

An Inquiry into the Nature of Words, Speech and Language

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Contents

Introduction

Chapter I What Is a Man?

- §. 1. Of Mind and So Forth
- §. 2. Of Senses and Organs
- §. 3. Of Consciousness and So Forth
- §. 4. Of Action and So Forth

Chapter II The Expression of Will

- §. 1. Of Words
- §. 2. Of Speech
- §. 3. Of Language

Chapter III The Relations between Word, Speech, Language and Meaning

- §. 1. The Relations between Word, Speech and Meaning
- §. 2. The Relations between Word, Language and Meaning
- §. 3. The Relations between Word, Speech, Language and Meaning

Chapter IV What Is a Man Once Again?

Conclusion

Introduction

I think that what is important in conducting an inquiry into the nature of words, speech and language is to begin with the question of what a man is. It seems to me that when I as a man consider the nature of a man, the relations between an inner man¹ and an outer man², a man and another man or others, and a man and a thing or things, I shall naturally come to the question of words, speech and language. A dead man cannot act, nor can he use his words, speech and language. Only a man who is not only alive but full of life and spirit and who is not static but dynamic³ can express what he really means. Only such a man has the power to create something universal. In this sense, for example, a whole thing which a novelist full of life and spirit constructs by earnestly and sagaciously using every word into which he puts his heart and soul is, I think, his novel.

CHAPTER I

WHAT IS A MAN ?

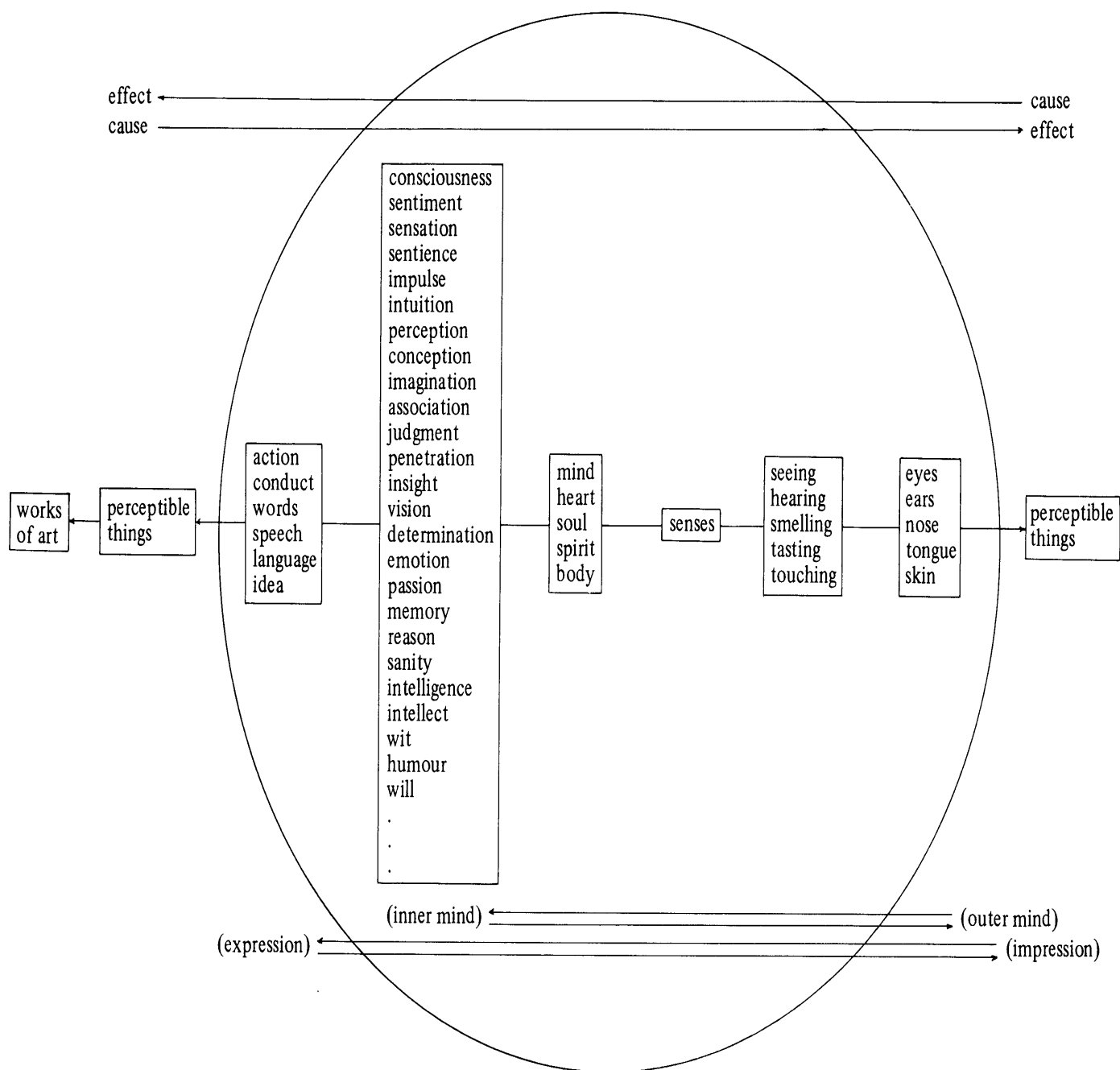
Let's first look at figure 1, making a developmental inquiry on the assumption that a man consists of mind and body and that mind and body are one and the same thing. The part surrounded by a circle means a whole man. There are in the circle six parts surrounded by squares, which I only use for convenience' sake to grasp a man analytically, because every part of a real body is too complicated and too difficult to pick up one by one. So, let's consider analytically and synthetically the six parts as having close relations to one another.

§. 1. Of Mind and So Forth

Of mind, heart, soul, spirit and body, the last may seem different from the other four, but as a typical example to express the relation between mind and body we can take a baby who has just been born and has not yet worn its clothes, or a stark-naked man to take a bath.

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1. This is what I mean by the action or state of thinking. (cf. the inner man)
 2. This is what I mean by the expression of thinking. (cf. the outer man)
 3. This means being both mentally and physically so.

Figure 1



Although we seem to understand the relations between mind, heart, soul and spirit, the contents of the four words are so complicated that we cannot separate them exactly from each other. For this reason, generally speaking, we may sometimes use the four words interchangeably, and yet we have to bear in mind the existence of the idiomatic use of each word.

§. 2. Of Senses and Organs

The assumption that a man consists of mind and body brings us to the question of senses, which remind us of the inseparable relations between seeing and eyes, hearing and ears, smelling and nose, tasting and tongue, touching and skin. Seeing and eyes are closely interrelated: since there are eyes, there is seeing and since there is seeing, there are eyes. This is true of the respective relations between the other four senses and organs. Eyes, ears, nose, tongue and skin have the close relations between a man and his outer side or thing. Eyes, when they are opened, always relate to outer things; ears, except (or including) supersonic waves, always to outer things; nose always to outer things; nose always to air, smell and so forth; tongue always to food and so forth; skin always to not only air but the stream of air, wind, pressure, temperature and so forth.

§. 3. Of Consciousness and So Forth

Thus far we have been considering the relations between mind, body and outer things to which mind and body relate, and we now want to consider what is 'inner' against 'outer.' Its typical thing, I think, is consciousness. It is a man's life which is in contrast to medical death. To be more exact, consciousness is life and unconsciousness is death. We often use the word 'unconsciously.' If, however, we take it from my point of view as it means, it means 'without life' or 'in the state of being dead,' which is a very unreasonable expression. Instead, we should use a word meaning 'in the state of "low" or "weak" consciousness,' but we really don't, so we have to create a proper word or words meaning various kinds of consciousness. In any case, I want to explain my thoughts of it on another occasion. And I have to explain every word, too, from sentiment to will, but in order to avoid the complexities of my explanations I want you to refer to the definition or definitions of every word in the *OED*: sentiment (6, 7, 9), sensation (1), sentience (only one definition), impulse (3), intuition (5), perception (6), conception (5), imagination (1, 3), association (5), judgment (8, 9), penetration (3), insight (2), vision (2, 3), determination (6, 10), emotion (4), passion (6), memory (3), reason (10, 11), sanity (2), intelligence (2), intellect (1), wit (2, 3, 4), humour (4, 5), will (5, 6, 7).

§. 4. Of Action and So Forth

(1) action

We first regard it as what continues as long as there is life in a man, but there are also action taken by a voluntary muscle and action taken by an involuntary muscle, and so we want to especially consider the former here.

(2) conduct

We regard it as nearly the same thing as action, especially, good or bad conduct including quality.

(3) words

In figure 1 we have put “words”, not “a word”, for convenience’ sake, but this basically means containing words from one word to infinite words.

(4) speech

We regard it as what begins with sound a man makes, reaches the sense of hearing through his or others’ ears and becomes the starting point of his or their action.

(5) language

We regard it as what is written by a man or printed by him or others, reaches the sense of seeing through his or others’ eyes and becomes the starting point of his or their action.

(6) idea

We regard it as what contains various ideas from a vague one to a concrete one.

So far we have glanced over a man. In order to consider concisely the relations between an inner man and an outer man, a man and another man or others, and a man and things, we regard the outer side of a man, that is, eyes, ears, nose, tongue and skin, and their senses as ‘outer mind,’ and in contrast to this we regard every word, its meaning and its entity from consciousness to will as ‘inner mind.’

In figure 1 there are two ‘perceptible things’ outside the circle showing a man. This ‘perceptible’ means ‘understandable through the five organs or senses,’ that is, ‘understandable by seeing through eyes, by hearing through ears, by smelling through nose, by tasting through tongue, by touching or feeling through skin.’

Now let’s, as an example, take a skylark and a poet. One spring morning a skylark (i.e. a perceptible thing) flies up into the sky singing energetically. A poet sees with his eyes the figure (i.e. a perceptible thing) of the skylark flying up and hears with his ears its singing voice (i.e. a perceptible thing). The flying figure and the singing voice exert some influence on his inner mind through his senses (in this case his two senses of seeing and of hearing). His consciousness, sentiment, sen-

sation, sentience and so forth become more and more active. He is still looking at the skylark's figure and is still listening to its voice. He talks to himself or the skylark: "Oh, skylark! Fly higher and higher." After a while the skylark suddenly stops singing and begins to fly straight down to the field. With its figure in his eye, with its voice in his ear and with all its action from the beginning to the end lingering in his inner mind, his meeting with it finally ends. The poet takes out his notebook and fountain-pen straight away and begins to write a poem (i.e. a perceptible thing), or goes back home, enters his study and begins to compose a poem (i.e. a perceptible thing), visualizing the skylark whose figure he has just seen and whose voice he has just heard. If it is a poem in which the skylark full of life is described vividly, it may remain a work of art eternally. Whether it is a musician, a painter or an ordinary man who sees the skylark's figure and hears its voice, he may receive some impression of them.

As the relations between an inner man and an outer man and those between a man and a thing or things are shown in figure 1, a man receives an impression of something through his five organs or senses, repeats his inner operation of it, and expresses as a typical expression⁴ his action, words, idea and so forth, which become concrete things which can be perceived by not only himself but another man or others.

Let's consider the poet once again. His action of writing a poem begins when he sees the skylark's figure and hears its voice (or before the time he may intend to describe a skylark), and the skylark is a perceptible thing (PTa) and at the same time the cause of the action of writing a poem. When he finishes writing a poem, which becomes a perceptible thing (PTb) and at the same time the effect of the action of writing a poem. And also when he tries to improve PTb over and over again, the PTb now becomes the cause. One day in one place he observes a skylark again, which becomes the effect of PTb. The more passionate he is, the more original poem he may compose, the oftener the relation between cause and effect may be repeated, and the more immortal work may be created.

We human beings sustain a variety of relations to one another, expressing our actions, words, ideas and so forth through the relations between ourselves and others and through the relations between ourselves and things. The more active and dynamic a man is, the more he expresses. As long as he is alive, he goes on acting at will or against his will.

4. In this essay we go on to consider on the supposition that if a man receives an impression of something he never fails to make an expression of it in any form, because he is a complicated animal and sometimes does not venture to express himself even if he gets impressed.

CHAPTER II

THE EXPRESSION OF WILL

We have so far considered the relation between a poet and a skylark as an illustration which expresses the relations between a man and himself, him and others, him and things. In this essay an inquiry into the nature of words, speech and language is my aim, so I want to consider words, speech and language which are the expression of will, and meaning which is closely related to those three.

§. 1. Of Words

'Word' has two kinds of functions, one of which is to communicate one, or more than one, sound which a man makes with one, or more than one, meaning to the sense of hearing of him or another man or others; the other to communicate one, or more than one, letter which a man combines with one, or more than one, meaning to the sense of seeing of him or another man or others.

In the sentence 'Words cannot describe the beauty of the scene', for example, I can give to the 'words' three interpretations: 1) words expressed by sounds with meanings, ie by speaking; 2) words expressed by letters with meanings, ie by writing; 3) words expressed by both sounds with meanings and letters with meanings, ie by both speaking and writing.

From these interpretations I can say that words have two kinds of functions, that is, one for speaking and one for writing.

§. 2. Of Speech

'Speech' is defined in the *OED* as 'I. 1. The act of speaking; the natural exercise of the vocal organs; the utterance of words or sentences; oral expression of thought or feeling.' Here is a simple question: what is 'speak'? It is defined in the *OED* as 'I. intr. 1. To utter or pronounce words or articulate sounds; to use or exercise the faculty of speech; to express one's thoughts by words.' For these two definitions we can understand that 'speech' is 'sound with meaning which a man makes through his mouth.'

Now 'sound' has the following qualities: 1) momentary continuity; 2) speed, ie quickness and slowness; 3) stress, ie strength and weakness; 4) intonation, ie loudness and lowness; 5) quality and

quantity; 6) directness⁵, not indirectness, to the sense of hearing.

There is, for example, a sentence: 'Man is the only animal that has the faculty of speech.' If I express this sentence by my words at my ordinary speed, I take less than five seconds to express it, but even if I really articulate it, I cannot directly communicate the speech expressed by my sounds to anyone except within the reach of my sounds. A typical example of this is 'speech' which means 'a talk or address given in public.' There is no direct way in which we understand it unless we go to a meeting hall and listen to it with the ears. A way to understand it by indirectly listening to its content or meaning is probably far from true.

§. 3. Of Language

'Language' is defined in the *OED* as '2. In generalized sense: Words and the methods of combining them for the expression of thought.' I want to confine 'words' in the definition to words for writing. They express the will of a man who writes with a pen or a fountain-pen. If they are printed, they do not always express his will, for he and a printer are not always one and the same man. In any case, words in which I am now expressing myself here are all 'language,' by means of which I am describing my will.

Now language, in comparison with speech, has, on the part of a man who writes, the following qualities: 1) slowness for expression; 2) no stress; 3) no intonation; 4) quality and quantity; 5) directness to the sense of seeing.

When we consider language, on the part of a man who reads, 1) it is comparable with that of a man who has written; 2) it is an instrument or material useful to judge roughly his personality, if it is directly written by himself; 3) it cannot communicate his way of writing, if it is printed by movable type, and in other words, it is deprived of his personality or character; 4) it can only communicate his meaning or content, if it is printed.

§. 4. Of Meaning

In figure 1 I have not included 'meaning' in action, words, idea and so forth, because I think meaning begins with a man's being alive, but I cannot help giving up explaining it in detail here.

Now 'meaning' is defined in the *OED* as '2. That which is intended to be or actually is expressed or indicated. a. Of language, a sentence, word, etc.: The signification, sense, import; a sense, interpretation.' 'Words,' 'speech' and 'language' are all closely related to their or its 'meaning,' or

5. The technique of recording a variety of sounds has been recently developed, but the correct sounds of the human voice cannot yet be reproduced.

rather we cannot consider them without their meaning. When a man tries to make the expression of his will, whether in accomplished words or in newly-coined ones, what inevitably follows is, I think, their 'meaning.' Or conversely even when he does not try to do it, it will express a certain meaning. In any case, when we think about meaning, we need to analyze it in detail and to synthesize it.

CHAPTER III

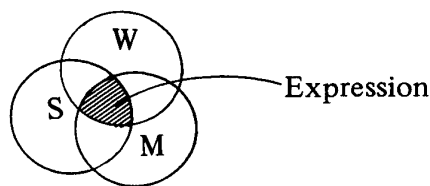
THE RELATIONS BETWEEN WORD, SPEECH, LANGUAGE AND MEANING

We have just tried to define word, speech, language and meaning on the basis of the definitions of the *OED*. Let's go on to conduct an inquiry into their nature, regarding word as *kotoba* in Japanese, speech as *hanashi-kotoba* ie words for speaking, language as *kaki-kotoba* ie words for writing, and meaning as *imi* ie content, to put our ideas in order.

§. 1. The Relations between Word, Speech and Meaning

Let's look at the relation between Word (W), Speech (S) and Meaning (M) ie 'Expression' in figure 2.

Figure 2⁶



Now let's take sentences out of a junior high school English textbook published in Japan to explain 'Expression' in figure 2.

Lucy: Good morning, Miss Green.

Miss Green: Good morning, Lucy. How are you?

L: I'm fine, thank you. How are you?

G: I'm fine, too, thank you.

6. Since we cannot help showing the figure on a plane, it only shows the relation of the three so that we can easily understand it. We can really regard the figure as one entity mixing W, S and M. The figure is the analytical expression showing the relation of the three, and all the illustrative sentences are the synthetic expression.

L: Miss Green, this is my sister May. May, this is Miss Green.

May: How do you do, Miss Green?

G: How do you do, May? Your hat is very pretty.

M: Thank you, Miss Green. I like this hat very much.

G: Your little sister is a good girl, Lucy.

L: Thank you, Miss Green.

G: Good-by, Lucy and May.

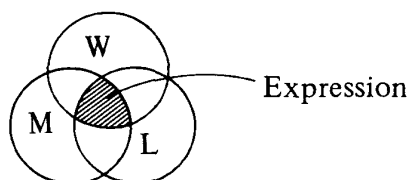
L, M: Good-by, Miss Green.

In this conversation 'Expression' in figure 2 is equivalent to the analytical expression showing from one word 'Good' of 'Good morning' Lucy says to the last one word 'Green' of 'Miss Green' Lucy and May say, and the illustrative sentences are the synthetic expression of both speech and meaning consisting as a whole of 79 words. I am now expressing myself inevitably in language ie words for writing, but the truth is that the real 'speech' in this case ends in about 35 seconds and that the sounds can no longer be heard.

§. 2. The Relations between Word, Language and Meaning

Let's look at the relation between Word (W), Language (L) and Meaning (M) in figure 3.

Figure 3⁷



As an example I'll again take sentences out of the same textbook.

Hotel London

April 12, 1972

Dear May,

I have been here in London for three days. We have had a little rain every day. They say it rains a lot in England in the spring.

I did not forget you, but I have had no time for writing letters.

London is much bigger than Madison. I am surprised to see so many old buildings here. This old city is full of people from all over the world. We sometimes stop

7. The figure is much the same as figure 2, and every word such as 'Hotel,' 'London,' 'April' and so forth in the illustrative sentences is the analytic expression and the whole letter is the synthetic expression of both language and meaning consisting of 97 words.

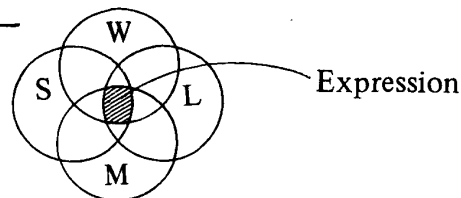
people on the street to ask the way, and find that they are also from other countries.

In the expression like this there are three ways of (1) really writing a letter with a fountain-pen, a pen or a penicil, (2) typewriting a letter, (3) printing a letter by movable type. I take about 6 minutes to copy this letter with my fountain-pen and about 5 minutes to typewrite it, and if May who has received this letter reads it silently or aloud, she will take about 30 seconds to do it.

§. 3. The Relations between Word, Speech, Language and Meaning

Let's look at the relation between Word (W), Speech (S), Language (L) and Meaning (M) in figure 4.

Figure 4⁸



This is also an example from the same textbook.

Friends, I'm going to talk about the zip code. My father is a mailman. He works in the post office near the Capitol.

Now look at this letter first. We need the zip code here. You have to write the zip code after the name of the state.

My father says, "We can read thirty-six thousand zip codes an hour now. But there is one letter without a zip code among every four letters."

Friends, do you always write the zip codes on your letters? They help the people in the post office.

In this example if the speaker expresses every word in his manuscript just as it is written, changing it into every sound, that is, if he expresses every written word (ie language) in every word for speaking (ie speech), it will be the figure 4 showing figures 2 and 3 together. If the time⁹ for writing a manuscript for the speech (I shall take about 5 minutes to copy the manuscript with my

8. This is the figure showing figures 2 and 3 together, and every word such as 'Friends,' 'I'm,' 'going' and so forth is the analytic expression and the whole example is the synthetic expression and the whole example is the synthetic expression of speech, language and meaning consisting of 93 words from 'Friends' to 'office.'

fountain-pen and about 5 if I use a typewriter) is compared with the time⁹ for really making a speech (about 50 seconds), the latter is far shorter.

Thus far we have considered the relations between word, speech, language and meaning, but we have to notice that there are great contradictions in the three examples, because any word, I think, has at once concreteness and abstractness.

First, in the case of the conversation I have to be in the situation in which Miss Green, Lucy and May are exchanging greetings and talking with one another, and I have to listen directly to their greetings and talks, and when I see them behaving, see May's hat and their dresses or clothes, and know various conditions such as place, time, I may really understand the conversation.

Secondly, in the case of the letter, if a girl typewrites a letter, and sends it to May, May who receives it cannot correctly understand how it has been typewritten, because she is not in the situation where it is typewritten and sent to her. Therefore, she has no way to imagine and judge the content of the letter except by the language (ie words which are written) in it.

Thirdly, in the case of the speech, the speaker himself knows the brief particulars from the time when he begins to write a manuscript till the time when he finishes it, and he can express every word in his manuscript, making sure of it by his sounds, when he is really making a speech, but the listener, unless he really goes to a meeting hall, sees the speaker, sees a real letter¹⁰, listens to his voice, momentarily judges his speed of speaking, the quality and quantity of his voice, those of the content of his speech, and finally has the ability to judge them all synthetically, probably cannot really understand the speaker's meaning.

9. We have already thought about the difference between speech and language. If we invent and put to practical use such a machine as a man's speech is recorded and at the same time is printed on a paper or something like that and the printed words (ie language) do not disappear, the extent of our understanding him will be more correct and that of our misunderstanding him far smaller.

10. Because, in the example, there is a sentence 'Now look at this letter first.'

CHAPTER IV

WHAT IS A MAN ONCE AGAIN?

We have already thought about a man, but in this chapter let's change our point of view and consider a man once again focusing especially on 'inner mind' in figure 1.

Let's first begin by explaining the following two premises: 1) Everything changes; 2) A man (or his ability) is finite.

I regard 'everything' in 1) as 'all things concerning the outside and the inside of the earth' and 'changes' as 'constantly moves perceptibly or imperceptibly.' I regard 'a man' in 2) as 'a being who has one mortal life' and 'finite' as 'having bounds.' I want to regard 'having bounds' as 'reaching a bound when trying to do something' or as 'being unable to get over a bound.' I now have my fountain-pen, intending to do something, but I cannot correctly¹¹ understand what I have so far been writing and I don't know beforehand correctly¹¹ how this essay will develop from now on. Although I am roughly thinking of its outline, no one knows what will become of it. What I want to say is that if I compare what I can do with what I cannot do, the latter is far more. In short, my ability seen from this universe is little or nothing.

Now what is a man again? I have given 25 words in 'inner mind' in figure 1, but if I try to institute an inquiry into what consciousness is, what sentiment is, what sensation is and so forth, every word is so complicated that I cannot explain it and get confused shortly. As an example of the complexities of this 'inner mind', it is explained in Buddhism that there are the 108 or 84,000 passions a man is subject to. To my mind, the number of this 'inner mind' is not so small, but infinite; imaginatively speaking, it is the same as the number of a man's cells. Hyperbolically speaking, every time a man takes a breath, millions of 'inner mind' are constantly wriggling. In this way, a man has a complicated mind and at the same time his ability is finite, so we can find how difficult it is to really understand one another.

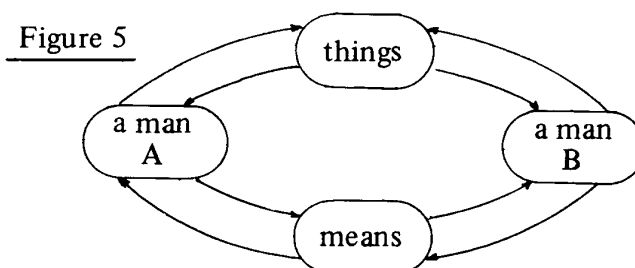
Let's, as an example, take the synonyms with 'glad' in which we express our feelings. 'Pleased' 'cheerful' 'joyful' 'gladsome' 'gratified' 'cheering' 'exulting' 'joyous' 'merry' 'inspiring' 'delighted' 'happy' 'pleasing' 'gay' 'jolly' 'lively' 'sprightly' 'vivacious' and so forth can be considered, and in our daily conversation we try to express our delicate feelings, adding 'very' 'much' 'greatly' and so

11. It is that I cannot correctly know where I have written or will write what.

forth.

We have to create more complicated and delicate words to express our feelings, but, whatever words of complicated meanings a man may create, we cannot use them as some instruments for communicating our will, unless we understand them and hold them in common. For example, the word 'freedom' is often spoken of and written of, but if what is meant by it is different, it will not become an instrument for communicating our will. We can say it is the contradictions, namely, a man's inner complexities and his outer simplicities that always oppress our minds.

We can imagine the following figure as a situation of a man A's communication of will to a man B.



Now let's imagine a situation¹² in which a man A and a man B are talking with each other at one time in a place. A man A who has more than 84,000 passions and a man B who has also more than 84,000 are talking of a thing or things expressing each other's will. While they are sitting face to face with each other, the relations between the two is in a state of constant flux, and not knowing what topics will spring out of each other's mouths, they go on talking. If a man C should join them, the relations of the three will become far more complicated.

In our human relations in our life we are constantly repeating a one-to-one or one-to-more scene and are expressing ourselves, and these relations are much like permutations, combinations and factorials in mathematics, but human relations, since they are in flux, are much more complicated and unintelligible than mathematics. For this reason, we cannot imagine how difficult it is to conduct an inquiry into the complicated, unintelligible human relations, human beings who form such relations, and words which come out of complicated, unintelligible things. However, it is the difficulty, the complicatedness and the unintelligibility, I think, that are worth challenging with courage.

12. What I mean by a 'situation' is one in which, for example, the two men see flowers in the garden, hear birds twittering, feel comfortably warm, drink and eat, and there is a sweet smell of flowers.

Conclusion

Thus far I have been venturing to challenge a great problem 'the nature of words' and I am also coming to a great problem 'How should I put my ideas into practice?' If I take a novel as an example, I first have to consider the relations between the author, the novel and the reader, and the relations of the characters in the novel. Then I have to consider whether he has his universal ideas, whether his consciousness of the good, the true and the beautiful is strong or weak, and whether he inquires into them closely. In any case, what I am now writing is concrete to the sense of seeing but is abstract in its content.

What is a word? What is speech? What is language? A great many people have tried, or are trying, to answer these questions. I have also tried to answer them. And the action of conducting an inquiry into the nature of words, speech and language does not end by finishing this essay, but the action of conducting a wider and deeper inquiry into their nature from now on begins and the cause-and-effect relations will be constantly repeated. And in order to establish my idea I am having to create something concrete in the near future.

Finally I want to conclude by saying for the present that words are those used by a man on the basis of his sense of value and his judgment and that the nature of words is human nature itself.