

Chapter One

**UNDERSTANDING MEANING:
REPRESENTATIONALISM Vs.
ANTI-REPRESENTATIONALISM**

1. INTRODUCTION

The philosophical problem of understanding meaning had been traditionally viewed as an epistemological issue. It was thus associated with the problems of truth and knowledge in important ways and often called for a comprehensive doctrine that connected those concepts together in a coherent way. In the framework of the philosophy of language also, many of these traditional worries were retained. But here the primary question is; how meanings are presented, transmitted and understood through the various structural patterns acquired by the linguistic signs. Traditional theories of meaning propose solutions to this problem and a shift of emphasis from a theory of knowledge to a theory of language and linguistic meaning can be viewed as an attempt to tackle this issue more accurately by analysing the underlying conceptual issues in new lights.

The notion of understanding meaning is thus closely linked up with the concept of human knowledge, though the phenomenon of understanding meaning is not identical with knowledge acquisition. Some thinkers, especially those who model their semantic theories after the process of knowledge acquisition in the natural sciences highlighted the intimate affinity between the two and proclaimed a model of understanding meaning, which by its very nature claimed universal validity. But we encounter the issue of understanding meaning in a vast variety of cases other than in natural sciences. In our encounter with a literary text or a historical document, for instance, we do not raise the question whether the linguistic system we encounter provides us an objective understanding of any factual situation which is spacio-temporal. We

rather look for other forms of agreement, which are sometimes emotional or imaginative in nature, rather than factual

Here a pivotal aspect of language calls for immediate attention, the concept of communication. It is in the accomplishment of the latter that the very purposefulness of linguistic activity is contained. Whether it is the factual language of science, or the imaginative language games of poetry or literature, understanding meaning consists in the communicative interaction with textual meanings. The sharability and communicability of linguistic meanings are therefore, the most pivotal prerequisites as far as linguistic understanding is concerned. And all traditional theories of meaning conceived these prerequisites as the most fundamental ideals. If meanings are not shareable, then the very activity of linguistic communication will become impossible and linguistic activity will become a futile exercise.

But we receive strong support from all quarters to the fact that linguistic activity is not a futile exercise, and communication of meaning actually takes place in the multitude of life contexts where we employ language. We employ language in a variety of ways and contexts in our lives and it is also a fact that in many such occasions we encounter the problem of communication; lack of clarity, failure to grasp meaning etc. Our language seems to betray us in such occasions and lead us to perplexities and paradoxes.

This has led philosophers to investigate the principal operations of language, or more precisely, the essential nature of language, as they thought, such a knowledge would help them avoid certain conceptual errors we commit as a result of getting betrayed by language. This

investigation was further encouraged by the fact that there is at least one realm of human activity and language use which is free from such shortcomings of language. It is the language game of science.

Making shareability and objective communicability as ideal, Immanuel Kant conducted an examination into the nature of human knowledge which exerted tremendous influence upon all future investigations on conceptual enterprises. Knowledge acquisition in the purview of natural sciences, as seen by Kant, happened with a mental process of synthesising the scattered data of sensations in order to comprehend it as a unity. The structure of this unity was determined by the *a priori* structures of understanding, which were uniformly present in all due to their transcendental nature. The two processes of sensation and synthesising were to be necessarily present to make scientific knowledge possible.

But this Kantian thesis did not limit itself to the evaluation of knowledge that was relevant in the natural sciences alone, but made a claim of universality. It asserted that rational and objective knowledge, be it in the purview of natural sciences or elsewhere, had to conform to certain parameters which were revealed in the analysis of the *a priori* structure of understanding. Kant's doctrine therefore, suggested a unified version of understanding that had inter-cultural and interdisciplinary validity. He enquired into the fundamental conditions for the occurrence of knowledge and assigned the experience of knowing in the natural sciences a normative role to the rest of human cognitive endeavours. This model demanded apodictic certainty and absolute objectivity, and Kant provided them with the concept of transcendental subjectivity.

This apparently reductionist position hardly exhibits any sympathy towards other forms of enquiry. As Roy J Howard observes, Kant could satisfy the demands of a long lasting ideal, only by making the knowledge occurring in the non-scientific realms, theoretically untenable and only emotionally, psychologically - in short, irrationally - tolerable.¹ Consequently, reason is equated with scientific rationality

Subscribing to a similar or same ideal led some philosophers of language to search for absolute sharability and objective communicability in our language use. Like Kant who propagated a unitary version of knowledge which was supported by transcendental presuppositions, these thinkers searched for a unitary version of language use where meanings got fixed to objective entities in advance, so that they would be available for objective cognition, irrespective of people, time and place. The model of understanding they longed to arrive at implied two things:

- 1) Meanings of linguistic expressions were fixed and were determined by extra-linguistic entities. Since the ideals of objective understanding and knowledge were found in the natural sciences, the model of language they idealised posited the latter as a representation of the factual reality. This was because, science stood for the body of objective knowledge about the factual reality and nothing beyond the factual world could find room in the ontology of natural sciences.
- 2) It implied the rejection of the facticity or historicity of the individuals who employed these linguistic signs in their various communicative interactions.

2. MEANING AND LANGUAGE

This view presupposes Kant's unitary version of knowledge, i.e. outside the purview of natural sciences, no claim of rational knowledge can be legitimately raised, since there language was not a system of representations. As rational knowledge is limited to the framework of natural science, meanings which are sharable and communicable, are confined to the structure of representational language. No question of meaning and consequently no question of linguistic understanding can be raised outside the language game where the rules are strictly representational.

Representationalists, in general, inherit such a conception of linguistic understanding and knowledge. They heavily relied upon the classical empiricist writings and attempted to derive their fundamental tenets from the teachings of John Locke and other traditional empiricist philosophers. Modern representationalists are therefore, largely empiricists. But the focus on language and logical structure of language prompted them to overcome the psychologistic conclusions arrived at by the traditional thinkers. Therefore, these basic doctrines were supplemented with the logico-linguistic discoveries made by Wittgenstein in his *Tractatus*. They thus developed a theory of meaning, which propagated the fundamental status of natural observation language for all semantic enquiries.

The implicit reductionism of this model attracted wide criticism from many sectors and it has evolved as a common anti-thesis for an entire range of anti-foundational doctrines. Even some philosophers of the analytical tradition like W.V. Quine, have registered their protest

against this hard-core reductionism. Quine³ and more explicitly Thomas Khun⁴ have shown how basic observation depends upon theory which essentially formed the background of any enquiry. They thus brought into light the conventional character of the validity criterion widely employed by the natural scientists.

This attack on the positivist reductionism of language is essentially an attack on the positivist theories of meaning and in a sense on the representational doctrine of understanding meaning. The semantic reductionism of the representationalists eternally fixes language to the factual reality in determinate ways which can be decided *a prioristically*. This is because, logic, that rules over language as well as reality, is transcendental. This conception of the status of logic is in conformity with the Kantian Unitary theory of knowledge which asserts that apparently different logics of enquiry must in reality have the same essential pattern.

But the language-world isomorphic contact that lies behind the logico-semantic doctrines of representationalism is challenged with the contention that observation depends upon theory. This suggests the impossibility of constructing a theory of meaning on the basis of a determinate language-world relationship. Moreover, the appeal to extra-linguistic entities also puts the representationalists in trouble. They pointed towards the extra-linguistic world in order to explain meaning, owing mainly to their reducing all uses of language to the framework of language-world relationship. Meaning, in that framework is the information content of linguistic propositions. But this position ultimately led them to make meaning independent of language. Some philosophers like Frege, explicitly propagated semantic autonomy by creating a separate logical or Platonic universe to locate the semantic content of language. Later the neo-empiricists

identified in the objects of the factual world the final reference points of language, The ideal of sharability and communicability were achieved by separating the semantic content of language from language itself and fixing them in some extra-linguistic entities This was the reason for their skepticism about ordinary language, which was obviously rich with arbitrariness, especially regarding the relationship between word and object

What is aimed to be achieved with by the fixation of linguistic expressions on extra-linguistic meanings is a logical purification of language, which will ensure absolute sharability and objective communicability of semantic contents But we hardly find such a logically pure language in our day-to-day lives. The language we use does not exhibit the formal unity propagated by the hardcore representationalists There, what we see is, as Wittgenstein says, only a family of structures more or less related to one another. A word in language, when approached semantically, should not be seen as an eternal representative of an object in the world. What has to be understood is, rather, its use in the language game which is its original home. Wittgenstein puts it

The more narrowly we examine actual language, the sharper becomes the conflict between it and our requirement. (For the crystalline purity of logic was, of course, not a *result of investigation*: it was a requirement). The conflict becomes intolerable; the requirement is now in danger of becoming empty. - We have got on to slippery ice where there is no friction and so in a certain sense the conditions are ideal, but also, just because of that, we are unable to walk. We want to walk: so we need *friction*. Back to the rough ground!⁶

In other words, we have to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use⁷ This is to bring meaning back to language and thereby to relate it back to the life contexts

where it finds uses. Since we engage ourselves in a multitude of language games in our life, understanding meaning poses a separate problem in each occasion and cannot be settled with an ideal approach which presupposes a general theory and calls for a sophisticated method.

3. DIFFERENT LOGICS

At this point, the representational conception of language and the underlying assumption of a unitary vision of knowledge that implied that the different logics of enquiry had the same essential pattern were challenged. Before we focus on the problem of understanding meaning, we shall have a brief look upon this issue. We now have two opposing standpoints. The representationalists who assert the universal validity of a particular form of language and its opposing view which insists on the difference between language-games. We shall see how the representationalists tackled the issue of different logics. If the representational language of natural science was the essential pattern of rational linguistic activity, how could we justify the possibility of social and human sciences? Since language-games like, poetry, literature, art, religion etc., do not find room in the language-game of natural science where the rules are representational, what should be our approach towards them?

The representationalists discussed this issue in detail with the strong uncompromising presupposition that other logics of enquiry, to have any validity, must confine to the logic of representations. They thus explicitly profess the unity of sciences and agree with Earnst Mach who considered the borders of different sciences as artificial, since, according to him, all of them were ultimately based upon a set of observation statements.⁸ Implicit in Mach's theory is the

concept of unique relationship between knowledge and sensations, as the former can be reduced to the latter. This is justified by the fact that science depends on observation reports which are the immediate derivatives of sensations

The idea of making a set of basic statements as *terra firma* for theories of language and understanding acquired a different dimension with Wittgenstein's introduction of elementary propositions. These propositions qualify as the most suitable candidates for the basic statements of language which establish representationalism. This Wittgensteinian notion explains how a set of sentences in language is intimately connected with the factual reality without falling back on epistemological presuppositions. Elementary propositions are formed out of names that are in immediate combination, where those names are understood as standing for objects. Any proposition in language can be analysed into these elementary forms and due to their intimate contact with the factual world, they constitute the foundation for all "sensible talk".

With such a unitary vision of language the representationalists propagated a unitary and reductionist vision of knowledge and understanding meaning. This was possible, they thought, because the language - world relationship was isomorphic. Since such a language was the perfect medium for intersubjective communication, it has to be adopted by all sciences, including the social and the human sciences. With this assumption they thought that they could satisfy the primary objective of their manifesto; to have a scientific conception of the world by developing epistemology as a logic of science.¹⁰

The methodological reflections that followed such primary assumptions further clarified the dependence of the model of language the representationalists developed upon the practice of science with all its theoretical and practical implications. The very idea of the "unity of sciences" presupposes a highly methodologically defined reductionism, which again is semantically rooted in the practical possibility of having a "thing language". The ideal of methodological monism which was necessary to give an account of the possibility of scientific knowledge, could be satisfactorily achieved only by emphasizing the unidimensional character of language and the consequent model of linguistic understanding. This, in fact, categorically rejects the possibility of different logics applicable for different disciplines, and idealises the logic of representation and the methodology of physics.

Once physics was granted to provide the methodological ideal for all rational endeavours, the immediate task would be; how to justify the admission of social and human sciences into the chambers of rational knowledge, as they seem to be appealing to totally different logics and consequently to different methods. J.S. Mill had earlier attempted something similar and finally concluded by asserting the universal validity of inductive method, which applies to the domain of human sciences as well. With its emphasis on consistently observed regularities, inductive method achieves an apparently demystified appearance. This, Mill found, makes the latter an ideal method for scientific enterprise. The logical positivists, later, with greater logical rigour, advocated a similar reductionism by focussing on the logical possibility of reducing the language of social sciences to the object-language model of physics and other natural sciences. And since explanation of the observed phenomena on the basis of universal principles constitutes the core function of natural scientific practice, human and social sciences are also expected to follow the

same procedure and are come to be viewed as devoted to the pursuit of explanations, Universal generalisation becomes an ideal in such disciplines also and consequently, the neo-empiricists concluded that, even for the sciences dealing with man and his culture, the only legitimate goal is providing explanations in terms of the laws of nature.

But as it is evident, the human sciences to a large extent directly deal with intentional sentences, and so language of the human sciences cannot be understood extensionally. Hence, the Tractarian semantics with its thesis of extensionality and implicit criterion of meaningfulness fails to deal with such sentences adequately. The model of explanation based on scientific norms also fails to apply to the domain of human actions.

Wittgenstein encounters this problem when he deals with the belief sentences. As Karl Otto Apel points out, Wittgenstein's difficulty with belief sentences introduced for the first time the problem which arises if we attempt to incorporate the *Geisteswissenschaften* into an objectivist unified science in its modern linguistic form.¹¹ The problem was, how to secure the idea of a unified structure of all meaningful utterances, while social sciences inevitably call for an understanding of human intended meanings. The logical framework of language, according to Wittgenstein, strictly prevents the entry of such expressions, since for him, there is perfect structural isomorphism between language and reality. Wittgenstein therefore, distinguishes the syntactical superstructure of linguistic units from the logical grammar by means of logically analysing the linguistic signs. He contends that the propositions of the form, 'A believes that p', 'A thinks p', 'A says p' - where a judgement is contained in another judgement, but not as a condition for the truth of the complex proposition - are of the same form 'P says P', where what

is involved is not a correlation of a fact with an object, but correlation of facts by means of the correlation of their objects.¹² Here the problem of intentional consciousness is considered as a psychological issue and, is therefore, replaced by the semantic problem of the truth functional language. The psychological analysis is replaced by language analysis based on the idea of truth function. This reductionism is further supplemented by a strong anti-psychologism and a subsequent transcendentalism¹³

Wittgenstein's logico-linguistic theory, accompanied by this transcendentalism, attempted to prove the availability of a universal conceptual scheme on the basis of the notion of the "common form of proposition". This common form of proposition subscribes to a logic - the transcendental logic - which in turn guarantees the possibility of a universal conceptual scheme.

But the neo-empiricists were not prepared to admit the entry of transcendentalism. Hence they proceeded with the notion of universal conceptual scheme - which was inter-subjectively valid and which successfully dealt with the logical interconnections among objective facts - without subscribing to transcendentalism. The human sciences, according to them, were not genuine sciences so long as they paradigmatically affirm the scope and importance of human intention. Some of them, therefore, along with Russell, proceeded with another reductionism where the so-called intentional sentences were reduced into sentences about behaviour. A behaviouristic interpretation of the human subject was also presupposed here. The human subject's assertion of a propositional meaning was interpreted as a relation between two simple objects. The belief sentences were thus taken to be standing for the elementary depiction of facts.

Wittgenstein, on the other hand, reduced those intentional sentences into semantical sentences, i e., sentences about sentences. This analysis necessarily reveals a paradox, as Wittgenstein's logical theory conclusively establishes the impossibility of such semantical sentences. Since what they try to express shows itself in the use of language, but cannot be said. As Apel puts it.

On the one hand, this behaviourist reduction is the only possibility left by the semantical theory of the *Tractatus* to make a science of the *Geisteswissenschaften*, on the other hand, this reduction is not in accordance with Wittgenstein's reduction of intentional sentences to semantical sentences.¹⁴

Thus, followed to its logical extremes, the logico-linguistic analysis provided in the *Tractatus* does not permit to locate the intentional sentences inside the milieu of meaningful discourse. Hence, Wittgenstein does away with the possibility of social sciences. But the neo-empiricists attempt to incorporate the latter by externally imposing on them the parameters of the physical sciences with a law-explanation model. Thus Carl Hempel explicitly employs the methodological apparatus of the physical sciences to deal with the historical phenomena without diluting the ideal of the experimental sciences. By employing the logic of casual explanation to the domain of social disciplines, he seeks to discover the fundamental laws and principles for the behaviour of individuals and group. To achieve scientific explanation in history and social sciences, Hempel argues, we need suitable general hypothesis or theories which are bodies of systematically related hypotheses. Hempel's endeavour is both conceptually and historically pivotal, as it can be seen as the first attempt of logical positivism to make explicit contact with the hermeneutic question earlier raised by Dilthey.¹⁵

Hempel, by employing the logic of causal explanation to the domain of social disciplines, seeks to discover the fundamental laws and principles for the behaviour of individuals and societies. This proposal of causal explanation, in accordance with the logical deduction from general hypothetical laws and from sentences describing antecedent conditions for the occurrence of the individual fact to be explained, is substituted for the teleological explanations, which heavily depend upon and emphatically call for intentions and purposes. Hempel proceeds with an elucidation of causal explanations that materialise in historical sciences. There the actions are objectified into events, so that they could conveniently be reshaped to be utilised as objective materials for causal statistical explanations. Scientific knowledge demands the possibility of explaining these objective events by means of general laws. Further, the motives which are understood as the desires to reach a certain goal, and which exist chronologically prior to the action, are classified as the antecedent conditions which make such explanations possible. By subsuming these antecedent conditions under a general law, practically all the necessary preconditions are prepared for a methodologically consistent causal explanation of the event in question. This is precisely what Hempel proposed when he asserted the relevance of causal analysis in the realm of purposive behaviour. Hempel was however, aware of the inherent difficulties of such a behaviouristic reductionism. With all such methodological purifications, the motivational explanations in social sciences fall short of the ideals of scientific knowledge, because, the maximum that could be expected from this explanation was a high degree of probability. He finds fault, of course, not with the methodology but with the practical unavailability of the necessary covering laws in the social sciences.¹⁶

We see in Carnap a more radical form of this behaviourism, which is brilliantly supplemented with the formulation of constructive semantics. The latter provided the foundation for reformulating experience in a behaviourist thing-language. Underlying such reformulations are the assumption that behaviour is itself a part of language¹⁷

What we derive from all these reasserts the unidimensional view of rational knowledge and the model of understanding, which are the necessary ingredients of the representational model. The logical positivists as a whole conceive the problem of understanding as a matter of explaining rationally, by means of the logical deduction of observation statements from general laws. And to explain rationally some phenomena is to see that a set of circumstances grow to become the instantiation of a known law-like relationship. On the basis of this, one can to a certain extent predict the occurrence of the event in question.

This form of causal explanation is conceived here as the 'only' model that can be rationally adopted for understanding meaning. Any attempt to approach reality in the social sciences with an aim to empathetically understand the intentions is undermined as irrational. Hempel openly criticizes the latter notion of understanding and argues that it is neither necessary nor sufficient. Above all, it does not satisfy the condition of empirical testability which, according to him, makes expressions meaningful.

But in social sciences we encounter a different dimension of reality, which does not fit the ideals of the ontology of natural sciences. As Apel points out, in the human sciences which try to understand human actions from their motives, we encounter an altogether different kind of

knowledge and not a residue of metaphysics. All other departments of human enquiry like social and human sciences, art, religion etc., have different modes of coping up with reality. In the language of Wittgenstein, the different language games cannot be reduced to one single system, rather they are associated with different systems or forms of life, which operate with different paradigms of reasonability, knowledge and truth.¹⁸

Again with the radical objectification of actions into events that can be subjected to empirical verification, the logical positivists ignore the organic nature of human actions and apparently neglect their communicative possibilities. In other words, with their emphasis on detached observation they neglect the scope and possibilities of communicative understanding based on intersubjective linguistic exchanges. With the methodological purification of subjective and objective categories they fail to notice the progressive merging of the two in a multidimensional plane provided by language. The basic error in the neo-empiricist assessment of the logical nature of human sciences consists in their assertion of an *a priori* semantics as foundational for all rational understanding. This conception has set eternal standard of analysis, which again calls for a reduction of all explanation and understanding to causal patterns. Consequently, they prefer to view the phenomenon of 'intentionality' and the 'purposive nature of human actions' and their- representative in linguistic utterances as obstacles that prevent rational explanation of them.

This is to ignore the *noetic* aspect of human behaviour in *toto*, which is responsible for all that humankind has achieved in terms of culture and civilization. They thus fail to grasp the very organic process which supplied man his cultural history and conceptual categories. Neo-

empiricism views this noetic phenomenon in terms of psychological categories, and aspires to reduce them to behaviouristic parameters. This consequently helped them make these *noetic* phenomena subjected to causal explanations. Hans George Gadamer analysed such a reductionism in detail and found it basically mistaken. He criticises representational outlook which approaches these disciplines from the methodological perspective of natural sciences. This eventually makes them fail to notice the differences that are of fundamental nature. What is important is, Gadamer contends, not simply defining a specific method, but rather recognising an entirely different notion of knowledge and truth.¹⁹ Against J.S Mill, who aims to show that inductive method is valid for the domain of moral sciences also, Gadamer argues that the adoption of this Humean model does not allow us to circumscribe the experience of the socio-historical world. Gadamer then categorically affirms that the true goal of historical knowledge, that is characteristic of all human sciences, is to understand a historical phenomenon in its singularity and uniqueness. He says:

Historical consciousness is interested in knowing, not how men, people, or states develop *in general*, but, quite on the contrary, how *this* man, *this* people, or *this* state became what it is, how each of these *particulars* could come to pass and end up specifically *there*²⁰

This shows how the casual-explanation model with its semantic foundations and object-language doctrine falls short in dealing with the historical and social phenomena legitimately. Even the logical positivists were aware of the shortcomings of their mono-methodologism. Carl Hempel thus called most historical writings explanation sketches rather than explanations proper.²¹ Yet, the failure, they contended, consisted not in the reductionism, but in the practical difficulty in obtaining data in sufficient quantity on which the similarities were to be established.

This prompted them to postulate a hierarchy of disciplines in their programme of the unity of sciences. This has been done on the basis of a criterion which adjudicated the degree of success with which each discipline conformed to the methodological parameters of causal explanation model

With an emphasis on the above mentioned *'noetic'* aspect and with a presupposition of what Gadamer has suggested as the entirely different notion of knowledge and truth, we shall proceed to examine an altogether different model of understanding. The fact that the character and goal of the human sciences are different from natural sciences does not by any means make the former inexact. It only suggests the necessity of an alternative outlook. This is because, the *noetic* aspect itself is a product of human activity, which is understood as the objectification of the 'Geist'

Gadamer further proclaims that the human sciences with their conception of a peculiar mode of knowledge that distinguishes them from the natural sciences are the true heirs of the humanistic tradition. He finds in J.B. Vico, the humanistic tradition's major proponent of the wisdom of the ancients, an insight which is relevant for the hermeneutic enquiry he intends to pursue. With his appeal to *sensus communis* (common sense) Vico intends to reveal the limitations of modern science. This *sensus communis*, for him, is not the general faculty in all men, says Gadamer, but rather is the sense that founds community. Gadamer puts it.

According to Vico, what gives the human will its direction is not the abstract generality of reason, but the concrete generality that represents the community of a group, a people,

a nation or the whole of human race. Hence the development of this sense of the community is of prime importance for living

This *sensus communis*, understood as the general sense of the true and the right, is not a knowledge based on argumentation. Rather, it entails the rejection of such a conception of knowledge. It further amounts to the recognition of a framework in which questions pertaining to the cognitive interrelations between man and his world are legitimately addressed.

These changes in the traditional conception of rational knowledge has vital implications in a theory of understanding meaning. To recognise the possibility of different logics of enquiry is, therefore, to recognise a different notion of knowledge and truth. Such a recognition necessitates changes in our conception of the language-reality relationship and in the notion of meaning and its understanding. It also calls for a change in our very conception of reality, and the role of language, not only in our cognitive enterprises, but also in our very life.

4. LANGUAGE, REALITY AND UNDERSTANDING

The representational framework, in its radical form construes a picture of reality, which is perfectly in conformity with the ontology of natural sciences. We have seen how the representationalists developed a picture of language which would fit this ontology with the help of the notion of elementary propositions.

Instead of a language which reflects the general rational faculty of man, the emphasis was later shifted to concrete human communities, where language is employed for a number of

different purposes. Each of these purposes represent a unique use of language determined by practice and custom. These customs are not something eternally fixed, so that they could be classified under a general law. Yet they will have their own ways of arranging concepts and categories which guide and control our actions and deeds.

This picture has very important consequences as far as a theory of meaning is concerned. It makes meaning essentially related to a system of practices and habits, rather than making it the abstract essence of linguistic signs. Moreover, the whole question of the validity of knowledge and truth, and that of meaning seemed to have application only within the framework of the system, and therefore, is limited to the collective rationale of a particular community which actually practices the different language games.

This is to realise, along with Richard Rorty that, there is nothing called the "intrinsic nature of language" and consequently the "intrinsic nature of reality" and of human self.²³ Once we admit the possibility of alternative language games - and for Rorty this admission follows our shift of emphasis from single sentences to vocabularies and from our ceasing to think that the world speaks rather than us - we should not make appeals to any criteria that will decide once for all the reasonability and correctness of any one form of language game over others. Each language game will address a unique dimension of reality and will conceive a unique language-reality relationship.

But this relationship nevertheless suggests no fixed structure in terms of an essence, rather it is absolutely a matter of customs and convention. This factor reiterates the fact that

different language games have different logics. They have their own unique categories of conceptualisation and rules for understanding.

The pivotal role played by customs and conventions in deciding the language - reality relationship has important consequences. Since our customs and conventions were contingent - as they could not be explained on the basis of law-explanation paradigm - one could argue with Rorty that there was also an element of contingency in the language we use. Rorty argues for developing a willingness to face up to this contingency and prefers to see how a recognition of the contingency of conscience and how both recognitions lead to a picture of intellectual and moral progress as a history of increasingly useful metaphors rather than of increasing understanding of how things really are.²⁴

But what is implicit in these recognitions is the ultimate significance of language to design and determine everything we can know and experience and a concept of meaning which never calls for any relationship between language and an extra-linguistic realm of objective entities. Rorty writes:

For it is essential to my view that we have no pre-linguistic consciousness to which language needs to be adequate, no deep sense of how things are which it is the duty of philosophers to spell out in language.²⁵

An examination of this point would explain how reality and the human self itself are evolving out of the various ways language is being employed in the multitude of social situations and contexts. Reality in this sense constitutes the system of entities with which we are

interrelated in significant ways in the various forms of life we are engaged in. The rules of the language games reflect the very significance of these interactions and our own self is nothing but a product that has evolved out of such interactions. We make ourselves through the various ways we participate in the various language games, as Wittgenstein says, Language is part of our natural history²⁶

In other words, our participation in a language game is itself a self making process, which simultaneously happens with the evolution of reality in the corresponding form of life and the revealing and understanding of meaning within the language game. The hermeneutic tradition works on this aspect and examines how understanding meaning constitutes a central position as far as the human self-making process is concerned.

Heidegger thus says that, the human being is always a being-in-the-world, who relates himself with the world in essential ways²⁷. In one sense, he himself has created the world, since the latter is not a pre-given collection of objects but a set of instruments which form part of his projects that design his existence. Again his being itself is nothing but something that has revealed out of such projects by means of which he understands the world and himself. All his projects and their realisation necessarily happen in the horizon of time and language. Hence the greater significance of language is realised in the hermeneutic tradition as the result of recognising the factor of historicity.

Along with the recognition of our possibility of encountering with different paradigmatic horizons, hermeneutics overcomes the monopoly of the ontology of science with the introduction

of the notion of historicity. It is this factor which makes hermeneutics the immediate antithesis of the representational tradition, which in many ways calls for an evaluation on the basis of correspondence. Representational semantics depends to a greater extent on the ahistorical and unchanging rule-structure of the ontology of natural science. In order to explain the universality of such a rule-structure, Wittgenstein introduces his transcendental logic and makes it the fundamental scaffolding of both reality and language. It is on the background of this pre-supposition, Wittgenstein builds the idea of a universal "picture language" and the idea of the common form of proposition which forms the basis of all linguistic interactions of humanity in general.

But with the recognition of historicity, the very question of legitimacy of our language uses gets associated with a limited community, instead of satisfying the demands of humanity in general. The innumerable paradigms of our various language games cannot be reduced to the causal paradigm of representational language and semantics. The various paradigms with which we operate and which design our actions and aspirations are necessarily cultural products given to us historically. They are, in other words, not given to us externally, rather we find ourselves in them, and also recreate it with our various encounters with the reality that is opened to us through them.

5. UNDERSTANDING AND INTERPRETATION

With this picture of reality, it would become impossible to explain our relationship with it in terms of correspondence. Language here ceases to be a mere medium of representation, and

acquires a more prominent role, as reality itself appears as a matter of historical-cultural opening up in it. In all our encounters with language, this opening up of reality is constituted in cultural and historical contexts. In other words, reality is given to us in and through language in our concrete lived experiences. Our very existence is constituted out of such lived experiences in language. And since language itself is an interactive encounter that materialises in definite cultural and historical situations, the legitimacy of linguistic understanding cannot be determined by imposing a system of rules externally. This is because any such external evaluation necessitates deductions, and the continuity of history which constitutes the very core of the opening process, resists such reductionism.

If the nature of reality is different, the way it is related to us also is different. The model based on regularity observations and abstract generalisations is of no use here. Our language games derive their momentum from the associated forms of life and its conventions. As Dilthey says, all starting point of our thought and action is the 'life' to which both the object and subject of enquiry belongs, and which therefore constitutes the essential and necessary framework of experience.²⁸ The experience of this life involves the whole wealth and variety of the latter. The parameters of the positivist model which limits itself to sensations and impressions fail to capture this wealth and variety. Thus, instead of a detached objective account, the experience of life refers to a 'subjective' response to the world, which again is no more a value-free endeavor but an active emotional involvement.

Edmund Husserl's notion of 'primary experiences' which are immediately given to consciousness as "things in themselves" in the "subjective modes of givenness", here presents

alternative concept for the representational outlook. What are prominent here are the experiences, which are directly given to the consciousness with an intuitive immediacy. As Husserl puts it

To put it more precisely: what is actually experienced is the world as simply existing, prior to all philosophy and theory - existing things, stones, animals, men. In natural, direct life, this is experienced as simply, perceptually "there" (as simply existing, critically certain presence) or, just as simply, in terms of memory as "having been there", etc²⁹

Dilthey made such experiences the distinctive mark of human sciences over and against the experiences directed towards the objective world

With these assumptions, Dilthey opposed the monomethodologism of the representationalists and tried to prove the legitimacy of other language games and other models of understanding meaning. He was not prepared to admit that the social and human sciences were inexact and therefore inferior to the physical sciences, as the positivists maintained.

Husserl's deliberations on the topic were more radical. He claimed that natural sciences themselves had their basis on the life-world, which was primary and where all that was important was the way things were formed as per the way they were directly given to the consciousness in the subjective modes of givenness.

Representationalism idolised scientific rationality such that, as seen by Husserl, it had led science itself to a crisis, since the more science autonomised itself with its peculiar methodology,

the more it got alienated from the life-world which was the ultimate foundation of meaning. In other words. Husserl asserts that, the positivistic reduction of the idea of science to mere factual science resulted in a crisis, where science loses its meaning for life.³⁰ It was the immediate flow of unreflective life that constituted the ground of all human endeavours. This unproblematic, pre-given world was the source of all self-evidence and verification. It was the world as we actually lived it, which was always already there, existing in advance for us, and was the ground of all praxis. From it our theoretical and logical reasoning drew their validity. The objective world of science was only an interpretation of this world of immediate experience. According to Husserl, this life-world transcends or precedes all objectivistic and subjectivistic categories. As David Carr observes,³¹ while science operates with abstractions, the life-world is the concreteness from which these abstractions are derived; science constructs, and the life-world provides the materials for this construction. It is the realm of original self-evidence to which the scientist returns in order to verify his theories. Science interprets and explains what is given while the life-world is the locus of all givenness.

The concept of life-world provided hermeneutics a very strong justification to accommodate historicity. In the very idea of "world that is given to us in the subjective modes of givenness" the notion of historicity is taken care of, since, the mention is no more about the objective world of natural science, but about the cultural reality that is given to us historically through the various conventions and customs of our language uses.

Gadamer derives from these Husserlian reflections the fundamental insight, which recognises the historically and culturally situated character of all human cognitive efforts. Even

the notion of objectivity, patented by modern science is itself historical, as it is merely a standard suited to certain kinds of knowledge with certain purposes and goals. What is more important is the realisation that all human endeavours are grounded on pre-scientific experiences. This invites us to redefine many of our traditional notions like, truth, meaning, knowledge etc. As G B Madison puts it:

If all scientific theorising is but a matter of idealising and interpreting a pre-scientific experience which does not contain within itself, and thereby neither dictates nor conclusively legitimates, any theories about it, what becomes of the philosophical scientific attempt to express the "objective" truth of things.³²

The focus on life-worlds therefore, may suggest that, there are no fixed truths for all. Instead of the world of representing subjects and represented objects, the world is something about which I am conscious of and which spreads out in space endlessly becoming and having endlessly become. I find it with intuitive immediacy, a mode of presentation which determines mine being conscious of it. This world is there, for me, "on hand" with all its wide range of objects. It is therefore, not merely a world of factual objects, but a world of objects with values.

All these suggest that we cannot approach the world in a detached way. If reality appears as a set of objects with values, then for us, it already suggests some meaning, and is no more a set of objects as the epistemologists conceived it. Even prior to our reflection about them, the objects in the world are related to us in definite ways. Heidegger in this context talks about the foresights of understanding, and says that such foresights necessarily guide all our cognitive endeavours. Before a subject-object relationship could be established, there exist a context of tradition which connects us with the world of objects in definite ways. Such a tradition -

something which we necessarily inherit - will dictate the routes which determine any comprehension of the world by us.³³

With this recognition of pre-understood meanings, the concepts of experience, knowledge, understanding etc, have changed radically, and it were these changed concepts that became relevant, when we consider human sciences, Gadamer makes this point more clear, as he says that, every encounter with the phenomena in human sciences is an individual case and is a unique experience which contributes in a unique way to the whole of a person's life. Or more precisely, every object of understanding differs from scientific object in its relationship to self-understanding³⁴. This is to reassert the concreteness and historicity of each life-world, and the boundedness of all activities to those life worlds.

Heidegger explicates this situation by interpreting being in terms of temporality. He identifies time as the ultimate horizon for the most primordial ways of interpreting man's being-in-the-world (*Dasein*). He goes on interpreting all structures of *Dasein* as modes of temporality. The structure of temporality has been understood by him as the ontologically determining factor of subjectivity. The hermeneutic of *Dasein* is primarily an enquiry into the modes of the being of *Dasein* who always finds himself in concrete life situations which determine him in certain ways and simultaneously provide him opportunities to realise his projects and possibilities. It is such an enquiry that reveals some hitherto unknown dimensions of the problem of understanding meaning. He conceives of understanding as a fundamental existentiality - mode of being - of *Dasein*. Understanding is, therefore, no more a matter of 'empathetic reliving' achieved with the aid of any methodology.

As a necessity, we find ourselves in a state of "thrownness" in the world, says Heidegger, as the being of Dasein is always a being-in-the-world. And as noted earlier, this state of thrownness necessarily suggests for us a background of meaning in terms of foresights. It is from such inherited background, all our encounters with reality and language stem. The temporal dimension of existence is taken care of within this framework. Understanding is locked inside the dynamic movement of this framework where the past and the future come to a fusion. On the basis of the foresights and the anticipation of future the *Dasein* is said to be designing his projects which are nothing but projections of meaning. This emphasis on temporality forcefully asserts the historicity of the phenomenon of understanding, which is in a peculiar sense, a sort of self-understanding. As Gadamer says, in the end, all understandings are reducible to a common level of an "I know how to go about it", that is, a self-understanding in relation to something other.³⁶ It is to form a project from one's own possibilities. This project is earned out in a structural web of relationships where man necessarily relates himself "interpretatively" with his life situations. These interpretations are actualised in a temporal continuum where the past, present and future experiences are intimately interconnected and derive their individual meaningfulness from the structure of such a complex interconnection. This discovery radically reassesses and calls for a total revision of the notion of the representational model of understanding meaning. Gadamer makes these insights more apparent with his notion of "rehabilitation of prejudices": He writes:

What before appeared as prejudicial to the concept of science and method, as only a 'subjective' approach to historical knowledge, today is placed in the foreground of fundamental enquiry.³⁷

By making this idea central, Gadamer, proceeds to reveal the fundamental linguisticity of understanding. The essential historicity of existence as well as all our cognitive endeavours were also examined in the light of this aspect. Understanding, as Gadamer conceives it, is no more a subjective act, but is necessarily an aspect of effective history. The interpreter essentially remains subject to the hold of this effective history. This, in other words, is to say that he cannot simply escape the ways in which the objects are already been understood in the tradition which he inherits through his language. Effective history and the linguistic tradition are operative in all human understanding as all understandings are already in the horizon of particular questions, prejudices, interests and viewpoints which are deterministically prevailing in our tradition. This rootedness in tradition is a fundamental concept extended universally, and is effectively utilised in order to counter the long-standing ideals of rationality, without falling back on relativistic categories.

With these preliminary observations, we shall conclude our discussion of the problem of understanding in this chapter. But before we sum up, we shall have a brief analysis of the way language is related to the problem of understanding meaning.

6. LANGUAGE, MEANING AND UNDERSTANDING

A close examination of the above discussion will reveal that gradually language is acquiring a more important role in the whole problem of understanding meaning. Philosophy of language always placed language at the core of conceptual inquiry - representationalists, thus made meaning the information content of language and understanding meaning was taken to be

closely linked with a knowledge about the empirical situation described in the linguistic expressions

But language becomes more vital with the introduction of the notion of language game, as it then acquired an ontological significance, both to constitute and understand meaning. The hermeneutic tradition recognised this with the introduction of life-philosophy and this in turn reasserts the linguisticity and historicity of all understanding

In the representational tradition, there was a natural tendency to isolate meaning from various contexts of language use, and sometimes from language altogether. Frege, as we observed earlier, thus placed the semantic content of language in a totally independent realm - in the Platonic third world. But contrary to this, Gadamer places meaning at the very heart of our language use. The prejudices of our linguistic tradition, and therefore, of our language are conceived by him as constituting the very precondition for the understanding of meaning. According to him, they provided the very possibility to project oneself. This would also explain the creative role of interpretation. The rootedness in history and language makes the interpreter cognitively independent and eventually provides him the possibility to engage in a dialogical endeavour.

What acquires prominence here is neither the cognition of any extra-linguistic reality, nor the subjective content of any individual consciousness, but language itself in the form of dialogue. It is the dynamism of this dialogic process that reveals the meaning which itself originates from such a process.

In the following Chapters, we discuss the different ways meaning is related to language and trace the conceptual route through which a notion of understanding meaning was developed, which not only resists the legitimacy of positing any extra-linguistic world, but also recognises the fundamental ontological significance of language in its entirety, both for construing reality and our very selves, and also for understanding meaning.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1) Howard, Roy J 1982, *Three Faces of Hermeneutics*, (hereafter *TFH*), Berkeley, University of California Press, p 5.
- 2) For example, A.J. Ayer conducts such an explicit study. He prefers to see John Locke, not just as a philosopher who enquired about the origin of ideas, but as a philosopher of analysis. Cf. Ayer's introduction to, 1968, *British Empirical Philosophers*, in Ayer A.J. and Winch, Raymond (Eds.); New York, Clarion Book, Simon and Schuster, p. 12.
- 3) Cf Quine, W.V.. 1981, *Theories and Things*, Cambridge The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, p 25
- 4) Cf Kuhn, Thomas : 1970, *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Chicago, Chicago University Press
- 5) Cf Wittgenstein, L : 1976, *Philosophical Investigations*, (hereafter *PI*), tr. G. E. M. Anscombe, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 108
- 6) *Ibid.* 107
- 7) *Ibid* 116
- 8) Cf. Mach, Earnst: 1914, *Analysis of Sensations* tr C M Williams, La Salle, Open Court Publishing Company, p.30.
- 9) Wittgenstein, L.: 1961, *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus*, (hereafter *TIP*) tr. D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 4.221.
- 10) A detailed analysis of this, and the problem of the unity of language are discussed by Rudolf Carnap in "Logical Foundations of the Unity of Science" in Hanfling, Oswald,

- (Ed) : 1981, *Essential Readings in Logical Positivism*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, pp.112-129
- 11) Cf Apel, Karl Otto 1980, *Towards a Transformation of Philosophy*, tr. Glyn Adey and David Frisby, London, Routledge & Regan Paul, p 8.
 - 12) Cf. *TIP*. 5.541 and 5,542.
 - 13) Cf. Apel, Karl Otto : *Op Cit* pp.9-10.
 - 14) Apel, Karl Otto. 1967, *Analytical Philosophy of Language and the Geisteswissenschaften* (hereafter *APG*), tr. Harald Holstelihe, Dordrecht, D. Reidel Publishing Company, p 7
 - 15) Cf, Howard, Roy J *Op Cit* p.25.
 - 16) See also Apel, Karl Otto : *APG*, pp.18-25.
 - 17) Cf. Carnap, Rudolf. *Op Cit*, pp.123-127
 - 18) Cf. Wittgenstein, L : *PI*. 23 & 24. Wittgenstein asserts that speaking of language is part of an activity or of a form of life
 - 19) Cf. Gadamer, H. G.: 1979, "The problem of Historical Consciousness" (hereafter *PHC*), in Paul Rabinov and William M. Sullivan (Eds): *Interpretative Social Sicences*, Berkeley, University of California Press, p 113
 - 20) *Ibid*,p.116.
 - 21) Cf. Hempel, Carl G : 1959, "The Function of General Laws in History" in P. Gardiner (Ed) : *Theories of History*, New York, The Free Press, p.351.
 - 22) Gadamer, H. G.: 1975, *Truth and Method* (hereafter *TM*), New York, The Seabury Press, p.21.
 - 23) Cf. Rorty, Richard : 1989, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, (hereafter *CIS*), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, p.8.

- 24) Cf *ibid* p 16
- 25) *Ibid* p 16
- 26) Cf Wittgenstein, L *Pl.* p.25
- 27) Cf. Heidegger, Martin : 1962, *Being and Time* (hereafter 57), tr. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, New York, Harper & Row, p.67.
- 28) Cf Dilthey, Wilhelm 1989, *Introduction to the Human Sciences: Selected Works, Vol 1*, (hereafter *IHS*), Rudolf A. Makkreel and Fritsch Rodi (Eds.); Princeton, Princeton University Press, pp.66-69.
- 29) Husserl, Edmund 1970 *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, (hereafter *CES*), tr. David Carr, Evanston, Northwestern University Press p.219.
- 30) Cf. *Ibid*, p.5.
- 31) Cf. Carr, David : 1974, *Phenomenology and the problem of History*, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, p 13.
- 32) Madison, G.B: 1990, *The Hermeneutics of Postmodernity*, Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, pp 44-45
- 33) Cf. Gadamer, H. G.: *TM*, pp.261-63.
- 34) Cf. Gadamer, H. G.: *PHC*, p. 106, Gadamer asserts that human sciences contribute to human self-understanding because they in turn are based in human self-understanding.
- 35) Cf. Heidegger, Martin : *Op. Cit.* p.38.
- 36) Cf. Gadamer, H. G.: *PHC*, p.132.
- 37) *Ibid*, p.132.