

THE IMMEDIATE AND THE NAIVE METAPHYSICS*

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In this article, I discuss Pirmin Stekeler-Weithofer's ideas about the nature of language and the metaphysical residue that seems to be present in the realm of immediate experience, despite all the criticism and success of positive knowledge. This includes, first and foremost, the ability to perceive objects, facts, and possible worlds which humans have from the early stages of their development, but which are difficult to describe theoretically due to their pragmatic nature. These should be approached not through ontology or the theory of knowledge, but through the use of language for communication. Objects, facts, and possible worlds in relation to semantic formal ontology and pragmatics are epiphenomena of signification. It is based on basic metaphors of a non-cognitive nature.

Keywords: semantics, pragmatics, immediate, signification, naive metaphysics

НЕПОСРЕДСТВЕННОЕ И НАИВНАЯ МЕТАФИЗИКА

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В данной статье рассматриваются идеи Пирмина Штекелера-Вайтхофера о природе языка и метафизическом остатке, который, несмотря на всю критику и успехи позитивного знания, сохраняется в сфере непосредственного опыта. В первую очередь это способность воспринимать объекты, факты и возможные миры, присущая человеку с ранних этапов развития, но трудно поддающаяся теоретическому описанию в силу своей прагматической природы. Подход к ним должен осуществляться не через онтологию или теорию познания, а через использование языка в коммуникации. Объекты, факты и возможные миры в контексте семантической формальной онтологии и прагматики являются эпифеноменами означивания, основанного на базовых метафорах некогнитивной природы.

Ключевые слова: семантика, прагматика, непосредственное, означающее, наивная метафизика

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Pirmin Stekeler-Weithofer's article is very diverse in content and provokes comments, objections and new ideas. I agree with its main points, in particular that (to express it in my own way) the metaphysics behind natural language is revealed precisely by analyzing the pragmatics of language, which is superimposed over semantics and incorporates sociocultural context, plans of affects and non-cognitive reactions.

My focus will be on some of the details.

I'll start at the end. Steckeler-Weithofer's conclusions seem unexpected to me. It turns out that "the evolution of life, the development of sapience, and the emergence of reflected persons are just *histories*, told from today's perspective". To consider all of the above as "causal explanations of the present world" is to have "naïve view on the whole world from nowhere or sideways-on". This view is "neither part of the sciences nor of philosophy as a practice of speculative reflections on the logical topography of our concepts, knowledge and references to the world". It is hard to agree.

Firstly, history in its essence is what is told today, from the perspective of a subject and with a political motivation. There is not and cannot be an outside view, but the intention is to put forward a subjective view as objective in two aspects. First, as potentially shared by many, and second, as corresponding to what "really" happened. The latter refers to an absolute witness, i.e., a God or other exclusive authority, whether we believe in them or not. The absolute witness is an apophatic logical construct, as in Christian theology or Descartes. Secondly, evolution is the "cause" of the emergence of life and mind only in the "naïve" popular literature. Natural science, on the other hand, deals with the principle of evolution as a heuristic, and we know it succeeds. The fact that it is not possible to prove the hypothesis of evolution apodictically does not contradict the productivity of the principle of evolution. Similarly, although the expediency of the world is impossible, as Kant points out in the Third Critique, this does not prevent us from successfully using the principle of expediency, i.e., following Aristotle: "for the process of evolution is for the sake of the thing finally evolved, and not this for the sake of the process" (Part. Animal. 640 a 16) [Aristotle, 1984]. The principles of evolution and expediency are not "stories", they are historical metaphors on which theories are built that are incomprehensibly effective in explaining observed phenomena. There is no point in asking whether these theories are correct – it is enough to recall the medicine based on the theory of humoral pathology that satisfied Europeans for more than two thousand years.

Metaphor provides a transfer of properties of the observable to the field of the unobservable. The key metaphors of science are balance, hostility, attraction, kinship, filling, emptying, motion, rotation, etc. Even Thales explained the eclipses of celestial bodies by casting a shadow, transferring the mechanism of this simple phenomenon from the household to the heavens, and Sigmund Freud drew metaphors of tension and energy



from physics, where they in turn came from the practice of handling veins (bowstrings), skins (furs), and weights.

Nowadays, the metaphysical holds the sphere of the so-called immediate, and in its aspect, which is opened from the side of language and is called “linguistic picture of the world”. It contains an understanding of what objects and facts are, and also provides “acquaintance” with objects and the reference of deictic units of language. There is no doubt that in language we operate with the meanings presupposed by the sociocultural environment, and we reveal these meanings pragmatically. Semantics deals with the formal side of the relationship between expressions and their designata. In section 5 of Stekeler-Weithofer’s article, the deictic plan of language is supplemented by the symbolic one in the picture of glottogenesis. Such a picture is often supplemented by human activity and labor, as was the case, for example, Ludwig Noiré, Friedrich Engels, and Nikolai Marr. It is also consistent with the theory of Karl Bühler [Bühler, 1982, p. 80]. Based on the ideas of the above authors, the emergence of semiosis can be described as a movement from (1) a grasping hand to (2) a hand extended to grasp, then to (3) a hand extended to point, then to (4) a word implying what can be pointed to, finally to (5) a word implying what cannot be pointed to. The cognitive significance of this movement is provided by the sequence of arising and withdrawing affections [Zaitsev, 2021, p. 104–106].

The meaning of linguistic units is based on basic metaphors of a sensorimotor nature, the source of which are movements forward, backward, up, down, sideways, tension arising from grasping and pulling toward oneself, as well as from putting something inside and pushing it outside (container metaphor) [See: Lakoff, Johnson, 2003]. Sensorimotor reactions are non-cognitive (instinctive) and non-reducible. Their metaphors create a naive metaphysics of “man-sized” objects and facts, going back to Aristotle’s first essence and Leibniz’s material bodies. The same metaphysics underlies the logico-semantic theory of types and the theory of grammatical categories. The former are expressed in part by the syntax of language, and therefore, in order to distinguish between canonical and derivative forms (tropes), we need to use the tools of semantics and pragmatics. The metaphysics of the object is implicit in all phenomenology of sense experience (from *de re late* scholasticism and English sensualism to Leibniz, Kant, and Hegel), and where it is methodically dispensed with, it is best traced. In Edmund Husserl’s “*Ideen zu einer Reinen Phänomenologie*” it is explicitly stated that it is neither a question of “theory” nor of “metaphysics”, but only of grasping and investigating the “essential necessities” contained in the noema of the thing and in the “giving thing” consciousness (Ideen I, 313, 20) [Husserl, 1992, S. 348], which, however, in the “natural” setting is what metaphysics is. Husserl describes the object in terms of the descriptive psychology of inner experience and his theory of contents believed in acts of consciousness



(Ideen I, §§ 149–153), thus realizing a translation into phenomenological language of the naive metaphysics of the object.

Phenomenology is not in demand in semantics and pragmatics. Here the object, fact and possible worlds are not ontological (especially not mathematical) but semantic constructs, which have no direct connection with extra-linguistic reality. This connection is ensured by the use of language according to the laws of pragmatics, dealing with situations of utterance, lexical contexts, the purposes of speakers, the conditions of establishing meaning, etc. In this way, the structures of worlds help us to understand what is meant by “necessary”, “possible”, “know”, “want”, etc., but worlds exist to the same extent as the objects that “exist” in them and the facts that constitute them. A kind of “scandal” in philosophical logic and semantics is that, although the invalidity of Bertrand Russell’s and Ludwig Wittgenstein’s concept of the atomic fact became known quite soon, it did not affect the widespread use of this concept. The reason is that atomic facts do not appear outside logico-semantic constructions. Here, a fact is something that takes place when the set of sentences expressing it is true (equivalence class), and does not take place when they are all false. The substantive criterion of truth in this case is outside of semantics. Atomicity is nothing more than a formal attribute stating that the mentioned sentences are constructed without logical units of language (details are omitted). An object, in turn, is defined pragmatically: it is something to which predicates can be attributed, and whose existence or non-existence in the possible world makes facts (of which it is a part) influence our decisions and actions. Such a definition can be derived, for example, from works of Frege [Munton, 2017].

The treatment of immediacy is difficult in anti-psychological analytic discourse. I agree with Stekeler-Weithofer that it succeeds for Hegel in the first chapters of “The Phenomenology of Spirit”, where he actually creates a theory of language by speaking of the universal forms of agency and objecthood that determine signification. For Husserl, the corresponding pure structure reveals two differently directed acts that yield different functional units. In both conceptions, the thingness is immanent to contemplation, so that immediacy is an appeal to the thingness of a special kind, for the constitution of which time, space, and modes of modification of perception are also necessary, giving the object in a certain completeness. The founder of this theory, of course, is Aristotle, in whom we find the first essence – a material man-sized thing, whose appearance is explained by the known four causes, so that, understanding what the thing in front of us is, we know its past and possible future, variants of its modifications, necessary and accidental features, ways of dealing with it, etc. This holistic view of things is never expressed in speech because its functioning presupposes extensive background knowledge. There are also no syntactic markers that indicate the need to refer to it.



The naming of the first entity is carried out in the *modus de re* by means of demonstratives (*in praesentia*), proper names and pronouns (causally, starting from the past *praesentia*) and referential descriptions (starting from the situation and certain kind of *praesentia*). In the second and third cases there is no syntactic identification of the existence of the signified, and in the third case also the term itself can be treated as generic – *de dicto*, therefore here an analysis of pragmatics is required to establish the meaning. The direct reference to the thing *in praesentia* is the most difficult semiotic action for the theory, since the thing can be present but not known in relation to its causes, i.e. in its properties, and then we are deprived of the possibility of describing it in any other way than by demonstration. Meaning remains entirely *de re*, thus communication is impossible without the *praesentia* of the thing, and we cannot proceed to the symbolic plane of language, where the description of the possibly absent, i.e. the *modus de dicto*. Although any *de re* use can, with some effort, be replaced by *de dicto*, the reverse is impossible. To be the first essence, i.e., a prototypical object, means to be available for acquaintance, and since the latter is rooted in basic sensorimotor reactions, the object is an epiphenomenon of the sequence of cognitive and non-cognitive states in which we constitute it, hold it, see it in modifications, desire to receive it, paint it, give it as a gift, and so on.

The above is especially important for the structures of worlds used for the interpretation of propositional attitudes. Leibniz writes in “Theodicy” that each world is non-contradictory, i.e. logically possible, but God thinks them through in temporal sequences, i.e. deals with all versions of the history of the world, and chooses for realization the one in which the greatest number of essences can be realized [Leibniz, 1996, p. 128–129]. Leibniz’s material bodies are in the process of unfolding and coagulating, and their substrate is infinitely divisible seeds. From world to world in each history, some objects arise by joining others, undergo modifications and disintegrate. God knows the path of each corpuscle in advance; nothing comes from nowhere and disappears into nowhere. Thanks to this, we can say, for example, that a certain person has changed during the time we have not seen him, but that he is “the same person”. Although no object of one world is identical to any object of another, cross-world identification is possible, which consists not only in retaining the basic characteristics of an object from world to world (this provides duality in David Lewis), but also in retaining cognitive contact with that aggregate of corpuscles that is in continuous modification. The same “Ship of Theseus” is not a ship with the same characteristics, but a ship obtained from the original “before our eyes”. The meaning of the name “Ship of Theseus” is the knowledge of what characteristics this ship and all its parts had in each of the worlds since its creation. Such knowledge is unattainable, but its incomplete version is sufficient. I don’t think that if I don’t look at my cat, it will turn into a dragon; on the contrary, I am



sure that if I look at it all the time, it will remain a cat. This is unprovable and naïve – of which we are constantly trying to be convinced, not only by skepticism, but also, for example, by Art Nouveau, for which all things are not only not what they seem to be, but depend for what they are on both the presence of our gaze and the question contained in it.

The result seems to me to be this: basic sensorimotor metaphors and the practice of handling man-sized things create prototypical semantic entities – objects, facts, and possible worlds; and prototypical pragmatic entities – speaker, receiver, situation, goal. These entities do not have to respond to neither the insights of speculative metaphysics nor the constraints of skepticism. They are elements of a naive metaphysics, or a linguistic picture of the world, that captures primarily those of our semantic and pragmatic expectations that are formed non-cognitively and therefore serve as the basis for all others that arise in conscious activity.

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