

# Lecture 4

‘Speech and the Body as expression’

# Why 'speech'?

- In trying to describe the phenomenon of speech ...we shall have the opportunity to leave behind us, once and for all, the traditional subject-object dichotomy' (202)
- Basic thesis: the traditional view of the relation between thought and language is that thought is inherently subjective whereas language is objective. So it exemplifies 'the traditional subject-object dichotomy'.

- For M-P, this view is mistaken: instead speech, which is a bodily act, is the ‘accomplishment’ of thought (207). So speech breaks down the ‘subject/object’ dichotomy (and also the ‘mind/object’ dichotomy).
- But there is a sense in which there is a residual subject/object dichotomy even within M-P’s account of speech (see later).

# The initial dialectic

- Usual moves –
- Empiricism – fails to provide an account of language, because it tries in vain to treat meaning as the product of ‘objective causality’ (205)
- Intellectualism – also fails because it just treats language as the external accompaniment of thought (204)
- A better view: holds that language/speech has intrinsic significance – neither borrowed from thought nor produced by causal connections.

# Speech and thought

- Key claim is the anti-intellectualist thesis that speech is not just the 'clothing' or 'envelope' of thought (211).
- Instead: speech is the 'body' of thought – i.e. it is a type of meaningful behaviour. Just as intentional actions express desires, feelings etc., speech expresses thoughts.
- M-P does not deny that there can be 'speech' without meaning (cf. a parrot); but that's imitation.
- Similarly there can be silent thought (213); but that's a derivative phenomenon, dependent on spoken thought.

# ‘Existential meaning’ (212)

- Speech is a type of expressive behaviour.
- It is comparable to aesthetic expression (e.g. painting) (213).
- It is not the translation of antecedent thought, but the way in which we create new thoughts.
- Think of speech as ‘gesture’ (cf. ‘sign-language’):  
    ‘the spoken word is a gesture, and its meaning, a world’ (214)

# Understanding language

- M-P compares: understanding others with perceiving an object.
- In perception: the object perceived (a fire-place) is not inferred (215). It is manifest in the perception.
- In language: the meaning of another's speech is likewise not inferred (216). It is manifest in what is said.
- Assumption: 'available meanings, in other words former acts of expression, establish between speaking subjects a common world' (216)

- Key to understanding others is the recognition of ‘the reciprocity of my intentions and the gestures of others’ (215)
- compare with Grice’s meaning ?  
By uttering  $x$  to audience  $A$ , speaker  $U$  means that  $p$  iff
  - U intends (i) to get  $A$  to believe that  $p$ 
    - (ii) that  $A$  should recognise that  $U$  intends to get  $A$  to believe that  $p$
    - (iii) that  $A$ ’s recognition that  $U$  intends to get  $A$  to believe that  $p$  should provide  $A$  with a reason to believe  $p$



# ‘Authentic’ vs ‘Second-hand’ language

- See fn p. 207
- M-P’s account applies in the first instance to ‘authentic’ speech, which is creative, poetic (217).
- Contrast: ‘second-hand’ (not ‘second-order’) speech, which just reuses words and phrases whose meaning has been established by authentic speech-acts.
- Other descriptions:
  - ‘constituting’/‘constituted’
  - ‘speaking’/‘spoken’ (229)
- Schneider’s language: just second-hand (228)

- M-P here draws on Husserl's conception of 'sedimentation' (220)
- Because constituted language is established, it is easy to understand.
- Hence it gives rise to the ideal of language as a 'transparent' representation of the world (218-9). Connect with ideal of objective truth.
- Compare with perception and M-P's account of the way in which perception leads us to think of it as the passive presentation of an object.

- M-P rejects both positions;
- just as the phenomenology of perception is supposed to bring to light the constituting role of the body in perception
- the phenomenology of language is supposed to bring to light the constituting role of the body as expression ('authentic, speaking, speech').
- 'we must therefore recognise as an ultimate fact this open and indefinite power of giving significance – that is, both of apprehending and conveying a meaning – by which man transcends himself towards a new form of behaviour, or towards other people, or towards his own thought, through his body and his speech' (226)

# But is M-P's right to distinguish between 'authentic' and 'second-hand' speech?

- Isn't this itself a new 'subject/object' dichotomy?
- Is there really 'authentic'/'constituting' speech?
- Isn't all language 'second-hand' insofar as it involves rules?
  
- Would it be bad news for M-P if he was wrong about language?
- (what about the comparison with perception?)