

Representing – Remembering – Memory

In German there is the expression >Küchen-Etymologie<, literally translatable as >etymology of/from the kitchen< for an account of the origin and meaning of a word which is not scientific and, more often than not, not correct. Being a linguistic philosopher writing in German and, occasionally, in English too, >Küchen-Etymologie< is a constant danger for me, because writing in a language, which is not one's mother-tongue I am time and again tempted to compare the foreign language with my regular vernacular. Reading more languages than I can actively speak, the temptation of comparing reflections is multiplied.

I.

Latin >membrum< means >part of the body< or >part of a whole<, >membra< (pl.) means just >body<, In English, the particular meaning of >member< is specialized to the male private parts; the abstract >part of a whole< is less specialized to social contexts – one is member of one's family and can be member of clubs or even of Parliament.

>Re-member< literally should mean making something a part of some whole *again*. Which whole? Some person, because as equivalent roughly to >recollect< (literally >gather together again<) remembering is an ability of persons, which are *speaking, acting and self-evaluating animals*¹. The German equivalent of >remember< is >erinnern< [literally >making something belonging to the inner (again)<]. The basic meaning of >innen< is >within s.th.<, but in >Erinnerung< the psychological meaning of >inner< is used. [Psychologically what is (kept) within, is what is not expressed, uttered and testified to.] The meaning of >erinnern< is therefore almost as abstract as >making something part of a whole again<.

Erinnern or to remember in Latin, by the way, is >reminisci<, which in the history of languages is not connected to the English and German expressions for the past-regarding propositional attitude.

II.

To be a member of Parliament is to represent the citizens of the electoral district, in

¹ The concept of a person is extensively treated of in my German books *Was wir sind* und *Wer wir sind*, also my English paper >The concept of a person and the ontology of common sense< (all on www.emlange.de).

which one was elected. To represent one's voter is to deputize for them in the processes of making political decisions. Literally to >re-present< should mean >to make present *again*< what otherwise would be absent. The accent is here on the representative, not on who he deputizes for.

This can be seen to have been quite the opposite with the Latin >re-praesentare<. More detailed dictionaries tell us that >repraesentatio< in classical Latin had just one very specialized meaning, namely >payment in cash<. But I believe that we here meet with one of the limitations of lexicography. It limits itself to descriptions even then, when an explanation is needed to understand. The following might do. Market-exchange in pre-capitalist societies was focused on the – to use Marxist categories – use-value of what was exchanged, not on the exchange-value. A >payment in cash< was really just a representation of, and of lower order than the use-value of the good it deputized for. The focus is here on the represented, not on what does the representing. If this explanation is correct, one sees why only this special meaning of >repraesentatio<, which also in Latin descriptively could have applied to any >place-holding for<, was of use to the speakers of classical Latin .

III.

Memory in the sense needed here is the faculty to remember, here as an ability of persons, not as in computer-jargon a container of coded information (cp. >memory-stick<). But remembrances come in two different ways – as spontaneous reactions and as elaborated representations mostly of linguistic form, for which even some effort to produce them might have been needed.

Wittgenstein claims quite generally: „The words with which I express my memory are my memory reaction.“ (*PI* para. 343) I doubt that this is the case generally, but I once experienced a memory *reaction*. Some forty years ago I was attacked by a group of young people when riding my bicycle past them in a quiet street. I fell and was treated with footsteps, also in the face, which gave me a broken cheek bone, got me hospitalized and operated upon. The prominence of the cheek bone could not be restored completely and so I am reminded of the incident each time I see my face in the mirror. The police quickly ascertained the culprits because they had bragged about their deed in a dance club nearby and some girl told the police when they came by. When released from the hospital I was

summoned to the police station for an identification, I expected to be led into a room where one is presented with possible candidates behind a one way transparent glass. But when I entered the police station a young man, guided by two officers, passed me by in the floor. I instantly recognized the leader of my attackers in him and, growing pale, exclaimed quite without control: „That's him.“ This I recognized as Wittgenstein's *memory reaction*. Some memories then are spontaneous reactions.

Those readers of this piece who have read other essays of mine may have noticed that I always try not to get entangled in traditional epistemological problems of the sort >How is reality given to us at all? Is the visual more important than the auditory? Etc.<. I took for granted that it is given and scepticism is simply nonsense by way of saying that at least givenness in its explicit form of linguistic representation should not be doubted as soon as a question is put. Because he who does so inevitably uses language and thereby – as I have shown in my investigations into the concept of language and the formal concepts = variables that give structure to our understanding – is ontologically committed in several ways, the most important of which is one that comes with being a speaker of language and therefore a *person*. A person doubting that there are persons is talking nonsense.

Here, however, I have to break with my usual strategy in contending that every instance of linguistic representation, even a contemporaneous comment on the passing show, involves memory in formulating what is seen or heard. Phenomenologists call this inconspicuous engagement of memory >retention< in order to distinguish it from full-blown memory reports. I am as sceptical of phenomenologist analyses of the processes of consciousness (because of their complete neglect of language) as I was about Wittgenstein's talk of memory *reactions* until I had the one described. But now I believe that one has to admit the existence of retentions in the phenomenologist sense for consistency's sake. The case is different from the philosophical misuse of the expression >dying< in the common saying >To be born is having begun to die<. Being just born *is not* beginning to die, but retention *is* a form of memory.