

# Fritz Mauthner\*

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Fritz Mauthner (1849–1923)

## 1 Introduction

I have no difficulty in imagining Mauthner's reaction had he been a recipient of the Editor's request to inquire into the interrelationship of semiotics and the philosophy of language. We have to imagine that Mauthner remained a witness, understanding, sometimes approving but as often also disapproving, of the vast developments in the philosophical activities around language which took place in the last sixty years, despite his death in 1924. He could now justly regard himself as a pioneer of this development and, as pioneers often do, he would now be inclined to feel that the movement he had helped fathering has gone the wrong way. Faced now with the Editor's request, he would exclaim: "Endlich!" "At last", he would say, "they are realizing that formal semantics cannot do duty for a philosophy of language which, if properly understood, is nothing but critique of language. The true object of the philosopher's interest is not the formal properties of language but the truth about its status, chiefly as an instrument of knowledge. These latter-day philosophers of language could do with a dose of critique themselves".

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Mauthner was, in an odd sort of way, a very traditional philosopher. I am not saying that he was wrong in being that: I only wish to point out the fact. I would go as far as to say that, in his aspirations at least, he was a Platonist, since, like Plato, he sought to grasp the ultimate nature of reality. His philosophy of language rests on the awareness that the Platonic objective is unattainable and that, therefore, the task of philosophy is critique, viz. a refutation and rejection of all possible substitute-solutions to Plato's problem. Mauthner's critique is thus highly radical and, by comparison, Kant, for example, would appear almost uncritical. In brief, Mauthner's concern with language was not for its own sake but for the sake of knowledge of reality.

Surveying the present scene of language-centred philosophy, Mauthner would not have much reason to be happy. He would certainly reject the notion that Tarski's theory of truth, so central to so much current philosophizing, is a genuine step towards a true theory of reference (see below 7.2). Mauthner would, no doubt, make light of Tarski's famed definition-schema because it is (as a definition-schema) a tautology, pure and simple. Mauthner could never see any magic, ontological or other, in the use of quotation marks. He was reaching out to all reality and he would regard it as a mean trick to claim to have captured it by a mere notational device.

The purpose of this article is to present, as faithfully as I can, the essentials of Mauthner's confrontation with recent semiotics. Thus, I shall aim at articulating both what Mauthner said and also what, in my understanding, follows from what he said regarding the contemporary scene. However, I feel I ought to say something concerning my own views about the matters to be discussed. When I was working on my *Mauthner's Critique of Language* (Weiler 1970)<sup>1</sup> during the late fifties and most of the sixties, I tended to be more critical of Mauthner than I am now. Perhaps it is more correct to say that I would now criticize him for things other than those I have found wanting at the time. I was then, rather unknowingly, too much under the influence of the ruling ordinary language school. So I did not think much of Mauthner's scepticism while now I tend to see his strength as lying just here (see 10 below). That I no longer judge Mauthner by the standards of that school is just one aspect of my increasing scepticism, perhaps even Mauthnerianism.

## 2 Philosophy of language

"Philosophy of ..." typically aims at answering the question "what makes anything ...?" meaning thereby necessary and sufficient conditions. These conditions cannot be satisfactorily specified unless the relation of ... to "all" other things, to "the world", is at least essayed in tolerable detail. That no philosophy of ... is ever complete is thus attributable, at least in great part, to the impossibility of specifying all such necessary and sufficient conditions and the total relationship of ... to the world. Thus, for example, the philosophy of law must say quite a lot about ethics, politics etc. and, at least in a minimal-marginal sort of way, also about the physical world since this constitutes the *forum* and the sum-total of limiting conditions of human action, which is the central subject-matter of law. The philosophy of social sciences is typically much occupied with its similarity to, and difference from, and therefore with the nature of, physical science. These considerations apply with added force to the philosophy of

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<sup>1</sup> I rely on this book heavily and this paper contains my current "second thoughts" about it.

language, for language, whatever else it may be, is a means of relating to items in the world which are usually not items of language. Thus a philosophy of language worthy of that name cannot limit itself to an investigation of language, but must attend to its metaphysical status or at least to the question of its epistemological serviceability. This was Mauthner's way and, as far as this goes, it certainly seems to be the right way. My teacher, the late Gilbert Ryle, never tired of explaining why, because of such considerations, the philosopher's job is so different from that of the grammarian, the lexicographer etc.

"Philosophy of ..." is never exempt from questioning the reliability and truth of ... Philosophy of science, by asking what science is, is not limiting itself to the question about the accepted social usage of the word "science" but asks rather what makes science worthy of that name, viz. what makes its theories true or nearer to truth than its competitors. Philosophy of law asks what law is, "over and above" what lawyers and judges do. Likewise, philosophy of language is inevitably concerned with the "thing" behind the word, with a reality behind the expression. Philosophy of language *is*, in a sense, ontology, only here Mauthner would have shrunk from Quine's view - if it really is his view - that ontology was but a matter of commitment (cf. Quine 1953: 1ff. & passim). For Mauthner, ontology was a matter of discovery, of finding out, if possible, what there really is. Now Mauthner and Quine are at one in rejecting the notion of an ontology which is both true and discoverable. But they are also at one holding that we adopt languages that suit us (see below 5.3 and 8), that serve us well in our real-life situations and doings. For Mauthner, though not for Quine, this last remark is a contribution to the theory of the relation between language and reality and thus to the critique of language *qua* epistemology. Mauthner too rejects the notion that language "reflects" reality, yet there remains in his pragmatic suitability-doctrine an element of a claim to truth which is absent from the Quinean commitment-doctrine. There is a lot of difference between conventionalism and voluntaristic arbitrariness. For Mauthner the limits of possible conventions are set by suitability; failures are not suitable.

If Mauthner still has any message for us, then I would be inclined to see it in the proposal that we should take seriously the idea of a critique of language, in the sense in which Mauthner himself has explicated it: viz. as a *Kritik an der Sprache*. Language, in this sense, can be the subject-matter of criticism only from the vantage point of some *desideratum*, in the light of which language can be, in degrees, success or failure. Mauthner has a notion of such an objective: translinguistic *truth*. That this is unattainable can be appraised in various ways. One possible response is to declare the whole notion misconceived, for this or that reason, and resolve to make do with a second-best solution e.g. Tarski's definition. But this appraisal is by no means necessary. Mauthner's own response, a linguistically inspired epistemological scepticism, still remains a live option, *qua* another way of "dealing with" truth (below 1). For some decades it had seemed that psychologism (below 3 and 4) was defeated. This is no longer that certain. Given all we know about the history of philosophy, it would be rash to regard any defeat as final. Philosophical defeats, like victories, are often, perhaps even mostly, but changes in fashions of thought. A Mauthner *redivivus* today is more of a likelihood than an impossibility.

### 3 Sensationalism

How is contact with reality achieved? The empiricist answer is that we do this by means of sensations. Sensations are internal events which *somehow* are supposed to be signs for some

external reality. At this stage, we do not yet understand what all this means but at least we realize that this question, how contact with reality is achieved, is not the same as how do things *cause* sense-experiences. For, it is quite possible, indeed likely, that the causal mechanisms misrepresent the nature of the causes of sensations. Sticks bent due to diffraction (*pace* Austin), mirages etc. illustrate the point. How, then, can we get at least as near as possible to the sensation itself? Near is meant here in the sense of neat, *qua* sensation neat, without any foreign material being *beigemischt* (Kant B: 3). I use the Kantian term deliberately for here the predicaments of Kant and Mauthner are rather similar.

The point has been noted and discussed by Cassirer (1953 a: 188f.; cf. Weiler 1970: 319ff.). He argued that instead of trying to get near to things, we should rather enhance the tension between reality and symbol. If “perception is taken as something utterly particular, individual and punctual” then, according to Cassirer (*ibid.*), “there remains, of course, an unbridgeable gap between world and language [...] and the world of perception, which is regarded as an aggregate of simple sensations”.

What are we to do with this gap? Well, according to Mauthner, even if there were nothing foreign *beigemischt* to sensation, there would already be a gap because of the contingent nature of our sensory apparatus, our *Zufallssinne*. But, anyway, we cannot do without such minimal admixture of foreign material since something has to render sensations meaningful and if *this* is not in the world, it is foreign then. Once we administer such meaning-inducing component to the *bare* sensation we must be doubly suspicious of the faithfulness of the final product. Meaning-inducing components are linguistic; in this way we come to understand that without language we have nothing which means anything *to us*, whereas with it we have on hand something which not only differs from reality but is also alien to it. Language and the reality which it endows with meaning are thus heterogeneous. So much for Cassirer’s critique of Mauthner’s sensationalism. It is, of course, valid – at least arguably so. Mauthner would have endorsed it for he was not the *primitive* sensationalist Cassirer took him to be.

Indeed, in Mauthner’s view it is the very central task of the philosophy of language to clear up this predicament or, should this prove impossible, at least to get as clear about it as possible. It is for this reason, as we shall soon explain, that Mauthner’s philosophy of language is radically psychologicistic.

#### 4 Vorstellung, word and judgement

The sensationalist theory about our contact with reality, given at the beginning of section 3, is not Mauthner’s theory *simpliciter* and Cassirer misread him. Whether Mauthner’s theory, much more complex than simple sensationalism, is also the better one, remains to be seen.

A convenient way of introducing Mauthner’s account of the matter is to cast a glance at Kant. In an important, though somewhat obscure, passage (Kant B: 376) Kant attempts a set of definitions of the basic notions of epistemology. “The whole class may be called representation (*representatio*). Under it stands conscious representation, *perception* ...” (“Die Gattung ist Vorstellung ueberhaupt ...”) But, one immediately asks, the whole class, the class of representations, the *Gattung*, of what? L.W. Beck (1978: 142) answers as follows: “Representation: an actual sensory content of consciousness, which Kant called ‘perception’ ...”. This is correct insofar as Kant mentions only perception as coming under representation, *Vorstellung*. But in principle it is possible that there should be also *unconscious* representations, *Vorstellungen*. The point is of importance since perception, according to Kant, is

already articulate and we are here seeking the border of articulation and with it the hallmark of objectivity. Since perception has as two subclasses sensation and knowledge, its domain is the whole of objective knowledge. Unless we know the boundary, within “the whole class of representations”, between conscious representation, i.e. perception, i.e. sensation and knowledge and the rest, then Kant did not solve his problem by means of terminology and it remains a source of trouble for his whole philosophy. It stands in the centre of the Transcendental Deduction and his difficulties with it made him rewrite completely this part of the Critique for the second edition. It is here that Kant struggles with the central problem of his own epistemology, whose solution is necessary for the success of the whole system. The issues are well summarized in the commentary of Walsh (cf. Walsh 1975: 88–96). The first edition account, he explains, remained subjectivistic since, if the process of perception begins with the occurrence of private *Vorstellungen*, then no transition can be found from the private to the common. So, for the second edition, Kant has recast his thought. The centre-piece now became the notion of judgement, which is impersonal, relates to facts and not to *Vorstellungen*, and thus to privately perceived “things”. An impersonal, intersubjective world now becomes possible. Walsh sees well enough that Kant’s improved account is not adequate either to the task of solving the problem of heterogeneity. For how could judgement be what Kant means it to be if it is made on the basis of data which are private?

Mauthner is not satisfied with Kant’s improved founding of objectivity. The element of objectivity inherent in Kant’s concept of judgement rests upon the *claim* (§ 9)<sup>2</sup> to the assent of others. My judgement is objective since it is possible for others to assent to it or to reject it. Mauthner, by contrast, seeks an objectivity which rests upon nothing short of truth. This concept, *truth*, is the lynchpin of all epistemology, for by means of it the transition is effected, if at all, from knowledge *qua state* of mind to knowledge *qua* something other than a mere state of mind. The question, how do we concoct one public world out of private materials, is a question Kant did not solve and which forced Schroedinger (1958) to embrace monopsychism, the One-Mind doctrine of the Upanishads. It is very much Mauthner’s question.

Mauthner’s psychologism is incompatible with the usual progression in epistemology, from perception to knowledge and thence to truth. Likewise, he rejects the progression from concept to judgement and thence to inference. His argument is that judgement presupposes inference and, more importantly, concept presupposes judgement. The central role in all this is occupied by language, by the use of words. “When one hears a well-known word, then only in exceptional cases does there emerge for him a picture [...] normally [...] there will be awoken a little world, a microcosm of association of ideas” (Mauthner 1923 c: 263). The words, themselves, of course, rest (*liegen zugrunde*) upon sensations but these do not attain the rank of *Vorstellungen* (cf. Mauthner 1923 c: 264). In other words, the *Vorstellung* is already articulate and it is typically but a derivative of the concept-word, by being an example of it (cf. Weiler 1970: 63–85). Sensation is not articulate. Articulation, and with it conscious-

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2 *Anm. d. Redaktion* (EHL): Except the note “Kant § 19”, the author does not give any information on the edition he used. A first edition of Kant’s *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* appeared 1781 in Riga (Hartknoch Publishers), a second edition came out in 1787 by the same publisher. A useful edition for the non-specialised student reader may still be the one by Weischedel: Immanuel Kant [1781/1787] 1956 [1975]: *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Werke in zehn Bänden, ed. Wilhelm Weischedel, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, vol. 3: 111 sqq.

ness, begins with the word. However, sensation exerts a steady background pressure in the direction of scepticism because our senses are but an evolutionary accident (*Zufallssinne*).

Thus, for Mauthner, perception is, *ab initio*, *beigemischt* with judgement. In this way he seems to be circumventing Kant's problem, how is it possible for public judgements to be made up out of private materials. For Mauthner, judgements occur as items in the psychological biographies of real persons. Thus, we have public or intersubjective judgement but it is now impossible to endow it with objective validity, if this is to encompass truth. Mauthner's judgement is a mental item and as such it is afflicted with the privacy of such items. (In German, the term '*Urteil*' makes this plausible enough and Kant got a lot of mileage out of this fact, in his '*Kritik der Urteilskraft*'.) Mauthner's judgement is contained in the word since by identifying something as a horse I cannot do without the word "horse", as only by means of it can I *judge* that this is a horse. We could say, that *contra* Kant, Mauthner did not see judgement as a vehicle of truth. Rather he saw it as a sort of semi-intelligent perception, along the lines made familiar by the psychology of *Gestalt*, though it seems clear enough that Mauthner (1923–24: 499) was not familiar with it. I say *semi*-intelligent, because the perception of the *Gestalt* is also responsive, and so we could say that it is a kind of unconscious *Vorstellung*.

Kant's classification of *Vorstellungen*, with which I began this section, was meant to delimit *ideas*, so that they may be distinguished from that class of *Vorstellungen* which constitute knowledge. Mauthner makes no such distinction. For him all concepts are *fictions*, the differences between them being not epistemic but pragmatic (see below 5 and 8).

To sum up so far: our request for knowledge and truth makes us examine the equipment by means of which we are supposed to attain and express them. Our equipment belongs to, and bears the marks of, an accidental creature in the evolutionary process, whose immediate and inarticulate contact with its environment is through senses developed contingently, through the same process (*Zufallssinne*) (cf. Weiler 1970: 59ff.). Our means of expressing what we perceive are linguistic and there is no correspondence between what there is (facts) and what we say about it (sentences). Language is an all-important means of orientation and survival but not more than that. It is made for truth.

Epistemologically this is a no-win-position. However, Mauthner is in a strong position when he points out that all would-be bridges from human nature (*hominism*) to truth are inevitably failures. Mauthner's central thesis is that the cause of this failure is inattention to, and misunderstanding of, the nature of the point of contact viz. language. To redress this omission is the task of the *critique of language*.

## 5 Semiotics

Formal semantics or semiotics is the all-inclusive name for the study of linguistic symbols. Since C.W. Morris it is customary to divide it into (a) syntax, the study of the relations between symbols and of the rules which govern these, (b) semantics, which deals with the interpretation of symbols, both reference and meaning (cf. Quine 1953: 130ff.) and, finally (c) pragmatics, whose business is to inquire into all matters related to the use of symbols.

Naturally enough, Mauthner would not tolerate such a clear-cut classification. However, the term 'semantics' was known to him and a short quotation might indicate the sense in which he used it and, at the same time, also highlight his naturalistic conception of symbols. He says (Mauthner 1923 b: II 194; cf. I 149):

Our dogs are so intelligent that they can play, lie and steal. It is true enough that animals do not possess human concept-language; yet, we know next to nothing about how far animal semantic goes i.e. the use of signs for the purpose of remembering for oneself and for communication.

Mauthner was also familiar with the *significs* of Lady Welby and praised her for distinguishing between the standard meaning, the individual meaning and the value-meaning of the same sign (Mauthner 1923 b: I 150).

*Mauthner's view on syntax* is that grammatical categories, linguistic rules and logic, are but accidental historical products. In this he is in discord not only with contemporary deep-structure theorists but also with what Leibniz had to say on the matter (see 6 below).

*Mauthner's view on semantics* is a) that meaning is an accidental product of our changing attentions, historically and culturally determined and that b) reference is never successful in the strict, clear-cut sense but only pragmatically (see below 7.1 and 7.2).

*Mauthner regards pragmatics* as primary since his whole view of language is informed by the insight that language is a tool of orientation in our environment, a tool of survival for the species and of success in action for the individual, so that all other aspects of language, syntax and semantics included, are derivative of it (see 7.3 below). As said, this threefold division is not Mauthner's own, even though he was aware of syntax, semantics, and pragmatics as aspects of the concrete situation of *language-in-use*.

## 6 Syntax

Mauthner holds that syntax is an accidental historical and social product. This is why a very large part of his writings on the subject is given over to the recording of differences between languages, especially about the interchangeability of grammatical categories. Thus the notion that emerges supreme is 'convention' and here, like in other parts of Mauthner's philosophy of language, the notion of '*Spielregel*' (Mauthner's original invention!), is of central importance. This notion means that rules are but factual regularities which facilitate communication and whose status is due in its entirety to the recognition accorded to them by the "players".

The chief target of the critical implications of what I just said is the doctrine, in all its varieties, that the rules of syntax somehow resemble, or are isomorphous with, the structure of reality or of reason. For it is a consequence of the psychologism of Mauthner that even if the rules of syntax, like other rules of language and of logic, were uniform in all mankind (which they are not), this would at most exhibit something about the human mind naturalistically conceived. Consequently, such uniformity would have nothing to say about reality or reason. So Mauthner is inclined to emphasize the importance of *Sprachgefühl* and so he rejects the very notion of the 'inner form' introduced by Humboldt (cf. Weiler 1970: 21ff.), just as he would nowadays be committed to rejecting all doctrines about deep structure.

Generally speaking, Mauthner thinks that differences are more important than similarities. He regards, with Sextus Empiricus, actual usage as the standard of correctness and he is fond of musing about what kind of logic the Chinese would produce (cf. Mauthner 1923 b: 324f.). He makes no distinction between rules of grammar and rules of logic (he does not seem to have been acquainted with Frege or Russell), – for him both are just summaries of how people, this or that people, have thought over the generations. Only success in communication matters and what we take to be rules of syntax are nothing but the codifications of habits of communication that have been found effective and successful. As a source of knowledge about the world, syntax is worthless.

## 7 Semantics

I follow here Quine's (1953: 130ff.) classical division of the field. In 7.1 I shall deal with Mauthner's theory of meaning, including some remarks about synonymy and analyticity. In 7.2 there will be a discussion of Mauthner's theory of reference, with remarks about truth and naming. I shall essay also a possible Mauthnerian confrontation with the current theories in the field which operate with truth-conditions.

### 7.1 Meaning

The chief concept of Mauthner's theory of meaning is that of a *game*. Language-users are like players joined in a game. Indeed, it was from Mauthner that Wittgenstein got the idea of *Sprachspiel*, only Mauthner's notion is more ambitious. In bare essentials it amounts to this (cf. Weiler 1970: 116–126): Living beings, such as people, might have a similar physical-mental make-up, and as a consequence also similar experiences, and they express this similarity by establishing more or less fixed meanings to more or less similar sounds and marks, to the some "words". Our ability to play this *Gesellschaftsspiel* is just our ability to communicate with each other as part of our effort aimed at cooperating for the sake of survival.

It is easy to see, even from this inevitably unfair sketch, that an essential element is missing from this theory. Mauthner has no account of how, in the first place, sensation is metamorphosed into language-items, of how the *Vorstellung* is linked to the judgement which alone makes the sensation meaningful for us. Mauthner knew that something was missing here, that the inarticulate and the articulate are linked by a "black box" of sorts (cf. Cassirer 1953 a: 188f.; cf. Weiler 1970: 319ff.) (see above 3). Einstein too knew that there was no rule which is to tell us how to connect an observation with the observation-statement it occasions.

Synonymy is part of the theory of meaning and Mauthner, in consistency with his emphasis on language as something the being of which is in its use, flatly denies that there are any synonyms at all. Even though the dictionary may list words as synonyms of each other, yet "concrete language knows not and cannot know duplications" (Mauthner 1923 a: 62; cf. Weiler 1970: 162ff.). Language *in use* naturally eliminates synonyms, for words are tools and these tend to specialization. In a way, perhaps even the "same" word is not quite the same in all its tokens.

Perhaps no part of Mauthner's philosophy of language shows so clearly both its strength and its weakness as what he has to say about sameness of meaning, of tautologies and of analyticity (cf. Weiler 1970: 228–243). This is explained by his dominantly epistemological-psychological, indeed psychologicistic, orientation. In accordance with his doctrine about the socialization of experiences (above 6), he holds that there can be nothing truly new in well-socialized linguistic *Spielmarke*. Since we associate with words known experiences, statements state what we already know and are thus tautologies. In this way, for those who already know it, "dogs have four legs" is a tautology. In this sense, there are only synthetic "moments" in life at the instant, when a new discovery is made. In those rare moments there perhaps even synthetic statements but once the discovery is habituated into the common fund of accepted knowledge, then the later articulation of the once new discovery becomes also analytic. On the other hand, seemingly analytic statements, even of the Form "A=A", can be synthetic *in use* (cf. Mauthner 1923 c: 359f.), a point in which Mauthner insightfully antici-



pated Wittgenstein's saying that "'War is war' is not an example of the law of identity either" (cf. Wittgenstein 1959: II.xi.221; cf. Weiler 1970: 235).

It is clear enough that this is no satisfactory theory of analyticity. But then it was Quine (1953: 138 & passim) himself who pointed out in what unsatisfactory state the whole business of analyticity is in, and things have not significantly improved since he said this. I think Mauthner can be credited with having dealt with the dilemma of analyticity by opting for one of its horns. For the basic problem about statements being analytic or not is whether terms *mean* the same or not. Difficulties arise because *meaning* can neither be detached from, nor entirely be attached to, what people *mean*. Now, Mauthner, instead of holding firm to the ideal of analyticity by somehow explaining away what people *mean*, opted firmly for explaining analyticity by reference to what people actually do mean. Thus statements are analytic or not by the criterion of the utterer's state of mind viz. his state of knowledge: it is possible that a statement may be analytic for you but synthetic, because containing new information, for me. Thus analyticity is turned, from being a purely linguistic notion ("analytic-in-L") into a psychological-epistemological notion ("analytic-for-P" where P is a person).

## 7.2 Reference

If Mauthner is perhaps out of step with current thought about analyticity, because he links the notion to language-users and not to languages, he can certainly be seen as a pioneer of sorts of the notion that truth is always truth-in-L (cf. Quine 1953: passim). I say "of sorts" for, as we shall see, Mauthner's assertion of the inevitable linkage between truth and language was taken by him not as a solution but as *the* problem.

According to Quine (1953: 130) "the main concepts in the theory of reference are *naming*, *truth*, *denotation* (or truth-of), and *extension*". Stated somewhat simple-mindedly, there would be no problem about reference if our language were such that it contained one name for every existent thing and not more than one name and if, further, it contained no names for the non-existent. If these "legitimate" names were now combined in language in the same way as they are combined in reality, isomorphically, then we should have a language so perfect that the nature of reality could be read off it. That this is a poor sort of phantasy is realized by philosophers at least since Plato composed his *Kratylos* and Leibniz conceived the idea of a *characteristica universalis*.

Mauthner knew that naming was not that simple. In accordance with his doctrine about the primacy of use, he notes that *in use* there is not even a clear distinction to be drawn between proper names and class names. Moreover, the idea that proper names somehow just refer is false. For proper names too have *Vorstellungen* associated with them and these supply the stuff of "the meaning" of proper names. Therefore, names have no special status in language, they are not particularly informative about what there is: they are like other words and what they actually are is to be determined, in each case, by attending to their use.

In principle, this should be the way of Mauthner in the theory of truth as well. Still, he had to admit that there was something special about the difference between truth and falsity since this difference is the focus of all epistemology and metaphysics. Truth is about the world, there is some fact which makes true what we say and there is also the question of how we recognize this. Mauthner readily asserted that truth is a matter of language (cf. Weiler 1970: 206ff.) and quoted enthusiastically the dictum of Hobbes: "Verum et falsum attributa sunt non rerum sed orationis" (Mauthner 1923 a: 693). In this sense too, Mauthner was certainly among the first who could be said to be advocating that truth should always be understood as

truth-in-L. He went even so far as to say that truth was nothing but the common use of language (*gemeiner Sprachgebrauch*) (cf. Mauthner 1923 a: 694f.; cf. Weiler 1970: 215). Mauthner's argument for this position is simple enough: if truth is meant to be a kind of correspondence, well, there is nothing to compare our *Vorstellungen*-cum-judgements with but themselves and this is done by reference to the use that terms have in our language. This is another way of saying that since there is no access to translanguistic truth, there is no such concept *for us*. This, then, is a theory of truth. It tells us what makes statements true and how we recognize this. However, since both these moments occur within language, we have no notion, could have no notion, whether things are really the way we say they are. If we now add to all this all we know about the contingent and limited nature of the human organism, it is reasonable to assume that things are not at all the way we say they are. What, then, is special about truth is that with respect to this concept, our linguistic usage and what we know from philosophy, is at variance. Philosophy tells us that truth is *in-language* while what we mean when we use the term 'truth' is something that points beyond language. This circumstance makes the theory of Mauthner, like that of theorists who locate truth *in-language*, not a little counterintuitive. For it is the import of such theories that the expression "how things are" is, strictly speaking, devoid of meaning unless it is meant in some language L. If things are such that p is true-in-L then it is quite possible that things are such that p is false-in-L+. Thus, what 'p' means is language-relative. As a recent text-book states the presently "ruling" doctrine: the truth is what a theory of sense is a theory of (cf. Platts 1979: 61f.). The difference between Mauthner and this theory which links sense with truth-conditions in some L, is that the latter theory does not allow any notion of some L-independent truth. Mauthner at least hankered after such truth and when offering his theory of truth, linguistic conventionalism, he knew he was presenting a substitute and not a solution. Were he now presented with the current doctrine, I guess he would reject it on the ground that it commits the same fallacy as the ontological argument or the paradigm-case argument viz. that it leaps from the meaning of some terms to an assertion about how things are in reality.

As stated in the introduction, Mauthner was a very traditional philosopher, rather platonic in his philosophical passions. Perhaps I should have said that he was Aristotelian, since he could never rid himself of the vision of a true classification of things, and was therefore never satisfied with the conventional game of assigning class-labels according to our needs and convenience. He criticized anyone who would delude himself with less and who would declare himself satisfied with less. There was a bit of Don Quixote in Mauthner.

## 8 Pragmatics

Mauthner's position may appear here somewhat paradoxical. As we have seen, he emphasized, at the expense of the then current notion of "correctness", the overriding importance of success in communication and yet, nowhere in his writings does he pay sustained theoretical attention to the investigation of success and failure. There are, of course, illustrations in plenty, rather in the spirit of anecdotal exemplifications, but no pragmatics à la Morris. Mauthner treated success and failure in communication as belonging to the study of meaning since, for him, inevitably unsuccessful utterances, those which cannot be understood in a language-community, were devoid of meaning.

Perhaps inconsistently, he voiced a low opinion about pragmatism. He said that if it were true, then "all prejudices and mistakes which ever played part in the mad history of mankind,

such as the belief in the Devil, have been true” (Mauthner 1923–24: 570f.). Mauthner was a conventionalist, true enough, but he always raised his epistemological sights higher than more convention. At heart he was an *Aufklärer*.

## 9 Judgement and Objectivity

Kant sought objectivity by means of the objectivity-making power inherent in judgement. By distinguishing between “this feels f-ish” and “this is f” he focused attention upon the claim to universal assent implicit in the second expression. All this, roughly speaking, presupposed a psychology whose basic concepts of gradation were sensation, perception and judgement. We have seen in 4 above that Mauthner was no adherent of this gradation. Rather he held that as soon as I use the word “f”, I am *already past* making a judgement. I identify something as an f and therefore this identification is subject to the vagaries of my psycho-physical make-up and is not a means of transcending it. The inner event which underlies the identification is an experience-cum-act which Mauthner calls paying attention (*aufmerken*) (cf. *ibid.*) to some similarity or feature of the situation.

Judgement, then, is no stepping-stone to objectivity and truth. On the contrary, if we understand, as Mauthner would wish us to, what judgement actually is, we must think of judgements as if they were some kind of natural events. Contingent judgements are part of my biography while the “necessary” or “most reliable” ones may be explicable in terms of our phylogenetic make-up. The light that is shining from the fascinating discoveries of ethology, together with the argumentations of evolutionary epistemology, may yet, by reflection, make Mauthner’s philosophy of language shine with a new brilliance.

## 10 Scepticism

What is the philosophical point of concerning ourselves with language? It is essential to the philosophical tradition of the subject that the philosopher’s concern differs from that of the linguist, the lexicographer, the grammarian etc. Ryle made a lot of this point, while Austin thought that out of his kind of labours may grow a new science of language. The current philosophy of language, though more technical than its immediate predecessors, is still readily distinguishable from non-philosophical inquiries into language. What then is the point of it all?

It seems to me that there are certain considerations with regard to meaning, truth, knowledge, doubt etc. of which we are permanently aware. Kant redrew the map by limiting the knowable to the phenomenal and language-minded philosophers tended to substitute the linguistic for the phenomenal. And there is, of course, the old dark horse which still gallops after: the truth. These options are various possibilities to deal with the idea of a translinguistic truth. The emergence of one way of thinking over another, in this domain, is not so much the consequence of some knock-out arguments as of a shifting of attention, of a different apportioning of weight and importance, to some of those considerations of which we are permanently aware. This state of affairs may be described as change in the fashions of philosophy. Looked at it in this way, the naturalistic explanation of knowledge, common to Mauthner, ethology and evolutionary epistemology, may yet return to occupy the centre of the philosophical stage. Naturally enough, even this would not amount to a complete vindication of

Mauthner. To put it bluntly: should naturalism prevail, “truth” will be a loser and if we are to go by the lessons of history, it is unlikely to stay loser for very long. Kant took science for granted to the extent of dogmatism about it. Mauthner never doubted that the key to all “knowledge” is language, and that psychology is the key to the understanding of language. This position has its limitations, like any other, but it is not foolish.

The enduring importance of Mauthner seems to be that he offers us a theory which emphasizes the importance of some considerations of which we are permanently aware and which we can ignore only at our intellectual peril. Mauthner asked the question, whether language was a tool suitable for the attainment of knowledge; he answered his question in the negative, as a sceptic. It is not a question ever to be ignored.

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