, acceleration, light and so on. Let me explain further: There is the solar system, in which the planets move round the Sun. It can be argued that the planets are kept in place i.e. their respective orbits, and check by the Sun in conformity with physical principles. But what is it that is keeping the Sun in position which is keeping the planets in position? If the answer is Milky Way or galaxy, then what is keeping the galaxy in position? The answer is difficult, hence noumenon. Hence physics of physics is metaphysics. I am tempted to define: “Metaphysics is physics that cannot be explained or inferred or known or knowable by physical principles.” It is this metaphysics that people call the Creator, God and by countless names.

*Martin Heidegger, ‘Identity and Difference,’ Translated and with an Introduction by Joan Stambaugh.

** Is it not curious that many of the philosophers of language have been German-speaking? Perhaps they are in a better position because of their interest in Sanskrit and access to Semitic languages.

***Nuclear physicist J.R.Oppenheimer, who was member of the American atomic project, recalled Brahman, as the blinding nuclear flash went off during the live experiment in the New Mexico test, which he compares with million Suns, towards the close of Second War. However, Brahman in Hindu mythology is responsible for creation, not its destruction.