

A common source for verbal and pictorial meaning
– dialectics for preconceptual experiential
contrarities

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Preliminary clarifications/obfuscations

- 'meaning' is an experiential (and not primarily a structural, let alone referential) notion; that is, meaning of a word or a picture must be characterized in terms of the experiences which we attach or associate to them
- 'experience' (as a notion) covers more than sensations and perceptions alone
- not all experience is conceptualizable
- conceptual language is a special case of language
- declarative sentences (with a simple grammatical structure and with simple truth conditions) don't comprise the core of language where the description and explanation of language should first be directed
- the verbal-pictorial distinction doesn't equal the conceptual-nonconceptual distinction; the pictorial meaning contains both nonconceptual and conceptual elements; similarly with verbal meaning

Neglected imagery

Early Analytic Philosophy

- disambiguation of propositional content with the help of new logic (Frege, Russell)
- no role for mental images (except Russell, 1919)

Model Theory

- The Tarski schema, $T[p]$ iff p ; pictures cannot be true or false

Generative grammar and cognitive science

- Computer metaphor, presumably free of imagery: thinking as computation
- today the situation is complex: Lakoff & Johnson, Nelson Goodman

Back to the lost past

Before the Analytic turn it was customary to believe that thinking and speaking cannot be explained without resorting to such notions as mental images, sense-related imagery, imagination, and sensuously, especially visually, lively ideas.

- Kant's transcendental *Einbildungskraft* is the root which connects concepts to sensuous content (says at least Heidegger in his Kant monograph)
- *Aufhebung* with Hölderlin and Hegel: unification of contradictions nondiscursively and dialectically (without formal logic or grammar); 'intellectual intuition' or *die intellektuale Anschauung*, 'mental-intellectual inner perception'
- The 20th century: C.G. Jung, Wolfgang Pauli, Gaston Bachelard

A preconceptual source of meaning is needed in order

- to connect the sensuous sources to concepts
- to understand the essential role of imagination (activity of mental images) in generating *any* meaning
- to understand radical and perpetual meaning change
 - as in paradigm shifts
 - in real-life dialogues, including the scientific ones
 - in metaphors, metonymies, analogies...
- to create spontaneously new concepts for on-going discourses
- to create new individuals and worlds (cf. Nelson Goodman's sense of the word 'world')

- to understand the connections between the visual (pictorial, for instance) and verbal (sentential, for instance) meaning generation
- to understand how conceptual structures *transcendentally* shape and modulate perception, awareness and consciousness
- to understand verbal imagination (also in poems, myths, magical rituals, religious texts)

Experience and experiential contrarities

Experience: includes both perceptual and nonperceptual elements; i.e., covers more than sense perception: sexual desire; depression; sense of reality or lack of it; pulse and rhythm; agency; joy of life; fatigue; alertness

By preconceptual (better: *aconceptual*) experiential contrarities we mean such primordial experiential dualities as

desire-aversion; pain-pleasure; agency-patience; attack-retreat; similar-different; one-two; male-female; old-new; pure-dirty; real-irreal; warm-cold; now-earlier; near-far; above-below; inside of something-outside of it...

The list is infinite but not denumerably so.

Some properties of aconceptual contrarities

Though aconceptual contrarities, as regards their systematic role, may resemble Husserl's *cogitatio* they do not equal them. The following holds for the former but not always for the latter:

- they precede (are prior to) concepts (especially any variety of logical negation or logical complement) and serve as a source for all subsequent conceptualization
- they lack logical or propositional structure
- they presuppose neither a grammatical (or logical) subject-predicate structure nor a psychological subject-object distinction
- they precede the emergence of conscious subjectivity (personal identity; self-consciousness; conceptualized intentions)
- as regards meaning, the opposite parties of a contrariety depend on each other, and remain, to some extent, inseparable also after conceptualization

Some properties... (continued)

- they are often, but not always, sense-related and body-related, typically related to elementary bodily abilities (sensorimotor skills; Piaget)
- their elementary meaning is inseparably tied to the natural environment and the way of life (of the culture) where they appear
- they are culturally unique, that is, essentially untranslatable over linguistic and cultural boundaries
- they are, especially if attached to other aconceptual contrarities, potentially contradictory and highly ambiguous
- their meaning cannot be comprehensively captured by any single consistent conceptualization or theory.

Some consequences of these properties

- aconceptual contrarities comprise a kind of 'givenness' which isn't, however, conceptually structured
- as an experiential source, anything goes: dreams, hallucinations, fantasies; also verbal sources like rumors, prejudices, myths
- they don't provide certainty: their presence in experience can be doubted (Freud: every son both loves and hates his father)
- the laws of classical logic, the law of non-contradiction in particular, do not always hold (logical pluralism and paraconsistency: Hegel, Graham Priest)
- they are often, at least partly, unconscious (but neither in the Freudian nor in the modern linguistic sense); 'unconscious' means 'conceptually ineffable' or 'conceptually inaccessible' (as with Schelling and Schopenhauer)
- they require a special kind of *transcendental and aconceptual dialectics* to be handled properly; this dialectics remains always local (nonuniversal)

From aconceptual contrarities to concepts

- concepts emerge through self-organizing processes which shape aconceptual experience into more or less permanent structures
- the processes are mostly unconscious and take place in a social setting
- the transcendental antinomy: because theoretical, scientific and empirical concepts arise from aconceptual experience they cannot adequately explain it; in other words, aconceptual experience is prior to concepts, and therefore, at least partly, conceptually inaccessible and ineffable

An example of conceptualization in verbal (but presentential) meaning generation:

- aconceptual contrariety as experience (light-dark, not necessarily in concrete or physical sense)
- vocalization/verbalization of it (with sounds); protometaphoric stage when literal meaning cannot be separated from the metaphoric one (in Finnish 'valkia' associates to fire, to white color, and to daybreak)
- stabilization in a social/cultural frame by repetition
- further metaphoric extensions (as 'enlightening-obscuring')
- conceptualization (boundaries with logical complement)
- poetic/religious/scientific use within an institutional frame
- literalization; literalness as a positive norm, as a cultural program, as in academic institutions

Sentence-forming stage

- the agency-patency contrariety is the active source both for the emergence of subjective consciousness and for the elementary sentential subject-predicate structure
- me vs. not-me (the emergence of constitutive subjectivity)
- I do something to something (the emergence of the grammatical subject, predicate and object positions); sentential variables arise
- every thing and every subject matter is potentially contradictory (Hegel; Adorno); every sentence is ambiguous and contains contradictory elements
- dictionary entry is an unfortunate metaphor for word meaning

Thinking, including figurative thinking

- all meaningful (semiotic) activity (Nelson Goodman), including figurative and imaginative activities, music and visual art, exemplifies and requires thinking of its respective kind
- ambiguity is not only a necessary but beneficent property of natural language; we cannot and shouldn't get rid of it
- perfect literalness and disambiguation (*Ars characteristica*) would be harmful and would finally make serious thinking impossible
- privacy is needed to generate necessary meaning variation; errors, misconceptions, prejudices, misconceived cultural loans are useful for this too
- back to Piaget: 'thinking' is 'interiorized symbolic action'
- verbal meaning cannot be dissociated from figurative experiences; imagination and figurativeness is used in *all* meaning generation

Verbal imagination

- literalness is a derivative of figurativeness, of protometaphoric ur-meaning
- the stream of primitive (aconceptual) visual contrarities enriches the generation of verbal meanings, image-related (metaphors, metonymies; analogies) meanings in particular
- and the other way round (namely in the transcendental direction): metaphoric-metonymic oppositions at different levels of conceptualization serve as channels which organize and shape the stream of mental images
- speaking and thinking would be impossible without this transcendental underground river, *Potamos Akherôn*, a stream of partly unconscious mental images, which runs in two directions between two spheres (the sphere of senses and that of concepts) and remains partly inaccessible and ineffable with respect to normal scientific theories
- meaning is not use; rather, meaning is partly unconscious anticipation of use: desire to say something, ability to react spontaneously to what was said

Consciousness, imagination, freedom

- aconceptual contrarities are not perceived; they are not perceptions directed to something outside of the experience; they have no object toward which they are directed
- they are what we, as conscious human beings, are: we are pain, desire, love, experience of agency, and so on; we don't see the stream of mental images, we are it
- we desire to say something which isn't yet present as a determinate idea; and we expect a reaction and anticipate its content; what we say is a surprise as often to ourselves as to others
- thinking possesses an overall orientation, not determinate direction
- self-consciousness is not a mental act directed to the self (cf. Dieter Henrich; Manfred Frank); self-consciousness is immediate awareness of aconceptual contrarities in experience; it makes the generation of spontaneous and unpredictable meanings (i.e. freedom) possible