

## LANGUAJE (1912)<sup>1</sup>

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I hope you do not expect me to give a comprehensive picture of our time in these lectures. You will even be disappointed if you expect me to tell you something new. What I have to say is obvious and everybody can see it, in a way that is perhaps better than I can, certainly different. Yet it is well worth looking occasionally at what is familiar through the eyes of a stranger, and if nothing else is achieved but a lively conflict of opinions, that is quite enough for me.

With this I have come to the theme of today. One has to speak in order to exchange opinions and I want to talk to you a little about speaking.

Daily and hourly we use an instrument, I mean language, and we take it so much for granted that we hardly ever think about it and what kind of a tool it is, just as we use a handkerchief without asking how old this custom is and where it comes from. This is the fate of everyday things. That much is clear: language is the vehicle of culture. It is the precondition of human communication. Language has created religion and art, built streets and conducted trade all over the world. In truth it is the means by which thought turns to action and, eternally fertile, it produces new thoughts. Agriculture is as unthinkable without language as is philosophy; the comforts of the house and even the house itself were made by it; all action, thought, emotion, even love and hatred, God and nature are dependent on language. All this is obvious. Yet I beg you to look around once more and with eye and mind find all the concepts which make up language. I would like you to devote at least a short while to the contemplation of this miracle. The bolder your imagination, the quicker its survey of this world, the better for our mutual understanding.

For now I beg you to consider the opposite, the culturally inhibiting effects of language, the invincible claims by which language enslaves our thought and action. There is the well-known saying that man was given language in order to hide his thoughts. You may think what you like about this. But it is quite another thing to ask whether language is capable of expressing thought. We all know from experience that it isn't, that it is incapable particularly of expressing the most cherished and deepest thoughts. Nature has been wise in this, for the individual alone should know about his innermost and deepest thought. Man's most personal thought is speechless, subterranean, unconscious, and the struggle of the creative forces with mute nature constitutes man's innermost life. The inner muteness is the real human personality whether one chooses to call it soul or spirit or anything else. It is common to us all, the common factor, the basic human entity. Yet creative ability is a human being's most valuable gift. The degree to which he can communicate vividly and effectively what goes on inside him, and the value of these communications, is a distinguishing mark between great and small minds, between the poet who remains the greatest of all mortals and the common people. Yet even the most marvellous poet can express no more than a fraction of his thought in words; his best ideas remain as mute as with everybody else, and he would be committing a sin if he revealed them. It would amount to being unchaste. He would lose himself and cease to exist as an individual if he could completely expose himself. Here, as I said above, language acts as a fetter which wisely holds us back. Nature shies away so much from showing itself as it really is that it does not allow the inner life to be conceived in words, not even in silent words. Suddenly there is something, nobody knows where it came from. Life is an abyss of impenetrable darkness, from which strange shapes rise up like butterflies which lose their beauty when the finger touches them, and so would our thoughts if they had to be cast into words. When something has to be communicated from the innermost soul as happens particularly in relationships between men and women, then it is done by gesture, touch, by the light of the eyes, perhaps by a louder

sound, perhaps even by music, but never by language. The barrier is insurmountable.

There is one thing: man does not manage to express his innermost self in words; his capacity to speak does not enable him to say the truth. Going one step further, it can be recognized that speaking as such already contains the distortion of truth. We speak of a piece of bread, a glass of water, a picture, a star, as if they were self-contained objects with defined frontiers. This is wrong. They do not exist as separate objects, we do not perceive them as separate. When we perceive a glass of water we also see the table on which it stands, the hand which holds it, the room in which the table is placed, or the person to whom the hand belongs. Or another image: a piece of bread is certainly a piece of bread. Everybody knows what it is and calls it that, too. Leave it lying about, for two days only. Then it is still a piece of bread for us, but in the meantime it has changed; even with blunt senses one can see the transformation. It is hard and dry now, and has started to go mouldy. And yet we all say: this is a piece of bread that was left lying about. But is this true? No. One only has to touch it or bite into it to know that it is no longer the same. We resort to excuses and say: it is old now. But what does this mean, 'it is old'? When did it grow old? Today? Yesterday? No, it grew old gradually. Gradually? When did it start? one might ask, and the answer ultimately is, it never started to grow old. It changed constantly, without interruption, was never constant, not even the smallest fraction of a second, not even the moment when we held it in the hand, but changed constantly with the help of certain forces which are active inside it and preserve it in the context of the whole. We immediately understand: the piece of bread only exists as a separate thing because we name it, because we arbitrarily and dishonestly tear it from its context, because we talk of it.

We are thus faced with the fact that every word in our language is a lie whether it is uttered by our mouth or remains mute in our brain, a lie which violates facts, which makes us look at the world from a false perspective and think falsely. For it is the same with water as it is with bread; it does not for a moment stop evaporating, getting colder or warmer; dust continually falls into it and so does light and electric current. We take a drop and put it under the microscope and ask with astonishment: is this really the same water, the water I drink? there are thousands and thousands of animals in it which quarrel, love each other, breathe, feed, die and are born. Or let's take a picture. We stand and look at it. How dark it looks! The painter messed it up, it's all blurred, without contours, without life. Here a line is too hard, there we see a lump of shapeless flesh. And now from the window a beam of light falls on the picture. It is still the same picture. But what has happened to it? Suddenly it is different, glowing, colourful; triumphantly art asserts itself. A little bit of sunlight proves that the picture did not exist by itself, that it exists in the context of the world, that only our language has lied to us. Or the star. We see it shine up there in the sky. Yet we know for certain that it changes constantly. Millions of years ago it was a speck of mist, in millions of years it will be extinct. Maybe at this moment already it is no longer a shining star, we merely see the light which thousands of years ago was sent out by it when it still existed, was still shining.

Language lies, it must lie; this is due to its being part of human nature. And the answer with which Christ agreed to what the Roman had said, 'Truth is neither in heaven nor on earth nor between heaven and earth', is clear to everybody. It is in the nature of language to be imprecise, to distort, it is in the nature of man. Yet it is also in the nature of man the more sophisticated he is the more to correct this imprecision of language and the more truthful to be. This holds true in particular for silent speech, for talking to oneself, for thinking. We Germans have produced a man who was exemplary in all things, who recognized and defined this phenomenon clearly: Goethe. There is a statement which he made repeatedly in talking and writing and which he tried to live consciously, perhaps the only human being ever to do so: Everything should be considered as part of the whole. See the whole in the part, see in the whole the part. - This is how one should go about doing research. Grip the object in front of you tightly, look at it and touch it on all sides, yet when you have done that remember that this apparent whole is merely a part, a dependent link in a chain. When you want to investigate an arm, forget that it is attached to a body and try to see and understand it as an entity. Then you must remember that this arm is nothing without the human being to which it belongs and that this human being is a part of its parents and that these parents have come from the flesh of animals and the fruit of the forest and that the ray of sun awakens the fruit and the animals and that the sun is revolving

around other suns in the universe and owes its existence to other stars.

Now you'll say these are well-known stories; everybody knows that and there is no need to call on old Goethe. We all know. Of course we all know. Yet we do not live as if we did. And to live in the awareness is the aim, the unattainable and yet necessary aim. To experience everything as a part, to experience one's self as a part -nobody can do that. And yet it is the way to the truth, the only way and the way we have to take and shall take. It is not easy. Which of us looks at this moment at a cup or the tablecloth or the neighbour or me and sees in this cup, this cloth, this person the whole of the world? Nobody. Nobody even tries to. And yet it is necessary. And yet this attempt will transform the whole of the world, the inner world, religion and science. And Goethe made this attempt.

Goethe's reputation as a scholar had a curious fate. His contemporaries rejected him as an amateur, as a troublesome amateur even, and for half a century his scientific studies were considered nonsense. Then it became fashionable to praise him as a precursor of Darwin, yet one placed him on a considerably lower rung than that occupied by the English master. Gradually people are beginning to understand that he was not merely a precursor, and the statement made against universal mockery by the physiologist Müller in the Thirties is taken seriously: Goethe was greater as a scientist than as a poet. We can foresee now that in centuries to come people will rightly say that he was one of the greatest thinkers of all times. He showed science a new approach, namely the approach of seeing the part in the whole, of taking the apparent whole as a symbol of the universe, of seeing the whole world symbolised in a flower, an animal, a pebble, the human eye, the sun; and to construct the world from this flower, this pebble, that is to create it anew and to investigate things not by analysing but by placing them in the context of the whole. He opened up this approach to science which will achieve undreamed-of results in fields which have so far been untested and unknown, for, hardly have we started on this approach, it turns fairytales into truth, confirms with its theory of radiation the Old Indian legend about different kinds of light which emanate from all creatures, and fulfils the alchemists' and goldsearchers' dreams by transforming metals into other metals. Goethe opened up new avenues to life. The old concept of the world which regarded man as the crown of creation will disappear, and a new life with a new religion will come about. What we now call Christianity, the doctrine of man's sin and salvation, is fading away. For man is nothing by himself, he only exists as a dependent part.

Again one can say that all these ideas about seeing the whole in the part or about man being nothing by himself are not new to Goethe and have been taught by thousands of men before him, and yet the world continued on its course. Goethe's wisdom is ancient, older than the walls of the Assyrians. For sure. Thousands of people have thought it before him, yet nobody tried to put it into practice, to make it happen, to live it. And now take any bit of Goethe's life, any day, any word, any poem or idea of his. Everywhere you will find the attempt to make the part suggest the whole and to represent the apparent whole as a part. He never forgot that he was in the world and, as its creature, affected this world. In all his utterances and innermost revelations one comes up against the imperative: be objective. One is sometimes tempted to think, when one comes across this recurring word which demands the highest degree of self-denial, that he is related to the Indian thinkers who strive for the same goal of objectivity, of self-distancing, of dehumanisation. Yet the Indian strives to get away from the world in order to reach his goal. Goethe, however, threw himself into the world in the fullness of life and tried to objectify it; he was not at all a renouncer of the world, but a human being who was very much alive, perhaps the most alive personality of all times.

You must not be surprised when you hear me talk so enthusiastically. My intention is to present trends of our modern times, and in this context the first word has to be about this man in whom the modern aspiration for objectivity is embodied, and the striving for a new world view which does not see man as a God; this man in whom the coming religion is embodied. For it is certain that it is coming and not too far away.

Of course I do not want to suggest that Goethe was an objective human being. This is totally impossible, every man is subjective, nobody can forget himself, yet one should at least make the attempt. And whoever tries, if only for a moment, will realize at once how infinitely difficult it is, how such an attempt can well purify a man with a thousand flames and change him inside out. For not only the artificially bred arrogance of man, which is expressed in the belief in immortality and eternal happiness, but all our habits, our thoughts

and feelings, our whole life and particularly our language are in contradiction to this aspiration. And this brings me back to the statement that language hinders culture. You must recall that language possesses the word I, a word which we hear everywhere and which determines and dominates our whole life. And then you must try and understand what kind of an I this is. Try and understand this I, separate it, grasp it as an entity on its own. You will see that this is impossible. There is no such thing as an I; it is a lie, a distortion, to say: 'I think, I live.' It should be: 'it thinks, it lives'. It, that is the great mystery of the universe. There is no I. Science has long since proved even to the pedants that this I is made up of millions of smaller I's; every day brings more scientific proof of the fact that the blood that circulates inside us is as independent an entity as is the I in which it circulates, and that the human being is as dependent on and inseparable from the whole as is the blood from the human being. Daily, science adds more proof to the notion that every organ, the brain, the heart, every gland in the body, every cell is an entity with a will and a mind of its own, and yet that it is nothing but a part which has come about through the whole and affects the whole. Everything is in flux. Quite certainly there is no I. This is one of language's untruths and unfortunately a fateful one. For nobody can free himself from this single word I.

We are confronted by one of nature's deep mysteries which cannot be fathomed. The awareness of being an individual, an I, is a primitive and completely internalized awareness. Reason, science, religion may prove irrefutably that it is an illusion, yet man would rather be skinned and live on in suffering than stop conceiving of himself as a whole, as an individuality, an I. It is in man's nature, it is one of his characteristics, like the roundness of his head or the shape of his hand. And we all know, too, that man's self-confidence is a great strength; one could even say that life's whole purpose lies in the effort to assert oneself in this world, in the struggle for the recognition of individuality. The more man separates himself from his environment the more he will achieve, the higher he raises his self above others the more energetic he will be, the more strength he will draw from others.

Yet the consciousness of self, this natural instinct, is like all other human instincts. Like the sapling of a plant that runs to leaf it has to be held down, cut back, otherwise it will destroy man's equilibrium. Thus the desire for happiness is the innermost impulse in a woman's soul; that she does not succeed in taming it is the ultimate reason for woman's sufferings. The instinct for self-preservation is the protector of life yet, left to itself, it degenerates into fear. The power of instinct is immense, elemental, and to further it artificially is to destroy the whole in favour of the part, an important insight which throws light on the mistakes of our education and is a warning of imminent danger. Life defends itself against this danger, not least against its tool, language. Next to the hunger for happiness it puts hysteria; the names gourmand, rake, drunkard, coward are given to those who blindly follow the forces of nature. Honour, obedience, industry, spirit of sacrifice, all these words stand for a specific fetter which has been applied to these primitive forces. To tame the consciousness of self, has also been attempted many times; selfishness and egotism are strong insults in our language. Yet how little they achieve against the single word I. They disintegrate when confronted with it; man's soul is sated with the consciousness of his own personality, the belief in himself and his own importance. This is his nature. Mankind is conscious of this most dangerous of all linguistic lies. Everywhere self-denial is considered the highest virtue. It was planted wherever man tried to ennoble himself.

In the two highest of the world's religions, in Christianity and even more in Buddhism, self-denial, disregard of self, is considered the aim of all our strivings. Now Buddhism, which I have called the wider-reaching vision of the two — it does not stop at man but also includes animals - Buddhism, or at least its fundamental ideas, is gaining more and more ground among Europeans. Yet Christianity is still the leading belief of our time and with it the dogma that gradually developed from the envious, basic moods of suppressed man, the dogma of the immortality of the self and of the heavenly reward and eternal punishment to which this I is subject. This is a fateful doctrine. It does not tame the elemental forces of the I; it has allowed them to grow into a terrible force, and there is reason to fear that it has undermined the innermost strength of European nations. I shall come back to this perhaps in a different context, since the idea of man's central position is still a pivotal concept of all action and thought with its implications of a God who is only concerned about man's well-being, of man's world domination, of God's sacrificial death for man. Here the

few words I have just uttered will be sufficient to explain my position with regard to these problems; my attitude of contempt towards the insane arrogance of the human Ego.

Only one thing I want to point out. One of the fundamental differences between the modern age and antiquity is the attitude of religion towards nature. The Greeks saw God everywhere. Nature to them was something venerable, something fearful. We moderns with our naked unscrupulousness are unable to understand why the Greeks of the classical age practiced so many strange customs when they cut down a tree or hunted an animal. We smile about superstitious fear. Unfortunately with the fear we also lost our holy awe; the only attitude towards nature we have is that of the exploiter vis-à-vis the exploited. For the sentimental love of nature which we harbour is a luxury feeling shared by the aesthetically educated; it is not a sacred feeling of awe, but importunate staring and touching governed by clichés. For us nature has lost its godhead. To this we owe all our progress in technology, in civilization, yet we have lost much in inner culture, in inner values. In antiquity man did not presume that he was the center of the world, the ruler of earth, rather the contrary. And now you must consider the strange fact that the classical languages express the Ego only by means of verb endings. For us the I has become an almost insuperable linguistic obstacle to recognizing the unimportance of the human individual and to endowing life, religion, poetry with the sacred awe felt towards nature. Whoever looks at modern Europe carefully will be horrified about our lack of culture, no matter how highly he may value the sophistication of our civilization. The Renaissance, the only movement which can be considered to have been an approximation to culture, originated with a nation that is still steeped in antiquity and for which the word *io* is almost unknown. And even now the dead and totally degenerate Italian people have an attitude towards nature which we Germans might consider crude, barbarous, contemptuous, yet it still has traces of an awareness of God Nature.

Again I am using a word by Goethe - God Nature, *Gottnatur*. I have returned to this man deliberately. For our relationship to nature is beginning to change. A new world is opening up for us, a world in which there can be a growth of culture, in which Godhead Nature will be experienced with awe, a feeling we hardly know the name of. If anything can reconcile us to life, which takes away our breath with all its haste and greed, it is the sight of this gentle current of respectful veneration of God Nature.

But one must not underestimate the obstacles, the rocks, deserts, and swamps which obstruct the stream. Above all one should not underestimate the power of linguistic tradition. It is not only the lie 'I' which stops us. As I have already said, this lie is in man's nature. It cannot, does not have to be overcome completely. For what belongs to the nature of man is legitimate and must be respected. Yet we have inherited words which are the patent lies of ignorance, which we know to be lies, and which are yet so firmly rooted in language that we cannot do without them, so that we are astonished when we notice by chance that they are lies. Think of the word *sky*. How many educational, moral, and vital values are associated with this mendacious word. Impressed on the mind of the child, it remains ineradicably in our innermost being, never to be destroyed, always sending up new shoots. Or even the word *soul*, a word that tears man in two, a terrible heritage, a continuing curse of our life. I can hardly think of a greater achievement than to write the history of this word *soul*. It is impossible, as I well know. For just as nobody can see their own eyes, so nobody can get to the bottom of this word *soul*. But we can probably say: the belief in a soul, that is the belief in something which at most exists in the imagination, this belief is the basis on which all modern life is built. This has not always been so. In antiquity people thought otherwise. The people of Asia think otherwise. But it will be in vain if we try to rid ourselves of this nightmare. For language has secured it for the eternity of our existence.

Do you want more examples still? Then take the word *atom* on which our science is based. Quite certainly it is a lie, quite certainly a foolish idea which cannot even be entertained, for how should anything be indivisible? Or the word *life*. Something lives, yes, and we know that there is nothing that is not alive, that the stone is as alive as the bird that sits on it. We talk of death and are afraid of it; yet we know that there is no death. We talk of the five senses and have known for quite some time that there are rather more than five. We talk of settled nations and yet we can see that the Europeans are a nomadic people. We call ourselves Germans and our neighbours Austrians, Swiss, or Dutch, and yet we speak the same language, come from

the same tribes, are cousins and brothers. One can already predict the tragic consequences of this ridiculous folly of calling ourselves Germans. And now take a name like Belgian or Russian. The fact that we do not understand what goes on in the Tsarist Empire is largely due to the fact that we conceive of the Russians as a uniform people because we are seduced into thinking this by our language. In reality there is even more variety there than in the Roman Empire of Augustus, a veritable chaos of races and peoples, a Babylonian confusion of languages.

You may wonder what this dry and rather problematical argument on language has got to do with the trends of our modern age. But I have tried to establish a base for myself on which perhaps one can continue to build. I have already expressed my view that we are on the threshold of a real cultural revolution, the attempt to reinstate the harmony between man and nature which was interrupted for a thousand years. There are many signs of this. The question is merely whether Europe has enough energy left to develop the budding forces. Not to answer — it is not yet possible — but to consider this question is of sufficient interest to justify our meetings. And if it is to be considered, then the first thing is to test the tool with which this new age will be built and this, as I said in the beginning, is language. The spirit of language is one of the signs which betray the direction of the trend and is almost the most accurate.

Unfortunately it does not prove very favourable as far as the possibility of a strong cultural development in Europe is concerned. Again I shall have to take you into the confusion of words a little longer in order to help you understand what I mean. That I choose the German language will not be held against me. As far as my knowledge of foreign languages goes, I consider that the same is true for them, too.

It is at the very least inaccurate. Kantorowicz is and will remain a Pole and he is at the most a subject of the German Empire, yet never a German; Keller is German through and through and only secondarily a citizen of Switzerland. To use Germany and German Empire synonymously is a grave linguistic mistake which will lead to errors of thought and action in the course of time. Negligence of speech opens up an artificial abyss which, after a time, will be difficult to bridge.

In this particular case language is thoughtless. And immediately we remember that there are thousands of cases like this. We say that the sun rises and the moon rises. This is simply stupid. There are two completely different processes at work. The moon really rises because it rotates around the world. Yet the sun is standing still and we are rotating around it. Only a thoughtless language can describe with the same words two events as different as these. Small wonder that Copernicus' discoveries have still not penetrated people's minds. It struck me recently that I had told an acquaintance that I had gone from Dortmund to Amsterdam. This is stupid. Never in my life have I gone (gegangen = walked) so far. Or a patient tells me that he had a terrible (schreckliche) night and it emerges afterwards that he was lying awake for an hour. Bad if that frightens him (wenn er darüber erschrickt). Fear and anxiety, what a frightened breed of people we would be if we believed our language. Today people enjoy themselves awfully, they find a new dress terribly pretty!

We no longer know what words mean, our language does not think any more. Dear friend, somebody says to me, a double lie and disparagement of the highest ideals, of love and- friendship. The man neither loves me nor am I his friend, he even uses the expression mockingly. One's heart could break when one considers what thoughtless uses the word love is subjected to. I tell my wife that I have seen Herr Müller talk to Frau Schulze. Nonsense, neither of them was talking, talking is something totally different from speaking. With almost every word I have to tell myself 'stop, you are merely talking nonsense'. There have been as many thoughtless remarks as there have been sentences in my talk tonight. And this is the same everywhere and with all human beings. Try just once, pay attention to what others say, to what you are saying yourself; every third word is an error of thought. Or take something printed, not a newspaper since everything is wrong in newspapers anyhow, but perhaps the works of a great poet, let's say Keller or even Goethe, not to mention the great stylist Nietzsche. You would simply laugh because you would find so many stupidities on the first page. This is a disquieting sign in terms of our ability to develop. When a language has become thoughtless through and through, when words no longer express what they mean, then it can hardly hope to have a future. This is the childish babble of old age. We are no longer able to distinguish words carefully from one another; they flow into each other, there is no strength and vitality in them any more.

This aging process can be detected in other peculiarities of our speech. We exaggerate because words are hollow, speech. How often we have experienced the most marvellous thing! How often we have found something unspeakably stupid! How many thousands of times we have found some miserable talent or enviable piece of luck. For shame, in a decent language nothing should be enviable. And how about all the things we call wonderful! And yet, alas, we do not believe in wonders. Because we are surrounded by them.

All this is very sad, and the saddest thing is that it is the most valuable feelings and impulses of man that are devalued by language. I have already mentioned love and friendship, but let's return to wonder (Wunder). We bewundern (admire) a beautiful woman, a marvellous view, a perfect painting, a festive table, cold champagne, and a leather wall-covering. Things have gone so far that there is nothing we can marvel at (bewundern) any more. We have altogether become so indifferent and blasé that we are no longer capable of admiring though we could learn something from every blade of grass or flea. We do not possess this most marvelous of human characteristics, the ability to admire. We only imagine that we do. We are really quite dominated by the pseudo-wisdom of *Nil admirari*. We may not have gone quite as far as the Englishman with his 'very fine indeed' or the Italian with his 'bellissimo', his 'stupende'. But we have to admit that a language which uses concepts in this way is childish, senile. We no longer have any youthful sensations, and this is why we have to get intoxicated artificially with words. Where this will lead us is obvious. First to wrongheaded thinking, gradually to mistaken vision and learning. You only have to establish how few people can see or hear, how they cannot distinguish round from angular even when they try, how many applaud bad music merely because it exaggerates, how many buy bad works of art merely because they exaggerate, how many take a bad person for a good one because he is articulate. One has to be very trusting to hope for a good future.

The individual word has become devalued. Unfortunately this is not all. The individual dialect too has become devalued, and all the world is trying to destroy it completely, first the state and then educated people. Sometimes we remember that we perpetrate a sacrilege when we deprive a region of its individuality, and yet we go on enthusing about elementary schools and general education for all. This is a trend of the times, a trend which goes all out to blur distinctions, hierarchies on which, if not the world, then at least all culture is based. It is indeed a sad spectacle. In the same way in which the sober dress of our time gradually drives out all national dress so that only poor cranks continue to keep it alive, language works towards uniformity, more slowly yet more certainly, and one can work out the time it will take until the Saxon bureaucratic language<sup>2</sup> will be spoken everywhere, diluted and stripped of all the ideas which Luther expressed in it; for the few good minds and poets will not be able to stop the process once every trade and professions and particularly every school starts spreading Standard German (Schriftdeutsch).

School, education, and above all our mothers. One does not stop at destroying the dialects, one tries hard to destroy the mother tongue itself, in all innocence of course, in a stupid innocence. What is better in the modern view than to be able to speak foreign languages? Yet the German already finds it difficult to express his thoughts accurately in German. In a foreign language he never succeeds. In the foreign language he speaks even less accurately than in his own; there the use of words often does not correspond to the concept he is thinking of. When we cannot think of an expression in our mother tongue we take another one without hesitation, and the more often we do the more fluent we are. It does not matter in the individual case. So rarely do our educated people have anything original to say that ultimately it doesn't matter whether they repeat parrot-fashion pre-processed ideas in German, in English, or in French. The more common it becomes to talk in foreign tongues, the greater the danger that thoughtlessness will spread to those circles which still have a spiritual conscience, and that thinking men will be seduced into sloppiness of language and thought. Already it is considered a disgrace for decent people not to be able to speak fluent English or French; yet to speak fluently is the more difficult the more one is in the habit of thinking.

This is a well-known fact; Goethe, though he tried hard from his earliest childhood, never managed a conversation without difficulty in French and Italian, not to mention English, and Nietzsche was not even able to do that, although he lived in Italy and France for years. People like them would nowadays have to write sloppily in order not to become a laughing-stock. Now I believe that one single mistake of

Goethe's or Nietzsche's against their intellectual conscience would have done more harm than could ever be offset by the usefulness to our young girls of the ability to converse with a foreign suitor. It is said that thoughtlessness is not in the nature of woman but merely a consequence of their spiritual slavery. If this is true then the learning of foreign languages is a certain means of keeping women in their sphere of spiritual slavery. This is quite all right with us men. Every thoughtless word produces in us thoughts and actions provided we love the mouth who speaks it.

I could re-inforce my doubts about the probability of a cultural renaissance with a few more characteristics of modern linguistic usage, but I shall rather try to find out whether there are any comforts to be had in this usage. Two points strike me. The first ties up with what I said above; it is the attempt at inventing a world language and making it accessible to everybody. Clearly it would be much better for our spiritual education and, I would like to say, for our morality, if there were only one foreign language to learn and one which did not possess as many shades and nuances as modern languages. It would be less difficult to speak the truth. Unfortunately such a development is opposed by the strongest force in our age: the vanity of woman. Since she wants to prove that she is our spiritual equal, she will not give up the only field in which she is without doubt superior to us, namely chattering in foreign tongues.

The other point I would like to make which makes me hopeful is the use of foreign words. A language like German which is able to digest and incorporate and thus Germanize lots of foreign words cannot well be called senile. I do not share the modern aversion to foreign words. An excess is certainly harmful. Yet I am glad about every foreign word that is a genuine gain for the language. And I cannot see why 'Nation' or 'Mikroskop' should not be considered good German. A comparison with former decades or centuries is very instructive. A word which sounds alien in Goethe is not offensive when it is used by a contemporary. And if one considers what kind of German was spoken before and after Goethe, German interlarded with French sounds and interrupted by French sentences - it must have sounded like modern Alsatian — then one can say that in this respect we have come a long way.

In this respect and in something else. Whoever has followed the development of literature in the last thirty years must admit that some writers, at least the better writers, have recently become more conscientious in their use of language. It is a certain fact. And with this increasing conscientiousness in the use of language artists and writers have achieved almost spontaneously an increasing accuracy of thought, and greater care in the composition, the choice of ideas and materials. It would be rewarding to study this advance in the arts, and the reasons for it, in a separate talk.

To sum up my rambling discussion in a brief formula, which may be thought of as a conviction, I offer the following statement: We are barbarians, yet we have the possibility of producing a genuine culture in future. But language, the most important tool with which to further this, almost entirely fails us. Perhaps other means will appear later which are more useful for the spirit and for truth.

'Von der Sprache' (Hin zu Gottnatur, Leipzig, 3rd ed. 1912). Reprinted in *Psychoanalytische Schriften zur Literatur und Kunst*.

**Published in:** Groddeck, G. (1977). *The Meaning of Illness*. *Int. PsychoAnal. Lib.*, 105:1266. London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of PsychoAnalysis. Copyright © 2014, Psychoanalytic Electronic Publishing. Help |pp 248 - 264



**Notas al final**

- 1.- Von der Sprache' (Hin zu Gottnatur, Leipzig, 3rd ed. 1912). Reprinted in Psychoanalytische Schriften zur Literatur und Kunst
- 2.- Standard German is based on the language of Luther's translation which was developed from the German used in the Imperial offices of Saxony at the time.