

WITTGENSTEIN AND HEIDEGGER ON THE IMPASSABLE BRIDGE¹

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From the historical perspective, in Western thought, generally, we are confronted with the dichotomy of language and reality (world, extra/non-linguistic entities). For example, Aristotle says, in *Peri Hermêneias (On Interpretation I, 16a)*:

*Esti men oun ta en tê phonê ton en tê psykhê pethêmaton
symbola, kai ta graphomena ton en tê phonê.*

which can be rendered English in the following way :

“Now what (takes place) in the making of vocal sounds is a symbol of what there is in the soul in the way of passions, and what is written is a symbol of vocal sounds.”

Thus, for Aristotle, the letters “show” the sounds. The sounds “show” the passions (impressions) in the soul (mind) and from the continuation of the text, which has not been presented above, it can be inferred that the passions (impressions) in the soul “show” the matters that arouse them².

In the above quotation I think there are at least two terms which need clarification: *passions and symbols*. “Passions” (*pathêmata*) may be construed as “notions”, “impressions”.³ “Symbols” (*ta symbola*), on the other hand, is of crucial importance for the purpose of the present essay. By taking into account the context in which this term takes place, it can be interpreted as “point of contact” or “bond of unions”.

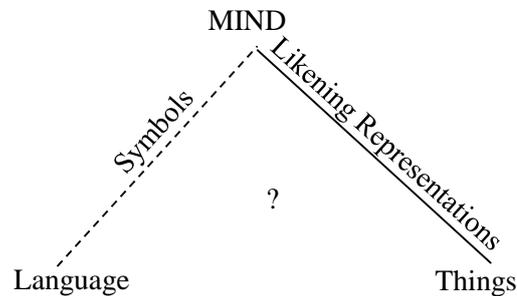
I have explicated the term «symbol» as a point of contact. Why? What are my grounds for stating that symbol must (can) be understood as a point of contact, or bond of union or as in the case of Heidegger's interpretation is “that which holds to each other”? What kinds of entities come together by means of symbols? Perusal of the given passage may intimate the answer: “symbols” bring “letters” and “sounds” together, and in the same way “sounds” and “impressions” are united by the chain of “*symbola*”. If it is expressed in modern philosophical jargon, “symbols”, in the Aristotelian sense, have “syntactic” as well as “semantic” aspects. In the limit of present essay, I will concentrate on the semantic characteristics of “symbols”. But we have one more important semantic relation in Aristotle's philosophy: “impressions” (*pathêmata*) in the «soul (mind) are *homoiômata* (likening representations) of things.

In a nutshell, we have the following relations:

Letters Sounds Impressions → Things

The dotted lines indicate the connections which symbols provide. Note that the alleged tie between impressions and things is of different character, there are peculiar sorts of

“similarities” or “resemblances” between “things” and “impressions”. It is open to discussion, but I think, the following diagram makes clear what is meant in Aristotle's *On Interpretation* in terms of modern philosophical terminology:



Surprisingly enough, this diagram, from a certain viewpoint, is like the diagram given C.K. Ogden and J.A. Richard's *The Meaning of Meaning* (1923: II)⁴.

Hence, there is (are) a point (s) of contact between language and mind, and between mind and things. I cannot say anything about the relation between language and things. Metaphorically speaking, there are certain “bridges” between several distinct domains. Language and mind come together by means of symbols. Mind and things can be linked by the bridge of “Likening representations”. Then, we are given a path between language and things: Mind highlights this connection between them. It constitutes, a passable, secure bridge.

Construed in this way we are ready to investigate the character of linkage (s) between language and things (Reality, World) in Heidegger and Wittgenstein.

I am of the opinion that to understand a philosopher like Heidegger or Wittgenstein, using so to speak the “principle of charity”, it would be proper to let him speak in his own way.

Heidegger frequently uses metaphors. I am going to leave them as they are. I have no right to distort Heidegger's own expressions by trying to explicate them in allegedly “neutral terms”. I am afraid this might be sort of hair splitting (*Spitzfindigkeit*). Lest some doubts be left lurking in the minds of my readers, let me explain my aim in writing this paper. I do not want to pretend to make clear what Heidegger and Wittgenstein say. My modest intention is to indicate a traditionally obstinate problem as expressed by two contemporary philosophers. Some may think that paper tries to explain what is obscure by what is more so, namely, *obscrum per obscurius*. I am aware of this sort of danger, but, at my own peril, I venture to be one of the interpreters of both Heidegger and Wittgenstein.

Heidegger, in his well- known philosophical interest in the etymology of philosophical terms, finds an Archimedean point for his philosophical view of language in the Greek word *Logos*. “Logos speaks simultaneously as name for Being and for Sayings”. Heidegger (1959:185). Heidegger does not accept the split and “distancing” between language and

reality. Notice that it is not we, as human beings who speak but language, as intimately linked with being, reveals its hidden structure by speaking. Heidegger (1959:161:255). Although language is seemingly given to man, it is not one of his primary possession, it belongs to being. Language is “temple” (*Bezirk*), Heidegger (1957:286-292) “house of Being” (*Haus des Seins*). Heidegger (1959: 166). We are doomed to dwell in the “house of Being”.

Like Parmenides, who says, «the same thing exists for thinking and for being” Kirk and Raven (1977: 269), namely, thinking and being are the same, Heidegger, presumably, one of his enthusiastic philosophical heirs, states that, “they belong together”. Heidegger (1959: 255). In the same vein, Heidegger claims: Language and being belong together. We cannot separate them. Since he insists: “The being of language; language of being” (*Die Wesen der Sprache: Die Sprache des Wesens*). Heidegger (1959:181).

Is Heidegger playing with words? No, on the contrary, he maintains that language plays with us (him?). So, we cannot try to dissect this intrinsic unity. We cannot speak about language if we could, language might have turned “almost inevitably into an objects, but language is not an object, among objects. Heidegger (1959:149). It occupies a privileged place. We cannot speak about it, language speaks for itself. It does not need us. “In order to be who we are, we human beings, remain committed to and within the being of language and can never step out of it and look at it from somewhere else”. Heidegger (1959: 266).

In the following, I'll try to argue, in a somewhat metaphorical manner, à la Heidegger, against him.

Heidegger seems to be in need of establishing a linkage between language and reality. This linkage has already been given at the beginning. He does not have to cross the bridge, starting from the terrain of language in order to reach reality or being: “If we go through a stream or if we go through a forest, we go through the word ‘stream’, we go through the word ‘forest’ and this occurs even if we fail to pronounce these words or recall their linguistic reality”. Heidegger (1957: 286).

Wherever we go, we take along our portable bridge: the bridge between language and reality. Then, what a strange bridge it is!

But, Heidegger says we are compulsory dwellers in the house(s) of being, and cannot communicate with each other; are we imprisoned in language?⁵ «Language speaks “lonesomely”, Heidegger (1959: 266), furthermore, language does not primarily belong to us. To whom does it belong then? To being? To which one do we human beings belong? How can Heidegger have any warranty to know this situation in which we are bridgeless human beings? Does he surreptitiously put the bridge between language and reality? A poet like Hölderlin whom Heidegger glorifies, says:

So I renounced and sadly see

Where word breaks off no thing may be.

Against his interpretation of Hölderlin can we say that if we destroy the bridge between the word and the things, then “no thing may be”?

So, Heidegger cannot abstain from the proposition that the bridge has already there. Otherwise, nowhere can words be broken off. “House of being” is the bridge itself. We reside on it. We are permanent crossers-over. How can Heidegger assert that language and being exist but not bridge? If we accept that we have two different words language and being, are we compelled to accept that, in Heidegger's sense, we are given two different domains? How can language invade the territory of being? Why do we allow language to play with us? If we do, we are then on the impassable bridge. We must live in our ivory tower, in our frozen language, in our “bottle”. But is it the task of the philosopher “to show the fly out of the fly bottles”? Wittgenstein (1953: 309).

Let us agree, for a moment with Heidegger that language is the “house of being” and language is “what closes in upon itself” (*das Verschliessende*). Can't we ask what there is beyond it? Nothing? Is “nothing” in the “house of being”? Hence, we are prisoners in the “house of beings”. Why can't we choose freedom?

It is not we who are the prisoners. It is not we who are on the impassable bridge. It is Heidegger himself who is the prisoner and who is on the impassable bridge. He takes with him the word “Heidegger” wherever he goes. The word is a kind of shackle for him. He always “hears” its sounds. Since we can see him as he is, it means that we are on the other side of the bridge. I hope and believe that we are not “nothing”.

Without much effort one can find certain resemblance between Heidegger's and Wittgenstein's attitudes towards language, although their starting points are different. Heidegger's philosophical works have been ceaselessly fostered by Greek philosophy especially by Pre-Socratic philosophers. On the other hand, Wittgenstein's main concern is mathematical logic (though we know that Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, and the cultural atmosphere of Habsburg Vienna might be considered his immediate philosophical forebears).

What kind of kinship exists between Heidegger and Wittgenstein? They are members of the same family that lives within the endless boundaries of language. But, I believe, Wittgenstein is in a better situation to appreciate his own philosophical standing. In his youth, in the period of *Tractatus*, he thinks that he can somehow establish a connection between “world” and “language” by means of his *Bildtheorie*. He believes in the existence of the bridge between the two realms on the condition that he cannot say anything about it. This is an “inexpressible” (*Unsaybar*) bridge. It belongs neither to language nor to reality. It is in “no man's land; but on the other hand oxymoronically speaking, it shows what it is common between language and reality.

He says something evocative of Heidegger's philosophical attitude towards in the preface to *Tractatus* “It will therefore only be in language that the limit can be set, and what lies on the other side of the limit will simply be nonsense”. Again we are on an endless bridge which leads us to a place which it is «nonsense» to speak about. To Wittgenstein an “impassable bridge” is not impossible. He accepts the bridge, since language is the “great

mirror” Wittgenstein (1969: 5.551). Then the bridge is the beam of light coming from the world. We can see reality through language. Language shows reality. We can find reality in language. Like Aristotle, Wittgenstein too, admits *homoiômata*, resemblance, likening representations between these two “distinct” domains. But, why is it «nonsense» to try to speak about the other side of the bridge? It is “nonsense”, in my opinion, just because it is “inexpressible”. What can be said can be said within the boundaries of language?

Why do we dare to go outside the limits of the language? “Outside” has already been pictured inside, in language. So “the bridge” is redundant. If we imagine such a bridge, it will be nonsense, because there is only darkness behind the mirror. On the face of it, Wittgenstein cannot go through the forest without the word “forest”; but there is an odd possibility, a curious a path which leads to the world without language. We can show the world without speaking. A different sense of “showing” can be found in Heidegger, viz., in the sense of “saying as showing”. Heidegger (1971: 123). We are on the other side of the bridge, at the expense of becoming an aphasiac. We are dumb therein.

Unlike Heidegger, Wittgenstein maintains that language is given to us. (Recall that in Heidegger language belongs to being.) “...the limits of language (of that language which alone I understand) mean the limits of my (emphasis is in the original. A.I.) world”. Wittgenstein (1969: 562). “I am my world”. (Ibid). Hence, I am my language. This means in my interpretation (let me be one of the countless commentators on Wittgenstein!) I cannot transcend myself. I am fenced with the barbed wire of my language, I am haunted by “solipsismus”, notwithstanding the fact that I am aware of 'the territory beyond it.

In the later phase of his thought, Wittgenstein insists that language has an autonomous character. For him language is a “system”, in a certain sense a calculus. The connection between “language and reality” is made by definitions of words which belong to grammars. Wittgenstein (1974: 15). Once more, we have to be in language. The bridge leads nowhere. He says: “We can't cross the bridge to the execution until we are there”. Wittgenstein (1974: 160). Language is a system “which is not accountable to any reality”, and we are the part of this system⁶. If we risk getting outside the language if we try to cross the bridge with the hope that we can pass it, we are in trouble: Young Wittgenstein was looking through the spectacles of mathematical logic. He was bewitched by calculus. Late Wittgenstein fights against the formidable obstacles to the limits of language, in vain. He is on the impassable bridge. I imagine that he meets Heidegger there. Both of them, during their agonizing walk on 'the endless bridge, may see Aristotle waving his hand on the other side of the bridge.

Who are crossers-over? Aristotle Heidegger and Wittgenstein. For Aristotle, there is no doubt about the firmness and position of the bridge. He is bold enough to construct a bridge and pass over it easily. But our contemporary philosophers (What is wrong with them?) do not have enough heroism even to imagine such a bridge. What makes them so timid? Does the tormented life of a seeker for truth render them anxious? Should we concede that they consider their times as a dissolution of traditions in philosophy? Von Wright (1978: 73) Or rather, are we too conservative to appreciate their attitude towards language while we pretend that they are two well-known mystics of our age?

Ankara, June, 1981.

¹ This is the revised version of the paper published in *Felsefe Arkivi* 1990, Vol.27, pp.159-167, with Turkish translation by my friend Samet Bağçe.

² In this explication, I make use of Heidegger's interpretation. Heidegger (1959: 224-245)

³ De Vogel (1997: 44).

⁴ Here, if signs may be read as symbols, it is interesting to note that Saussure, whether he was aware of this fact or not, agrees with Aristotle when he says : I call combination of a concept and a sound image a sign Saussure (1974: 67)

⁵ On the face of It F. Jameson's *The Prison House of Language* may be found as related to my present essay. I confess that I had not read it while I was writing this essay, but upon the recommendation of my friend Sabri KOÇ, I felt a strong desire to do so. After having read the whole book, I have the impression that Jameson's aims and Philosophical perspectives are very different from mine. In this paper, it is not my intention to reckon with the "Structuralists" (Saussure, Strauss even Althusser...) Moreover, I should say that I ca not share his criticism of Wittgenstein (p. 23). Also, it seems to me that his point on Heidegger are rather shallow.

⁶ For holistic nature of language see, Wittgenstein (1974: 5, 10, 13, 16, 21, 143) Wittgenstein (1967: 146); Wittgenstein (1953: 224). For the autonomous character of language, see. Wittgenstein (1974: 29, 97).

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