CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The general purpose of this book is to develop an understanding of the human situation. I will argue that the key to understanding the human situation is to realize that,

LANGUAGE IS DUPLICITOUS

The specific purpose of this book, then, is to establish this one point of fact, and to explore its implications.

In framing this endeavor, the first premise I want to lay down is this: If we want to understand the human situation, we must orient our endeavor correctly in relation to the central and most dominant fact of the human situation.

What is this central and most dominant fact of human life? It is this: There is a mysterious force at work in human life that causes confusion, erroneous thinking, misguided behavior, and suffering. As I will show below, if it is not already obvious, the normal human situation in all cultures and throughout all history is dominated by this chronic tendency to confusion and suffering. This troublesome tendency only infects human life, but it infects every aspect of human life. There is no aspect of human life that is not subject to this strange human disorder. So the central and most dominant fact about the human situation is that human life is dominated by this distinctively human malady.

The human tendency to confusion is something like a gravitational force that governs the realm of what is specifically human, and only what is specifically human. It governs every human urge, taking control of it as soon as it is born, confusing it, turning it away from satisfaction, and inclining it toward dissatisfaction and suffering. The tendency to confusion is to the human realm as gravity is to the physical realm. Thus, as physical gravity governs the physical life of human beings, so does this confusing gravity govern the mental life of human beings. And so, just as physical gravity is the central force of physical life on this earth, so is this confusing gravity the central force of mental life in the human realm.

Given this fact, this most central and most remarkable gravitational force, which so dominates the human situation, one would naturally assume that scientific studies of the human situation would take it as the central point of reference in their endeavors to make sense of the human situation, all the
more so since it is so distressing. But what is perhaps the most strange thing of all about this strange feature of the human situation is that the purportedly scientific studies of human nature have, almost without exception, systematically ignored it.

Just think of the enormity of this systematic ignorance. It would be as if the science of physics had tried to make sense of the physical universe while ignoring the force of gravity. Imagine where the science of physics would be today if it had totally ignored gravity. And that is about where the humanistic sciences are today. You can read the mainstream literature in psychology, anthropology, sociology, history, political science, economics, etc. and you will rarely find even so much as a mention of the fact that human beings are dominated by the perverse tendency to confusion and suffering. I suggest that this is why the humanistic sciences are so profoundly confused theoretically, and so utterly useless practically. I suggest that this is why the humanistic sciences have remained at the level where physics was before Galileo, i.e., in the Dark Ages.

So the basic premise of this book is that the central and most dominant fact of human life is that human life is dominated by this strange tendency to confusion and suffering. And it follows that, while it may not be a pleasant subject to contemplate, it is a fundamental strategic error to ignore this central fact of human life. Therefore, instead of ignoring this fact, I hold that the scientific study of human nature should focus upon this fact and take it as the central fact of any endeavor to make sense of the human situation.

In the context of a frame of reference that takes this fact as the central reference point, the next purpose of this book is to assert that the perverse tendency that plagues the human species is a function of language, which is the other thing that is uniquely characteristic of the human species. More specifically, I assert that language is problematic in this way because it is duplicitous. Therefore, I argue that the scientific study of human nature should be centered upon language. And the study of language should be centered upon the duplicity of language.

Let me briefly describe how these three basic elements fit together to frame the normal human situation. To begin with, it is a fact that people commonly believe in their language. At least normal people do. They believe that their language is an honest and reliable broker of reality. They believe that their language represents reality faithfully. They believe they can transact in reality through the representations of their language. So they believe in the representations of their language. They accept the representations of their language at face value and they rely on those representations. They count on those representations. They invest themselves in those representations. They build their conceptualization of themselves and of reality on the basis of the representations of their language. They build their worldview in the representations of language.

This common belief in the beneficial nature of language is found in all languages and so it can be characterized as the foundation of the universal folk theory of language. Or in simpler terms, the naive belief in the representations of language is the foundation of language. That is, language is sustained by people’s common belief in and trust of it. Language exists in the realm of naive belief. The substance and the value and the power of language is a function of people’s common belief in and trust of their language.

And since language is the framework in which we construct out individual identity and our other social and cultural institutions, this folk theory of language is also the basis of individual identity, and the basis of other social and cultural institutions. Subscribing to this folk theory of language
is the very essence of the social contract. Thus this folk theory of language is the basis, not only for primitive and old fashioned systems of thought, such as mythology and magic and folk-science, but also for more sophisticated and modern systems of thought, such as history and technology and scientific science. And of particular relevance, this unconscious universal folk theory of language is the basis of the modern scientific theory of language. That is, generally speaking, linguists are like other scientists, and like historians, and like other folk, in that they also believe in and trust the representations of their language. Consequently, the prevailing modern scientific theories of language, like the prevailing modern scientific theories of everything else, have been established on the basis of the universal folk theory of language which all normal people hold in common.

As is implicit in the foregoing, the basic purpose of this book is to point out that there is a universal folk theory of language and that this universal folk theory of language is naive and gullible. While this claim might seem outrageous, and indeed I agree that it is outrageous, the question is whether it is true. And the blunt truth is that the normal conventional world view is fundamentally framed by the naive belief in the representations of language. But it should not be surprising that the common folk theory of language should be naive and gullible when you realize, as I will explain below, that each of us developed this folk theory of language when we were helpless infants. In accord with the saying “The child is father to the man”, we developed the basic framework of our theory of the universe, our theory of ourselves, and our theory of language, etc., when we were naive and gullible infants. So, while it is outrageous in one way, in another way it is quite natural that, if we have never revisited our most primitive assumptions, we should find ourselves as adults still holding on to an infantile worldview.

But now that we are adults, now that we can stand on our own two feet, now that we can eat meat, now that we have suffered from our infantile theories for so many years, it is high time that we subject our basic beliefs to critical scrutiny. And I am arguing that this critical scrutiny should begin by bringing into question our blind faith in the credibility of the representations of language. I will show that when we do critically investigate the representations of language it becomes clear that language is not an honest and reliable broker of reality. It becomes clear that, on the contrary, language is essentially duplicitous. And so it becomes clear that it is a profound mistake to take the representations of language at face value. And therefore it becomes clear that the universal folk theory of language, and everything that is conceptually downstream from that theory, must be reframed on the basis of the realization that language is essentially duplicitous.

The purpose of this book, then, is to assert, contrary to the common folk theory, and contrary to prevailing linguistic theory, that language is essentially duplicitous. And, of course, to give evidence to prove that language is duplicitous. And to show how language works duplicitously. And to begin to explore the implications of the duplicity of language. And to begin to reconstruct a more adequate understanding of language and of the human situation in general on the basis of the realization that language is essentially duplicitous.

So the central point of this book is that language is duplicitous.

Some Common Misunderstandings

Because of the nature of the belief I am trying to call into question here, because it is normally an unconscious belief, because it is such a primitive belief, and because it has such far reaching consequences, it is not easy to appreciate the implications of the point I am trying to make. In the face of
such difficulty the mind automatically tries to find a easy way to understand, or rather, an easy way to
misunderstand. And this tendency to misunderstand is an example of how the duplicity of language
works. Way down deep in the structure of the conventional mind, institutionalized in language, is an
erroneous policy which leads us to accept the representations of language at face value, and thus to
systematically misunderstand things. So it might be helpful at the beginning for me to speak to some
of the common initial misunderstandings which I have encountered.

The first type of confusion I usually encounter is that people think I cannot mean what I have
said - that language is duplicitous - so they try to help me to state my point more accurately. They
suggest that perhaps what I mean is that language is ambiguous. Or, perhaps what I mean is that lan-
guage can be used to lie, which everyone would concede, but surely not that language is always false.
Or, they concede that language is not perfect, but point out that it helps us to understand things, and it
would be impossible to live without it, so it would be foolish to throw the baby out with the bath
water. And having thus helped me to clarify my point, implicitly or explicitly, then they can dismiss
my whole argument as the work of a person who cannot tell the difference between ambiguity and
falsity, who is cynical, and who goes to extremes.

In reply to this confusion, first let me point out that it is not cynical to permit yourself to
become aware of a problem. It is realistic. And it is a necessary condition of solving a problem. So
what is at issue is not whether it is cynical to hold that language is duplicitous. The question is
whether language is duplicitous or not. It is an empirical question. And to evade the question is the
opposite of cynical, i.e., naive.

Second, I have not suggested throwing language out. I did not say that language is bad
because it is duplicitous. I said that language is problematic because it is duplicitous. I am not saying
that language is necessarily problematic. I am saying that it is problematic in so far as people think it
is not duplicitous and thus do not know how to interact with it correctly. So I am not suggesting that
we throw language out, but rather that we learn to understand what sort of thing language is and how
to use it.

Finally, let me assure the reader that I have formulated the basic point I am making with great
care. That is, I have intentionally chosen the verb “is” and the adjective “duplicitous.” I mean to
assert precisely that language is duplicitous, not merely that language can be duplicitous, nor merely
that language can be used duplicitously. And I mean to assert precisely that language is duplicitous,
not that language is false, not that language is ambiguous, not that language is vague. I am asserting
that language is duplicitous, intrinsically, necessarily, by its very nature. I am asserting that, as water
is wet, as fire is hot, so language is duplicitous.

The predicate of this proposition is the word “duplicitous.” So obviously, an appreciation of
the meaning of this word is the key to understanding the point I am trying to make. This is an ordi-
nary English word, and I mean it in the ordinary sense, but I am elevating this ordinary word to the
level of a technical term in the theory of language. And I am positing this word as the seminal con-
cept at the very root of the theory of language, and I am asserting that this ordinary word precisely
characterizes the ontology and the logic of language.

I will undertake a detailed analysis of the word “duplicitous” in the section entitled “An Analy-
sis of the Duplicity of the Word “Duplicitous”” beginning on page 222, but for now I will just mention
the three basic characteristics of a duplicity:
1. There are two levels in a duplicity.
2. There is a relation of priority between the two levels, i.e. one is first, the other is second.
3. The second of the two levels is false in relation to the first.

Let us consider a specific example of an ordinary type of duplicity, a metaphor. Suppose I say, "Bob is a gazelle," meaning to assert, not that Bob is a gazelle, but that Bob can run fast. In this case,
1. The two levels involved are the literal and the metaphorical
2. The literal usage is first and the metaphorical usage is second
3. The second is false in relation to the first because from the literal point of view it is false to say that "Bob is a gazelle" means "Bob can run fast." In other words, Bob is not literally a gazelle, so it is literally false to assert that he is.

I will represent the two levels of this metaphor, and metaphor in general, and duplicity in general as in Figure 1 below.

**FIGURE 1. A Representation of the Logic of Duplicity**

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Now that we have this concrete example of linguistic duplicity before us, we can address a deeper level of misunderstanding that I have frequently encountered. The root of this deeper misunderstanding is an erroneous conceptualization of the relation between the true and the false and the duplicitous. We will be exploring this relation more fully below, but the point I want to make here at the beginning is that, while duplicity is a species of falseness, a duplicity is not simply a falsity. Indeed, I will argue that there is no such thing as a simple falsity. But in any case, the point is that what makes a duplicity precisely a duplicity, as distinct from a falsity, is that it is both true and false. So it is an error to hold that a duplicity is just plain false. Whether a duplicity is true or false depends on how you take it.

Our metaphorical example makes this point clear. In saying that this metaphor is duplicitous I am not saying that it is simply false, but that it is false from a certain point of view, namely from the literal point of view. But while it is false from the literal point of view, it may well be true in the metaphorical sense. If Bob is fast, then it is true, metaphorically. But false literally. So a metaphor can be
both true and false, depending on what level you look at it from. And what I am asserting is that this applies *mutatis mutandis* to duplicity in general, and thus to every element of language.

So to those who naively attack my argument by arguing *reductio ad absurdum*, “Are you saying that there is nothing good about language and that we should not use language at all?”, I reply, “That would be absurd.” The point I am making is this: because of its duplicitous nature language is a slippery and dangerous thing, a thing of insidious sinuosities, and therefore it is important to understand the nature of language and how it works. I am saying that, just as it is important to understand that fire is hot and to know that it can burn you, so too it is important to understand that language is duplicitous and to know that it can confuse you.

And to those who naively attack my argument by trying to turn it against itself thus, “If you insist that all statements are duplicitous, and hence false, then your argument, your theory, and anything you say about language is also false”, I reply thus. First, as I pointed out above, it is an error to think that a duplicity is simply false. In fact, although every duplicity is false, every duplicity, even the sort of thing that is considered to be a plain lie, also necessarily conveys truth - if you look at it from the right point of view. So in terms of our example, it would be an error to conclude that because the sentence “Bob is a gazelle” is literally false, that it does not convey a meaningful truth functional proposition. It does convey a proposition, namely, “Bob can run fast,” and that proposition may literally be true, but the truth of this assertion depends on the nature of Bob and not on the nature of language. So the point is that the truthfulness of the proposition that is metaphorically conveyed by the sentence is of a different logical type from the truthfulness of the proposition that is conveyed by the sentence on the literal level. I believe this distinction is akin to the distinction logicians make between synthetic and analytic truth. If so, then we can say that this metaphor is analytically false, but it might well be synthetically true. And the same can be said *mutatis mutandis* for all metaphor, and for all of language. Thus it can be seen that this line of attack has no force because it is based on a false premise.

And I might as well deal with a variant of this line of attack which I have encountered. It goes like this:

If every element of language is duplicitous, then the word “duplicitous” is duplicitous. It is a matter of common knowledge that a logically coherent scientific theory cannot be constructed upon the basis of an ambiguous word, much less a duplicitous word; therefore a logically coherent theory of language cannot be based on the word “duplicitous.”

To this argument I reply with two observations. First, I concede that this argument is correct in concluding that the word “duplicitous” is duplicitous. Indeed, it does not go far enough because the fact is that this word “duplicitous” is duplicitous in several different ways. We will explore the levels of the duplicity of this key word in depth in the section entitled “An Analysis of the Duplicity of the Word “Duplicitous”” beginning on page 222, where I will try to make it clear that I found this particular word to be astonishingly appropriate to serve as the basic predicate of a theory of language precisely because it is itself a duplicitous duplicity. Second, in regard to the widely held belief that a proper scientific theory must be based on unambiguous words, I reply that this belief is no more than a naive ideal. If language is essentially duplicitous, then there is no such thing as an unambiguous word. Therefore any theory of anything that is based upon any word or any other symbol necessarily violates this prescription.

Abstracting from these specific misunderstandings, we can extract a general principle that is being misunderstood. The principle is this: If it is true that language, the repository of conventional
wisdom, is duplicitous, then the whole universe of conventional wisdoms must be duplicitous. Therefore, if language is duplicitous, one cannot continue to rely on the same naive and simpleminded way of thinking about language, or anything that is conceptually downstream from language. And the most basic element of this naive thinking is the idea that just because something is duplicitous, or even blatantly false, it is thereby to be rejected as meaningless and useless. The contrary is the case: the very essence of meaningfulness in the realm of language is a function of the duplicity of language. And this duplicitous meaningfulness that is characteristic of language is illustrated by the metaphor represented in Figure 1. This is an example of the type of meaningfulness that is characteristic of language.

So returning to the beginning once again, the point I want to make in this book is that language is of a duplicitous nature intrinsically and necessarily. It is not that we human beings have the option of creating a language that is not duplicitous, although philosophers have spent a lot of effort trying to do just that. The duplicity of language is prior to and independent of our personal desires and our personal intentions and our personal competence. Whether we intend to lie or to tell the truth, and whether we understand or misunderstand what we say or what others say, and whether we manage to use language to our satisfaction or not, the fact is that language is duplicitous because that is the nature of language. When we use language, we use something that is duplicitous. It is inescapable. There can no more be an un-duplicitous language than there can be an un-hot fire.

In this regard, language is like any other natural phenomenon. Water is wet, whether we drink it to satisfy our thirst or drown in it. And fire is hot, whether we cook our food with it or burn our house down with it. So too, language is duplicitous, whether we understand it or get hopelessly confused by it.

However, the fact that the nature of things is independent of our intentions or desires does not imply that the nature of things is outside of the sphere of our interest. On the contrary, if we are to function satisfactorily in this world, we must understand the nature of things. And if this is true of fire and water, which are not inherently troublesome, how much more does it apply to language, which is not only duplicitous, but insidiously duplicitous. So the motive for trying to understand the duplicity of language is greater than that for trying to understand fire and water. Let me spell it out.

If you were in a business relationship with someone whom you trusted, and if he was a double-dealing con man, that would be a problem, and you would want to know about it. And the deeper and the more intimate your involvement with this person, the more serious the problem, and the more important it would be to know about it. So, given the depth and intimacy of our involvement with our language, given that our language, our mother tongue, is the medium in which we have constructed our identity and our world view, given that our language is the medium in which we conduct our business and personal relationships, if language is intrinsically duplicitous, then we confront a very deep and pervasive problem, and it is correspondingly all the more important for us to know about it. The problem is that it is an error to naively believe in and trust the duplicitous representations of our language. The bizarre, incoherent, self-destructive character of this error aptly described over a thousand years ago by the sixth patriarch of Chinese Buddhism, Huang Po, who said, “It is like mistaking a thief for your son.” (Blofeld, p. 42) Therefore, I will go so far as to assert that the duplicity of language is the single most important problem for every human being because it not only engenders a world of confusion and suffering on its own, but because it also exacerbates every other problem.
Of course the problem of understanding the duplicity of language can be framed, like all problems, as a scientific problem. But it is important to realize that if we take the scientific approach to the problem that does not mean that it is just an abstract theoretical problem. The fact is that this is a concrete personal problem that goes to the most vital interests of every human being. And what is more it is not just a potential problem like poverty, or cancer, or killer bees, or nuclear war. The problem of the duplicity of language is a vital personal problem that each and every one of us is suffering from at this very moment.

It is important to bear this in mind because the present study of the duplicity of language is motivated at bottom by this immediate concrete ordinary everyday problematicalness. But neither the problematicalness nor the duplicity of language can be understood from the ordinary everyday point of view, for the ordinary point of view is implicated in the problem. The ordinary point of view is the problem. The ordinary conventional point of view is a function of language, so it is conceptually downstream from the duplicity of language, so one cannot comprehend the duplicity of language from that vantage point. When we look at things from the ordinary conventional point of view we are like the proverbial fish in the water who can not see that he is in the water because he is in the water. Therefore, to be able to see and understand the duplicity of language we have to approach it from a more general and more primitive point of view. So although we are motivated by the ordinary problems that are engendered by the duplicity of language, we can best approach those ordinary problems from the extraordinary point of view of the science of linguistics.

Unfortunately, however, the theory of language which currently dominates the science of linguistics is also downstream from the duplicity of language, as I will show below, so we will have to develop a new theory of language based upon the realization that language is essentially duplicitous. So the purpose of this book is to establish the premise that language is duplicitous and to begin to develop a new theory of language on the basis of that premise.

But the point I am trying to stress here is that as we pursue a theoretical understanding of the duplicity of language we must not loose sight of the fact that we are simultaneously pursuing the practical problem of understanding the duplicity of language. There are not two problems and two understandings here, a theoretical one and a practical one, but one problem and one understanding. The disease of duplicity is different from a medical disease, for example, where a theoretical understanding and a cure are two different things. To put it in terms of the ancient distinction made by Socrates, in medicine thései is different from phúsei, but because of the duplicitous nature of language, in language they are the same. The abstract theoretical problem and the concrete practical problem are the same. So in regard to the problem of the duplicity of language, because of the nature of duplicity, understanding is the cure. To understand a duplicity is to master it, to transform it from a confusing and potentially malevolent thing into a benevolent thing, from a poisonous serpent into a nutritious treat. Therefore as we pursue a theoretical understanding of the duplicity of language down into the depths of language let us continually bear in mind that a theoretical understanding of the duplicity of language is the solution to the practical problem of human confusion.

Two Corollaries of the Duplicity of Language

I think it might be helpful in framing this discussion to state the two most important corollaries of the premise that language is duplicitous. First, if language is essentially duplicitous, then language is of a duplicitous ontology. This means that language is not essentially a physical thing, nor is
it essentially a biological thing, but rather language is essentially a truth thing. Therefore, language is not governed by the laws of physical or biological nature, but by the laws of truth. And language is not a function of physical forces, but a function of the force of truth.

Second, if language is essentially duplicitous, then everything in language is duplicitous, and from this it follows that there must be two different kinds of logic. Of course the very idea of two logics would be absurd from the conventional logical point of view, but that is the point of view we are in the process of trying to break free of. And outside of that narrow conventional perspective it is a matter of common knowledge that there are two logics, informally known as rational logic and irrational logic. Technically, the former is known as “symbolic logic”, and I suggest that the latter is the paradoxical logic of duplicity.

The suggestion that there are two logics may come as a surprise to logicians, but not only is it common knowledge that there are two logics, but numerous scholars in various disciplines have been independently led by empirical fact to suggest that there are two logics. I will mention three in passing. First, Sigmund Freud argued that in order to understand human reasoning it is necessary to posit two systems of logic, which he called primary and secondary reasoning. Second, Edward Luttwak argued that in order to understand the realm of strategy one must realize that it is governed by a “paradoxical logic of its own, standing against the ordinary linear logic.” (p. 4) Third, I will show below in Chapter 2 that, as it happens, there is already a well developed theoretical framework which allows for two different kinds of logic and is based upon the logic of duplicity, namely, Peirce’s theory of signs. In Peirce’s theory of signs all signs are generated by an mental, or logical, operation which he called the “cut”; the cut divides the prior universe of discourse thereby deriving a subsequent universe of discourse as represented in Figure 1. So in the theory of signs the duplicity of all signs, and thus of language, is a function of the cut. And thus the logic of all signs, and thus the logic of language, is a function of the logic of the cut, which is the logic of duplicity. So the second corollary is that there are two logics.

And of course many other important implications follow from the fact that language is essentially duplicitous. For example, if one assumes that human psychology is largely a function of language, as I do, then it also follows that the theory of human psychology must be based, not upon the laws of physics and biology, but upon the ontology and logic of duplicity as a function of truth. Thus the elements of human psychology such as “I”, “ego”, and “identity”, for example, must be duplicitous objects. Below I show that, as it happens, Jacques Lacan’s transformation of Freud’s theory of human psychology into the framework of linguistics has gone a long way in the development of just such a theory of psychology.

Another line of implication: If one assumes that human society and culture is largely a function of language, as I do, then it also follows that the theory of society and culture must be based upon the ontology and logic of duplicity. As far as I am aware such a theory has not been developed in any systematic way in anthropology or sociology, though my knowledge of these disciplines is by no means comprehensive. I point out, however, that several different dualistic concepts, such a Pike’s etic/emic, Levi-Strauss’ raw/cooked, Freud’s primary processes/secondary processes, Lacan’s imaginary/symbolic, Jakobson’s similarity/contiguity, and Geertz’ thin description/thick description, to mention just a few, have been used as the framework for the analysis of aspects of society and culture, and all of these dualisms are instances of the logic of duplicity. It would seem that a theory of society and culture explicitly based on the logic of duplicity would be more adequate. And, of course, Lacan’s transformation of Freud’s theory of human psychology also provides the framework for a
theory of society and culture, because, if the pronoun “I” is duplicitous, so is “you” and “he”, and the 
overbearing “they”, and so is the whole fabric of society and culture.

Having pursued the implications of the duplicity of language this far, it is obvious that the 
implications of the duplicity of language radiate out into every aspect of human life. Not only is lan-
guage itself duplicitous, but our conceptualization of our selves and our entire worldview is duplicit-
tous. So there is nothing in human experience that is not at least potentially subject to the duplicity of 
language. Having thus delimited the outer boundaries of the problem of the duplicity of language, let 
us return back to the beginning to consider our approach to the root of the problem, which is the 
duplicity of language.

Establishing a General Frame of Reference

In this section I would like to step back from our narrow focus on the duplicity of language to 
try to develop an appreciation of how the duplicity of language relates to the human situation in gen-
eral. In this way we can establish a general frame of reference in which to orient our inquiry into the 
duplicity of language.

Some twenty years ago, as I was marveling at the depth and the breadth of human confusion 
as it was being played out in my own life at the time, it dawned on me that the reason we have so con-
sistently been frustrated in our efforts to understand human nature is that there is something funda-
mentally wrong with the frame of reference we commonly assume in trying to understand human 
nature.

Perhaps this seems trivially obvious, but let me explain. What became clear to me was that 
there is a pattern to our confusion. It is not chaotic, as it is normally supposed to be. But we do not 
normally notice the pattern precisely because it is contrary to what it is normally supposed to be.¹ The 
normal idea of confusion is this: we understand things in general, but the continuity of our under-
standing is intermittently interrupted by brief episodes of confusion and misunderstanding. However, 
in reality it is just the opposite: we are generally confused about things, particularly in the realm of 
human nature, and the continuity of our confusion is intermittently interrupted by brief flashes of 
understanding that burst mysteriously out of the fog of confusion. The epistemological pattern that is 
normally thought to obtain is just a myth. The epistemological pattern that really does obtain is one of 
continuous confusion occasionally interrupted by flashes of understanding.

In other words, we are not like the normal stereotypical person, for whom getting lost would 
be a rare event that might happen by chance once in a while on the way home from work, but rather 
we are more or less continuously lost, and we only catch a glimpse of home once in a while, fleet-
ingly as in a vision or a dream, but in reality we have no idea where home is or how to get there. We

¹. I use the word “normal” in the literal sense of “in accord with a norm”, where a norm is a conventional rule or law, 
rather than in the statistical sense of “the most frequent”, though sometimes the normal may happen to be the most fre-
quent. An etymological note that is relevant to the present discussion: “norm” is from the Proto-Indoeuropean root 
“gno- “to know” and is thus cognate with “know”, “cognition”, “ignorant”, and Greek “gnosis”. Thus “to be normal” is 
normally confused with “to be known.”
are like the proverbial pilgrim stricken with amnesia in a foreign land who tries to find his way home by means of a compass that systematically points in the wrong direction.

When one comes to realize that confusion and misunderstanding is the norm, that we systematically misunderstand things, especially human nature, and our selves, it is a small step to interpret that systematic misunderstanding as a sign of systematic error. The systematic pattern of our misunderstanding points to some primitive error way down deep in the frame of reference we commonly assume in trying to understand human nature. So the frame of reference, the system of beliefs, which we commonly take for granted is the compass that systematically points in the wrong direction.

Therefore, the practical implication of the pattern of our confusion is that we must sit down right where we are and try to fix our compass before we take even a single step toward home, for although it is true that the longest journey begins with a single step, and although it is true that the sooner we begin the sooner we will arrive, and although it is true that he who hesitates is lost, it is also true that we are already lost and that every step we take in the wrong direction makes the longest journey even longer. This was what dawned on me some twenty years ago as I was marveling at the thickness and richness of the fabric of our confusion.

Since then I have been pursuing the questions that follow from this realization. What exactly is the frame of reference we commonly assume? How is it that we come to subscribe collectively to the same wrong frame of reference? Why do we commonly subscribe to a frame of reference that is wrong? What is wrong with it? And, how can we rectify it?

The Problem with the Normal Frame of Reference

Obviously it will be necessary at the beginning of this book to establish the validity of the premise that there is something fundamentally wrong with the frame of reference we normally assume in trying to understand human nature, or at least to establish the *prima facie* plausibility of this premise as a working hypothesis. But for several reasons I do not think the best way to establish this premise would be to retrace the same line of reasoning that I followed. One reason is this: The line of reasoning that I followed passed through some arcane technical issues in the foundations of linguistic theory, such as the problematic ontology of the phoneme. The point is not that those issues are unimportant nowadays, but that they presuppose a knowledge of the foundations of linguistic theory which would make the argument impossible for a general audience, or even for many linguists, to follow or to appreciate. Another reason is this: I think that it is better in principle to invest effort in developing understanding on the basis of correctness than in trying to reenact the history of our wanderings in the confusion of error. But the main reason is this: After I came to the conclusion that this premise is true by following a long and obscure and convoluted line of thought, I came to realize that, if you stand back and look at the human situation in general from the perspective of the ordinary person, the truth of this premise is perfectly obvious to the ordinary person and the relevant facts are common knowledge. In other words, after I took a long and difficult way to arrive at the realization that the premise is true, I realized that there is a short and easy and better way to arrive at the same place. So the easiest and the most generally comprehensible and the most advantageous ground on which to establish the premise of this book is on the ground of common knowledge. So that is what I will try to do.
The frame of reference we commonly assume in trying to make sense of human nature is basically the conventional frame of reference, which, of course, in our modern cultural milieu is dominated by the scientific frame of reference. The scientific frame of reference has come to dominate our conventional frame of reference for a good reason: because the scientific frame of reference has established a spectacular record of success in making sense of the physical universe, and as a consequence it has enabled us to exercise a previously unimaginable degree of mastery of the physical universe, and thus it has enabled us to attain a previously unimaginable degree of satisfaction of our needs and desires, at least in so far as our needs and desires can be addressed by physical means. In other words, in accord with the pragmatic standard of correctness, the scientific frame of reference is held in such high esteem and is considered to be correct because it works. It satisfies. This is a matter of common knowledge.

But it is also a matter of common knowledge that the scientific frame of reference has a record of failure in understanding human nature with the consequence that after hundreds of years of effort we are no more masters of the human realm, or even of our individual selves, than people were hundreds or thousands of years ago. And there is every reason to believe that after having lived under the government of the scientific frame of reference for a hundred years or so we are just as confused and frustrated and dissatisfied as our ancestors were hundreds or thousands of years ago, if not perhaps more so. This record of failure leads to the conclusion, by the same pragmatic standard that leads us to believe in the correctness of the scientific frame of reference in regard to physical nature, that there is something fundamentally wrong with the scientific frame of reference as it has been brought to bear on human nature. That is, the prevailing scientific frame of reference, which evolved in relation to the study of physical nature, does not work when applied to human nature. It does not satisfy. This too is a matter of common knowledge.

This is not to say that there have been no gains in our understanding of human nature in the prevailing scientific frame of reference. The point is rather that such gains as have been made are fragmentary and disjointed. In other words, many new pieces of the puzzle have been discovered, but the picture of which they are pieces has not become clearer. And these fragmentary discoveries have not contributed in any significant degree to our ability to master human nature in anything approaching the degree to which we have mastered physical nature. In sum, these fragmentary discoveries do not satisfy.

What is more, as the scientific study of human nature has evolved, instead of developing a progressively increasing degree of theoretical coherence, the study of human nature has become progressively more and more fragmented to the extent that today there is no common ground that could be thought of as the foundation of the human sciences. There is, in other words, no such thing as a unified theory of human science in the same sense as there is unified theory of physical science. There is psychology, which includes innumerable conflicting and mutually exclusive schools of thought. There is anthropology, which also includes innumerable conflicting and mutually exclusive schools of thought. There is sociology, ditto. There is linguistics, ditto. There is philosophy, ditto. Etc., etc.

It is this persistent and general pattern of failure and fragmentation, which are the cardinal symptoms of error, and especially by contrast with the pattern of success in making sense of physical nature, that compels the conclusion that there is something fundamentally wrong with the frame of reference that we have been commonly assuming in trying to understand of human nature. So on this
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general level of analysis the purpose of this book is to identify what is wrong with the prevailing frame of reference, to propose a new and better frame of reference, and to begin to explore the human situation as seen from this new and better point of view.

The Paradox of the New and the Old

Before I go any further, however, I must parenthetically address a problem in this statement of purpose. There is an element of confusion in the statement of purpose which is unavoidable because it is intrinsic to the point I want to make here. The element of confusion is that this new way of framing the study of human nature that I want to propose here is not really new at all. Or rather, it is both new and old. Let me explain.

This paradox is a manifestation of the duplicity of language, upon which I want to focus our attention below, but this particular duplicity happens to rise to the level of a crucial issue in the attempt to state the purpose of this book, so it is necessary for me to explain this particular duplicity in trying to state the purpose of this book.

In brief, this paradox about newness vs. oldness is a function of the repressive dynamic of the conventional frame of reference in relation to truth. The conventional perspective known as “history” is inconsistent with truth in such a way that the same truth keeps reappearing over and over again in the dimension of history. (And this is the case whether one is looking at the history of an individual or the history of a society.) So truth is manifest in the dimension of history as repetition. The same old truth keeps reappearing over and over again. But the same old truth that keeps reappearing always strikes us as a new, fresh, vital way of looking at things each time it appears. Let me explain this chronological paradox in terms of the two frames of reference we are considering here (the old conventional way and the new way I am proposing) and then I will discuss an example to illustrate the paradox concretely.

We are considering two different and conflicting ways of looking at things: the conventional way and the other way that I want to propose here. The conventional frame of reference is systematically opposed to the other way of looking at things, just as conventional standards of dress are opposed to nakedness. So the other way of looking at things tends to be excluded from the conventional universe of discourse, just as nakedness tends to be excluded from the universe of public intercourse. As a consequence, this other way of looking at things does not normally appear, at least not in a normal way, in the normal course of human interaction. So whenever we happen by chance to catch a glimpse of someone or something as seen from this other point of view, the abnormality of such a sight is striking, it surprises us, and it seems new.

And yet, in as much as the conventional is systematically opposed to this other way of looking at things, the other way of looking at things is always there under the surface of the conventional, just as we are always naked under our clothing. So this other way of looking at the human situation is really prior to the conventional, just as nakedness is prior to clothing. But the conventional regards the underlying level of phenomena as a dirty secret, and so we are conventionally obliged to participate in a collective conspiracy to keep this underlying level of things hidden from public view, an obligation which places us in a perplexing paradoxical situation such as that portrayed in the fable of the Emperor’s new clothes.1
And what is more, this obligation is not only logically paradoxical, but it is also pragmatically impossible, for no matter how hard we try to cover it up, the underlying is still there. And what is worse, the underlying, being intrinsically mischievous from the conventional point of view, always manages to make itself manifest in the very form of the conventional in many different ways. For example, the shape of the underlying is systematically manifest in and actually governs the general shape of the conventional, just as the topography of the land underlying a city is systematically manifest in and governs the general shape of the city. A city will tend to have hills and valleys where there were hills and valleys before the city was built. The seven hills of Rome were there before the city was founded.

Another example of how the underlying is manifest in the surface of the conventional: the structures that comprise the city, the roads and buildings, are constructed of materials such as bricks, and cement, and steel that are extracted from the earth, materials that were there prior to the city. Another example: little bits and pieces of the underlying intermittently break through the conventional facade to appear naked on the surface, if only for a brief moment, in one or another forbidden form such as insanity, or criminality, or art, or a joke, or a slip of the tongue. Then these conventionally forbidden manifestations are quickly covered up and repressed in one way or another, e.g. by being ignored, disguised, hidden, forgotten, etc., like the proverbial crazy old aunt we keep locked up in the basement when company comes to visit.

Let me briefly discuss an example of this latter kind where the nakedness which underlies the conventional momentarily breaks through to the surface of our interactions. Consider a typical example of the conventional way of insulting someone: suppose Bob says to Jim,

Bob: You are a fool.

And by contrast consider the following dialogue in which Bob does more or less the same thing to Jim, but in another way, a deeper, and more effective, and more satisfying way.

Bob: Do you know how to make a fool wait?
Jim: No, how?
Bob: I will tell you tomorrow.

While these two speech acts might seem to be doing the same on the surface in the sense that they are both insulting, as a matter of pragmatic reality they are radically different in the sense that they do not do the same thing at all. The former speech act merely asserts that Jim is a fool; the latter speech act makes Jim a fool. The former merely represents a state of affairs; the latter actually causes that state of affairs to happen. The former has mere conventional force; the latter has real force. The former is like talking about food; the latter is like eating. The former is like phone sex; the latter is like real sex. The former induces a verbal response; the latter induces laughter. And this difference is encoded in English grammar: we say that Jim is a fool, but we do not say a joke, we make a joke, just as we make love. So the former is an act of saying, while the latter is an act of doing.

1. This obligation is not just a fable. In his insightful and influential analysis of social structure in terms of frames of reference Irving Goffman demonstrated that in order to sustain the normal conceptualization of reality we are obliged to become “collaborators in unreality” which involves adopting an attitude of “voluntary ignorance” on one hand and a willingness to pretend that what we are normally obliged to believe is really true on the other. (Quotes from Frame Analysis p. 46.) And, of course, there are powerful sanctions to enforce this obligation to collaborate in unreality.
On a more technical linguistic level, we can say that although both speech acts use language, what distinguishes a joke from a normal speech act is precisely that a joke uses language, in the derogatory sense of “uses.” A joke takes advantage of language. A joke violates and misuses and exploits language in order to satisfy its own ends, i.e., ends which are outside the sphere of language, and which are therefore generally brutish and uncivilized in some sense or other, and of course prohibited by language. So a joke exploits language to satisfy desires that are prohibited by language and which, not coincidentally, language is incapable in principle of getting at. This is the underlying layer of things we want to try to get at here.

At the level of pragmatic principles then we can characterize the difference as follows. The former is a conventional act, whereas the latter is a strategic act. That is, the former attack is governed by conventional principles, whereas the latter attack is governed by strategic principles. We will return to discuss the pragmatics of the conventional vs. the strategic in more detail below, but to elaborate briefly here, the conventional attack establishes a relation of symmetrical conflict such that Jim can defend himself merely by replying in kind with the same sentence inverted in one way or another, e.g., “I am not a fool” or “You are a fool”. In this way the conventional speech act sets in motion a system of symmetrical exchange which evolves, if that is the word, into a cyclical dialogue of symmetrical reciprocity which results in a theoretically endless series of repetitions of the sort that is common in the arguments of children, as illustrated in the following dialogue, and in slightly more sophisticated ways, in the arguments and wars of adults, of which the trench warfare of World War I is probably the prime example.

Bob: You are a fool.
Jim: No, I am not a fool.
Bob: Yes, you are.
Jim: No, I’m not.
Bob: Are too.
Jim: Am not.

By contrast, the strategic attack begins by establishing a relationship of asymmetrical conflict such that the possibility of conflict is reduced to a minimum. The strategic attack here maneuvers to establish such a relationship by using a seemingly innocent question to lure Jim to take an exposed position, a position which exposes him to the coup de grâce, against which there is no defense whatever, and which brings this speech act to a sudden and complete and natural climax. So whereas the conventional dialogue tends to develop into an endless cycle of symmetrical exchanges, an endless cycle of repetitions, an endless cycle of unsatisfying and inconclusive repetitions, this other way of interacting tends to develop into a climactic and intrinsically satisfying consummation.

So this other way of doing the “same” thing is experienced as a new and pleasurable way of actually doing in reality what the conventional way merely represents. And note that this joke is experienced as new even though it is actually very old.

I hope these brief observations make it clear that this other way of looking at the human situation - in terms of what is really going on under the surface, as distinct from looking at what is conven-
tionally represented on the surface - is a possibility that is necessarily available as alternative underlying the surface of the conventional.

As would be expected then, since this other way of looking at the human situation is not really hidden, except from the conventional point of view (like the nakedness of the Emperor, which is perfectly obvious, his clothes being mere pretense), this other way of looking at the human situation has been rediscovered there under the surface of conventional pretense again and again and again independently in different cultural settings at different times throughout history. We will discuss many examples of the repeated discoveries of this underlying perspective in more or less detail throughout the discussion below.

I mention in passing, for example, *The Concept of Anxiety* written by the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard in 1844 in which he was trying to explain this underlying way of looking at the human situation. He talked about the two ways of looking at the human situation thus:

There is an old saying that to understand and to understand are two things, and so they are. ...for a man to understand what he himself says is one thing, and to understand himself in what he says is something else. (p. 142)

And in keeping with the humorous spirit of this observation, this other way of looking at things is always akin to a joke in that it violates the conventional rules (to say “to understand and to understand are two things” violates the logic of reference in grammar) for the purpose of uncovering a new and fresh and vital and pleasurable way of looking at things, although what is thus uncovered is actually the old way, the way that is prior to the conventional. This is the sense in which this other way of looking at the human situation that I want to propose here is new, and yet it is really old.

In the light of this clarification of the chronological inconsistency between the conventional way of looking at things and the way of looking at things I want to get at here, I will restate the purpose of this book more precisely as follows. The purpose of this book is not exactly to *propose a new* way of looking at the human situation, but rather to *uncover the old* way of looking at the human situation anew.¹ And then, having laid bare the underlying way of looking at the human situation, we will begin to explore the human situation as seen from this new point of view in order to directly experience its validity and its practical utility as a better and more satisfying way of understanding human nature.

**The Three Basic Facts Framing the Human Situation**

The purpose of this section is to establish the three basic premises of the new frame of reference that I am proposing here. I assert that these three premises enjoy the epistemological status of being perfectly obvious, if not technically self-evident, facts. And thus I will assert that this frame of reference enjoys the advantage of epistemological certainty, as well as explanatory adequacy, and pragmatic utility. Therefore, I will refer to the three premises as the three basic facts framing the human situation.

¹. By the way note the implications of the grammar of the determiners here: *a* vs. *the*. It is logically impossible to “propose *the* new”. We will discuss the logic of this difference below.
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As we begin this discussion I will simply state the three facts and then explain in more detail where they come from and how they are interrelated.

1. The normal human situation is a state of chronic confusion and suffering.
2. Language is the root of the human type of confusion, which causes the human type of suffering.
3. Language is confusing because it is duplicitous.

Now let us orient ourselves in this new frame of reference by considering the human situation from the beginning. Let us put aside all of our assumptions about the nature of human nature and about everything else in so far as possible and stand back from the details of the human situation and survey the human situation as if from a great height so that we can try to see the most salient general features of the human situation.

From this panoramic perspective, whether we are looking at the human situation in terms of our personal experience of human life, or in terms of objective scientific data, such as anthropological data, psychological data, sociological data, historical data, etc., or both, I submit that there is one most salient general fact about the human situation, one fact that stands out above all else, one fact that is most remarkable. And, as it happens, this same fact literally cries out for our attention most urgently. I am talking about the fact that the human situation is pervaded by and dominated by a chronic condition of confusion and suffering. Simply put, the normal human situation is a state of confusion and suffering.

In appraising this fact it is crucial to realize that the suffering that is characteristic of the human situation is a special type of suffering that is unique to the human species. The uniquely human type of suffering is not a function of deprivation in regard to some biological need, such as hunger or thirst. All animals, including human beings, experience this biological type of suffering. But the special human type of suffering is not a function of deprivation in regard to anything; it is rather a function of confusion, the special human type of confusion.

So it is also crucial to realize that the confusion that is characteristic of the human situation is a special type of confusion that is unique to the human species. While other animals do experience confusion, their confusion is generally a momentary state\(^1\) and animal confusion is always a function of a conflict precipitated by some real dilemma in their immediate situation. A typical example of animal confusion is that of a deer crossing the road at night who becomes frozen in panic as to whether to go ahead or to go back when he is suddenly dazzled by the headlights of an oncoming car. And, of course, humans can experience this animal type of confusion in similar circumstances. But in contrast, the special human type of confusion is not episodic; it is a more or less continuous state. Also in contrast, the human type of confusion is not a function of conflict in relation to a real dilemma that is present in the immediate situation. This is why the cause of the human type of confusion is obscure and mysterious: it is not present in the immediate situation. To make this point explicit, the human type of confusion is distinct from the animal type of confusion because it is not a

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1. There are a few exceptions to this generalization. For example, in scientific experiments psychologists have been able to cause chronic states of confusion in rats, which they equate with the state of neurosis in human beings, by holding them captive and structuring their living situations so that they are subject to persistent and irresolvable conflict. But this is one of those exceptions that proves the rule, for the point I am making is that being a captive subject to persistent and irresolvable conflict is exactly what causes the chronic state of confusion in human beings.
function of immediate conflict, but a function of mediated conflict. Or in other words, the human type of confusion is distinct because it is not a function of some conflict in relation to the present situation, but a function of conflict in relation to the represented situation. But we are getting ahead of the argument here.

Of course, we all have first hand familiarity with the human type of confusion and suffering, and we will be exploring its depths throughout the course of this book. But just to make sure we have the same thing in mind we will briefly describe it. On the level of mental processes it is manifest, of course, as confusion, which is a type of error in which a person takes one thing as another thing. A confusion is a mistake. So the systemic human confusion is a systemic tendency to mistake and misunderstand things and thus is a tendency to make erroneous judgements and to hold erroneous beliefs about ourselves and human nature and nature in general. Hence, the various well known types of erroneous beliefs that universally plague human kind - superstitions, stereotypes, myths, fantasies, delusions, etc. On the emotional level this human species of confusion and suffering is manifest as a persistent feeling of uncertainty, alienation, anxiety, frustration, disease (in the literal sense of disease), and dissatisfaction. Sometimes it bursts out into episodes of frozen panic or and maniacal rage. And on the level of overt behavior this human species of suffering is manifest in chronic muscle tension, in inhibition and incompetence, in inappropriate and unsuccessful acts, in strange and pointless acts of violence against self and others. In general human confusion is manifest in a persistent tendency to behave in ways that are contrary to our own best interests.

In regard to the question of the proof of the validity of the foregoing view of the human situation, or in other words, in regard to the question of the epistemological status of these supposed facts, I would like to make the following points. In the first place, as I said above, I regard it as being perfectly obvious, if not technically self-evident, to every human being that these are facts. As I see it, these are just plain ordinary everyday facts on a par with the fact that the sun comes up everyday, that water is wet, and that fire is hot. It is a fact about human life that people are born, and people die. On the same epistemological level, it is a fact that people are deeply and chronically confused, and it is a fact that people suffer as a consequence of their confusion. We directly experience this confusion and suffering. And our confusion and suffering is as much a part of everyday life as breathing. So in my view, facts of this kind are so obvious that it is somewhat ridiculous to demand proof.

Nevertheless, there are people who would question this view of the human situation. Indeed, there are people who would deny that this view of the human situation is true. Of course, if this view of the human situation is true, it would follow that there would be people who would doubt and deny that it is true, in spite of the fact that it is obviously true. Therefore the fact that there are many people who deny the validity of these assertions is not evidence that these assertions are false, but rather is evidence that they are true. Although, given that these facts are perfectly obvious to begin with, such proof would be superfluous. So for those who realize that the normal human situation is a state of confusion and suffering, the fact that there are others who deny that it is need not be of concern.

And for those who take the contrary view, those who deny or discount the fact that the human situation is a state of confusion and suffering, I suggest two alternatives. One alternative would be for such a person to put this book down and go away and live life for a while. Perhaps, if he is lucky, he will get knocked around enough that he will come to realize that he is wrong. Then he might want to come back and consider the line of reasoning that I am trying to develop here. The other alternative would be to tentatively accept the assertion at issue as a hypothesis and to consider the line of argument that follows and to judge the validity of the hypothesis in accord with the fruit it bears in under-
standing the human situation. The following line of argument is intended to satisfy the desire for proof in this sense, as in the saying, “the proof is in the eating”.

Nevertheless, for the benefit of this latter category of reader I offer the following observations in regard to proof. Speaking from my own personal perspective, one of the few things that I can testify to with absolute certainty is that my personal situation is pervaded by confusion and suffering; Indeed at some stage in the course of my inquiry into this line of thought I came to realize that it is my own personal confusion and suffering that motivated me to pursue this present line of inquiry. And from what I can tell about the people who I deal with directly, family, friends, business associates, clerks in the supermarket, etc., their situations are also pervaded by confusion and suffering. And according to what I can learn from other sources of evidence, some of which I will discuss in detail below, there is an abundance of evidence that it is not just me, and not just those around me, and not just Americans, and not just members of Western cultures, whose lives are pervaded by confusion and suffering, but that the situation of every human being across culture and throughout history is pervaded by confusion and suffering. Therefore, on the basis of the unanimity of the evidence across such a wide range of sources, and especially on the basis of my own personal direct experience, I take it as not only the most salient fact about the human situation, not only the most demanding fact about the human situation, but also as among the most certain facts about the human situation that the human situation is characteristically a state of confusion and suffering.

This is the line of reasoning has brought me to the conclusion that we should take this fact as the first fact framing our conceptualization of the human situation, as the central reference point governing our inquiry into the nature of human nature. So the first fact framing the human situation is this:

THE NORMAL HUMAN SITUATION IS A STATE OF CHRONIC CONFUSION AND SUFFERING

And given this fact as our central reference point, the questions that follow are these: “What causes this chronic condition of confusion and suffering?”, “What is it confusion about?”, “How does it work?”, “Why does it happen?”, and most important of all, “How can we clear up the confusion and alleviate the suffering?”, “Or, is this unhappy state of confusion and suffering intrinsic to human nature?” These are the questions that will be pursuing below.

Now that we have our basic point of reference and the questions that follow from it, we can begin to search for answers. Of course we cannot expect at the beginning of this search for answers, which I will characterize as an archeological search, to be in a position to see what goes on way down deep in the roots of human confusion. We will have to dig down beneath the surface of our confusion layer by layer to uncover the underlying roots of human confusion. But before we can even begin to dig, we must decide where to dig. So we must begin to address the questions posed by the fact of human confusion by trying to locate the area of human life in which we might expect to find the roots of human confusion.

The problem is that there are so many places we might look, and if we look in the wrong place, we could dig forever and never find the answers. For example, we could look into the phases of the moon for the roots of human confusion as the ancients did. (Hence the words “lunatic” and “Luci-
Of course there are many people who still are searching in outer space for the answers to the human problem.

Or we could look into our biological nature. Perhaps there is a special confusion gene that only human beings have. Or perhaps there is some as yet undiscovered gland in human beings that secretes a special confusion hormone. Or perhaps there is some as yet undiscovered corner of the human brain that is the locus of confusion. Or should we look into psychology? Perhaps if we understood more about how rats learn to run through a maze we could discover the cause of human confusion. Or should we look into anthropology? Perhaps if we understood how primitive people manage their sexual relations and how they nurse their young we could discover the roots of human confusion. And so on and so on. The possible places to look are endless. So the problem is to decide where to start digging.

I have spent, one might say “wasted”, a great deal of time wandering around looking in all sorts of wrong places such as these for the roots of human confusion before I found the right place. But, as I said at the beginning, there is nothing to be gained in retracing the specific line of reasoning that I followed (even if it would be possible to pass off my erratic wandering as a “line of reasoning”). It would be better just to go immediately to the right place than to waste even more time here retracing my wanderings in the wilderness of confusion. So instead of talking about the many different wrong places, let us turn our attention directly to the right place.

In accord with my own finding, which is corroborated by a multitude of evidence, as we will see below, the right place to look for the roots of human confusion is in human language. This, then, is what I am asserting is the second fact framing the human situation:

**LANGUAGE IS THE SOURCE OF THE HUMAN TYPE OF SUFFERING.**

Let me state explicitly that I am not saying simply that language causes human confusion. And I am also not saying that the human type of confusion is limited to the realm of language, unless you take language in the largest possible sense. What I do want to say is that language is the means by which we cook our raw perceptions and transform them into civilized forms. Language is the institutionalized embodiment of human confusion. Language is the fabric of our confusion. Language is the city of human confusion, sometimes known as Babel. Language is the very state of the distinctive human type of confusion.

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1. The word “archeology”, like all words, and like language itself, has many layers of meaning. The newest and most superficial meaning of this word is “the study of old things.” It is used in this sense as the name of an academic discipline of study in which people literally dig down under the surface of the earth to discover remains of the past from which they try to figure out what was going on in the past. But taking an older and deeper sense of “arche-” the word “archeology” also means “the study of things of the highest rank.” And in a still deeper sense of “arche-” the word means “the study of the beginning”. And just as “arche-” has several layers of meaning, so too does “-logy.” So taking an older and deeper sense of “-logy” the word “archeology” means “old logic”, or “logic of the highest rank”, or “logic of the beginning”. And taking an even older and deeper sense of “-logy” the word “archeology” means “old word”, or “word of the highest rank”, or “the first word” or “the beginning of the word.” And if we take this latter sense of “-logy”, where it means “word”, metonymically, “archeology” means “the beginning of language.” When I use the word “archeology” here I mean it in all of these senses, but especially in the oldest and deepest sense.
Therefore, if we want to uncover the underlying roots of the human type of confusion, which is the cause of the human type of suffering, we must dig down into the multifarious layers of sedimented conventionality that comprise language. So the practical conclusion of this fact is that we should focus our archeological exploration upon language.

As we turn our attention to language, we must acknowledge that, even with this narrowing of our focus of attention to the relatively small realm of language, it is still a daunting task to try to get down to the roots of confusion, for the realm of language is itself a vast universe of bewildering complexity. Language has baffled and confused the best experts - theologians, philosophers, logicians, linguists, psychologists, biologists, mathematicians, physicists, etc. - for hundreds and thousands of years. Even today with all of our modern methods and devices, our sophisticated mathematical tools like calculus and statistics, electron microscopes, rocket ships, computers, etc., we do not in general understand language much better than Plato or Moses did. Given that this is so, and I will discuss the view of language taken by both Plato and Moses below (Chapter 3), how much more difficult would it be for an ordinary human being to make sense of language.

The pivotal fact about language is that all of us, whether we are a sophisticated scientist or an ordinary person, are normally inclined to avoid dealing with the confusion of language, precisely because it is confusing. But this inclination to ignore the confusion of language is the crux of the problem of trying to understand the roots of human confusion. This is the very point on which our emotional compass consistently points in the wrong direction. So to determine the right direction we must reverse the direction of our normal inclination, because in order to understand our confusion we must focus our attention upon the headquarters of confusion, which is language.

In this regard, the fact that we find language difficult to understand is not incidental to the dynamic of confusion. If, as I am claiming, language is the locus of human confusion, we should expect that we would find language confusing. In the normal, conventional frame of reference the fact that language is confusing is taken as sufficient grounds for ignoring language, so in the normal, conventional frame of reference we ignore language as much as possible. And this normal tendency to ignore language, the very locus of confusion, is the necessary foundation upon which confusion depends. To put it the other way around, the one thing that confusion cannot stand against is the light of awareness, because awareness leads to understanding, and understanding dissolves confusion. By contrast with the normal frame of reference, in the new frame of reference I am trying to develop here, where we have taken the desire to understand the confusion of the human situation as the highest priority, the fact that language is confusing implies that we should look at language precisely because language is confusing.

So the way to dissolve confusion is to pay attention to it, to develop awareness and insight about it, and in the end to understand it. We must realize that our confusion is not really chaotic and incoherent. It is not a dangerous and alien phenomenon. Confusion is organized and structured and it conveys a surreptitious message. This is so because confusion is the underside of language. Confusion is how language works. Thus confusion is organized and structured like language, because it is language. Indeed, just as our nakedness underneath our clothes is really us, so too our confusion underneath our language is really what we mean. Furthermore, it is not just that we want to understand our confusion, but our confusion, which is really our surreptitious original being from which we have been alienated, also wants to be understood by us. This is why the understanding of our own confusion is the only thing that can really satisfy our deepest desire.
And in order to understand our confusion, to understand how confusion works, to understand how to function in the realm of confusion, we have to get into our confusion and become intimately familiar with it. We cannot understand confusion from the outside any more than we can learn how to swim or ride a bicycle by reading a physics book. For this reason, the unpleasantness of a new and bewildering experience notwithstanding, if we want to understand human confusion, we have to jump into the sea of confusion naked and experience it directly. But the fact of the matter is, under the surface of the conventional pretense that we understand who we are and where we are and what we are doing, we are already deeply submerged in the chaotic swirl of human confusion, just as we are already naked under our clothes. So in reality, confusion is not a new bewildering experience, but rather an old, familiar, bewildering experience. Therefore, it is not necessary for us to get naked to the experience of confusion, because we are already exposed to our own confusion. And it is not necessary for us to jump into the sea of confusion, because we are already in it up to our necks, or rather, way over our heads.

So when we stand back and look at our personal situation from a panoramic perspective we find ourselves in the human situation, a situation of chronic confusion and suffering, a situation where our desire to understand the confusion and alleviate the suffering cannot be addressed by choosing anything, much less by actually doing anything, like jumping into it (because we are already in it) or getting out of it (because we do not know how to), or getting naked or putting clothes on, or going somewhere else to find out what it means. So there is no choice and there is nothing to do. The only way that we can hope to satisfy our desire is to understand our situation, the human situation. And the path to understanding the human situation passes through language, the city of human confusion.

Lest we become too discouraged because we are deeply submerged in the confusion of language, a situation which has baffled and confounded many of the best and brightest scholars for hundreds of years, I would like to point out that we enjoy a significant advantage here because we are pursuing a totally different line of inquiry in the context of this new and better frame of reference. For the most part, prior investigations of the human situation in general and of language in particular have framed their undertaking in the context of the commonly accepted frame of reference, which we pointed out at the beginning has been systematically misleading when it comes to trying to understand the human situation. In other words, most efforts to understand language have been based upon a set of assumptions about ontology and ontogeny and phylogeny and logic which are of questionable validity. In fact, I will argue below that at least some of these commonly accepted assumptions are conceptually downstream from language. From this latter point it follows that these assumptions are confused as a function of the systematic confusion of language, and therefore an enterprise that is framed by these premises is not only doomed to end up in confusion (in accord with the common saying, “garbage in, garbage out”), but such an enterprise begs the question.

For example a great deal of effort has been invested in the attempt to make sense of language in terms of its biological foundations. Obviously, such an effort is framed and motivated by the assumption that language has biological foundations. Unfortunately, no significant biological foundations have been found. We will return to discuss this issue in more detail below (See “The Original Linguistic Insight: Language is Neither Organic or Physical” beginning on page 39), but I will point out here that it is a matter of common knowledge that there are no organs of speech in the same sense as there are organs of seeing and of walking. And in spite of the intense desire to find it, there is no structure or subsystem of the brain that is dedicated to language. There is no language gene. There is, in sum, no biological foundation of language. Further, as far as I am
aware, this entire branch of research has contributed very little to our understanding of language. And my estimation is corroborated by the fact that no university in the world, as far as I am aware, requires even one course in biology as part of the curriculum in the study of linguistics. In practice scholars of languages and linguistics rarely talk about biological matters, except of course for those few who doggedly resist the evidence, or rather the lack of evidence. So those who hold this assumption have been frustrated and confused, and have had trouble making sense of the human situation, and of language. I suggest that this is because their assumption that language has a biological foundation is wrong, and needless to say, we are not encumbered by this assumption.

Another example: A great deal of effort has been invested in trying to make sense of human behavior and human thought and human language in terms of rational logic, or, to be more precise, in terms of what is technically known as symbolic logic. The premise underlying this effort is that symbolic logic is logic, the one and only logic, and therefore it must be the logic that governs human behavior, human thought, and human language. This premise has worked out fairly well in so far as it has been limited to the study of reasoning in the abstract, as in highly self-conscious philosophical discourse, in mathematical discourse, and scientific discourse. For example, symbolic logic is the logic of propositional calculus, set theory, mathematics, the artificial languages of logical machines e.g. algorithms, computers, etc. And it seems to have worked out fairly well as a foundation for the theories of physics and chemistry, though I am not personally in a position to judge. But it is pretty hard to hold on to this premise when it comes to human beings because human behavior and human thought and human language simply do not obey the laws of symbolic logic. And it is perfectly obvious to even to the ordinary person that human beings do not in fact obey the laws of symbolic logic. For this reason, the effort to make sense of the human situation in terms of symbolic logic has been disappointing and perplexing. In a frame of reference based on the assumption that symbolic logic is the one and only possible kind of logic, one must conclude that human beings and human language are not logical. From this point of view, it appears that the human sphere is not just illogical, but perversely anti-logical. From this point of view there seems to be some mysterious “X” factor at work in the human realm, which some suggest is emotion, that continuously subverts human thinking and human language. Consequently those who have tried to make sense of human behavior and of language on the basis of this assumption about the nature of logic have been frustrated and confused, and have not been particularly successful. I suggest that this is because their assumption about the nature of logic is wrong, and once again, we are not encumbered by this assumption here.

So as we begin to focus our attention upon language let us bear in mind that we are doing so from a position of advantage in that we are not encumbered by the confusing and impossible obligation to try to find something that is not there, such as a hypothetical language gene, or an idealized rational system of thought. We are trying to find the roots of the concrete fact of confusion in the realm of language, a phenomenon we can see being played out almost continuously before our very eyes, and in our minds, and in our hearts. So we not only enjoy the advantage that we are trying to understand something that is really there, but also we are trying to understand something which is familiar and ubiquitous in our ordinary everyday lives, i.e. human confusion. And we enjoy the further advantage that we are doing so on the basis of our own direct experience as human beings rather than on the basis of a theory or on the basis of an idealized notion about the way people ought to think. So let us focus our attention upon language presupposing only that language is the locus of the human type of confusion.
Now, when we bring our attention to bear on language we encounter a realm of phenomena that is not just naturally complex, but insidiously confusing. Language is elusive and ephemeral and perverse and perplexing. For example, consider the semantics of the word, the basic unit of language. I am sure everyone has had this experience: when we try to figure out the meaning of a word, and we look it up in the dictionary, we are led from one word to another to another until we come full circle and end up back at the word we started with. In the end we are more confused about the meaning of the word than when we began. Not only that but we find that the same word can mean things in many different ways, such as referential meaning, connotative meaning, etymological meaning, metaphorical meaning, idiomatic meaning, colloquial meaning etc., etc. Further, we find that the same word can mean totally different things in different contexts. For example, “duck” can be a noun that refers to a bird that quacks or a verb that means “to get down.” Further, the same word can mean totally different things in different dialects or in different languages. For example, “bonnet” is a kind of hat in American English but the hood of a car in British English. And “nine” in English means “no” in German. So the farther we look into the meaning of words, the less we find, until in the end we are forced to come to the conclusion that the meanings of words is elusive, chaotic, and confusing.

When we try to figure what a word actually consists of, an issue which belongs to the area of phonology, an issue which we will discuss in detail below, we discover that a word does not have any substance at all. In ordinary language we say, “We hear a word”, but strictly speaking we only hear the sound that represents a word, and not the word itself. A word is prototypically represented in the medium of sound, but it can also be represented in the medium of writing or hand gestures or flags or Morse code, etc., but the word itself does not consist of any of these things. The relationship between the stereotypical complex of sound that represents a word in a certain language and the word itself is the same as that between, for example, the United States Senator of a state and the state itself. The Senator of a state stands for that state in the realm of the federal government, but he is not the state. So too a certain complex of sound stands for a certain word in the realm of some particular language, but that sound is not the same thing as the word. The world of representation and the world of being are entirely different worlds, and language belongs to the world of representation, not the world of being.

Consequently, if we try to get a hold of a specific word by capturing its representation as for example by recording the sound of its pronunciation, or grasping the hand that signals it, or by cutting out the bit of paper on which it is written, we will not have captured the word itself. We will have captured a bit of sound or a hand or a bit of paper, but not the word. And whereas in ordinary language we say, “I can erase that word”, in fact no such thing is possible: we can erase the sound or the writing that represents a word, but we cannot erase the word itself. So it is impossible to get a hold of a word in the same way we can get a hold of, for example, a duck: we can grab a duck, and then we can watch it and play with it and teach it to distinguish between blue and red, and the we can cut it open and see what makes it work. By contrast when we try to grab a word, we always end up holding something else. And for good reason: A word exists only in the sense that it is represented, and it must necessarily be represented by something else.

Putting the ontological problem aside for the time being, let us consider how language actually works as the tool which we use in conducting the ordinary business of everyday life - thinking, appraising, judging, deciding, persuading, complementing, commanding, requesting, maneuvering, manipulating, etc. - the area of language known in technical linguistic parlance as “pragmatics”. (See “The Pragmatics of Language” beginning on page 153) Here too we find that language is not just
complex, but is insidiously perverse. Language often seems to have a mind of its own: Not only does language often fail to do what we send it off to do, much like our Senators, but it frequently does something entirely different from what we want it to do, and it sometimes does exactly the opposite of what we want it to do. As one comes to appreciate the depth and the breadth of the perversity of the pragmatics of language, one begins to wonder: Is language is a tool that people use, or are people a tool that language uses; Do we speak language, or does language speak us?

For example, Shakespeare has immortalized the Me-thinks-the lady-doth-protest-too-much effect, whereby the more forcefully we try to deny something the more we end up persuading the other to believe it is true. The inverse happens as well: the more forcefully we try to persuade the other that something is true, the more we engender doubt. Similarly, as anyone who has raised children can attest, the more directly and the more forcefully we command obedience, the more likely we are to induce disobedience and the more stubborn the disobedience will be. Similarly, the more we try to explain a misunderstanding, the deeper the misunderstanding gets. This is best exemplified by the well known impossibility of explaining a joke: the more you explain a joke, the less possibility for it to be funny. Another way of saying the same thing: Brevity is the soul of wit.

Compliments are a notoriously volatile type of speech act: the slightest degree of excess enthusiasm or inappropriateness can convert an intended compliment into an insult. For example, a professor could compliment his student’s class presentation for having “good delivery and clarity of organization”, but it would have the force of an insult for a student to praise his professor’s class presentation in the same way. A similar reversal of valence is implied in the familiar saying “damning with faint praise.”

The contrary is also found: insult can have the force of compliment. That is the point of the old saying, “the insults of fools is praise indeed.” In this same vein, in modern colloquial English, especially among black adolescents, “You’re bad” means “You’re good”. And “You’re good,” is a grievous insult. The inherent ambivalence of the force of a speech act is perfectly illustrated by, “You dirty dog”, which can be used either as a compliment or an insult.

And it is possible for the speaker to intentionally exploit the ambivalence of the pragmatic force of language by using a compliment as a way of covertly conveying an insult. For this reason it is impossible in principle to determine for sure if what appears to be a compliment is really intended to have the force of a compliment or the force of an insult. And conversely, it is always possible for the addressee to engage in creative misunderstanding in order to discomfit the speaker. So on the face of it, “You look healthy and happy today”, might look like a compliment. But it is impossible to be certain whether the speaker of this sentence intends it to be a compliment or an insult. And even if the speaker does intend it as a compliment, the addressee can take it as an insult by focusing upon the word “today” such that it implies, “You normally look sickly and depressed, but by contrast today you look healthy and happy.” Or, the addressee could take it as an insult in a different way by focusing upon “look” such that it implies, “You look healthy and happy today, but under the facade you are really sickly and depressed.”

Thus upon consideration of the pragmatic level of language we find that the force of speech acts tend to be ambivalent. That is, while we may be certain that a given speech act is intended to have some sort of force or other, we cannot be certain as to the vector that force is intended to have, nor can we be certain as to the vector it will be taken as having. So at the level of pragmatics too, language is seen to be elusive and perverse and confusing.
In these and myriad other ways it is a matter of more or less common knowledge that language is elusive, perverse, and confusing. And this derogatory evaluation of language is not a misleading impression as a function of superficial acquaintance: As one studies language more and more, as one comes to have a deeper and broader knowledge of his own language, English in this case, as one becomes familiar with a wider variety of different languages and language families, as one comes to have a deeper technical knowledge of phonology, semantics, syntax, pragmatics, etc., one only finds a greater depth and breadth and intricacy of the elusiveness, the perversity, and the confusion of language. One finds that language is not just superficially confusing, it is confusing all the way across and all the way down to the bottom. One cannot find anything at any level of any language that is not confusing. And so at some point one must give up trying to find the boundary of the confusion in language and reverse one’s field of inquiry by positing the null hypothesis, which is this: Language is intrinsically confusing. And one must try to make sense of language on the basis of this hypothesis.

So the question is how can we make sense of language as intrinsically confusing? Why is it confusing? If it is intrinsically confusing, how is it that language can at least sometimes makes sense? How does it work? And why?

The key to making sense of language and answering these questions is the following fact:

**LANGUAGE IS DUPlicitous.**

And so this is the key to understanding the human situation in general, because the duplicity of language is the root of the confusing nature of language, and thus it is the root of the chronic confusion that is characteristic of the human situation, and thus it is the root of the chronic suffering that is characteristic of the human situation. So we will take this as the third fact framing the human situation and we will focus upon this single point from here on. So the purpose of this book from here on will be to explore the duplicity of language.

Let me make this key point perfectly clear. The point is not merely that language is sometimes duplicitous, or that there are some parts of language that are duplicitous, or that it is possible for someone to use language duplicitably. Rather, the point is that language is inherently duplicitous. Language is duplicitous in the same sense as water is wet and fire is hot. Language is of a duplicitous nature.

This, of course, implies that there are two kinds of nature - regular nature and duplicitous nature. Or, in other words, natural nature and unnatural nature. Or, in yet other words, first nature and second nature. As one might say, “Language is our second nature.” Or, as we do actually say, “English is my mother tongue”, “mother tongue” being secondary in relation to my real tongue. So the implication of “mother tongue” is that I am born a second time into the matrix of my second nature, my language.

Thus language belongs to a different ontological category from such purely natural phenomena as water and fire and electricity and trees and ducks, and my tongue. Language belongs to a sec-
secondary order of phenomena, or rather, epiphenomena. Language belongs to the same epiphenomenal ontological order as images, echoes, and shadows.

To put it in other words, this secondary order of phenomena, this order of epiphenomena, this order of images, echoes, and shadows is the realm of things that C. S. Peirce called “signs”, and about which he developed a general theory. And following Peirce, I want to assert that language belongs to the realm of signs. Further, I assert, also following Peirce, that all signs and all systems of signs are duplicitous. Therefore, I assert, still following Peirce, that language is duplicitous.

To put it in yet other words, contrary to the prevailing conventional belief, which is stated thus by Chomsky (1980, p. 226),

the study of language is a part of human biology,

I assert that language is not a biological thing, nor is language a physical thing, but rather

**LANGUAGE IS A TRUTH THING.**

This is implicit in the premise that language is duplicitous, for duplicity, being a species of falsity, is a function of truth. Let me amplify this line of reasoning.

Everyone knows that language is normally embodied in and conveyed by means of physical stuff, such as sound or marks on paper, but as we mentioned above, language does not consist of physical stuff. A duck can only be embodied as a duck, but language is not like a duck. Language is like money. An element of language or an element of money is essentially a contract, an agreement, or a promise, the representation of which is ideally embodied in some physical medium, but which need not necessarily be embodied at all. For example, it is possible to have a tacit communication, just as it is possible to have a tacit contract. And contrary to conventional belief, the essential act by which a government creates an element of money is not that of stamping out coins or printing notes, but rather the essential act by which a government creates an element of money is one of fiat, whether explicit or implicit. Thus in the United States the Federal Reserve Bank creates money implicitly by purchasing treasury instruments from certain banks and paying for them by a fiat. In much the same way, the essential act by which an element of language comes into existence is by implicit fiat, usually on the part of an individual. This is what it means to “coin a new expression.” And so the value of an element of money or an element of language depends upon the power and the authority and the veracity of the fiat.

Thus language is not governed by the play of physical forces and physical substances, but rather it is governed by the play of truth and falsity. So, since the false is a function of the truth, language is a function of truth. Or to be precise, it is an inverse function of truth. To be even more pre-

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1. Peirce does not use the word “duplicitity” in his description of the sign, but he does posit the “cut” as the primitive predicate in the logic of the sign, and this cut engenders the duplicitous logic which governs the nature of the sign. See “The Cut” beginning on page 77

2. The verb “fiat” was borrowed into English from Latin. It is the third person singular present subjunctive of *fier*, meaning “let it be so.” So “to create by fiat” means “to create by saying ‘let it be so.’”
cise, language is a function of multifarious iterations of pairwise inversions of truth. And these pairwise inversions of truth are the duplicities which comprise language.

From this it follows that, just as the shape of physical space and the behavior of physical stuff in physical space is governed by the force of gravity, so the shape of the linguistic space and the behavior of linguistic stuff is governed by the force of truth. And just as the earth is the center of our physical universe, at least in the practical sense, so truth is the center of language. And just as a tree grows up and branches out from the earth counter to the force of gravity by means of the machinery of biology, so too does language grow and branch out counter to the force of truth by means of the machinery of duplicity.

Therefore, in order to understand how language works, and how it doesn’t work, one must look at language as a creature of duplicity, not as a creature of biology or physics. In these terms the purpose of this book is to establish the foundation for a theory of language based upon the fact that language is not a biology thing, nor a physics thing, but a truth thing. And more specifically, the purpose of this book is to assert that language is duplicitous, to explain and illustrate the duplicity of language, to give evidence and argument to prove that language is duplicitous, to begin to explore the implications of the fact that language is duplicitous, and to begin to develop a coherent conceptualization of language and the human situation on the basis of the realization that, contrary to conventional belief, language is duplicitous.

Language as the Quintessential Human Problem

Now let us consider the duplicity of language on a more general level. In order to appreciate the scope and the significance of the fact that language is duplicitous, one must look at it from two different perspectives at the same time. In the above examples we were looking at it from the technical point of view of the science of linguistics. We must also look at it from the non-technical point of view of the ordinary speaker of language, the person who linguists refer to as the “linguistically naive speaker”. This “naive speaker” is the idealized normal person who performs the same role in the thinking of linguists as the idealized “rational person” in the thinking of philosophers, lawyers, and economists. Let us then consider the duplicity of language as seen from the point of view of the ordinary naive speaker.

What I am claiming here is that as a function of the duplicitous nature of language, language is deceptive, contradictory, confusing, captivating, misleading, and frustrating, not to mention dangerous. But from the perspective of the ordinary linguistically naive person, language does not appear to be duplicitous, deceptive, confusing, etc. From the point of view of the ordinary person there is clearly some mysterious source of deception, contradiction, confusion, etc. that bedevils the normal human being, but it is not obvious that language is the root of this problem precisely because language is duplicitous. That is, because language is duplicitously duplicitous the normal naive speaker of language does not realize that language is the root of human confusion. Therefore, from the point of view of the ordinary linguistically naive person, the duplicity of language is only perceived indirectly in its effect as a mysterious jumble of perplexing confusions, frustrations, and dissatisfaction.

So although the duplicity of language is the root of human confusion and suffering, the ordinary person does not perceive it as such. The ordinary naive speaker of language is entirely unaware of the insidious influence of the duplicity of language. And that lack of awareness is the crux of his
role as a normal naive speaker and at the same time it is the crux of the problematicalness of lan-
guage. And so our attention here must be directed precisely at the lack of awareness of the duplicity
of language as the root of the confusion and suffering that plagues the human situation. We must, in
sum, consider language to be essentially duplicitous in particular and to be essentially problematic in
general.

Of course, everything has the potential to be problematic. Even ordinary things, which are
usually harmless or irrelevant to our lives, such as rocks or trees or ducks, can be problematic, under
the right circumstances. Even the necessities of life, such as air and water, can be problematic, when
we do not have enough of them, or when we have too much of them, or when they are in the wrong
place. But the point I am trying to make here is that language, being duplicitous, is a different kind of
thing, and that as a consequence it is problematic in a different kind of way.

Language is different from ordinary things such as rocks or trees or ducks or air or water in
that those things are natural phenomena, whereas language is (1) not phenomena, and (2) not purely
natural. In regard to its phenomenal status (1), as I said above, language belongs to the realm of
epiphenomena, along with things like shadows and mirror images and echoes. Epiphenomena com-
prise a distinct secondary order of phenomena, with a distinct secondary nature. Epiphenomena are
like real phenomena in the sense that you can see or hear them, but they are unlike real phenomena in
the sense that you cannot grasp them or eat them or drink them or make a house out of them. That is,
to put it in perfectly general terms, epiphenomena do not satisfy. Water satisfies, food satisfies, truth
satisfies. But epiphenomena do not satisfy.

Epiphenomena have a special kind of parasitic being that is derivative of and totally depen-
dent upon prior things, that is, real phenomena. Epiphenomena have no independent substance or
being of their own. So they look like real phenomena, but they are not real phenomena. And yet, they
are not nothing. They are something, and yet they are not something. This is the contradictory onto-
logical nature which is characteristic of epiphenomena. And so epiphenomena have an epiphenome-
nal nature, in accord with which they are constrained by the necessities of the laws of phenomena, but
at the same time they arise and flourish in accord with the possibilities of the laws of epiphenomena.
So language is different from ordinary things in that it is epiphenomenal.

In regard to the naturalness of language (2), whereas some epiphenomena are purely natural,
such as shadows, and mirror images, and echoes, language is not purely natural. It is a mixture of nat-
ural and unnatural. It is crucial to note that the relation between the unnatural and the natural is one of
opposition, and especially that it is one of asymmetrical opposition as distinct from symmetrical
opposition.¹ It is like the distinction between pure water and impure water: there is an absolute cate-
gorical distinction between pure water and impure water, and yet there are degrees of impurity. Pure
water is water and nothing else but water, whereas impure water is water and something else, and
there can be greater or lesser amounts of that something else. So there is absolutely pure water, but
there is no such thing as absolutely impure water. The same is true of naturalness: There is an abso-
lute categorical distinction between things that are natural and things that are unnatural, and yet there
are degrees of unnaturality. So whereas something can be absolutely natural, it is impossible for
anything to be absolutely unnatural.

So shadows, mirror images, and echoes are purely natural epiphenomena in that they are
entirely a function of the nature of light and sound. In other words, everything about them is predict-
able by the laws of physics. So it follows that all images are epiphenomenal, and that all mirror
images are natural epiphenomena, but not all images are natural epiphenomena. For example, the
conventional image of a star - ★ - is not the natural image of a star, as you can see by looking at a star in the sky at night. But it is not entirely unnatural either: it is a conventionalized representation of the natural image of a star. It is a man-made likeness, not a natural likeness.

In this same sense, language consists of epiphenomena that are unnatural in that they are artificial, man-made epiphenomena. For example, the relation between the moon and the image of the moon which I see reflected in the water is entirely a function of the natural laws of light, but the relation between the letter “m” in the word “moon” and the moon itself is a function of the arbitrary laws of the English language. We for whom English is our native language feel that it is quite natural that the word for moon should begin with the letter “m”, but this feeling of naturalness is erroneous for in reality there is no natural relation between the letter “m” and the moon. This relation between the letter “m” and the moon is a relation of the special kind of second nature, the unnatural epiphenomenal nature, the duplicitous nature, of which language consists. So an image of the moon in the water is a natural representation of the moon, but the word “moon” is an unnatural representation of the moon.

Thus although language appears to us so-called native speakers to be natural phenomena, it is really unnatural epiphenomena. In general terms, this is the sense in which language is duplicitous. And in consequence of the duplicity of language, while trees and ducks, air and water, and other natural phenomena, are occasionally or incidentally problematic, language in its guise as natural phenomena is intrinsically problematic.

So the point I want to make here is that language is problematic, not as water is problematic or as fire is problematic, but language is problematic as water is wet, as fire is hot. Therefore, as a practical matter, given the pragmatic axiom that we must relate to things in accord with their true nature in order to be able to function satisfactorily in the world, it follows that just as we must relate to water as being wet, and just as we must relate to fire as being hot, so too we must relate to language as being problematic. And to do that we must understand how it is problematic, which is to say, we must understand the duplicity of language.

Now, the idea that language is intrinsically problematic might seem to be in conflict with conventional wisdom, which considers language to be the opposite of a problem. Conventional wisdom

1. The same could be said of the distinction between phenomena and epiphenomena. Indeed, the same could be said about anything in language because everything in language is a function of the absolutely fundamental distinction between these two types of opposition. The opposition between these two types of opposition it is the very warp and woof of the fabric of language. It might be helpful to provide some references. The recognition of the necessity for making this distinction in the framework of modern linguistics can be traced back to the Prague Circle of Linguistics in the first decades of this century. Its fullest elaboration was in Trubetzkoy’s *Principles of Phonology*, where he developed the theory of markedness as it applies to the phonology of language on the basis of this distinction, which he termed “equipollent opposition” vs. “privative opposition.” Roman Jakobson was a member of the Prague Circle, was a friend and close collaborator of Trubetzkoy, and actually edited and arranged for the publication of Trubetzkoy’s *Principles of Phonology* posthumously. Jakobson collaborated in the development of Trubetzkoy’s thinking about this distinction and all of Jakobson’s subsequent research and publication was dedicated to the exploration of the manifestations of this distinction throughout language. Jakobson eventually came to talk about this distinction in terms of the relations of “similarity” vs. “contiguity.” Just to mention one more connection, Jakobson pointed out that Freud discovered this same distinction in the operation of unconscious mental processes, and that Freud called them (in English translation) “condensation” vs. “displacement.” Lacan referred to these two “imaginary” vs. “symbolic.” And C. S. Peirce called them “secondness” vs. “thirdness.” I prefer to use sterile logical terminology here in order to focus on the logical crux of the difference. A symmetrical relation (equipollent, similarity, or condensation) is one in which F(a,b) = F(b,a). An asymmetrical relation (privative, contiguity, or displacement) is one in which F(a,b) ≠ F(b,a). We will motivate this distinction in terms of the general theory of signs below in Chapter 2.
holds that language is essentially a means of communication. (See “Language as Means of Communication” beginning on page 163) It is the means by which we human beings are able to interact with each other and our environment. Therefore it is commonly considered to be a special capability that enables us to solve problems. Not only that, but language is also considered to be the instrument which enables us human beings to develop knowledge, to gather knowledge, and to share knowledge, so that we can understand, and thus control, and thus govern, and thus reap the bounty of the universe. It is the capability to use language that makes us human beings what we are. We think of language as the special human capability: As birds have the ability to fly in air, as fish have the ability to swim in water, so human beings have the ability to talk in language. The essence of the common idea of language is this: To speak language is to be human. So the common idea is that language is not just a capability, but that language is the quintessential human capability.

But the idea that language is a capability is not in conflict with the idea that language is problematic. The fact is that every capability is problematic. For example, on the individual level, it was only when we learned to stand up as infants that the problem of falling down arose. It was only when we learned how to walk that the problems of getting lost or getting into dangerous places arose. It was only when we gained the ability to manipulate objects with force that the problems of breakage and injury arose. On the social level, it was only when we learned how to use nuclear weapons that the problems of nuclear proliferation, of nuclear terrorism, and of the possibility of the total destruction of life on earth arose. So in general every capability gives rise to its own dimension of problematicalness. And so it is with language.

However, in consequence of the fundamental role of language in human life together with the duplicitous nature of language, the dimension of problematicalness to which the language capability gives rise is far more complex and far deeper and far more troublesome than that of simple natural capabilities such as the ability to walk. Indeed, the problematicalness of language underlies and pervades and exacerbates every other dimension of problematicalness which arises in human experience. Therefore, while it is true that language is the quintessential human capability, language is also the quintessential human problem.

One might be skeptical about this sweeping indictment of language, particularly when it is thought to be inconsistent with conventional wisdom, which considers language to be a good thing, not a problem, let alone the quintessential human problem. But the fact that we do not normally hear much about the problematic dimension of language in the conventional dialogue is perfectly consistent with this assertion. The human dialogue, individually and collectively, is normally dominated by language. That is exactly what “normal” means in this context, i.e., the normal human dialogue conforms to the norms of language. Language governs the normal discourse, because the normal discourse takes place in the medium of language. In other words, language is the universe of normal discourse. And in order to be pragmatically viable language must represent itself as a good thing. In other words, duplicity must represent itself as truth in order to function as duplicity. That is, duplicity represented as duplicity cannot function as duplicity, so such an act would be pragmatically impossible. So there is a natural tendency in the normal universe of discourse to focus upon the favorable side of language, and for this reason the problematic dimension of language does appear on the surface in the normal universe of discourse.

What is more, in conjunction with its positive effort to represent itself as a good thing, language censures and represses the dark side of language. This repression is what makes the problemat-
ical side of language dark, for in reality the duplicity of language is perfectly obvious for all to see. To cite a trivial example of the normative repression of truth, the norms of polite conversation demand that, if you become aware of the fact that someone is indulging in a little self-serving duplicity in a normal conversation, you must not only refrain from pointing it out, but you must pretend that you did not notice it, you must pretend to believe it, and you must try to carry on the conversation in a cooperative manner as if it were true. In this way, and many others, the norms of language repress truth and foster duplicity.

This dynamic is not coincidental. It is the repression of the awareness of the dark side of language, the repression of the awareness of its duplicity, and the repression of the awareness of its problematicalness, which constitutes the conceptual framework within which language exists, in so far as it can be said to exist at all. In other words, if language is essentially duplicitous, then it can only function in a dialogical context that is framed by ignorance of its duplicity. This is so because, in general, if one is aware of the duplicity of an act of duplicity, then that very awareness robs the act of its duplicity, and consequently of its deceptiveness, of its power to lure, to confuse, to captivate, etc. Likewise, awareness of the duplicity of language uncovers and robs language of its power to be problematical. Or, to put it the other way around, the naive willingness to be gulled into believing in the duplicitous representations of language sustains the power of language to deceive, beguile, and captivate. Therefore, the awareness of and the understanding of the duplicity of language is the key to unraveling the problematicalness of language.

The purpose of this book is to engender and foster the awareness of and the understanding of the duplicity of language as a foundation for understanding language in particular and the human situation in general.

So in the light of these observations, the fundamental question is this: Is language a problem? And, if so, in what way is language a problem? And, what are the practical consequences of the language problem? And how can we solve the language problem?

These are the questions we will be considering in this book, so by way of framing our discussion, we might as well begin by giving the answers.

1. **Is language a problem?** Yes. As I have suggested, language is the quintessential human problem. This is not to say that language is the only problem, but it is the generic human problem, and it is a very troublesome problem. Language is the problem which characteristically plagues all human beings.

2. **In what way is language a problem?** The problematicalness of language is a function of its duplicitous nature. But we must emphasize that duplicity, in and of itself, is not necessarily problematic. We all play games, and all games are duplicitous. But games are harmless unless some naive person is taken in and absorbed so deeply in the pretense of the game that they loose track of reality and think that the realm of the game is reality. The lure of frames of reference, however, is intrinsic. As explained by Irving Goffman in his *Frame Analysis* (p, 34):

   Frame, however, organizes more than meaning; it also organizes involvement. During any spate of activity, participants will ordinary not only obtain a sense of what is going on but will also (in some degree) become spontaneously engrossed, caught up, enthralled.
So what is problematic is not the duplicity of language in itself, but the erroneous belief in the truth of the duplicitous representations of language. What is problematic, in short, is the belief in the pretense, in the false. So, as a practical matter, the fact is that we human beings are normally taken in and engrossed and enthralled in the duplicitous frameworks of pretense of our own language. Therefore, language is normally problematic for all normal human beings in that it is a system of collective pretense in which we all are caught up, jointly and severally, as both the perpetrators and the victims, of both ourselves and others.

3. **What are the practical consequences of the problem of language?** There are so many troublesome consequences of the language problem, that it would be impossible to catalogue them all. And it is not really necessary either, for we already know what they are, though we do not commonly recognize them as consequences of the language problem. For example, it is common knowledge that human beings are chronically plagued by a feeling of alienation and anxiety, but it is not common knowledge that this is a function of the language problem. And it is common knowledge that human beings are plagued by an incomprehensible compulsion to do things that are contrary to their own self interest, but it is not common knowledge that this is a function of the language problem. So instead of trying to describe the myriad branches of the practical problems which are a function of the language problem, which we already know about anyway, let us cut to the heart of the matter. The problem of language on the practical level, in the words of Jacques Lacan (Miller, 1993, p. 243), is this:

> man is the subject that is captured and tortured by language

Through the conceptual machinery by which the logic of the self is constructed in the medium of language, each of us is the subject that is captured and tortured by language. This is the problem of language on the ordinary everyday practical personal level. And so on the practical level, this is the problem we are addressing here.

4. **How can we solve the language problem?** The answer is simple to state, but hard to do: If language is problematic because it is duplicitous, then the realization of the fact that language is duplicitous is the solution to the problem. The realization of truth is the antidote to duplicity. If one is captured and tortured by a fraud, then the key to breaking out of the fraud is the realization that it is a fraud.

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**A Discussion of Some of the Various Ideas of the Nature of Language**

**The Naive Idea: Language as a Means of Communication**

The root of the language problem is that the conventional idea of the nature of language, to which we commonly subscribe when we are infants as the basis of the social contract, is wrong. The conventional idea is that language is a tool of communication which we can use to interact with other people and which we can use to help us think, and analyze, and understand things. The essence of this
naive idea is that language is a good and useful thing. But if one subjects this idea to critical scrutiny, one discovers that there is serious doubt as to whether we use language or language uses us.

The naive idea is that language is a tool, like a stick, for example, which we can use to extend our reach so that we can get things we could not otherwise get. But this is a grave error, for language is not a dead thing like a stick which passively lends itself to being used to satisfy our wishes. Language is a living thing, more like a poisonous snake than a stick, with the inclinations and proclivities that are inherent to its nature. And the inclinations and proclivities of language, like those of a poisonous snake, are not subject to our desires. Indeed, the point I am trying to make here is that the inclinations and proclivities of language are systematically inimical to our desires. As I am trying to argue here, the nature of language is duplicitous, therefore, in so far as our interests and desires are concerned it is beside the point whether language is a tool or not, and it is beside the point whether it can be used for communication or not, and it is beside the point whether it is good or not. The essential point about language that we must focus upon is that it is of a duplicitous nature, and for this reason it is insidiously deceptive, and it is dangerous. This is the sense in which I am saying that language is more like a poisonous snake than a stick.

Therefore language is doubly problematic: first because it is dangerous, and second because we believe it to be benevolent. Indeed, language is triply problematic because we have already placed our faith in language and we have already taken this serpent to our bosom thinking that it is the matrix of our being. We have adopted our language as our mother tongue, through the images of which we have conceived of ourselves and our situations in the world.

As a consequence of our misplaced faith in language, we now find ourselves deeply entangled in confusing and troublesome situations. So the beginning of the process of unraveling ourselves and our situations is the realization that we have been taken in by our language, that we have misplaced our faith, and that language is deceptive and dangerous.

Let us look in more depth at the process by which we come to be in the confusing and troublesome situation in which we find ourselves. One of the basic premises of the conventional world-view, to which we commonly subscribe as the foundation of the conventional social contract, is the belief that language is a beneficial and useful thing. This premise, like the other basic premises of our world-view, is established at the very beginning of our lives when we are naive and helpless infants governed more by impulse and appetite than by a realistic evaluation of the world. At that very early formative stage in our lives, as one of our very first policy decisions, we adopt the premise that language is a good and useful thing, and we proceed to build our world-view on that premise.

As we proceed to build our world-view on the basis of this premise, we move on past this basic policy decision to focus our attention on aspects of our world-view that are conceptually subsequent, and thus we come to regard that fundamental policy decision as finished business. As we proceed to construct more and more elaborate and sophisticated structures of belief upon the foundation of this policy decision, the fact that we adopted this fundamental premise as a policy decision recedes farther and farther away from the locus of our immediate interest. The belief that language is a beneficial and useful thing comes to be regarded as self-evident fact. The belief becomes the fixed foundation of our conception of the universe and of our conception of ourselves. It becomes ossified. It gets buried deeper and deeper under the progressively evolving structures of our world-view until by the age of five or six when the general framework of our world-view has been completed, the foundation
of our world-view has disappeared completely from sight, out of sight and out of mind, like a long forgotten battle of ancient history. So by the time we get to be full fledged adults, the fact that our theory of language rests upon an infantile policy decision has faded so far into the background of our minds, buried under generations of sedimented conventional structure, that we are entirely unaware of it. And besides, as adults we don’t have time to fool around with obscure problems of ancient history because are too busy trying to deal with the myriad real practical problems of everyday life which demand immediate attention.

The problem with this situation, as I have said, is that the primitive premise upon which it is constructed is wrong. And, it is not just a problem of ancient history. It is true that the decision to adopt this view of language is an ancient one, both phylogenetically and ontogenetically, but what makes this ancient policy decision a contemporary problem of the greatest importance is the fact that the policy that we adopted so long ago as naive infants is still being enacted to this day through our language, through our world-view, through our thought processes, and thus through our overt behavior. The problem is that this ancient naive policy is still in effect. It still governs our thinking and our behavior to this very day. And thus the immediate practical problems that we are so preoccupied with in our everyday life as adults are largely a consequence of this ancient erroneous policy decision.

Indeed, this policy decision generates such a plethora of problems precisely because it is such ancient and primitive error. It is an error of the first order. And thus it is a problem of the first order.

A More Sophisticated Scientific Idea: Language as a Means of Communication

In framing our inquiry into the nature of language, it is important to realize that the erroneous belief that language is a tool of communication, or at any rate a good thing, is not only a premise of the worldview of the ordinary linguistically naive person, but it is also the premise that predominates among sophisticated scholars of language, such as linguists and anthropologists and psychologists and computer scientists, etc. While one might have supposed that sophisticated scientists would have a more adequate idea of the nature of language than the lay person, in the present context this should not be surprising because sophisticated scholars begin life as naive infants just as everyone else does. So as naive infants we who are going to become scholars adopt the same erroneous premise about the nature of language and develop the same erroneous worldview as everyone else. Then when we have grown up and begin to look at language as an object of objective study we have brought our unconscious erroneous belief about the nature of language with us. So we end up trying to make sense of language and those things that are a function of language, such as worldview, identity, thinking, etc., from the same erroneous point of view as that which is taken by the ordinary linguistically naive speaker.

Focusing on the discipline of linguistics, it is true that over the years the discipline of linguistics has managed to develop a point of view in regard to language that is somewhat more sophisticated than that of the ordinary speaker of language. It is in recognition of this fact that we linguists thus distinguish our theoretical point of view from that of the ordinary person by calling the latter “the linguistically naive speaker”, which implies that we are the linguistically sophisticated speakers. But such gains as have been made in the discipline of linguistics by way of liberating it from the primitive error we are considering here have been relatively superficial. Linguists, as well as anthropologists, psychologists, computer scientists, etc., with all of our digging into the mind, with all of
our facts, and with all of our sophisticated conceptual machinery, have not generally realized that there is a fundamental problem, and thus have not tried to dig down to the root of the problem, which is the fundamental premise as to the nature of language. As a consequence, most of the various sophisticated scholarly theories of language, of culture, of the human mind, and of the human situation in general are as confused and inadequate as the views of the ordinary man in the street, because they share the same basic erroneous premise, which is that language is a good thing.

Furthermore, most of the sophisticated scholars of language not only assume that language is a good thing, but they also assume, explicitly or implicitly, that language is essentially a tool of communication, just as the linguistically naive do. It is not easy to demonstrate that this is what most scholars assume however because the basic assumptions about the nature and function of language are usually taken for granted and are not often explicitly stated. For example, one would certainly expect Levinson to explicitly state what he considers the basic function of language to be in his otherwise excellent review of the field of linguistic pragmatics, but he does not. He discusses many aspects of the function and use of language in great detail, but only in regard to subsequent issues. I think one can infer from his discussion that he assumes that the basic function of language is as a means of communication. For example, he favorably mentions Jakobson’s analysis of the functions of language into the “six basic components of the communicational event” (p. 41). And he discusses the distinction between “incidental transfer of information and communication proper” (p. 16). But he nowhere says explicitly that he holds that the basic function of language is a means of communication.

One can occasionally find explicit statements however, and I will cite a couple of these here by way of establishing a prima facia case for the claim that most sophisticated scholars of language hold the view that language is a tool of communication pending a detailed discussion of this issue in the section “Language as Means of Communication” beginning on page 163. There I will demonstrate that this claim is true by examining the views of three prominent scholars who hold this premise and I will explain in detail why it is wrong. At this point, I will just cite a couple of prominent scholars who have taken this view.

One example is André Martinet, a well known and respected linguist, whose view I have chosen to cite in part because he is one of the few linguists who has explicitly spelled out his position in regard to the basic function of language. He said that language is “an instrument or tool” and

The essential function of this instrument...is communication. Thus French is primarily the instrument which enables French-speaking people to establish contact, to enter into relations with one another. (And it is also) an aid to thought. (1964, p. 18, words in parentheses added)

Another example is George Lakoff, another well known and respected linguist, who said, more or less incidentally, in the latter stages of the development of an argument,

The primary purposes of language are to frame and express thoughts and to communicate...(1987, p. 228)

So by way of framing this discussion, the point I am trying to make here is that the problem of language does not revolve around the usual educated/uneducated dichotomy. It is not like a medical problem or a legal problem or a computer problem or a plumbing problem, with respect to which there is a division in society between laymen, who do not know much about it, and experts, who make it their business to know all about it so that they can sell their knowledge to the laymen. The problem of language is different: the experts are, generally speaking, in the same boat as regular people in two senses. First, generally speaking the experts hold the same erroneous premises and thus do
not understand the problem any better than laymen. And second, the root of the problem is knowledge, or rather the lack of knowledge, but it is not new knowledge, nor is it some kind of obscure technical knowledge: it is ordinary everyday knowledge that everyone already possesses. Therefore, the language problem is not a knowledge problem, or a skill problem, or an experience problem: it is an awareness problem. Thus the remedy is not more education, or more facts, or more sophisticated ideas, or more complex conceptual machinery. Just the opposite. So as we approach this problem, we must bear in mind that the problem we are considering is a primitive problem which is the consequence of an infantile error. Therefore we must try to shed our sophisticated world view so that we can revisit the problem from the infantile point of view, because at bottom this is a problem of the naïveté of sophistry. So we must try to think about this primitive problem in primitive terms.

The Most Sophisticated Idea: Language as an Organ

Taking a strictly physicalist point of view, Noam Chomsky, who is far and away the most famous and the most influential contemporary American linguist, considers language to be entirely a biological thing. Specifically, he considers language to be a special human organ which is part of our shared biological endowment (p. 2, 1988).

He said,

We may usefully think of the language faculty, the number faculty, and others, as “mental organs,” analogous to the heart or the visual system or the system of motor coordination and planning. (p. 39, 1980)

and again

...we may regard the language capacity virtually as we would a physical organ of the body... (p. 185, op cit.)

Chomsky evaluates this organic endowment thus.

The language faculty confers enormous advantages on a (sic) species that possesses it. (p. 38, 1988)

In considering Chomsky’s view, note that, although he does not use such simpleminded words as “good” or “useful” in his characterization of language, it is obvious that he considers language to be a good and useful thing. For example, he calls language an “endowment”, which is a gift, and if a thing is a gift, then it must be a good thing. Likewise, “confer” implies that its object is a good thing. Similarly, the “faculty” or “capacity” to do something is a good and useful thing. And an “enormous advantage” is also a good thing. Thus it is clear that Chomsky holds the same basic premise as the ordinary linguistically naive speaker, i.e., that language is a good and useful thing.

One might suppose that Chomsky’s idea of language as an organ is radically different from the ordinary conventional idea of language, but actually it is the ordinary conventional idea of language. What makes the idea of language as an organ seem extraordinary is that we are not normally aware of the fact that we think of language as an organ. That is to say, the idea is normally unconscious. But if you think about it for a moment, you will realize that we commonly speak of language as if it involved a special organ of perception. When we say, “I see what you mean”, we are not referring to visual perception with the physical eyes, but to linguistic perception with the eye of the mind. We are referring to vision in terms of the light of understanding as if it were a function of a special linguistic organ of perception analogous to the eye. Likewise, we commonly speak of language as a special tool
which enables man to manipulate his environment in ways that other animals cannot, analogous to
the special manual dexterity afforded to man by his opposable thumbs. Hence we say, “I grasp the
point.” Also, we commonly speak of language as comprising a special phenomenological dimension
to which man alone has access and in which man alone can function. The idea here is, as I mentioned
at the beginning, that as birds have the special ability to fly in air, and as fish have the special ability
to swim in water, so man has the special ability to talk in language. Hence we say, “He jumped
abruptly from one topic to another”, “He went too fast for me to follow”, “He is talking in circles”,
etc., as if one moved through the medium of language by talking as one moves through space by
walking. From such examples as these it is obvious that we commonly think of language as an
organic capability.

Returning to the more general idea that language is a good and useful thing, we should speak
to the fact that most people would probably deny that they hold this view. Perhaps they would say
that they don’t hold any particular view, or perhaps they would say that they consider language to be
a natural thing, like gravity or rain, a thing which is neither good nor bad. But once again, no matter
what we might consciously consider our view of language to be, there is good evidence that the com-
mon underlying view is that language is a good and useful thing. For example, we commonly con-
sider knowledge to be a good thing, and we commonly consider knowledge to be a function of
language, so from that it follows that we must think of language as a good thing. Conventional wis-
dom holds that it is only when we name something, and thereby bring it into the realm of language,
that we can begin to understand it. That is, the belief is that naming is the beginning of understanding.
In the same vein, it is commonly believed that the more words you know, the more knowledge you
have, especially big words, and especially if you know how to use them, and especially if you know
how to spell them. Indeed, the belief that knowledge is a function of language is the basic premise of
the prevailing educational philosophy in our culture, and consequently it is the preeminent standard
by which intelligence is measured in our culture. The conventional belief is that language is the
embodiment of knowledge, education, and intelligence, and thus that language is a good and useful
thing.

The ultimate standard of what we think about something is how we actually relate to it. What
we do speaks louder than what we say. So whatever we might think we think about language, and
whatever we might say we think about language, whether we are ordinary linguistically naive people
or sophisticated scholars of language, it is what we do in relation to language that speaks with the
greatest authority. And the fact is that we talk almost constantly, if not aloud, if not with others, then
in subvocal discourse with ourselves. But, we feel especially compelled to talk when we are troubled
by a problem. We use language to try to solve our problems, or at least to alleviate the suffering. And
in our constant recourse to talk, particularly when driven by problems, we give evidence of our belief
in the efficacy of language as balm and solace, as therapy, as oracle, as fount of wisdom. It is as if
when we become adults, our mother tongue takes the place of our mother. And in that role language
takes on the benevolent mantle of motherly love.

Thus we see that, although no respectable scholar would describe his premises as to the nature
of language in such childish words as “good” and “useful”, the common theme underlying all of the
above mentioned views of language, whether ordinary or sophisticated, is that language is a good and
useful thing, like an eye, or a thumb, or a wing.

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On the Duplicity of Language(Draft of 10/14/99)
A Discussion of Some of the Various Ideas of the Nature of Language

Having asserted that the conventional belief that language is a good thing is in error, I do not intend to take the opposite position, that language is a bad thing, though that would be nearer to the truth, in the sense that language is a duplicitous thing, and a duplicitous thing is liable to lead to bad ends, especially if you erroneously believe it is a good thing. It would be an error to take either side of the question of whether language is good thing or a bad thing because that question rests upon a false assumption, namely, that language is a thing. In other words, the conventional view of language, whether naive or sophisticated, is most fundamentally wrong in that it incorrectly puts language in the category of things. The point is that the fundamental error is not a matter of value, but a matter of ontology.

And what is more, I will argue that the erroneous conventional conceptualization of language is not incidental error, but rather that it is a systematic error, a systematic misconceptualization of language. And further, I will argue that this conventional misconceptualization is integral to the conceptual dynamic of language. I will argue that this systematic erroneous reification\(^1\) of referents is what constitutes the ontological essence of language, and therefore that the realization of this fact is the key to understanding the nature of language.

The Original Linguistic Insight: Language is Neither Organic or Physical

The seminal insight which originally engendered the science of linguistics and which sets the science of linguistics apart from other sciences is the realization that language is not essentially a biological or a physical thing. Prior to this realization, proto-linguists such as the Neo-Grammarians and philologists tried to make sense of the regularities that had been discovered in the history of language in terms of the biology of the human body and the physics of the sound of speech. It was the realization that language is ontologically distinct from speech that freed linguistics from the fetters of the conventional perspective and engendered the burst of intellectual evolution that took place in the youth of the science of linguistics after the turn of the century. And then in the 1940’s and 1950’s as the science of linguistics reached its adolescence, like all adolescents, it got caught in the ontological dilemma that gave birth to it in the first place, namely, if it is not biological or physical, then what is it? And lacking a way to resolve the dilemma in a coherent way, linguistics resolved the dilemma by subordinating its original insight to the conventionally predominant scientific worldview which held that everything is physics.

I am suggesting that we go back to the original insight which gave rise of the science of linguistics in the first place as described by, for example, Edward Sapir, who was one of the founding fathers of linguistics. He argued in the 1930’s, on the basis of the relatively limited knowledge that was available to him in those days, that there is no language organ. He observed that, in the sense in which the eye is an organ for seeing, and the thumb is an organ for grabbing, and the foot is an organ for walking, there is no organ for talking. The following is the beginning of Sapir’s classic *Language*.

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1. “Reification” means “regarding or treating (an abstraction) as if it had concrete or material existence”. Note first that the counterfactual conditional “as if” together with the subjunctive “had” tells us that reification is a mental process which hypothesizes an imaginary world or frame of reference in which something that is actually false can be taken as if it were true. Note second that the word was borrowed from Latin, the main root being *res* “thing”, thus the semantic equivalent in English would be “thing-ification” or “making something into a thing”, which of course implies that it is only a thing in that hypothetical world.
Speech is so familiar a feature of daily life that we rarely pause to define it. It seems as natural to man as walking, and only less so than breathing. Yet it needs but a moment’s reflection to convince us that this naturalness of speech is but an illusory feeling....To put it concisely, walking is an inherent, biological function of man....Not so language.

And in another place:

Language is thus not a simple biological function even as regards the simple matter of sound production. ("Language" in *Selected Writings*, p. 8, henceforth referred to as "SW")

This same realization came independently to Ferdinand de Saussure, another of the patriarchs of the science of linguistics:

In setting up the science of language within the overall study of speech, I have also outlined the whole of linguistics. All other elements of speech - those that constitute speaking - freely subordinate themselves to the first science, and it is by virtue of this subordination that the parts of linguistics find their natural place.

Consider, for example, the production of sounds necessary for speaking. The vocal organs are as external to language as are the electrical devices used in transmitting the Morse code to the code itself; and phonation, i.e., the execution of sound-images, in no way affects the system itself. (Saussure, 1959, p. 17-18)

Saussure’s geometric imagery here is explicit: the vocal organs are external to language. And he recapitulates:

The study of speech is then twofold: its basic part - having as its object language, which is purely social and independent of the individual - is exclusively psychological¹; its secondary part - which has as its object the individual side of speech, i.e. speaking, including phonation - is psychophysical. (p. 18)

Although this original view might be considered by some to be antiquated, and although I am not an expert in human biology, as far as I am aware, the language organ which is hypothecated by Noam Chomsky still has not been found to this day. Not only that, but as far as I am aware no coherent relation whatever has been found between biological structure and language, whether in particular detail or in general. In regard to detail, for example, I am not aware that anyone has found a brain cell or a gene that corresponds to a word or a phoneme or a grammatical rule, or any other language entity. And in general, I am not aware that anyone has found any general systematic relation, such as for example, between the size of man's brain and his language capability.

It is common knowledge that man has a larger brain (as a percentage of body weight) than most other animals (except the porpoise), but there is no evidence that man’s superior linguistic ability is a function of his larger brain. In addition to the lack of corroborating evidence, there are numerous facts which argue against the belief in the biological foundation of language. For example the following are among the facts of common knowledge which militate against the belief that language is essentially an organic phenomenon.

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¹. In regard to the idea that language is “psychological” see “On the Psychological Reality of the Phoneme” beginning on page 314.
1. It is a well known fact that the porpoise has at least as large a brain as man, and yet the porpoise does not speak language\textsuperscript{1}.

2. There is at least one chimpanzee, who has a much smaller brain than man, who has nevertheless learned to speak fairly sophisticated English in sign language.

3. There have been numerous examples of humans who have experienced massive loss of brain tissue without manifesting corresponding losses in language ability.

It is legitimate to wonder, in this case, why the higher animals do not speak language like humans? Or complimentarily, it is legitimate to wonder why, particularly if language is such a problem for them, humans do speak language? Though it is highly speculative at this stage in the development of our understanding of the duplicitous nature of language, I offer what I consider to be a reasonable explanation below. But whether we can explain why animals do not speak language or why people do, the fact remains that there is no evidence that language is an organ, nor even that it is governed by biological factors, except in the most general sense that in order to talk people have to be alive and breathing and not to have suffered too much brain damage.

In so far as out thinking is governed by the facts of biology then, there is no support for the belief that there is a language organ. However, we must address the seemingly contradictory linguistic fact that we do talk about “speech organs” and we do say, for example, “the tongue is an organ of speech.” One might conclude from such expressions that the tongue really is an organ of speech but that would be an error, for such expressions are figurative, that is, duplicitous, and thus the tongue is not really an organ of speech. But to confuse the issue further, the fact is that the tongue is an organ and it does play a role in the production of speech. So in our language we find the tongue involved in the typical duplicitous paradox: it is an organ of speech and it is not.

Sapir recognized that this figurative usage is a confusing paradox, and in one place (SW p.8) he suggested that we should sort the paradox out by distinguishing between a primary level of organic function and a secondary level of linguistic function. This is, of course, the logic of duplicity, so a theory of language that is framed by the premise that language is duplicitous would automatically explain this particular paradox in exactly this way. So the idea is that the use of the tongue in speech is not the biological function which governs the biological characteristics of the tongue, but rather is a secondary function which is superimposed upon the prior biological function.

The same kind of secondary function can be observed in other realms of interaction. For example, the tongue can be used in various ways in sexual interaction, but that does not make the tongue a sexual organ. This would be another secondary function, not the inherent biological function. Indeed, the finger and the nose and the foot, as Freud pointed out, can also be used as sexual organs, but that does not make them sexual organs in the biological sense. Thus it would be as erroneous to conceive of the tongue as a speech organ as it would to conceive of the foot as a sex organ.

\textsuperscript{1} When we speak of “porpoise language”, “bee language”, etc., we must bear in mind that this is just a figurative use of the word “language”, and we must take care not to confuse a figure of speech with the real thing. We will explain below exactly how it is that animal systems of communication are categorically different from language. It should also be noted that the word “language” itself is figurative, having derived from the Latin word “lingua” meaning “tongue”, and many animals do not even have tongues, such as the bee, and most of those animals that do have a tongue, such as the porpoise, do not use their tongues as communicative organs, so such expressions as “bee language” are doubly figurative.
If we were to consider the tongue to be a speech organ, then for the sake of consistency we
would have to go to the absurd lengths of considering the lungs and the throat and the nose and the
lips and the teeth to be speech organs too. And in view of the fact that mute people use their hands
and fingers and arms in language, we would also have to consider the hands and arms and fingers to
be speech organs. The absurdity of this line of reasoning can be avoided and the plain facts can be
accounted for, as Sapir suggested, by recognizing that the use of the tongue as a speech organ is an
extrinsic, secondary function superimposed upon its prior, inherent, biological function. And he
spells this out fully and explicitly in the introductory section of his book *Language* (p. 8)

I have just referred to the “organs of speech”, and it would seem at first blush that this is tantamount to an admis-
sion that speech itself is an instinctive, biologically predetermined activity. We must not be misled by the mere
term. There are, properly speaking, no organs of speech; there are only organs that are incidentally useful in the
production of speech sounds. The lungs, the larynx, the palate, the nose, the tongue, the teeth, and the lips, are all
so utilized, but they are no more to be thought of as primary organs of speech than are the fingers to be consid-
ered as essentially organs of piano-playing or the knees as organs of prayer.

In regard to the question of the biological foundation of language then, we will take Sapir’s
view which is that there is no such thing as a language organ, organs of speech, etc., except in the
metaphorical or secondary senses mentioned above. We will take the view that there is no biological
foundation in human beings, such as superior brain power, that specifically enables the language
capacity in human beings, and that in general language is not essentially an organic, or even a physi-
cal, function. Language is not essentially a transaction in the physical realm. It is not like eating, for
example, because it does not involve the actual consumption of anything. Language is a transaction in
the epiphenomenal realm of signs, which have an indirect bearing on the consummation of one’s
aspirations as a function of one’s ability to interpret them correctly and to use them skillfully. Thus
language is in the realm of things like menus, and, although a menu is about food, we do not want to
make the mistake of confusing the menu with food. In our view, to take language to be essentially a
biological or physical phenomenon is the same error as taking the menu to be food. This is not, of
course, to be interpreted to mean that we are claiming that there is no relation between biology or
physics and language, any more than we would claim that there is no relation between food and
menus. There is a definite relationship, but it is not a biological or physical one. The relationship
between language and concrete reality is more a function of truth than a function of physics or biol-
ogy.

In fairness to Chomsky it should be pointed out that there are several indications in his charac-
terization of language as an organ which suggest that he did not really intend to say that language is a
biological organ in the same sense as the eye or the foot is a biological organ. Consider this quote,
which I repeat here for convenience.

We may usefully think of the language faculty, the number faculty, and others, as “mental organs,” analogous to
the heart or the visual system or the system of motor coordination and planning.

First, note that he spoke of language as one of the “mental organs”, where the modifier “mental”
implies, by opposition, that language is not a physical organ like an eye or a foot. Second, he put the
expression “mental organs” in quotation marks, which means that he did not intend the expression to
be taken in the ordinary sense, which implies that he thinks of language as an organ in some extraor-
dinary sense, i.e., that it is different from ordinary organs like eyes and feet.
In another of the above cited quotes he said, “we may regard the language capacity *virtually* as we would a physical organ of the body”, which means that we may regard the language capacity as a “virtual organ.” And, a virtual organ is not really an organ at all.

Note that the idea of language as a virtual organ has exactly the same sort of figurativeness, or secondariness, which we saw in the idea of the tongue as a speech organ, in the word “language”, and in the expression “porpoise language”, etc. Indeed one seems to encounter this same virtuality, this same secondary fictiveness, this same parasitic secondariness, everywhere in language. For example, in ordinary English usage the word “symbolic” is virtually synonymous with “virtual” in the sense that when we say, “That is merely symbolic”, we mean that it is not real. Similarly, when we say, “That is just a semantic problem”, we mean that it is not really a problem. Even, “That is a language problem”, means that it is a trivial problem. When one comes to be aware of how pervasive this secondariness, this virtuality, of language is, one is lead to the hypothesis that language is entirely virtual. The realization of the pervasiveness of the virtuality of language thus led me to explore the hypothesis that language is entirely virtual, and I came to the conclusion that it is because I find this virtuality everywhere I look in language, and I can find nothing but virtuality.

In the course of this exploration of the virtuality of language, I was also trying to find a word which concisely captures the essence of the peculiar ontology of virtuality. That is, although language does not exist in the same sense as an eye or a thumb, we cannot simply say that language does not exist, for in some sense it does exist. We use language all the time, and sometimes it does what we want it to do. In other words, to some extent language is predictable in the pragmatic sense that it works. Further, linguists have discovered many other senses in which language is predictable. So we must find some concept that will permit us to make sense of the paradoxical fact that language does not exist, and yet at the same time it has some coherent relationship with what does exist. We have been saying that language has virtual existence, which is accurate, but the word “virtual” does not fit the bill. We need a word which could function as the basic conceptual framework for a theory of language which would be capable of making sense of the virtuality, the deceptiveness, and the parasitic secondariness of language. In the course of my exploration of this line of thought I eventually arrived at the word “duplicity”, which, as we will see as the discussion unfolds, is not just appropriate for this purpose, but is so exactly appropriate on so many levels that it is uncanny. (See “An Analysis of the Duplicity of the Word “Duplicity”” beginning on page 222) It is as if the collective unconscious of language had evolved the word “duplicity” layer upon layer over thousands of years specifically for the purpose of serving as the seminal concept in a theory of language as a virtual thing.

Armed with this fundamental concept of duplicity, let us consider the idea of language as a duplicitous thing. Of course, everyone is aware of the fact that language is sometimes used duplicitously, but the common view is that language, which is assumed to be an organ-like thing, is not itself duplicitous. The common view is that the duplicity of language is only incidental to language, occurring as a function of the speaker's use of language to deceive, and that duplicity is not a an intrinsic property of language. In other words, the common view is that if there is some duplicity in language, it is a function of the speaker, not a function of language. We think people are duplicitous, but language is not itself duplicitous. We think of language as a neutral thing, an innocent thing, like a stick: If someone hits us with a stick, we do not blame the stick, but the person wielding the stick. It is in conflict with this common view that I am asserting that language is duplicitous, not incidentally, not occasionally, but always, necessarily, intrinsically. I am asserting that language is duplicitous, just as water is wet, because that is its nature.
However, this should not be taken to imply that I intend to exonerate the speaker from culpability in the duplicity of language; rather I am asserting that language is the creature of man's duplicity. Language is the conventional institutionalization of man's duplicity.

The dynamic that is in play in the relationship between man and language is this. A simple, straightforward, naked falsehood is so obviously false that it cannot be sustained as a credible fiction, so man has devised this vast and intricate web of conventionally institutionalized duplicities, which we call language, as a complex fabric of deceptions in which he can clothe his fantasies, wishes, desires, hopes, pretenses, etc., in such a way as to display them in an elaborate facade of credible verisimilitude. In other words, language is a device which enables man to display his fantasies, wishes, desires, hopes, pretenses, etc., as veritable things in veritable reality, or, in other words, as virtual things in virtual reality. Moreover, the insidious deceptiveness of this fabric of duplicity, in conjunction with its mind boggling complexity, constitutes a defensive bulwark which obfuscates, deflects, and diffuses the penetrating glare of truth, and thereby contributes to the ability of the whole fraud to sustain credibility. And finally, in order to be accepted as cooperative members of society, we all are obliged to conspire together to pretend that we believe the representations of language (like the Emperors' new clothes), so as to invest the whole fraud with the authority of collective credibility and conventional legitimacy, which is not as good as the self-evident authority of truth, but it is enough to sustain the legitimacy of the fraud, if we are willing to believe in it.

This is the sense in which I am asserting that language is a creature of man's duplicity. And at the same time man is a victim of his own creature. Man is captured by the duplicity of language. So man is both the perpetrator and the victim of his own duplicity. (Man is both of the fish pictured Figure 2 below.)

On the Naturalness of Duplicity

Lest the claim that language is duplicitous be taken as a condemnation of language, which would follow from the naive conventional belief that duplicity is intrinsically a bad thing, I hasten to assert to the contrary that duplicity is not intrinsically a bad thing. It makes no more sense to consider duplicity to be bad than it does to consider water, or fire, or gravity, to be bad, because duplicity is a natural phenomenon, like water, or fire, or gravity. Duplicity is a dimension of life in which living organisms at all levels of evolutionary complexity interact, from man down to monkeys, to dogs, to reptiles, to insects, all the way down the evolutionary scale to plants, even bacteria, even viruses. Of course, there are different levels of evolutionary complexity in the realm of duplicity, which we will discuss in due course, just as there are different evolutionary levels in biology. But there are also basic samenesses underlying the different kinds of duplicity, just as there are basic samenesses in biology underlying the different genera and species. Thus we can speak meaningfully in general terms about the realm of duplicity, just as we speak in general terms about the realm of biology, without thereby precluding the possibility of different types of duplicity.

Given that we can speak generically about duplicity, in regard to the question of whether duplicity is intrinsically bad, consider the group of fish known as Lophiiformes, commonly known as angler fish.¹ Let us consider the species Phrynelox scaber, pictured in Figure 2 (from Wickler, p. 127). This fish gets food by duplicitously luring his prey to the vicinity of his mouth with a fake worm, which he has managed to grow attached to a fishing-pole-like appendage protruding from his
first dorsal fin-ray. When _Phrynelox scaber_ persuades some gullible little fish to believe that his worm-like appendage is actually a worm by displaying it prominently and twitching it seductively in a worm-like manner, and when that little fish comes closer in order to gobble up what he thinks is a worm, he himself is quickly gobbled up by the angler fish, who thereby reveals the fraud and inverts the situation, changing the role which the little fish thought he was playing in the drama of life from that of predator to that of prey, no doubt to his great surprise, and chagrin.

Now, with this example of natural duplicity before us, consider the question: Is the duplicity of _Phrynelox scaber_ good or bad? I think there would be two conflicting opinions: The angler fish would consider his duplicity to be good, even delicious; the prey fish, however, would consider the duplicity of _Phrynelox scaber_ to be bad.

In other words, as this example makes clear, duplicity is not pragmatically bad. And it is not morally bad either. Duplicity is bad only from the point of view of the victim of duplicity. So to paraphrase Tallyrand, one of the most successful diplomats in history, i.e. one of the most successful human practitioners of duplicity in history, duplicity is not bad in the sense of a crime, but duplicity is bad in the sense of a blunder. So what is at issue in duplicity is not badness, but gullibility, or stupidity. It is stupid to take a duplicitous representation at face value.

1. It should be noted that many biologically unrelated species manipulate worm-like or other dummy baits so as to "exploit the appetite of their prey in order to satisfy their own" as Wickler (p. 129) put it. According to Wickler, these include not only various unrelated species of fish, but also frogs and turtles.
Further, not only is duplicity not intrinsically bad, but the example of *Phrynelox scaber* makes it clear that there is a sense in which duplicity is good. The angler fish uses duplicity to get food, just as other animals use speed or physical power. In this sense duplicity is a means of manipulating one’s environment and exploiting it for one’s benefit. It is an instrument of power, as are speed and physical force, but it is even more effective than those physical means of power because they are merely tactical, whereas duplicity is strategic, and strategy dominates tactics. Thus duplicity is good in that duplicity is the essence of strategy. (See “Strategy” beginning on page 83)

Further, duplicity can also be a good thing in that it is the essence of play, and humor, and jokes. And it is also the essence of drama. Thus in so far as play and laughter are good and in so far as dramatic entertainment is good, duplicity is good.

In summary, in keeping with the nature of duplicity, there are two conflicting views of duplicity corresponding to the two roles of the participants in a duplicitous interaction - that of the victim, and that of the perpetrator. And it is clear from both points of view that it is important to understand what is going on in a duplicitous interaction. Therefore, it is important for us to realize that language is duplicitous and to try to understand how the duplicity of language works. Let me explicitly spell out the motive as seen from these two points of view.

From the point of view of the victim, the failure to realize that language is duplicitous is a fundamental strategic blunder, a blunder which destines us to perpetual suffering as the victims of the duplicity of language, and, tragically, as the perpetrators of our own victimage.

From the point of view of the perpetrator, the ability to play freely and competently in the medium of duplicity affords great advantage not only in regard to such primitive matters as gaining the satisfaction that comes from eating, but also in regard to the matter of the satisfaction that flows from being competent in interacting with one’s environment, the sort of joy that one feels vicariously in the flight of birds, in the play of squirrels, which is the joy of life.

*What Kind of Thing Are We Doing Here?*

Let us draw back once again from this particular line of reasoning and take a general point of view so that we can focus on another facet of the duplicitous situation of language. I would like to point out that it is very important to be aware of the fact that the world of duplicity is radically different from what we think of as the normal world. It is akin to the difference between the land and the sea. It is a different medium, a different kind of space, with different laws, inhabited by different kinds of objects. So one must be prepared to think and move and interact in different ways. One must be willing to give up old ways and learn new ways. Just because a bicycle is a convenient vehicle on land, does not mean it will be convenient in the sea. On the contrary, what is useful on land can be an actual impediment in the sea. So too, when we enter into the realm of duplicity, we will have to abandon some of our familiar and convenient assumptions and modes of thought, not just because they do not work there, but because they will impede our understanding.

When we enter into the realm of duplicity, we are dealing with a kind of phenomena that is totally different from what we are used to dealing with, and we are playing a sort of game that is totally different from the games that we are used to playing. It is not just that the game of duplicity is different from the normal games with which we are familiar, as football is different from chess, and
chess is different from mathematics, and mathematics is different from physics. The game of duplicity is a totally different kind of game. In fact, it is not a game. But the game of duplicity is not just different from normal games because it is not a game; it is different from games because the spirit of a game is one of cooperation in conformity to some rules or standards or norms, whereas the spirit of duplicity is the antithesis of cooperation and conformity. Duplicity is antithetical in relation to rules and standards and norms, the very things which constitute the framework of a game. Duplicity plays with the rules and standards and norms of games, and duplicity is always in play. In other words, duplicity is always other in relation to some prior reference point, such as a rule or standard, so you can never pin it down. It is always a moving target. We always just miss it, because wherever we try to grasp it, is precisely where it isn’t.

For example, a duplicitous phenomena is duplicitous because it is not a phenomena, and yet at the same time it is a phenomena: Something is there, but it is not what it seems to be. And a duplicitous game is duplicitous because it is not a game, and yet at the same time it is a game: some game is being played, but it is not the game that appears to be being played. A duplicitous apple is duplicitous because it is not a real apple, but it is not nothing: there is something there, but it is something other than an apple.

This sounds crazy, of course. And it is. It is precisely the logic of craziness. But that is the point I am trying to make: if we are going to make sense of duplicity we have to put aside our normal presuppositions and get into the crazy kind of thinking that goes on in the realm of duplicity and try to make sense of it in its own terms. It would be a mistake to conduct our inquiry in the realm of duplicity as if we were dealing with physical phenomena. When we go into the realm of duplicity we have to modify our assumptions and our methodology in accord with the nature of the realm of duplicity, if we are to make sense of it, and if we are to function adequately in that realm.

So, although duplicity does not play a game, it is play. Duplicity is the fundamental logic of play. Duplicity is the dualistic framework of pretense that constitutes the context of playful interaction. So the realm of duplicity includes the play of games, but it is not limited to the play of a game, or to the play in a game. The kind of play that takes place in the framework of a game is a tame, domesticated, civilized, citified form of play. The play of a game is an inhibited species of play because it is limited by the rules of the game. Beyond such civilized play, duplicity also includes wild, unconditioned, totally free play. Therefore, duplicity cannot be characterized or grasped in terms of the logic of games, or in terms of game theory.

On the contrary, rules are grist for the mill, for duplicity plays with the rules of games, on the rules of games, outside the rules of games. Likewise in relation to the rules of language and society, i.e., conventions, duplicity plays with conventions, it plays on conventions, it plays outside of conventions. Likewise, in relation to any kind of beliefs, or expectations, or hopes, or wishes. In general, duplicity can take any prior standard, or boundary, or fixed point of reference as the basis of play. And, underlying all of these various kinds of standards, at bottom duplicity is a play on the ultimate standard, which is truth. So duplicity is the play of possibility against the background of necessity. It is the play of what is not in the context of what is. Thus, in sum, duplicity plays with truth.

Given this, it is evident that in trying to understand the duplicity of language we are not trying to figure out how to play any of the familiar games better. Nor are we trying to figure out how to play a new game. Nor are we trying to understand duplicity in the context of game theory. On the contrary, because duplicity is the framework of games, in order to understand how games work, we must first understand how duplicity works. And then we can try to understand how the duplicity of play evolves
into the framework of a game. So we must begin by trying to understand duplicity in order to understand games, not the reverse.

Also we are not trying to develop a new theory. We are not trying to find new facts, or to gather information. We do not need any new data. We are not trying to invent or create something new. We are not trying to learn anything new. We are not trying to discover anything new. As I said above, we are trying to dis-cover things that we already know. We are like archeologists of the mind, digging down layer by layer into the wealth of duplicitous knowledge that we already have, but which we do not know that we have, because it is buried layer by layer beneath the surface of our conscious awareness, buried under a vast heap of generations of accumulated layers of conventionally sedimented duplicity, which we call language.

So, contrary to the normal kind of inquiry, our attention here is not aimed in the direction of things that we do not know, but in the direction of things that we do know, but which we do not know that we know. Contrary to the normal idea, we are not trying to progress, but to regress. We are trying to go back to the beginning of the structuration of our thought, so that we can discover and correct the primitive error that is buried there. What we are trying to do here is to realize the truth of the duplicity of our own language and of our own minds.

And in order to keep from becoming disoriented as we enter into this tangled web of duplicity, we must bear in mind that when we realize something in the realm of duplicity, technically speaking, nothing at all has happened in reality. To be sure, the event of becoming aware of something might have consequences in reality, but the dawning of the awareness of something in itself does not change anything in reality. For example, if there was a snake under my chair, and if I was not aware of it, and if then I became aware of it, I would certainly do something as a consequence of my awareness, but nothing in reality would have changed by my becoming aware of the snake. The snake would have been there just the same whether I was aware of it or not. So technically speaking, when we delve into the duplicity of language, into the duplicity of our own minds, we are not doing anything in reality. What we hope to do - to bring about the realization of the truth of the duplicity of language - takes place entirely in the realm of duplicity. If we are successful, if we do realize the truth, it is not the truth that will have changed, but our awareness, or rather limitations which we have imposed upon our awareness that will have changed. In short, it is not truth that will have changed, but duplicity. And if something that does not exist changes, nothing will have changed in reality.

It is crucial to bear this in mind, because the realization of this fact compels us to suspend a very fundamental belief that is much cherished in our modern society, namely, the belief that everything in the universe is governed by physical law. We are used to trying to make sense of things in terms of the laws of physics, chemistry, biology, etc. But while these laws may be inviolable in the physical realm, they have only an indirect force in the realm of duplicity. Indeed, as we pointed out above, in that the laws of physics, chemistry, and biology are fixed standards, they become grist for the mill of duplicity. Duplicity purposely plays upon the laws of physics, chemistry, and biology, perverting and flaunting them. For example, there are many different kinds of play which toy with the law of gravity, usually in ways that are controlled and limited in such a way as to prevent the injury and death that are often the consequence of falling. This sort of play includes jumping into the water, sky diving, bungee jumping, jumping on a trampoline, carnival rides, etc. The motive for all of these activities is the pleasurable feeling that is derived from the defiance of the law of gravity. Thus such behavior cannot possibly be explained as a function of the laws of the physical realm, for it is an inverse function of those laws. So too, nothing in the realm of duplicity can be explained as a function
What Kind of Thing Are We Doing Here?

of physical laws, because everything that is duplicitous in relation to the laws of physics is an inverse function of the laws of physics.

Thus as we enter into the realm of duplicity, we must put aside the presuppositions derived from the physical realm, and we must proceed with an open mind to explore the realm of duplicity, to try understand the kind of phenomena which we encounter there without prejudice, and to try to discover the laws which govern the realm of duplicity.

Let us approach the question of what we are doing here from another direction. There is a wise saying which observes that the basic difficulty in solving a problem is not so much finding the right answer, but finding the right question. While this is true as far as it goes, it does not go quite far enough, because there is an even more basic difficulty in solving a problem. The first requisite in solving a problem is that you must realize that there is a problem.

It is at this most basic level, at the level of realization, that we must begin this study of the problem of the duplicity of language, because people commonly do not even realize that there is a generic human problem. And the basic reason people do not commonly realize that there is a generic human problem is because they assume that the world is governed entirely by physical laws, but since this human problem is not a physical problem, it cannot be apprehended as a physical problem. It does not show up as a coherent object on the radar screen of those whose world-view is bounded by the assumption that every problem is a physical problem. Further, if people do not realize that there is a generic human problem, how much less do people realize that it is a problem of language? And then, how much less do people realize that the problem with language is that it is duplicitous?

Thus we must begin to address the problem of the duplicity of language first by trying to broaden our field of vision so that we can focus upon the fact that there is a generic human problem, then we can move on to the realization of the fact that the problem is one of language, then we come to the crux of the problem which is the error of not realizing that language is duplicitous.

Further, there is another sense in which the nature of the problem necessitates beginning at the level of realization: the problem of duplicity is essentially a problem of realization. That is, duplicity is problematic only in so far as one does not realize that it is duplicity. If one realizes that something is duplicitous, then it ceases to be problematic. Indeed, if one realizes that something is duplicitous, there is in principle the possibility of inverting the situation and of turning that very duplicity to one's advantage at the expense of the prospective perpetrator.

Thus the essential character of the problem of duplicity, which should determine the way we approach the problem, is not that duplicity is intrinsically problematic, but that duplicity is problematic as a consequence of our own limited awareness. Therefore, the study of duplicity, at least in the beginning, takes place entirely at the level of our own personal realization. So what we are doing here is trying to realize the truth about duplicity, particularly the duplicity of language.
Is This Science?

In our culture the scientific method is considered to be the only legitimate way to investigate and verify our beliefs. Therefore, if an investigation is considered to be unscientific, then it is considered to be dubious.

There are some aspects of this present enterprise which would probably be considered by some to be inconsistent with the scientific method, which raises the question of whether what we are doing here is scientific, or not, and thus whether it is legitimate, or not. In order to forestall such doubt, I will briefly address the question.

Does this study violate some of the commonly held assumptions about the nature of scientific inquiry? Yes it does. Does that mean this investigation is not scientific? No, it does not. My view is that this present investigation is scientific, but because the realm of duplicity has heretofore been excluded from the realm of scientific inquiry, when we broaden our scientific perspective to include duplicitous phenomena, it will necessitate some changes in some of the commonly held assumptions about the nature of scientific inquiry.

It would be premature for us to try to work out the implications of this study for our conceptualization of the scientific method in detail. Nevertheless, because the appearance of scientific legitimacy is so important in the prevailing intellectual milieu, if this study appears to be unscientific, it might not even be permitted to pass through outer gates of the city, let alone being granted a fair hearing before the scientific tribunal. Therefore, I think it would be expedient to discuss four issues which I think might raise some scientific eyebrows.

Logic

The first aspect of the present discussion which I think might be seen as scientifically dubious is the uncompromising illogicalness of the whole realm of duplicity. There is indeed something dubious here, but my contention is that what should be considered scientifically dubious is not the illogicalness of duplicity, but the traditional assumptions about logic. The illogicalness of duplicity should not cause science to turn away from the realm of duplicity, but rather it should cause science to reconsider its assumptions about logic.

In the traditional scientific world-view, logic has always been considered to be outside of the purview of the scientific method. The prevailing assumption has been, and still is, that logic is not subject to empirical testing. And this is the prevailing scientific position in spite of the fact that the most fundamental dictum of the scientific method, the very bedrock of scientific thinking, is that all assumptions should be subject to empirical test.

In this regard, the scientific community looks upon logic in the same way today as the Pope looked upon the planets and the stars in Galileo’s day. The Pope considered the planets and stars to be part of the fixed framework of the universe which God put in place before the beginning of our world and he thought that it would be disrespectful for us lowly human beings to subject God’s creation to our grubby empirical tests. And today the scientific community considers logic to be the fixed framework of thought which God put in place before we lowly human beings began to think and that logic is the immutable and unquestionable a priori laws of thought.
Further, the traditional scientific point of view has not only assumed this mystical theory of holy logic, it has assumed that nature itself is logical in accord with this holy logic, and it has assumed that scientific reasoning must be logical in accord with this holy logic, and it has assumed that scientific laws must be logical in accord with this holy logic. Thus the traditional scientific assumptions about logic have the status of unquestionable articles of faith. And consequently, these assumptions have not only been untested empirically, but they are considered to be untestable empirically. Therefore, in my view, if we are going to take the scientific point of view, then it is these articles of faith about logic that ought to be considered to be scientifically dubious.

It is my contention that we must reframe our thinking about logic in the context of the fact that language and logic are deeply related, if indeed there is such a thing as logic apart from language. Logic, which basically meant “to speak” in ancient Greek, from which it was borrowed into English, was then and is now considered to be the laws of reasoning. But since reasoning is done in language, it would seem reasonable to assume that the laws of logic must be part of the laws of language. As there are laws of phonology, and laws of syntax, and laws of semantics, and laws of pragmatics, so there are also laws of logic. In fact the ancient Greeks did think logic was an integral aspect of language, which is why they called it “logic”, and which is why they studied logic as a component of rhetoric. This is also my view.

And it follows from this view that, if language is duplicitous, then logic must be duplicitous also. This in turn implies, in keeping with the above conceptualization of the logic of duplicity, that there must be two levels of logic. I suggest that these two levels of logic correspond to a distinction that has frequently been observed in regard to logic. Freud, for example, considered it necessary to distinguish two kinds of logic, which he called “primary and secondary process thinking”, so called because he considered the former to be conceptually primary and the latter to be secondary, which is in accord with our conceptualization of the ordering relation between the two layers of duplicity. Korzybski independently made a very similar distinction between what he called “non-Aristotelian and Aristotelian logic”. And many other scholars in various fields of inquiry have arrived at the conclusion that there are two kinds of logic. We will offer a principled framework for this distinction and a fuller discussion of the duplicitous character of logic below.

I would like to mention another line of reasoning which should lead science to question its assumptions about logic. Consider this question: If logic is the system of inviolable laws of thought, then why does thought not obey those laws? Rocks invariably obey the law of gravity, why do thoughts not invariably obey the laws of logic? Why do our thoughts so persistently stray from the laws of logic? Why do we have to struggle, seemingly against the natural flow of thought, to obey this supposedly inviolable law? What kind of law is this law that not only has no intrinsic force, but which seems on the contrary to go against the natural flow of thought? It is certainly not law of the same order as the law of gravity, the sort of law which we could not possibly disobey.

It is common knowledge that there are in general two kinds of law. There is the kind of law which says, “You cannot walk on the grass”, and then there is the kind of law which says, “You cannot walk on the water.” It seems obvious to me that logic, as science has traditionally assumed logic to be, is the former kind of law, as distinct from the law of gravity, which is the latter kind of law. In this regard the laws of logic would seem to be of the same order as the other laws of language, such as the syntactic law that all sentences in English must have a subject (to which there are innumerable violations, such as “fat chance”), and the phonological law that no word can begin with the consonant cluster “pt” (to which there are also numerous violations, such as the way people actually pronounce
“potato” in ordinary casual speech, which is commonly “ptato”) or “kn” (“Can he...?”, which is commonly pronounced “Kne...?”). However, one must not conclude from such violations that there is no law, but rather if one understands what is going on in detail, it becomes clear that there are two levels, two types, of law.

Finally, I would like to point out that it is not just our thoughts that are illogical, but it was logically proven by Russell and Whitehead in *Principia Mathematica* (1910-1913) that logic itself is fundamentally self contradictory. That is, that logic itself is illogical. Bertrand Russell came up with a makeshift way of working around the problem, called the theory of types, which avoids contradiction by distinguishing between logical types of phenomena e.g. category vs. member of the category, use vs. mention, etc., and prohibiting propositions which mix sentences from one level with sentences from the other level. Notice that the concept of duplicity, as we saw it applied to the example above, does exactly the same thing as Russell’s theory of types. Thus whereas Russell's theory of types provides a means for avoiding the problem, it is an *ad hoc* solution, and thus it does not explain the problem. But if one considers logic to be an integral aspect of language, and if one assumes that language is duplicitous, then the paradox at the root of logic that was discovered by Russell and Whitehead can be explained as just another manifestation of the duplicity of language.

While these remarks unfortunately are too brief to fully explain this very important issue, we have to do first things first: before we can sort out the implications of the duplicity of language in the realm of logic, we must establish a basic understanding of the duplicity of language. The basic point I want to make here is that when the scientific point of view broadens to encompass the duplicity of language it is going to lead to some radical changes in the deepest levels of our traditional scientific conceptualization of logic. In particular, this broader point of view will enable us to bring logic from the mystic realm of holy apriorism into the realm of empirical science, just as the fathers of the scientific point of view brought the planets and the stars down from the mystic realm of supralunar perfection to the same empirical ground on which we lowly human beings stand.

**Mental/Physical Dualism**

The second issue that might raise scientific eyebrows is this. I said above that physical laws do not govern the realm of duplicity and that there are other laws which do govern the realm of duplicity. Further, I used the word “mind” to refer to the realm of duplicity. No doubt such comments will be taken as evidence that I am assuming that there is a realm of mental phenomena apart from the realm of physical phenomena, in accord with the conventional mind/body distinction. If I did hold this assumption, it would raise the question of scientific legitimacy because it is in conflict with the mainstream of scientific thought, which holds that there is no mental realm of phenomena because there is no physical evidence of a mental realm of phenomena.

The first point I want to make in reply is that I do not make this assumption and I do not subscribe to the conventional mind/body distinction. My position is that there is a realm of duplicity, but things that are in the realm of duplicity do not exist. For example, the worm with which the angler fish lures his prey exists, in so far as it can be said to exist at all, only as an erroneous conceptualization in the mind of the victim. The worm is a figment of the imagination of the victim. Of course, the victim is lured into conjuring up the image of a worm in his mind’s eye by the angler fish's skillful
Is This Science?

manipulation of his worm-like appendage. But in the end the question will be decided by who eats who. In this example, there was no worm. Only an image of a worm.

Does the fact that the duplicitous worm is a figment of the imagination mean that there are no laws governing the realm of duplicity? No it does not. It is perfectly obvious that there are laws governing this realm because the duplicitous worm does have a predictable effect on the real physical behavior of the prey-fish. And moreover, the angler fish knows what effect it will have. And so do we. And the angler fish makes his real physical living in the real physical world by exploiting the predictability of the effect of this duplicitous worm in the real physical world. In other words, the angler fish uses a duplicitous worm to get his real food, and it works. This is the ultimate pragmatic proof: It satisfies.

This means that the predictability of the effect of the duplicitous worm is not a function of physical laws. This means in turn that the behavior of fish, and other living things, as distinct from non-living things like rocks, is not entirely a function of physical laws. It means that there is a duplicitous realm of phenomena apart from the physical realm, and that there is another system of laws apart from the system of physical laws. There are no doubt systematic relations between these two systems of law, but one cannot begin to explore that relationship until one has at least a general understanding of the duplicitous system of law, which is what we are doing here.

This brings us to the second point I want to make in regard to the issue of the mind/body distinction, which is that “mind” and “body” are words. As such they are elements of language, and thus they are creatures of the duplicity of language. Now, the conventional worldview holds that both mental and physical phenomena are real, and the scientific worldview distinguishes itself from the conventional worldview by insisting that only physical phenomena are real. In the present context the question arises as to whether the whole issue that arises as a consequence of the distinction between mind and body is not itself a function of the duplicity of language. That is, the scientific worldview agrees with the ordinary world view in assuming that there is a distinction between the mind and the body, but distinguishes itself by taking the position that the mind is not real. That is not the same, as we will see in the next section, as taking the position that there is no such distinction. This latter position is the one to which we are led by the present argument. But in any case, it would be begging the question to preclude the possibility that the whole issue is a misleading duplicity. In other words, before we can make sense of the mind/body distinction, we must understand the duplicity of language.

The Boundary of Nature

The third source of possible scientific doubt about the line of reasoning I am pursuing here is closely related to both of the foregoing problems. The scientific worldview, as I pointed out above, assumes that there is a distinction between mind and body. It might seem that, since the scientific worldview holds that there is nothing real in the category of mind, that the assumption of the distinction is pointless. But it is not pointless in the overall strategy of traditional scientific reasoning, because maintaining this distinction serves the illicit function of permitting the scientific worldview to preserve its traditional prejudices about the nature of nature, and about the relationship of man to nature, and about the nature of language, and about the relationship of man to other animals, by using
the category of mind as kind of waste basket to which it can discard any inconvenient or recalcitrant facts.

E. A. Burtt, the philosopher of science, speaking in *The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Science* about those who held the Newtonian point of view, which is perhaps outdated in some respects, but which I think nevertheless accurately reflects the unconscious world-view which most scientists bring with them to the discipline of science even today, observes the following.

mind was for them a convenient receptacle for the refuse, the chips, and whittlings of science, rather than a possible object of scientific knowledge. (p. 320)

By contrast,

The really important world outside was a world hard, cold, colorless, silent, and dead; a world of quantity, a world of mathematically computable motions in mechanical regularity. (p. 239)

Thus in the common scientific world-view there is mind on one side, the inside, and there is the “really important world outside.” In the common scientific world-view the outside world is considered to be important because it is considered to be the real world, the physical world, the world of real power and substance, as opposed to the mental world, which is ephemeral, fleeting, hence unimportant. In this view, the real world is coherent and predictable. It is the mathematical, logical, lawful, harmonious realm of nature, as opposed to the mental world which is the illogical, chaotic, incoherent, deviant realm of mind. Thus from the traditional scientific point of view, if there is an illusion, or a logical inconsistency, or an anomalous fact, it is assumed that it must belong in the waste basket, the realm of mind, because nature is logical, coherent, systematic. Anything that does not conform to what is assumed to be the nature of nature is thus not considered to be natural. Nature is natural, so whatever is unnatural must belong to mind.

Further, it is assumed in the common scientific point of view that the realm of the natural is the same as the realm of the physical. In other words, the natural is physical and the physical is natural. Thus whatever is not natural is not physical and whatever is not physical is not natural.

And notice further that in this view the boundary between the realm of mind and the realm of physical nature is not drawn between living and non-living things, but between human beings and other animals. Human beings are in one category while animals are in the same category as rocks and water. In fact the boundary is drawn in the middle of human beings, because man is partly a physical being and partly a mental being, but animals are, like rocks and water, considered to be wholly physical. Correspondingly, animals are considered to belong wholly to the realm of the natural, but man is only partly natural, the other part being mental, i.e., unnatural.

Of course this is a stereotypical view of the assumptions of science, which is to say that many scientists disagree with it in one way or another, but such disagreement notwithstanding, it is the consensus view of the scientific community. It is the unconscious view which scientists bring with them from their childhood to the enterprise of science. It is the world view that they imbibe with their mother's milk, the world-view which is embodied in their mother tongue. It is the worldview that is a function of language. It is the conventional point of view.

One of the areas of scientific inquiry from which considerable disagreement with the scientific stereotype is emerging is ethology. And one of the key issues is the question of whether animals can lie or not. Since the conventional scientific establishment assumes that animals are in the same category as rocks, it must also assume that animals cannot lie any more than rocks can lie. So if ani-
mals can lie, then the fundamental categorial boundaries of the conventional scientific world view have to be reorganized. So the premise that animals cannot lie is a key premise of the prevailing scientific world-view.

And it is perfectly obvious that the facts are in conflict with this premise. Animals do lie, and for anyone who cares to consider the issue there is an abundance of evidence. We talked about how the angler fish uses deception earlier in this chapter. And the angler fish is not alone. The whole fabric of life, the whole biosystem is a communicative system, which is to say a system of signs, and as we will explain in Chapter 2, all signs are duplicitous. But aside from this technical claim, the duplicity of animals is a matter of common knowledge. Everyone knows that the animal kingdom is rife with camouflage and mimicry, which are forms of lying. Everyone knows that birds sometimes pretend to be injured in order to lead potential predators away from their nests. But not everyone appreciates the complexity and sophistication of animal duplicity, nor does everyone appreciate the fact that there is even duplicity in the plant kingdom. So to get an idea of the depth and richness of non-human natural duplicity, one ought to consult an expert on the subject such as Wolfgang Wickler’s classic *Mimicry in Plants and Animals*. And for a recent survey of the duplicity of higher animals, especially non-human primates, see *How Monkeys See The World* (Cheney and Seyfarth, 1900) especially Chapter 7, “Deception”.

So it is only possible to maintain the belief that animals, not to mention plants, cannot lie by ignoring the mountain of evidence to the contrary. And if animals do lie, then it is not possible to maintain the prevailing assumptions about the boundary of nature in relation to the categories of mind vs. matter and man vs. animals.

Thus the fact that the present discussion violates some of the traditional scientific metaphysical assumptions in regard to these categories does not imply that the present study is unscientific, but that those traditional assumptions must be revisited and revised to accommodate the fact that animals, indeed all living beings, interact duplicitously.

**Empirical Evidence**

The fourth issue which I think is likely to raise some question in regard to the scientific legitimacy of what we are doing here has to do with the bottom line of the scientific method, which is empirical evidence. This issue divides into two questions? First, given that what we are doing here is trying to realize the truth about the duplicity of our own minds, then the question is this: Can such realization be considered to be valid empirical evidence? And second, is there any way the normal kind of objective scientific evidence can be brought to bear on the argument being developed here?

In replying to these questions let us reframe them by considering the implicit assumptions about subjectivity and objectivity which underlie them and which beg them.

The common scientific point of view assumes that the objective point of view, as opposed to the subjective point of view, is the only legitimate scientific perspective. This relates to the present argument in that from this point of view the experience of realization is considered to be subjective experience, and therefore scientifically illegitimate, whereas the normal kind of evidence is considered to be objective, and therefore scientifically legitimate.
I reply once again by pointing out that "subject" and "object" are words, and as such they are creatures of the duplicity of language. Moreover, these words refer to elements of sentential syntax. Thus they are not merely creatures of language which refer to things that are not in language, but they are creatures of language which refer to creatures of language. The concepts "subject" and "object" are not themselves objective phenomenal "things" that can be found by looking through microscopes or telescopes, but are among the ephemeral category of epiphenomenal things in the realm of duplicity. Therefore the conceptual framework of the subjective/objective opposition in terms of which science has traditionally framed its point of view in relation to the world is conceptually downstream from language. Therefore, to assume the traditional scientific point of view in trying to understand the duplicity of language is begging the question. The question of what the subjective and objective points of view are and how they are related to each other and how they are related to the world is a question that can only be answered in terms of the duplicity of language, not the reverse.

Given this reframing of the issue, let me respond to the two questions raised above. First, in regard to the question of the validity of subjective evidence, when one looks at the issue of what counts as empirical evidence from the point of view of the duplicity of language it becomes clear that there is a whole vast realm of experiential phenomena which has traditionally been excommunicated without a proper hearing by the scientific establishment because of the conventional prejudice against the subjective point of view. As I just pointed out, we cannot intelligently discuss this issue until we have developed a fuller understanding of the duplicity of language, which will permit us in turn to understand how the grammar of subject and object relate to the world. However we can mention a couple of facts which might help to clarify the basic parameters of the issue in the meantime.

First, we should realize that in terms of the experiential facts of the universe as I see them from my point of view, there is always a correlation between the subjective position and the first-person position. That is, from my point of view, it is always the first person "I" who does the seeing, the hearing, the feeling, etc. So I say, "I see" to describe my seeing. And so do you. However, when speaking of objective evidence we say, for example, "It weighs 2.5438 grams." But this is just a convenient elliptical shorthand for saying, "I see that the scale shows that it weighs 2.5438 grams." If we speak fully and explicitly, it becomes clear that there is no such thing as objective third-party evidence apart from the subjective first-person point of view. All evidence is subjective. The subject is the one who sees. Therefore as a matter of fact subjective evidence is conceptually, ontologically, and experientially prior to and superior to objective evidence.

Second, what is really at issue here is not the question of subjective vs. objective evidence, but the problem of validation. The scientific establishment has come to hold the view that the only legitimate kind of validation is agreement among persons who independently replicate the same experience i.e., collective social validation. But I would like to point out that social validation is just as possible in relation to subjective experiences as it is in relation to objective experience. And of particular relevance to the present argument, social validation is quite possible in regard to the subjective experience of realization.

Consider the joke. Generally speaking, if I undergo the experience of realization in response to what is purported to be a joke, the experience that we call "getting it", then I find that sometimes other people also get it. If other people get the same joke, then that is social validation of the joke. Thus the phenomenon of sharing a joke demonstrates that it is possible for people to share the same subjective experience just as much as it is for people to share the same objective experience. In fact, technically, it is not really possible to share an objective experience because there is no such thing.
The Basic Question

One cannot have an objective experience, so how can two people have the same objective experience. The objective point of view is necessarily alienated from direct firsthand experience.

Of course, it is not always possible to share the same subjective experience with every person. That is, in terms of the example of a joke, for any given joke, there are some people who get it and there are some people who do not get it. And there are some people who get most jokes, and some people who don’t get any jokes. But these variations are a function of individual differences, not a limitation on the possibility of subjective validation.

Third, it is relevant to the question of the validity of subjective evidence, particularly in relation to language, to point out that the prejudice against the subjective point of view, and against immediate direct first-person experience is integral to the conceptual dynamics of language. In other words, the validity and credibility of language as a medium of interaction is undermined by immediate experience. For this reason, language has a vested interest in inducing us to value its representations at the expense of the reality which it represents. Therefore, the scientific bias against subjective evidence is not an objective, empirically justified principle, but is rather a function of the duplicity of language.

Turning now to the second question about empirical evidence, which is the question of whether there is any objective empirical evidence which can be brought to bear on the present argument. The answer is yes, there is an abundance of objective empirical evidence, but once again we will not be in a position to see how such evidence bears on the duplicity of language until after we have developed a fuller understanding of the duplicity of language. I will mention by way of example that there is a large body of facts called variously “markedness phenomena” or “language universals”, which have been well known for decades, but which have remained a mysterious and controversial anomaly in the linguistic dialogue, because they are unexpected and inexplicable in the prevailing theoretical frame of reference. It happens that I previously wrote a book explaining how a duplicitous theory of language would predict and thus explain these unexpected facts, and thus how these facts are proof of the validity of this theory. However, that book has only been privately circulated, because the argument presupposes an understanding of the duplicity of language. Therefore, publication of that line of argument based on objective empirical evidence will have to follow the present attempt to develop a foundation of awareness of the duplicity of language.

The Basic Question

Finally, I would like to end the discussion of the question of the scientific legitimacy of this study, and the introduction in general, by observing that the ultimate test of the validity of a theory is not one of empirical fact, but of pragmatic utility. Therefore the most important question is not “Can you prove it?”, but “Does it work?”

In regard to the validity of a theory of language one can ask the pragmatic question at several levels. Does the theory work in helping us to understand and explain the facts of language? Does it work in helping us to talk better? Etc.

But remember that the basic point of this book is that language is duplicitous. And remember that on a practical level the relevance of this fact is that as a function of its duplicity, language is a
troublesome human problem. In the words of Jacques Lacan, as quoted earlier in this introduction, the generic human problem is this.

**MAN IS THE SUBJECT CAPTURED AND TORTURED BY LANGUAGE**

So the most important empirical question that we must ask of a theory of language is this. Does it solve the problem of language? Does it expose the duplicitous fraud? Does it liberate us from the captivity of language? Does it bring the torture to an end?

And since these are pragmatic questions, they require pragmatic answers. And a pragmatic question is like a joke: The answer is not in the realm of words, but in the realm of concrete experience. Indeed, the point is to engender an experience of liberation and pleasure, and if you get the point, then you are thereby satisfied, so a verbal answer becomes irrelevant.

So the appropriate answer to this kind of question is the silence of satisfaction, but this is a radically different kind of silence from that with which the unfortunate Wittgenstein concluded his famous logical argument,

> What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence. (p. 151)

For, alas, after a few years hiatus, he resumed speaking about that which we cannot speak about, but at least he did so in an illogical manner, if not in a satisfactory manner.

So the most basic empirical question to ask of a theory of language is this: “Does it satisfy?”, which can only be answered by the direct experience of satisfaction, not by words. And at bottom, it is truth that satisfies.